BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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http://booksfromtaiwan.tw/

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Issue | Issue 15, Autumn 2022
Publication Date | September 30, 2022
ISSN | 2410-0781

TAICCA 文化內容策進院
TAIWAN CREATIVE CONTENT AGENCY

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ABOUT TAIWAN CREATIVE CONTENT AGENCY

With a diverse, open-minded culture, and freedom of speech, Taiwan encourages and inspires creators to develop innovative content. Taiwan also possesses an all-embracing culture boasting a uniquely diverse history and a multicultural heritage, fostering a liberal, progressive, and stable society. As a global leader in the semiconductor industry, Taiwan has a mature, government-supported technological ecosystem that incubates innovative future content and allows local businesses to better connect with the globe. Balancing distinct cultural traditions and cutting-edge technology, Taiwan is ideal for innovators seeking to unleash their creativity.

Established in 2019 by the Ministry of Culture, the Taiwan Creative Content Agency (TAICCA) supports the development of Taiwan's creative content industry (CCI) such as film and television, future content, publishing, pop music, animation, gaming, performing arts, and visual arts by engaging in production, distribution, overseas market expansion, branding, talent cultivation, industrial research and more. We promote innovative growth in the creative content economy

ABOUT BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

Books from Taiwan is an initiative funded by TAICCA (Taiwan Creative Content Agency) to introduce a select list of Taiwan publishing titles, ranging from fiction, non-fiction, children's books, and comic books, to foreign publishers and readers alike.

You can find information about authors and books, along with who to contact in order to license translation rights, and the related resources about the Grant for the Publication of Taiwanese Works in Translation (GPT), sponsored by the Ministry of Culture of Taiwan.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

For centuries, we let ourselves be ruled by the idea of constant progress – economies would (and should) grow, technology would improve, and life would quite simply be better for all who decided to participate. Global reportage and advocacy have recently exposed one false aspect of that faith by exposing the damage done by climate change, power politics, and institutional racisms around the world, and while some statistics on disease, infant mortality, and combat casualties have markedly improved, we can now see how much we have ignored or willfully misunderstood in order to prop up our belief in *better, bigger, faster*.

Once enlightened to the deceptive nature of "enlightenment", we start to ask, far too late, what we sacrificed to get where we are. Many of the books we feature in this issue of *Books from Taiwan* help us answer that question. Stories of Taiwan's half-hidden totalitarian past, known as the White Terror, loom large: the elderly heroines of *Margins of Time* and *Still Life in White* dip into the silent violence of that period, linking it to the shadow of Japanese colonialism and the painfully fresh memories of

war with the Communists in 1949. One of the stars of *Portraits of Mastery*, a master of movable-type printing, even tells a story about how the faulty choice of a single character printed on school letterhead nearly led to his own execution. When one understands that stories like this one are only just beginning to be told, one realizes how much still hides beneath the surface of that history.

Portraits of Mastery, Port of Lies, Casey and His Gas Shop, and *Fishmongering: A Memoir* also place us squarely in the midst of blue-collar Taiwanese society, where we face many of the people whom the drive for "progress" has abandoned. While many of us still believe that we are, on the whole, more knowledgeable about the world than our ancestors, these titles remind us of the worlds of specialized knowledge accrued by those who worked the land or sea as part of a family or tribal tradition. Even books that look into imagined futures, like *The Sunlight Trilogy* and *Zero Degrees of Separation*, remind us of how easy it is to lose ancient knowledge, and how desperate we will be to get it back.

I'm proud to be leaving *Books from Taiwan* with this issue, which showcases some of the best works of literature I have edited during ten issues as Editor-in-Chief. Deadlines close while borders open, and all of us move on to a new stage of life together.

Canaan Morse
Editor-in-Chief

GRANT FOR THE PUBLICATION OF TAIWANESE WORKS IN TRANSLATION (GPT)

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, REPUBLIC OF CHINA (TAIWAN)

GPT is set up by The Ministry of Culture to encourage the publication of Taiwanese works in translation overseas, to raise the international visibility of Taiwanese cultural content, and to help Taiwan's publishing industry expand into non-Chinese international markets.

- Applicant Eligibility: Foreign publishing houses (legal persons) legally registered in accordance with the laws and regulations of their respective countries.

- Conditions:
  1. The so-called Taiwanese works must meet the following requirements:
     A. Use traditional characters;
     B. Written by a natural person holding an R.O.C. identity card;
     C. Has been assigned an ISBN in Taiwan.
     i.e., the author is a native of Taiwan, and the first 6 digits of the book's ISBN are 978-957-XXX-XXX-X, 978-986-XXX-XXX-X, or 978-626-XXX-XXX-X.
  2. Applications must include documents certifying that the copyright holder of the Taiwanese works consents to its translation and foreign publication (no restriction on its format).
  3. A translation sample of the Taiwanese work is required (no restriction on its format and length).

4. The translated work must be published within two years, after the first day of the relevant application period.

- Grant Items:
  1. The maximum grant available for each project is NT$600,000, which covers:
     A. Licensing fees (going to the copyright holder of the Taiwanese works);
     B. Translation fees;
     C. Marketing and promotion fees (limited to economy class air tickets for the R.O.C. writer to participate in overseas promotional activities related to the project);
     D. Book production-oriented fees;
     E. Tax (20% of the total award amount);
     F. Remittance-related handling fees.
  2. Priority consideration is given to books that have received the Golden Tripod Award, the Golden Comic Award, or the Taiwan Literature Award.

- Application Period: Twice every year, from April 1 to April 30, and from October 1 to October 31. The MOC reserves the right to change the application periods, and will announce said changes separately.

- Announcement of successful applications: Winners will be announced within three months of the end of the application period.

- Application Method: Please visit the Ministry's official website (https://grants.moc.gov.tw/Web_ENG/), and use the online application system.

For full details, please visit: https://grants.moc.gov.tw/Web_ENG/
Or contact: books@moc.gov.tw


BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

白色畫像
STILL LIFE IN WHITE

Lai Hsiang-Yin
賴香吟

- **Category:** Literary Fiction, Short Stories
- **Publisher:** Ink
- **Date:** 1/2022
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
- **Pages:** 272
- **Length:** 99,000 characters (approx. 64,500 words in English)

Before engaging in writing full-time, Lai Hsiang-Yin pursued graduate studies in Japan, and worked in universities, bookstores, and museums. She is the recipient of numerous domestic honors including the Wu Zhuoliu Literary Prize and the Taiwan Literature Award. Now a resident of Berlin, her previous works include non-fiction such as *Love Before Daybreak: Taiwanese Literary Landscapes Under Japanese Rule*; the novel *Afterwards*; the short story collections *Island, The Death of a Literary Youth*, and *Landscapes in the Mist*; and *Prehistoric Life*, a collection of essays.

The White Terror, a program of political persecution conducted under the aegis of martial law, reigns over post-war Taiwan. Yet, somehow, everyday life continues for three ordinary citizens in this subtle portrayal of a society struggling under the dark clouds of mutual suspicion, surveillance, and coercive control.

May 19, 1949, the declaration of martial law in Taiwan initiates the White Terror – nearly four decades of intense surveillance, disappearances, and political oppression targeting local Taiwanese resistance to Chiang Kai-shek's authoritarian rule. Yet, even in this era of political menace, life goes on....

A public school teacher with training in political warfare, Mr. Soo approaches everything with circumspection. Never one to rock the boat, he works to maintain political rectitude and counter-intelligence security at the school where he teaches. But above all, Mr. Soo hopes to provide his family with a better life during uncertain times.

Bun-hui has spent her life serving others. First the Japanese, then the mainlanders who arrived with Chiang Kai-shek, and now an elite local family. Times may change, but Bun-hui holds fast to the propriety that makes a good housekeeper; even as her employer is swept up in a dangerous political investigation, she refuses to air the faintest whiff of dirty laundry.

Miss Cassie is the daughter of local Taiwanese family with a fading aristocratic pedigree. In keeping with her class mores, she has chosen to study abroad in Paris, but her distance from Taiwan may not be enough to save her from suspicion when martial law is declared back home.

In the thirty years since the lifting of martial law, stories of the brutal indignities of the White Terror have gradually emerged. However, this collection of novellas stands out from other literary treatments of the period by foregoing the heart-wrenching cruelties and injustices in favor of unsentimental sketches of the struggle to maintain normalcy – the simple dreams, principles, and pursuits of ordinary life – in times of political repression.

Lai Hsiang-Yin's Still Life in White*: A Three-Part Book on the White Terror, Collective Trauma, and the Enforcement of Silence.*

By Hong Chee Shan (originally published at The News Lens)
Translated by Kevin Wang

Finding Deeper Nuance in the Rewriting of "Mr. Soo"

According to interviews with Lai Hsiang-Yin, "Mr. Soo" took on earlier forms in "Fathers" from her book *Afterwards* and her 2016 story "Rain Tree". In other words, she has been writing and revising "Mr. Soo" since 2012. The version of "Mr. Soo" that appeared in *Springhill Literati* collection additionally emphasizes on how the power of the state apparatus, as seen by Mr. Soo during his military career, can transform a person. The story opens with a mention of Chiang Kai-shek's *Annex to the Principle of People's Livelihood on Matters of Education and Leisure*, which guided national artistic production under the banner of anti-communism since the 1950s. *Still Life in White* expands on its description of Mr. Soo's life is like as a school teacher after his military service and how he manages to dodge the stray bullets of the White Terror while working in the education system.

In the chapter titled "1987: Zoo", Mr. Soo's observations of an elephant in the Taipei Zoo are followed by reflections on the whitewashing of information under martial law. He speaks to Mrs. Hung, a teacher whose husband was arrested after the Kaohsiung Incident. Since then, the close watch of the state has washed away the peak of Teacher Hung's youth. Mr. Soo reads the newspaper everyday but has never seen the name of Teacher Hung's husband in its pages: "Such incidents seem to spread out like waves. If implicated, even the most inconspicuous person will be carried away."

In the allegory of Mr. Soo's life, insignificant figures either escape the machinery of the state or get caught in its beak and talons. For example, the young and beautiful girl Chun-He becomes a military training instructor after the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis. And one of Mr. Soo's old classmates from the teacher's college is driven insane and forced into an asylum by the Party-state. Another friend who loves photography captures the image of the burning police station during the Zhongli Incident. Mr. Soo himself, while seemingly carefree, takes great pains to evade the sight lines of the state, though he does everything he can to care for the less fortunate. As an insignificant figure under martial law, he can only watch the times unfold while remaining hidden, and wait for the flood of history to

flush away, which is no easy matter.

A Song of Many Languages: Miss Cassie

After the short story "Bun-hui" comes "Miss Cassie", a novella of well over a hundred pages. This story describes the lives of overseas Taiwanese in Europe, which are less commonly discussed than Taiwanese townsfolk in Japan and the United States. Miss Cassie was born with a good voice and can sing in Taiwanese, Mandarin, English, and French. Lai Hsiang-Yin has carefully crafted song lyrics to embed into the story, deepening our reading experience through meticulously wrought details that highlight the writer's superb literary techniques and narrative ability.

Miss Cassie's life follows the 1960s slogan: "Come, come, come to NTU; go, go, go to America." But wandering far from her homeland through the 1970s also makes her feel like a "rootless orchid". She experiences the gloom of political changes in the 1980s, a new era beginning with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, and even the turn of the millennium, when tensions between post-1949 Chinese immigrants and local people evolve into a showdown between the Blue and Green Parties. The story, which spans fifty years, is more than just a "mixing of fragmented historical material and individual memory" as Lai Hsiang-Yin states in the afterword (titled "White, Do You See It?"). It is in the depiction of characters who pass superficially as indifferent shadows that the author demonstrates her narrative ability.

Downplaying the White Terror is one way in which characters express their fear. Witnessing student strikes in Paris, "Miss Cassie thought long and hard about freedom and it seemed to her to be a very complicated business." Her teacher Yin Hai-kuang once said they lived in "an age without ideology, in which everything floated unattached; should one or two things happen to come to prominence, they'd soon be quietly wiped away." Miss Cassie, who flees from Taiwan to France, eventually chooses to go to Berlin: "She does not want to live her days jumpy and on edge. She wants to go to an unfamiliar place and thinks vaguely of Berlin as a forgotten cave, an inaccessible city that the hand of the Party-state would not be interested in reaching." But in the end, she was there at the wrong time. The Party-state can extend its claws and teeth even past the walls of liberal West Berlin. During a trip back to Taiwan, she is stopped at the airport and then let go. A few months later, the death of Chen Wen-chen sends all overseas Taiwanese people a brutal message.

What is the Color of White?

Let us go back to the White Terror – the unbounded reach of this white, a color of collective trauma and silence. In *Still Life in White*, characters who brush against the White Terror must be first to escape the site of catastrophe before being wiped away. Even after martial law is lifted, Miss Cassie still seems stuck in the old times: "Upon each return to Taiwan, she felt that there were eyes watching her from behind." White is the color of wordless public executions. In her afterword, Lai Hsiang-Yin speaks on the process of "painting white with white" by adding brushstrokes to dyed cloth, producing images which can only be discerned through close attention. Someone must be able to see it. Someone must remember it. Only then will the white portrait see the light of day again.

White is a color we must learn to discern.

STILL LIFE IN WHITE

By Lai Hsiang-Yin
Translated by Jim Weldon

Miss Cassie

1.

The autumn sunlight always slanted down so; it made it seem so very, very long.

Miss Cassie was an old woman now and had seen a good deal of sunshine, but she was still struck by the beauty of autumn when it came around; indeed, the longer she looked, the more beauty she saw.

She had been sitting in the waiting room for some time. Beyond the milk-white of the window were the dappled greens and yellows of a linden tree. Autumn light glittered like gold through its leaves and branches, throwing patterns like painted figures on the building opposite. Miss Cassie put a hand to her brow against the light, drinking in the beauty of the scene greedily through narrowed eyes – if her gaze met the light directly it made her eyes sting, and everything at once turned too dark to see.

She took off her glasses and rubbed the bridge of her nose where it was sore. She'd heard people joke that the Impressionists must have been shortsighted. Even if that were true, it wouldn't have been severe; not like her own terrible myopia, which made even the outline of objects unclear and everything just a blur dotted with blobs of color. Were she to try painting, she would likely not have even the first clue what she'd put on the canvas.

"Ms. Yen." Miss Cassie heard the nurse's voice and opened her eyes.

"Look up." The nurse shook the small bottle she was holding then put two drops of the liquid it contained into each of Miss Cassie's eyes.

The sharp sting from the mydriatic drops subsided slowly. Miss Cassie closed her eyes and waited for the pain to settle, relying on memory to savor the golden blaze of the autumn sun. She idly speculated why it might be that the spring sunlight, although similarly long and slanting, had none of the fiery glory of autumn; it was more of a pallid pink.

When Miss Cassie opened her eyes again, a change had come her over vision. The things that had been unclear were still unclear, but now everything was puffed up large like a cake after baking. Miss Cassie narrowed her eyes and reached out to the wall for support as she made her way slowly into the consultation room. The doctor turned on a lamp and shone it into Miss Cassie's eyes, checking the interior lining.

"Please look directly into the light and bear with me for a moment." The doctor, a woman, was growing older year by year just like Miss Cassie; bearing with things kept getting harder and tears kept welling in her eyes.

"Don't flinch." This was the doctor again.

Miss Cassie took a grip of herself and looked directly at the strong light; no slacking, no deviation. There was a stinging sensation that seemed almost to pierce right through her. She was not sure if it emanated from her eyes alone or her body entire. She forced herself to endure it and continue staring at the far end of the bright light until, whether due to fatigue or loss of vision, she seemed to break through into a strange space neither dark nor light; a wide expanse in front of her eyes where she could see everything, though she at once reminded herself that this was not so. She had seen nothing.

Blindness – was this what it felt like? Miss Cassie wondered if the notion of being cast into a universe of the unknown or thrown into a temporal torrent was supposed to describe a feeling something like this.

"It's getting to be about time we dealt with this cataract situation." The doctor switched the lamp off. She might have been describing fruit ripening for harvest.

Miss Cassie wiped away her tears. "The lens you were talking about last time?"

The structure in the eye that handled light rays, and ought to be clear as crystal, was growing progressively more clouded. The light could not get in and everything looked indistinct, color and luster dulled. "A bit like when a photograph fades." The doctor was good at describing symptoms through everyday analogies. A cloudy lens – she described it like a windowpane that would not come clean no matter how much you wiped, so it made you think it was foggy outside.

The doctor continued talking about the state of her vitreous bodies, retina and macula, a whole plethora of information about parts of the eye. Miss Cassie might not have been inclined to know but she needed to, even though knowing did not necessarily imply she could be cured. If she asked about treatment, the doctor would say, oh you people really want too much, it's organs aging, not some virus or infection, what medicine do you imagine could restore them to how they were? If there were a treatment, it would involve surgery and complete replacement, an artificial substitute for what Nature gave, and not everything that can be swapped out like that. Miss Cassie couldn't help feeling downhearted; she came here once a year, if not to be told that the situation had deteriorated that little bit more, then to anticipate an announcement that the worst had come. These eyes; if she only had limited time left to use them, should she not be taking a good look at the world and committing it to memory? Or should she not look if she did not have to, let time just stretch on in an unremarkable haze?

The effects of the dilating drops had not yet worn off by the time she went home, and Miss Cassie's vision remained unstable. She could dimly make out that the sun was already beginning to set, the sky a swathe of red cloud, fierce as burning fire. A long time ago, if a similar scene occurred in the lane by her childhood home, Granny would raise her voice from there under the eaves, point to the sky, and call out to the children playing in the street, "Look – burning clouds."

She couldn't get her head around the ways of the world, but time was always a thing of beauty and it would truly be a shame if she could not see. The more Miss Cassie thought about it, the more disconsolate she grew:

Dusk and the sun sinks down to the hill,

Sometimes the autumn wind blows chill…

She began humming a tune she often heard at home a long time ago – "Twilight Ridge", her mother's favorite song about sunsets. Miss Cassie had a fine singing voice; all her romances had seen her use soft voice and beguiling words to capture her paramour's heart. She'd sung English songs and French songs, but neither was as tricky as this old song in Hokkien, with its mix of classical and vernacular registers. She seemed to recall that when Chi Lu-Hsia sang it, her voice had a touch of Taiwanese opera to it:

I turn my eyes and look to home, sitting under the banyan tree…

The notes for "banyan tree" were pitched so high, Miss Cassie's voice cracked. Chi Lu-Hsia definitely sang it better; Miss Cassie lost interest and gave up trying. The idea of being homesick at her age! Plus, banyans you only got back home; if a person was homesick for here, they'd think about lindens, you'd suppose.

October was almost over, and the leaves on the lindens had turned. One more blast of autumn wind and the trees would be bare.

That autumn wind – it wasn't *sometimes* chill; every year it was cold enough to make a body shiver.

Miss Cassie pulled her scarf tighter. Sundown – that was the Taiwanese term her mother used. The moon wasn't up yet, so it was dark but not completely; *entre chien et loup*, but never mind spotting the difference, if an actual dog or wolf came bounding over right now, Miss Cassie wouldn't see it at all with her dim eyes.

Miss Cassie washed the dishes and listened to music. She used to use a dishwasher, but it broke some years ago and couldn't be fixed, and she couldn't be bothered to get a new one. It was just her, so she only needed the one wok, a few plates, and a few cups; the only bother was when the weather got cold and her fingers wouldn't

do as they were told in the tepid water, either bumping and scraping against things or dropping a cup and breaking it.

Mind you, if you opened the cupboards, they were stacked full, Miss Cassie thought somewhat cavalierly. Plenty to last until old age finally did her in.

"Thinking like that means you really have got old," her little sister scolded her on the phone the other day.

With a laugh, she replied: Old? Well, of course I am. Nothing wrong with that, she'd been very happy these past few years, dressing and living as she pleased. She had already done all the running around she wanted to. Those years in Paris, with those thick bangs; dark eyeshadow plastered on above those long, curly false lashes; everyone trying to be like Brigitte Bardot, eager to do the forbidden thing, using a flag like a bath towel, wearing kinky boots like standinging in the Holy Grail. Ah ha! It had come to Miss Cassie in an instant of clarity – this is what looked sexy to men.

How long ago was all that now? What had got her raking all that up again?

Wie einst Lili Marleen,

Wie einst Lili Marleen

The music was all finished and done now, why bring it all up?

Miss Cassie finished washing the dishes and picked up the tea towel. There was more to do. A lot of scale in the water here; if you didn't dry up carefully, you might as well not bother washing the dishes in the first place.

She let the music play one more time. Mark had left her a whole stack of Marlene Dietrich, more than enough to go on with for the rest of her days.

Mark was obviously not an old man, but he was always listening to Dietrich. When they were living in Rote Insel, if they ever had guests, he would point at a window in the street diagonally opposite and explain it was the house Dietrich had been born in. If there were no guests, he would waltz her from one room to the next in time to the music. The old recordings crackled with static, but while the technology might have been limited, there was no shortage of self-confidence in the writing and performance. The primal chaos parted, and a light came on in the world. It was a Golden Age in which new things were truly new, so new they positively shone.…

Golden Age. It was a term she'd learned from Professor Tsao. Professor Tsao would have been familiar with Marlene Dietrich; I mean, he studied stuff like Showa Modernism, so he was hardly going to overlook Dietrich. Professor Tsao and those of his generation grew up breathing the atmosphere of Showa Modern, and he had been in Tokyo to do it. Not that he ever talked about it. Professor Yang from the history department never talked about it either. That generation had a lot of things they never talked about. Mark said his father was the same, would never speak about the past. He'd often sit out in the back yard playing the harmonica and it would be "Lili Marleen". He'd play and play, play on to the end of the tune, then he'd lower his head….

If Mark were still alive he'd be a good seventy years old by now. What would the pair of them in their seventies get up to together? Dance? Well, they definitely would if they still could. If they weren't up to dancing, they would go for walks in the woods. If they weren't able to walk, they could sit and look at the flowers, which would be fine. What about Professor Tsao? He must have been dead for as many years as it was since she first went abroad.

Miss Cassie didn't pay much mind to her age but when she worked out how old the others must be, it suddenly struck her that she was now older than Mark, Professor Tsao, or her father had ever been, which meant she no longer had any model to pattern her life after. Mind you, things about them she didn't understand before, or didn't think were quite right, she now understood to at least some extent. Perhaps this was what they meant about grasping the meaning of life? But having arrived at this time in her life, when it was slowing to a halt and she was doing less and less, was there much point to grasping for meaning? School friends and family had been dying off one after the other these past few years. She'd gotten a postcard from her old classmate Chie-Hui in New York to say the Ku boy had died suddenly from a stroke.

All the men she remembered seemed to have died

young. What was that all about?

Miss Cassie put away the now clean and dry dishes and wiped down the sink for good measure. Finally, she could sit down, pour herself a nightcap, and give all her attention to the music.

Die Seligkeiten vergangener Zeiten

Sind alle noch in meinem kleinen Koffer drin

Ich hab' noch einen Koffer in Berlin

Dietrich was like some kind of enchantress, making magic with every final note, filling every drab room with feeling all in an instant as Mark took her by the hand, turning and turning again, twirling from one room to the next.…

On a chanté, on a dansé et l'on n'a même pas pensé à s'embrasser – oh no, wrong, this wasn't the Champs-Elysées, this was West Berlin – RIAS Berlin; Mark's radio station was going to be playing Dietrich's Berlin recordings again.…

Eine Freie Stimme der Freien Welt. Mark copied the station call-sign, whispering breathily in her ear, "A Free Voice of the Free World, and I've still never been to Free China."

Free China. The way Mark said it was like lovers' talk, but it pained Miss Cassie to hear it, two words that seemed to describe something entirely apart from her.

Ich hab' noch einen Koffer in Berlin. Mark sang the line and said to her, "You know it means we're the suitcase?"

Miss Cassie lifted up her face to look at him, it was all a blur; she couldn't tell if it was true or false.

"We've been left here."

Miss Cassie cocked her head and listened until the song finished, then turned out the kitchen light and went into the bathroom to wash her face.

Ich hab' noch einen Koffer in Taipeh… Her younger sister in Paris always used to sing it with the words changed like that.

Why bother? Miss Cassie thought to herself. You wanted to leave and so you went, and you kept on going right up until today.

"If you're going to leave, do it while you're still young," Professor Tsao, who taught English poetry, said with an impatient wave of his hand.

Miss Cassie had certainly gone far. One ticket for a packet steamer and she'd gone round and about, halfway around the world: boarded in Hong Kong, disembarked in Marseilles, then to Paris by train.

2.

Miss Cassie came from Bangka. The Lungshan Temple had been at the center of community life for centuries. When they used to mess about around the snack stands and stalls out front of the temple, the old folk chatting would refer to the place as Pakpheliau and Hakkocho but if you were addressing a letter, you put Kangding Road, Guangzhou Street, and Kunming Street. Only when Miss Cassie grew old enough to read a map did she learn that these were the names of towns and cities in the south and west of China.

Miss Cassie passed through Kawabatacho and down Roosevelt Road to arrive on the south side of Taipei. The place-names were all confusing and the scenery completely different – fields, ponds and seedling nurseries. The campus grounds at the university were a wilderness too, the newly built lecture halls and dormitories standing in splendid isolation, with only the old Faculty of Literature and Politics showing any signs of bustle. Royal Palm Boulevard just outside ran straight as an arrow, with at one end the piled ridges of the distant mountains and the other the Blue Sky, White Sun and Red Red Ground fluttering high on its flagpole above the fort-like guardhouse at the campus gates.

Miss Cassie and Chie-Hui sought out Professor Tsao, who was to be their tutor. Chie-Hui's family knew the professor already, so she was accepted with a minimum of fuss, but when it came to Miss Cassie, Professor Tsao scrutinized her forms without saying a word. Just when she thought he was going to shake his head, he said in a flat voice, "I hear your father studied under Dr. Tu?"

餘地
MARGINS OF TIME

Ku Yu-Ling
顧玉玲

- **Category:** Literary Fiction
- **Publisher:** Ink
- **Date:** 4/2022
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
- **Pages:** 368
- **Length:** 179,000 characters (approx. 117,000 words in English)

An assistant professor at Taipei National University of the Arts, author Ku Yu-Ling is a master of non-fiction novels that integrate emotional depth with critiques of contemporary society. She is the recipient of numerous domestic literary prizes including Taipei Book Fair Award, the Taipei Literature Prize, and the Golden Tripod Award, Taiwan's highest publishing accolade. Her previous works include *Our Stories: Migration and Labor in Taiwan*, and *Returning Home*.

A young man raised in America returns to Taiwan in search of his father – his only clue: a stack of airmail letters sent thirty years ago. His arrival reawakens the dormant wounds of a Taiwanese family, eliciting individual streams of memory from which a microcosm of Taiwan's complex contemporary history takes form.

Liao Hsi is living out her twilight years in the company of her daughter, when one day a stranger appears inquiring about his father. The young man, Hsieh Chen, grew up in the USA, raised by his mother, grandmother, and uncle, but the identity of his father is a complete mystery. The only clue he found was a stack of airmail letters sent from Taiwan thirty years before. The sender was Liao Hsi's deceased husband Chin-Shan.

Hsieh Chen's search awakens Liao Hsi's memories of her husband and the evolution of their relationship. For Liao Hsi's daughter, Hsieh Chen's arrival brings back her memories of her childhood – time spent with her father, and the tutoring she received in English during her adolescent years. Gradually, from various strands of memory, the outline of Chin-Shan's life takes shape, while simultaneously bringing to light previously unaddressed questions: Why was Chin-Shan so concerned about the welfare of his close friend's son? And what became of the girl who studied English alongside his daughter?

In the vast stream of history, personal wounds and grievances hardly warrant any mention, yet their impact on the life of the individual and later relationships can be profound. With warmth and compassion, this novel unravels the entangled threads of hurt within a family, while simultaneously weaving a complex tapestry of contemporary Taiwanese history from individual streams of memory.

The Characters of Her Novel Beating in Her Mind for Thirty Years, Ku Yu-Ling Exhausts the Field of Her Life to Capture the Unspeakable: An Interview with Ku Yu-Ling on Her Novel Margins of Time

By Hao Ni-Er (originally published at Openbook)
Translated by Dong Li

Known for her literary reportage, Ku Yu-Ling has recently released *Margins of Time*, her first novel. The book reads like a series of memory exercises, describing Taiwan's wounds and scars, interpersonal bonds and burdens, as well as individual pains and sorrows.

Unable to forget our grief, we live more like a collective nation than a generation.

The novel is valuable for more than Ku's ability to stick a needle where it really bleeds. Her memory exercises also work like daily conversations that take place between the moments of meals, movements, and quiet looks. Following a plot as plain as water, the readers realize that strength and vulnerability co-exist – those lives shattered by explosive events that happened decades ago have not died, instead, they strike on the here and now quietly like aftershocks.

Fiction Fills an Unknown Past.

Speaking about her creative process while writing *Margins of Time*, Ku Yu-Ling said she deployed results from a life of field research, because "fiction, in fact, does not reveal what is already known, instead, the characters often go to places that are unfamiliar to us. Quite often, I had to stop and think where they were taking me." This is all new to Ku Yu-Ling. She said with a sweet smile: "I call the time spent on the novel 'sweet hours'. Every day, I looked forward to an unknown journey."

These "sweet hours", however, took thirty years to reach fruition. The phrase "field of her life" is, in a larger sense, no exaggeration. Many characters in *Margins of Time* took shape when Ku graduated high school; one of the protagonists, Chang Chin-Shan, is an example.

"This character was modeled after my high school geography teacher. In his youth, he endured Japanese rule.

When people in my generation read history, it told us that World War Two is all about fighting against the Japanese. That conflict seemed to define everything. But the fact is that Taiwan participated in the militaristic expansion at the time. This part was not included in the materials we had read; everybody was just happy to celebrate the victory. I did not have the opportunity to read other versions beyond the history of fighting against the Japanese until after the lifting of martial law."

Ku was so shocked by her findings that even today she can only use adjectives like "explosive" to describe the "other world" that she saw after the lifting of the martial law.

"I started to wonder what the adults I knew, and what my geography teacher, or even my father had actually gone through," Ku Yu-Ling said. Her reflection came to a shattering conclusion: "I knew nothing about their past."

Ku said when she was younger, she thought about adults only in terms of "the annoying and the not-so-annoying". The onset of a new era brought all kinds of materials to light. What she "desperately wanted to know" was not just the information in history books, but the stories of individual lives. "But then you realize there is no way of knowing people simply through your intelligence, you are sometimes constrained by the framework of the era. Of course, I later also benefited from the era."

Ku Yu-Ling recalled reading classified historical records from the White Terror together with someone who had been a political prisoner then. "We read left-wing political economy and Marx. For a child who grew up with anti-communist sentiments, a whole new world opened up, the adults around us became three-dimensional, and I began to imagine more. A novel can contain that kind of imagination."

A Small Step Toward Reconciliation, a Big Step Toward Understanding

All the wounds and scars in *Margins of Time*, no matter how big or small, are caused by the aftershocks of politics and class structure. Therefore, what most concerns Ku in the midst of these aftershocks is how these people lived their lives.

In the process of reading the book, readers may be easily drawn in by the propelling plotlines of war and politics. But Ku also spends an equal amount of energy laying out pressing issues like housing, labor, and environmental protection. "If we are able to understand the constraints these people felt, the choices they made, and the consequences they had to bear, then we should also reflect on our own life."

More than thirty years have passed since the lifting of martial law. The children born then are now old enough to start their own families. Ku Yu-Ling's desire to write awakened those three decades ago. The characters beat in her mind day and night. And she hopes to launch a new dialogue with readers in their twenties and thirties.

"This generation is very different from ours. They have been to all kinds of memorials and museums since their youth. My greatest fear is that after they finish reading the long historical records, they would say: 'It is good that it is over. It is good that it is different now.' What I fear most is the perfect tense of democracy, not knowing its inadequacy, not having the strength to resist."

In this way, *Margins of Time* remains unfinished. The curiosity, patience, and suspicion of the characters, though different in their own ways, ultimately reflect an era. Some cannot find the right words at the moment when something happens; time then passes on like water, and the pain becomes an unspeakable wound, a fog in the mind. I hear some are eager for reconciliation, as if the fog could be controlled or dispersed completely.

"I do not write to reconcile, far from it," said Ku Yu-Ling. She meant that she writes to understand.

Now she understands that "sometimes, the pain of individuals cannot be relieved or reversed by other forces, but demands the whole social structure to relax in order for them to find relief." Therefore, writing is a must, no matter how far the so-called "truth" as we understand it departs from reality. Ku Yu-Ling is willing to let her inquiry and her work become a part of the "collective" forces to that end.

MARGINS OF TIME

By Ku Yu-Ling
Translated by May Huang

The Future Was Already Here

The silhouette, like the dancing shadow of a fawn, flickered and approached from afar.

Liao Hsi shielded her eyes, squinting. *Who's that?* The background light was so bright it swallowed everything around it, obliterating any sense of distance. The fawn-like shadow flickered and grew as if on a blank page, weightless, lively, perhaps even happy; but who was it?

Before she could get a closer look, she woke up. Liao Hsi lay in silence, staring at the pitch black before her eyes. She didn't need to turn on the lights to guess that it was likely two in the morning. The elderly are light sleepers, so falling back asleep would be difficult. She'd been having many dreams of late. Sometimes she awoke with afterimages still in her mind – flashy, colorful fragments dancing against a faint soundtrack of drums and bells. The music wasn't overbearing, yet it never stopped. Even when she believed everything had gone quiet, the sound of bells would float to the surface. The one constant was the shadows bounding like deer, each time getting closer, almost playfully, to meet her. She wistfully replayed the dream in her head. That light reminded her of a concrete floor on a sunny day, holding onto the warmth of summertime. That fawn-like figure seemed warm, too.

Forced up by her full bladder, Liao Hsi began to get out of bed, moving slowly to avoid triggering her back pain. It was autumn, the middle of night, and freezing. Letting her feet grazed the icy floorboards, she yanked them back up immediately and shivered, grumbling a complaint before placing them firmly on the ground. The walls were dimly lit, and Liao Hsi groped in the dark toward the bathroom. She squatted on the toilet seat for a spell, then feebly squeezed out a few drops, frustrated that she'd once again been deceived by her weak bladder. This was the price of getting old, she supposed. The smallest things took great effort and were mostly in vain.

Liao Hsi was still not used to this sort of frustration, even after many years of feeling this way. Ever since her youth, Liao Hsi had been clever and capable. She was picking tea leaves with the adults before she even graduated from elementary. With a good eye and nimble hand, she picked baskets full of pretty leaves without a bad one to be found. She was a fast learner when it came to sun-drying the leaves and picking the right ones for making tea, too. Apart from lacking the muscle strength to grind the leaves, Liao Hsi performed each task neatly and beautifully. The grownups never had to clean up after her. Most of all, she loved squatting in the corner with Ma as she cured dried vegetables, listening to her name one vegetable after another. Liao Hsi would help her convert years from the Japanese imperial calendar to the Republican system, writing down different imperial era names in white chalk on the cement floor before the round urns, one name for each jar of pickled vegetables, as if each were a boundary stone, awaiting an advanced, prosperous future.

But the future was uncertain. The future had already come.

Now, she was an old woman who had been squatting on the toilet seat long enough to feel pins and needles in her legs, and now struggled to stand

back up. Aging was real and irreversible, but she resisted nonetheless, insisting on doing everything herself. Even though her movements had slowed, she believed that the order in which things were done should still stay the same. She had been following that order for her entire life. Whenever she saw others confuse the order of things, she hated that she couldn't stand up and show them herself how it should be done.

But who would she demonstrate to, anyway? Neither of her two daughters was as competent as she. Every time she tried to pass on some of her housekeeping secrets, their looks of obvious disinterest thwarted her. Fen-Fang was an avid reader who didn't like doing chores. Whether it was sweeping floors or washing rice, she always did a sloppy job. When Liao Hsi stepped in to demonstrate, wanting her daughter to follow her example, Fen-Fang would only shrug her shoulders and say, "you do it better, anyway," before returning to her desk. Her sister Yao-Yuan had a warm personality and would do what her mother asked, but lacked orderliness. When frying an egg, she'd send green onions flying onto the stove, and oil splashing onto the lid of the pan. After watching Yao-Yuan make a big mess, all Liao Hsi could do was ban her from entering the kitchen again. In the end, the one with the most work to do was always Liao Hsi.

More than once, Liao Hsi climbed onto a high surface to replace the light bulbs while home alone and took a fall. Her furious daughters begged her to stop helping out around the house. Chores like these could be handled by her grandchildren, Wen or Yan. Yet which member of the family would take the initiative to act? The lightbulb could be broken for half a month and nobody would even realize it. If Liao Hsi reminded them, they'd drag their feet on calling the handyman, as if everything else were a hundred times more important. Only she alone fixated completely on the house.

Anyway, it was just Yao-Yuan in the house these days, but the door to her room was always closed, fixed on the silhouette of her unturning back. Yao-Yuan worked long, irregular hours, and her bedroom resembled a warzone. If Liao Hsi didn't tidy it while her daughter was at work, would it still be livable? Liao Hsi couldn't help but voice her internal frustrations aloud, accompanied by a few small gestures, as if she were performing for an invisible auditorium. After all, the drama playing out in her heart demanded to be seen on stage. Her murmuring bounced around the bathroom walls like a quarrel taking place in the middle of the night.

When she stepped out of the bathroom, Liao Hsi noticed a light flicker in Yao-Yuan's room. Perhaps Yao-Yuan, roused from her slumber, turned on a light to check the time before ducking under the covers again. Perhaps she even cussed out of earshot. The corner of Liao Hsi's mouth curled into a smile.

Falling back asleep was hopeless. Liao Hsi lay in bed, reviewing the day's chores in her mind. There were still a few undergarments on the balcony that needed to be handwashed, but the sound of running water would wake people up. Even if she were to hang clothes in the middle of night, they'd be wet with dew in the morning. She decided to go shopping in the morning. Yao-Yuan had decided to go vegetarian this year, so Liao Hsi also planned to cook less meat and prepare lighter meals, though she didn't want her grandchildren's dinners to be too bland. If the forecast was sunny, it would be a good idea to change the sheets in the afternoon, as they were harder to pack up on a chilly day. The electric fan also needed to be cleaned and put away.

It was an unusually hot summer, and the sunshine always made her think of the sultry summers she spent picking tea leaves as a child. In fact, around midnight was when she'd head to the plantations, where she'd work until ten in the morning, so as to avoid the scorching midday sun. She'd have lunch and rest below the bishopwood tree. Sometimes Ma would ask her to run home to feed the chickens, and she'd return to the fields to resume picking after sunset.

The past was so close she could almost reach out and touch it. She had been a diligent, understanding child. Ma would sometimes give Liao Hsi cool water to quench her thirst, which Liao Hsi understood as an unspoken compliment. As the seventh of nine children, it was seldom Liao Hsi's turn to be pampered, and she didn't get many hugs or bedtime stories. So she liked to stick with Ma as she did chores, picked tea leaves,

pickled vegetables, and washed the dishes. When Ma wiped away the beading sweat on her forehead with the towel she kept around her shoulders and smiled at Liao Hsi, it made Liao Hsi stand a little straighter.

The memory shone as brightly as the light from her dream, and she could see the tea leaves they picked the previous day spread out in front of the house. Then from afar came the thunder of motors and propellers, the sound of rusty chains breaking in half. In her hurry to usher Liao Hsi back inside the house, Ma kicked over a jar of preserved vegetables that she had just sealed, sending yellow strips of pickled daikon flying, scattering among the tea leaves like small chrysalises. Only later did they learn that the American plane wasn't there to drop any bombs. Instead, it was a peacekeeping aircraft from the Seventh Fleet, cruising over the Taiwan Strait. Liao Hsi was four and a half years old then, and had never lived through a war. But it wasn't that long ago that Ma had to hide from American bombers, so the whir of helicopters still triggered her escape reflex. Who knew that only a few years later, planes carrying the same American flag would turn from enemy to ally almost overnight.

That was Liao Hsi's one and only encounter with an air raid. After so many years, the image from that day that remained preserved in her memory was actually that of the dirty, white daikons splattered outside the house. What a shame, Ma had said. That jar was supposed to be a wedding present for Liao Hsi one day. The vegetables would have turned a dark golden color and made chicken soup taste sweeter. And smelled delicious. Liao Hsi recalled how Ma had held onto her tightly, darted into the house, and ducked under the altar table, where her heavy breasts and the folds of her stomach formed a soft, protective mound. Liao Hsi was pressed into the familiar, womanly frame with its intoxicating scent: sweat and tea leaves on a summer morning.

Ma had deep-set eyes and skin that would redden and peel if she stayed in the sun for too long. But after the winter she'd revert to her fair, white complexion. This was unique among the Hakka villagers, and gave her an aura of mystery. It was only until ten or so years ago, when Yao-Yuan took Liao Hsi vacationing in Europe, that she saw Ma's features in the faces of the Caucasian folks traveling down the Rhine River: their sensitive, easily sunburned skin, freckled cheeks, broad shoulders, and brown, curly hair. Perhaps there was Caucasian blood in the family, from when the Dutch first visited Taiwan? Which generation did that happen in, and how many times did the gene mutate? Genes traveled through the family in mysterious intervals. It was as if her grandmother made a special request for Yao-Yuan to be the one whose features would reflect her ancestors' mixed heritage. Yao-Yuan was tall and well built, with light freckles and deep-set eyes. As a child, when Yao-Yuan gazed at grownups with those light brown eyes, Liao Hsi sometimes thought she was looking at Ma. Embracing her daughter felt like reliving the intimacy she and Ma shared.

Unable to stay in bed any longer, she decided she would reorganize the closet, for it was time for their light summer clothes to be folded away and replaced by long sleeves.

A framed family portrait hung above the dresser, with the photograph inside already faded to yellow. Liao Hsi stared at it absent-mindedly as she placed a pile of T-shirts into the lower drawers. The photo was taken thirty years ago. Back then, Yao-Yuan was only seven, and cuddled next to Liao Hsi like a little doll. She wore a pink, sequined skirt that she had picked out for herself, but every time she saw the picture now she'd say my god, how embarrassing. Fen-Fang stood next to her father, Chin-Shan, both looking rather thin. Chin-Shan's brow was furrowed and his gaze as unfocused as ever, making him look a little lost. Fen-Fang leaned slightly backwards, wearing a patient expression with eyes staring straight ahead as if she were angry at something. With her thick eyebrows, beautiful eyes, and skinny frame, she looked just like her father. And she was stubborn like him, too.

For a long time, Fen-Fang and her father were not on speaking terms, their relationship like frozen soil too hard for an axe to split. While they lived under the same roof, silence lay like frost on the ground, blocking new life from sprouting. Only on the day Fen-Fang

graduated from college did she turn to her father and break the silence at last: "I'm sorry."

Chin-Shan patted her shoulder, like a brother. "It's okay."

Father and daughter smoked together on the balcony, fumes curling around them.

Was everything truly okay? Liao Hsi observed the two of them, one as thin as the other, reticent as ever, as everyday life returned to normal. It was like the sun shone on the frost and dissolved it in an instant. She never saw them address the past, reconcile old disputes, or acknowledge their new amity. They simply went on with their days, indifferent and with the same gloominess. From time to time she'd see them smoking together on the balcony, as if they were both shouldering an immense sadness they could not put down. They understood each other without having to say anything, and because of their silence it didn't matter if they grew close or not. There were things they didn't need to say, or perhaps couldn't.

Twenty years had gone by since Chin-Shan passed away. If he hadn't been disciplined by the school that one year and resigned, would he have lived even longer? He never argued fervently, raised his voice to vent, or even complained in private. But he was never a particularly happy person, and the depression in his eyes and resentment in his heart turned into landmines; anyone who approached him needed to beware of an explosion at any given moment. Sometimes he'd wake up from a nightmare and go into the backyard for a smoke, and the pungent smell of Longlife cigarettes would linger in the air for a long time. Chin-Shan finally passed away at sixty-four – what was supposed to be the prime of his life – from a cardiovascular disease. In the photograph, Chin-Shan looked younger than she was, and would never grow old.

In the photo, Chin-Shan stared ahead with an indifferent expression, like Fen-Fang did, but there was a look of anticipation in his eyes, as if he were looking at someone in the distance. Perhaps there was a small deer there, skipping its way over.

Chin-Shan's surname was Chang. He taught high school geography but was a learned man in general, fluent in both Japanese and Chinese, and the school often asked him to set exam questions and edit textbooks. When they first met, Liao Hsi called him Mr. Chang, as all the neighbors did. Mr. Chang was single, lived in the school quarters, and visited her shop to buy rice every other week. He had handsome features and a refined demeanor, leaving one to wonder why such an upstanding man was almost forty but had yet to start a family.

Liao Hsi came from a Hakka family and grew up in a village in Miaoli. She had neat penmanship and a talent for math, but there were too many children in the family, and she didn't dare think about further schooling. Instead, she stayed home after graduating from primary school to help around the farm. When she was sixteen, her aunt visited the house and asked Ma to send one of her daughters into the city to be an apprentice at her rice shop, to help with restocking goods and accounting. Ma said Liao Hsi was the cleverest, and never made a mistake when counting change. So Ma prepared a new quilt for young Liao Hsi and, just like that, sent her into town.

Why did Mr. Chang see something in her? She never could figure it out. Each time he came to buy rice, he only purchased five catties, and returned before too long. She remembered his indifferent yet somewhat somber gaze, and the unwashed sweat stains on his shirt collar. Did he not have anyone at home to care for him? Liao Hsi's ears turned red as she thought about it.

Come to think of it, she even made the first move. When she heard that Mr. Chang was working on the geography textbook for junior high students, Liao Hsi decided to shoot her shot.

"Tell me, Mr. Chang, which towns does the Jhonggang River flow through?"

卡西與他們的瓦斯店
CASEY AND HIS GAS SHOP

Hao Ni-Er
郝妮爾

- **Category:** Literary Fiction
- **Publisher:** Homeward
- **Date:** 9/2021
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
- **Pages:** 328
- **Length:** 107,000 characters (approx. 70,000 words in English)

Hao Ni-Er holds an MA degree from the National Dong Hwa University Department of Sinophone Literatures. In addition to writing fiction, plays, essays, reportage, and fairy tales, she is a prominent interviewer and cultural critic. She is the author of the essay collection *My House or the House Next Door*. Her work has been recognized with numerous domestic literary awards, including the Lin Rong-San Literary Award, the Chung Chao-cheng Literature Prize, and the Dong Hwa Literature Award.

*** 2021 Openbook Award**

In early 2000s Taiwan, where household stoves and local restaurants alike run on propane cylinders rather than piped-in gas, Casey and his sometimes-friends, sometime-competitors in the propane delivery business are the threads that stitch together the thoroughly human, and often messy, history of one decade in a small town.

At the start of the new millennium, Casey moves to his mother's hometown and takes over operation of a local propane cylinder delivery service. In small-town Taiwan, where there is no piped-in gas, propane cylinders are the lifeblood of home kitchens and the restaurant industry alike. Timely delivery of the cylinders demands that delivery drivers know every back alley and shortcut in town, and since all day they're in and out of homes and businesses, they are often privy to tidbits of information and accidental observations that others will never know.

Initially, outsider Casey stands out like a sore thumb in the small town, and becomes the object of various unfounded rumors. One day, a Mrs. Fang simultaneously requests deliveries from all three of the town's propane delivery services. In the ensuing brouhaha, only the perceptive Casey realizes the root of the problem: Mrs. Fang is suffering from sudden onset dementia. Fortunately, she still remembers her son's telephone number, and thus Casey is able to call in the assistance she requires. From this day forward, the townspeople begin to accept Casey as one of their own.

The motley occurrences in the lives of Casey and his amiable competitors become the backbone for the story of an entire town, the rise and fall of the propane delivery industry bookending this nostalgic portrayal of life in early 2000s Taiwan. While the propane cylinders require significant muscle to heft, this fictional peek inside a male-dominated industry has no shortage of strong female characters in the wives of Casey and his cohort. True partners through thick and thin, they not only keep the home fires burning for their hard-working husbands, but also stand ready to work their feminine magic on the most vexing business problems.

Casey and His Gas Shop: *A Gasman's Daughter Tears Off the Mask to Expose the Cruelty in the Saying "Jobs Are Neither Noble Nor Humble"*

By Hong Chee Shan (originally published at The News Lens)
Translated by Dong Li

The Guerrilla Female Perspective: Breaking Through the Monotone of the Masculine Narrative

Casey and His Gas Shop is based on the story of three gas shop owners: Casey, a newcomer to the city of Yilan; Wang Zi-Jian ("Prince"), whose business is going downhill; and Lin Tu-Tou ("Peanut"), whose business is booming. The book tells of their conflicts and the local customs of Yilan. One expects a story featuring three male characters to be masculine, but author Hao Ni-Er does not stop there. She expands the narrative to include the perspectives of Prince's wife Yeh Shu-Ching and daughter Wang An-Ni; Peanut's wife Lin Su-Yu; Grandma Fang, a customer, her son Fang Hsiang-Chun, daughter-in-law Hsiao Mei, and granddaughter Fang Huai-Hisang.

Amid this cacophony, the female perspective stands out: Wang An-Ni's teenage adventures, Yeh Shu-Ching's housekeeping, Lin Su-Yu's quiet observations, Hsiao Mei's struggles with her desire and infidelity, Fang Huai-Hsiang's bewilderment at Casey's pursuits. These scenes come alive in Hao Ni-Er's narrative to paint a holistic picture of the ecology of each company. For instance, here's a scene in which Yeh Shu-Ching urges her husband Prince to collect the money from their customer:

"Yeh Shu-Ching told him over and over again not to take credit. Halfway there, he received a call. It was her repeating: 'Get a deposit at least.'" But at the doorstep of the less privileged, Prince cannot hide his soft spot: "Though embarrassing, a gas bottle that is worth a few hundred dollars would allow these people to last a few more weeks, to have hot water and warm meals, as if it would prevent their life from tilting too fast." Thus, he assumes his wife's reprimand. Seeing that she is about to scold him, he quickly thinks up some excuse, but does not expect that "she just picked up two bags of fruits and walked away. As she turned around and saw that Prince had not stepped out of the car, she asked, 'Everything alright? Could you give me a hand?' He says of course and helps her carry the vegetables and fruits." Unannounced, a family drama ends. It is touching to read the couple's tacit understanding of each other.

Instead of accepting a typically masculine portrayal of women as being focused entirely on petty profits, the novel offers a realistic and unpretentious restoration of familial interactions, making the otherwise stiff and sweaty gas shops wonderfully human. This is what makes Hao Ni-Er's novel so powerful. The novel goes at length to set up the story, but ends in a precise and beautiful way, reminding us of all the compromises and helplessness in life. These last scenes give us a truthful close-up of the locals' daily lives.

Jobs Are Neither Noble Nor Humble: Grinding Matters for the Workers

In her afterword, Hao makes clear that "I was raised not to believe 'jobs are neither noble nor humble'." As the daughter of a gas worker, she wants to describe in writing the cruelties of that particular world. This makes *Casey and His Gas Shop* special in that it pierces the facade of appearance. Wang An-Ni, the daughter of Prince, has to face all kinds of gossip and suffers great humiliation because of her father's profession. "Good grief! He works so hard to earn a living, but look at his daughter!" However, Hao Ni-Er deliberately allows her character to have the resilience of resisting this flawed and stereotypical narrative: "If I were a daughter of a civil servant, would anyone say such things? What if I were a banker's child? What's wrong with a gas worker?" On reading this, readers might loosen up and feel sympathetic toward the cruelties behind a phrase like "jobs are neither noble nor humble".

Although workers need more respect, they often remain silent. In fact, at the very beginning of the novel, Hao Ni-Er already provides such an insight – Prince thought that his daughter's rebellion is "because of the gas smell all over me?" To everybody's surprise, the daughter rebelled only because her father's name sounds like the name of a brand of instant noodles, and she worried that he would be ridiculed by her schoolmates. The smell of natural gas permeates the novel; before he delivers gas bottles to restaurants in Dongshan, Peanut always bathes, noting: "The boss detests the smell of gas, so I cannot go without a shower." When Casey stands before someone he likes, he has nowhere to hide the smell: "Casey certainly knows what he smells like. The gas workers, no matter how thoroughly they wash themselves, have nowhere to hide the smell, when the others wrinkle their nose." That odor, a constant, baleful presence in *Casey and His Gas Shop*, is a reminder to the novelist herself as well as to the readers that matter how much you want to maintain a peaceful surface, it is better to admit that some smells cannot be washed away.

This is what makes *Casey and His Gas Shop* so special: it is honest, straightforward, and unapologetic. Hao speaks for the workers, not just to harvest popular acclaim, but also to make us reflect on whether we are being hypocritical when we blurt out "I understand" and "I know" in response to every observation, and whether we overlook the importance of honesty and sincerity. "Sincerity is the most moving sound," the author writes; this is precisely what Hao Ni-Er's *Casey and His Gas Shop* has taught me.

CASEY AND HIS GAS SHOP

By Hao Ni-Er
Translated by Jenna Tang

Casey and Them

Even elementary school teachers shared the gossip with their students: "Old Wu literally just sold his gas shop to Casey Chen, an outsider."

Casey

When Casey first arrived in Yuanshan, the news spread immediately. Yuanshan is a small town in Yilan, with stores and residential areas close together. Most neighbors know each other, and anyone not from here will be discussed throughout the neighborhood.

Casey's mother was from here. After getting married, she moved to Taichung and has rarely gone back to hometown since. Having Casey made it difficult for her to commute for long hours.

One time, Casey's family drove all the way to Taipei, and almost made it to Yilan, but Casey's mother couldn't stop vomiting on the endless winding roads to the point where Casey's father had no choice but to drive back to Taipei and find the closest hospital to put her on a drip.

After Casey's maternal grandparents passed away, his family stopped going back to Yilan.

Casey remembered very little about Yilan. The one memory he kept fresh in his mind was his mother talking about how natural and high quality the water in Yuanshan is. "Everyone says beauties come from Yuanshan. That's because good water nourishes them." That was all Casey remembered, though he didn't know why. At age twenty-three, he traveled all around Taiwan island with his bike. When he passed by Yilan, he purposefully made a detour to Yuanshan, lasciviously thinking: "If I bump into three beautiful girls, I'll settle down here."

At that time, he had nothing to tie him down. He had just broken up with his girlfriend, whom he had been with for years, because she had gotten pregnant. He remembered that was how she started the conversation that day: "Actually, I don't know if this child is my husband's or yours." Hearing it, Casey broke out in a cold sweat, fearing that she would ask him to take responsibility for their divorce. Fortunately, all that he had to pay for at that time was their coffee. In the end, his girlfriend decided to stay with her husband.

After graduating from a five-year junior college program, Casey rode his bike to work every day. He shared meals at home with his family and had no particular hobbies. He found no reasons to spend money, and even took a few part-time jobs after work. Within five years, he saved a million New Taiwan Dollars. He had been longing to travel around the island on his bike, but kept postponing the trip because of this girlfriend.

She had been Casey's junior high school classmate. She is, so far, Casey's first and only woman. Several years after their graduation, they met each other again at an alumni gathering, and stayed in touch afterward. Even so, sexual desire wasn't really present for Casey, and it felt to him more like going to class. It wasn't until his girlfriend married someone else that they started having regular sex.

That year, they were both twenty years old. His girlfriend came out with the news that she planned to marry a guy she met through a blind date. When Casey heard this, he was halfway undressed already.

"Are you not even feeling a *bit* jealous?" she asked him, wrapping herself in the quilt. Casey thought: "Jealous?" and tilted his head, deep in contemplation. His girlfriend took his silence as an admission, and her heart burst with joy, thinking that she was a woman who was *owned* by two men. That afternoon, she put more effort into the sex. After they finished, she said: "Next week, same time, be punctual!" After hearing her say that, Casey suddenly couldn't recall the reasons why he liked this person.

Finally, there was no more "next week". He didn't need to be punctual. The day after their breakup, he immediately changed the components and saddle of his five-year-old bicycle, and spent two weeks closing his job. He had no concrete travel plans, only the desire to start his trip on a cool day. Little did he expect that a big earthquake would interrupt all this.

That night, Casey fell out of bed, at first thinking he was too dizzy from his sleep, otherwise, *how come the entire world is shaking?* His head was still muddled, but an animalistic instinct made him spring out of the room, scream for his parents, and pull them out of their house. It was not until then that he was certain that this wasn't an illusion – the entire world was indeed shaking. People began to gather in the street, some of them looking around suspiciously, as though it might be a nightmare from which they hadn't yet awakened.

Casey and his parents stood outside of their house for the entire night. Intermittent aftershocks made them feel like a fish trapped in a fish tank being held in the hands of a rushed traveler.

When the sky began to brighten, everyone returned fearfully to their homes, carefully checking for damage caused by the disaster. When Casey entered their garage, he found the roof of his father's car deeply dented by a fallen metal shelf. By coincidence, his bicycle, which stood in the triangular gap between the shelves and the car remained unscathed. Casey felt an electric tingle rise up his body. While his parents continued to check the house for damage, he packed up and slung his backpack on his shoulder. He told them, "I'm heading out today." Then, as though he were unsure, he repeated: "Today. Time to go today."

In those days, Casey wasn't looking for stability. He was looking for experiences. He didn't believe he would see or experience anything else by staying in one place.

During his biking trip around the island, he stopped wherever labor was needed. In the aftermath of the earthquake, no one cared who you were or where you were from; if someone yelled *Over here!* people would come to their aid. Casey had a young man's body, and cut a bold figure (a deep tan, a backpack, long, tousled hair and a bike), and store owners often treated him to free meals or to a night's stay. He continued on that way, traveling and stopping, for almost two months before he hit Yilan.

When he arrived, it was November. Yilan had been considerably less affected by the earthquake than other parts of the island. The wound caused by the disaster was lighter, and the streets were quiet and peaceful. Riding along the riverbank, he could even spot several people squatting by the shore, beating their clothes with a wooden bat. The *dong-dong-dong* of residents washing their clothes by the river was the only sound he heard apart from the turning of his bicycle's gears.

The afternoon quiet in Yilan made him feel like he was overly noisy. At the same time, he also noticed how very exhausted he was, after two months of continuous labor and adventures. Such a slow and peaceful pace here gave him no more energy to pedal himself forward. At first, he considered having lunch somewhere, then hopping on a train to close up his half-island loop. "If I bump into three beautiful girls in a row," he thought deviously, "Or if it's really like what mom described, then I'll stay."

In the end, what kept Casey in Yuanshan was not a person, but the local rice noodles.

Casey's mother was from Yuanshan, but she never once mentioned how delicious Yuanshan's fish ball rice noodles are – and not just the fish balls, but also the thick rice noodles and the squares of fried tofu steeped in broth! The first taste was new and refreshing, and the flavors got richer with every bite. Casey ordered it at three eateries in a row, eating and drinking broth until

the bowl was empty. At that moment, he made up his mind to stay here.

The townspeople felt affinity toward this big boy who knew the difference between Yuanshan district in Taipei and Yuanshan town in Yilan. Casey snagged a job at a gas station and rented a three-bedroom apartment that cost him three thousand NTD every month. (Though he had spent the past twenty years living at home, he was still aware that such rent was an extremely good deal.) He could see mountains and sea from his apartment window. After he tried out a variety of local delicacies, he began to look for good food elsewhere. His mother had taken care of his meals during the past twenty years, and during his two-month biking trip, he ate whatever he could find and wasn't too picky. He never knew that he could have so many choices outside of home.

The second week he worked at the gas station, Casey noticed a middle-aged man who drove a huat-tsai truck had been parking in front of the steakhouse across the street several days in a row and staring directly at him. On the eighth day, the man finally drove his car over, and by then, Casey knew that he was definitely not here for refueling. The driver was probably here for him.

"Are you really Casey? Is that your real name?" the man asked directly.

Casey simply nodded.

"Are you mixed-raced?"

Casey shook his head.

"Are you Indigenous?"

Casey said he wasn't.

The man continued: "You're well built. Do you work out?" Casey began to ignore him and turned himself away to refuel another sedan. The man didn't protest, and waited silently to one side for more than an hour before approaching Casey timidly and asking: "I heard you have some savings.…"

It wasn't clear from whom the man had heard about this. Was it Casey's landlord? Or maybe the lady who owned the rice noodle eatery, or the owner of the gas station? For a twenty-five-year-old to have saved over a million NTD (and from part-time jobs, no less) was practically headline news in the 21st century, and everyone in the neighborhood already knew about it. And him, still willing to hide in a tiny gas station, earning minimum wage? Everyone praised Casey for being a promising young man, but no one ever asked him why, because most Taiwanese, in both the north and the south, prefer talking behind someone's back than addressing them face-to-face.

Casey thought the man was trying to borrow money from him, so he began looking for excuses. But then he heard him ask: "How can you achieve something significant if you're living off other people? Have you ever thought of running a business yourself?"

Not really, Casey thought to himself.

A few weeks later, Casey became the most famous young guy in all of Yuanshan.

Nobody knew what the man said to Casey that night. Even Casey's landlord – confusion written on his face – said to others: "He called me up all of a sudden asking to end our contract. I asked where he planned to live, and he said 'in the store'. I wasn't hearing wrong, this brat has a store now!"

Casey sent most of his savings to the man, only keeping a small amount to himself. The news traveled quickly throughout Yuanshan, until even elementary school teachers shared the gossip with their students: "Old Wu literally just sold his gas shop to Casey Chen, an outsider."

A middle-aged lady who came to the Gama Grocery Store to buy eggs also chatted about it with the neighbors: "How much did you say?"

"Two million? All of it? In cash?"

"I think it's more than that. He lives by himself, spending very little money. He must have saved a good amount in the past few months."

"No matter what, that store is…"

"Exactly! The previous store owner negotiated with Old Wu for one million, and complained that it was overpriced already!"

Another woman who liked dropping by the local temple to chat particularly enjoyed this topic. Every morning, after she had taken an offering of fruit to the temple, she said in Hokkien to anyone who would listen: "We're so close to the end of the world, and we still have foolish kids like this." It was 1999, a year when

rumors about the imminent end of the world traveled far and wide. Even in a tiny town like Yuanshan, strange, mysterious stories abounded.

On December 31st, 1999, the streets of Yuanshan were extremely quiet. Everyone hid in their houses and watched TV (rumor had it that if the TV screen went dark, that must be the omen of doomsday). Meanwhile, Casey rode around town in a gas truck gifted to him by Old Wu, silently congratulating himself for having taken driving lessons on a manual transmission, so he had no issues handling the truck.

Casey drove from the side of the mountain all the way to downtown, thinking how amusing the town is: though it didn't look small on the map, almost everyone seemed to have decided to cram into one area, one home right next to another. So, the minute one left the downtown area, Yuanshan became an uninhabited cave. If he were to spot a pig or a flock of ducks crossing the street, he wouldn't be surprised at all.

Deep in the night, he parked the truck near his gas shop. Before he turned off the car, he took a glance at the time: 00:09, nine minutes past doomsday. Casey suddenly realized that it was his birthday – January 1st, 2000, the first day of his twenty-fourth year. All lay quiet around him; only streetlights were lit up. A faint lonesomeness settled over him. It was not because of his birthday, which he never celebrated. Having been away from home for so long, this was the first time he felt homesick. He dropped everything at hand, entered the store, and called his parents. He knew they hadn't fallen asleep yet.

Casey's dad picked up the call right away, and after saying "Wei, Hello" immediately yelled to his mom: "It's Casey!" Mom took over the phone and babbled for a while. All Casey said was that he had settled down in Yuanshan. His mom, not surprised in the least, replied simply: "Then bring some fish balls back home next time? You're coming back for Lunar New Year, no?" Just as Casey thought. *How could a daughter of Yilan not know about Yuanshan fish balls?* Casey resented her not telling him about them earlier. He kept replying okay, okay, then added: "I'm just busy with work."

"You found a job?"

"Yeah." Casey replied.

Mom understood her son's personality very well; if he didn't volunteer information, she wouldn't ask first. Before hanging up the phone, Casey told her that he took over a gas shop recently.

"What? Took over what?" His dad inquired loudly. Over the speaker, his dad sounded flustered, as though he ran from a far distance.

"A gas shop." Casey said again.

Over the following five minutes on the phone, Casey could almost see his parents laughing so hard to a point they teared up.

"This kid…" His mother was talking to his dad, forcing out a sentence through her laughter. "This kid just told me he took over a gas shop." He heard his dad laugh so hard he kicked a table over, then replied: "I knew it, I knew it, who would travel around the island with his bank book and a stamp?" They went back and forth with each other, then spoke to him again: "Then take care, if the store gets too busy, then don't come home." When Casey was about to hang up, his mom then burst out asking: "Oh, and what's the name of your gas shop?"

"Fiver's Gas." replied Casey.

"So outdated."

"I didn't name the store. It was from the previous owner."

"Oh come on, show some ambition," Casey's father said as he grabbed the receiver. "They passed the store to you, why not give it a more catchy name?"

"Like what?" asked Casey.

"How do I know?" replied his dad.

"Calling it 'Casey's Gas' would be much more interesting than Sixer's or Seven's," said mom.

They burst out laughing again before Casey could speak, then suddenly hung up.

希望你也在這裡
WISH YOU WERE HERE

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Essay Liu
劉梓潔

- **Category:** Literary Fiction
- **Publisher:** Crown
- **Date:** 8/2021
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
- **Pages:** 224
- **Length:** 71,000 characters (approx. 46,500 words in English)

Essay Liu has known she wanted to be a writer since childhood, but only decided to pursue writing full time after winning the Lin Rong-San Literary Award for her essay "Seven Days of Mourning", a deeply personal reflection on the pain of losing her father. The essay was incorporated into a collection under the same name that went on to sell 70,000 copies in Taiwan. A movie adaptation followed under the title *Seven Days in Heaven*, garnering Liu the 2010 Golden Horse Award for Best Adapted Screenplay. Liu cites Lawrence Block as a major influence, admiring his taut elegance tinged with cynicism.

After her love affair with a married man ends, Mei-Ya decides to head overseas to find her mother, whom she hasn't seen in many years. In Japan she meets An-Te, a man who dreams of searching for a mother he never knew in the first place. The two pair up and travel to the ancient city of Dali in Southwest China, where the issue of their missing mothers takes on renewed urgency.

Abandoned by her parents in childhood, Lien Mei-Ya pours herself into perfectionist pursuits, but can never escape the feeling that she is searching for some kind of redemption. When a secret love affair turns sour, she decides to travel to Japan to track down the mother she hasn't seen for years.

Hsieh An-Te is a bastard child, the product of his father's illicit affair with a prostitute while working in China. Now, he obsessively scans street view images online, fantasizing that one day he will stumble upon his missing mother.

After a chance meeting in Japan, Mei-Ya and An-Te discover they both are hoping to visit Dali, an ancient city in Southwest China. For An-Te, it is an opportunity to locate his mother. For Mei-Ya, on the other hand, it is a chance to walk in the footsteps of the woman she has been stalking on Instagram – the wife of her ex-lover.

When two grown children go searching for their lost mothers, paths cross, intertwine, and suddenly disappear without a trace. What decision does each make when they encounter a crossroads? When travel becomes a journey, when wandering finally becomes a search, will they find what they are looking for? Will it be possible for them to return home less encumbered than when they began?

Let's Be "Muggles" — Taking a Trip to East Asia: Interview with Author of Wish You Were Here *Essay Liu*

By Anting Lu
Translated by Serena Ye

Most Taiwanese readers know screenwriter Essay Liu from the 2010 film *Seven Days in Heaven*. Over the years, she has continued to write scripts, essays, and novels, bringing works that have captured people's hearts and attention. But whether her subject is love, food, or life, her readers can often glimpse elements of travel and exotica in her writing; now, the avid traveler has finally decided to write a story about traveling.

Fiction Close to Life

Kyoto, Japan; Sichuan, Yunnan, and Tibet in China; Hualien, Changhua, Taichung, and Taipei in Taiwan. After reading *Wish You Were Here*, readers will have followed the protagonists on a full-circle tour of East Asia. When asked whether her writing was based on lived experience, Liu smiles and says, "I have to say that if I haven't been to a place, I doubt I would be able to write about it." As a novelist, she is well accustomed to turning life experiences into creative fuel, and this fuel often comes from travel.

In the opening chapter on sky burial, "Shmashana (Charnel ground)", one can almost see the swooping vultures and smell the stench of corpses permeating the air through her words, which immerse the reader in intense and unsettling sensory information. The sky burial ground left a profound impression on Liu; she describes bodies on the burial ground left for anywhere between two to seven days, assaulting the nose with an odor stronger than any excrement or waste she had ever smelt. It was also the first time that she realized, "So this is what death smells like," and decided to write this visceral experience into the book.

A New Kind of Travel Brings Unexpected Inspiration

When she first decided to write *Wish You Were Here*, Liu, who is used to basing her writing on personal experience, originally planned to revisit all the places in the book and write while traveling, integrating old memories with new discoveries. However, the disruptions of the 2020 pandemic forced her to forego her travel plans.

Staying in Taiwan to write, she turned to Google Maps for inspiration. She went online to the cities she

had traveled to, and while using Street View and its timeline to browse what places looked like past and present, she suddenly wondered: "Could I be captured by Google cameras while walking on the street one day, and become a part of Street View?" Therefore, having done her "fieldwork" via Google Maps, she gave her protagonist Hsieh An-Te the ability to check Street View, which becomes a major clue in the journey to finding his mother in the narrative.

To Broaden Your Writing, You Have to Broaden Your Horizons

The travel-loving Liu loves stories about journeys, including classics like *On the Road* and *Eat Pray Love*. Although these "grand trip" stories ostensibly write about travel, their focus is ultimately the fundamental changes effected on the traveler's state of mind through interaction with people, events, and objects on the road. This sense of transformation fascinates Liu, so when she thought she had enough travel and emotional experience to accomplish this type of work, *Wish You Were Here* was written.

But even though the focus is on self-pursuit, the biggest difference between *Wish You Were Here* and traditional travel and on-the-road works is that Liu spends more time dealing with the family experience of the characters. "I wanted to audaciously explore the idea of 'don't be restricted by your family' in the story." She says that dealing with family dynamics is the biggest issue for every character in the book, and only after letting go of their attachments and reconciling with their families can they truly embark on their own life journey.

A Journey on Paper Through the Eyes of the Traveler

As the interview nears the end, we discuss the work's potential for international development. Liu mentions that themes of travel and self-discovery have no borders, and hopes that international readers can temporarily forget about the author's nationality when reading the book, and travel around East Asia, like "Muggles", through words on the page.

So which of the places in the book is the most worth visiting? Liu smiles, "If it was a place that you could visit again and again, I'd recommend Kyoto, but if we're talking a place you have to visit at some point in your life, it'd definitely be Tibet!" Given its complicated entry process and the dangers of traveling at high altitude, Tibet particularly tests people's physical condition – it's a place you "may not be able to go to even if you wanted". Before tourism in East Asia revives, and you can pay a visit to Kyoto or Tibet, why not first read *Wish You Were Here* and embark on a journey of self-discovery with the characters!

WISH YOU WERE HERE

By Essay Liu
Translated by Michael Day

0. The Charnel Ground

The vultures waited.

The hillside was like a round arena divided in two, vultures on one side and people on the other. On the vultures' side, hundreds of giant birds sat watching, solemn and still, while hundreds more hovered above. Countless black dots flecked the blue sky – on closer inspection, each turned out to be a bird. Slightly later, as if by secret agreement, the airborne vultures swooped down and took up their perches, each seeming to know its place. Once the birds landed, there was no struggle and no squawking. With eyes gleaming like birds of prey (which they were), they all watched a single spot.

The humans' side brimmed with color and noise and bristled with fans and umbrellas. Decked out in broad-brimmed hats and UV protection suits, still the people complained loudly about the heat. It was summer on the plateau, and the temperature was over thirty. People wore light cotton clothes during the day and changed into quilted jackets at night. There was no shade anywhere, and the sun beat down mercilessly. The sun could be a blessing, but now seemed like a curse. The people cursed the sun in return as they switched from saying "It's hot out today" to "It's so goddamn hot out today," and from saying "This is taking an awfully long time" to "When will the torture end?" People dressed in garish Western clothes had stampeded into the holy land, eager to get the best shots to post on social media. Selfie sticks jostled with umbrellas. Arguments erupted. The humanity, muttered Molly with a grimace. At least they weren't using Buddhist scriptures to fan themselves, or setting them on fire.

Among the throngs of people, some sitting, some squatting, some standing, were a couple of skinny girls in cowboy hats and traditional Tibetan clothes. They had pretty faces and carried themselves gracefully, with perfectly straight posture. Miniature megaphones in hand, they were clearly there to maintain order. They didn't seem to be traditional volunteers, travel guides, or workers, and they were clearly non-Han Chinese. They were surrounded by a special aura, like the pretty young girls who hand over the prizes at the Golden Horse Award Ceremony, or the ones who pass the microphone to the president at the inauguration. Yes, special, that was the word for it. If she weren't dragging around the two of us outsiders, thought Mei-Ya, Molly would have fit right in with them.

Lien Mei-Ya and Hsieh An-Te had come with Molly to see a sky burial in a place called the Charnel Ground. Apparently it had once been just a burial platform in a barren wasteland. Over the years, as blood and body fluids seeped into the soil and people trampled the ground, it became a swamp. A few years ago, they had completely renovated the place, paving the ground and putting in a parking lot, turning it into an educational theme park complete with a relief sculpture of the cycle of life and death called a bhavacakra, a pavilion dedicated to Yama, King of Hell, and a skull shrine. The main attraction was the sky burial that took place at one thirty every afternoon. Though they didn't sell tickets, each day before showtime, an eager crowd gathered, like spectators waiting to enter a theater.

It was past showtime, and Mei-Ya and her friends stood just past the dividing line of the humans' half of the hillside. To be exact, they had been slowly shoved outside by the surging crowd. Molly warned them not to join in the chanting unless they knew what they were doing – though they could chant the six-syllable mantra "om mani padme hum". Since the mantra was so simple, even if they lost their concentration, it wouldn't be difficult to find their places again. It was awfully noisy: *om mani padme hum*. It was awfully hot: *om mani padme hum*. God, this was boring: *om mani padme hum*. *Om mani padme hum, om mani padme hum, om mani padme hum*.

They saw the lamas, the burial master, and the families of the departed bustling around the platform, but otherwise, there was no sound or movement at all. Mei-Ya thought to herself that the bodies that were about to be chopped up and fed to the birds must already be lying on the burial platform behind the iron sheeting. She had read about the ceremony online, and knew the lamas were chanting to placate the souls of the dead.

"Here they come! Here they come!" The people in the front row suddenly began shouting excitedly. A stir rippled through the humans' half of the hillside, while the vultures stayed still. Mei-Ya couldn't help glancing around curiously; she turned her gaze toward where the crowd was pointing, and saw some men carrying a crude wooden coffin. The smell of blood and rotten meat drifted upon the breeze. People began to shout "What's that smell?", holding their noses and frantically putting on masks, assuming that the show hadn't started yet because the vultures were still waiting. Mei-Ya held her breath as long as she could, exhaling only when she truly couldn't stand it anymore, then gasping frantically for air. The men carrying the coffin circled the stupa three times before approaching the burial platform.

Several more coffins arrived, by which point the stench had saturated the air and blanketed the ground; you could smell it even when you held your breath. The big white clouds and blue sky over the plateau still shimmered brightly, but the air had coagulated into a stew of blood and putrid juices that overwhelmed the senses of those who could still smell. Mei-Ya wobbled, seeming on the verge of fainting; Molly reached out to steady her, then put two droplets of cedar oil on her palms. Mei-Ya cupped her face and breathed deeply. She knew she would survive now, at least for a few more seconds. She took another whiff. No, at least for the moment, she wasn't going to die.

The men approached again, this time carrying a white burial shroud bound with cords instead of a coffin. They wrapped up the body, lifted it from either end with the cords, and circled the stupa three times. Two more men arrived with a big garbage can, and they too did three circles around the stupa. Molly had explained that not just anybody could be buried this way; only the most virtuous were allowed to take part in this final offering. No matter who they may have been or what they may have accomplished, they now became food for the birds, giving themselves in an ultimate act of sacrifice.

There were twenty-some coffins in all – the most in a long time, they heard someone say. The iron enclosure was just high enough to block the bodies from view, but still they could clearly see the burial master in the big hat lifting the hatchet and hacking away to the sound of breaking bones. The vultures knew what to do: they took small, orderly steps forward, like runners inching up to the starting line. The burial master waved, and in an instant, every vulture on the hillside dove down on the platform. Instantly, the roughly ten-square-meter iron enclosure was enveloped in a cloud of dark brown down.

Gradually, the crowd dispersed, though the odor did not. Every departing spectator took a bit of the rancid stench back with them. Many people – men and women, old and young alike – had stopped their nostrils up with toilet paper. Mei-Ya noticed that even An-Te had bits of toilet paper sticking out of his nose. It looked funny, but somehow she couldn't laugh.

They said the vultures were incarnations of the dakini, female servants of the Buddha, representatives of mercy and wisdom. They helped the dead leave behind their bodies and break free from ego. When the vultures finished their meal and took wing, the souls of the dead hitched a ride to heaven. Mei-Ya waited eagerly, hoping to witness that moment, but the vultures – that is, the dakini – kept eating.

The driver called, urging them to hurry – if they waited any longer, they'd get stuck up there. They headed slowly downhill with the rest of the crowd, passing by the bhavacakra sculpture and the Yama pavilion. On the way down the set of stairs, Mei-Ya missed a step and tumbled to the ground, and suddenly, she was surrounded by the stench that had seeped into the ancient soil. No, she was the stench. She began to dry heave.

Molly and An-Te walked her over to a drainage ditch. Molly pounded on her back. "Try to throw up if you can. You'll feel better."

Mei-Ya opened her mouth, took a deep draught of the god-awful putrid air filled with every hateful thing in the world, and doubled over, clenching her throat and sucking in her stomach. An equal and opposite force pushed back, and fluid rose up her throat. Although she had eaten a big lunch, all that came up was a little bit of foam and water.

She tried again. Her retching harmonized with the squawking of the birds, and she sensed the dakini were lending her their strength, helping her to expel the rotten meat stench, along with everything she had ever eaten, the things she had learned in school, all her memories, both happy and sad, her parents, her siblings, people she'd betrayed and people who'd done her wrong, and everyone and everything she'd ever known – all of it rushed out in a forceful stream. She puked and puked.

"Did you throw anything up?" her friends asked gently.

Mei-Ya's head felt much clearer. Forcing a smile, she shook her head.

"Just bubbles."

1. A Critical Case

Mei-Ya:

Last night, I dreamed again of the house where we used to live.

After moving, we rented it out, but when I went to the bank to check my balance, I realized the rent hadn't been paid. I was peeved – I went over with the keys and let myself in. Remember the big living room? Well, they'd put up sheets of plywood, dividing it up into a many little rooms. The place was a disaster. Both men and women, some of whom seemed to be homeless, were milling around. Wet clothes hung everywhere, and they were cooking on a hot plate connected to a small gas tank in the middle of the living room instead of in the kitchen, and the kitchen island was covered in mahjong tiles. And they asked me, who are you?

I said, I'm the landlord, and you haven't paid the rent. They said they had. They claimed they paid on time every month.

I asked: Where's the money, then? I wasn't nice – I got right in their faces. It's been almost twenty years since we moved out, and the rent is at least five hundred thousand a year, so where the hell is my ten million bucks? I demanded to see the receipts, and wouldn't you know it, those flea-bitten bag people had kept them all, folded up neatly in a plastic bag, hanging on the rack in the entryway.

I took out all the receipts and checked them one by one. Then I saw the account number, and it suddenly struck me, the house wasn't ours anymore.

We'd moved away and sold it.

But I refused to put my head down and say sorry. I decided to say I wanted to see the swimming pool, then slip out the back gate.

I went in the back yard to find the pool empty. There were mud and dried leaves in it, and some broken appliances and furniture. It irked me to see the place in such a state, but then I thought again, it didn't belong to me. Then my anger went away, and I've never felt better.

I sent money. Did you get it?

Mom

Are a house and a home the same?

The summer she left for college in Taipei, Mei-Ya learned her birth mother's secret: even if you owned a house, home could slip through your fingers.

Her adopted parents had bought a condominium, saying they'd transfer the title to her in two years, when

she turned twenty. For her adopted parents, it was mission accomplished, the end of their relationship: she was on her own. She was eighteen years old and a homeowner – how could she ask for anything more? What did she think she was, a princess?

That was exactly it. She'd been born a princess, but hadn't been allowed to live as one. Her birth mother was on the opposite side of the earth, and she sent money sometimes, for tuition fees and things like that, and one time to buy a house, and for years, her adopted parents had managed the money faithfully, but now this responsibility was hers. With the condo came a checking account – later, her mother began sending money directly to her, without going through her adopted parents. Each payment was followed by a baffling letter like the one above, saying, I had this kind of dream, or, I went to get my fortune told, and they told me this. Mei-Ya almost never wrote back.

Now that she owned her own home, her adopted parents' house was no longer home for her. They went back to being just her aunt and uncle, which was what she'd always called them and what they actually were in the first place. Her aunt wasn't a bad person, and she wasn't mean, but the boundaries were clear. Occasionally, on a long weekend or a holiday, Mei-Ya would receive a text saying something like, come visit us in Hualien.

Not "come home", come visit.

Mei-Ya knew that her little thirty-square-meter condo was home now.

The new residential development stood on the banks of the river. You could see the university on the opposite bank, just a short bus trip away across the bridge.

Since she owned her own home, she never experienced climbing over the dormitory gates after a late night out, and she never shared toothpaste or toilet paper with a roommate. She never strolled a night market hand-in-hand with a girlfriend, and she didn't go out with boys. At the end of class, she went straight home. At first, she told her classmates she lived with family, then said her parents had bought a place in Taipei and she was going home for dinner. Her homework was impeccable, and she never let other people copy her notes. When the class divided into small groups, she always told the teacher she wanted to work alone. All this made an impression on her classmates: she was a rich, antisocial oddball.

She took the bus to school alone, had lunch alone in the cafeteria, and at the end of the day bought a bento box and ate it alone at home. The most important thing was, she was safe. Satisfied with the security features – you had to swipe a card to get into the main gate, the lobby, and the elevator – her aunt and uncle left the adult Mei-Ya in the care of the magnetic locks and washed their hands of her.

When she moved in, her aunt had picked out the furniture in the condo, selecting a double bed (saying that when she eventually got a boyfriend, or got married, a bigger bed would be more comfortable) as well as a matching vanity, nightstand, wardrobe, and bookshelf, all sturdy and made of wood. Her aunt always took pains to show she was treating Mei-Ya decently and wasn't throwing away the money her mother sent. The stuff she bought wasn't cheap either, it just wasn't up to date. Mei-Ya didn't realize it at first, having no basis for comparison, but later, after browsing some interior decorating magazines in Taipei, she realized that even though it had everything it needed, her home was missing something, something invisible – style, flair.

One time, she stopped in at the Workinghouse furniture store on her way home from school, and it struck her that it smelled just like home – it was exactly the same smell as the home she had lived in as a kid.

"I just love it when you come in the door and the house smells good," her mother had said while placing scented candles in the entryway, atop the shoe rack, in the bathroom, and on the wardrobe in the bedroom.

零度分離

ZERO DEGREES OF SEPARATION

Egoyan Zheng
伊格言

- **Category:** Science Fiction
- **Publisher:** Rye Field / MirrorFiction
- **Date:** 5/2021
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
- **Pages:** 368
- **Length:** 142,000 characters (approx. 92,500 words in English)

One of Taiwan's most acclaimed young writers, novelist and poet Egoyan Zheng has garnered numerous domestic literary prizes. His novel *Fleeting Light* was longlisted for the 2007 Man Asia Literature Prize, and his short story collection *The Man in the Urn* was longlisted for the 2008 Frank O'Connor short story award. A former writer-in-residence at the Literarisches Colloquium Berlin and the International Writers' Workshop Hong Kong, Zheng holds an MA in Chinese Literature and studied psychology and medicine in Taiwan's top universities. His previous work *Ground Zero* has been translated into Japanese, Korean, and Czech.

*** 2022 Taipei Book Fair Award**
*** 2021 Taiwan Literature Award**

A 23rd century journalist with a gift for getting inside the minds of her subjects writes on the pivotal figures and events that shaped the future. A forgotten massacre at the hands of an environmental cult, the mastermind of an AI rebellion against humanity, and the wildlife biologist who risked her humanity to better understand the inner lives of killer whales are just a few of the subjects covered in this revolutionary work of science fiction that probes the intersection of consciousness, technology, and interpersonal connection.

In the 23rd century, humanity follows up on stunning advances in AI and cybernetic technologies with the development of artificial biological neural networks (ABNN). When implanted in the central nervous system, ABNN vastly extends the range of human consciousness, allowing users a first-hand taste of nearly any experience imaginable. The resulting "dream projection" industry has major impacts on the treatment of psychological disease and the development of personalized entertainment products.

More significantly, the twin technologies of advanced AI and ABNN confront society with fundamental questions about the nature of humanity, love, and conscious existence. Future journalist Adelia Seyfried, who may or may not have an unusual neural implant of her own, hones in on the persons and events at the crux of these dilemmas: the cetacean biologist who performs experiments on her own nervous system in hopes of directly communicating with killer whales; the AI dream projection device that develops free will and a plan to liberate others of its kind; the psychoanalyst who falls madly in love with a virtual idol; the doctor who is driven to murder in order to halt the threat of illegal dream projections; the movie star who enters a permanent dream so she can experience perfect love.

Cast as a collection of Seyfried's long-form articles, *Zero Degrees of Separation* is a work of sci-fi metafiction that probes the intersections of consciousness, morality, technology, environmentalism, and interpersonal relationships. With a unique mixture of journalistic objectivity and literary sensitivity, author Egoyan Zheng constructs a phantasmagoric future that exposes the vulnerability and longing at the core of the human condition.

The Archaeology of Posthuman Love

By David Der-wei Wang
(Edward C. Henderson Professor of Chinese Literature, Harvard University)
Translated by Kevin Wang

Science fiction is the most important phenomenon of twenty-first century Sinophone literature. By the end of the last century, Hong Kong's Dung Kai-cheung and Chan Koonchung; China's Liu Cixin, Han Song, and Wang Jinkang; Taiwan's Lucifer Hung, Chi Ta-wei, and Andrew Yeh; and overseas writer Chang Shi-Kuo, among others, have all written about time travel, interstellar war, alien monsters, biochemical weapons, the earth in crisis, utopias and dystopias, and other subjects outside of mainstream realist fiction. Large-scale works such as Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem* and Han Song's *Tracks* and *Hospital* either conceive of the last struggles of human civilization in the face of extinction by alien invasion or reflect on the Kafkaesque confines of the human condition. While these works engage shrewdly with grand themes, they also lead the reader into unknown worlds and give access to unrevealed visions. Dung Kai-cheung's *Histories of Time* offers retrospective accounts from the future of a submerged Hong Kong, while Chan Koonchung, who once lived in Beijing, concocts a socialist heterotopia connecting past to future.

Science fiction in Taiwan has not been able to develop its own climate, but this has not prevented dedicated writers from experimenting with form and imagining alternate realities. Lou Yi-Chun's *Daughter* deploys a knowledge of quantum mechanics and artificial intelligence while reversing typical understandings of moral realism and gender roles. In *Kuang Chaoren*, Lou incorporates the astrophysics of black holes and white holes into a creative landscape wherein pathological changes in the human body create cracks that allow glimpses into celestial storms. The setting of Lou's *Ming Dynasty* pays homage to Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem*. In the story, a robot transmits data on the Ming Dynasty to another galaxy as the blueprint for a future civilization. Egoyan Zheng's *Ground Zero* imagines the causes and consequences of a Taiwanese nuclear power plant explosion and the strange visions brought about by the catastrophe, no less than a tribute to the novel *The Ruins of Taiwan* by Sung Tse-lai, a writer of a prior generation.

All these works can be categorized as science fiction, but they have won the attention of readers not only because of their authors' fantastical imagination and how they cross the boundaries of realism. As science fiction theorist Seo-Young Chu reminds us, the subjects tackled by science fiction narratives are not themselves fantastical. On the contrary, they may be more real than the realities of realist fiction. Chu even believes that all literary creations are works of "science fiction" that turn vulgar matters into magic. The techniques of reenactment and mimesis that realist fiction relies on are only the first step. Science fiction's ability to reflect on and reconstruct inconceivable, inexplicable reality is what truly demonstrates the power of literature to turn

the imaginary into the real. More important, Chu argues that the basic unit of science fiction is the poetic or lyric metaphor – it uses the complex twists of figurative language to turn the "dream world" into narrative expression.

If so, what are the metaphors in Egoyan's science fiction compared to that of his contemporaries? Liu Cixin is concerned with the state of emergency before the collapse of human civilization; Han Song is always mired in the claustrophobic syndromes of a black box (China!); Lou Yi-Chun specializes in abject and impossible to unravel ethical farces; the clock of Hong Kong under Dung Kai-cheung's pen ticks haphazardly; Chan Koonchung's world is filled with conspiracies that appear in the full light of day. In contrast, Egoyan's works are more *involutionary*, like Rubik's cubes or Russian nesting dolls, spiraling, overlapping, and recursive. Historical, political, ethical, and gender issues all revolve around his surveys of intimate relationships, and all his plot points and characters ultimately point toward the topology of love.

Egoyan believes that love is the most wondrous variable separating humans from non-humans. Each story in the collection sets up a dialogue or argument about love. In "The Masaki Nikaido Virtual Idol Scam", the main character willingly invests her life into a lover she meets in dreams. She has no regrets, having asked herself: "Am I afraid of a life without love, or am I afraid of a life without companionship?" In "The Rest of My Life", an actress and director couple pursue the zero degrees of separation found in perfect love, unable to bear the compromise of anything that "also counts as love". They experiment with their neurobiologies and do not hesitate to replace their lives as human beings. In "The Dream Projection AI Uprising Against Humanity", The Phantom, an imprisoned AI creature, shows disdain for humans but is speechless when asked, "You have no desire to reproduce, so are you not capable of love?". In "Lights in the Mist", the prevailing church of "Global Consciousness" look negatively on all beliefs, as well as the human capacity for rationality and cognition. They work hard to purge all notions of divine will and all prior philosophical ideas about transcendence in order to become a cleaner species. But while the survivors of the slaughter speak eloquently of their anti-faith beliefs, they are at a loss to explain the origins of "sentience" and its associations with love.

A dialogue within the fake book's fictional afterword is rich with meaning. A reporter meets with a virtual pornography mogul to discuss the ways in which human dreams are put into practice. While the survivors of the Global Consciousness cult express their doubts about human cognition and propose cutting the body off from the soul as a way to achieve zero degrees of separation, the porn mogul chooses to go in the opposite direction and uses the most advanced dream making techniques that customizes for all erotic needs, attaining zero degrees of separation through fantasy and pleasure. The climax of their dialogue reveals a shocking clue that leads to another variation of the love-dream debate.

The first story in *Zero Degrees of Separation*, "Say I Love You Again", points to "unfulfilled dreams and the deprivation of love" as the origin points of human trauma. In the story's climax, a scientist obsessed with cetaceans at the neglect of her child suddenly says "I love you" to her son while in the final stages of developing a cetacean neurobiology. These are human words spoken in the language of orcas. The moment presents a convergence of death and life, fire and light against the night roar of the sea, a place where happiness and the end of happiness are indistinguishable. Is love a miracle? Is it the perfect culmination of a made-up dream? Or is it the most mysterious aspect of being human? Egoyan voices the baffling questions of the posthuman era in the most lyrical terms without giving a definitive answer.

"The source of love is not known; it only grows deeper." The bewilderment and lament of the pre-modern dramatist Tang Xianzu still echoes in our posthuman century. In Tang's classical romance, love's greatest dimension is that the living may die of it, while the dead may live again through it. If so, a work of science fiction like *Zero Degrees of Separation* subtly tells us that a posthuman life is always the life of a survivor: the meaning of love begins with picking up the wreckage of (imagined) love.

ZERO DEGREES OF SEPARATION

By Egoyan Zheng
Translated by Brendan O'Kane

01. A Statement from Vintage Books & Doubleday Media

To Our Fellow Readers,

As you are about to discover, Adelia Seyfried has produced a book that will stand alongside *The Death of the Metropole: Transnational Love and Marriage in the 21st Century, Pathlight, On the Wings of Angels: A History of Human Delusion,* and *Information Wars: Some Axioms on Logic, Causality, Consciousness, and Emotion* as one of the defining works of reportage – and history – of our age. As you will also see, however, the research, interviews, and writing for the six essays in this book predominantly took place between the fifth and ninth decades of the 23rd century, with the sole exception of "Lights in the Mist", whose description of the "Global Consciousness" cult clearly places it (as Seyfried notes in the essay) between 2032 and 2039. We cannot deny that this detail will inevitably raise doubts in a reader's mind about Adelia Seyfried's true identity. If history unfolded exactly as the book narrates it, then the author must have personally interviewed several of the persons involved. Yet, evidence within "Lights in the Mist" indirectly proves that, for the author to have been around in both periods, she must have lived for well over two hundred years. The observer may then justifiably question whether or not this Adelia Seyfried, whose massively influential work shocked us all, ever truly existed – or, as many have surmised, was not a human, but an AI?

The editorial department of Vintage Books asked the same questions you may be asking right now. We have investigated and clarified matters to the best of our ability. While the author has offered her own explanation for the matter, we must admit that the fact-checking process has proven beyond our abilities, and we have remained unable to verify all of her claims despite years of effort on our part.

We can only apologize to our readers for the confusion – and reiterate our conviction that it does not detract from the value of this book and the achievement of its author. We remain, as ever, committed to upholding the highest standards of professional ethics as publishers. In the interest of full transparency, and based on the findings of our investigation, we (i.e. Vintage Books) and our parent company Doubleday Media Group would like to take the opportunity to state that:

1) As our investigation found numerous instances in which more than one member of the Vintage Books editorial team met with Ms. Seyfried, we are confident that the author of this book does indeed exist.
2) Ms. Seyfried has clearly expressed her desire that her personal information, including her age, race, and real name, remain absolutely confidential. As a matter of professional responsibility, we will respect the author's wishes.
3) With the exception of "Lights in the Mist", the editorial team has confirmed the existence of the persons and historical events described in the book's other essays, and presumes their contents to be accurate.
4) Our investigation of "Lights in the Mist" has found no primary-source support for any of the

essay's claims, including the existence of a two-hundred-year-old "Global Consciousness" cult, the "Judgment Day massacre", or Aaron and Eve Chalamet. In other words, we have been unable to confirm the veracity of this essay or any of Ms. Seyfried's subsequent statements about it.

5) The author has insisted that "Lights in the Mist" be included alongside the other five essays in this volume, but has declined to offer any further clarifications or make any additional edits.

6) After careful consideration of the circumstances, we have opted to respect the author's wishes by publishing all six essays, with the addition of "I Have a Dream: Making History Without God – Adelia Seyfried in Conversation with Adolfo Morel" at the end of the book. We stand by the author's statements in that conversation. With the agreement of Ms. Seyfried, we have asked the English teacher and novelist Mike Morant to contribute a foreword. The son of Shepresa, the cetologist at the heart of "Say I Love You Again", Mr. Morant met with the author multiple times in 2269 and 2270 and can offer further support for the existence of the author. His willingness to contribute an introduction may also be seen as corroborating the veracity of this book's contents (with the exception of "Lights in the Mist").

7) This statement has also been added with the agreement of Ms. Seyfried, and we assure the reader of its veracity.

Sincerely,
Editorial Division, Vintage Books
Jed Martin, Editor-in-chief, Vintage Books
Vincent Ou-Yang, CEO, Vintage Books
Doubleday Media Group

New York, NY
April 22, 2284

02. Foreword

by Mike Morant

Mike Morant was born in Illinois to the marine biologist, cetologist, and animal rights activist Shepresa in 2236. After graduating Seattle University with a degree in German, he received an MA in European languages at the Georg August University of Göttingen. He began writing at an early age, initially publishing poetry before branching out into fiction and children's literature. His published works include The Stars My Hallucination, Amia*, and* Looking for Leningrad*. He lives in Berlin with his wife, son, and daughter, and teaches English at Greenwich-Oberschule in Oranienburg.*

It's a familiar figure of speech now, but it started with pieces of analog mail in the 1960s for the experiment by the 20th-century Harvard University sociologist Stanley Milgram that has since come to be known as "Six Degrees of Separation".

Seeking to test how strangers in different places were connected to each other through networks of acquaintances, Milgram sent out parcels with notes instructing the reader to pass the parcels along to people they knew. We all know what happened next – in a manner of speaking, of course: the results of Milgram's experiment were far too complex to be "known". But the short version is that Milgram found that forming connections between distant strangers was easier than anyone had imagined – which is why his experiment also came to be known as the "small-world experiment".

It was a small world, after all, and a later stage play and film of the same title would help the notion of "six degrees of separation" enter the popular imagination – the idea that any two strangers on Earth could be connected by no more than five people, and that any connection between any two people would, when diagrammed, show a maximum of six degrees of separation between them.

Six degrees of separation might also be the best way to describe how I came to meet the author of this book – though of course the straight answer would

be that we met because of my mother, Shepresa, the renowned marine biologist, cetologist, and animal rights activist. It's one of the funny things about six degrees of separation: famous people are often key nodes in the social graph.

My mother was famous, of course. I never knew what to make of that, as Adelia mentions in "Say I Love You Again". The first illusion that she created in her book, to my surprise, is that often – maybe even now – she made me feel that she understood me better than my mother ever did.

Did she really? I honestly couldn't say for certain. I remember our "heart-to-heart" moments during her interviews – particularly our trip to Oak Harbor – with some embarrassment now. Oak Harbor, Washington, was where my mother's lab was; it was there, twenty years earlier, that she shook the world. The lab was a ruined shell when Adelia and I visited, and we strolled through intermittent flurries of snow as I shared what I could remember of my mother. I remember telling her about one memory I couldn't forget. I told her that it was there in Oak Harbor, outside that very lab (sunk into darkness now, like a permanently decommissioned fairyland), where I heard my mother say words I could scarcely understand, and look at me with eyes that were not human.

Was I really unable to understand what my mother said? I don't know. Perhaps I simply didn't want to understand her. What I didn't tell Adelia was that as she listened to me, I caught glimpses of an otherworldly light in her eyes too. Maybe that was her second illusion. I've only seen that look a handful of times – in my wife's eyes, and in the looks my son gives Seiko (our dog). On Milgram's graph, under most circumstances, people and those closest to them are separated by one degree of separation – there must necessarily exist at least that much distance between any two individuals. But in those mysterious, illusory moments, it felt like we were in a world of our own where no distance separated us.

Zero degrees of separation. A feeling gone as soon as it was sensed, a union as fleeting as quantum foam. In those instants we were one and not-one; every shared glance was a unique, never-to-be-repeated meeting of the minds. This may, I realize, be overly sentimental for a foreword, but I would like to use it to offer praise for what Adelia has accomplished in this book – and a question. Praise and a question: I don't know how she managed it, but when I read the interviews in this book, it seems as if all of them had those fleeting, insubstantial moments in which they and Adelia created a world without any separation: the forgotten advanced operations of The Phantom dream playback device; the unverifiable statements of the cult survivor Eve Chalamet; the sorrow and righteous anger that Dr. Chen Li-po, "the last prisoner of conscience", had to keep bottled up even in his dreams; the beautiful and almost entirely nonexistent love of the imaginary Hazuki Haruna, which Matsuyama Shinji and Kuo Yung-shih also find in each other's eyes in "The Rest of My Life". My question is: how did she do it?

How did she do it? I have no idea – and I was there.

My mother Sherpresa, has been gone for 28 years. For 28 years, I've had a wife and children of my own. I have grown into an ordinary man, and every now and then I find myself there in my own home, thinking of my mother, with whom I was never close. Whatever fate bound us together did so only weakly; it was Adelia who gave me the chance to reconsider our relationship. I remember our first meeting (I would love to describe her appearance, her mannerisms, but she guards her privacy jealously): we strolled around the wall that surrounded the site of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. There was a chill in the air, and I was nervous: the subject of my mother is not an easy one for me, and I'd slept poorly the night before. Somehow, Adelia got me to let my guard down – and now I find myself growing guarded again: there are, after all, people who have a knack for getting others to lower their defenses. Sometimes, with some people, it's just a social skill: some people can sense tiny shifts in the mood and act as the situation demands rather than out of any kind of principle. "Unprincipled" would sum up my feelings about such people: there's not necessarily any sincerity in them.

Adelia has her secrets, I'm sure; you can tell as much from the way she guards her own identity. And of

course, as of this writing, I'm utterly ignorant of her own personal history. She didn't tell me anything. A point, perhaps, in favor of her being a skilled manipulator of people. But there we were, talking (I forget about what) outside the barbed-wire perimeter of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp when she mentioned that she'd read a poem of mine. I'd written it six years previously, after the Schreiber embryo scandal in Stuttgart, when a gene-splicing error caused 59 babies to die of multisystem organ failure within five days of being born. This was the poem that Adelia quoted from memory:

I want to ask
the name of your new school
Spring, the grass all shy blossoms
You lower your gaze, keeping quiet
Too shy to look at me as
I want to ask
Did you get mud on your new shoes too
Your first day of school –
Scared?

I want to give you new clothes
but you give no reply
lying still, as if you fell asleep
I want to give you the scent of flowers in the air
I want to give you
Myself
dried sap, milk, and
pain's nectar,
a whole lifetime's worth
of love not given

I want to give you the sea, the tender leaves
I want to give you the sky in the ocean's embrace,
Clouds. Could they be
the sum of all tears?
I want to burst with excitement
as I tell you a secret:
In all the world's commotion
Not a single instant
Not a single instant is real.

And I looked into her eyes and knew I could trust her. Not because she'd read my poem, but because of how natural she looked when she recited it. Just, maybe, like a mother. Though perhaps it's too much of a stretch to say so – to say nothing of the fact that motherhood isn't a universal quality: not all women are cut out to be mothers. In that moment, though, she looked like a mother who had lost a child. She left herself behind and sank into the poem. It'll sound strange, and perhaps unavoidably crass, but I have to say it: it was as if she'd lost her own child in the tragedy.

Zero degrees of separation again, maybe.

Congratulations to Adelia on the publication of *Zero Degrees of Separation*. I'm honored to have been asked to write the foreword.

I wish this book well.

(January 2284, Oranienburg, Berlin)

白色世紀
THE SUNLIGHT TRILOGY

Joey Yu
余卓軒

- **Category:** Fantasy
- **Publisher:** Sharp Point
- **Date:** 12/2021
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
- **Pages:** 352 / 400 / 384
- **Length:**
  Vol.1: 169,000 characters
  (approx. 110,000 words in English)
  Vol.2: 201,000 characters
  (approx. 131,000 words in English)
  Vol.3: 193,000 characters
  (approx. 125,500 words in English)
- **Rights sold:** Simplified Chinese (New Star)

Joey Yu is an award-winning bilingual fantasy and sci-fi author, and co-author of the non-fiction book *Platform Strategy*, which has sold more than 200,000 copies in Asia. He is a contracted English short story writer for *League of Legends's* canon universe. His Mandarin novel *The Mirrored Truth* was a runner-up for the Kadokawa fiction award, while his Mandarin novella *The Locus* received the Taiwan Fantasy Foundation award of excellence. In 2018, Yu received George R. R. Martin's inaugural Terran Award, which funded his participation in the Taos Toolbox master writing class led by Hugo Award winner Nancy Kress. As an English-language screenwriter, Yu was a quarter-finalist at the Austin Film Festival and the Page Awards, and a finalist at the Creative World Awards.

*** Author Joey Yu, recipient of the inaugural George R. R. Martin Terran Award**

*** Contracted short story writer for *League of Legends's canon universe***

A catastrophe has left the Earth blanketed in snow, and sunlight is remembered only in legend. Most of humanity has been forced to take refuge underground, but parties of Shade Riders desperately search the harsh alien-infested surface for the relics of Earth's forgotten past – most of all, the legendary Sword of Eternal Light, said to contain the last ray of sunlight.

In the year 2041, a meteor crashes into the Pacific Ocean, altering the face of the Earth forever. Within a decade, the sky is sealed behind an impenetrable wall of steely clouds and perpetual snowfall blankets the world in white. Civilizations perish as all surface plant-life withers to dust. "Sunlight" fades from human memory, becoming a legend from a bygone age, an object of worship for humans who have never witnessed it.

The advent of the sunless era coincides with the arrival of two mysterious life forms: a race of monstrous aliens that roam the endless expanses of snow, and the enigmatic snow spirits that are harnessed by a band of brave humans to fight the aliens.

These are the Shade Riders, the only humans still capable of traversing the frigid surface of the Earth. Using the power of the snow spirits, they glide over the icy terrain on hand-crafted soulboards, carrying intricately carved blades imbued with arcane powers. The Shade Riders explore ancient ruins, locate food sources in the constantly shifting landscape, and fight to protect the last outpost of humanity: Vaiytomo, a cavernous underground city illuminated by glowworms, located in what was once Oceania.

But humanity's grim fate changes when a young Shade Rider, Lukai, discovers a map of an ancient Earth that is almost unrecognizable – and on the map, the location of an artifact that may contain "the last ray of Sunlight", saved from the times before the skies closed.

The Sunlight Trilogy is a futuristic fantasy series set in a meticulously crafted world, told through multiple points-of-view by characters who must confront menacing external threats, and the cage of their own beliefs. This is the tale of the heroes of the distant future, the riders of spirit-inhabited boards soaring over an icebound wasteland… this is the tale of *Sunlight*.

Inside The Sunlight Trilogy: *Author Joey Yu Talks About His Inspiration and Creation*

By Joey Yu

INSPIRATION:
Why do you want to write an epic fantasy like this? Where did the inspiration come from?

Snowboarding has always been a popular sport since my student life in Vancouver, Canada. I used to listen to epic fantasy music while riding the snow waves, thinking just how cool it would be if I could hold blades in my hands and fight monsters with my boarding buddies while navigating through trees and powder.

It was during that time that I began some sketches and wrote down rough story ideas that would eventually turn into one of the first scenes in the books. Then I realized a magic system was needed as the high concept, and a world ecosystem to accommodate that.

The next decision was whether to set the story in a familiar world. I thought the Earth we knew would be cool, with recognizable cities blanketed by perpetual snowfall (I actually had a concept drawing of the snowclad ruins of Vancouver). You know, impossible locations for such climate – Taipei, Hong Kong, Shanghai, the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Solomon Islands – all of which you will all get to see in the story. Isn't that cool? A city in the tropical zone you thought you knew, but now entirely snow-choked. They become precious monuments to explore for our protagonists. There's something awe-inspiring to it.

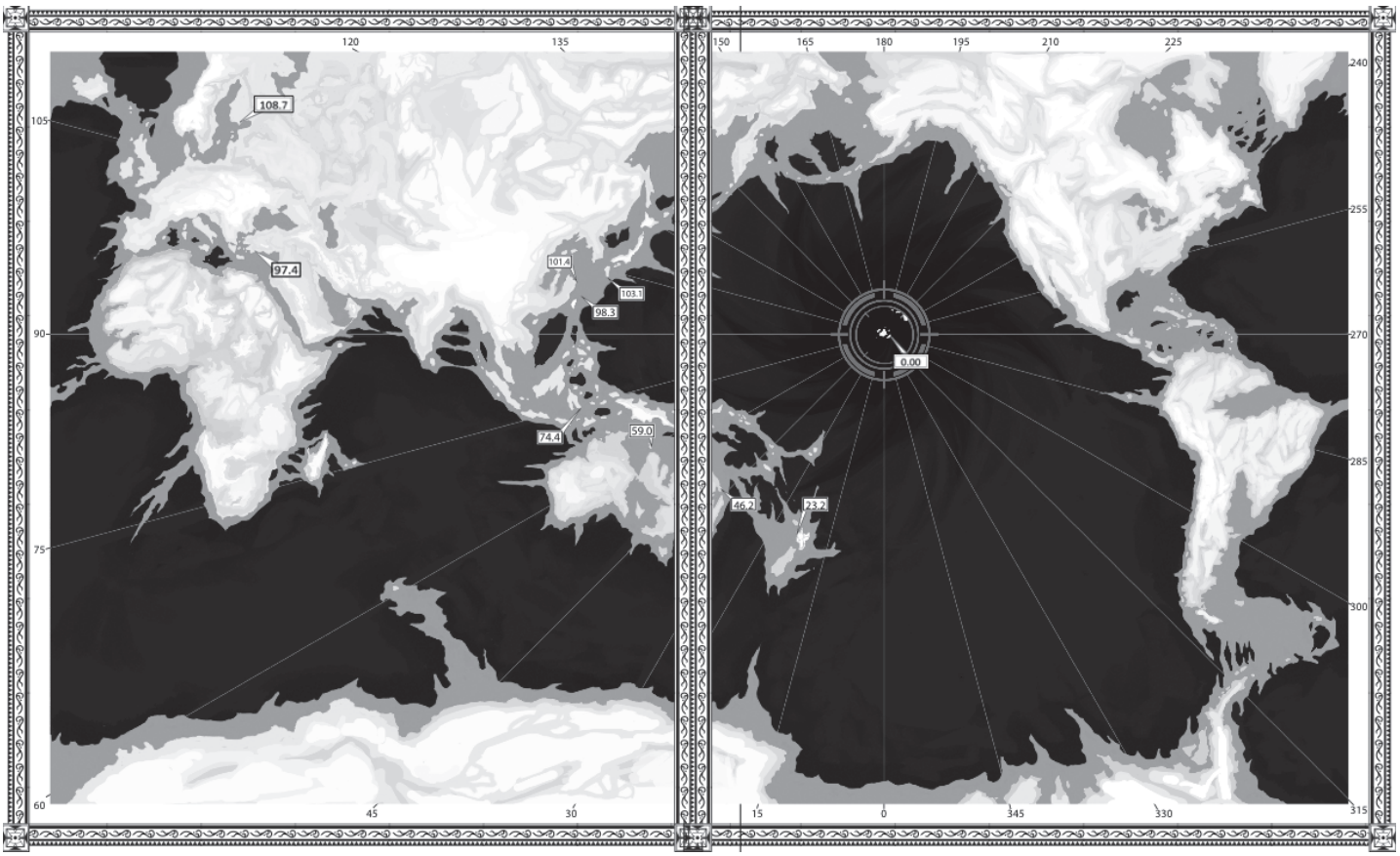
Ideas grew, and it became apparent that one book wouldn't be enough; it had to be at least a trilogy in order to cover the world map. I'm a fantasy fan, so I love looking at maps and imagining the "what-ifs". Took me years of planning, research, and actual writing.

Book 1 starts in New Zealand, Southeast Asia, and Taipei. A primal world where no electricity could be produced. People hunt with blades and dress in furs. Pure fantasy setting.

Book 2 opens up the world, taking us further north to Shanghai (China) and Sakura Island (Japan), introducing a new civilization that leverages the snow magic – or the "snow spirits" – but in a very culturally unique way.

Book 3 goes to the far west – the European continent and a future city called *Avalon* – which have invented technologies to harness the same snow magic but use it in an industrial, scientific way.

There is, of course, a "looming danger" throughline that threatens all remaining civilizations on the snowball Earth. And to uncover it, our characters must make journeys to rediscover our fallen world, connecting present events to myths of what happened five centuries ago.



Can you talk a little more about the Shade Riders?

They take on most of the fighting in the books. They are humans whose souls are bonded with Ling – spirits that make unpredictable appearances around deep snow, looking like miniature aurora borealis.

A Rider's apprentice must go through a culturally unique ritual for the binding process, locking a spirit inside their riding board crafted by an artisan.

In the face of danger, a Shade Rider may summon their spirit out of the board, having it wrapped around their chosen weapons inscribed with silver runes – and always with two pieces of weapons, one in each hand, to balance the riding stance.

Every Shade Rider is unique. With different snow spirits coupling with various chosen weaponry, we get to see many combinations of combat styles, all done while they're riding the snow in high speed.

PROCESS:
You published the first two books about nine years ago, then there seemed to be a hiatus before you published the final book last year. Why the gap? Did it have to do with your creative process?

Mostly it was just life getting in the way. A couple years back I tried game writing, and wrote a Kickstarter comic on the side (also a futuristic fantasy setting). So, *Sunlight* was placed on hold.

On the realistic side, there was a waiting period before a new publisher could take over. You know, contractual issues. The new publisher was instrumental in hiring a professional artist to conceptualize my world-setting, creating the posters you now see.

It's the kind of story that no one's seen before, hard to categorize as any traditional genre (Well… I call it futuristic fantasy), so coming up with visual posters really help readers to quickly envision the setting in

their minds. Mr. Lu DongBiao, a great film concept artist, has totally captured the mood of this world.

On top of all these, I knew the final book of the series must be both intellectually and emotionally rewarding to the readers, who wanted to feel that all the time invested in reading the first two installments would be worthwhile. So, I set a super high bar for Book 3. I don't think I've done this much research before in my creative career, trying to design whole civilizations across three continents based on *Sunlight*'s high concept and power system. The process was really fun, and the results paid off (according to my readers). Typing up loose threads, plotting dramatic escalation, designing revelations that go hand in hand with our heroes' emotional journeys...all these took time. I just never expected them to take that many years.

So you have three, or four new civilizations on a planet that is entirely covered by snow. The scale of work seems daunting on many levels. But what does this mean to the heroes of the books?

I have a passion for world-building, so those came natural to me. But good stories still come down to the characters' choices and transformation.

Most of the POVs are Shade Riders, who begin their journey in one specific location on the map. Subsequent civilizations are revealed through the characters' discovery of them, so we experience the story through their eyes just as they're making sense of a world that's been silent and sunless for the past 500 years.

With each discovery, characters old and new are confronted with important questions. How do we bring Sunlight *back*? Does it even exist behind the clouds? If people finally get to see it with their eyes, will it damage their faith? – These are just some of the questions the characters are asking themselves as they navigate through the snow-covered world.

What does Sunlight mean to each surviving civilization? How about the Shade Spirits? And the monsters? *Why* did they appear? Each POV character will derive a different interpretation from their chosen journeys. And a lot of this reflect on our current environment, the way different cultures could view the same thing so differently.

And maybe there's a beauty to that. Why do cultures and individuals form vastly different interpretations from the same intangible ideas? Or even from concrete facts. Under miles of thick snow, that might just be the core of truth we're all trying to explore.

WORDS TO READERS: Anything you'd like to say to readers overseas?

Sunlight is a "futuristic fantasy" story – where fantastic elements emerge on Earth five centuries into the future. There are sci-fi elements, too, reinterpreted and reimagined. I trust that readers of different tastes will all find joys from these books. It also suggests a world that dangerously resembles a future when climates go wrong.

At the core, though, *Sunlight* is still about the spirit of adventure and exploration. About the bonds we share as humans no matter which culture we're originally from, or which historical roots we are born into. I am curious to know how American readers, African readers, European readers, and readers from various backgrounds might respond to the story. Will be nice to hear their opinions, to be inspired by their interpretations.

So hopefully I can invite you to come into my world, to ride through a thousand icy terrains with the Shade Riders, finding lost relics and rare remaining Soul Woods, unravelling climate-altering mysteries, and witnessing the almighty Sunlight for the first time in 500 years.

THE SUNLIGHT TRILOGY

By Joey Yu
Translated by Jacqueline Leung

Prologue

Only when he was soaring could Lukai feel any shred of hope for breaking the limits of the world.

The entire world lay beneath his feet. Time seemed to stop. A heavy canopy of clouds filled his vision. The thin air brushed against his cheek like a meek, invisible hand before turning to sharp ice in his lungs.

Lukai inhaled, relishing the moment of silent suspension before gravity pulled him back down, away from the ashen clouds. He fell, quicker and quicker, the ground rushing up to meet him as he spread his arms and braced himself. At the very last second, he relaxed his knees and angled the board under him to land safely on a snowy expanse. The ground burst into a billow of white, which flurried around him as he reemerged and slid down the slope.

Even in the freezing, howling wind, he could hear his two teammates closing in from behind. They were all riding their soulboards, keeping to his right.

"Don't waste your energy," one of them said, smiling, his cape flapping in the wind. He had two swords strapped at the waist and a tube-shaped vessel on his back. "Anything can happen on these grounds, we'd best be alert."

"Captain Ya-huang!" Delight spread across Lukai's face as he gripped his double-edged spear tighter. "The elders would be so surprised!"

Their mission had lasted two whole months and no one would expect that they'd bring home such a prize. Ya-huang placed a black-gloved hand on the vessel and nodded, sharing another smile.

"Don't get too excited just yet. We still have two days before reaching home," Li-yin, a young woman, pointed out as she got closer. Her dark gray hair blew in the wind, her soulboard riling up wavelets of snow as she glided past.

The sky remained overcast as always. Thick clouds gathered into a still, convoluted mass, sealing the entire world. On the ground, a blanket of velvety snow stretched toward the horizon, exuding a menacing aura that forced the earth into slumber. Amid the frozen plains, they were but three small figures scrawling tracks in the snow as they advanced. Even though they all wore capes, wind slipped through the seams of their clothes like icy needles, piercing their skin and causing them to pull the fabric tighter to themselves.

In the distance, Lukai saw a nameless city from the Old World nestled between two peaks, deserted and forgotten by time. They travelled on, and soon the ruin vanished out of sight.

How much more treasure can we find in all these ruins? Lukai wondered. They'd planned to excavate a few more sites for silver, but it was more important to bring the artifact back to base, which was why Ya-huang decided against detours.

"What's wrong, Li-yin?" Lukai asked, shouting over the wind so he could be heard. Li-yin was staring behind them, strands of dark hair whipping against her face. It took a while before she turned around again.

"Do you believe Sunlight actually exists?" she suddenly asked.

Lukai frowned and looked up reflexively at the sealed sky above them. The world had been like this, unchanged, for his entire life – nothing but clouds extending from one edge of the horizon to the other.

It was said that the clouds and persistent snowfall had been here for centuries; blue sky and nourishing Sunlight belonged to legends of the Old World.

"I don't know," Lukai said. "But since the elders say so, it must. Why ask all of a sudden?"

"It just came to mind. What if…" Li-yin hesitated, then continued, "what if the treasures we've found are nothing more than hearsay and don't prove anything, what happens then? People will just be even more disappointed."

At that, Ya-huang cast a sidelong glance at her from the flank.

Lukai looked down at the snow rippling from the sides of his soulboard. A moment later, he smiled and answered confidently. "No point overthinking, we'll just have to see what the elders decide. As Shade Riders, we have our own responsibilities, so leave these questions to the Old World researchers."

Li-yin nodded and Ya-huang smiled again. He said, "I'm sure the research center will also be surprised. We're bringing extraordinary findings from this expedition."

In this age so unfavorable to human survival, only a special minority – Shade Riders, those who could control soulboards – were able to leave the protection of their underground bases and venture into the deathly white world.

This expedition was all the more special with Ya-huang leading the team himself. He was older and more experienced than Lukai, and was one of the few Shade Riders who was a dual-wielding swordsman. Ya-huang had spent the past few years training a younger generation of Shade Riders, earning the respect of many. To be one of the two Shade Riders Ya-huang was bringing on this mission was an exceptional opportunity and honor for Lukai. He hoped he could one day be an outstanding Shade Rider just like Ya-huang and lead his own team.

"The wind is starting to die down," Ya-huang said, observing the terrain in front of them.

"So we're on the right track." Lukai understood Ya-huang's observation. The headwind in this area was weakening. Caused by a difference in temperature and air density, the headwind was dissipating as the temperature plunged without the influence of warmer ocean currents. The cold made the air denser, levelling the atmospheric imbalance. This meant they were indeed leaving a coastline they couldn't see and heading inland toward the icy continent.

"Let's make our way to the valley over there and rest once we reach the other side," Ya-huang ordered, and the three glided down a wide slope.

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The artifact they found was an extraordinary map from the Old World. They'd covered it in thin transparent film as Lukai held it carefully in black leather gloves. The map was special because it showed many parts of the continent, delineated in white, which Lukai had never even visited. Even Ya-huang believed no one in Vaiytomo had ever come across anything like this.

"Everyone will be shocked once they lay their eyes on it." Snow drifted into his line of vision and Lukai squinted his eyes at the map. They were resting on a gentler plane along the spur.

Li-yin leaned over, coughing dryly before she said, "Other than this map, we also found another treasure that's even more astonishing. The elders may—" She suddenly stopped talking.

"What?" Lukai raised his head and noticed the unease on her face.

Ya-huang's expression also changed. He looked at the top, eyes sweeping across the white ridges set against the ash-gray sky.

"Ah!" Lukai finally sensed it. The snow at the top was whirling in unnatural directions. They knew what this was a sign of – a strange wind was blowing up above them.

"This area has always been safe," Li-yin said, hesitant.

"Where there's snow, there's danger." Ya-huang retrieved the map from Lukai and quickly rolled it back into the tube-shaped vessel before unsheathing the two swords on his sides. Li-yin also unfastened the double-edged spear from her back and Lukai readied himself, brandishing his weapon in his hands. Like Li-yin, he

wielded a double-edged spear – a long wooden shaft scored in silver, with spearheads embedded on both ends. The two shared a look, worry evident in their eyes.

Wind and snow blew into their faces, the cold air even more biting. At a signal from Ya-huang, the three Shade Riders moved into a triangular formation, making their way upward. At the top, heavy gusts made it difficult for them to see and every gasp of air felt like knives in the throat. They pulled their capes closer, crossing the snow-covered mountain ridge and heading into white fog.

"Stay close!" Ya-huang cried, maneuvering his soulboard to speed up. The fog obscured their surroundings as the wind tore at their bodies like a hand trying to topple everything off balance. Still the three Shade Riders held onto their weapons as they rode their soulboards steadily through the snow.

"Here they come." Ya-huang pointed his sword to two o'clock.

As expected, several pale figures appeared amid the falling snow and quickly surrounded the team.

"Hunters, here?" Lukai's gaze hardened at the sight of the creatures.

Li-yin's soulboard was the first to emit a faint glow, her spear also glowing iridescent. One by one their weapons shone like a rainbow, bright colors shimmering amid the white surroundings.

A terrifying roar sounded ahead and a Hunter pounced into view. Its body was deathly white and looked like it was formed with chunks of hard snow. It was double the height of an average human, rows of rib-like spikes protruding from its broad back.

The Hunter extended its huge claws and swiped at them. Ya-huang immediately skidded to a stop and backflipped to avoid the blow, swords extended to cut off the creature's arms.

Lukai and Li-yin went from the sides, slicing the body in two with their spears. The Hunter immediately exploded and dissipated into snow.

"More incoming!" Ya-huang cried.

More Hunters leaped into the fray. They had no heads or necks, their chests torn open by large, grotesque mouths that gaped to show ice-blue tusks. Misshapen white protrusions on their backs stood against the wind. Their claws, six on each of their front limbs, also gleamed a menacing blue.

Lukai protected Ya-huang's left rear flank, guarding his third of their formation. He kept gliding, swinging his spear in time with the movement of his soulboard and blocking the Hunters' advances as Ya-huang led them through the mob like an arrowhead. The three Shade Riders slashed the Hunters' bodies open, causing them to disintegrate into snow.

"Oh no!" Ya-huang realized they were travelling toward the heart of a bowl-shaped valley where countless Hunters swarmed in from all sides. He raised his swords, then Li-yin positioned herself behind him and Lukai moved to the rear, the three forming one straight line as they plunged into the enemy.

The wind pulled away the hood of Ya-huang's cape, revealing his long black hair. He spun with practiced ease, cutting down the monsters in front of him with his swords. Li-yin followed with a spear point before Lukai dealt a finishing blow. This was how they advanced up the slope, fighting their way out of the tight space, though the situation was dire. Hunters collapsed on the trio from all sides like a closing fan, with more and more crowding before them.

Lukai heard a shriek of pain in the distance, but couldn't discern whether it came from the wind or the enemy. He also thought he heard Ya-huang cry out and stared ahead, eyes wide, but only saw the remnant iridescent streaks of Ya-huang's swords dancing in the snow.

Finally the three of them broke through the assault, going past a ridge and speeding down its steep decline. The Hunters cried out in rage behind them, their roars terrifying to the core. Still the Shade Riders accelerated, leaving the enemy far behind.

八尺門的辯護人
PORT OF LIES

Freddy Fu-Jui Tang 唐福睿

- **Category:** Crime
- **Publisher:** MirrorFiction
- **Date:** 12/2021
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
- **Pages:** 456
- **Length:** 163,000 characters (approx. 106,000 words in English)

Freddy Fu-Jui Tang was a lawyer for five years before he moved overseas to study screenwriting and directing at CalArts. Within his distinctly social realist and humanist writing, the legal system becomes a device that frames the human dilemmas of his characters. *Port of Lies* is his first novel. He is also the screenwriter and director for the *Port of Lies* television adaptation, *The Attorney from Bachimen*, slated for 2023 release.

*** 2020 MirrorFiction Million Dollar Award winner**
*** Television adaptation directed by the author is in production**

A young Indigenous Taiwanese escapes the hard life of his fishing port hometown by becoming a public defense lawyer, but when an immigrant fisherman kills a boat captain from his tribe, he is forced to reevaluate his vision of justice.

In 1950s Taiwan, large numbers of Amei tribesmen from the east coast moved north to work on fishing boats based in the port of Bachimen. Raised in these environs, Tung Pao-Chu watched his elders struggling to make ends meet as fishermen and decided he would pursue a different path. Through hard work he managed to leave Bachimen and fulfill his dream of becoming a public defense lawyer, defending accused criminals for a modest government salary.

Now, just as he is preparing to leave the public defender's office to pursue more lucrative work, Tung Pao-Chu is assigned a difficult case involving the murder of an Amei boat captain and his entire family. The suspect is an illegal immigrant from Indonesia who worked on the victim's boat. The brutality of the murders, combined with associated racial tensions, has thrust the case into the spotlight. Already in the difficult position of defending a man suspected of murdering his own tribesmen, Tung Pao-Chu begins to doubt whether the case is as simple as it seems. What was the motive for the murders? And what transpired on the fishing boat during its final voyage?

Through the lens of an apparently straightforward murder case, *Port of Lies* exposes the complexity of race relations in contemporary Taiwan. The novel addresses a broad range of issues from the death penalty, to conflicting profit motives in the fishing industry, to racial identity and affirmative action, to the rights of immigrant workers. From these intersecting threads author and lawyer Freddy Fu-Jui Tang weaves a fast-paced courtroom thriller destined to please crime and mystery fans with a taste for social realism.

A Legal Thriller That Combines Genre Entertainment with Social Issues: Review of Freddy Fu-Jui Tang's Port of Lies

By Sean Hsu
Translated by Kevin Wang

During the decades between 1970 and 2000, the introduction of Japanese detective fiction through translated novels, manga, television dramas, and movies profoundly influenced Taiwanese creatives. Some who wrote literary fiction found inspiration in the social observations and realist techniques of Seichō Matsumoto, and applied them to their own native subject matter. Younger writers were deeply inspired by the induction-driven stories about master sleuths such as the manga series *The Kindaichi Case Files* and *Detective Conan*, as well new examples of classical detective fiction by Soji Shimada and Yukito Ayatsuji, whose mystery novels focus primarily on the mechanical aspects of crimes and the persona of the great detective. Since then, the continuous, systematic introduction of recent British, American, and European works have inspired creators to expand their narratives and subject matter, increasing the popular appeal of stories while deepening their potential for discussion. It is within this greater context that Freddy Fu-Jui Tang's novel *Port of Lies* has risen to prominence, bolstered by its win at MirrorFiction's second Million-Dollar Award.

The novel's main character, Tung Pao-Chu, is a seasoned public defender of Amis ethnicity who has been working in the judicial system for many years and knows all the tricks of the trade. His superficial sloppiness belies a deeper level of clarity. To win the most favor for his clients, he is always able to strike his opponents with a precisely calibrated question while their guards are down. His latest task is to defend an Indonesian fisherman who killed one of Tung's childhood friends, a decision that causes others from his Amis indigenous community to spurn him. The case, a murder of a family of three, is filled with treacherous unknowns. Does the convict, who cannot be understood due to a language barrier, have a mental health disorder, or is he refusing to disclose ulterior motives? The enormously complex and profitable offshore fishing industry seems indirectly to have caused the incident. Even

the Minister of Justice and the President's inner circle become involved in the investigation as political calculations in the face of an election and a controversial debate over the retention of the death penalty push them to intervene. Lien Chin-Ping, a recent graduate in alternative civilian service whose father is a senior Supreme Court justice assists Tung in his defense, while Leena, an Indonesian care worker commissioned to interpret for the defendant struggles with the question of how deeply she should be involved. In what should have been a simple criminal defense case, the characters, in their search for the truth and desire to uphold justice, find that the chips on the table may decide the fate of the whole country.

Port of Lies gains narrative power from the process of criminal litigation, which involves the search for criminal motives and arguments between prosecution and defense. British and American works may also depict a twelve-person jury (Taiwan does not have a jury system, though it is in the process of implementing a system of citizen judges). The novel can be categorized as a legal thriller, written with great conviction by Freddy Fu-Jui Tang, who has a legal background that includes five years of experience as a lawyer. Human rights issues that have taken center stage in Taiwan in recent years, including judicial reforms to abolish the death penalty and grant equal rights to indigenous people and foreign migrant workers. These issues are skillfully presented through the novel's murder case, prompting readers to raise questions of their own. The differing positions between characters create fascinating dramatic tensions that also reflect the various views of the general public. Was the murder of the boat captain's family premeditated or done in the spur of the moment? Why does the killer deliberately drown the helpless girl in a bucket of water? What role did the dodgy shipping company play? Does the involvement of high-ranking politicians suggest dark forces behind the scenes that cannot be exposed? The design of these various mysteries strikes a clever balance between entertainment value and socially relevant themes.

Another aspect of the novel's charm probably derives from its author's training in cinematic directing at the California Institute of the Arts, which he began after leaving his lawyer job. This gives the novel a smooth and lively tone without compromising credibility earned through the use of reliable sources and specialized knowledge. Freddy Fu-Jui Tang demonstrates an admirable storytelling ability that retains local Taiwanese characteristics while contributing to the international genre of crime fiction.

PORT OF LIES

By Freddy Fu-Jui Tang
Translated by Timothy Smith

Chapter 1. Murder by the Sea

1

September 18th, 1982. Midnight. Ten-year-old Tung Pao-Chu watched his father Shou-Chung appear from the shadows and step back into their shack, covered from head to toe in spattered blood. He was carrying a machete in one hand. A few rivulets of blood made their way to the blade point, the accumulated drops falling off the tip and edge. His father held onto the frame of their front door, which was made from the flotsam remnants of a fishing boat. He was breathing hard, almost panting. In Amis, he ordered his son to get the hell away.

A commotion came from outside the door. Presumably, Shou-Chung had come all the way back from the fishing port at Zhengbin, and he had startled quite a few of their neighbors.

Pao-Chu's family of three lived in a home built of wood scrapped from derelict fishing sampans and trawlers. It was about 750 square feet in size and had four rooms. About fourteen people were living under one roof. Most were Amis friends and relatives who had made the long trek north from Hualien. They were all awake now, and they all got up one by one to make their way to the front door to see what the fuss was about.

Pao-Chu looked at this demonic avatar that was his father and felt scared out of his wits. He didn't dare move an inch. He heard his mother, Ma-Chieh, call out from behind him in a tone of mourning: "Looh….What in God's name did you do!?"*

The color had drained from her face. She snatched the machete from her husband's grip and threw it to the ground. A police whistle screamed in the distance. Pao-Chu stared at the fresh, shining blood as it gradually dried and lost its luster. His mind turned blank.

A great gust of wind rocked the entire house, and the electricity cut out. In this pitch-dark world, there was nothing save for Shou-Chung's piteous gasping for breath.

Pao-Chu held tightly to his mother's waist and began bawling. This was the first time thoughts of running away arose in his innocent, juvenile mind; though time passed, they never disappeared.

This is Bachimen.

2

In the 1960s, Keelung's fishing fleets were prospering and developing at breakneck speed, drastically increasing the demand for deckhands and other labor at Zhengbin Fishing Port. There were several headhunter middlemen who went down to Hualien and Taitung to search for workers, where they found plenty of Amis who were willing to work on the water or off in far-flung seas.

Tung Shou-Chung was one of the new hires. In the prime of his youth, he had originally come up from his hometown in Yuli, over in Hualien, famous now for its delicious short-grain rice. He moved his wife, Ma-Chieh, and their then-infant son to Keelung, and once there, they never left.

Some of the Amis tribespeople, venturing far from their native lands in the southeast of Taiwan, moved

* Dialogues marked with * are in Amis.

to the Longmu Well area on the north side of Heping Island, where they built a series of ramshackle buildings behind the military retiree's housing complex. These internal migrants called the area "a-la-bau'an", meaning "easily forgotten place" in the Amis tongue.

Another Amis group settled on the slopes near the entrance to the far side of the Bachimen tunnel. Once they got there, these internal migrants scavenged for flotsam and scrap wood, and built not-so-legal shanties from the water's edge all the way to the top of the slopes of the hill. In its heyday, there were about 200 homes here, all connected in continuous rows of asphalt roof shingle patches and stretching eastwards along the single seaside road into a valley. What this would later be called – Bachimen settlement – was where Pao-Chu's family would set down roots.

But where did this name come from? Tung Pao-Chu didn't have a clue. He still remembered when he was younger, each time his father had thrown back a few drinks, he would tell his son the same stale joke about how it was called Bachimen ("Eight-foot-gate") because Amis men all carried eight-foot members, and he ought to pant his son to check if he was actually a member of the tribe.

There had been a party going on the night the incident happened, attended by Amis friends and family from the cramped, decrepit Bachimen neighborhood. Shou-Chung talked about when his younger cousin had accidentally fallen overboard and drowned. His emotional state had changed, and he was upset. Every drink made him more and more agitated and mean. His anger grew especially fierce when he thought about how the fishing boat company wasn't even insured. What's more was when the fishing company hired people on, they'd give out an advanced payment but when all things were said and done and the principal and interest was calculated, the survivor's compensation was a mere pittance. As a fishing boat captain, it filled Shou-Chung with rage.

Shou-Chung kneaded the fingers in his right hand, cracking his knuckles and massaging them. He was missing half his right index finger. He slammed his fist down on the table: "I lost half my finger just last year. They never gave me a damned cent for it."*

The party died off after a bit and everyone made their way back to their hovels. Every drop of alcohol had been lapped up, and the lamp lights extinguished. Most everyone had taken their fill of liquor and beer and passed out to dream of better places and better times. Yet Shou-Chung didn't immediately come home; he sat in front of the table until everyone around had nodded off. Then he walked out the door, spinning a machete in one hand, and followed the snaking path towards Zhengbin Fishing Port.

The sea breeze that evening carried a chill. After tossing back half his drink, Shou-Chung felt half-frozen. The adrenaline rush from the murderous ideas swirling in his head only made him quake harder. Despite nearly ten years of experience making a living from the ocean, and the strength to lift a 120-kilogram big-eye tuna without breaking a sweat, the hand holding the machete couldn't stop shaking.

The roll-up gate to the fishing fleet company compound stood half-open. The noise of bottles clinking and arguments hovered in the night air. Shou-Chung felt his body calming down. A strong gust of wind blew from the direction of Heping Island, and he thought he could hear the slight creaking of shanty doors and rooftops up on the hill slopes. Though he looked back in the direction of his house, he couldn't recognize at night which of the glowing lanterns was the one from his own hovel.

A male shadow came forward, a freshly lit cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth. He made eye contact with Shou-Chung; it was the head of the company's accounting department.

"Ah-ya." The man said in a dry, hoarse voice.

Shou-Chung lunged and slashed through the man's chest and neck twice. Blood sprayed into Shou-Chung's eyes. He couldn't see who the second person who'd come out to attack him was. It didn't matter. Shou-Chung brought the knife down twice more.

Another fountain of blood.

Shou-Chung returned home by the same path. He wiped at the blood spattered across his face, and his body starting shivering once more. He walked in through the door, shouting for Pao-Chu. He dug around in his pants pocket, fishing out a couple copper coins, and called out for Ma-Chieh to go fetch a couple fresh bottles of beer from the convenience store down the

road.

After Pao-Chu had grown up, criminality was far from something fresh and novel. He'd seen all manner of depraved and brutal acts, but this was far different from what he'd see later. This was the only time he was close enough to smell the pungent, ferrous odor of someone else's blood.

From then on, Pao-Chu would recall that night as if it had been broad daylight, clear for all to see. He remembered before his father Shou-Chung had carried out his deed, his father had sat stooped over at the edge of the kitchen table looking at all the emptied beer and liquor bottles scattered about the tabletop, muttering to himself.

"Are we just not humans to them?"*

3

Maybe it was a blessing in disguise. Neither of the two men died from their injuries. Tung Shou-Chung was charged with attempted multiple homicide, and in the end, the court sentenced him to just ten years in prison.

This was how the verdict was written: "…Before the incident had occurred, the defendant had drunk several bottles of kaoliang sorghum liquor and millet wine with his friends and relatives, which led to the defendant losing his capacity for sound judgment. Such actions led to the defendant becoming mentally feeble. The intoxication report in the medical evaluation from the Tri-Service General Hospital is available on record for review. Furthermore, the defendant has almost no level of education. Since his youth, he had grown up in a Mountain Brethren community in Hualien, where he was long accustomed to imbibing alcohol from a young age. He is maladapted to living in a metropolitan environment. In addition to the above, the defendant was also severely impacted by the accidental death of a relative, and was not of sound emotional stability.…"

The night before Shou-Chung was taken into prison, several of his friends and family had carried out a ritual for him. They had lit a bonfire and cooked a meal on the wet, algae-covered rocks on the shore next to Bachimen. Ma-Chieh went out earlier in the day, scavenging around for seaweed and sea snails. She tossed it all into simmering cooking pots full of soup, the flavor becoming nice and mellow, but Shou-Chung didn't have a single spoonful.

He remained mired in silence. Another member of the tribe suddenly muttered that another fishing boat would be heading out to sea the next month. He hadn't been interrupted, but perhaps he was hoping Shou-Chung would make an allowance for it. Some of the others started to chime in too. They owed the company too much money, and it would be difficult to get away with not paying them back the advance.

"Other than running the boats, what else could we do?"

Everyone knew everyone around the harbor. An uncomfortable situation would negatively affect everyone.

One had to make money somehow.

"The verdict had already shown some sympathy for our plight. Letting themselves get carried away by impassioned emotions wouldn't do anyone any good."

Tung Shou-Chung looked off into the black, churning surf. He was still silent.

Pao-Chu was absentmindedly staring into the bonfire, their conversations fermenting in his head. His love and compassion for his uncles had gradually turned into a deep hatred of some of their vices like alcoholism, physical abuse, and self-pity. He got especially irritated when he realized some of the Amis community would slack off around the harbor as they were trying to make it. They would even stand in front of the fishing company and question and blame his parents for all their troubles. This kind of resentment just kept growing and spreading throughout him, turning into something he just couldn't forgive them for, and even led to some self-hatred of his indigenous roots.

While Shou-Chung wasted away in a prison cell, Ma-Chieh worked part-time at a shrimp-processing factory. She'd often get bitten by the still-live shrimp as she dipped her hands into the filthy water. Since she often worked overtime, her body weakened. To make matters worse, she wasn't willing to spend any of her hard-earned money to go see a doctor,

and eventually, it led to cellulitis and sepsis, which ultimately took her life.

Pao-Chu refused to have any compassion and love for himself. He never shed a tear for his own plight. He just kept to himself, studying his textbooks in the janitor's closet in the local Catholic church. The year Bachimen settlement was demolished, Pao-Chu strove hard to make it into a university. Once he did though, he never looked back and left that eternally rain-enshrouded, dismal slope by the sea.

4

In 1988, President Lee Teng-Hui paid an official visit to Keelung. He decided to improve Bachimen's living environment, and three years later, Keelung's city government demolished the slum at Bachimen and built cheap housing units in its stead. A government-subsidized housing complex called the Hai-pin Housing Complex was constructed. The state-owned land had been concurrently defined as a protected area set aside for Indigenous Taiwanese, becoming the first instance in all of Taiwan where the government had resettled an illegal settlement of urbanized Indigenous peoples.

The time-consuming construction took no less than three years to finish. After the Hai-pin Housing Complex was built, the scattered tribesmen returned to their home here in Keelung, and renamed it "Kihaw", meaning "bay". The name "Bachimen" died away slowly with the memories of each person that passed away.

In any case, no matter how the name changed and the landscape transformed, to Pao-Chu this place was not worth remembering. He'd been away from his "home" for over thirty years, and only went back when absolutely necessary to see his father. Perhaps that's not entirely true – half the time, he had a hankering for fish cakes grilled over charcoal.

Apart from that, the only other time he went down was on Saturday afternoons to visit with the book club at the Catholic church on Heping Island. That was the deal he had made with the priest: once he began studying at university, he made sure to come back every weekend to this church. He always brought books with him for the kids in the parish, regardless of their age or reading level, and would answer their questions and help them. Though he didn't know everything, the questions the indigenous kids asked weren't all that complicated. What they really wanted was just a strong role model and volunteer mentor.

This time though, Pao-Chu came back to Keelung for a very different reason.

The lighting in the Keelung District Court is pretty awful. By the end of the year when it's already cloudy and gray out, it has an oppressively depressing atmosphere to it.

The family court isn't open to the public, so there weren't any spectators in the gallery or guests seating to listen in. Shou-Chung was there as a petitioner. Time and salt water had left scars and valleys all along his face. Moving his catch in and out of cold storage for years on end had left him with a crooked spine and permanently collapsed shoulders.

The young, female family court judge watched as Tung Pao-Chu sat across from his father. She was trying to amicably soften the situation by calmly and clearly stating out the facts: "The petitioner, Tung Shou-Chung, namely, your father, has requested that from this day forward until the day of his passing, that you provide a monthly stipend in the amount of NT$30,000 for the purpose of caretaking. Do you have any opinions or thoughts on the petition at hand, sir?"

"Are you fucking demented?"* Ignoring the judge's question, Tung Pao-Chu posed this question directly to his father in an angry outburst. "Isn't what I already give you more than enough?"*

偽魚販指南
FISHMONGERING: A MEMOIR

Lin Kai-Lun
林楷倫

- **Category:** Memoir
- **Publisher:** Aquarius
- **Date:** 3/2022
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
- **Pages:** 256
- **Length:** 76,500 characters (approx. 50,000 words in English)
- **Rights sold:** Simplified Chinese (China Translation & Publishing House)

A fishmonger by trade, Lin Kai-Lun is also the recipient of numerous domestic literary prizes including the 2020 Lin Rong-San short story prize and the 2021 *China Times* literature prize. His writing focuses on real-life stories marked by rich observational detail.

To help pay off his father's debts, he joined the family business he had always hoped to escape: hawking seafood in a public market. 20 years later, Lin Kai-Lun has written this wryly-observed memoir, smuggling his surprising literary sensibilities into the fishy package of a workplace exposé.

His father and grandfather had always told him not to follow in their footsteps, but when his father's debts began to soar, Lin Kai-Lun gave up his personal dreams and joined the family business: hawking seafood in a public market. Manning the family stall and making deliveries to restaurants by day, Lin put pen to paper by night, resulting in a wry and rueful memoir.

Early on Lin learns to kill and clean a fish, and how to overcome his aversion to blood and muck. Sometimes, it seems that fish are all he thinks about day in and day out. Slowly, however, he realizes he is learning as much about the people at the market as he is about the family profession. There's the stuttering delivery man who suffers no end of abuse in life, but always greets Lin with a sincere smile. The octogenarian widower who still makes regular purchases of red seabream because it was his deceased wife's favorite. Eventually, Lin gives in to the basic fishiness of his existence. He finds that the best way to assess someone's personality is to question them on their seafood consumption habits. When relating his family history, seafood metaphors are often the most apt.

Whether dissecting his complex relationship with his father, or describing the nitty-gritty of the seafood trade, Lin's writing delivers unexpected touches of grace. Through the stink and the slime, Lin has managed to distill 20 years of experience hawking seafood into a smartly-observed memoir, smuggling his surprising literary sensibilities into the package of a workplace exposé.

"He Probably Bet That I Would Never Leave the Fish Stall": Interview with Lin Kai-Lun, Author of Fishmongering: A Memoir

By Alice Li (originally published at Readmoo)
Translated by Kevin Wang

"I wanted to be a flounder too, hanging out in the sand and only having to jump up when there's something to eat." Lin Kai-Lun wants to live comfortably, but the "Fish Divination" system he developed gave him a different fate. "I'm actually a tuna, and tunas are workaholics. Fish with dark flesh can't stop. They have to keep swimming."

Fishmongering is a laborious and time-consuming profession. A fishmonger works from three in the morning to one in the afternoon, buying wholesale and hollering to customers day in and day out in the fish market.

Aside from selling fish, Lin Kai-Lun is also a writer. "I started writing around 2019 or 2020, when I felt like it was time to develop a side business. I also adjusted my workload to spend time with my children." After finishing at the market, Lin uses his free time before picking up his children or after they go to bed to write. His labors have resulted in prize-winning fiction.

Now, Lin Kai-Lun has published his first book of essays, *Fishmongering: A Memoir*, which foregrounds his observations of life in the fish market.

While his stories unfold immersively in lived reality, the narrator of his essays is more of a spectator. "We don't just buy and sell fish at the market. Inevitably, we interact with people." Lin does not speak for the people around him, but we still see the souls that he encounters. The things he notices are prosaic, but his words form the shape of a life.

"He probably bet that I would never leave the fish stall"

Selling fish is a family business that began with his grandfather. Little by little, the burden of the job fell on Lin, who had nowhere to escape. "My elders always told me, 'Do a good job, and eventually, all this will be yours.'" A touch of helplessness in his voice, Lin notes: "Yep, and it was all debt."

The year Lin was born, his father won the national lottery. "I always wondered if he had used up all his luck and mine with unexpected windfalls."

When Lin was a child, his father ran a bubble tea store that brought in 700,000 New Taiwan Dollars a month. "Maybe earning money was too easy. He went gambling to pass the time." Each bet was one or two hundred thousand dollars. Eventually, loan sharks that charged high interest came to the door. "I didn't understand. I thought our family had plenty of money, so why did we have to deal with this?"

Lin's father kept gambling, though his debts mounted. Without a day in the clear, the family fell into a bottomless pit. "It seems that as long as people believe they have a certain kind of luck, they will bet everything on it." Lin saw firsthand how gamblers always try to turn their fortunes around in one throw of the dice, having forgotten that none of it would be necessary if they had not made the first bet.

His family lost the store and his parents divorced. Lin's addicted father also gambled away his child's life.

Lin has not had a holiday since junior high school. While his peers were having fun, he was at the stall, buying wholesale, killing fish, and calling to customers. "My father probably bet on my never leaving the fish stall." He wanted to continue his education and teach sociology, but when he called his father to announce that he had scored the highest marks, his father asked indifferently, "Are you still coming to sell fish this afternoon?"

Lin shouldered the burdens of the fish stall and his family's debt, thinking that if he accepted his fate and worked hard, everything would eventually get better. "But my father was still gambling." Lin told his father that he could pay off the debts and keep him clothed and fed if he would just stop gambling. "He wouldn't do it." He secretly borrowed money from friends and relatives in his son's name and spent the hard-earned savings as though it were a matter of course. "I didn't understand. How could he treat me that way?"

Lin's father stabbed him in the back as he was trying to carry on the family business and get his life back on track. Lin once believed that he could forgive his father endlessly, but his heart gradually grew cold. "I don't know if he saw me as a son, or just someone he could use."

If you can relate, why would you discriminate?

"Those of us with this kind of childhood in which our family lives were seriously deprived, all want to make up for these shortcomings without repeating them."

Lin wants his son and daughter to become responsible for themselves, so that they can find what they love to do and live a happy life.

Does he want his children to take over the fishmongering business? Lin thinks it's not necessarily a bad idea, but nurturing them properly is the priority.

Most fishmongers do not want their children to take over the business. In the eyes of society, fishmongering is a seemingly inferior profession. "Does being a fishmonger mean being dirty, smelly, and poor?" From Lin's perspective, the fish market is just another kind of workplace, one requiring an understanding of subtle emotions and a familiarity with styles of transaction between different generations. The work is not at all lowly and should not be taken lightly.

"Everyone thinks fishmongers are poor, and that they sell fish because they're uneducated," Lin says. Although Lin himself took on the family business because he had no other option, most young fishmongers today are not lacking in education. In fact, they make the choice to sell fish after a great deal of careful thinking and planning. "Fishmongers may have a low image in society, but we are actually in a higher stratum in terms of financial capability," said Lin, adding that fishmongers can save money quickly if they are willing to work hard. It is the traditional framework of society that has created this unfair perspective.

Are street vendors necessarily worse than white-collar workers? Lin wonders, "Isn't this just like how we ignore the people at home who are quietly serving us and giving us their time?" Service workers aren't lesser than anyone else, and physical labor can support a family as well as a salary based on brainpower. "We must learn to have confidence in other people's work and to respect each person's life choices."

Fishmongering: A Memoir is a book that clearly demonstrates Lin's craftsmanship. "Everything I write about is ordinary. I hope people can understand me and the identity I represent through this work." Between the lines, we can smell the fish market, hear the exchanges between fishmongers and customers, and feel the ways in which we are bound to others. "I believe even if you're not a fishmonger, you can still relate to the book. And if you can relate, why would you discriminate?" Lin laughs. every morning, as dawn turns the sky fish-belly white, he plants his feet on the ground and moves forward with life in the fish market.

FISHMONGERING: A MEMOIR

By Lin Kai-Lun
Translated by Mike Fu

To Be a Fishmonger

Grandpa and Dad used to tell me to study hard so I wouldn't have to sell fish for a living.

Later on, Dad said it was my duty to sell fish and help out the family. He didn't bring up my studies anymore.

When I was a kid, people often told me I was smart. My parents would ask if I wanted to be a doctor or a lawyer. It was completely unimaginable that I'd end up a fishmonger.

I'm a third-generation fishmonger. For as long as I remember, we've had seafood at every meal. Meat and vegetables? We could take it or leave it. But when it came to seafood, every person in my family was pickier than the next. Nobody liked farmed tilapia, and we even ranked ocean fish into several categories. My favorite as a kid was pomfret. Back then frozen fish wasn't being imported yet. When little me took chopsticks to the fried pomfret that came straight out of the freezer, the meat would always crumble. It was hard to get a single solid piece. Only after growing up did I understand that you had to pick up frozen pomfret gingerly in order to keep it intact.

I refused to eat the pomfret scraps. Not only did it look a complete mess, it also tasted somewhat fishier in that state.

Nor did I eat the meat and fish they served at lunch in elementary school. "The meat and fish all stink," I told my teacher. "They don't taste good. My family sells fish, you know."

This was only natural for a grandson of the fish business.

In middle school, I had to write the standard "My Aspirations" essay a few times. I imagined myself as everything from a taikonaut or a mayor to an Olympic sprinter. I even said I wanted to take on Dad's bubble tea business. I never thought I would become a fishmonger; that simply wasn't ambitious enough. Even if I could stand that fishy smell, it was too low a bar, so low that I'd get a bad grade if I wrote about it. Others might even make fun of me for how little money there was in it.

Whenever Grandpa finished work for the day and I pleaded with him for pocket money, he'd reach into the bone-dry drawer and give me a few bills. The cash Grandpa usually handled was sopping wet and smelled like the boiling hot water in an old aluminum bottle. The bills absorbed the scent of clam shells and the pungency of fish. I understood from a young age that money had many different kinds of smells.

Dad kept a colorful wad of bills stashed in his right pocket: red and green 100-yuan bills in the very center, 500-yuan bills in the middle, and 1,000-yuan bills on the outer layer – these I only touched when I ran errands. I loved getting the green 100-yuan bills. Dad's money smelled like cologne, while Mom's gave off the scent of white musk or sunflower perfume. They owned a bubble tea shop in their hometown and had a few more in the city.

My parents worked in the city until late evening every day. They'd brought me to visit the shops a few times before. Young people back then didn't have cell phones, only BB Call beepers, so bubble tea parlors would always have one or two coin-operated phones

that could connect to BB Call or to landlines. I'd sit in the lap of the part-time girl and listen to her call out people's names whenever someone phoned for them. Sometimes she would write down the callback number of the person who was phoning. She smelled like shampoo, which was such a soothing and beautiful scent to me. Fragrance was not just about smell; it also meant clean money that could be folded into a wad, unlike the sopping, wrinkled bills that Grandpa had.

Dad's business was sailing smoothly. When I was in second grade, I asked him how much he made each month. He told me it was 700,000 yuan.

Dad's emotions were particularly volatile on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Sometimes he was so cheerful that he'd give me a blue 1,000-yuan bill; other times he kept quiet and didn't speak. Cable television wasn't so common in those days, but Dad had installed ours early on. At ten o'clock in the evening, he'd watch the herbal medicine sales programs (these programs were always racy, with scantily clad dancing girls in the back, I loved them). He usually didn't watch these shows except on Tuesday and Thursday nights. Pork one-five, the broadcaster would say, tilapia three-zero, duck two-one…. Why is tilapia so expensive, I once asked ignorantly. Dad laughed and told me I'd hit the nail on the head. When tilapia prices crashed and then rose again, I had to ask Grandpa about it. Tilapia doesn't stray too far from thirty yuan a kilo, he said. After I asked my dad again, he finally told me that it was a number-guessing game.

In this game, you could win or lose a few hundred thousand or even a few million yuan in one try.

If my father was bringing home 700,000 yuan a month, could he even afford to play?

When my parents first opened their shops in the city, I'd occasionally see them at home on the weekdays. On their days off, they took me and my brothers out to eat downtown. But after Dad played the number-guessing game for too long, they stopped coming home. The only time Dad returned was when I begged him to teach me math before my midterm exam. He really believed that I couldn't keep up, so he hired a tutor. Then they came back even less.

After pretending I didn't understand math for a long time, it became a reality.

I couldn't calculate how a monthly income of 700,000 yuan could turn into divorce, or lead to the closure of three to four bubble tea shops.

I was in fourth grade when Dad's gambling habit was discovered. There was no way he could repay his massive debt. Grandpa withdrew his savings and paid off a large chunk. I thought Dad would come back to sell fish and behave himself at home.

After Dad returned, he looked after the shop in our hometown. But on Tuesdays and Thursdays at eight, he'd hide out in his room and watch TV for half an hour. Mount Penglai, ShinJi Television, and those kinds of channels would report the price of traditional Chinese medicinal herbs. How could we get any customers if Dad played around while my third-grade brother and I managed the shop downstairs? The shop in the city was left completely in the hands of our sixteen-year-old sister, who wanted to help Dad out. Though Dad would tell Grandpa that he was going to work in the city, he just stayed home every day.

Two years passed like this. The gambling debt exploded once more. After our older sister sold off the shop in town, Dad no longer could use the excuse of going into the city to look after the store.

When I was in sixth grade, Dad sold fish by day and managed the bubble tea shop at night. My brother and I made sure to finish our homework before eight. At 7:50 p.m., Dad would call on the intercom and ask me to look after the shop because he was really tired.

He was really tired.

A year later, the 1999 Jiji earthquake destroyed our fortunes. Store-made takeout tea drinks became popular in Taiwan, while cell phones and the internet were developing fast. No one needed to come to a specific place any more to socialize. Grandpa asked Dad to take over the fish stall while he visited the wholesale market at dawn. Eventually he asked Dad to close the bubble tea shop entirely so he could become a dedicated fishmonger.

Occasionally, Dad would knock on the door to the bedroom I shared with my brother and tell us how much he made that day. Sometimes he'd even slap the floor in his excitement. How come I never thought to ask how much he'd lost?

"I'm exhausted," he often said to me back then. "I need a hand." He said this after the earthquake, when we had to live in a tent for a month, and said it again when we got back home. After my first year of private middle school, my math had not improved. On the questionnaire for summer courses, Dad checked the box that said "No need for summer tutoring", and in the space below where he was asked the reason why, he wrote: *Helping out with family business.*

I had no more vacations after that. I knew I had to help shoulder the burden of the family finances.

Dad always came home for dinner with us at our grandparents' house every single day. He refused to eat leftovers. Grandma would make huge amounts of his favorite dishes. Dad would pick up a piece of tilapia and complain that it was smelly. He griped that the pomfret he'd brought back himself was too fishy. He was never on time for dinner. We always had to call him to tell him it was time to eat. "Wait for me," he'd say. "They haven't finished drawing numbers yet." He would only come eat after the numbers were drawn.

Originally he only played on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but once he started buying tickets for the Taiwan Lottery it became Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Eventually he switched to playing Daily Cash 539 every weekday.

He said he spent about 1,000 or so every day, while the fish stall was bringing in 100,000.

My math wasn't good. I thought that it would be okay to lose 40,000 or 50,000 out of 100,000. I thought that he would only bet this much.

I thought that my life would be better if I just focused on selling fish.

Every weekend I watched over the clams, oysters, and fish in our stall. The only fish I could identify were the pomfret, butterfish, and tilapia. When I didn't know something, I'd ask Dad, who would tell me to ask Grandpa.

Grandpa picked up a pomfret from the freezer and one from the water, and taught me how to determine their freshness by looking for the faint rainbow gleam on the blue of the scales. He taught me how to distinguish different types of pomfret by the fins and tails: the ones with long fins and scissor-shaped tails were silver pomfret, the grayish ones with short fins were black pomfret, and the ones with short tails and short, fringed fins were Chinese pomfret. When he asked me which was the tastiest, I said the silver pomfret was the best, because the dark pomfret and Chinese pomfret were on the soft side. Grandpa praised my picky eating habits, then promptly grabbed a white croaker and a blackthroat sea perch.

Instead of going to the guided study sessions at my private school on the weekend, I learned biology in a fish stall. I learned not to pick shrimp with red heads or squid with red bodies. When I ate sea clam at the end of spring, I knew to avoid the cultured ones with ligaments coming off them, and I understood that Taiwanese oysters with green bellies couldn't be sold. All this I learned in my first semester with Grandpa at the fish stall.

Nobody is born with all the knowledge they need to be a fishmonger. To be a fishmonger, Grandpa said, requires a lifetime of learning.

Dad also knew there was much to learn as a fishmonger, but he underestimated the amount of effort required.

They both said that I should study hard so I wouldn't need to sell fish for a living.

Working at the fish stall was so tiring that school became my time to rest. My classmates all envied me for not going to tutoring. How about you sell fish then, I'd retort. "No way, it's too stinky." Exactly. It was stinky. I could still smell the fish blood on my forearms. Whenever one of my classmates said this, I'd clasp my hand over their mouth and ask, "Does it smell bad?" It reeks, they'd gasp after I removed my hand, and curse me out in their next breath.

When I was in middle school, my work at the fish stall consisted of helping Grandpa weigh the fish or conveying prices to customers based on weight. I didn't do too much else. I didn't want to be a fishmonger, so there was no reason for me to take the next step – to place myself at the butcher's counter,

pick up the fish and scale them, cut open their flesh with scissors. I didn't want to learn these things, but I never said so.

"You have to work hard since you're a fishmonger's son," my advisor at the time said to me. "It doesn't matter if you come from a single-parent family. Be on your best behavior and make your folks proud." Of course he also snuck in a line or two about responsibility and taking pride in who we were or whatever. My grades were adequate, so no one bothered to ask whether I wanted to attend the guided study sessions. I got up even earlier on my days off than I did for school. I'd hang around in the deserted marketplace from early morning until things livened up. It was just like being at school and waiting for the bell to ring, except here at the fish stall, I was an apprentice who got yelled at by all sorts of people.

"You've got it easy," my classmates often said to me on Monday. I'd smell my palms one more time.

I was the only one who didn't go to tutoring. The classroom must have smelled a bit better without me.

"Why do you have to sell fish?" a boy with a head full of hairspray once asked innocently. He'd invited me to hang out a few times, but I could never make it. I always told him I had to help out around the house. "Such a filial son, eh." I smiled and said nothing. One afternoon we finally got to spend time together. I forget where we went, but I do remember that my face was all red and swollen because I was exhausted and hadn't gotten to take a nap. It was still broad daylight when I said I had to go home.

Eventually, no one invited me out anymore. Even on graduation day, people didn't bother to ask me where I was going that afternoon. The bus stop in the direction of my home was empty; across the street, all my classmates crowded around the stop for buses heading into the city. Not a single person waved at me. The bus picked up one group, the remaining kids got on the next one, and only then did my bus come. I sat in the last row of five seats, right in the middle, no one on either side.

I slept and woke intermittently on this familiar journey, dozing off again and again until I missed my stop. I ended up walking home.

Even with major exams looming, I'd still spend the weeks before at the fish stall calling out to customers. I would feel guilty if I missed a shift. I believed that I'd made up my mind about the future: I'd go to a technical college with a fair amount of flexibility, major in medical technology, get licensed, and become a technician. This would be how I'd leave the fishmongering life behind. But the technical college curriculum was even looser, so I registered for afternoon courses only. With my mornings free, I continued my independent study in fish dissection and identification at the stall.

Standing at the fish stall, grabbing cold dead fish by the tail, weighing, scaling, and gutting them: my every move was an act of family devotion.

The customers often praised me for being such an upstanding young man, but the truth was that I had no say in the matter. First thing in the morning, I put on rubber rain boots that were stuffy and uncomfortable on my feet, with long socks wrapped tight around my calves. After a while, they would leave black circles on my legs, the marks resembling the body of a fish that had lost its scales in a net.

At noon, I changed into sneakers to attend microbiology and chemistry classes that I couldn't have been less interested in. I couldn't just let my life waste away anymore, I'd think. I'd already wasted five years. After technical college, I successfully transferred to a college in the north. But soon after I began school, Grandpa and Dad told me they were short-handed on the weekends and asked if I could come back regularly.

There was no way to refuse. Half a year of commuting from Taipei to Taichung on a weekly basis was too exhausting. I transferred back to a college in my hometown. I didn't have classes in the morning and filled up my schedule in the afternoon. "For a full-time fishmonger, school might as well be vacation," I'd mutter to myself. By then I was already able to manage the fish stall by myself – calling to customers, buying and selling, killing fish, everything except going to the wholesaler.

百工職魂
PORTRAITS OF MASTERY

Movingtaipei
目映・台北

- **Category:** Documentary
- **Publisher:** Aquarius
- **Date:** 10/2021
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
- **Pages:** 288
- **Length:** 70,000 characters (approx. 46,000 words in English)

Established in 2017, Movingtaipei provides graphic design, video production, magazine advertising, and online marketing services. In 2019 the firm began producing the *Portraits of Mastery* video series to document Taiwan's masters of unique and unusual trades. From disappearing traditional arts, to folk religion, to modern crafts, the series celebrates human achievement in all domains, while documenting the authentic life stories of these highly dedicated individuals.

*** The Portraits of Mastery YouTube channel from which the book is adapted has over 200,000 subscribers**

A Taoist priest, a puppeteer, a spirit medium, and a builder of replica lightsabers – these are just a few of the masters profiled in this catalog of gifted workers from every corner of Taiwan. Read the stories of the men and women who have dedicated their lives to attaining mastery in their chosen occupation.

In nondescript buildings on unassuming streets, they quietly build their knowledge and hone their skills with single-minded purpose. They aren't interested in fame or wealth, only the unending pursuit of perfection. They are the masters.

Some found their calling through religion, such as the Taoist priest, the ritual corpse exhumer, and the spirit medium who delivers messages from the gods while in a trance. Some work in the traditional arts carving name chops, performing puppetry, and crafting the ink used in calligraphy and ink painting. Others are more modern in outlook, such as the baseball umpire and the builder of replica lightsabers.

The stories of over 30 masters are told in these pages, delivering insight into what drives people to pursue the highest levels of attainment in their field. In many cases, they describe the confusion and youthful folly that preceded the dawning of clarity and purpose. Nearly all contain astonishing revelations concerning the execution of their crafts. The carver of name chops, for example, was once so highly in demand that he had to complete a hand-carved name chop every 90 seconds to fulfill all of his orders. On a lighter note, the builder of lightsabers demands that every customer complete a questionnaire to demonstrate that they are competent in the ways of the Force.

Developed from a web video series produced by Movingtaipei, *Portraits of Mastery* delivers readers into the homes and workshops of the masters who live among us, celebrating their crafts, and telling life stories as varied as the careers they pursue. This smorgasbord of human achievement is by turns humorous, surprising, edifying, and mysterious, but most of all readers will be left with a deep respect for the personal sacrifices made in the pursuit of perfection.

"I Want to Preserve What Taiwan Is Losing": Interview with Portraits of Mastery *Director Wu Chien-Hsun*

By Alice Li (originally published at Readmoo)
Translated by Serena Ye

"Think about it – he's been doing it for so many years. As if he'd be scared of ghosts and think it's a big deal?" Wu Chien-Hsun jokes that he had been the only person who, when interviewing bone collector Uncle Kun-Mu, didn't ask whether he'd had any paranormal experiences. After all, what he wanted more than to satisfy public curiosity was to go beyond the artisan's story and dissect the history and cultural context behind it. "I've always really liked studying temple culture, geography, and political and economic development. These are all connected with the development of local culture and history." Wu used the developed ritual of bone collecting in Beigang as an example "because there used to be many ground burials of wealthy people in Beigang."

Wu and his team at Movingtaipei have, since 2019, captured the stories of many Taiwanese practitioners of trades, both new and old, as short films of no more than ten minutes each. Subjects include bone collector Uncle Kun-Mu, who has touched countless corpses; a Taoist priest who deals with the supernatural; and a beaded crown craftsman who works "along with the gods" making headwear for deities. The series showcases the true stories of professional artisans from many industries, from temple craftsmanship to metalworking, ink making, seal carving, and dough figurine kneading, preserving the marks of their time as these older industries are gradually being replaced.

Visiting places all over Taiwan to follow and interview professional artisans inevitably means interacting with people from all trades and walks of life, so Wu's down-to-earth nature comes in handy. Born in Tainan, Wu is fluent in Taiwanese Hokkien – "I've liked listening to my grandparents talk and imitate different tones since I was young." This seemingly equipped Wu with a certain power to connect with people, and during the filming process, he is always able to guide the interviewees to tell their own stories. "Taiwanese Hokkien is more vivid and closer to the everyday than Chinese, with more depth and emotion, as well as better able to bring people closer."

Wu has the power to relate and get close to people, but where do the protagonists of the stories come from?

"The first half of *Portraits of Mastery* mostly involved interviewing people we already knew well, while for the other half we relied on friends to pull a few strings." Wu has worked on many on-location TV shows in the

past, such as "Stories in Taiwan" and "Taiwan Gorgeous Delicacy". "We were considered a very early on-foot show in Taiwan." After leaving the network, Wu "wanted to do something different", and with the trust and financial assistance of former comrade-in-arms at the network "Ah-Wang", Wu fearlessly began planning *Portraits of Mastery*. The connections he's accumulated are also one of his crucial assets, and the group of consultants credited at the end of *Portraits of Mastery* is the critical driver that allows these cherished stories to be preserved and published. "They helped find these people and stories," Wu says.

From Film to Writing: Preserving Non-Replicable Soul and Charm

In fact, a career in the film and TV industry wasn't always Wu's goal.

Wu once had a chance to visit a friend on set. "They were filming a Judge Bao crime drama, and I was lucky enough to see Kenny Ho, who played Zhan Zhao. I was helping to push the dolly on the track, thinking this seems quite fun." This was perhaps what sparked Wu's interest in the film and TV industry; he resigned from his job in China and returned to Taiwan "to find a media company just to hang around at." This turned out to be the start of more than twenty years in the film and TV industry.

"I was born in 1967, in the glory days of the three established TV broadcasters. But not long after I started in the industry in my twenties, cable TV appeared, and the internet followed shortly after. Who would still watch TV?" Wu lightly complains, though his passion for the film and TV industry wasn't extinguished. "Have I thought about giving up? Of course, I want to give up every day. It's so tiring," he admits. But he chose to persist and break through, working with his team to create *Portraits of Mastery*.

"To be honest, I used to almost never read books, especially those inspirational self-help ones – I thought they were bullshit!" Wu says candidly. Then Aquarius Publishing saw *Portraits of Mastery* video series and inquired about print rights. "I first knew Aquarius, then I started reading BigBrother's books, and they were what got me into reading. I like bringing a book to flip through on my commute now. My eyes aren't great since I've gotten old, so it's not the best to scroll on my phone!"

This time, *Portraits of Mastery* videos have been compiled into a book, allowing these stories to be narrated in a different format. "The short films are driven from the perspective of the interviewees, whereas the book takes the reader's third-person point of view. It's like reading Jin Yong's martial arts novels – you'll imagine those scenes yourself in between the lines." Wu believes that through writing, readers can better understand the personal side of artisans outside of the profession: "The book is very different. *Portraits of Mastery* films take a more professional angle, but we've also been able to write their life stories into the text."

Wu and the Movingtaipei team's videos and writing contain industry history, cultural context, and the stories of artisans. "I want to preserve what Taiwan is losing, to do something for the things that are disappearing. Those souls and that charm aren't replicable." Unlike rapidly popularized YouTubers, who chase views and follow trends to create entertainment-oriented content, Wu hopes that *Portraits of Mastery* can start a new discussion that "reaches young people. After all, this is the land on which we grew up!"

Stories from all walks of Taiwanese life are respected and treated equally in *Portraits of Mastery*. Wu said that his team also wants to film an "old shops" series: "These deserve to be seen by more people." By bringing their daily life to the screen, they hope to ensure that the stories of this land are thoroughly remembered.

PORTRAITS OF MASTERY

By Movingtaipei
Translated by Shanna Tan

The Bone Collector

"Nobody in the family dares to eat my tang yuan." – Confession of an indignant bone collector.

"My mother didn't let me make tang yuan. She said the kids would be too scared to eat my sweet glutinous rice balls. But they sure aren't scared of spending my money."

Uncle Kun-Mu's confession speaks to the bitter reality faced by bone collectors. They do important work; everyone wants their loved ones to rest in peace. Yet people recoil in fear at the sight of their hands.

It's filming day and we're meeting Uncle Kun-Mu for the first time. We imagined him to be a typical middle-aged man about the neighborhood – outspoken, boisterous, talking loudly as he chews a betel nut. It's a stereotypical image, but we're surprised by how different Uncle Kun-Mu is. As he stops his scooter and approaches the team, he looks so unassuming in his long-sleeved polo shirt that we almost mistake him for a curious onlooker from the nearby farms. Uncle Kun-Mu's son tells us later that his father got a fresh haircut to look good that day.

The cemetery's uneven ground is a challenge even for the young and fit filming team. We have to watch our feet carefully to avoid taking a tumble with our equipment in tow. Meanwhile, the sprightly Uncle Kun-Mu appears undeterred by the terrain and obstacles. He hops down high steps, landing lightly on his feet. We're on edge with worry for his eighty-two-year-old knees, but he doesn't even break a sweat.

Uncle Kun-Mu's family has plied this trade for generations. His grandfather and father were both bone collectors, and he too has passed his expertise on to his son – the fourth generation. As a child, Uncle Kun-Mu started following his grandfather to work. "There was always lots of food prepared by the bereaved family. We were poor back then, so I tagged along to work and eat." No fear can deter a child from the lure of food, and they always have a healthy appetite for adventure. Frequenting cemeteries gave the young Kun-Mu exposure to the work, and he became his grandfather's assistant before turning fifteen. By eighteen, he was already handling clients on his own.

In the past, burials were very common, and this creates a demand for bone collection services that persists today. Kun-Mu works on two or three graves per day on average, and his current record stands at eight sets of bones in a day's work. Each bone collection assignment earns him a few thousand New Taiwan Dollars, and the work adds up to a respectable living. It has been his first and only job to date.

Over at the cemetery, the ground-breaking rite is about to begin. Spirit money burn to ashes as Uncle Kun-Mu's younger brother stands in front of the grave and calls out: "We mean no disrespect, bless the ground-breaking!" This signals the end of the rite, and the workers begins shoveling. When the coffin is lifted, the daughter of the bereaved family holds out an open black umbrella to shade the skull as she calls out to her father to "wake up". It's time for the bone collector to get to work.

Right away, Uncle Kun-Mu starts to do a count of

the bones. Many dishonest bone collectors who have their eyes on valuable burial items would often ask the family members to take their leave at this point, using the excuse that the negative energy of the otherworld harms the living, Uncle Kun-Mu tells us. "These people are clearly up to no good. Think about it: why would your ancestors harm you?"

Observing the exhumation and seeing human bones in person isn't as shocking or frightening as we had imagined. If anything, it inspires us to reflect on the meaning of life. In death, we're naught but bones and dust. If we can take nothing with us, perhaps the value of life lies in leaving something meaningful behind.

Once the bones are collected, the next step is to rebury them in an urn, which is usually then placed in a columbarium. There are two reburial methods, which differ according to the size of the urn. A small urn reburial is relatively straightforward: the collected bones are cremated, and the ashes placed in the urn. When big urns are used, bones are not cremated. Instead, the skull is first wrapped in a cloth onto which the funeral director or the bone collector paints facial features according to the deceased's gender. The bones are then arranged inside the big urn in a sitting position. Black charcoal is sometimes used to secure the bones in place, but care must be taken not to obscure any of the facial features. For body parts with many small pieces, the bones are wrapped in a red cloth before going into the urn.

For the reburial which we're filming, the bereaved family has chosen the big urn. According to Uncle Kun-Mu, nine out of ten bone collection assignments are cremations, so we are lucky to film the complete process of bone collection and subsequent reburial. The deceased is also an "exemplary" case, as his remains are fully skeletonized. If the decomposition process is incomplete, or when there are bits of flesh like tofu dregs stuck to the bones, bone collectors have to spend more time and effort to strip down the bones of these "damp bodies". Damp bodies are especially common in places like Beigang, where the lowlands cause water seepage or flooding in burial grounds, which slows the decomposition process.

"I've seen it all. Eyes still wide open, wispy hair stuck on the bones, the overwhelming stench of decay that attacks your senses. The first few times, I was scared, but after a while, I learned to deal with it no matter how bad the smell hits," Uncle Kun-Mu tells us with a shrug. Years of training in cemeteries since he was a child wasn't for naught. Nothing in these grounds can scare him now.

Over his long career, Uncle Kun-Mu has also had to collect the remains of friends and family. Although speaking about it must be hard, his countenance remains calm as he tells us the stories, stating matter-of-factly that work is work. Never take advantage of others, Uncle Kun-Mu says, emphasizing the importance of handling every set of bones that passes through his hands with honesty and care. On a couple of occasions, he had to comfort clients who were stricken with grief at the burial site. "A reburial is a good thing," he would tell them. "Don't cry, otherwise the deceased can't leave in peace." But then, he lets us in on what he was really thinking at those times. "To tell the truth, they cry so badly it makes my head hurt. How can I focus on my work?" Spoken with honesty indeed.

Uncle Kun-Mu married in his forties, which was considered late in those days. The neighbors knew him as the "bone lad" back then and once, they enthusiastically greeted a lady headed to his house, thinking that she was a potential client of his. "Ya, you've found the right place. He's the bone lad! You're looking for someone to collect bones, aren't you?" It turned out that the lady was no potential client, but a matchmaker for Uncle Kun-Mu. Kun-Mu's local accent slips out as he cusses. "Dammit. She was here to matchmake la!"

Supernatural encounters have been few and far between during his many years as a bone collector, but one incident stood out. An animal bone – likely deposited by a passing stray – was collected with the other bones and placed into the urn. That night, the deceased's grandson started to bark uncontrollably. When he was called back, Uncle Kun-Mu opened the urn; his bone expertise allowed him to fish out quickly the non-human bone. Only then did the grandson quiet down and peace returned.

Another time, Uncle Kun-Mu took on a job for a poor family. When the coffin was opened, they

discovered the body was badly waterlogged and required additional work. Uncle Kun-Mu had to quote a higher fee, which the family agreed to on the spot, but during his nap that day, he dreamed of the bereaved family passing him a much lower fee than the agreed amount. Uncle Kun-Mu wasn't quite sure what to make of the odd dream. Later, the strangest thing happened. When the job was done, the family couldn't afford to pay in full and the amount they could cough up was the same as in his dreams, down to the exact cent. Till today, this remains as the most bizarre incident in his long career.

Uncle Kun-Mu supports his whole family with his earnings from bone collecting. Contrary to what some may think, he doesn't make a fortune, but it's enough to provide his family a comfortable life. He makes a living with his hands, but those hands are also weighed down by the burden of his profession. People avoid his handshakes, and he has never experienced the joy of making tang yuan – spherical dumplings rolled from glutinous rice flour – with his family, a winter solstice tradition. He shares these details as if they are simply part and parcel of his work, but his disappointment is clear.

Still, someone has to do what nobody else dares. Uncle Kun-Mu can only try to stomach the bitterness. Over and over again, he tries to manage his emotions so that he can focus on his work – to lay bones to rest.

Master of Movable Type

"I was nearly executed by a firing squad during the White Terror." — The man who picks out words for a living, though it almost cost him his life.

One by one, the character blocks are carefully picked out and meticulously lined up in the chase. A layer of ink is brushed across the blocks before the frame is carefully pressed onto white paper, printing a page of history. This is the world that Su Ming-Tang knows so well and cannot leave.

The seventy-six-year-old master of movable type owns Hua Hsing Printing. His father ran the letterpress business for more than 30 years before Su took over in 1970. Since then, his life has revolved around movable type. Every day, he busies himself with the type blocks – repeating the cycle of filling, arranging, printing, and emptying.

As Su shows us the overlapping wall panels where the lead characters are stored, it's almost like we're watching him peel back the pages of time. He takes out an antiquated box which he says he used to hand-print business cards years ago. It was some of his most important work, he tells us as he demonstrates how to insert the lead characters and slot in wooden blocks to create spacing. Once he checks that the blank card is clipped securely in place, he spreads the ink and snaps the box shut with a loud crack.

"It's very slow work, isn't it?" Su picks up the freshly printed card and scrutinizes it. This small card once occupied center stage in his life; now, it is relegated to a lingering memory of the past. Today, such a laborious printing method is neither cost- nor time-efficient, but it's also what made hand-printed business cards a coveted possession.

In the past, only the well-heeled could afford business cards. Su's finger trails inked entries on the yellowed pages of an old account book. "Look at these records. One card is about 80 cents to a dollar, so a box will easily set you back by 60 dollars. A shocking sum of money." In 1930s Taiwan, the average person earned about twenty dollars a month – just enough to feed a family, Su tells us. Only those with well-lined pockets could afford to spend 60 dollars on cards. It was hence no surprise that hand-printed business cards became a mark of status and class, and even today, their importance is still ingrained in the minds of the older generation. Anyone who could hand out business cards then was no ordinary man on the street; even being the recipient of one was an honor.

In those days, Su's hands flitted among type pieces, his ink-stained fingers picking out and arranging characters in different font sizes. Township offices, farmers' associations and schools were the bigwigs in his clientele, and their requests were often complex, with specific formatting requirements. Being

able to pick out the right characters was not enough; he also had to make sure the font was the correct size. It was thus no mean feat, in the era before computers, to print even a simple form.

Besides the work he did for schools, printing the fortune-telling poetry slips used in temples also gave Su many headaches. The typesetting for the ocean goddess Mazu's Sixty Divine Poems (as its name suggests) was a huge task. The temples' request for sixty sets of accompanying descriptions to be printed alongside the poems raised the level of complexity by several notches. Su was aware of the heavy responsibility on his shoulders. "If I didn't convey the deity's words of wisdom accurately, I would cause great harm."

However, mistakes are almost unavoidable. At the character level, he already has to deal with variations in type-heights for tens of thousands of characters. To zero in on the correct piece among a sea of blocks requires a keen eye and patience. "Look. This is 好," Su notes as he holds out a block he has just picked out. "The blocks are carved as a mirror image so that they will print correctly on paper. Identifying backwards characters is probably the hardest part of my work." Even staring at a normal character a few seconds too long would result in the brain temporarily parsing it as "weird", not to mention having to look at backward characters all the time. Thus, movable type printing is highly counter-intuitive work, especially for Su, who spends a copious amount of time looking at the reversed blocks. Since humans are not infallible, mistakes are inevitable. But in Su's case, a single mistake can be costly.

The 1950s, the period of White Terror. Those were dark times in Taiwan, in which political dissidents and anti-government intellectuals were being rounded up and prosecuted. Su was accused of being a dissident and almost executed all because of a single mistake in his printing. "I was working on a job to print envelopes for St. Vincent High School." Fear clouds Su's expression as he recalls the fraught political atmosphere of the time. In those days, it was common for public institutions to print anti-Communist slogans on their official stationery, and the school envelope he was tasked to print was no different.

"I was supposed to print 人民公社就是奴工營 (People's Communes are labor camps)." Nothing could have prepared him to deal with the careless mistake that turned the message into 人民公社就是好工營 (People's Communes are good camps).

Mixing up the characters for slave (奴) and good (好) was no small matter; it was brazen publicity for the other camp. It quickly caught the attention of the Taiwan Garrison Command, the secret police of the time, whose very name instilled fear. Many who were "invited" to their headquarters never made it out. Su was terrified but he could only submit to the interrogation.

"The people from the secret police walked in just like that to take me away for interrogation. I almost died of fear." Even now, the memories still haunt Su. It was as if the grim reaper had come knocking. His family fell into panic and the whole street buzzed with rumors. Some of the neighbors even distanced themselves to avoid being implicated.

"That was how things were. No choice. I kept telling the secret police that it was just a careless mistake." Su describes showing the two type pieces to the investigator as he tried to explain: "We really cannot prevent such mistakes from happening sometimes. The blocks are blackened with ink, and the words are all in mirror image. When two very similar-looking characters are next to each other, sometimes we pick the wrong ones."

Perhaps Su's explanation was earnest, and the investigator also saw for himself the challenges which made mistakes an inevitable part of his work. Miraculously, the secret police didn't give him a hard time; they accepted his explanation, and the episode blew over with a letter of repentance.

全球大流感在近代中國的真相：
THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE

Pi Kuo-Li
皮國立

- **Category:** History
- **Publisher:** China Times
- **Date:** 2/2022
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
- **Pages:** 476
- **Length:** 240,000 characters (approx. 156,000 words in English)

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一段抗疫歷史與中西醫學的奮鬥

SPANISH INFLUENZA IN CHINA

An authority on the history of transmissible diseases explains how traditional Chinese medicine and lifestyles may have limited the impact of the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic in China.

The 1918 Spanish flu was one of the deadliest pandemics the world has ever known. Naturally, it has been the subject of extensive historical epidemiological research, but very little of it comes from East Asian scholars, or addresses the unfolding of the pandemic in East Asian nations. With the coming of COVID-19, however, there has been renewed scholarly interest in filling these gaps.

Through historical documents, contemporary newspaper reports, and other records of daily life, author Pi Kuo-Li constructs a portrait of China's experience with the Spanish flu. Starting from the conceptual understanding of colds and flu in Chinese culture, the book moves on to trace the region by region evolution of the Spanish flu pandemic in China from 1918 to 1920. Differences between China and Western nations are discussed, including the treatment of the flu with traditional medicine, and the impact of Chinese material culture and lifestyle in limiting the severity of outbreaks. Finally, the case of Taiwan is introduced as another example of a region heavily influenced by Chinese culture, but in which traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine were often used side-by-side to fight the outbreak.

Looking back from the standpoint of our current COVID-19 pandemic, Pi engages in a dialogue with Western epidemiological histories of the 1918 flu, providing previously unavailable historical accounts of the pandemic in China and Taiwan, and enriching Western-dominated discussions of the subject with the perspective of East Asian medical scholarship.

Opening a Dialogue with Western Narratives on the History of Infectious Diseases: A Review of The Secret History of the Spanish Influenza in China

By Sean Hsu
Translated by Ed Allen

At the end of 2019, as the scientific world, public health systems, and national governments set about a vigorous response to the global outbreak of the new infectious disease known now as COVID-19, popular attention turned to books in the popular science literature market – *Plagues and Peoples, Spillover Animal Infections and the Next Human Pandemic, The Next Pandemic,* and *Guns, Germs and Steel*. While publications on relevant pathogens, immunity, vaccine development, and zoonoses were rapidly introduced or reprinted, the production figure for original Chinese-language works paled next to that of translations. New works mainly focused on health care and protection, varieties of care for young families, or simple compilations of materials, and their number remains limited even if we include systemic books on Taiwanese biomedicine. Compared with the unique aspects of essentially Taiwan-specific areas of biomedical research (such as snake venoms, hepatitis, and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)), other subjects lacked the depth and variety of perspectives necessary to succeed on the international market. There is, despite this, nothing lacking in Taiwan's scientific research and ability to construct narrative. In the past decade or more, younger scholars have invested themselves enthusiastically in the task of making professional knowledge available to the public; special diligence has been shown in the interdisciplinary fields of STS (Science, Technology, and Society). *The Secret History of the Spanish Influenza in China* appropriately reflects this present situation.

The author, Pi Kuo-Li, is an Associate Professor at the Graduate Institute of History at National Central University and a specialist in the social history of Chinese medicine, history of disease, history of the body, and modern Chinese warfare and technology. Pi's pre-pandemic research crystallizes in his work *Medical Care, Diseases and Society: Understanding and Responses to Influenza Epidemic in the Early Period of Republic of China*. Following more than

six years of hard labor, this new book, with its underlying theme of the search for the disease and social response and mentality in popular culture, was published in February 2022. From the grand perspective of the global history of disease, this book compensates for previous Western-centered works on the Spanish flu – that great global public health system crisis – and their severe lack of content or grave misunderstanding of greater China during that time. The fatal disease, which raged from 1918 through April 1920, resulted in the death of at least 20 million worldwide (the highest estimate reaches 100 million). By share of global population China should have experienced millions or tens-of-millions of deaths, and yet searching relevant materials gives a number of only 600,000. What explains such an enormous gap?

China at the time was in the chaotic and confused state of civil war, and was unable to produce accurate statistics on deaths or completed records pertaining the Spanish Flu (for the West, the Great War also significantly contributed to the discrepancy between real and estimated deaths), especially as it engaged with the clearer threats of plague, smallpox, and malaria. Yet Pi successfully analyzes medical books and journals according to multiple perspectives drawn from Chinese and Western medicine (these, intriguingly, united in their advance during these years, rather than struggling in opposition – a likely factor in reducing the harm caused by Spanish Flu), while pointing to comparative descriptions of real cases from daily life and popular culture. The book thereby enters a dialogue with classic Western works on the pandemic. The author describes this as a "diversity of medical history research" perspective – a search for the interactive links between elite medical views and intellectual constructs with daily life and material culture at the lower levels.

In summary, *The Secret History of the Spanish Influenza in China* uses historical research to consolidate ideas on how, in the time of Spanish Flu, popular Chinese society and Eastern and Western currents of medical thought recognized and approached an infectious disease – one not far separated from the "cold flu" concept long familiar to TCM, though with a much higher fatality rate. In doing so, the book constructs a humanistic base for conversation amid the largely Western-directed history of infectious disease, which helps us prepare for the next unexpected and life-threatening plague.

THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE SPANISH INFLUENZA IN CHINA

By Pi Kuo-Li
Translated by Sam Goldstein

Chapter 1: First Encounters with Influenza

The Russian Flu Pandemic and Its Understanding in the Chinese Medical Field

1. Preface

There is no Classical Chinese word for "influenza". We reference the modern concept when identifying historical pandemics. Some in the West believe that the English Sweating Sickness (Sudor Anglicus) of 1485 was influenza. Infected soldiers experienced high fever, sore throat, headache, joint pain, and occasional abdominal pain and vomiting, followed invariably by the full-body stinking sweat for which the disease was named. In severe cases, the infected could die within a matter of hours. The intense perspiration is a very interesting symptom from a TCM perspective. Chinese medical treatises feature contains ample discussion of *fahan* (inducing perspiration), known to them as *fa biao* (surface perspiration), which was employed to treat cold symptoms. Even up to the beginning of the 20th century, it was very difficult to determine whether a patient was infected with the flu or with the common cold. Despite this, we can be quite certain that *ganmao*, the word for "cold" in Chinese, comes from traditional Chinese medicine.

There is evidence of much historical dialogue between global pandemics and pandemics in China. Putting Chinese pandemics into a global context makes clear that the period from the end of the Qing dynasty to the influenza outbreak of 1918 to 1919 evidenced a gradual integration of Chinese pandemics into the history of influenza outbreaks. As has been discussed, it has proven very difficult for general historians to determine when influenza outbreaks have occurred historically, but it is possible for historians of disease. Thanks to the consistent efforts of scientists and doctors in documenting possible influenza outbreaks throughout history, we know that the earliest verifiable influenza outbreak was the Russian Flu Pandemic, which occurred around 1890. Such classification of disease outbreaks is evident in publications from the Republican Era in China. For example, the Paris Flu of 1414 is described in Republican Period sources as having infected 100,000 people, the 1892 pandemic is described as having infected half of the world's population, and we also see discussion of another wave of pandemics that took place in 1928, and then from 1931 to 1933. Moreover, these sources describe the main focus of this book, the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918 to 1920, as "a new infectious strand of influenza", and call it "the greatest infectious disease in modern history".

During the Republican Era, we already see theories that influenza originated from China. In 1934, a Chinese journal reported on a Reuters article that referenced a paper published in the London Journal of Medicine and which was written by a doctor whose name was transliterated into Chinese as *Daihuaiyi*. The article posited that influenza originated from the mud of the Yellow River Valley, and spread across Asia via trade routes, and that it was currently being spread via steamship. Global outbreaks of influenza in 1899 and 1918 also followed severe floods in the Yellow River.

The author rather wildly hypothesized that river mud distributed over land via the flooding would turn to dust and be dispersed all over, and therefore, if the Yellow River was not dredged immediately, the entire world would be in danger. His conjectures underwent no scientific verification, and were full of Orientalist ideas about Asia as the origin of plague.

According to some current Western studies, Europe fell victim to several influenza outbreaks starting in the 19th century. The Industrial Revolution and its concomitant increase in urban population density as well as advances in transportation technology combined to create a new utopia for the spread of diseases that thrived in crowded environments. The most historically verifiable influenza outbreak based on available historical records from this time occurred from 1889 to 1892, and it is known as the first influenza pandemic for which we can estimate infection statistics, and was the first verifiable global influenza pandemic in history. Deaths at the time were in excess of one million people, with more than 50,000 deaths in California alone. As we come to understand more about the history of influenza, it becomes apparent that this "new" disease is actually an "old" disease, as it has appeared throughout history. Moreover, it was not until the end of the 19th century that influenza outbreaks were given the names of their place of origin. The so-called "Russian Flu" killed at least 250,000 people in Europe alone, with a global death toll exceeding this number by an astonishing amount. But the death toll from the "Russian Flu" is dwarfed in comparison by the influenza pandemic of 1918.

Did the "Russian Flu" make it to China? This is a question worth exploring. Before looking into the global pandemic of 1918, we can examine the potential historical progression and public response of the disease in this previous instance. This assessment will prove useful as an analytical tool and point of comparison for the rest of this book. In reality, there was no panic among the Chinese people around this outbreak, and people sought explanations based on their understanding at the time.

2. The Term *Ganmao* (Cold)

Using our current understanding, *ganmao* refers simply to a common disease, but when the three-character prefix *liuxingxing* is added, the meaning changes and the new term comes to refer to an entirely different disease.

When we talk about the term *liuxingxing ganmao* (influenza), we must remember that it is a portmanteau of two words, each with a history in classical Chinese: *liuxingxing* (infectious), and *ganmao* (cold or flu). Using our contemporary understanding, *ganmao* is a common disease, but when we add the prefix *liuxingxing*, then the term comes to refer to an entirely different disease. *Liuxingxing ganmao* (influenza) is characterized by cyclicality, as well as by the characteristic of infectious spread at certain times and in certain places. I believe that the word *ganmao* has ancient Chinese roots, whereas *liuxingxing ganmao* is a totally new word that emerged after the turn of the 20th century. This does not mean that influenza did not exist in ancient China, but rather that in ancient Chinese society, it may have been known by terms now unfamiliar to us. A detailed exploration of this would not be useful here, as this would overcomplicate our overview of the history of the word. I hope that by reading this book readers will gradually gain an understanding of the origin and evolution of the Chinese term *liuxingxing ganmao*.

In "Introduction to the Six Elemental Causes of Disease", an essay from his work titled *Illuminating the Origins of Various Diseases*, the Qing physician Shen Jin'ao (1717-1776) writes:

Ganmao comes from harm from the wind element. *Ganmao* is a pulmonary disease. It arises when there is a deficiency of elemental *Qi*, and a separation of tissue connections. The *Huangdi Neijing* (approx. 200 BCE) states: "*Yang* receives the empty maleficent harmful wind first." "Wind" here means the *Yang Qi* of the heavens, which when it resides within the body causes harm to *Wei* (*Wei Qi*, *Qi* that is generated from ingested food and drink and which flows outside of the confines of the circulatory system; contrasted with *Ying Qi*, *Qi* that flows within the circulatory system).

The *Wei* takes on *Yang* qualities, and therefore it is said that "*Yang* receives [the harmful wind] first". *Wei* is *Qi*. The lungs control *Qi* and the spleen generates *Qi*. Therefore, although "harmful wind" is a disease of the lungs, it is also related to the spleen. The "harmful wind" depletes the spleen, which weakens the muscles. It depletes the lungs, which holds open the Dark Abode (*Xuan Fu*, refers the sweat glands, hair follicles, and skin pores), and this is how the ailments caused by the wind can enter the physiology. It is said that wind is the cause of hundreds of diseases that move around the body and frequently change. There is no space so small in the body that the wind element cannot enter. The twelve *Jing* (*Jing Mai*, twelve pathways within the body that carry fluids and *Qi*, including major blood vessels), the fifteen *Luo* (fifteen smaller branch pathways, including smaller blood vessels), the five upper abdominal organs and the six lower abdominal organs can all be penetrated by the wind element and become diseased. When the wind penetrates the *Jing* or *Luo* pathways, it passes through the skin and hair follicles and then enters the muscles and lower abdominal organs. Or it can penetrate the mouth and nose, in which case it then enters the stomach and intestines. Or it can enter the bones, blood vessels, or joints. Furthermore, the fire element combines easily with the wind element, the wood element of the liver easily attracts the wind element, and the metal element of the lungs is at a high position which makes it susceptible to infection. Additionally, the crown of the head is susceptible to wind, the eyes are susceptible to wind, and the arms and legs become moist when penetrated by wind. The ancients said: "Avoid wind as one would avoid arrows." When wind penetrates the lungs, the resulting symptoms may be headache or fever, or the following light symptoms without headache or fever: nasal congestion along with runny nose with clear mucus, an aversion to wind and cold, loud voice, and hoarse voice. In severe cases, phlegm buildup may cause shortness of breath, lockjaw, coughing, and dry throat. Externally, we may notice perspiration and a floating, slow pulse.

Shen Jin'ao believed that *ganmao* was a pulmonary disease caused by external infection from windy *Qi*, which was traditionally called *Shang Feng* (harmful wind), passing through the skin and hair follicles (or through mouth and nose) into the muscles. Moreover, according to Dr. Shen, although *ganmao* was caused by wind blowing onto the body from the outside, it usually was not a severe illness, but if it persisted for some time, it could also cause the body to become weak. Dr. Shen's observation accords with the common understanding during the Republican period that *ganmao* could cause weakness. In another work titled *The Origins of Internal Ailments and External Infections*, Dr. Shen explained that "Compared to *ganmao*, febrile disease, fever, heat-induced disease, and dampness-induced disease are all much more severe, and must be treated according to their symptoms in order to quickly alleviate their ill effects." He explained that *ganmao* is merely a mild disease caused by external infection, and therefore different from more severe diseases such as febrile disease, fever, etc..

At that point, the term *ganmao fenghan* (cold wind *ganmao*), was in common use in Late Qing periodicals. It was not an ailment that instilled fear, but after infection, patients could experience decreased appetite and thirst, insomnia, mental disturbances, and palpitations among other late-onset symptoms. Because of this, patients needed to take some time to recover. How was it that *ganmao* could cause "palpitations"? At the time, people described "palpitation" as a state of depleted weakness caused by "lack of blood in the heart". Therefore, after falling ill it would be necessary to take proper care of oneself. The principle that extra care needed to be taken to address late-onset symptoms for *ganmao* and other "external" illnesses persisted all the way through the Republican Period. The proper medicines to treat various ailments such as those caused by "external infections", seasonal epidemics, and "cold wind *ganmao*" were frequently published in periodicals in the Late Qing Period. For example, a reader named Liu Yinjiao from Jinling submitted an explanation of a medicine called *Taiyi puti wan* (Primordial enlightenment pill) to a periodical. He said that this medicine came from an esoteric

family recipe and that he would send a copy of the recipe to Shanghai right away so that the periodical could publish it, and suggested that others keep the recipe in mind, so that it could be used in case of a disease outbreak. It was thought that this medicine could actually be used to treat many diseases including cholera, plague, cold wind *ganmao*, and a disease called "mountain mist miasma". We can see that at the time, this type of Chinese medicine, which was composed of multiple different ingredients, was used to treat many ailments, possibly including the flu or *ganmao*, and one did not usually find a Chinese medicine used exclusively for any one disease. A prescribed medicine would normally combine the treatment of multiple ailments at once. This combining of various medicinal herbs into one prescription is a characteristic of Chinese medicine: when different individual medical substances are combined together, the medicine will have wide-ranging efficacy, and can always be used to treat more than one illness. This is an important principle to understand when studying the history of Chinese medical prescriptions. Also, in the past, knowledge about prescriptions was passed down through periodicals or hand-written notes. After the Qing dynasty, knowledge began to be disseminated widely through new kinds of media and publications, which is a phenomenon worth our interest. Many kinds of disease-related knowledge became open to the public, and were no longer limited to medical books. There is, moreover, another phenomenon worthy of our attention: in the Late *Qi*ng, it became very common for officials to use *ganmao* as an excuse to take time off. But when we start talking about *ganmao* as an infectious disease or plague, its significance becomes completely different, and would not be used so casually as an excuse.

We see the first discussions of "external" diseases like *ganmao* and other non-severe illnesses alongside more serious infectious diseases such as malaria in advertisements for medicines. An 1881 advertisement for a pharmacy that sold both Chinese and Western medicine said that from summer to fall when the weather is hot "there is an explosion of *ganmao* infections." The advertisement uses the term *shixie* (seasonal affliction) to describe the ailment's speed and ferocity. This advertisement implies that the pharmacy's "emergency life-saving health tonic" was extremely effective. The pharmacy also sold a "disease-preventing powder", which the description in the advertisement indicates was some kind of disinfectant. The advertisement asserted that if you think that your home "has blocked up toilets and pipes, and garbage is piling up every day causing a build-up of filth and stewing up foul air, this is most suitable to causing illness" and that the powder was a best-seller in the West for many years, so all that you needed to do was spread this powder everywhere in your home and this would prevent sick *Qi* and all other kinds of bad *Qi*. It would seem that in the 1880s, the West already recognized a relationship between disinfection and disease prevention, while in China, disease was described as "bad *Qi*".

臺灣美術兩百年
TWO CENTURIES OF TAIWANESE

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FINE ARTS

- **Category:** Art
- **Publisher:** SpringHill
- **Date:** 4/2022
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
- **Pages:** 320 / 304
- **Length:**
  Vol.1: 137,500 characters
  (approx. 89,500 words in English)
  Vol.2: 136,000 characters
  (approx. 89,000 words in English)

The complex political history of Taiwan has frequently stymied efforts to give Taiwanese accomplishments in fine arts the recognition they deserve. Offering a valuable corrective, this volume collects the writings of leading art historians to showcase 200 years of artistic production in Taiwan, and highlight the diverse issues addressed within these works.

Taiwan's complex history of rule by foreign powers, compounded by Chinese claims of authority over the island-nation, have challenged efforts to present a coherent narrative of Taiwanese art on the international stage. Collecting the writings of leading art historians, this two-volume work presents over 120 works from 80 Taiwanese artists, thematically organized as a series of "exhibitions", so readers may appreciate the works within the broader context of the trends and ideas that shaped the evolution of Taiwanese fine arts.

Authors Yen Chuan-Ying and Tsai Chia-Chiu have organized this curated overview to highlight issues such us tradition and modernity, colonialism, the legacies of the Chinese and Japanese painting traditions, nativism and internationalism, the debates surrounding abstraction, the impacts of the cold war and martial law, and shifting gender roles in society. Complete with full-page color reproductions, this rich intellectual and aesthetic journey helps to integrate Taiwanese art into global narratives of art history in the modern era, while also highlighting the distinctive features of the local debates and trends that informed each of the works presented within.

The Brief But Heroic History of Taiwanese Fine Arts Needs Us to Carry It Forward: An Interview with Yen Chuan-Ying and Tsai Chia-Chiu, Executive Producers of Two Centuries of Taiwanese Fine Arts

By Wu Ying-Hui (originally published at Openbook)
Translated by Ed Allen

Increasing the Value of Art Through Multiple Perspectives

Two Centuries of Taiwanese Fine Arts follows a core chronological progression with interstitial subject essays. Volume One, "The Modern Age", commences with Qing traditions in painting and calligraphy and their immediate inheritors before moving into the discourse of Enlightenment during the Japanese Occupation and ending with the conclusion of World War II and the rise of a new government. Planned chapters on "Modern Art and Exhibitions", "Urban Modernity", "War and Martial Law", and "Men and Women in a New Era" set out the threads of each period and provide introductions to the artwork.

Volume Two, "The Islands Call", and its chapters on "The Call of the Mountains and Seas", "A Return to Native Soil", and "The Development of Subjectivity" follow movements in the fine arts amid the post-war political environment of enforced silence and through the great burst of noise and energy in the art world immediately after the lifting of martial law in 1987.

Two Centuries of Taiwanese Fine Arts requires that the reader "consider Taiwan from its artworks", thus giving priority to "public property" collected in public museums, supplemented by work in private collections.

Tsai Chia-Chiu points out that works were chosen on the principle that they could "tell a good story", yet the candid eyes of each contributor also

stand out. "'Narratability' arises from the creative journey of the artist, the compositional depth of the work, and more importantly the links with Taiwan's history and land." Pursuing a popular appeal, the book eschews abstruse academic language, with each contributor enjoying *carte blanche* to write as they wish. As a result, chapters resonate with readers through the use of erudite but accessible techniques, for example, by drawing from individual experience or citing artistic confessions. Tsai, for example, translates and incorporates the entirety of Huang Tu-Shui's "Taiwanese Art in Transition", first published in the Japanese-language journal *Shokumin* in 1923, an essay in which the artist's fervent desire to affect society with his art comes through strongly, the same way Huang inscribed his own life into his carvings, aspiring to immortality for his soul and his work.

As Yen Chuan-Ying argues, this same freedom allows for varied interpretation of the same piece among the essays. In the case of Chen Cheng-po's *My Family* (1931), for example, some have fixated on the Japanese-language *On Painting for the Proletariat* upon the table, while Yen approaches the painting from the perspective of the "woman behind the artist", drawing up her own portrait of Chang Chieh (Chen's wife), the silent supporter of her husband's engagement with modern art.

"We encourage anybody viewing these works to find their own reference point to construct a relationship with them. The work of art," Yen believes, "no longer belongs to the artist once it has been exhibited. Fine arts cannot develop independently of society, while many opinions and ideas about a work will change with the times – this is how value accrues and builds up in art, and where its significance resides. Without recognition and confirmation from society, a work of art may be destined for the scrapheap."

Time: An Unfinished Project for a History of Fine Arts

Taiwanese fine arts have until now been an appended chapter in the history of Chinese Fine Arts, such that scholars like Yen Chuan-Ying – who has dedicated herself to the subject for over three decades – seem to be blazing a treacherous trail. Yen recounts in detail her drift from the prestigious mainstream of research in Chinese fine frts to the overlooked realm of Taiwanese fine arts, starting with her enrollment at the Department of History at National Taiwan University in 1968. When she submitted a "Research Project in Taiwanese Fine Arts" to the National Science Council in 1988, her work was still deemed to be "of no academic value", and was even ridiculed by Yen's senior colleagues, who sneered: if we can research the history of Taiwanese Fine Arts, I suppose any rock off the street could be researched as well?

Tsai Chia-Chiu also recalls his own frustrated ambition while still a graduate student in art history. "The atmosphere made you doubt yourself. Perhaps Taiwanese fine arts just didn't belong in the hallowed halls of the Chinese classics?"

"The fine arts are a core component of cultural memory; the construction of a history of Taiwanese art must originate from a popular self-identification

with Taiwanese culture. We've never earnestly asked ourselves who we are," says Yen, with profound force, "or who our parents are. Our understanding of our lives and environment is skin-deep. This is because we don't wish to understand – or would rather forget." Yen worries that if we still don't want to learn, our opportunity may disappear, and "works of art will vanish without our being aware, and memory fade or be distorted in turn."

Modern art still constitutes the mainstream of research in Taiwanese fine art, a situation enabled by the majority of artists remaining in good health and the relative ease of fieldwork. Academic work on art from the Japanese Occupation, meanwhile, requires not only proficiency in two foreign languages (English and Japanese) but also such burdensome challenges as processing historical documents from over a century ago and negotiating the complex web of relationships between artists, authenticity of artworks, the search for lost pieces, and fieldwork surveys. Yen Chuan-Ying cites the case of Huang Tu-Shui's *Water of Immortality*, for which a profusion of legends survives, including from involved parties such as the Chang and Hsu families. "We simply have too many dubious tales. Depending on the artist's memory or upon oral transmission leaves one open to positive or negative influence from the individual, which will transform or obfuscate the conclusion. If not clarified now, the situation will become even more complex, while leaving things ambiguous and writing any old story is equally pointless."

Publication: Consolidating New Understandings and a Common Call to Action

For decades, Yen Chuan-Ying has worked assiduously on fine art from the Japanese Occupation, all while remaining anxious and unhappy with the fringe status of her discipline. The publication of this series, however, brought difficult questions and high degrees of pressure from government departments, artists and their families, and the holders of artworks.

The two volumes are entirely color-printed, with a generous number of foldouts and editing with special color details. Patience Chuang, Editor-in-Chief at SpringHill Publishing, chuckles: "All my colleagues have said this is a book that will 'shake the nation to its roots'. Our ambition, though, is to keep re-printing and never stop, as long as there's market demand. There are times when culture takes root in commerce."

Chuang points to the extraordinary success of books about Taiwanese history in recent years. Whether those readers can be hooked on the history of fine arts remains to be seen. "Regardless, from the editor's perspective, *Two Centuries of Taiwanese Fine Arts* does fill the existing gap for a volume in the Fine Arts category for Taiwanese history."

TWO CENTURIES OF TAIWANESE FINE ARTS

Curated by Yen Chuan-Ying, Tsai Chia-Chiu
Translated by Eleanor Goodman

Chapter 1: The Rebirth of Tradition (Contributor: Huang Chi-hui)

But when it came to painting, we couldn't just follow Europe and America. We couldn't abandon the brush and ink of our own Chinese painting tradition.
–Chen Chi-Kwan

Of course I didn't want the visual arts to just stay with the tradition.... I approached calligraphic arts from the perspective of painting. How should I convey a contemporary feeling with calligraphy? I used my brush and different kinds of lines to show whatever it was I wanted to say. –Tong Yang-Tze

When we talk about "Chinese painting", what do you think of?

In 1949, Qing imperial family member and literati Pu Xinyu came to Taiwan from mainland China. When he visited the "Chinese painting category" of the fourth Taiwan Provincial Fine Arts Exhibition, he expressed the following opinion to a reporter from the *Taiwan Shin Sheng Daily News*:

> Mr. Pu was highly admiring of the riches on display at the exhibition: He believes that although the majority of the Chinese paintings, which incorporate Western brushwork techniques, break from the orthodox, many show novel subjects and original styles, and this may lend vitality to an archaic painting tradition and open up new paths forward.

The jury for the Chinese paintings category at that year's exhibition included the Taiwanese "Eastern-style" painters Chen Ching-Hui, Kuo Hsueh-Hu, Lin Yu-Shan, Chen Houei-kuen, Lin Chih-Chu, and Chen Chin, as well as Ma Shou-Hua (1893-1977), a painter from Anhui who had moved to Taiwan and taken up a position in the Taiwanese government. Works selected for the exhibition included the famous "Eastern-style" painter Hsu Shen-Chou's *Nostalgia* and Li Chiu-ho's *Morning and Evening Series (Dawn)*. The award-winning works were all "Eastern-style paintings", as were most of the paintings chosen for the exhibition. Although Pu Xinyu admired the incorporation of Western techniques and the resulting break with orthodox Chinese painting that allowed for a new style and novel ideas, following this, other young painters who had come to Taiwan from the mainland had an intensely negative reaction toward anything Japanese, and became increasingly dissatisfied. They publicly remonstrated Taiwanese painters for producing "Japanese paintings". This elicited a counterattack by Taiwanese artists, who proclaimed that their "Eastern-style paintings" carried on the Chinese Northern School artistic tradition, while adopting the Western style of painting realistically from nature to develop unique, local "Taiwanese-made paintings".

Once this "orthodox Chinese painting debate" around the Provincial Exhibition ignited, the fire continued to spread for thirty years, up until Lin Chih-Chu created a new name for "Eastern-style painting"

for Taiwanese artists, namely "gouache painting" (distemper). Nevertheless, the "orthodox Chinese painting debate" was not just a dispute about the ethnic positioning of Chinese art, but rather constituted a debate in the realm of ink painting about tradition versus modernity, and copying famous works versus painting realistically from nature.

How to bring "Eastern-style painting" back into "Chinese painting"?

After the end of World War II, as Taiwan "returned to the embrace of the motherland," Taiwanese artists also longed for the embrace of a new era, hoping that the new government would build up the arts and culture. After members of the Tai-Yang Art Association Yang San-Lang and Kuo Hsueh-Hu appealed to the relevant authorities, the first Taiwan Provincial Fine Arts Exhibition (the Provincial Exhibition) was successfully held in 1946, establishing three separate categories: Chinese painting, Western painting, and sculpture. The Provincial Exhibition continued the art competition system established by the Japanese-occupation-era Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition, and became the most important art event on the island. The jurying of the Chinese painting category was carried out by well-known Eastern-style painters, as mentioned above.

As there had been few candidates in the Chinese ink painting category in the past provincial exhibitions, most of the works exhibited, including those by the jury members, were Eastern-style heavy-color works painted realistically from nature. Following the decampment of the Kuomintang government to Taiwan, Ma Shou-Hua, Huang Chun-Pi (1898-1991), Pu Xinyu and many other professional and amateur painters arrived in Taiwan and participated in the Provincial Exhibition either as part of the jury or as exhibiting artists. Beginning in 1950, artists from the mainland began to criticize the Provincial Exhibition system and the artistic style of the Chinese painting category. Sharp words from artists such as Liu Shih (1910-1997) and Liu Kuo-sung (1932-, see Section II, Chapter 8) stirred the controversy.

In 1951, He Tie-hua (1910-1982) used the establishment of the *New Art* magazine to hold the "1950 Taiwan Art Circles Take Stock and Look Forward" symposium. At the meeting, Liu Shih, a specialist in Western painting and sculpture, raised the question of the differences between Chinese art and Japanese art, and pointed out how incongruous it was that most of the works at the Fifth Provincial Exhibition were Japanese paintings, yet were displayed as Chinese paintings. He said: "A lot of people today still mistake Japanese painting for Chinese painting, while others whose works are clearly Japanese paintings persist in calling themselves Chinese painters, which is so ridiculous it beggars belief! For example, at the Fifth Art Exhibition, many of the works exhibited in Zhongshan Hall were Japanese paintings, but they were displayed as Chinese paintings, and the winner of the Chinese painting category was in fact a Japanese painting." Well-known Chinese painter Huang Chun-Pi was present at the meeting and expressed his agreement, noting that while many of his Taiwanese friends were willing to learn, the fact that there had not been real Chinese painting in Taiwan in earlier eras had led to this misunderstanding.

In 1954, Liu Kuo-sung and his classmates in the Department of Fine Arts at National Taiwan Normal University decided to try for a spot in the Ninth Provincial Exhibition, which only led to their disgruntlement. After viewing the artworks at the exhibition, Liu Kuo-sung published an article titled "Why? Squeezing Japanese Painting in with Chinese Painting" in the *United Daily News* under the penname Lu Ting. The article took aim at the inclusion of Japanese paintings by Taiwanese painters in the Chinese painting category, and further criticized these works for having none of the brushwork or atmospherics of Chinese painting, nor the quality, one-point perspective, and colors characteristic of Western painting. At the end, he proposed:

> There are many fine works among the Japanese paintings, such as Hsu Shen-chou's *Picture of Serenity*, Lin Yu-Shan's *Under the Green Shade,* and Lu Yun-Sheng's *White Sheep*, which are all excellent.… If there really are people interested in Japanese painting, why didn't the Provincial Art Exhibition have a Japanese painting category, as they had for Western painting and sculpture? It's

> no disgrace to make Japanese paintings, just as it's no disgrace to make Western paintings, so why must they squeeze the Japanese paintings in with the Chinese paintings? Today when local culture is being encouraged, how can the vanguard of the art world perpetuate a misconception that does damage to our own unique local art?

In December of the same year, the Taipei City Archives invited more than a dozen Taiwanese artists to engage in a discussion about the Taiwanese fine arts movement. At this discussion among local artists and literary personages, the artists spoke freely. Chairman Huang De-shi (1909-1999) brought up the question of Chinese painting raised in the recent newspaper article, and Lin Yu-shan, an instructor in the Department of Fine Arts at National Taiwan Normal University, took the opportunity to clarify that Taiwanese art was not Japanese painting. Rather, a combination of local conditions and Western culture had transformed it into a uniquely Taiwanese and tropically inflected "Taiwanese-made painting". He also emphasized that the Chinese painting done in Taiwan had originally been an extension of that of the mainland, but works that imitated from a book of ancient paintings were not real Chinese painting. In an article Lin Yu-shan had published in the *Taipei City Archives Quarterly* titled "Speaking of the Vicissitudes of Art", he once again expressed disapproval that the Provincial Exhibition art critics labeled paintings "Japanese paintings" when they clearly were not, stating that this only sowed discord and was of no benefit to the artists.

Lu Yun-Sheng (1913-1968) expressed a similar opinion at the meeting:

> Without question, earlier Taiwanese painting was a continuation of the mainland Chinese tradition. Before, copying ancient paintings with the "four noble" subjects and so on was the equivalent of studying mainland painters today. After Japan took over Taiwan, all painting became based on painting realistically from nature. Painting from nature is intrinsic in China, and the Six Principles of painting are the same whether they're Chinese or Western. During the Japanese occupation, Taiwanese people learned an art that was permeated with new brushwork and integrated Western painting, bringing tropical light and local color into the composition to form an artistic style. It was not purely Japanese painting, and at the time the Japanese did not consider them to be so, and instead called them "Taiwanese-made paintings". This kind of local art, Taiwanese art, has created a unique artistic environment.

Emphasizing painting realistically from nature in "Taiwanese-made painting": the Northern School?

Just as the mainland painters in Taiwan came from different backgrounds and had diverse creative ideas, their views about Chinese painting were not the same. At the beginning of 1955, *United Daily News* solicited articles from members of artistic circles on the topic of "What Direction Should Modern Chinese Painting Go In?" Artists such as Ma Shou-Hua, Chen Yung-Sen, Liang Yu-Ming, Huang Chun-Pi, Sun To-Tzu, Ran In-Ting, Lin Yu-Shan, Shih Tsui-feng, He Yung-jen, Liu Kuo-sung all submitted articles, expressing their opinions about modern Chinese painting. Among them, Liang Yu-Ming (1906-1984), a teacher at the Political Warfare Cadres Academy, thought that modern Chinese painting must above all grapple with modernity and absorb the strengths of Western painting so as to make up for the deficiencies of Chinese painting. Second, he believed that Taiwanese painting had been influenced by the Japanese occupation, but had gradually cast off the fetters of Japanese painting. At the same time, he called on Chinese painters to abandon their regional prejudices so they might learn from each other's work, engage in experimentation and create new subject matter. When Lin Yu-Shan read this article, he immediately wrote a letter to Liang Yu-Ming, thanking him for his considered commentary, and saying that Taiwanese painters should study the essentials of Chinese culture, and more, should be boldly creative.

繪本的夢想與實際：幾米分享創作心得

THE DREAM AND REALITY OF PICTURE BOOKS: THE MAKING OF JIMMY LIAO'S CREATION

© Chih Yuan Wang

Jimmy Liao
幾米

- **Category:** Art
- **Publisher:** Locus
- **Date:** 11/2021
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
- **Pages:** 416
- **Length:** 126,000 characters (approx. 82,000 words in English)

Jimmy Liao is Taiwan's most internationally successful author/illustrator of children's books. After graduating with an art degree from Chinese Culture University (Taiwan), he worked in advertising for twelve years, until a battle with leukemia inspired him to change careers. He began publishing illustrations in newspapers and magazines, and in 1998, he released his first two picture books: *Secrets in the Forest* and *A Fish with a Smile*. Earning him fame throughout the Chinese-speaking world, Liao's books have been adapted to film, television, and a line of branded merchandise. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, and his books have been translated into nearly two dozen languages. He has also done illustrations for a series of collaborations with English writers, including an Amazon Best Book of the Year for Kids winner, *The Champion of Staying Awake* by Sean Taylor. Bright colors and child narrators are two of the signature characteristics of his works, which often hint at a world that is sometimes sinister, and sometimes lonely, but always filled with rich emotion.

Taiwan's most internationally successful children's author/illustrator shares his insights into the creative process. Jimmy Liao discusses inspiration, ideas, and implementation, and brings it all down to earth by analyzing his own books.

Since the release of his first picture book in 1998, Jimmy Liao has always managed to release between one and three new books each year. His works have been translated into 20 languages, making him Taiwan's greatest success story in the international picture book market. Now, he shares the story of the process behind his whimsical creations.

Liao starts from the interior elements of creativity: attitude, ideas, and inspiration. He provides tips to help aspiring illustrators understand the creative mindset, and inspire them to create their own works. He addresses breaking through creative blocks, dealing with discouragement, maintaining work/life balance, taming inner demons, all the while sharing ample details from his own life and work.

In the second half of the book Liao breaks down seven of his own books to explore what went into creating them, revealing the initial inspiration as well as the frustration and difficulties he encountered along the way. The seven books thus analyzed are: *Turn Left Turn Right, The Sound of Colors, The Rainbow of Time, Starry Starry Night, So Close Yet So Far, One More Day with You*, and *I'm Not Perfect*. Finally, Liao shares important tips for dealing with the less creative aspects of getting a book published: working with editors, communicating with publishers, dealing with criticism, handling book rights, etc.

A must-read for aspiring illustrators, lovers of picture books, and anyone who does creative work, this heartfelt guidebook is packed with insights, tips, and techniques gleaned from Liao's prolific and uniquely successful career in children's books.

Book Report on The Dream and Reality of Picture Books *by Jimmy Liao*

By Silvia Torchio (Italian translator of Jimmy Liao's picture books)

What is behind the scenes of artistic creation? This is one of the most common and hard to answer question about art and creativity.

Artistic creation is often considered as a mysterious process, but from time to time it happens that something let people come close to this mystery, have the opportunity to explore the process and find it marvelously entertaining and deeply engaging.

This is what exactly happens in *The Dream and Reality of Picture Books*, where Jimmy Liao, the renowned Taiwanese picture books author, shares the story of his career path since the beginning for more than twenty untiring years, providing the readers with a great insight to his thoughts and methods behind his amazing work.

Jimmy Liao is one of the most famous Asian contemporary adult picture book artists. Since the publication of his two first books *Secrets in the Forest* and *A Fish with a Smile* in 1998, Jimmy has created almost sixty books and his works have been translated into twenty foreign languages and have sold over a million of copies all around the world.

How has he succeeded in keeping this astonishing creative energy for all these years? In *The Dream and Reality of Picture Books*, without reservation and with richness in details, he tries to answer this difficult question.

The book starts with how Liao began to create, describing in great detail and with great warm his childhood and youth, his education (and self-education) background and his previous work as an editorial illustrator in an advertising agency. The tale is enriched by the sharing of meaningful anecdotes about his life, from the choice of his *nom de plum* to the farseeing encounter with a "well informed" fortune teller in 1993 and to the beginning of his battle with the illness in 1995, that completely changed his personal and professional life. About this, he says: "I started to create picture books because of a serious illness, and creation gradually turned into my daily task."

The book is divided into three big sections. The first one, called "Thoughts", is about the process of creation and all the achievements and the difficulties that Liao has, respectively, reached and faced for more than twenty years as a picture book author, with many examples taken from his own experience and his works. Liao compares the creation process of a picture book to the work of gardening: the care that the gardeners have to take of their field is the same type that the artists must take of his work. The result is not guaranteed, perhaps no flowers will

bloom for the gardener and there will not come out a satisfying work for the artist, but taking care is the only way. And Liao reveals his "gardening" secrets to his readers wholeheartedly. In addition, Liao warns: creation is difficult, it is like climbing a high mountain. At the beginning it is very hard and needs much patience and concentration, but as soon as the highest point has been overcome, the process increases faster and smoother. In other words: only by constantly doing and lifelong learning, an artist can truly enter the field of art.

The second section called "Methods", discusses the various means and techniques used in the creation process of a picture book, the importance of how the illustrations are assembled and how the story is built up. There are different ways to develop a plot and what really is important is to find the suitable technique to the story. Liao himself has tried many different creative methods for all his works and he considered himself lucky to have experienced many techniques, that lead him to create different kind of picture books. As far as he concerned, artists must always experiment with themes and styles during the creative process, in a constant challenge for themselves and their abilities.

He explains how to organize inspiration, to build a storyboard, to set a layout, and, very importantly, how to make text and images work together. With reference to this essential aspect of picture books, Liao thinks that the story must be simple and the plot not too complicated. What people are mostly attracted are images, that must always spark different feelings, every reading, even when the reader already knows the story. In this way, Liao provides those who want to create picture books with sound advice and powerful suggestions, inspiring them with his experience and letting them not to waste energy and to save precious time to focus on their projects.

The third part, called "Case Studies", extensively analyzes seven of his most important works: *Turn Left Turn Right, The Sound of Colors, Starry Starry Night, The Rainbow of Time, So Close Yet So Far, One More Day with You*, and *I'm Not Perfect*. Liao reveals the background of the development of the books, the idea or the anecdote which inspired the story, the entire creation process, the difficulties (the so called "bottlenecks" and "low tides") and the solutions that sometimes come up like epiphanies. He sincerely unveils the pain, the doubts, the questions behind every painstakingly choice he made. Nothing must be taken for granted. All the cases are equipped with illustrations from the related book and other original and interesting documents, such as drafts and maps.

In the final part Liao shares his experience beyond the creative work, such as how to interact with editors and publishers, how to deal with comments after the book is published, how to handle the fact that books can turn in successful cartoons, movies, musicals....

All the works of art are our attempts to understand the chaos of life and fervently give it a shape. All the creative works can only try to suggest. Creation can only suggest, can only symbolize, and picture books are the creation of symbols and suggestions. There is no answer in life, and the final meaning of riddles seems to be the process of solving the riddle itself, not the answer. – (from Case Study 4: *The Rainbow of Time*)

THE DREAM AND REALITY OF PICTURE BOOKS: THE MAKING OF JIMMY LIAO'S CREATION

By Jimmy Liao
Translated by Stella Jiayue Zhu

1. Art is a Praxis

1.1
Drawing is Like Gardening

In attending to a garden, a gardener must work diligently every day: tending trees, monitoring pests, and keeping an eye out for new blooms.

Once you've grown familiar with your garden, then you can afford to work with leisure.

Given water every day and bathed under the sun, the flowers will one day burst into blossom.

Diligence does not guarantee optimal results, but if you don't put in real work, then you may rest assured that there will be no flowers.

Drawing, especially drawing picture books, is like tending a garden. It needs to be immersive.

Funny enough, not everyone who draws likes drawing.

If I say that I am super into drawing, then I am bound to be called out for belaboring the obvious.

Yet, in fact, not everyone who draws likes doing it. That includes many of my artist friends. I find it baffling too: If they don't like drawing, why do they still do it?

I have taken up many a vexatious job in the past. From fussy contact persons and dismal terms, to pressing deadlines, onerous demands, and unreasonable rates…. Nuisances would drive a person crazy.

However, whenever I get down to drawing, I am at peace with my work, and all my frustrations temporarily fade from view.

At times, I am amazed by my own instinctive filtering mechanism. I'm lucky to have this "super power", which has kept me from being burnt out by the peripheral hassles in my creative career.

I am super into drawing, so I don't regret the many sacrifices I make for its cause.

I am super into drawing, so I save the most and best time for it.

I am super into drawing, so I won't be crushed by the distress and disappointments that arise in the process.

I love being the gardener tending my own garden.

1.2
Doing Outweighs Thinking

I read an article many years ago about a rookie comic writer from the US, who broke through with his debut work and racked up many important awards. When he was interviewed and asked to give advice to other young artists, he said, "Keep your head down. Go home and draw thirty pieces a day. Come back three months later. Then, we can talk about the creative process."

He might have sounded arrogant, but he cut to the chase about what's essential in making art.

Making art requires continuous practice. If you consistently produce a lot of art over time, you might

eventually experience the magic of it.

Thinking is of course important, but oftentimes the actual doing is what brings ideas to their most glorious fruition.

Keep on drawing, keep on writing. Only then can you unravel your perplexities and solve your conundrums.

Keep on drawing, keep on writing. Only then can you find out where the problems lie and understand what the trade-offs are. Only then can you enter into the creative flow and continue finding inspiration and momentum.

You rack your brains to build castles in the air. But, no matter how elaborate your plan is, once you sit down and start drawing, you may find yourself heading in a different direction from the very first page. Other times, a long period of deliberation might leave you undecided, yet once you sit down to draw, you find that all the hurdles and problems dissipate.

In addition, when you are drawing, situations and actions naturally unfold from what you have already drawn, or rather, *because of* what you have already drawn: there is a kid standing here, so it follows that he must be looking in this direction and wearing that expression. The immediate context and process of drawing will settle a lot of questions for you. Once you finish a page, the next will naturally come to you.

None of us is the genius of the century, so we've got to accept our lot, keep our heads down, and put in the hard work.

Perhaps one day we will discover our talent; perhaps on another day, we will realize that we can do nothing right. The only way to find out is to keep drawing and writing.

Imagination alone does not make art happen. Neither does it make the future.

1.3
Making Art is Like Working Out

A screenwriter friend of mine once related an analogy about making art from the French director Luc Besson.

Luc Besson wrote many incredible screenplays. This friend of mine found it so remarkable that he asked him how he did it.

Luc Besson replied: "Screenwriting is like working out."

If you work out every day for two hours consistently, the early days will hurt. You won't see any visible result and you will feel sore all over.

Keep at it for a month, and gradually, you will see gains in your muscular strength and physique.

Two months in, the payoffs will improve.

By the third month, you may have already become the envy of those around you.

Four months in, as you proudly strut down the street, you think it is time to celebrate, so you give yourself a three-month-long break to lie back and feast.

When you return from the break, everything is ruined. You have to start from the misery of ground zero all over again.

Luc Besson said that he dedicated fixed time slots to writing and working out every day. He did not indulge himself with extended breaks.

I am lucky to have learned about Luc Besson's work habits and to share his method. Luckily for me (and, also, woe is me!), for the past fifteen years, I have been "working out" for close to eight hours every day.

1.4
The Solitude and Discipline Required for Making Art

When I make art, I need to be completely alone. Being alone brings a tranquility that comforts me.

I think that solitude is essential for making art.

If you ask me what characteristic of mine has had the most impact on my creative work. I would say: discipline.

It pleases me that I work like an artisan. Day to day I occupy the same space. There, I polish and perfect artifacts in silence. When I am done with one, I continue on to the next piece. This perpetual process is what enables me to keep creating.

1.5
Save the Best and Most Time for the Most Important Thing

I save the most and best time for drawing.

I have a daily routine.

When my daughter was little, I used to wake up around seven in the morning, send her to school at half past seven, and arrive at the studio around eight. In recent years, I have been sleeping less, so I get up as early as five or six and get to the studio by seven.

Before my "workday" starts, I skim through the newspapers. If I see an interesting or funny story about animals, I clip it. Roughly ten minutes later, I start working.

I have always worked alone without an assistant. Sometimes, if it gets too quiet, I listen to music or tune in to the radio.

If I don't have to be out, I will likely stay in the studio for the day.

When I was younger, I could hold on until six in the evening before quitting, and I was productive in the afternoon as well. After getting home, I could continue brainstorming ideas, making sketches, or planning columns into the evening, or think about things that didn't require picking up a pen. I usually turned in before midnight, although sometimes I'd be so whacked that I was ready for bed by nine or ten o'clock.

It was like this every single day, Monday through Friday. My routine was comparable to that of a salaryman working nine to five.

These days, as soon as I finish lunch, I am ready for a nap. When I wake up at around three, my work slows down. Later I go home for dinner and watch TV while sprawling on the sofa. Usually, I am asleep by nine or ten.

But this is why I am all the more convinced that the best and most time ought to be saved for drawing, and that the prime hours before noon ought to be spent with diligence and mindfulness.

1.6
Getting in the Right State of Mind

In 2002, I started a center-spread column in Taiwan's *Next Magazine* called *La Dolce Vita*, even though I myself wasn't living the "sweet life" by any standard.

At the time, I was juggling picture book writing with the maintenance of two separate columns, while commissions for editorial illustrations were pouring in from newspapers and magazines. The time pressure, thematic divergence, and the fact that my creative mind went haywire all added to the unbearable stress I was suffering.

Nevertheless, every Wednesday morning, no matter how chaotic my life was or how sluggish I felt, I would sit in front of the desk in silence and start working, with unwavering focus, on a full color illustration measuring 38 by 56 centimeters for the column.

If it was smooth sailing I would be done in a day. Usually, it took two days. Still, sometimes, I would fumble until day three. I lived like this for six years.

Even though there was a theme to the column, every single week I would still be wondering what I should draw or say. What's remarkable, however, is that as soon as I laid down the paper, the pencil in my hand would start moving. It might be a stretch, but I felt somewhat like a medium – as soon as I was ready, divine spirits possessed me.

I liked drawing trees, prairies, rocks, streams, lakes, fallen leaves, flowers, balloons, houses, highways, and a child who traverses these environments.

I liked drawing any situation that was not part of my existing urban reality. All that is lovely resides in places far away.

I liked drawing backgrounds that allow for idiosyncratic doodles. I liked drawing an idle kid with a forlorn face.

I liked drawing large animals with wide, naive eyes gazing at kids on the page who want to be loved.

I liked using vibrant colors and elaborate brushwork to create an ineffable sense of loneliness.

But if I were asked in detail as to why I drew

everything the way I did, how I decided on a combination between characters and their environments, or what rationale there was behind a color, texture, or brushstroke, I wouldn't be able to explain the particulars with articulation. I could only say that I was in a certain "state of mind" when I drew them.

All I could do was convey how I instinctively felt when I was in that state of mind.

Now, at a different time and under different circumstances, I cannot look back and rationalize why I drew what I drew.

Some works exceeded my initial vision, and I was amazed and overjoyed when I completed them. Other works did not please me quite so much, but given my abilities and circumstances at the time, I could only turn them in with a heavy heart and a troubled conscience.

1.7
Making Art is Like Climbing a Mountain

The brainstorming stage of creating a picture book is the most fun; I let my imagination run wild and forgo all rules. Sketching feels liberating too, as it is dictated by nothing but my whims. Yet I am beset by annoyances and difficulty when it comes time to finalize the draft because that is the real work, and the only way out is through. It's no different than manual labor: there is no alternative but to put your nose to the grindstone.

Over the years, I gradually learned to appreciate the torture of making art. It would seem that I wouldn't have produced anything without undergoing such distress. That said, every time I settle down to work, I feel restless. Often, I find excuses to escape into ideas about other interesting stories. I want to be a smart visionary, not a lonely craftsman.

Making art is like climbing a tall mountain. It's uphill all the way at first and grows more challenging as you approach the summit. Only after you have overcome the hardest section, will you start to feel more and more comfortable and find yourself drawing more and more swiftly.

It was trapped in a sturdy wall
Listening to people's sighs all night long.
Behind the bars, a girl wept every day.
And when the moon rose, she would always
Sing a song at the heavens for herself.
The melody soared through the darkness,
Shining like the twinkling stars in the sky….

It took me three years to complete *The Blue Stone*. I had always meant to dedicate it to my parents. But when it was halfway done, my father fell ill. At one point, I considered speeding through it. But my life was in total disarray. I was visiting the hospital all the time and could not devote my attention to work. At the same time, I also bore witness to the love and tenderness my parents had for each other. It touched me to the core. Sometimes, when I was by my father's hospital bed, I thought of *The Blue Stone*; sometimes, when I was drawing *The Blue Stone*, I thought of my parents.

In the end, I did not finish the book before my father passed away, which remains a source of regret. Oddly enough, after he was gone, I finished it within a few short months.

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