BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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Published by Taiwan Creative Content Agency (TAICCA)
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Issue | Issue 17, Winter 2023
Publication Date | December 31, 2023
ISSN | 2410-0781

TAICCA 文化內容策進院
TAIWAN CREATIVE CONTENT AGENCY

CONTENTS

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

Dear Readers,

Welcome to Issue 17 of Books from Taiwan! In our last issue, I resisted the temptation to encapsulate all of our book selections under a single theme. After all, our featured books are not chosen thematically. They represent the best writing coming out of Taiwan and any theme that links them is pure coincidence. Yet, that is exactly what has happened with Issue 17. As I reviewed the titles while preparing to write this preface, it became clear that the majority of our books deal with the truth behind surface appearances, and the few titles which aren't a perfect fit for that theme can at least be viewed through that lens without excessive distortion. So please bear with me as I ever-so-lightly sand down the corners of a few square pegs and apply this *post-hoc* theme to our titles: *Moving Beyond the Surface*.

Some genres, by their very nature, are suited to this theme. It's hard to imagine a mystery where the trail of clues doesn't lead the reader beyond surface appearances. However, in *Don't Die Again*, the theme is particularly fitting, since the story involves reinvestigating what was thought to be a cut-and-dried murder case. The body of a teenage girl is found in an orchard, recalling the circumstances of a murder that took place fourteen years before. Is it the work of a copycat killer, or is the original killer still at large? And if so, what of the man who was already convicted of the first killing?

The fantasy genre has always made use of secrets hidden behind the façade of appearance, and *Beastosis* doubles down on this tradition. A pair of brothers leaves behind life on their tribal reservation and discovers the truth about the outside world and the occupying army that enforces the isolation of their people. Yet, within this intricately imagined fantasy setting, even the larger world is but a false appearance when compared to the true reality, and sorcerers are able to generate magical power in proportion to their belief in the non-reality of the ordinary world.

One of our non-fiction titles, *Chinese Medicine: A Guided Tour with Illustrations & Comics* deals with a subject which lies beyond the realm of surface appearances. While Western medicine works with physical organs and tissues, Chinese medicine addresses unseen energies like *qi*, *yin*, and *yang*. This humorous and easy-to-follow introduction to this traditional medical system will help readers look beyond the surface anatomy of the body to discover how the flow of these energies impacts our health.

The next three books deal with a specific variation on our theme: the reality behind the image of success. *Spent Bullets* is a connected series of short stories that unveils the dark emotions and twisted relationships

which govern the inner lives of a group of elite engineering students. Terao Tetsuya's electrifying prose takes readers inside the halls of top universities and tech behemoths, where the intense pressure to perform takes a toll even on the most gifted minds.

Second Lead follows protagonist Claire Huang on her long path to success as an actress, and, more importantly, as a complete, individuated person. In a post me-too world, the cruel sexual politics faced by actresses may no longer surprise us, but the psychological impact of this hostile work environment has rarely been so sensitively chronicled as here. Fortunately, as Claire sees past her glamorous image of her occupation, and the limitations of her childhood conditioning, she discovers the strength to pursue her dreams without compromising her authentic self.

In another of our non-fiction titles *Post CCP-China: An Overview of Potential Outcomes Following the Disintegration of the CCP*, risk analyst Fan Chou has interrogated the outward image of success and power projected by the Chinese Communist Party. According to Fan's fiscal analysis, the CCP is already in the early stages of collapse, and his book provides timely advice on preparing for what will follow.

Returning to our fiction titles, *Eyelids of Morning*, a tour de force from Zhang Guixing – one of the most celebrated sinophone novelists worldwide – tells the story of an expedition to recover a lost family heirloom which entangles the protagonist in a conflict between communist guerillas and the British Empire in the jungles of Sarawak. The novel stands out from other postcolonial works by situating personal aspiration, familial legacy, ethnic identifications, and political struggle within a phantasmagoric vision of ecological and cosmological destiny. Now, if that isn't a feat of *Moving Beyond the Surface*, I'm not sure what is. Through the magic of Zhang Guixing's unique literary talents, the insignificance of human endeavor within the vast machinery of the universe is redeemed by the acts of mythmaking and storytelling.

The final title for this issue, *The Suncake Pastry Shop*, is the square peg that will require the most sanding to fit through our round-holed theme. But, our project remains salvageable, because what is the novel if not an art form that always moves beyond surfaces? What character arc doesn't force the protagonist to reevaluate their view of the world (the surface appearance), and move beyond the limitations it imposes? For Hsu An-Chun, the protagonist of *The Suncake Pastry Shop,* this process involves returning from his travels abroad only to be thrown head first into a tradition-bound family business run by his irascible great-uncle. While he would seem to have been teleported between two completely different worlds, the key to resolving his personal dilemmas, and saving his great-uncle's pastry shop, may be for him to realize there is actually a great deal in common between the homely baked goods of the family business and the refined delicacies of the patisserie where he spent his working holiday in Kyoto.

Naturally, with these brief introductions, I have only scratched the *surface* of all these books have to offer – please forgive the pun. I leave it in your hands to continue probing the depths that lie beneath by perusing the summaries and chapter samples that follow. I trust that your literary explorations, like mine, will lead you to a greater appreciation of Taiwan's rich literary heritage. As always, feel free to contact us should you require more information, or wish to acquire rights to any of the titles featured herein.

And… may you always discover the truth that lies beyond mere appearance!

Joshua Dyer

Editor-in-Chief
Books from Taiwan

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 house (legal entity) legally registered or incorporated 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 (applicants for this funding must propose a specific marketing promotion plan and complete the implementation before submitting the grant project results; those whose plans include talks or book launching events attended by authors in person will be given priority for grants);
     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, the Taiwan Literature Award, books on Taiwan's culture and history, or series of books.

- 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.

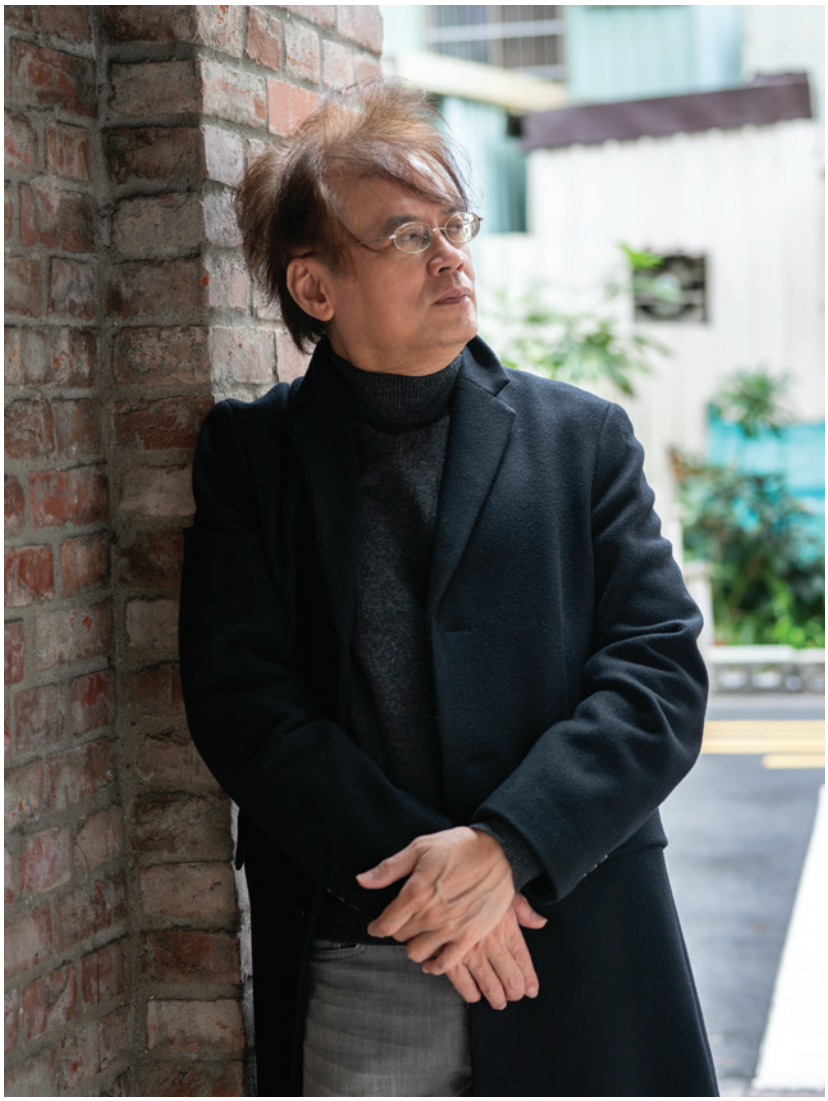
- Application Method: Please visit the Ministry's official website (https://grants.moc.gov.tw/Web_ENG/), and use the online application system.

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

BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

FICTION

鱷眼晨曦
EYELIDS OF MORNING



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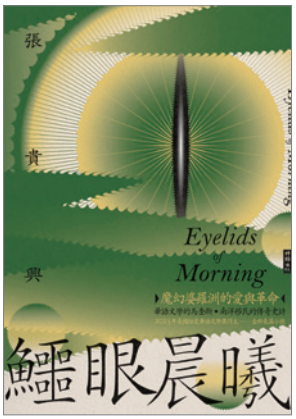
Zhang Guixing
張貴興

- **Category:** Literary Fiction
- **Publisher:** China Times
- **Date:** 12/2022
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw
- **Pages:** 448
- **Length:** 259,000 characters (approx. 168,300 words in English)

Born in Sarawak, Malaysia in 1956, Zhang Guixing came to Taiwan in 1976 to attend university, and has made Taiwan his home ever since. His writing centers on his native land of Borneo, detailing in particular the lives and history of Chinese Borneans. His novels have been awarded every major literature prize in Taiwan, and praised by scholars of sinophone literature worldwide. His previous novel, *Wild Boars Cross the River*, has been translated into French, Albanian, Korean, and Japanese.



*** 2024 Taipei Book Fair Award**
*** 2023 Openbook Award**
*** 2023 Taiwan Literature Award**

Zhang Guixing, one of the greatest living sinophone authors, once again returns to the lush rainforests of Sarawak, where the quest for a lost family heirloom becomes a meditation on multi-generational memory, colonial expansionism, rainforest ecology, and the evolutionary history of life on Earth.

At the close of the 1880s, a beautiful young woman and her father arrive in the town of Yunlo in Sarawak. Parasol in hand rain or shine, the sophisticated Fang Wu attracts numerous suitors in the frontier town, but only develops affections for Tien Chin-Hung, an ambitious young man seeking his fortune in the resource-rich region. The happiness of the young lovers is cut short when a giant crocodile devours Fang Wu, taking with her the seventy-two carat diamond Chin-Hung has gifted to her. Chin-Hung eventually becomes a wealthy merchant, but he can never forget the lost jewel that symbolizes the love he shared with Fang Wu – a diamond known as the Star of Sarawak.

Eighty years later, various powers converge on Sarawak competing for political dominance, and seeking not only the Star of Sarawak, but also a lost British crown. The grandson of Chin-Hung, Tien Chin-Shu, inherits his grandfather's obsession with the diamond, and assembles a team of young companions to undertake an expedition to recover the family heirloom. Deep in the rainforests of Sarawak, the expedition becomes entangled in the ongoing conflict between communist insurgents and British colonial troops, only surviving through the timely interventions of a mysterious red-haired woman. Seeming to appear and vanish at will, the woman is an enigma who only deepens the foreboding sense that Chin-Shu's fate lies in the hands of forces outside of mere human affairs.

With *Eyelids of Morning*, Zhang Guixing has once again surpassed himself, producing an epic novel that encompasses everything from rainforest ecology to the colonial history of Sarawak to a cosmological view of the evolution of all life on Earth, shuttling readers from the towns and forests of northern Borneo to the depths of interplanetary space. Under his pen, colonists deliver progress through the barrel of a gun, terrifying beasts lie in wait in the dark recesses of the rainforest, and all living things are but grist for the mill of biological and cosmological evolution. In a world where human endeavors are easily laid to waste by the forces of nature, the fearsome crocodile of Sarawak's rivers, survivor of five mass extinctions throughout ecological history, is perhaps the one fitting symbol of hope, renewal, and self-determination.

With his feet firmly planted in the tropical rainforest – the lungs of the planet – Zhang Guixing, one of the great novelists of the global south, casts his gaze across a century of intercultural commerce and conflict in Sarawak, situates it within a grand vision of ecological and cosmological destiny, and, in relating the tale of an inheritance lost and regained, points the way to humanity's future.

Love, Legends, and the Allure of Dreams: A Few Words on Zhang Guixing's Novel *Eyelids of Morning*

By Tsui Shun-Hua
Translated by Joshua Dyer

If one were to read only the parts of *Eyelids of Morning* that deal with the clashes between leftist guerillas and the soldiers of the British Empire, one might mistakenly believe it is yet another literary indictment of colonialism in Sarawak. However, in spite of the inclusion of myriad painstakingly researched details concerning the pomp and glorification of empire, the novel is far more than that. For all of the ink lavished on the coronation ceremony of Queen Elizabeth the Second in the first chapter – the strict protocol of the ceremony right down to the composition of floral arrangements, the displays of exotic beasts, the rare gems adorning the royal crown, and the exact cape the queen wore over her priceless gown – all remain in service of a single dignified phrase uttered by the young queen: "I solemnly promise…" Promises, vows, and commitments are the lynchpins of the story of *Eyelids of Morning* – its mantras, if you will.

The plot dances nimbly through a vast array of complexities. As the story unfolds, characters and predicaments multiply like the teeth of a crocodile, historical fact and fiction packed side-by-side. Zhang Guixing's pen encompasses a multitude of characters, each with its own theater of interior life, from dignified queens to wandering ghosts, commanders of vast wealth to cunning crocodile hunters, youths brimming with aspiration to maidens yearning for love – even the dust-caked laborer by the side of the road is given his due. At least equally captivating are the numerous natural creatures of Sarawak, none more so than the crocodiles that lurk in the Gambir River, their eyes glittering with the dawn light. The dark waters beneath the seemingly calm surface of the river seethe with their dark and calculating currents.

Tien Chin-Hung's harmonica provides the occasion for the first stirring of love between him and lovely Fang Wu. Their courtship has a rocky start, but after many twists and turns, and much waiting, Chin-Hung wins the heart of his beloved. What should have been the beginning of marital bliss is cut short when Fang Wu dies in the jaws of giant crocodile attracted by the glittering seventy-two carat rose-red diamond in her hand. Again and again Chin-Hung describes the beauty and allure of the diamond to his grandson Chin-Shu, but in his heart, the true diamond is his lost love Fang Wu, and the land of Sarawak where he has laid down his roots. Even as his body ages, and his mind falters, Chin-Hung can never forget the lost diamond that was large enough to reflect the entire countryside within its facets.

From childhood, Chin-Shu always swore to recover the diamond for his grandfather, an endeavor he seemed fated to pursue from birth, and which becomes the great mission of his youthful life. He

gathers a team of treasure hunters, and the seven young men leave home to enter the depths of the primeval jungles of Sarawak. The bond that holds their party together is another form of commitment: each completely trusts the others with his life. In the jungles they fall prey to the cunning commander of a squad of leftist insurgents, and flee under fire from the British Imperial Army, time and again surviving only by the interventions of a mysterious red-haired woman named Lucy. Enigmatic as a puzzle, and strikingly similar in appearance to the once beautiful Fang Wu, Lucy appears and disappears without a trace. She is the only one who can replicate the call of the yellow crowned nightingale when needed (using her harmonica), and it is Lucy who ultimately saves the seven youths and their female companions, and, cutting open the belly of the giant crocodile, recovers the diamond for Chin-Shu. In the end, Chin-Shu owes the fulfillment of his great vow entirely to Lucy.

In the second half of the novel, Chin-Shu has a bizarre dream: A giant red-haired woman carries Chin-Shu in her arms. As the dream progresses, Chin-Shu rapidly develops from an embryo into a young man, and then, just as rapidly, withers with age. As further dreamscapes unfold, time becomes even more compressed. Chin-Shu and the red-haired woman watch from a vantage point above the Earth in space, watching as 4.2 billion years of geological and ecological evolution unfolds before their eyes. Volcanoes spout blood-red magma, bubbles of life roil within the oceans, reptiles multiply, and a meteor impact ends the reign of the dinosaurs... great expanses of snow and icy peaks blankets the Earth, sunlight warms the face of a frozen planet, one day primates appear.... Chin-Chu takes it all in from on high, perhaps without ever realizing that the red-haired woman embracing him from behind is, in fact, *that* Lucy: the mother of all humanity.

One after another, life forms enact the drama of birth and extinction within the theater of Chin-Shu's dream. The sci-fi and fantasy overtones of this portion of the novel represent a stark stylistic departure, while also encompassing volumes of academic knowledge. The purpose of the fantastic alternate universe of the second half of the novel is perhaps found in the novel's epilogue, "A Soaring Ball of Fire". Therein, the author describes a legend about the *polong** that intermingles elements of the developmental and colonial history of Borneo. He then goes on to state that he never intended to write an indictment of colonialism. Instead, *Eyelids of Morning*, whether judged by textual or narrative intent, adopts a greater critical distance, casting its gaze on humanity's dependence on legend to explain both the beauty and pain of life, even clinging to the packaging of legend in its continuous act of dying. I think it is even possible to view the novel as a lengthy legend in its own right; a legend that mingles fact and fiction, encompassing undying love, terrifying monsters, unfeeling yet voluptuous fruits hanging in high trees, the wretched cannon fire of revolution, and the glory and dispossession of empire. In a world where all things traverse the distance from birth to death in an instant, perhaps only legends endure.

* The *polong* is a mythical creature, somewhat like a cross between a harpy and a witch in appearance, which acts as an intermediary agent for the spells cast by native sorcerers in Borneo. – translator's note.

EYELIDS OF MORNING

By Zhang Guixing
Translated by Brian Skerratt

Chapter 1

I

It was the grandest coronation ceremony of the twentieth century. In order to leave ample time for planning and preparation on the one hand and to allow a year's time to mourn the late King on the other, Queen Elizabeth II's coronation was held at Westminster Abbey on June 2nd, 1953, fully four hundred seventy-three days after King George VI died and the Queen inherited the throne. The coronation ceremony was planned and managed by the grand Coronation Commission, chaired by the Queen's husband, the Duke of Edinburgh. The coronation was broadcast by television and radio in forty-four languages to thirty million homes worldwide. Sales of television sets in the United Kingdom exploded; one quarter of the population of the world observed a holiday in celebration of the event. Six thousand regional trains and six thousand five hundred long-distance trains brought over two million members of the public to London. Forty-four kilometers of seats were installed along the procession route. Factories in Glasgow raced to weave the longest carpet in history, 57.3 meters long and 5.18 meters wide. Thirty-thousand soldiers from the Commonwealth countries were deployed at the ceremony; public parks air raid shelters left over from the war were repurposed as barracks, temporarily leaving London's children with nowhere to play. To ensure the dignity and orderliness of the ceremony, signs posted in red letters on white backgrounds prohibited soldiers from drinking or engaging in sexual congress during the forty-eight hours preceding the ceremony.

The main ceremony of the coronation took place at Westminster Abbey. Starting with King Harold II in 1066, Westminster Abbey had witnessed the coronations of thirty-nine English monarchs. The abbey was closed for six months, during which time a tramway was built right into the middle of the ancient structure for the delivery of tons of timber and steel. A platform was installed to seat seven thousand, five hundred guests, but the sheer numbers meant that each person had to squeeze into a seat just forty-six centimeters wide. Prime Minister Churchill had his own opinion on matters; in the days leading up to the coronation he gave out chocolates. Homes were painted the colors of the Union Jack. London's streets were decked out in crowns and the symbols of the monarchy. Children played tag wearing paper crowns. The streets were filled with citizens celebrating, sometimes all night long, and others camping out, bundled up against the cold, in order to secure a place where they could feel the proximity of the queen's royal presence.

On May 29th, 1953, the British Commonwealth climbing expedition, guided by the Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, reached the summit of Mt. Everest, the rooftop of the world, becoming the first humans to set foot on the highest mountain peak in the world. The news reached home on the morning of the coronation, sparking off the festivities ahead of schedule.

The *Times* declared: The Empire Stands at the Summit of the World.

II

1953: Queen Elizabeth II of England is crowned; humankind ascends to the summit of Everest for the first time; Stalin passes away; Khrushchev assumes the leadership of the Soviet Union; the Korean Armistice Agreement is signed in Panmunjeom; Cambodia gains independence; Egypt becomes a republic; the Cuban Revolution breaks out; Canada executes a female prisoner (Marguerite Pitre) for the last time; Hollywood releases the first 3D movies; Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck star in *Roman Holiday*; Superman appears as a live-action television show; Pierre Cardin introduces his bubble dress; Winston Churchill and Hemingway take home the Nobel Prize in Literature and Pulitzer Prize, respectively; Wei Jiangong oversees the editing of the first standardized dictionary of modern Chinese, the *Xinhua Dictionary*; Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* premiers in Paris; Chilean novelist Roberto Bolaño is born; the English-language literary magazine *Paris Review* prints its first issue; the third volume of Mao Zedong's selected works is published; Osamu Tezuka's *Sapphire Princess* ignites the craze for girls' manga; Ian Fleming publishes his first James Bond novel, *Casino Royale*; painter Xu Beihong begins his eternal slumber, the black ink horses from his brush galloping off the page towards distant Himalayan peaks; Ray Bradbury publishes his dystopian novel *Farenheit 451*; Isaac Asimov's first science fiction detective novel featuring Elijah Baley as protagonist, *The Caves of Steel*, appears serialized in *Galaxy* magazine; Shirō Ishii, retired director of the germ warfare division Unit 731, converts his home into a "bang-bang girl club" for servicing American GIs, meanwhile undertaking intensive study of Zen Buddhism; New York Yankee Mickey Mantle hits the longest home run ever recorded; Hugh Hefner founds the men's magazine *Playboy*; a Macau martial arts bout pitting masters of the tai-chi and White Crane styles against each other sets off a wave of new-style martial arts fiction; Kinsey publishes his second report on human sexuality, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*; John Kennedy and Jacqueline Bouvier marry; the giant oil painting *The Founding of the Nation* is unveiled in Beijing; the Sarawak Liberation League is established on Marxist and Maoist ideals in Malaysia; the General Assembly of the United Nations refuses membership to China; Chinese refugees swarm into Hong Kong; French paratroopers land on the Laotian border; the Soviet Union acquires the hydrogen bomb, and the U.S. and Soviet arms race compels the University of Chicago's *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* to set their "Doomsday Clock" to two minutes before midnight; some fifty thousand cats in Minamata, Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan, drown themselves in the ocean after eating fish contaminated with methylmercury from a nearby factory; British explorers search for the legendary Himalayan yeti; the Natural History Museum in London announces that the Piltdown Man is a great archaeological hoax, nothing but a human cranium fitted with a Bornean orangutan's teeth and an African chimpanzee's lower jaw; African American mathematical genius Katherine Johnson joins a working group at NASA; the CIA-sponsored Robertson Panel meets for the first time to discuss UFOs; artificial insemination is successfully carried out using frozen sperm; the double helix structure of DNA is discovered; Edwin Hubble, father of galactic astronomy, passes away; using an asteroid collected at Diablo Canyon, geologist Clair Cameron Patterson measures the age of the earth to be 4.55 billion years old; a 66 million-year-old, gigantic dinosaur fossil is discovered in Brazil; Hugh Everett III, future proponent of the "many-worlds interpretation" of quantum mechanics, graduates from Catholic University of America with a degree in chemical engineering; the Miller-Urey experiment, the classic experiment on the origins of life found in textbooks, is carried out by Stanley Miller and Harold Urey of the University of Chicago and published as "Production of Amino Acids Under Possible Primitive Earth Conditions", sending shockwaves through the scientific community.

III

The sacred objects of the monarchy – the coronation gown, the crown, the scepter, the orb, the spurs, the sword of state, the ring, Saint Edward's Chair, the urn full of anointing oil, the spoon for the oil, and so on – were taken out of storage at the Jewel House in the Tower of London. Meanwhile, the ceremonial gun salutes performed by the Royal Artillery along the riverbank by the Tower's south wall gave this ancient castle, the

residence of kings from William the Conqueror until James I, a boisterous yet eerie quality, which lasted from the eve of the coronation to the day of the event.

The Tower, constructed in 1087, was not only a royal residence, palace, and castle of Her Majesty the Queen, a witness to the succession of dynasties from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance; it was also a fortress, armory, treasury, mint, palace, astronomical observatory, bunker, chapel, menagerie, and prison. Every slab of granite, every massive stone imported from France, had a story of palace intrigue, a bloody feud, buried beneath it. Ordinarily the spirits of those imprisoned ministers and executed courtiers, the ghosts of political dissidents, wouldn't make themselves known. But over the course of those several days, they couldn't be contained.

The most frequently sighted was the mother of Queen Elizabeth I, Henry VIII's second wife, Anne Boleyn. Charged with eighty-one counts of treason and adultery, she was decapitated by a French executioner. English executioners were often unable to perform the deed with a single stroke; they would chop and chop with their axe before the head would fall off. Since Anne was sensitive to pain, King Henry hired a French swordsman at great expense to perform the execution with a keen sword. The night before Elizabeth II's coronation, Anne Boleyn appeared holding her head under her arm, riding circles around the Tower in a coach driven by a headless horseman, stopping occasionally to chat with the guards, who strove to maintain their composure. When someone asked the guard what the queen talked to him about, he said the queen asked him the name of the French swordsman, saying she felt she was right to choose death by the sword. Of course, no matter how deft the Frenchman's stroke, she had still felt the agony as her body was mutilated. Still, as she had been able to suppress the convulsions of her butchered flesh spasming outward from her severed spine, and prevent the urine from spraying out from her crotch, she had at least preserved a modicum of dignity.

Another headless ghost of noble birth was Henry VIII's charming fifth wife, Catherine Howard, another adulteress. When she strolled about the Tower's yards and corridors clad in a white robe, her head held in place precariously by her two hands, even the guards had to admire her bearing and beauty. With her head swollen up like a hag's cauldron and her delicate neck dangling below it, she looked like an hourglass, the blood spurting from her severed head down to her lovely body like the fine sands within.

When Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, saw the executioner coming for her on May 28th, 1541, she turned and ran. The executioner pursued her, hacking at random, and the beautiful, resolute, nearly seventy-year-old countess died a grisly death. Every year on May 28th, for over five hundred years, the Tower guards have heard the countess's wailing. In 1953, the year of the coronation, the countess wailed from May 28th until June 3rd, seven nights.

Twelve-year-old Edward V and his ten-year-old brother the Duke of York walked through the Tower grounds holding hands, dressed only in their nightgowns. Towards the end of their short lives they were imprisoned in the infamous Bloody Tower. This time, the ghosts of the two boys expressed their agitation in novel ways: every traveler visiting the Tower on the day of the coronation found two ghostly boys in nightgowns appearing in their holiday photographs.

On the eve of the coronation, the polar bears, wolves, rhinoceroses, tigers, leopards, and cougars once held captive in the Royal Menagerie also roamed the Tower, while the stone lions and baboons at the entrance and atop the walls were repeatedly seen to change postures and howl at the sky. The guards witnessed a group of Victorian travelers feeding live cats and dogs to the caged lions and tigers. A visitor from the age of Henry III danced with excitement in front of the leopard's cage, calling for the keeper to wash off those dirty spots. Some tourists from the time of King John – it was King John who founded the menagerie – were earnestly debating in front of a particularly humungous beast, whose long, fleshy nose and soft, oversized ears led them to suspect the monster's penis was located on its head.

Seven ravens, their secondary flight feathers clipped, walked the Tower Green with heads raised; they were in the care of the royal Assistant Ravenmasters, a group of functionaries clad in tall hats and black and red uniforms. According to legend, if the ravens ever left the Tower, the kingdom would collapse, so Charles II issued an edict that the Tower should always keep at least

seven ravens on its premises, to ensure British prosperity and prevent subjugation to foreign powers. Over the course of several hundred years of power struggles, executed royals and nobles often became morsels for their delectation. Fed on a diet of fresh meat, the seven grotesquely fat ravens, with their sleek, lustrous feathers, led a privileged life much like that of the royal family, and like the members of the royal family each raven had a noble name. They were capable of uncanny imitations of a dog's barking. The Ravenmaster charged with their care was able unfailingly to identify each one by name from its appearance and call. On June 2nd, 1953, they roved the green as usual, their life of ease unaffected by the coronation of the queen, and the grisly ghosts and ceremonial fusillade that created such an uproar in London generally did nothing to diminish their fondness for barking.

Throughout the whole of the Tower, it was only the planetrees and elms swaying in the warm evening breeze, along with the ivy scaling the Bloody Tower, that contributed some small touch of festivity to the scene.

IV

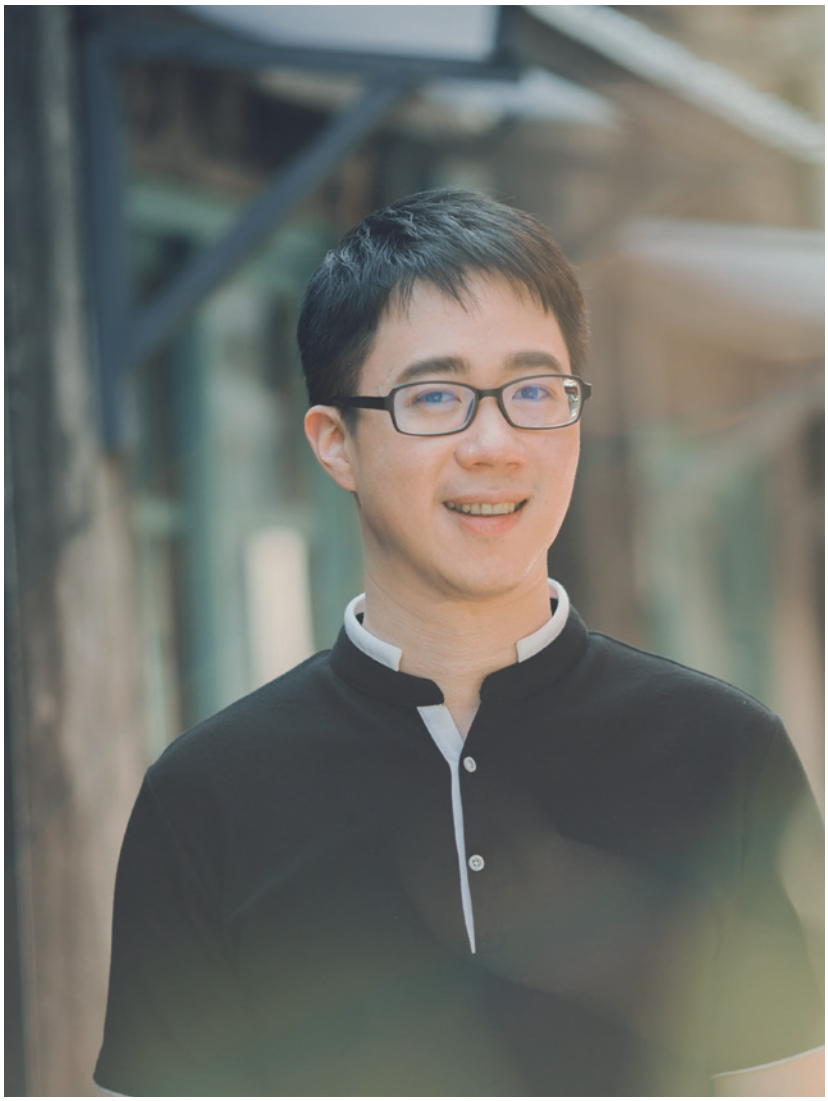
A shepherd lugged a sheep under each arm, looking for the best spot to allow the queen to view his ovine companions, painted red, white and blue for the occasion, as she rode from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey in her golden carriage. He wore a straw hat with a broad brim that covered his ears and half his face. His features were indistinct, further obscured by a chest-length beard and stringy hair that reached to his knees. He wore patched denim trousers and a tan hunting vest covered in pockets. His arms and chest were bare, revealing numerous tattoos. He seemed to be very tall, though he was constantly stooping in order to appear less conspicuous in the crowd, and yet people were constantly gaping up this giant, like ostriches craning their necks to get a look at a bashful giraffe. He made the sheep tucked under his arms look like rabbits. Still, it wasn't his physique that attracted so much attention as it was the pipe stuck between his lips: its bowl was the size of an ale glass and its stem was like the root of an old tree, as long as the shepherd's arm, resembling a Neanderthal's bone weapon. Although he was clenching the bit in his mouth, the shepherd kept propping up the bowl with his palm, suggesting the even the giant's jaw couldn't support the pipe's weight. A dense, acrid smoke redolent of excrement was emitting from the shepherd's mouth, causing those nearby to scramble clear. A few old folks who were unable to get away in time simply gave up, plopping down on the sidewalk. As the shepherd continued to puff enormous mouthfuls of smoke, the excremental odor intensified. A wave of agitation began to grow in the crowd; obscenities were uttered. It was speculated that the sheep in the giant's embrace must have long since lost consciousness in the haze.

A child borne on the back of a passing carpenter reached out his hand and poked the shepherd's arm. The shepherd didn't react. The child poked harder, accidentally stabbing the buttocks of the sheep under the shepherd's arm. The sheep suddenly came to, bleating coquettishly: *baa*. Its partner responded, equally coquettish, with two bleats of its own: *baa*, *baa*. The shepherd turned back to look at the child, but the boy couldn't make out any features beneath the shepherd's broad straw hat, apart from a nose floating like an iceberg in the shadows.

"Excuse me sir, might you be visiting from abroad?" asked a photographer in a smart-looking suit at the shepherd's side, inspecting the tattoos on the shepherd's arm with curiosity.

The shepherd cast the photographer a wordless glance, and when the photographer raised his camera, the shepherd reached out, covered the lens with his hand, and shook his head. As the shepherd walked away, though, the photographer aimed at his back and pressed the shutter. The shepherd whirled around and once again seized hold of the camera. With one squeeze of his five fingers, there came the sound of shearing metal, and when the shepherd released his grip, the lens fell to the pavement in shards. The photographer could only watch the shepherd walk away in silent astonishment.

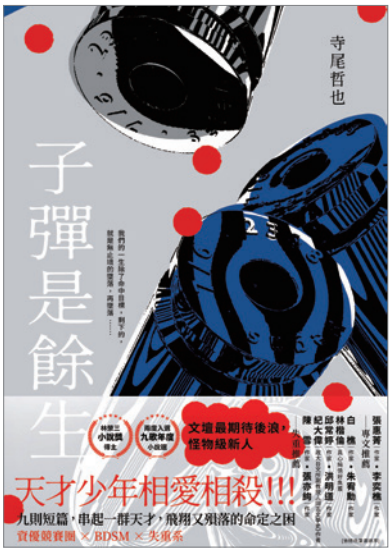
子彈是餘生
SPENT BULLETS



Terao Tetsuya
寺尾哲也

- **Category:** Short Stories, Literary Fiction
- **Publisher:** Linking
- **Date:** 10/2022
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw
- **Pages:** 264
- **Length:** 77,000 characters (approx. 50,000 words in English)
- **Rights sold:** Film (Each Other)

Terao Tetsuya studied information engineering at National Taiwan University. A Google engineer for eight years, he worked in Mountain View, Taipei, and Tokyo. He is the winner of the 2019 Lin Rong-San short story award, and his work has been included twice in Chiu Ko Publishing's annual anthology of best short stories.



*** 2023 Taiwan Literature Award**

When the brightest star within a cohort of elite engineering students leaps from the twenty-third floor of a Las Vegas hotel, his peers are left in confusion and doubt. These nine stories reveal the dark struggles and twisted motives behind the façade of competence projected by these gifted students.

The standout within an elite cohort of engineering students, Chieh-Heng is both admired and hated by his peers, who inevitably find themselves struggling to keep pace with his genius. At his best, Chieh-Heng is the bright star that lights the way ahead. At his worst, he is the darkness that swallows up the light of those around him.

When Chieh-Heng jumps from the twenty-third floor of a Las Vegas hotel, his peers are left to wrestle with their grief, envy, resentment, ambivalence, shame, and powerlessness. Why would a genius who could achieve whatever he wanted – without ever breaking a sweat – end his life? When the model of success you've exhausted yourself trying to emulate suddenly exits the stage, what is there left to strive for?

With these nine stories, Terao Tetsuya lays bare the dilemma of success faced by students at the top of the academic pyramid. From their teen years to early adulthood, from the top universities of Taiwan to the information technology giants of Silicon Valley, unrelenting pressure and intense competition are the name of the game, even at the risk of pushing oneself to the edge of sanity and the brink of despair.

Book Report:
Spent Bullets

By Kevin Wang

The hard-working geniuses of *Spent Bullets* ought to have ideal lives by the standards of any meritocracy. After attending the best schools in Taiwan, they gain employment in big tech, recognized around the world as the pinnacle of career prestige, but we do not see the rewards for their achievements. Instead, the book is focused on the grotesque contortions of psyches shaped by such hyper-competitive systems, where one's capacity for suffering is among the most important measures of worth.

Set mainly in Taipei and the San Francisco Bay Area through the past two decades, Terao Tetsuya's debut work of fiction consists of nine linked stories (or chapters) with a recurring set of characters and converging plot lines. The stories switch between different first-person perspectives, and it is not until the eighth chapter that their identities are all confirmed. A re-reading of the book, which is under 250 pages, highlights the author's ability to balance between delicately withheld information and stunning revelations.

"Terao Tetsuya" is a pen name inspired by characters from two manga series: *Over Drive*'s Terao Kōichi, who supports the main characters in their ambitions to be cycling champions, and Kuroko Tetsuya from *Kuroko's Basketball*, who is content to be a "shadow" that helps his teammates shine. This combination might hint at how Terao the author sees his role, having experienced proximity to genius as a student on the competitive programming team at NTU and as a Google software engineer.

The black hole at the center of his book is Chieh-Heng, the prodigy who can show up three hours late to a programming competition and still win. His peers enjoy remarking on his comical aloofness and incomprehensible quirks: Chieh-Heng prefers his yogurt unsweetened and with a pinch of salt. He only keeps one song on his MP3 player, which he listens to on repeat. In the three chapters told from his perspective, we see Chieh-Heng's own bafflement at the neurotypical expectations for socializing and emotional expression. Chieh-Heng never finds a sense of belonging, but it's not for lack of trying. He bends himself and diminishes his individuality to try to fit in. Within the same week, he goes from an ex-gay support group to a meet-up for gay Taiwanese men in the Bay Area, but he fails to connect because of other people's fear, misunderstanding, resentment, and obsessive adoration of him.

Mostly, Chieh-Heng does what school and work expect of him. His most vital deviation from these rigid systems is his years-long sadomasochistic power exchange with classmate Wu Yi-Hsiang, a tormentor turned lover who offers a thin tether to reality. Their relationship establishes an early and continuing conflict. Wu Yi-Hsiang is fascinated by Chieh-Heng's

inscrutable intelligence and, with an anxious need to please, carefully tends to Chieh-Heng's desire to be debased and made into nothing. But Wu Yi-Hsiang is also frustrated by Chieh-Heng's apathy and seeming inability to communicate emotionally. As their sex grows increasingly meaningless, the sub is shown to hold the real power over the dom.

None of these dynamics are stated directly, and a different reader may come up with different conclusions. While Chieh-Heng and Wu Yi-Hsiang are both first-person narrators, their stories are recounted from a cold distance. Such a detached style reflects how they have been trained to be calm under pressure from a young age. Their subtle dialogues are aligned with the "iceberg theory", which leaves much unsaid while gesturing toward certain truths. The prose often turns to qualities of light and shadow. The California sun is "bright and vapid", and in another instance, "orange like free detergent from the on-site laundry room". In the heart of a desert city, "spotlights of innumerable colors" give form "for a few fleeting seconds to jets of water that have no business being here in the first place". At times, the lens zooms in: zippers on a fly are interlocked tooth by tooth "like a greedy snake biting its own tail", and a face is adorned with "a row of freckles like an inkjet printer ad". Partly for this cinematic quality, *Spent Bullets* is now being adapted into a movie by Each Other Films, a company based in Taipei. The sense of uncertainty in the visual descriptions also highlights the theme of how impossible it is to truly understand another person.

The steady, deadpan sentences also allow for unexpected strikes of humor. In the opening story, a boy can't stop scratching at his itchy face even though he is about to get peed on by his classmates in a rite of humiliation: "Dead skin flaked off his skin as though he were a giant shiitake mushroom dispersing spores into the wind." Later in the book, after saying their wedding vows in English at a notary in Vegas, a gay man declares in Chinese to his newlywed lesbian wife, "I don't love you." She replies, "Me too."

Much of this comedy is born out of the absurdity of striving. After visiting a classmate hospitalized for her suicide attempt, Wu Yi-Hsiang vows to make a lot of money as compensation for their lost youths and self-destructive habits. But despite all the six-figure salaries and stock options that come their way, there is no description of indulgence in luxury other than a pool with added sea salt to imitate the smell of vacation and a strip club in which "grease from one face is smeared onto another" via the dancer's breasts. To save money, characters would rather drive than fly from San Francisco to Vegas. Instead of gourmet meals, they eat at Panda Express: "Chinese food as pictured in the American imagination". The most pride a character ever feels is when they snag a free washing machine at the office, having stuck an "out of order" note on it the night before.

Aside from the thrill of gun ownership and a heightened sense of social alienation, the characters behave no differently in America than they would in Taiwan. In Tsung-su's short story "Want to Fly" (1976), an important text in the lineage of tongzhi literature, the Taiwanese protagonist goes to study in America, excited by its promises of liberation, only to find himself becoming an exploited laborer. Three-and-a-half decades later, the characters of *Spent Bullets* must have no illusions about how Silicon Valley would be a mere extension of the oppressive machinery that they'd endured all along.

On their annual trip to Vegas to commemorate Chieh-Heng's death, Wu Yi-Hsiang asks his friend Ming-Heng whether he'd choose the same path again, from grueling preparations for exams in high school to their miserable jobs. Ming-Heng says yes, acknowledging that nothing about their lives would change. This obstinacy is one of the book's great puzzles. It seems that in the depths of despair, they have seen something about the world that they would not wish to unlearn. The book opens with a suicide, but it ends with another character's choice to go on living: to bear patiently the burdens of their fate, but also to bear the memory of the beloved, like a bullet in a glass case that will never tarnish.

SPENT BULLETS

By Terao Tetsuya
Translated by Kevin Wang

Chapter 3: Healthy Disorder

When my punches landed on his forehead, Chieh-Heng didn't even flinch. He seemed detached, as though the split skin and bruises on his brow had nothing to do with him. Flakes of his skin stuck to my knuckles. I thought I'd drawn blood, but it was only the slick of sweat.

"You should stop letting Hsiao-Hua take that drug," he said.

He squatted on the floor in front of me, facing my crotch. When I hit him, he would sometimes lose balance and topple back, then quickly return to his squat like a wobble doll.

"Stop letting her take drugs," he said even more softly. I knew he was just provoking me. After all, it had been Hsiao-Hua's own decision to start using Ritalin.

"I have no other choice," she'd said. It started during the ACM ICPC Asian Regional Contest. At night on campus, the entire Computer Center was lit up, and a national flag the length of three people hung over the entrance. Balloons for the contest were arranged in a square in a corner of the computer lab. That was when she first took Ritalin.

"You of all people have the least right to say that," I said, searching Chieh-Heng's indifferent face. I could not tell how he had so much trust in my aim. Just a few centimeters lower, and I could have broken his nose. A few centimeters to the side, and I'd have beaten him blind.

"Lie down," I commanded.

I pinned him onto the ground with an elbow locked around his neck, fixing his head in place. His nose bumped against my cheek as I pressed my mouth to his, our lips locking at a ninety-degree angle like goldfish attempting resuscitation.

His breaths came excited and desperate in quick, drowning gasps. The smell of his body and the damp rush of his exhalations enveloped my face. I spat hard at his open mouth, forcing every bit of spit and air I had into him. At the same time, I felt his erection quietly pushing through layers of fabric against my thigh.

"You like that, don't you." I unzipped my trousers and was in his mouth again.

A tangle of water pipes and their criss-crossed shadows ran across the floor. His back banged against the pipes in a succession of hollow thuds. It had been dark for a while. The balcony on the fourth floor of the Computer Center was secluded, with the wall of the Fisheries Institute just a few meters away to block out most sources of light. Only a small triangle of street light landed on Chieh-Heng's nose. Even at a moment like this, his expression was blank. I hated that blank expression.

◇

Problem C:
The inevitable mediocrity of the connected.

The score of a sequence of integers is defined as the bitwise OR value of all numbers in the sequence.

Now you are given a sequence of integers a_0, a_1, … a_{N-1}, and you must cut the sequence into K consecutive segments. Find the maximum possible value of the

sum of scores of all K segments.

Input: The first line contains two positive integers N and K ($K \le N \le 2\times105$) – the length of the sequence and the number of segments.

The second line contains N non-negative integers a_0, a_1, … a_{N-1} ($a_i < 2^{32}$).

Output: Output the maximum possible value of the sum of scores of all K segments.

◇

This was one of the problem sets that Hsiao-Hua bequeathed to us, and also her birthday gift to Chieh-Heng.

In high school, Hsiao-Hua had been recommended to NTU's Department of Computer Science and Information Engineering based on her exceptional performance at Selection Camp. Yet, once she got to NTU, she didn't interact with anyone in the competitive circle, nor did she hang out with people in our lab. When it came time to form teams for ACM ICPC, she came to me, someone with no competitive background.

"I developed an eating disorder at Selection Camp," she said. "Everyone there thought I was really scary."

I didn't ask, but she began to describe her bulimia in painstaking detail. She didn't gain weight because she'd vomit right after eating. As the only girl at the camp, she had the whole bathroom to herself and would feel a sense of peace whenever she lowered herself behind a stall to face the toilet. She was addicted to the way it sharpened her senses: the acidic heat of half-digested food sliding out from her throat, the strands of hair sticking to the cold sweat on her forehead, the dizziness of dehydration. She spoke faster and faster, letting a stifled pride seep from her words like that of a retired soldier telling war stories while fondly stroking their scars.

This aspect of Hsiao-Hua didn't actually bother me. At least she was willing to admit that she pushed herself to the breaking point.

"Most people at this school are garbage," she said. "Garbage with no aptitude, strutting around as though they were geniuses. They boast about giving it their all, but they have no idea what it means to really push themselves to the limit. Basically, aside from Chieh-Heng, everyone else is worthless, including you and me. I wish with my whole heart that people would understand this."

There was a twinkle in her eyes when she mentioned Chieh-Heng. I saw people like her all the time. The more they considered themselves gifted, cupped preciously in the palms of peers and teachers from youth, the more they spiraled into a hopeless fascination with Chieh-Heng once they recognized the vast gulf between them.

I knew then that Hsiao-Hua was bound to turn to drugs.

"We have no other choice," I began telling her.

After the national programming contest, Yang Chia-Hung had wept so violently in the bathroom stall that it triggered his asthma. The professor brought a crowd of people to knock down the door. When Chieh-Heng carried him out, he struggled to walk on his own. "Not you– anyone but you–," he shouted in Chieh-Heng's arms, his red face streaked with snot and spittle, helpless as a newborn baby.

"We have no other choice," I repeated. She was finally convinced.

At first, she took 10mg. After feeling the effects, she strengthened the dose until she reached the 30mg adult daily limit stated on Wikipedia. The drug gave her a dizzying thrill. It was like leaving the ground, she said. Her mind, both tense and clear, somersaulted through the air at every second.

When rashes appeared on her skin, I said, "It should be okay."

I thought she was joking when she started to convulse. But quickly, the strange twitch in her facial muscles and her chattering teeth escalated to an uncontrollable level.

I helped her out of the Computer Center before anyone noticed. Fog hung thick on Royal Palm Boulevard. The lamplights glowed hazily like spectral flames. Inside the health center, there was only one person on duty. All she did was get Hsiao-Hua to lie

down before returning to her booth. I hadn't been back to the health center since a mandatory health exam on matriculation day, and I didn't know it would be so eerie. Only one lamp was on, hanging over the adjacent bed. The partition curtains were all left open, and I could see all the way to the far end of the narrow ward.

Hsiao-Hua's convulsions gradually eased. Her muscles relaxed, and her teeth stopped chattering. Her breaths were raspy, but as long as she could make that sound, it meant that she was still here.

"Don't let Chieh-Heng know," she said, looking defeated.

I was quiet, observing the consequences of what I had incited. Seeing her on the bed, eyes wide and breaths heavy, muttering words meant for no one in particular, gave me an inexplicable sense of consolation. It must have been the most peaceful I'd felt since coming to NTU. Upon realizing that I was no more virtuous than Hsiao-Hua's Selection Camp classmates and no more twisted, I was relieved beyond measure.

◇

There was a shooting at Virginia Tech University. The shooter began by killing two students at a residence hall. Then, he proceeded to the building that housed the engineering department, where he launched indiscriminate attacks that resulted in thirty-two deaths and twenty-three injuries. He killed himself in the same building. In the time between the two attacks, he'd sent a package to NBC News with a manifesto: "You had a hundred billion chances and ways to have avoided today, but you decided to spill my blood. You forced me into a corner and gave me only one option."

I told Ming-Heng about today's headline.

"Mm," Ming-Heng said. "Very therapeutic."

On NTU CSIE night, the first-year women's dance team was scheduled to give a big performance before intermission. Ming-Heng and I watched from backstage, where we managed the lights. During a break in the song, the dancers tore off their hoodies, leaving only their cut-up department t-shirts that exposed all the skin on their torsos save for their breasts. Hsiao-Hua, who stood in the least noticeable position at the rear, snatched off her hoodie just barely in time with the beat.

She was trying too hard. Her movements were so high-strung that it made those who watched her fear an impending disaster.

"When do you think Hsiao-Hua will shoot us all?" I asked.

The audience was in shadow, though their glow sticks emitted dots of light that swung back and forth like bioluminescent creatures in the deep sea.

"That wouldn't happen," he said. "She's not that kind of person."

The music went on, each blast of bass an unnerving squeeze on the chest. Flurries of noise rose from the audience: whoops, shouts, confessions of love. At the front of the stage, columns of fire erupted from the flame machines, instantly lighting up everyone's faces. The dancers took a knee. Someone rushed on stage with a bouquet, tripped on a wire, and landed with a thud.

"What a shame."

"What's a shame?"

The flames had briefly illuminated Ming-Heng's sweat-soaked side profile. I regretted my question. After all, nothing there was worth lamenting.

◇

The trick is to say "we" instead of "you". Always tie yourself to the other person to maintain a mental image of shared fates: we have no other choice; we must give it our all; we never give up. These phrases should be taboo, because research has shown motivational phrases can strengthen suicidal tendencies. As for what to say when you want to convince someone not to die – well, I'm not sure about that.

"I've actually known for a while," Hsiao-Hua said.

"Known what?" I asked.

The wind was especially strong on the rooftop of the department building at night. There was almost ten meters of space between me and her. I was at the door while she was on the other side of the railing by the edge of the roof. We were as still as two pillars of

salt, waiting to be eroded. I had no idea what to do or say. When Hsiao-Hua wasn't miserable, I wanted her to suffer more. When she was really on the verge of disappearing from this world, I wanted her to stay.

"I know why you hate me so much," she said.

"Don't be ridiculous."

"It's because you see yourself in me," she said. "Funny, isn't it? Well, at least I think it's funny. Don't you get what I mean?"

She took a step back, one hand gripping the railing. "I wish I could see the look on Chieh-Heng's face when he finds out."

I took a deep breath. "Even if you were right, I know you're not as crazy as that Virginia guy on the news."

"Can you come here? I can't climb back over on my own," she said.

I closed our distance step by step. Her cheeks flickered as light ebbed across her face. The shadows from her bangs sprawled like branches over her forehead.

She said, "Oh, there's something I forgot to tell you. I know what you do with Chieh-Heng on the rooftop."

"And on the Computer Center balcony. I know about that, too."

When I was close enough to touch her, she began to laugh. It was a laugh of earnest satisfaction, as though she had accomplished something significant.

"You really did come over. Great job! Here's your reward," she said. Right in front of me, she leaned back and let go.

◇

Problem H: The singularity point.

Given a convex polygon P with N edges and an integer K, a Niezick-Linnai K-gon is defined as having K vertices that lie on the edges of P such that the perimeter of P is divided equally. A minimal Niezick-Linnai K-gon is the Niezick-Linnai K-gon with the smallest area.

Now, you want to apply this process repeatedly until the end of the world – given the initial polygon P and K, you want to find the minimal Niezick-Linnai K-gon, K_1 of P, then find the minimal Niezick-Linnai K-gon, K_2 of K_1, and so on, until the shape converges to a point Q.

Input: The first line contains two integers, N and K ($3 \le N, K \le 1000$) – the number of vertices of the original and new convex polygon.

Each of the next N lines contains two integers x_i and y_i, ($-105 \le x_i, y_i \le 105$), meaning the coordinates of the vertices of the initial polygon. The vertices are given in a counterclockwise order.

Output: output the coordinates of the converged point Q. The answer is considered correct if its relative or absolute error does not exceed 10-8. If it is not possible to converge to one point, output "impossible" (without quotes).

◇

This was the last problem set Hsiao-Hua gave to Chieh-Heng.

The department had arranged for a group visit to see Hsiao-Hua in the hospital. Her popularity took me by surprise. There were even some classmates who had folded a thousand origami cranes for her. The room brimmed with medical equipment, including an infrared eye tracker. The only movable part left in Hsiao-Hua's body was her left eye, and she relied on it to type. A speaker by her head read out her words in the odd, monotonous Chinese of an answering machine.

"Thank–you–every–one–for–coming–to–see–me."

Chieh-Heng was standing in the corner by the door, but she still spotted him.

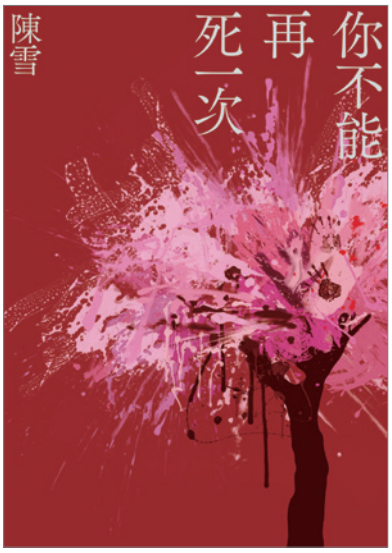
"Maestro–I–am–j–j-j-j-j-j-j-j-j–"

你不能再死一次
DON'T DIE AGAIN

Chen Xue
陳雪

- **Category:** Crime
- **Publisher:** MirrorFiction
- **Date:** 6/2022
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw
- **Pages:** 320
- **Length:** 157,800 characters (approx. 102,500 words in English)
- **Rights sold:** Portuguese (DarkSide)

Since the publication of her first book in 1995, Chen Xue has gone on to publish numerous essays, short stories, and novels. Her novel *Dear Accomplice* was awarded the 2022 Taipei Book Fair Award. Her other works include *Fatherless City*, *Skyscraper*, *The Child on the Bridge*, *The Book of Bad Women*, and *Ten Years in a Same Sex Marriage*.



Li Hai-Yen's father was sent to prison for the murder of her high school classmate. Fourteen years later, a shockingly similar murder takes place in her hometown, and Li Hai-Yen, now a journalist, returns to confront her painful past, and uncover the truth before the killer can strike again.

Li Hai-Yen has finally returned to Peachgrove Town. Fourteen years ago, the body of her friend Ting Hsiao-Chuan was found lying naked beneath a peach tree in her family's orchard. Her father, who had become an alcoholic in the wake of her mother's death, was hastily convicted of the crime. Unable to escape the label of "murderer's daughter", Li Hai-Yen left Peachgrove to start a new life, and did her best to forget everything about her past. Now, the corpse of another young woman has been discovered in an orchard in Peachgrove, and nearly every detail of the crime scene matches the original murder. Is it the work of a copycat killer? Or, was Li Hai-Yen's father wrongly convicted, and is the original killer active once more?

Drawn back to Peachgrove by the murder, Li Hai-Yen, now a reporter, encounters Ting Hsiao-Chuan's high school sweetheart, Sung Tung-Nien, now a police officer. Each has their own reasons for seeking the truth, and, as they revisit their traumatic past, so, too, must they revisit the pain each left buried behind them. The murderer has sworn he will strike again in seven days, and, soon, another girl goes missing from the town. Past and present intermingle as the two sleuths, each burdened with pain and regret, race against time to crack the case before another body is found.

For every crime there is the victim and the accused; but they are not the only ones whose lives are forever altered. More than a decade after the murder of her friend and the imprisonment of her father, Li Hai-Yen searches for the answers that could redeem them all: victim, accused, and herself, as well.

The Night Will Always End

By Kristin
Translated by Jim Weldon

The opening chapter resembles the start of a movie: the corpse of a pretty young girl lies in a peach orchard; whiteness, blood stains, blossom and the naked body create a strange beauty, accompanied by a growing sense of dread. With crisp and flowing imagistic writing, Chen Xue's new crime fiction sets the scene for a serial murder investigation that spans many years. This becomes the core of a story that revolves around several key figures involved in this first murder, approached at the level of human nature, paying equal attention to the protagonists' emotional lives and the narrative of events, each character experiencing a hard growing dogged by their own particular demons to become closed and lonely adults. Years pass, then fate brings these people back to where it all began to look for clarity about the cruel and poignant truth behind that bloody murder and in a search for a way out in their own lives.

Of the threesome of friends back then, Ting Hsiao-Chuan, Sung Tung-Nien, and Chou Chia-Chun, one has died in the flower of her youth, leaving behind her first love who blames himself overmuch, and a best friend who is now universally known as "the murderer's daughter". Fourteen years have sped by, but nothing is over just because the case was so hastily closed. Sung Tung-Nien has chosen the life of a policeman, a zombie-like existence revolving entirely around his work. Chou Chia-Chun has undergone a total transformation to become industry-leading crime feature writer Li Hai-Yen, forever seeking answers in the tragedies of others, answers about tragedy, about grief and about survival.

The Line Between Good and Evil

A detective novel such as this, proceeding from an exploration of human nature, is bound to challenge its readers' moral compasses. Right and wrong, good and evil, light and shade, life and death, beauty and ugliness, love and hate; everything exists as oppositions, but in *Don't Die Again*, everyone involved has their own way of thinking and has been living in a gray zone of ambiguity for a long time; only by escaping the fetters of conventional views will they be able to dig down to the truth about their real feelings.

In the case of Li Hai-Yen and her desire for clarity on all the unanswered questions in her life, for example her father and his supposed suicide out of guilt for his crimes, she finds the most practical approach to be voluntarily coming into contact with criminals and seeking to understand them, attempting to see the way the world works from their point of view. For Sung Tung-Nien, no amount of solving cases can work away the clot still lodged in his heart; nowhere can he find a path to his own redemption, and he is utterly consumed by a sense of powerlessness in the face of death. Also, one of the things "emotional realist"

writing seeks to achieve, beyond just telling us who the murderer was, is an exploration of the motive for the crime and the presentation of a more complete truth. The choice is to explore causes and influences at the psychological level and to shine a light into the shadow cast by social and environmental factors.

By and large, tragedy occurs not due to any single cause but as the result of a whole chain of misfortunes. Each person is always the protagonist of their own story in what actually happens, and each has their own version of the truth and their own way of responding to the world. By showing us the roads each of her core characters have come down, Chen Xue presents a thorough and well-ordered account of how the process of growing up and the environment that takes place in shape the particular qualities of a person's character.

Traumatic Memory

In this book, Chen Xue once again explores the major theme of traumatic memory through the medium of genre fiction. Sung Tung-Nien and Li Hai-Yen have both suffered profoundly because of the darkness in their childhoods and the murder, the effects revealing themselves in various aspects of their characters such as their silence and closed-off natures. They struggle on alone, doing all they can to forget, but are constantly being pulled back into the past, their lives in a stagnant state that began when they were sixteen, flipping back and forth between repression and avoidance. However, with some good fortune, the workings of love and fate mean they are no longer compelled to suffer the pain of making a fresh start all alone. Li Hai-Yen cracks the icy seal that has kept Sung Tung-Nien's heart frozen for so long, and Sung in his turn proves time and again through his actions that he is eager and determined to make a go of building a life together. It is a healing moment during which they can genuinely appreciate the truth of the maxim that "no man is an island".

Love Is Always Mightier Than Hate

The meaning of this crime fiction's title, *Don't Die Again,* is made manifest in the way that love remains the only answer even where, during the course of these serial murders, terrible crimes have been committed and indelible marks left on the soul. Which is why, even after a separation that has lasted many years, Li Yen-Hai and Sun Tung-Nien each still plays the part of only possible savior for the other; never, from their childhood years onward, have they known the security of being loved and cared for, always driven and controlled by their emotional wishful thinking, yet how many times does it turn out to be the case that true love is not about what you do, but what you don't do?

In the gap between getting and not getting, we catch a glimpse of love's power to destroy and simultaneous power to make good, the complexity that has been a theme Chen Xue repeatedly explores in her fiction. Li Hai-Yen comes to sense that love and suffering are also like this, amorphous and impervious to clear understanding. Sometimes when two people are on a journey together and have already been through so much, they will not fear for the future even if it promises only more hard trials and long nights. If all before has only been a world of darkness, then when a beam shines to cut through the night, be it never so weak or fleeting, then the light can defeat the dark and the travelers win through to a new life, testimony to the beauty and meaningfulness of sorrow.

DON'T DIE AGAIN

By Chen Xue
Translated by Jim Weldon

Prelude

The pinkish haze could be seen from a long way off, the leaves on the trees rustling where a light breeze had blown across the thin mist, a whirl of petals drifting on the wind. The grove was everywhere a riot of peach blossom; various items hung in the branches of the tree with the richest burst of flowers. Highest, on the tip of the topmost branch, was a white sailor suit, thin and light, flapping in the wind like a flag, its whiteness all the more eye-catching against the pink of the blossom. When the eye followed the fluttering of the sailor suit to the left, a blue pleated skirt could be seen hanging from another branch. To the right hung a pair of white underpants and a white undershirt. Below them, a pink backpack was hooked in the branches, then further down still, a pair of long, white socks, one higher, one lower. The tree had become a display stand for all a young girl's personal things.

The blossom, where it had fallen on the short turf formed a carpet of petals, and in its center bloomed the face of a young girl. Her exquisite features were finely carved as any statue. A pair of white gym shoes had been placed by her side.

The girl's eyes were closed, faint scratches apparent on her pallid face; beads of dew settled on her long, curling lashes; a slight redness blushing at the very tip of her straight nose; petals scattered here and there across her cheeks, and one peach blossom landed square between her parted lips. She appeared at first glance to be sleeping, but closer inspection revealed the purplish red marks of strangulation around her neck.

Her plump cheeks were still child-like. Her long hair hung down straight from behind the pristine white of her ears to her breast. The girl was completely naked. Blossom had fallen on her body; here and there between the petals, spread across her breasts, belly and sides, were a number of open wounds of various sizes, some deeper, others not, blood already coagulated.

The young woman's two arms were spread wide at her sides, palms facing up, cupping the petals that had settled there.

There were a number of people gathered around the girl, and more hurrying over from away off. They included uniformed police officers scurrying back and forth, plainclothes detectives dashing about, forensics specialists squatting in their coveralls. Others had begun to surround the scene with yellow barrier tape, or point cameras all about, or run out long tape measures here and there, or unpack an array of boxes and test tubes, swabs and tweezers, or don transparent surgical gloves and mark various spots around the body. Each person had their allotted task and busied themselves around the girl with their various equipment. A police siren could be heard in the distance, and further off still, a crowd was beginning to surge in the direction of the scene.

"She looks like she's sleeping."

"Like a painting."

"So beautiful."

"A beauty like that is terrifying."

Snatches of speech drifted over. The tang of fresh blood mingled with the scent of peach blossom to make a heady stench. One of the younger police

officers started to retch.

There were people trying to push through the barrier tape. Someone was shouting, but the words were muffled.

Part One: The Home-Comers

1.

Li Hai-Yen could always remember that house on a stretch of flat ground to the west side of Peachgrove town. When she was a child, the area was not yet built up and there were few neighbors. It was a long walk to the shops or market. Her grandfather had built the detached house on a patch of waste ground, and planted the grove of peach blossom trees and the orchard. After her grandfather died and her father took the place on, he spent a good deal of time refurbishing, rebuilding the house using traditional methods so it was both brand-new and old-style, all to his own painstaking design. Her father dug up the abandoned orchard, keeping only a small cottage and a plot of land on which he planted vegetables. He kept the peach blossom grove with its dozens of trees in neatly serried ranks. In blossom time, it was an expanse of pinks, a sight to delight the eye.

There was a road running by the house that went into town. They were on the outskirts here; there was a bus, but whenever her parents had business in town, they would drive the family car. In the evenings, the sound of the car returning could be heard from a long way off. She would often stand at the window looking out at the grove of peach blossom trees, seeing their full bloom in spring, then when the season was past, watching the blossom drift down on the wind, until the whole ground was thickly carpeted. Her mother would gather the fallen blossom. When she asked what for, her mother replied that it was just that she thought it was so pretty, it seemed a shame to leave it laying on the ground.

Sometimes she would bring classmates back to play, especially those days when she had been practicing with the choir. Those were the days she most looked forward to, everyone practicing hard, and then returning on the bus together. There was still a long walk to her house after they got off the bus, but they would be in high spirits, singing as they walked. She sang alto. One of their pieces had a female solo, the most important section of the whole song. She would always hold her breath during that part to put all her energy into listening to the voice of the soloist as it rose above the others. It was a sound that seemed to have come down from Heaven. When that girl sang, it would fill every corner of Hai-Yen's mind, creating a world filled with scenes and stories, illustrating the emotions of the song. The piece was called "Swallow's Song".

Hai-Yen recalled the day of the inter-school competition. The choir had traveled to the venue by bus, and she had brewed a big flask of malva nut tea in readiness, and brought loquat syrup, too, for the soloist to take, as she remembered the girl had told her she would get a sore throat if she took a chill. She had to sing the solo, and they were going to be in a real pickle if she lost her voice. When Hai-Yen gave her the flask of medicinal tea, the girl rewarded her with a warm and gentle smile.

Their performance that day was a great success, and the entire audience cheered for the girl. Her rich voice had started out low, then steadily took flight following the melody, until the high notes soared graceful as any swallow. She seemed to expend no effort at all when she sang, as if all she needed to do was open her mouth and keep breathing and the notes would come out. Her voice rang and reverberated around the great spaces of the performance hall. Hai-Yen was intoxicated by the sound.

O Swallow, hear me sing this song my beloved, my darling; listen as I tell these things to you, my Swallow;
O Swallow, how you are joyous, warm and full of life; how your smile glitters like the shining stars;
The bend of your brows and the shine of your eyes, your fine neck and hair so long; you are my girl, o Swallow;
O Swallow, don't forget your promise, don't change your heart; I am yours and you are my Swallow.

It was the last time she ever heard the girl sing.

They won the competition and they were all full of praise for the girl as they rode the bus back to their school. When they arrived, the girl's boyfriend was waiting for her at the school gates. She chatted with them a while, and then the girl said, "We'll be off, then. Don't forget, I've come round your house today to do our homework together!" The girl gave Hai-Yen a wink. This was an understanding they had: whenever the girl had a date with her boyfriend, Hai-Yen served as her excuse for arriving home late. Hai-Yen enjoyed the time she spent with the couple, even if it was only a few minutes. She felt so happy as the three of them chatted together outside the school gates.

Not long after the competition, the girl went out to meet her boyfriend one night but disappeared en route. Two days later, she was found lying dead in the peach blossom grove at Hai-Yen's house. Her father was awoken from his drunken sleep by the police knocking at the door of the cottage. They soon discovered a blood-stained fruit knife in the cottage, and her father became a suspect, and was arrested on the spot.

Hai-Yen's whole world fell apart overnight.

She recalled how someone had once said to her that peach blossom could cause demonic possession. Perhaps her father had been possessed.

Yes, there in the peach blossom grove, a girl had died, the pretty girl who sang "Swallow's Song", and everyone in town said it was her father who had killed her, though Hai-Yen did not want to believe it.

Deep in the night, she seemed to hear "Swallow's Song". She rose and went to look out the window. The bare grove lay wreathed in night mist. Someone had said there was a mist the night the girl died. The mist had enveloped the girl's naked body, wrapping it like a thin film, as if to protect her and prevent anyone spying on her.

The girl's name was Ting Hsiao-Chuan.

The peach blossom grove, her father, Ting Hsiao-Chuan, the "Swallow's Song", how had these things become linked? She could not think clearly. Her head was a mess. She was interviewed by the police time and again: what happened that day? Had Ting Hsiao-Chuan visited your house before? Were you friends with Ting Hsiao-Chuan?

In her confusion, Hai-Yen did not know how to answer. Any responses she gave might make her father's situation worse. All she was sure of was that her father could not have killed anyone. Even when drunk, he had never been cruel. The one cruel thing he had ever done was to slowly destroy himself with drink. She knew her father was trying to numb himself; could that be enough to turn him? Suddenly, she was no longer so sure. Increasingly, she felt there was likely a side to her father that she did not know, not that she would ever have expected that side to be so dark and twisted.

She had sat beside the girl at school. Their families had come together to watch them performing with the choir. Sometimes, Hai-Yen had a vague feeling that she ought to have been the one to be killed. She was, after all, daughter of the owner of the peach grove, and she had slept there, lying on a bed of peach blossom.

Yet, it had not been her.

Oh Swallow, who was it that smothered your song, stopped up your breath, made a corpse of you, so that now you cannot answer these questions? Hai-Yen held her breath and concentrated, waiting for the sound of song to carry on the air, waiting for those answers that would never come.

She sometimes lay wake in the night and saw her father's face right up close before her – a face long since turned to dejection and despair, even madness, in the wake of her mother's death – and it would seem unfamiliar, even frightening. Her father said he had not killed anyone; all he had done was get drunk. Her father contested the charges against him with a crazed energy. He changed his lawyer, and would speak to no one else. He claimed his previous lawyer had tricked him into confessing. He said his mental state was normal. He said he was innocent of any crime.

Hai-Yen wanted to shout out loud that if her father drank all the time, it was only because he was so sad. He would never kill anyone; the crazed look on his face was not cruelty, it was despair.

Whether despair might drive a man to kill, she did not know.

She did not know then that she would never see her father again.

2.

Li Hai-Yen always carried a black notebook when she conducted an interview, a small pad that could be held easily enough in one hand. Even when everyone else started using digital recorders, or using their phones to record speech and video, Hai-Yen still carried her notebook, quickly jotting down what her interviewee said.

She liked to hear directly and then immediately write down what was said to her. It was a type of first-hand record that allowed intuitive insights. Even if it only amounted to a few jotted words, she could get to the core of every utterance. She did not trust memory, in much the same way as she did not trust voice recordings, afraid that all of the recording paraphernalia would prevent her experiencing an authentic impression of the actuality. Her interview technique came across as old-school, but perhaps because she was writing rapidly in her notebook and not constantly staring into her interviewee's eyes, when she did occasionally look up, she would find they had lowered their guard and were willing to talk more freely. Her notebook became a protective screen, her camouflage; she let her ears do the work instead of her eyes, every word listened to with such careful attention was heard more clearly; its tone and timbre, the vibrations of the throat and the movements of lips and teeth; each thing left unsaid, every stumble and mumble or sudden change of subject, every evasion, deliberate or unconscious. It was like listening to music and being able to catch each shift in tone or duff note as it happened.

She was a reporter; her work entailed asking questions, looking, listening, recording, and then taking something out of these that went beyond the words spoken. For many reasons, this was the path she had chosen.

Li Hai-Yen, thirty years old, with a secret hidden beneath her slight and pretty exterior. She had done various jobs after graduating university until, after she passed the hiring exam for the newspaper, she started out on the community news beat. After reporting on a murder that caused a sensation, the paper promoted her to specialist reporter and she chose to write about crime. That mainly entailed interviewing the families of the victims, the investigating officers, the lawyers and prosecutors, and so forth. She also on occasion had the opportunity to interview the criminals themselves. Her reporting went in-depth and garnered a number of awards. Her editor thought she was a natural. She would write about a case from a variety of angles, by and large absent any bias and free of the influence of online discussions or the views presented in other media. She had her own style and her own point of view. The newspaper valued her reporting highly, and largely gave her a free hand when it came to selecting her subject matter. She could come and go from work as she pleased. She was a slow writer, dragging a story out until her editor was fit to explode, but then, at the last moment before her deadline, she would turn in yet another outstanding piece.

There was no requirement for her to be at the office every day, but when she did come by, she would bring coffee for everyone. She bought some for the editor-in-chief, the general editor, and the two sub-editors on her team, and would smile and refuse when they tried to pay her, telling them the coffee shop was downstairs in her building and the owner always gave her a discount. As the only woman on her team, she felt she had to work harder than anyone else. Sometimes the effort she put in and her driven character meant she put too much into the job. Often, she would come to the end of a series of interviews feeling on the point of collapse, still a long way short of where she wanted to be, and everything all in a muddle. It was enough to make her doubt herself, though in the end she always proved herself capable.

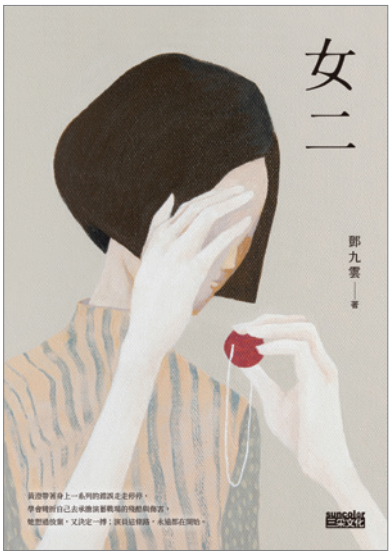
"Getting to the Truth, Seeing Human Nature" was the promotional blurb the newspaper put under her byline. Given her self-doubts, she found it ironic, but she accepted it. And why not? She had never lasted much more than six months at any of the many other jobs she had tried. The newspaper had become her refuge from the storm, the place she belonged. She looked at it like this: she was always going to make mistakes, so why at least make them in a place she liked?

女二
SECOND LEAD

Joanne Deng
鄧九雲

- **Category:** Upmarket Fiction
- **Publisher:** Sun Color
- **Date:** 2/2023
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw
- **Pages:** 464
- **Length:** 163,700 characters (approx. 106,400 words in English)

Actress, director, and writer Joanne Deng earned degrees in Korean language and advertising from National Chengchi University, and an MFA from East 15 Acting School at the University of Essex. Debuting as a model at age eighteen, she began acting at age twenty, and by thirty she was writing and curating exhibitions and performances. Her previous published works include essays and short story collections. *Second Lead* is her first full-length novel.



*** 2023 Kingstone Bookstore Rising Star Award**
*** 2021 Taipei Literature Award**

A young actress can't seem to break free from supporting roles, both in her family and in her work. As she comes to terms with the sexual politics of the industry, and the relationship patterns imposed by her childhood, she gradually finds the strength to write the script of her own life.

Growing up in a household with an absentee father and an emotionally unavailable mother, Claire Huang was primarily raised by her elder sister Stella. With a twelve-year age gap separating them, Stella served as Claire's primary role model, but she also cast a large shadow. As an adult, Claire's resemblance to a Japanese movie star leads her into a career in acting. Starting as an unseen stand-in, she applies to talent competitions, and attends various screen tests, finally signing a contract with an agent after receiving the recommendation of a middle-aged movie director, Mr. W.

As she pursues her dreams in the performing arts, Claire watches as her sister becomes mired in an extra-marital affair, leading to a falling out with their mother. The realities of sexual politics become all the more apparent when the power dynamics of her relationship with Mr. W begin impacting her career options. Still stuck in the rut of playing supporting roles, and aware that time is slipping away, Claire moves to London for further training. When yet another big opportunity suddenly evaporates, Claire is forced to question whether she should continue to pursue her passion for acting. Or is there some way to thread the needle between her relationships and her dreams, and begin living the life she truly wants?

With sensitive and refined prose, and an eye for the rich visual detail of life in the performing arts, Joanne Deng recounts the story of an actress contending with the issues of class, gender, and family as she charts her own course in life. From her days as a stand-in, to fresh-faced newcomer, to supporting, and finally, leading actress, to motherhood – through all of her loves and follies – Claire remains steadfast in her search for her authentic self, bringing sincerity, tears, and laughter to this tale of modern womanhood.

Diabolical Diva, or Married Woman: What Other Ending Could There Be for the Actress in *Second Lead?*

By Eslite Bookstore
Translated by Mary King Bradley

Joanne Deng has had two identities since 2015: actor and writer. After a number of short stories and essays, she attempted her first novel and immediately received recognition, winning the Taipei Literature Award. The title of this novel about "actresses" is *Second Lead*, the term used to refer to a supporting actress.

From her auditions as a 20-year-old model to now, as she enters her forties, Joanne's twenty years of experience in the performing arts have included roles in both film and theater, and directing as well as acting credits. As a creator, she believes her role is a passive one, and it is the ideas that seek her out. She wants to explore what she has seen and heard over the years, distilling these experiences in her writing.

When can an actor, perpetually relegated to supporting roles, expect to become the lead?

The protagonist of *Second Lead*, Claire Huang, is the second of two daughters. Launched into an unexpected acting career because of her resemblance to a Japanese actress, she starts out as a stand-in and then endures an endless wait for her chance to play the lead. "She has been playing a supporting role her entire life. When someone is acting, no matter how small the role, we have to help them create their personal backstory. Even if an actor is playing a supporting role in this particular story, there will be other stories in which she is the protagonist. The same is true for Claire Huang". Whether she is on stage or in front of the camera, the audience sees Claire in these supporting roles, yet we also see how exciting her life script is as a woman. We see her persistence in seeking out an acting career, her emotional choices, how she faces up to the relationships in her family of origin.

The story's zoomed-out perspective is divided throughout the novel into leading and supporting roles. As she waits for her place on stage, Claire is fully aware that her sister has the lead role at home. An absent father and seemingly never-there mother have made Stella Huang caregiver as well as big sister to Claire. This relationship between the sisters, says Joanne, is a common situation in dysfunctional families. The elder sister takes on the role of the mother and becomes the caregiver. Even after the younger sibling has become an adult, she retains the habit of using her elder sister as a reference. Stella does more than simply take care of Claire; her love enables her sister to pursue a life untroubled by family relationships.

The story cuts too close for comfort

Joanne says that while she was writing *Second Lead*, she read almost every literary work there was about actors, then supplemented these sources with real-life examples. She concluded that there are only two types of actresses. One type becomes the eternally youthful, diabolical diva; the other gets married and becomes a wife. Apart from these two outcomes, can there be any

other possibility that isn't boring? "What are the good and bad endings for an actress? This, too, is a question I reflect on in my work."

To determine Claire's ending in *Second Lead*, Joanne asked herself this question, but also turned to her own acting experiences. Writing with a crazed intensity for five months, she endured both physical and mental discomfort. The physical pain was caused by repetitive strain injuries and inflammation in her hands. As for the mental pain she felt, Joanne describes it as "a deeply overwhelming and terrifying state". An actor retains 10 percent of their rationality because there are still things to do after stepping off the stage. A novelist is completely sucked into a state of writing down whatever happens to come to mind: "It seems as if in writing *Second Lead* I tried to revisit some of my decisions and then experienced new outcomes for these." To recall a past that cannot be altered is sure to create some difficulties in addition to bringing a sense of change, especially when the story is one so close to the author.

Director, actor, writer: Which identity has the lead role?

Writer's block happens in the places an author is most deeply connected to the work. A desire to explore human relationships led to research on the Family Constellations psychotherapy method, an answer for how to position Claire's family members, and to many rewrites and revisions. In reflecting on the performing arts, the author had Claire participate in a Chinese reality television show, which involved sorting out improvised exchanges with the male actor, devising back-and-forth dialogue, and inserting the host's questions as a counterbalance to these. Planning out the improvised dialogue section was a mirror for Joanne's motivations. "That section was very much about sorting out my feelings on the performing arts. I couldn't let the writer step too far into the leading role, though. I had to let the actor imagine the best way for that scene to be performed and put that in, and at the same time, I couldn't let it become exposition." The scene had to be carefully penned and revised many times to let readers approach its central idea more gradually.

As she mastered her roles as actor and writer, she also developed greater self-awareness. "I have a weakness. I'm not very good at writing malicious people." The definition of "malicious", says Joanne, is "hurting people who are completely irrelevant to you". Claire meets an actress who appears to be a manipulative schemer and the director Mr. W. who plays with others' emotions. They aren't actually bad people, however. They are simply interested in their own self-gratification, just as Claire is.

Joanne humbly admits her weakness as a writer, but for a reader, her singular use of language invites an enjoyable contemplation of the smallest details. This is especially true of her "picturesque descriptions". Joanne shares her method for creating these. "The way I write imagery is to describe the characters' positions relative to each other and their postures. For example, in this conference room now, everyone is focused on different things. This is the part I like to describe. It allows the reader to enter into the setting right away and instantly feel the tension in the relationships." Through Claire's role in the book, we see a play and a performance in which there are not just the actors but other individuals, too, who are invisible to the audience and have the ability to control the actors.

Five years isn't enough; the distillation process can begin only after twenty years

"If I wasn't an actor, I would never have written this book." The deepest impression that remains after reading *Second Lead* is the changes that occur in the protagonist throughout the course of her mental journey as an actor. Claire's desire to act stems from fear – we see that waiting is the inevitable fate of an actor, and that the power structure in which actors find themselves can sometimes make them uncomfortable, but that it is also something they can do nothing about. In-depth analyses such as these peel back the surface beauty of the performing arts. Joanne is frank, saying that having some acting experience would not have been enough to write *Second Lead*. "If I had only been acting for five years, I couldn't have written this book. I have been an actor for twenty years. I live in Taiwan. So, the book's characters align with that timeframe and place."

SECOND LEAD

By Joanne Deng
Translated by Mary King Bradley

Act 1: Stand-in

01

Barefoot, she stepped into her sister's cloth shoes, so loose they were all but unwearable. Grit pricked her bare soles, but she didn't care about that. As soon as she had started to run, the shoes had fallen off. She had to turn back, scoop them up, and put them on again, then shuffle as she ran to make them stay.

This childhood incident was probably why Claire Huang took such small steps as an adult. Whenever she was in a hurry, she felt as if something was about to fall off. Her movements were neither fast nor slow, a bit constrained, all due to those hand-me-down, ill-fitting shoes.

Before the start of everything else, there had been her sister, Stella Huang.

Claire was convinced that her sister's face was the first thing she had seen after she was born. Or at least that was how she remembered it. Stella used to spend the whole day leaning over the front of Claire's crib, extending a playful finger. The two sisters were twelve years apart. Rumor had it that their mother lost a baby in the gap between them, and just when she thought another child would be impossible, Claire was born.

Claire's arrival meant a complete reshuffling of everyone's place in family portraits. When Claire was small, she wouldn't let anyone except Stella hold her, so the elder sister sat next to their mother, her arms around the younger sister. Their father stood behind them, alone. Their mother had a portrait taken every year, but the four of them were invariably looking in different directions. Their mother would look left, their father right, Stella down. Claire was the only one who always looked at the camera. After she turned six, her father's place in these photos remained empty.

When Claire was learning to walk, she would toddle along on unsure feet and bump into Stella's backside. She was soon eager for school, and it was Stella who took her to kindergarten on the first day. Right before Stella was about to leave her there, she told her little sister that she would wait for her at a bigger school. So from that very first day, Claire never cried, her initial fear of separation overwhelmed by a certain longing. Claire remembered all these things, but didn't often think about them.

Ever since her younger sister had told her she wanted to act, Stella had been saying that she would have to start digging deep, to dig up each and every fragment, no matter how small, and also that she would have to try to see herself from a "distance". And so, as Claire stood there looking into a reflector, slightly dizzy from the hot sunlight shining down on her, a story Stella had told her popped into her head –

A man told his wife a story.
The husband said, "I'm going to tell you a story. It's best if you can think of it like that, as if you're just listening to a story." The wife listened. With her hands arranged gracefully on the table, she demonstrated the same focused concentration she had maintained for the past thirty years. At first, the husband spoke in a calm, even tone, as if explaining what he had eaten for lunch. Then, to the wife's surprise, images began to bloom in her mind.

Her husband's words seldom had this effect on her. But after a certain point in the story, it seemed as if she heard as well as saw. She even smelled a foul odor. Goosebumps roughened her skin. Unheeding of what she did, the wife scraped her index finger against the edge of the table.

The husband stopped mid-sentence, shifting his gaze from side to side. He reached over and folded a hand over his wife's restless one. He didn't take her hand in his, simply laid his on top, as if to press it down. Looking directly at his wife, like a foolish child with reddened eyes who hopes to be comforted, he said, "Can you understand? Understand how I felt?"

The wife discovered she had left a mark on the table, a small indentation gouged out with her fingernail. The husband continued to speak, his voice rising and falling, loud, then soft. The wife couldn't hear every word clearly, but she heard enough to know that this was a middle-aged man's story of a lost love.

She gently withdrew her hand from his and swung it at the man's face.

The first time she heard this story, Claire didn't understand why the wife wanted to hit her husband. Stella didn't answer her question. Instead she told her the story again from beginning to end without a single change of word or tone. Claire nodded, as if she understood. Stella told her to try retelling the story several times in her own words, until she no longer needed to think about what to say next, until she could see in her head the faces of the husband and wife, could envision in detail their eyes, noses, and mouths, their each and every expression.

Last but not least, remember, Stella said. A story begins with a sentence. Some people say every story can be told in a single sentence. But – and Stella's pause here was deliberate – the first sentence determines the last.

Because of her resemblance to a famous Japanese actress, a student from a prestigious university embarked on a career in acting.

Claire composed a first sentence to distract herself from the set's high-pressure atmosphere. It was her first time shooting a commercial. After eighteen hours in the sun the previous day, she had discovered that the skin on top of her head was peeling. When she had awakened that morning, both her arms were red. If it hadn't been for that message on the PTT forum's Beauty Board, asking if anyone knew the College of Communications student who had been in the main library that afternoon and looked like actress X, Claire would be at home now, drinking mung bean soup with Stella.

After her name showed up on the PTT board, she attracted the attention of interviewers. Journalists came to the school to snap pictures of her in class, of her eating, reading, walking. They dubbed her "Little X", and referred to her this way on the news report headline banners. Claire's name was plastered right next to her face. On-screen comparisons were made, her facial features juxtaposed with those of the Japanese actress.

After these broadcasts, Claire received countless phone calls. *I saw you on TV, congratulations!* At a loss for words, Claire couldn't think of anything to say other than thank you. She didn't think she looked anything like the actress. At most, she bore a slight resemblance to her when seen through a lens at a forty-eight-degree angle, but that was because her long hair covered part of her temples. In other words, Stella looked far more like her, a fact Stella herself had discovered. One day, while they were watching a Japanese drama, she had suddenly walked over to the screen and said, doesn't this woman look a bit like me? Stella wouldn't let her younger sister tell the reporters, however. She had absolutely no desire to ever appear on TV.

A few weeks later, the call from the production company came. The Japanese actress was going to shoot an endorsement ad and needed a stand-in. Claire asked what the stand-in would do. The main thing was to stand there while they set up the lighting. Twenty-two hours over two days, eight thousand yuan. She immediately agreed. That was a month's salary at her part-time job in a coffee shop. Stella wanted to come along just for fun, but Claire never agreed to this. Everyone would see Stella. She was afraid others would realize her sister looked more like the actress

than she did.

Except for the sun, everything felt fresh on that first day. Evidently, filming a single shot for a commercial could last three hours and thirty-eight takes. It was now the second day. By the time she had finished her fifth bottle of water, they were ready for her to start, and the umbrella shielding her from the sun was removed. Once the lighting had been adjusted, the assistant director asked Claire to extend her hand.

Let's see a slap.

What?

This is a close-up. The female star is going to slap the male actor. This will be a tight shot on just the hand, so please do the slap as the stand-in.

A real slap?

A real slap.

Claire was stunned. She had never hit anyone in her life. And she wasn't used to being the focus of attention.

The actor whispered to her. It's okay, don't be afraid. Just slap me.

His forehead was covered in a sheen of perspiration. Thin trails of saliva stretched from his upper to lower lip as he spoke, probably caused by extreme thirst.

Slap.

Somewhat horrified, Claire looked at the actor.

Again.

Slap. Slap.

Again. A bit more straight on, and watch your nails.

Slap. Slap.

Four in a row, shouted the director off in the distance.

Slap. Slap. Slap. Slap.

Claire's lip quivered, and she giggled.

Hey, don't laugh when you're hitting someone! The actor's manager spoke in a loud voice, scowling at her.

Sorry.

Claire's eyes ached suddenly. She realized just how heavily all of their gazes weighed on her.

Let's adjust the lighting again. The two of you stay where you are.

Claire looked over at the big umbrella a short distance away. Beneath its shade, the female star wore sunglasses and sipped a drink, surrounded by a large group of staff brought over from Japan. Claire recalled the front page of today's entertainment news, which said the actress liked to drink pearl milk tea with her soup dumplings. She had to see herself from a distance. She had to tell a story –

The female stand-in watches as the actor's face slowly turns red. His left cheek is now swollen to almost half-again the size of his right cheek. After each slap, someone presses an ice pack to the swollen side. Holding it in place, the actor asks the female stand-in, is your hand okay? It's fine, I'm fine. The female stand-in tinges her voice with a note of regret. Hearing it, the actor smiles and tells her not to worry. This apparent non sequitur makes sense only to the two of them. The female stand-in discovers that when the actor smiles, the point of his chin curves upward, like a crescent moon. It's such a hot day, yet she can think of the moon and forget the sun. Is she on the verge of heatstroke? The female stand-in's hands are in fact gradually reddening, as are her cheeks, the redness evenly distributed. No one notices. Everyone's eyes are on the actor's left cheek under the ice pack. Even when only half of someone's face is visible, it remains obvious how good-looking the person is. A female college student becomes a stand-in and meets an actor. A story is about to begin.

Be sure not to miss a single word, she murmured.

What did you say?

Nothing. Not a thing. Am I hurting you?

Not at all. Don't worry.

Their voices are pitched just loud enough for the other's ears.

Okay, it's an official go, shouted the assistant director.

Slap. Slap. Slap. Slap. Slap. Slap…

Claire couldn't remember how many times she had performed the slap. Sweat dripped from her forehead into her eyes, and she could feel moisture soaking her armpits. The actor's eyes conveyed a message full of encouragement.

Don't be afraid. Again.

It was a message only Claire could hear.

02

Insomnia stage play casting call
Three female roles, ranging in visual age from 18 to 23 years old.
Type: slender, ethereal, an element of fantasy.
***Please wear a white dress for the audition.**

Clipped from *POTS Weekly*, the casting call was tucked inside Claire's communication theory textbook like a discount coupon, reminding her to use it before the deadline. Every time Claire flipped through the pages to it, she re-read the four words highlighted in fluorescent pen – an element of fantasy.

Stella said this was a hint that anyone who auditioned should be attractive and have sex appeal. The audition panel was probably all men. When she heard this, Claire's heart thumped a signal to retreat. Stella added that the white dress was very much in line with the virginity complex straight men had. Claire was about to wad up the newspaper clipping and throw it away when Stella suddenly twitched it from her fingers, hiding a little smile, and said, if you really want to act, you might as well try a stage play. You're going to run into something like this sooner or later, whatever you do.

The first stage play Claire had ever watched was the end-of-semester performance by Stella's high school drama club. Claire was five years old that year, the play her earliest memory to be clearly recalled in its entirety. She was in the front row, so she could see without having to sit on an adult's lap. The story was about a girl and her imaginary friends. The girl suffered from a delusional disorder, and the script made comedic allusions to fairy tales, which Claire was too young to understand. Gradually, the girl was pushed back into the normal world as her friends disappeared one by one. Stella, who played one of the friends, had the ability to hear every secret in the world. To block out the noisy buzz of these, she wore an oversized hat shaped like a Rafflesia flower.

From the moment Claire saw her sister appear on stage, she couldn't stop laughing. These episodes of laughter had been a problem from the time she was small. Stella was the last of the girl's friends to leave. She let her choose whether to go with her or stay behind alone. As the girl was thinking it over, the lights changed. During this brief interval, Claire felt sure her sister was looking right at her from up on stage.

The girl said, I want to stay.

Stella said, you're okay being left all on your own?

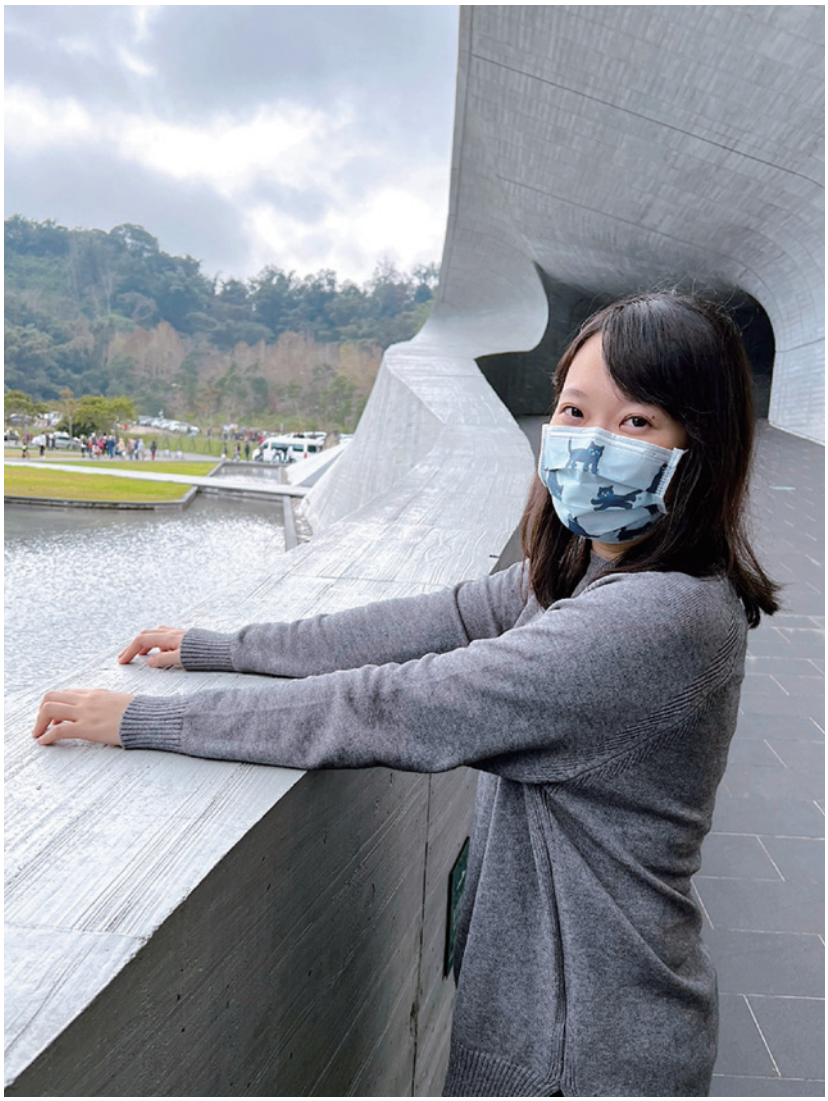
The girl nodded vigorously. Stella took off her hat, helped the girl put it on, and turned to leave. Before she disappeared, she stopped and glanced back into the auditorium. Claire felt her sister's eyes on her. Stella waved, and Claire, sitting in the audience, wanted to wave back. Once Stella's silhouette had faded into the deepest reaches of the stage, Claire cried.

Stella later said she didn't have any idea where they were sitting, and the bright stage lights made the audience invisible anyway, but Claire continued to believe that her sister had been looking at her. Their eyes had met. At that moment, she had felt something pass through her.

She appeared whole, flawless, with no obvious gaps. Like most people, however, she was still incomplete. As a five-year-old sitting in that audience, she had in one mystical instant felt herself come fully alive. That sensation of something flooding every cell of her being had been a kind of good fortune. As she grew up, it was what drove her. In the years to come, when she was standing on stage, she hunted frantically for the moment in which that force would take her over completely, body and mind. Until she gained mastery over it, her desire to reproduce this moment remained a desperate struggle, as if her life hung in the balance.

揚子堂糕餅舖

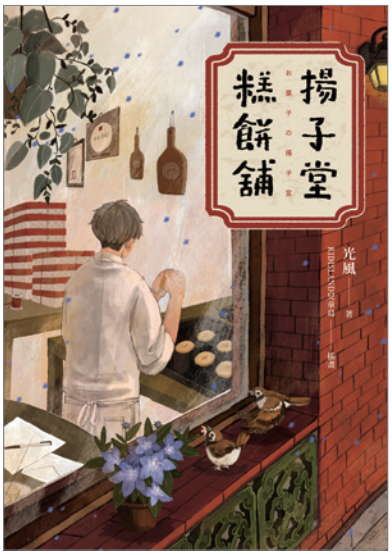
THE SUNCAKE PASTRY SHOP



L.W.
光風

- **Category:** Heartwarming Fiction
- **Publisher:** Gaea Books
- **Date:** 7/2022
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw
- **Pages:** 264
- **Length:** 88,200 characters (approx. 57,300 words in English)
- **Rights sold:** Thai (Amarin)

Born in 1989, full-time creative L.W. enjoys drawing, travel, and petting cats. Her novel *The Suncake Pastry Shop* was selected to receive support from the Ministry of Culture's fund for young writers. She has also published a picture book, *Purple in Flight*, which addresses conservation efforts to protect the double-branded crow butterfly in Taiwan. Her works have been awarded numerous local literary awards, and her latest title is *Island of a Thousand Deities*.



After returning home from Japan heartbroken, a young man becomes an apprentice baker at his great-uncle's traditional pastry shop. As he struggles to master the art of baking, he reflects on his experiences in Japan, which may, in fact, hold the key to reversing the declining fortunes of the family pastry business.

Hsu An-chun, a young Taiwanese man, struggles to get back on his feet after returning home broken-hearted from his working holiday in Japan. Sick of seeing him loafing around the house all day, his mother arranges for him to begin work as an apprentice in his great-uncle's pastry shop.

Specializing in traditional Taiwanese treats, the shop has hardly changed in the decades since it first opened, even as the tastes of Taiwanese consumers have gradually moved on. His competitors have all closed up shop, but Hsu An-chun's great-uncle keeps his pastry kitchen going through sheer persistence, and the patronage of a dwindling number of old customers.

As he learns the ropes of the trade, Hsu An-chun wracks his brain for marketing ideas that might improve business. At the same time, his thoughts turn to the contrast between the humble status of Taiwanese pastries like suncakes, and the cultured elegance of those served at the patisserie where he worked in Kyoto. As different as the two might seem at first glance, Hsu An-chun soon discovers they actually have a great deal in common. But will this be enough to bring about a change in fortune for the family business? And will his stubborn great-uncle ever take his ideas seriously?

Navigating between the cultures of Japan and Taiwan, tradition and innovation, and heartache and the promise of new love, Hsu An-chun slowly learns the exacting art of baking and the importance of duty, persistence, and professional pride. This tale of a young man finding his way in the world will delight readers as much with the warmth and levity of its narrative voice as it does with the enticing sights and scents of the pastry kitchen.

Book Report:
The Suncake Pastry Shop

By Lin King

Synopsis

Recent college graduate An-chun returns from Japan to Taiwan, having cut short his year-long trip of working short-term gigs abroad. He has had his heart broken by Emiko, the young woman set to inherit the hallowed wagashi (traditional Japanese pastry) shop, Han Shun Toh, where An-chun was working. Lovelorn, An-chun retreats to his mother's home in Taichung without any plans for his future.

This lack of purpose has been the plight of An-chun's life. He was a middling student who never felt the drive to exert himself for the sake of achieving a goal, and chose to major in Japanese largely because he enjoyed reading manga. The only constant in his life is a blog that he started in college, "A Wanderer's Diary", where he shares his experiences working a variety of part-time jobs and maintains an enthusiastic readership that resonates with his sense of aimlessness.

An-chun's mother, tired of his idleness and indecision, forces him to go help out at Yang Tze Tang, the traditional Taiwanese pastry shop that has been passed down from An-chun's great-grandfather to his great-uncle. The shop was once famous, but has fallen out of favor with modern Taiwanese tastes, which prefer Japanese or Western desserts and find the malt sugar of the traditional suncakes too sweet. It doesn't help that Great-Uncle has a notoriously bad temper, which makes it difficult for Yang Tze Tang to retain staff.

As An-chun adjusts to the grueling work at Yang Tze Tang, he reminisces over his time at Han Shun Toh, the Kyoto pastry shop that has an even longer history and even stricter traditions. Master Imanishi, owner of Han Shun Toh, initially rejected An-chun's application outright because he isn't Japanese, but Madame Imanishi was convinced that having Mandarin- and English-speaking An-chun would be an asset in tourist-heavy Kyoto. An-chun thus became Han Shun Toh's first employee who wasn't from a wagashi-making background, and the first such person to appear in the life of Emiko, the Imanishis' only daughter.

When they met, Emiko was struggling to earn her father's approval as a wagashi master. Wagashi-making involves crafting original pastries for every season, and while Emiko's creations are beautiful, Master Imanishi insisted that they were only imitations and lacked Emiko's individuality. An-chun encouraged Emiko, suggesting that she try seeing Kyoto through the eyes of a tourist and discover new delights in the city that she took for granted. The two grew attached.

Noticing this, the Han Shun Toh staff told An-chun that Emiko was engaged to the son of another wagashi-making family. When An-chun confessed his feelings to Emiko and asked her to travel with him, she declared that she was choosing Han Shun Toh and wagashi over him. Before he left Kyoto, she created a wagashi cake for him that communicated the poignancy of their relationship: she had found her own voice as a wagashi master.

Now, in Taichung, An-chun tries to help revitalize Yang Tze Tang, urging Great-Uncle to accept an interview from a young reporter, Pin-hsin, at a popular magazine. With Pin-hsin's encouragement, An-chun toils away to learn the craft, but still feels that he hasn't earned the right to inherit the shop from Great-Uncle whenever others suggest it. His unworthiness seems confirmed when Great-Uncle agrees for Yang Tze Tang to compete in a pastry competition for the first time, but An-chun fails to win a prize.

Meanwhile, An-chun has uncovered the origin story behind Great-Uncle's temper. Great-Uncle had fallen in love with a girl from a wealthy family while he was a high school dropout learning his trade, but the whole family had disappeared without a word. One day, this long-lost love sends a postcard to Yang Tze Tang: she'd seen Great-Uncle in Pin-hsin's magazine article. She now lives in Japan, and An-chun insists that Great-Uncle go look for her. With An-chun acting as interpreter and guide, Great-Uncle gets closure. They also visit Han Shun Toh, where Great-Uncle is impressed by the Imanishis' commitment to their family business.

Despite the attention garnered by Pin-hsin's article, it becomes apparent that Yang Tze Tang can't sustain itself in its current business model. When the question becomes whether to change or to close down, Great-Uncle chooses the latter. Han Shun Toh showed him that inheritance isn't something that he should impose on An-chun without having laid the groundwork for An-chun's success. After Yang Tze Tang announces its closing date, customers pour in for one last taste. An-chun leverages his blog to share stories about the store's final days, immortalizing Yang Tze Tang in his own way. He starts a new journey to travel Taiwan, and is inspired to write about it in both Mandarin and Japanese.

Evaluation

This is a cozy novel that, despite its romantic setting in ancient cities and pastry shops, addresses the malaise of youth and contemporary life. It grapples with the idea of the family business, both the rigid and limiting aspects of this burden as well as how it can truly be a life purpose that ensures the longevity of a culture's traditions. Through this, it also contrasts young people who aren't able to find a calling with young people who have a calling forced upon them, questioning whether people really get to "choose their destiny" in their work and life.

The answer, according to the novel, seems to be that they don't. Great-Uncle found his calling in traditional pastry, but not so much because he loved it as because he hated school and preferred helping his father. Emiko has always worked hard toward inheriting, but admits that she didn't know whether she actually liked wagashi until she met An-chun. Pin-hsin the journalist tells An-chun that she also stumbled into the profession; she'd been in Sales but liked listening to her clients' stories, and her supervisor switched her into Reporting. Everybody seems to commit to their professions through trial and error.

An-chun's aimlessness is the extreme case of this. There are plenty of clues throughout the book on what his strengths are: the Imanishi family tells him that, linguistically and culturally, he is an invaluable interpreter between Han Shun Toh and its diverse visitors; the other Yang Tze Tang staff tell him that he has helped bridge the generational and emotional gap between Great-Uncle and others; he writes a popular blog that brings together different people who feel lost; he falls in love with Pin-hsin, a journalist. However, nothing clicks for An-chun. It is only at the very end, while on another aimless journey, that he meets a child who talks to him about how important bridges are and finally has the revelation that his calling is to be a bridge between Taiwan and Japan, writing in both languages. There is a slight sense of anticlimax in the revelation given the earlier clues.

But the book's goal is not to shock the reader with twists, nor is it to wrench their hearts with true tragedy. Instead, it quietly addresses the disillusionment of youth without ever despairing in it, always maintaining a lightness of touch and an admiration for people going through their day-to-day lives. It is a "slice-of-life" story especially popular in Taiwan and Japan, comparable to *Days At The Morisaki Bookshop* by Satoshi Yagisawa, *Sweet Bean Paste* by Durian Sukegawa, and the popular series *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* by Toshikazu Kawagushi (minus the time travel element).

Following the conventions of the slice-of-life genre, all characters have cautiously optimistic endings despite the blow of losing the beloved shop. An-chun fills the hole that Emiko left with his affection for Pin-hsin and finally finds his own ambition, Great-Uncle seems content in retirement, and all the other Yang Tze Tang staff successfully find suitable work. Though there is no dramatic climax of An-chun miraculously saving the family business that he knew almost nothing about at the beginning of the novel, the bittersweet realism is in a way more encouraging to a reader who, like An-chun, will continue searching for purpose and meaning after this particular story ends.

THE SUNCAKE PASTRY SHOP

By L.W.
Translated by Lin King

1

I think often of the days that I spent strolling along Kyoto's Kamo River with Emiko by my side.

The first walk that we went on together took place shortly after I arrived in Kyoto, when the autumn trees were a blazing red. The river's surface shone with undulating reflections of blue skies and soft clouds; the gentle breeze rustled the maple leaves, revealing shades of orange and yellow underneath the red. It was a sight that filled the heart with joy and tenderness. Emiko, who walked a little ahead of me, light on her feet, spun around all of a sudden. The sakura-colored ribbon at her collar rose fluttered in the wind as she smiled and said, "In the spring, this whole place will be covered in sakura – it's so beautiful that it literally takes your breath away! You'll have to come see them!"

From her clear eyes alone, I could already see Kyoto swirling with pink petals.

Later, Kamo River became our designated spot for long walks and heartfelt conversations. It was where we went after work at the confectionery shop, and also when Emiko was feeling down, and really whenever we, for any reason, wished to talk to each other shoulder-to-shoulder. Kamo River's waters were forever unclouded, forever unfurling into the far-off distance, as if reminding us to always be honest with ourselves.

During those months, I was too focused on watching the changes in Emiko's expressions to notice the changes on the riverside. On the day that she said, "I'm sorry, An-chun," I was shocked to see that all the trees and shrubs around us had yellowed and wilted. The new view was so desolate that it seemed as though the sakura had given up all idea of ever blooming there again. Endless winter was approaching.

I chose to leave Kyoto before my heart could break completely and headed for Tokyo. In the end, it was in bustling and lonely Tokyo where I saw the sakura blossoms that Emiko had wanted me to see. The flowers opened on every street and every corner in a way that made them seem eternal, but in the blink of an eye, at the touch of a breeze, they vanished like a dream.

The omnipresent pink across Tokyo kept reminding me of the ribbon at Emiko's throat, making it impossible to work, impossible to go outside, impossible even to breathe.

All thoughts deserted me except one: *I want to go where I can't see any sakura at all.*

That was how I ended up returning to Taiwan earlier than planned. Arriving at home, I saw that Ma had kept everything unchanged during my absence. If anything, she seemed to have made it even tidier. When I entered my room, I found her in the middle of recycling my entire collection of *One Piece* manga. She was surprised to see me. Then, perhaps to conceal her embarrassment at being caught red-handed, she demanded whether I had been sent home because I was too incompetent. In the following days, she continued eyeing me with probing suspicion, but I would only pretend to sneeze and say, "I couldn't help it. I was too allergic to the pollen."

Everything had returned to square one – the aimless, bewildering starting point.

The sense of aimless bewilderment had dwelled

within me since the day I was born, blurring my view of the path forward like congenital nearsightedness. In elementary school, the assignment that plagued me the most was always the one titled "My Future Goals". I would always procrastinate until the final moment before scribbling down, per Ma's "recommendation", that my goal was to "be a safe, healthy, and kind person". Ma had misunderstood the assignment, of course. What she recommended was every parent's wish for their child, but it was hardly a life goal.

I maintained this ambivalent attitude through junior high and high school. In Taiwan's test-based educational system, people went to whatever school their scores got them into, and I managed to get by for five years while putting in minimal effort. By senior year, my peers were each battling invisible foes, which included their own laziness; they slept while bearing the weight of uncertainty about the future and studied while bearing the terror of counting down to exam day. I, meanwhile, passed the time by packing a sandwich and a carton of milk before school each morning, sometimes going to a bookstore to rent *shonen* action manga after school, hiding behind the books' rigid spines like a freeloader of other people's imaginations.

Eventually, I tested into the Japanese department of an average university, where I began a long string of wide-ranging part-time jobs: a buffet cashier, a pool cleaner, an administrative aid for my department, a teaching assistant at a Japanese language school. I cycled through these jobs as though I was searching for something, but in reality I had no idea what it was that I was meant to be searching for. After graduating, I decided to apply for a working holiday visa to Japan, which felt like indulging in wanderlust, but also a self-imposed exile.

And then I met Emiko.

And then I was crushed by her lethal remark: "I'm sorry, An-chun."

The end.

Up until that point in my life, I had never faced any major dilemmas or difficult choices, which also meant that I'd never had any reason or need to work hard. Human life takes countless forms, and a life of never giving anything one's all is but one of these forms – not striving, not struggling, just going with the flow. Just as I am doing now, sitting cross-legged in the corner of my bedroom untouched by sunlight, snacking on some nuts while scrolling through the dozens of unanswered comments on my blog.

The comments are for the blog I started back in college called "A Wanderer's Diary". My initial thought was that there were perhaps other people out there who also felt as though the future was but a muddle. If that was case, then I thought it only natural that those of us who are lost should help each other find the way. I started writing about my experiences working the dozen or so jobs that I'd held, which attracted quite a lot of readers who asked questions and sought advice: What does this job entail? Can you make money quick? What should I do if my boss is cheating me? My readership only multiplied after I went to Japan, with people wondering: How did you go about applying for a working holiday visa? What are the dos and don'ts of job interviews in Japan? How should I use *keigo* honorifics in Japanese so that I don't come off as rude? Do Japanese women like Taiwanese guys?

People have many, many worries. But seeing their worries relieves some of my own. *I'm not the only one* – there are thousands and thousands of people who are also full of questions about life. The thought makes me feel less alone.

Most of the recent comments are asking about whether I'm still working at Han Shun Do, whether they can stop by to see me while visiting Japan.

"Hey, I'm back in Taiwan now." I copy and paste this on all of the similar comments in one go.

Others asked why there haven't been any recent updates, adding that they looked forward to new content.

"Thank you." I type slowly, reading the words out loud as I go. "I'm taking a break for now."

"An, who are you talking to?" Ma comes in holding a basket of clean laundry and snatches away the jar of nuts that I've nearly finished.

"No one," I mumble, "nothing."

"You've been back for a while and all you've done is hole up in your room. Aren't you going to look for a job?"

"Yes." To avoid looking idle, I begin to help her fold the clothes. In the minutes of silence that follow, I

think about Emiko's face as she hung up the storefront curtains after washing them – I think about her smile as she told me that the clean curtains smelled of the sun. I sniff the clothes in my hand. Does the sun smell the same here as it does in Kyoto?

"You always say yes, but you haven't even started looking," Ma says. "I already spoke to your great-uncle. You're going to go help out in his shop starting tomorrow."

I stop folding. "You mean Great-Uncle on Pastry Street? Famously grumpy and stubborn Great-Uncle?"

"He kicked out another apprentice just last week. It's not easy finding young people who are willing to apprentice in this day and age, but he – anyway, don't worry, he'll probably show a little more restraint since you're my son. Remember how much you loved his suncakes when you were little?"

"What does that have to do with this? I majored in Japanese, Ma. How am I supposed to make pastries?"

"Well, you picked up whatever job you could get when you were in Japan, didn't you?"

"But – but it's *that* great-uncle we're talking about."

That great-uncle is, to be exact, my maternal grandfather's younger brother. From what I've heard, he started helping with the family's pastry business at the age of fourteen because he didn't want to study. Every morning, while Grandpa rode his bicycle to school, Great-Uncle rode his bicycle through the city streets selling baked goods. Later, Grandpa became a civil servant while Great-Uncle became a professional pastry chef, taking over the family business.

Grandpa, before he passed, used to say, "That great-uncle of yours just can't let go of the past, and he's too hard on himself. That's why his temper has gotten so bad."

How bad can a person's temper get? If someone asked Great-Uncle to repeat himself even once, he'd be on the verge of losing it completely; dozens of apprentices have had dough thrown at them on their first day of work, and then been told that they wouldn't be allowed to go home until their work met Great-Uncle's standards. Even veteran chefs have been shouted at so viciously over trivial matters that they quit in a rage. At his "record high", Great-Uncle was the only one left in the shop after all the other chefs and apprentices walked out. Even then, he remained unfazed, continuing to work day and night, keeping up the business all by himself for a full fifteen days before collapsing from exhaustion.

As a child, I gathered from adults' conversations that Great-Uncle must be harboring some specific source of fury that made him extremely, extremely angry, and consequently he sought out every opportunity to vent. I've asked my mother what exactly Grandpa meant by Great-Uncle's "past", but she never once gave me a straight answer – perhaps she doesn't know herself. Considering that Great-Uncle is silent as a boulder most of the time, everyone can only guess, never striking the core of the matter.

Little did I know that his fiery rage was still burning decades later.

"Maybe I'll try looking for another job first and save the Great-Uncle thing for later?"

"Well, what type of job are you looking for?"

I have no answer for her.

"Just go, An." Before leaving, she tosses out a final quip that pierces my Achilles' heel: "You don't know what you want to do with your future anyway."

2

"Future" is too distant a word – so distant that I couldn't reach it even after traveling over two thousand kilometers to Japan. I could only keep walking; I could only wait and see.

My plan for my working holiday went like this: I would start in Osaka for the summer, then move to Kyoto for the fall, then to Hokkaido for the winter, then to my final stop, Japan's City of Dreams – Tokyo.

I stuck to the plan and first found a job at a *takoyaki* street stall in Osaka for three months. The owner, Koike, was around the same age as me. With his bleach blonde hair and his sunny Osaka-style grin, he was dazzlingly handsome even when sweating profusely at the grill. He would say to me, "You can't go on like this, An-chun. Young people should have a bit more oomph, you know what I mean?"

And so my so-called training involved shouting "Welcome!" while giving ninety-degree bows to passersby. Koike went out of his way to call out,

"Louder! Louder!" That first night, I shouted "Welcome!" a total of three-hundred-and-seventy-five times, and I needed pain relief patches for my lower back from all the bowing.

Even so, Koike was less like a boss to me and more like a friend from high school – we joked around and laughed together, but we could also work together seamlessly when we got serious. Each day that I spent with him was like one of those summer *matsuri* festivals you see in Japanese movies: a whirlwind of fun that nevertheless left behind long-lasting and brilliant memories.

The autumn air in Kyoto tasted completely different from the summer air in Osaka. Kyoto possessed a certain unhurried tranquility. When I encountered geisha whom I'd only ever read about in books, I could not help but follow them into the Gion District and down Hanamikoji Street, where I took in the traditional Japanese architecture and flagstone footpaths, ever so different from Osaka's cityscape. The winding alleys made me forget the passage of time, and walking down one path only gave me the urge to go down another, and before I knew it I had arrived at Kyoto's oldest temple, Kiyomizu-dera. There I saw a large maple, lush and green except for a spot of reddened leaves at the tree's very top, the lone patch of crimson gleaming brightly under the sun. In that moment, I felt all at once that I was truly in the land where *The Tale of Genji* is set.

Filled with a sense of wonder, I wove through the alleyways, turning at various corners as I pleased until, as if by fate, I noticed the vermilion curtains of a storefront billowing in the wind. Approaching, I saw it was a traditional Kyoto *machiya* house, a two-story structure made primarily of wood, with dark roof tiles and intricately patterned lattice windows that evoked the steadiness and simplicity of time itself. A sign overhead read, in three golden characters, "Han Shun Do" –"abundant", "spring", "hall". The vermilion curtains, which covered nearly two-thirds of the entrance, had a row of small text indicating that the store was founded in the early 1860s. Also printed on the curtains was the store's white emblem: a camelia blossom with a circle at its core. But why would a store with "spring" in its name choose for its symbol a flower that blooms in the winter?

I lingered outside, pondering this mystery, only to discover that I'd been standing in front of a job advertisement all along. That was when I learned that Han Shun Do is a traditional Japanese confectionery store.

Perhaps the romantic sentiment of living alone in this foreign land had clouded my judgment, for I decided to overlook all the elements of the job advertisement that could politely be described as "extremely nitpicky" and called to schedule an interview. The lady who answered the phone spoke with the elegant tones unique to Kyoto women. She asked me to please come to the store the following morning.

"This way, please." The next day, back at Han Shun Do, I immediately recognized the woman by her voice. She wore a purple kimono the color of Tartarian aster flowers. I followed her through the shop to an inner room, where a man who seemed to be the owner sat cross-legged on the tatami floor, apparently waiting for me. Short in stature, he wore a set of traditional blue work clothes, and sported white-tinged hair and an expression as stiff as steel. As he read my résumé, he frowned so deeply that his eyebrows seemed ready to fight one another.

He asked only one question: "Taiwanese?"

"Yes, Taiwanese."

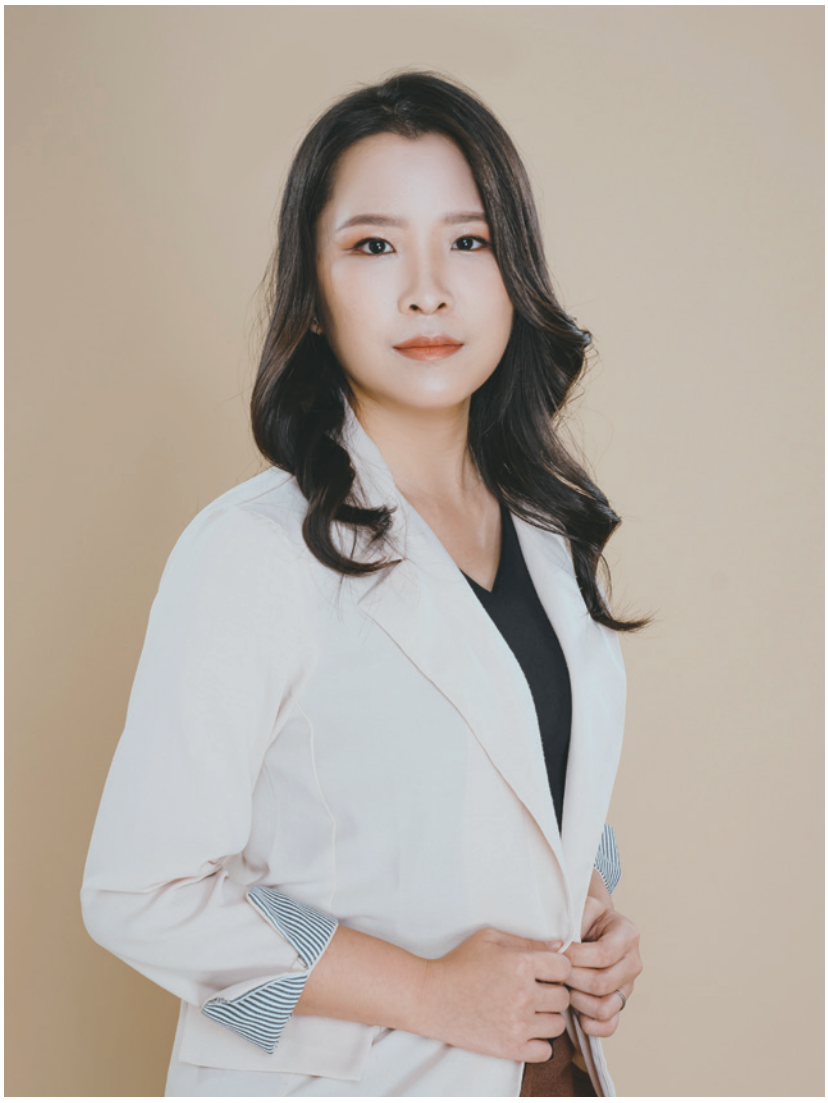
The awkward tension made me adjust my suit in spite of myself.

"That won't do. If you'll excuse me." He rose and made to leave, but the woman rushed over to intervene. She pulled him into the room next door, where they had a hushed but heated conversation. A little while later, she emerged alone, looking apologetic.

"I understand," I said. "Thank you." Getting to my feet, I found that my legs had fallen asleep from kneeling on the tatami, making my exit all the more pathetic. But, seeing as I'd come all this way, I decided to at least resolve one question in my mind. "May I inquire about something?"

She nodded.

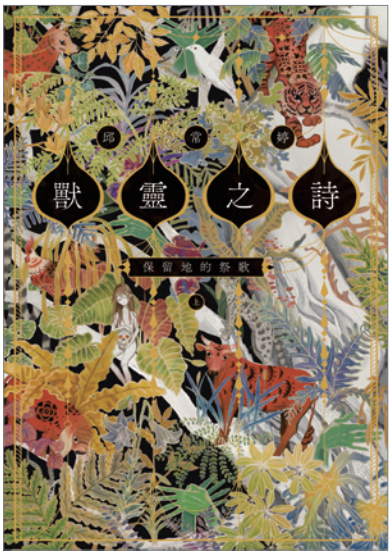
獸靈之詩
BEASTOSIS

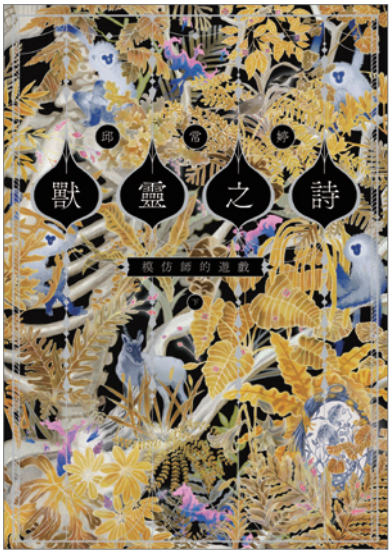


Chiou Charng-Ting 邱常婷

- **Category:** Fantasy
- **Publisher:** Apex
- **Date:** 4/2023
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw
- **Pages:** 544
- **Length:** 360,600 characters (approx. 234,300 words in English)

Chiou Charng-Ting earned her literary MFA from Dong Hwa University, and she is currently pursuing a PhD in children's literature at National Taitung University. Her work, which spans genre fiction, fantasy, children's literature, and upmarket literature, has won the King Car Fantasy Prize, the Unitas New Author Award, and the Openbook Award.





On an occupied island, the only hope for freedom is born in a primitive village on a tribal reservation – a mythical entity that grants superpowers, known as Beastosis.

After their parents disappear from their village, Taibang and his little brother Luan must depend on each other for survival. Because of the shortage of resources on the tribal reservation, Taibang must compete with his fellow villagers to snatch up the provisions that are air-dropped in by an occupying army.

One day, the brothers are unexpectedly selected to be assistants to the village emissary, which means they must follow the emissary on a journey beyond the mountains that gird the reservation, to the remains of an ancient village where the army has set up camp. Along the way they encounter many strange sights, including a red-faced totem that appears to conceal a momentous secret. Yet, after arriving at the ruins, the brothers soon realize they have only taken the first small steps towards understanding how vast, and dangerous, their world truly is.

Elsewhere, in a cold northern city, a graduate student named Lily faces an uncertain future. When her close friend falls victim to serial killer, Lily decides to track down the murderer herself, regardless of the dangers it might entail. At the same time, a mysterious force is awakened within her, releasing repressed memories from a decade before. As Lily approaches her inevitable confrontation with evil, how will she face up to the conflicts of the past?

Beastosis is the latest fantasy novel from literary and children's book author Chiou Charng-Ting. Epic in scale, the novel is set in a richly imagined and seamlessly crafted world where a resistance movement struggles against authoritarian rule, and steadfast friendships are forged among those suffering from oppression. Action, romance, and suspense are all given their due as multiple narratives unfold across a range of settings, delivering a reading experience unlike anything readers have seen before.

Editor's Note: *Beastosis*

By Kaiting Chan
Translated by Joel Martinsen

Are you familiar with Plato's Cave? People in a dark cave discuss the shadows that firelight projects onto a wall and are convinced they are real, when in fact reality can only be reached by facing the flames, leaving the cave, and experiencing pain. Inspired by this allegory, novelist Chiou Charng-Ting tells the story of an epic journey of two brothers between a shadow world and the real world.

Like the firelit images on the wall, the shadow world is entirely an imitation of the real world. This is the starting point for the author's fantasy worldbuilding, with analogues for Taiwan and China, Han and Indigenous peoples, power and oppression, transgender issues, incest, environmental destruction, extinction, and the craft of fiction. Its sumptuous literary feel is spiced with the genre flavor of fantasy: magic here is called "mimesis" (the pronunciation of the two terms is similar in Chinese), and the abilities of magicians – "mimesists" – emanate from "believing the world is false in order to obtain the greatest mimetic power". They can raise the dead, summon typhoons, transform gender, and cause pregnancy – nothing short of omnipotence.

In addition to the mimesists, there are other magical beings – beast spirits that can talk – who exist only in the shadow world, born of the love and memories people in the real world have for extinct creatures. There they seek out people chosen by fate and dwell within their spiritual voids, granting contentment and wondrous powers to the sad and lonely and serving as humanity's eternal animal companions.

Beastosis opens on the Isle of Wan, a stand-in for Taiwan, where five clans under the dominion of the powerful state of Midong rule with ruthless brutality over a destitute people. A pair of brothers, Taibang and Luan, light the fuse of revolt on the island. For the sake of his younger brother, elder brother Taibang refuses his destined union with a clouded leopard spirit, but the witch Utux, a person with a bird spirit bent on provoking a rebellion, needs his power. She schemes to separate the brothers so that Taibang will unite with the clouded leopard and join the revolutionary army. The revolution falters, and when Taibang dies, his bones are carried off by a Midong scholar for display in a foreign museum. However, having foreseen his death, Taibang had entreated the shaman Ivivigi to carve a mimetic totem into his skull bearing blessings that will one day be conveyed to the heart of his still-living younger brother.

Luan is fated for great things but lives a complicated life: his male body houses a woman's mind and he is in love with Taibang. When Utux separates the two, she commands her underlings to take Luan to safety, but they are waylaid by the golden rooster goddess, the head of the powerful Chin clan, who reveals Luan's identity as the heir to the Chin family. She cannot permit him anywhere near the five families, so she erases his memory and sends him into exile.

Over the next decade, Luan grows up abroad, his love for his elder brother forgotten, and lives as a woman under the name Lily. In college, she befriends Yasuko, whose subsequent murder puts her on the path to crime. After hunting down and killing the murderer and awakening her mimetic power, she learns that this has been "a mimesist test". The examiner, using the name Black Antelope, informs Lily that the answers she's looking for can be found in a foreign museum. There, she finds Taibang's skull. The sound of his last wish causes her lost memories to return, and she makes a deal with Black Antelope: if he instructs her how to resurrect Taibang, she will infiltrate the five clans on the Isle of Wan so he can play a game with another mimesist called White Ape.

The five clans are embroiled in a storm of their own. Although the revolution failed, it left the clans splintered, and now a series of assassinations have targeted the leadership at the most inopportune moment. Chin heir Chin Hsueh and his bodyguard Liu Amo want to find the assassin, stop the fighting, and rebuild the family fortune, but the ruthless killer is not their only enemy, for a young woman called A-lan is also bent on revenge. The inheritor of Utux's beast spirit and unrealized final wish, she aims to wipe out the five clans. But she is also searching for a young woman called Wagtail who taught

her the meaning of love during her exile but was caught by the Chin family. The assassinations are actually the work of powerful mimesists: White Ape and Black Antelope are using the Isle of Wan as a chessboard to play a fatal game, a grand final chapter before the ultimate destruction of the five clans.

Having told of a revolution against the powerful, murders in foreign lands, family power struggles, a young woman's vengeance, and a murder game for mimesists, *Beastosis* transitions to a new phase in which the real world, the source of the shadow world's imitations, is facing the end of days. As a strange, fatal disease originating in South America sweeps across the globe, a young man named Taibang spends his time writing *Beastosis*, a story first told by his younger brother Luan. When Luan hanged himself, Taibang's psychiatrist advised him to use writing as therapy. Then things start to change: as the disease mutates, people's personalities alter and they shout strange words as they die. The disease attacks Taibang's tribe, causing feverish children to babble things that only exist in his story. On his bathroom mirror, writing appears in his brother's hand: FIND ME. The tribe's shaman Ivivigi tells him that he is the key link between this world and the other, where Luan is calling out to him. The mirror writing and backward music are clues he uses to guide Taibang on a great journey.

That journey ends on the icy surface of a frozen lake, a magic mirror that shows him two faces. One is a grown-up Luan – Lily in the shadow world – and the other is Luan at the age of eight, wreathed in green flame like a mythical malevolent spirit. It turns out that Luan, foreseeing the extinction of the human race, used suicide as a means of reaching the shadow world and had not only guided Taibang but had abducted Lily – and with her the power to restore life she had learned from Black Antelope. After Lily's resurrection of Taibang left him with an incomplete soul, an evil spirit convinced her that a mirror could make him whole – but that mirror is actually a portal between the two worlds. By killing the shadow world Taibang and separating the real world Taibang from his flesh, his body would bestow new life on anyone who acquired. Lily does not want Taibang to die and fights with the evil Luan. The clouded leopard that vanished ten years ago after the revolution manifests and reveals it is the vessel for Taibang's spirit.

Meanwhile, Black Antelope's motive for seeking out Lily's assistance in his games with White Ape was to stem his string of losses and gain the upper hand to force White Ape to reveal himself. As children, Black Antelope and White Ape were inseparable friends under the tutelage of Red Phoenix, Midong's most powerful mimesist and master of the phoenix spirit's power of eternal life. A failed mimesis trial drove White Ape mad, and when Black Antelope was tasked with traveling on missions, the two gradually drifted apart. Over time, Black Antelope's observations of Red Phoenix revealed his secret scheme: probing the extremes of mimetic power, he believed the ultimate mystery could be found in the real world, and although the access mirror was in his possession, among the many conditions for passage was the need for a special body. His worldwide search had turned up just one suitable candidate – White Ape – and so he infiltrated his soul into White Ape's body and waited for the opportune moment. Sensing something amiss on the Isle of Wan, Black Antelope realizes that White Ape's broken mind has been invaded, and he follows him back to Midong with the aim of battling the mimesist who has taken control of his body to reach the real world.

The novel reaches a climax with a duel between brothers and a battle between mimesists across the real and illusory worlds, and Black Antelope and White Ape ultimately reunite to defeat Red Phoenix, losing their lives in the process. Evil Luan at last steps back and bids his elder brother farewell. Although young Taibang is unable to stop the extinction of humanity, the beast spirits will eternally preserve the souls of those in union with them, pointing the way to the next step in human evolution.

The denouement is wistful but not sad. The ensemble cast may appear complicated, but it's all in the service of a simple goal, to depict a boy unable to accept a loved one's absence, who straddles real and imaginary worlds to turn death to life. Mimesists in the shadow world are like gods who pass the time playing games with human emotions and desires. This is an adventure on a magnificent scale: the unknowns of the shadow world are ripe for exploration, while the real world offers up the evolved species of the future. But at the same time, this is a story of rich emotions in which beast spirits born of the love and memories people have for the departed give the mimetic world its shape, where the dead are reborn, and where every character fights for the love they hold in their heart. The metaphor of the shadow world is the relationship between story and reality: story responds to and creates reality. And fiction, so long as it produces meaning and emotion in the reader, is eternal truth.

BEASTOSIS

By Chiou Charng-Ting
Translated by Joel Martinsen

Taibang always knew his younger brother was different from other people.

First off was the smell: Taibang's nose was excellent, as keen as a black bear's, and his brother smelled familiar and warm – if he was willing to admit it, like honey made from passionfruit and longan nectar. Crying, he smelled like a soggy dog; angry, like the bitter, scorched scent of the earth prior to a thunderstorm, which made Taibang sneeze. When his brother went running late at night, his armpits smelled strongly of gray-blue spicebush and sliced through the forest like twin glowing beams, painting a scent track that Taibang could trace all the way to a cave in the northern forest to find his brother curled up and brooding.

In addition, Taibang thought his brother was smart. One of the few children who understood the writing of outlanders, the boy was sensitive to details and knew how to draw. In quiet moments, the scent of longan-passionfruit honey was more apparent, and when he concentrated on his charcoal sketches, his bodily aroma would burst forth with a sweetness that made Taibang's head spin and had him constantly wrinkling his nose. His brother was a boy, and Taibang knew what boys ought to be like: pungent, unsophisticated scents of metal and bonfires, soot and cinders, and sometimes the stench of fresh blood and animal corpses.

His brother smelled nothing like a boy.

Sometimes Taibang would wonder whether, even before realizing it, his brother already understood the mystery of his body. Always gently observing his surroundings, favoring beautiful, brightly colored clothing, hating filth, letting his hair grow long and not permitting Taibang to cut it – and later not even letting Taibang call him by his name.

And so for a long while, Taibang called him "Didi" – younger brother.

He didn't seem to like that name, either.

Taibang didn't make an issue of it; people here lived how they pleased, after all, and no one cared what his brother would ultimately grow up to be. By the first time he was bullied in the tribe, as his not-too-clever elder brother, Taibang was well-muscled enough to drive off the bad kids with a display of fists. Then he dragged his scuffed-up younger brother to the brook, stripped off his filthy clothes, and gave him a thorough washing.

Covered in wounds, the first thing he said was, "I want to change my name."

"What do you want to change your name to?"

"Luan."

Luan meant the mountain fog, but it was also a girl's name. Taibang sighed. "You can be called whatever you'd like."

Taibang had no family apart from Luan so he rarely refused his brother's requests; the emissary would not bother them so long as they did not stray too far from the village, and as far as the army was concerned, their names were meaningless, of value only to themselves.

Their tribe was small, ten or twenty families, but was still required by the army to dispatch an emissary. For as long as Taibang could remember, he had always known the tribe was their home, and that far off to the north was a border that was not to be crossed or else the army stationed there would shoot you dead.

Adults imagined that children didn't know the reason and were unclear about the nature of the place, and perhaps that was true for most of them – Taibang excepted. Scarcity had prompted their father to sneak across the border in search of supplies, and although Luan had been too young at the time, Taibang had gotten to taste a flat food that was oily and crisp, as well as a dark-colored, living sweetwater that hissed as it breathed, although his father and mother instructed him to wait for the bubbles to disappear and only drink the sweetwater when it had stopped breathing so it wouldn't prick his tongue.

One day their parents disappeared without a trace, apparently having decided to leave the reservation forever only to be discovered by the army, which carried off their bodies. "They brought it on themselves," Abak remarked at the time without explaining further, but from then on Taibang knew he had only Luan left and needed to take care of him.

Someone who died a violet death away from home would become an evil spirit. Such was their belief – as evil spirits, dead souls would harm the living, while only a death at home would allow someone to become an ancestral spirit, a good soul. The mutual opposition and obstruction of good and bad souls constituted the tribe's daily life: no prey when hunting in the mountains might be mischief from bad souls; a sudden recovery from an illness might be the protection of ancestral spirits.

Tribespeople feared and detested evil spirits, but more than that they felt boundary crossers were traitors who brought the cloud of army suspicion onto the entire tribe.

Taibang hated the army with his whole heart, a hatred that smoldered like a charcoal ember regardless of the tribe elders' claim that the army's actions were for the good of everyone on the reservation, since their bodies were too fragile to withstand the fearsome illnesses and pollution of the world outside. He couldn't quell his hatred and had often wondered about the reason for his parents' death – had they died because they had failed? Or because they had succeeded? After all, there was no punishment for successfully fleeing the reservation – you just couldn't turn back. If you returned after leaving, you brought with you the outside germs that would lead to death, and so to protect the people on the reservation, the army would shoot dead those who turned back. Taibang couldn't say whether he hoped his parents had succeeded or failed, because if they had indeed crossed the border, there was no question that he and Luan would have been their one reason for returning.

He also wanted to know why they had wanted to cross over, leaving the two of them to fend for themselves. "Because they didn't care about you and your brother," a tribe elder had gloated as Taibang was in tears after hearing the news.

Because they hated tribal life. That was what Taibang ultimately concluded. But was life really so good beyond the border? He had heard that due to illness and pollution, most people on the outside had died, and the remainder lived in cities under an enormous glass bubble.

These were just rumors that Taibang found unbelievable, and his impulse upon hearing them was to laugh, but also to cry. The very first time he heard one of these secrets, he had to cover his mouth to contain his intense emotions, lest he be discovered by the other emissaries. It was a habit he had long cultivated: eavesdropping on the meetings the emissaries held in the guardhouse. He would hide out of sight in the silvergrass, where he would press an ear – no less sensitive than his nose – to the ground and hear the voices inside a meter away.

Known as Abak, the emissary who served as the reservation's link to the army was typically among the tribe's most promising adults. The root meaning of the word was soul, but the word had been modified to designate tribe emissaries. Sadly, becoming Abak meant a person abandoned their original name. From then on they used the name Abak and could not reclaim their former name even if they left the position – a former Abak became nameless, and tribespeople would conduct an expulsion ceremony to drive them out of the village.

After becoming Abak, the emissary moved into a small hut at the village entrance known as the guardhouse. The implication was clear: in the future he or she would be a bridge between the village and the army and were no longer entirely trustworthy.

Nevertheless, people of the tribe still secretly trusted Abak, even if that trust was not openly expressed. In Taibang and Luan's tribe, a handover had just taken place, and the new Abak was a short young man just twenty years of age, with a dark reddish face that, in the past, had always borne a warm smile.

Abak occasionally caught Taibang while eavesdropping, but fortunately the new Abak was an understanding person who always let him go with a warning to not get caught next time. In this way Taibang learned more than other children his age.

Life in the village was hard. Taibang's daily task was to look for edible berries or rootstalks in the forest and, if he happened across efficacious medicinal herbs, bring them back home or resell them to the old witch Ivivigi. He didn't much like her. Every time she saw him, she would mutter, "Oh my, that's the boy who will soon become a clouded leopard." Taibang knew the legend but did not know why the witch always carried on so – and he had lots of work to do.

Every few days, when urban areas would make deliveries of supplies to the reservation, Taibang would go to a drop point near the village to scavenge. Luan had often expressed a desire to go too, but scavenging inevitably meant conflicts with other clanspeople – or even other tribes – and while Taibang, a nimble boy of fourteen, was able to make a quick escape if trouble transpired, the weaker Luan would have been easily caught.

"Wait until you're as tall as I am and we'll see," Taibang would promise, and then reach out and rub Luan's head.

The supplies generally consisted of things that could also be found on the reservation: fruit like mangos, passionfruit, papaya, and bananas plus honeycomb and beetle larvae, and occasionally, if they were lucky, meat like boar or sambar. Taibang never saw the greasy potato wafers and black sweetwater his parents had given him among the supplies.

Hunting and gathering those foods on the reservation wasn't easy work. Receiving a full basket of food that would otherwise require a month of effort was a good thing in the mind of most clanspeople, even if Ivivigi muttered that scavengers would be cursed, because meat that was obtained without effort was an insult to the clan's skilled hunters.

Other adults eager to scavenge simply ignored the curse, for what you obtained depended entirely on your own skills, so even a young orphan like Taibang was qualified. At first, he often came up empty handed due to lack of experience – he was immediately pushed to the ground by an adult, or had food snatched from his grasp, but as time slowly passed, he learned how to nimbly dart his slender frame in and out of gaps and, as he grew a little older and bigger, to hold his own against the adults.

He had never given up competing for supplies, because the baskets held not just food but lots of daily use items as well – fabric, cotton, matches, tools, tableware – all of which were essential if he was going to let Luan live well.

What would Luan do if he didn't have me? was a question he pondered frequently. An inexplicable sadness hit his chest with a palpable sting, and when he began to fall ill later on, he would remember that sadness and unease as its point of origin, causing fevers, tears, dry throat, and weak limbs, as if somehow, without him noticing, his organs had exited his body and were roving at large. What good was all his worry and attachment? For whatever reason, Taibang knew he was helpless to do anything but pretend all was well, to pull himself together to continue their journey.

The days passed and the two brothers slowly grew up. This is the story of the boy who would soon become a clouded leopard and his younger brother.

*

It was a longer, hotter summer than in years past, so Taibang took some provisions and set out early from the Krolom tribe while the sky was still gray and the air cool and clear, to cross the forests toward the drop point. He had learned of the delivery time a few days ago, but in the hope of a better yield, he did not share the secret with anyone else; the shame he felt only increased his determination.

He saw an enormous black shadow sweep over the land, and he looked up to watch a slim, long-bodied bird fly overhead and drop a large number of supply baskets from its belly. He waited until after the baskets

had landed before venturing forward to examine them and search for the special items Luan needed, which he couldn't let anyone else see.

Before long, people young and old were approaching, having seen the supply drop from afar. Exchanging glances like cats encountering each other before furtively averting their eyes and heading off in a different direction, they strove to preserve the appearance of peaceful coexistence as they searched for supplies. Taibang knew the reason all to well: after a few deliveries had sparked outbursts of violence, the army began monitoring every supply drop from the trees.

However, complete absence of conflict was impossible. To keep clear, Taibang decided to quit while he was ahead – he was nearly finished scavenging by this point anyway – so he carefully wrapped his collected items in muntjac skin, tied it into a bundle, and set off toward home in the shadow of the mountainside.

All of a sudden, his ears picked up a faint weeping plus a few words of panicked conversation, and he looked back into the thickening crowd to pinpoint the source. The tones were familiar – a clansperson – and after a moment's thought he identified the crier as a girl named Magake, who had an elder brother named Dano. Magake and Dano were among the few clanspeople in the tribe who spoke to Taibang, if only because their father had also left the tribe and, whether or not he had also crossed the border, had never come back.

A new batch of supplies hit the ground and the crowd shifted at once, while the tiny figures of Magake and Dano stood helplessly against the mountain wall. Timid as they were, once spooked they were too scared to rejoin the tussle, and instead waited to pick from what was left over. As the crowd thinned, Dano anxiously inspected each of the remaining supply baskets to see if they still contained anything. His sister stood sobbing to one side, her face scuffed, perhaps from a blow received during their earlier scavenging.

"Don't cry, Magake," Dano said, attempting to soothe her as he examined the baskets. "I'll have a look at your cuts in a little while. Don't cry.… The army's going to notice you like this."

Magake sniffled but couldn't hold her tears back. "Dano, I miss Dad. Why won't Dad come back?"

"He's not here anymore. He might be dead. Shhh.… Magake, you've got to…"

"I miss Dad." She seemed on the verge of losing control, and her choked-back sobs were increasingly conspicuous. "If only he were still here. I don't want to look at Mom's tear-stained face every day. What's near the border? What makes Dad not want to come back?"

"Magake." Dano's voice began to tremble, and even from his distant vantage point Taibang could see rustling in the trees, followed by the faint, low rumble of something approaching. But Magake kept talking.

"Gege, can't we and Mom just leave? We'll go look for Dad together. Why won't Dad come back?"

"Magake! Stop talking.…"

"Dad came back to see me once." There was a dreamlike quality to her sobbing voice. "One night when you and Mom were asleep, I was lying on the ground when I suddenly woke up. The moon outside shone on my face, and I saw Dad's upper body poking into the house. He bent down and extended a long arm toward me and placed something soft and slippery into my mouth." She licked her lips as if remembering. "I couldn't identify the flavor. It was, I don't know, a little sweet but not really. What mostly grabbed hold of my tongue was a little bitter. I spit, but it had already melted. It was the color of dried-up coconut leaves. I licked it up and it turned sweet again in my mouth.… Such a marvelous food! And one I had never tasted here before."

Dano seemed at a loss for words. "You mean.… Dad came back to see us? For real, Magake?"

The rumble was growing more intense, and the tree leaves and branches began swaying back and forth as the thing drew nearer. Anxiety burned in Taibang, but Magake and Dano remained frozen, staring at each other.

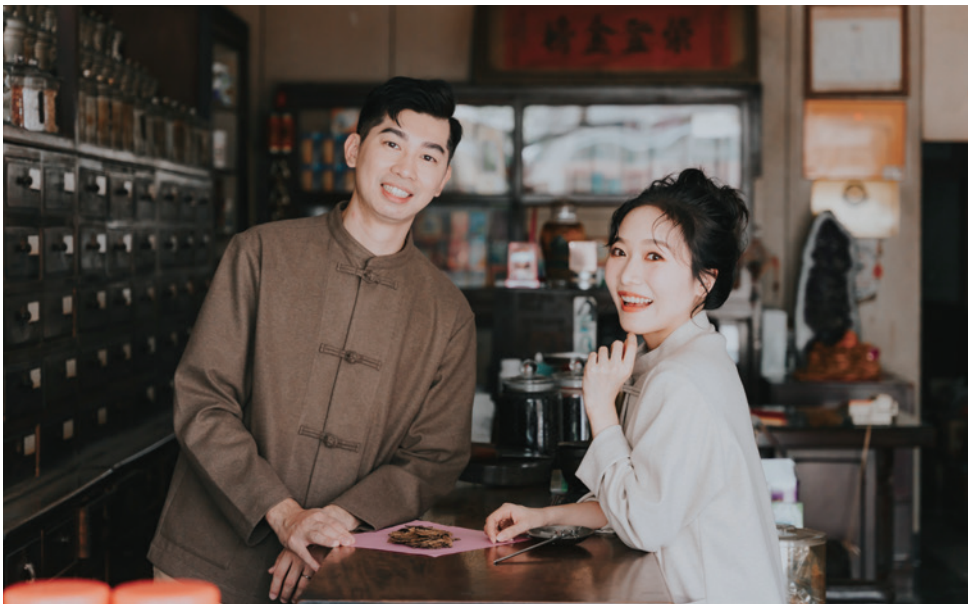

BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

NON-FICTION

中醫四物所：淺易圖文╳趣味漫畫，的眉眉角角，IG人氣平臺帶你無痛理

CHINESE MEDICINE: A GUIDED TOUR

Siwutopia
中醫四物所



Founded by two Chinese medicine interns, Siwutopia is a social media platform for promoting Chinese medicine concepts to a wider audience. Each of the founders began their careers in unrelated fields, and, despite their vastly different personality types, both chose to begin new careers in Chinese medicine. While stuck at home during the pandemic, they decided to start the Siwutopia platform on Instagram to share interesting content they had picked up over the course of their studies, explaining difficult Chinese medicine concepts in plain language, and, hopefully, making it fun. Their goal is to help Chinese medicine become part of their readers' daily lives.

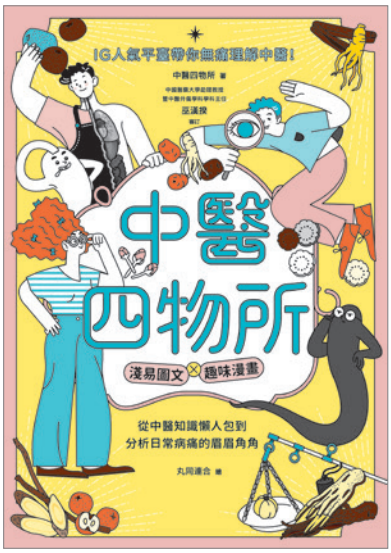
UN-TONED Media
丸同連合

A design studio specializing in book jacket design, UN-TONED Media takes its name from the concept of atonal music, implying that multiple voices can sing their own unique songs while still achieving mutual coherence and harmony.

UN-TONED
PRODUCTION

從中醫知識懶人包到分析日常病痛 解中醫！

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS & COMICS



- **Category:** Lifestyle
- **Publisher:** Faces
- **Date:** 7/2022
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw
- **Pages:** 240
- **Length:** 72,300 characters (approx. 46,900 words in English)

With over a thousand years of history, Chinese medicine remains the preferred treatment option for many in Taiwan. Packed with easy-to-understand illustrations, explanations, and comic strip interludes, this book introduces readers to the fascinating world of traditional medicine, from theory and diagnosis to herbs and acupuncture.

With over one thousand years of history, Chinese medicine is based in the traditional medical practices of the Han Chinese people. In contemporary Taiwan, this medicine continues to develop and advance, and it remains the treatment option of choice for many Taiwanese even as Western medicine has become widely available. Through easily understood explanations, illustrations, and comics (and a touch of humor), this book introduces readers to the uniquely fascinating world of Chinese medicine.

The first chapter begins with basic concepts, explaining the differences between Chinese medicine and Western medicine, the meaning of *yin* and *yang* and the five elements, and the Chinese medical understanding of the human body and disease. The second chapter explores how doctors of Chinese medicine evaluate symptoms to diagnose disease, and how readers can treat basic ailments through medical massage and dietary changes. The third chapter is devoted to the herbs of Chinese medicine, explaining how they are classified according to their basic medical properties, and how they are used in treatment. Finally, the last chapter looks at modernization and change as Chinese medicine expands in unexpected directions, including electroacupuncture, fitness, and veterinary medicine.

The origin of this book is the Siwutopia social media platform, which amassed over 15,000 followers on Instagram by making Chinese medicine more approachable through jargon-free explanations, humor, and relatable comic strips involving a repeating cast of characters. Now in print form, book readers can follow along with Lil' Yin, Lil' Yang, Lanky Joe, and his sister Miss Curves as they learn about the fascinating and practical wisdom of Chinese medicine!

Book Report:
Chinese Medicine: A Guided Tour with Illustrations & Comics

By William Ceurvels

The story of Chinese medicine in Taiwan over the last century has been one of survival: the profession was nearly eradicated through a Japanese modernization campaign during the occupation, then suffered from a serious legitimacy crisis surrounding the use of steroids in Chinese patent medicines mid-century, and in the modern era, this age-old medicine now struggles to remain relevant in a world increasingly dominated by western and scientific worldviews. Against this rather dire backdrop, *Chinese Medicine: A Guided Tour with Illustrations & Comics* is a necessary and welcome addition to the Taiwan book market – an accessible, but thorough introduction to Chinese medicine meant to engage and secure the attention of scroll-happy zoomers and millennials with a blend of humor, relatable real-life scenarios, illustrations and a down-to-earth writing style.

With its cryptic, symbolic language and ancient conceptual models, Chinese medicine must seem like an archaic relic of the pre-modern Chinese world to a younger generation of Taiwanese whose only exposure to such concepts comes from passing references in Jin Yong novels and fantasy mobile games. *Chinese Medicine: A Guided Tour with Illustrations & Comics* aims to translate the abstruse conceptual landscape of Chinese medicine into a language that the younger generation can easily identify with and understand through the prism of their own modern worldview. To this end, Faces Publishing has enlisted "Siwutopia", a group of young Chinese doctors at the China Medical University Affiliated Hospital who has built up an impressive following on Instagram and Facebook by creating Chinese medicine-related content that blends cutesy and humorous graphics with culturally relevant topics such as, "is your constitution suited to drinking coffee?" and "what to do about period pain?" The book maintains the relatable style of Siwutopia's online content and employs a variety of strategies to ensure a "painless introduction to Chinese medicine", as the cover advertises.

But why would any introduction to Chinese medicine be "painful"? As it turns out, the ancient healing modality can actually be overwhelmingly complex to the uninitiated – Chinese medicine employs a gamut of pre-modern logic systems such as five-element theory, root and branch theory, five movements and six qi etc., and its understanding of how the body functions, the body's constituent parts and the pathogenesis of disease all vary significantly from Western medicine. Thus, presenting all this information in a way that doesn't make cram school-weary youngsters feel like their reading another textbook is no small task, but *Chinese Medicine: A Guided Tour with Illustrations & Comics* accomplishes this feat quite successfully.

The first thing that stands out is the language – Siwutopia's prose is highly conversational; they addresses the reader directly and often refers to himself in joking asides. This conversational style helps to draw the reader in and alleviate any sense of alienation that may result from the highly technical and unfamiliar nature of the material. Additionally, by referring to themselves as the "clinic director" and peppering his speech with Taiwanese phrases, Siwutopia evinces an avuncular quality that instills both comfort and trust in the reader.

Siwutopia has also created a cast of characters that imbue a human element to otherwise difficult and unfamiliar theory: Lanky Joe and Miss Curves are a brother-sister duo whose misadventures appear in short comics at the beginning of every chapter and demonstrate how each subject is relevant to the life of an average person. In most of the comics, the two teens are also joined by a pair of ghost-like characters

named Lil' Yin and Lil' Yang. The two function almost like a Chinese cross-talk duo, with Lil' Yin playing the straight man who explains difficult Chinese concepts to Lanky Joe and Miss Curves, while Lil' Yang just tries to cook up trouble and find the punchline. In one of the early chapters on Chinese vs. Western medical theory, Miss Curves complains to Lanky Joe that her Chinese doctor told her she had a wind stroke. Lil' Yang feigns concern for her "serious condition", but Lil' Yin quickly intervenes to assure Miss Curves that this is simply a matter of differing terminology and she has nothing to worry about. These comics offer a nice reprieve after the more theory-laden back halves of each chapter and zoomers will no doubt identify with the brother-sister duo's humorous misunderstanding of concepts in Chinese medicine.

Explaining Chinese medical concepts to a lay audience is a difficult task, but Siwutopia is skilled at using analogy and familiar examples from everyday life to lend context and clarity to the reader. Particularly admirable is Siwutopia's explanation of the Chinese medical concepts of qi, blood and fluid by way of a steam-powered train. Qi, Siwutopia explains, can be likened to the steam that powers the engine, while blood and fluid are like the raw materials used to produce the steam. Despite qi being an inscrutable and hard to define concept, the steam engine image will be immediately comprehensible to lay audiences on an intuitive level. Going along with the transportation theme, Siwutopia likens Chinese medicine's channel system to "highways and byways", while describing acupoints as "checkpoints along the highway that can signal an issue in that locality". Just like the steam-engine analogy, this portrayal of the channels and acupoints is instantly comprehensible without sacrificing any accuracy. Siwutopia also makes expert use of common ailments familiar to even the least medically-minded teen to demonstrate certain less obvious Chinese medical concepts. In Chinese medicine, wind is considered an external pathogen that has a swift, protean, and unpredictable nature, but this can be a difficult concept to grasp. Siwutopia uses the common skin disease urticaria to bring the concept of wind to life, noting how Chinese physicians recognize urticaria as a wind-related disease because the skin lesions come and go quickly and without any predictable pattern.

Ultimately, even after deploying all the ingenious strategies described above, the average young reader may inevitably still tire from a ceaseless stream of didactic material, but Siwutopia has yet another ace up their sleeves – sandwiched between theoretical material at the beginning and end of each chapter, are practical guides for putting all this new knowledge to use. For instance, in the chapter on eye strain, Siwutopia recommends massaging two acupoints when the eyes become sore after reading and even shares an herbal tea that can be used to "nourish the eyes". In the section on acne, an interactive chart teaches the reader how to diagnose their own acne by location: acne on the forehead is a "heart" issue, suggesting an overactive mind, while acne on the left cheek indicates a "liver" disfunction for which the afflicted party should avoid going to bed too late. This interactive content compels the reader to experience the medicine for themselves, further reducing the distance between the westernized Taiwanese zoomer and this ancient healing system.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of *Chinese Medicine: A Guided Tour with Illustrations & Comics* is that despite all the attempts to humanize and simplify the medicine in this volume, Siwutopia manages to sneak in a surprising level of detail and depth in their descriptions of various ideas. I was amazed to find a table containing differential diagnosis for various organ-related coughs, detailed discussion of the role the Chinese medical notion of the "lung" plays in constipation, and a section on the lesser-known, eye-based diagnostic system called "five wheels and eight belts". If not for the histrionics of Siwutopia's motley cast of characters, the illustration-heavy presentation style and informal, vernacular feel of the prose, such in-depth material would certainly be too much for the tik-tok attention spans of the average teen, but the headier content is broken up just enough to maintain that "painlessness" while also delivering a substantive representation of the medicine's theoretical precepts.

Chinese Medicine: A Guided Tour with Illustrations & Comics is the perfect remedy for an ancient medical system struggling to remain relevant, a volume that balances a hyper-awareness and attentiveness to the aesthetic of its audience while never compromising the complexity and, indeed, the dignity of this profound and powerful system of medicine. As Taiwan continues to westernize, Siwutopia's "painless" didactic model may well serve as an effective and important strategy for transmitting this valuable knowledge to successive generations.

CHINESE MEDICINE: A GUIDED TOUR WITH ILLUSTRATIONS & COMICS

By Siwutopia
Translated by William Ceurvels

1.1 Differences Between Western and Chinese Medicine

Have you ever seen a Chinese medical doctor? Did they tell you, "You've got a case of wind stroke!", "Your issue is due to phlegm!" or "You've got kidney deficiency!"? At the end of the consult, did you find yourself horrified but still nodding your head despite not having a clue what the doctor was talking about? Sound familiar?

So, what exactly do Chinese medicine doctors mean when they say these things? To answer this question, we must first understand how the ancient Chinese understood the physiology and structure of the human body, and clarify the differences between Western and Chinese medicine.

Medicine Starts with Observation

Curiosity and observation are the starting point for technological development. As soon as we become curious about our surroundings, we then begin to search for the mechanisms and rules underlying what we see and hope to use these "explanations" to prosper and thrive. Throughout the history of human development, disease has continually presented a major challenge to humankind. Medicine, the science of prolonging human life, arose and developed in response to this challenge.

How Western Medicine Conceives of the Body

Western and Chinese medicine's differing observational perspectives have led them to follow two completely different trajectories of development. From the viewpoint of Western medicine, advancements in modern technology have brought about new possibilities for the medicine. Ever more powerful instruments allow scientists to see things humans have never seen before and the scope of observation has gradually progressed from the macroscopic to the microscopic. As scientists conduct ever more in-depth research and finally come to understand all the pathogenic mechanisms of a disease (you can think of these as all the steps in the progression of a disease), it is as if they are developing a detailed map of the body's inner functioning. Doctors and scientists can then focus on specific steps on that map and research and develop specifically targeted drugs to address that aspect of the disease.

As an example, Western medicine has used improved instruments and focused research to discover the body's heat regulating center. When we get a fever from a cold, we can use anti-pyretic medication (Acetaminophen, the main compound in Tylenol) which acts on the heat-regulating center within the brain to stop the fever. Additionally, developments in pathology have allowed us to discover a host of different fever-causing bacteria. Through researching the structures, physiology and effect on the human body of these bacteria, medical scientists can develop specialized drugs to suppress or eradicate them.

However, if we forcibly impose Western medical logic onto our understanding of Chinese medicine, we might encounter certain difficulties. At times, these difficulties might be enough to make someone want to slam this book shut and release a stream of expletives (The author refuses to admit the self-referential nature of this sentence!). Yet, if we just shift our perspective, we can immediately gain clarity on a number of questions. So, for the moment, why not put aside your fixed beliefs and, armed with a more open and accepting attitude, enter into the world of the ancient Chinese, a world where the body was viewed from a more holistic perspective.

The Chinese Medical Outlook in the Context of Daoist Philosophy

As stated above, ancient people derived their understanding of the laws that govern the natural world through observation. Yet, in contrast to the west, since antiquity the Chinese have been influenced by the Daoist belief that all things behave according to an all-encompassing law or principle which they call the "dao". But what exactly is the dao? Lao Tzu famously stated, "The dao that can be named is not the eternal dao." This statement implies that while all phenomena are governed by laws and axioms that can be investigated and described, so-called "eternal laws" are not immutable. In everyday life, the diversity of the natural world is an excellent example of how "what appears to be manifold in form still conforms to universal principles". As the ancient Chinese encountered and strived to identify the root causes of various illnesses, they cleverly applied conclusions they had made from their observation of the natural world to their understanding of Chinese medicine. This process accounts for some of the more interesting features of the Chinese medical perspective of the human body.

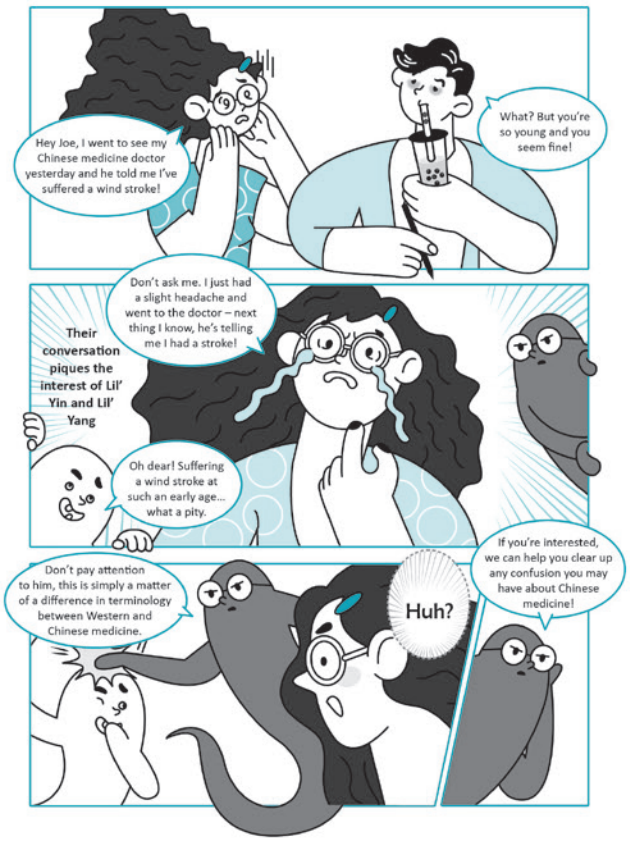
For example, the ancient Chinese were not aware of the existence of bacteria or viruses, but they observed that some people would get sick after changes in the weather or after being exposed to cold wind, thus, they attributed the illness to "wind" and "cold". Or, for instance, as Chinese physicians came to understand that the liver's* function was to manage the flow of qi and blood throughout the body, they noticed that this function was evocative of the branching of trees and the flourishing fecundity of the spring season, so the liver, wood, and spring became associated concepts in Chinese medicine. In a similar fashion, other seasons came to be associated with other organs and bowels based upon their common features: Summer is associated with the heart, fall with the lungs, winter with the kidneys and the spleen, and stomach with the late summer.

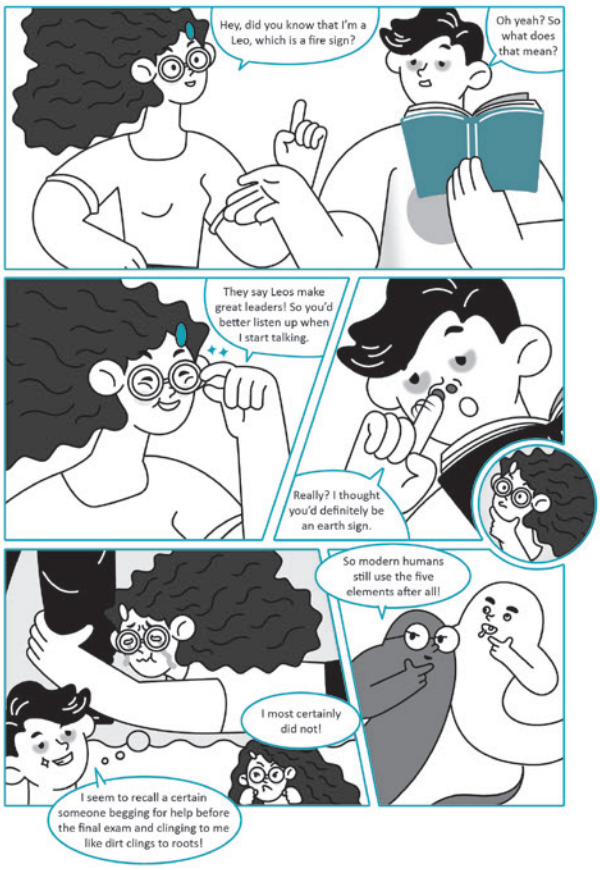
You might be saying to yourself, "The body is just tissues and organs. What does that have to do with spring, summer, or trees?" Yet these seemingly unrelated terms combine to form a dense web of associations that constitute the basis of Chinese medicine's holistic approach to understanding the body's various manifestations of illness. When treating a patient's illness, Chinese doctors will not just focus on symptoms and signs, they will also consider the effect that the external environment might be exerting on the patient. Factors such as seasonal variations in temperature and humidity or geographic location will all have an influence on the course of disease, and, in turn, will affect how the doctor decides to treat the patient. This relationship between the body and its surrounding environment is what Chinese medicine calls "the mutual responsivity between humanity and nature".

How Does Chinese Medicine Make Diagnoses Without Diagnostic Instruments?

Given that Chinese medicine traditionally did not make use of ultrasound, X-ray, and CT scans, how do Chinese doctors go about making diagnoses? In modern Chinese medical practice, doctors use something called "pattern identification as the basis for treatment". Put simply, pattern identification entails first collecting various information about the patient

* Please note that the Chinese medical concept of the liver does not correspond directly to the anatomical liver in biomedicine. While the Chinese medical conception of the organs is informed by anatomical knowledge, organs are primarily defined by a set of physiological functions and pathological symptom manifestations. (translator)





including their medical history, lab results, complexion, tongue diagnosis findings, radial pulse findings, and any symptoms the patient mentions. The doctor then evaluates this information to arrive at a diagnosis, as well as an understanding of the patient's constitution, after which they prescribe a suitable form of treatment. A "pattern" can be understood as a collection of several different related symptoms. For example, when a patient presents with fatigue, weakness, shortness of breath, a quiet, forceless voice, poor appetite, dizziness, a pale-colored tongue, and a thin, weak radial pulse, they will be diagnosed with a "qi-deficient" pattern. However, some patterns might have overlapping symptom presentations – blood deficiency is also marked by dizziness, for instance – so the doctor must consider the entire set of symptoms as a whole to come to an accurate diagnosis. Indeed, in some cases, a patient may present with multiple "patterns" – in such instances, the physician must rely on their clinical experience to make the right determination.

No discussion of Chinese medical diagnosis is complete without mentioning the four methods of diagnosis: "observation", "auscultation and smelling", "inquiry", and "palpation and pulse taking". Readers that have visited a Chinese doctor before likely have heard of the four methods, but may not have a detailed understanding of these forms of diagnosis. In the following, we'll give a brief overview of these pillars of Chinese diagnostics.

"Observation" refers to the physician using their keen powers of perception to evaluate visual data regarding your appearance and movement. For instance, the physician might be able to tell you have a structural issue from the way you walk. It is also common for doctors to inspect the patient's tongue – this "tongue examination" is another form of observation. For example, if the patient's tongue coating is yellow, unless they have had some food or drink like coffee or fruit that might alter the color of their coating, the yellow coating might indicate that the patient has "heat". Alternately, some patients will present with a large, swollen tongue that exceeds the

width of their mouth when they stick it out – this tells the physician that the patient has excessive dampness.

In the "auscultation and smelling" portion of the diagnosis, the physician observes the patient's voice and body odor. For example, they'll listen to the sound of their cough, the strength or lack thereof of their voice and note their breath and body odor.

"Inquiry" refers to the history taking portion of the diagnosis. Through inquiry, the physician learns about any discomfort the patient may have and what is the nature and time of onset of their pain.

Finally, in "palpation and pulse taking", the physician primarily inspects the pulse at the patient's radial artery right below the wrists, feeling for the strength, size, position, speed, and tension of the pulse. In Chinese medical terminology, these parameters are referred to as "Position, speed, shape, and dynamic". In Chinese medicine, the palpable radial pulse below the wrist is divided into three positions called the "cun", "guan", and "chi", which correspond to various organs and bowels. For instance, the left "guan" corresponds to the liver. When an abnormal pulse is felt at this position, this signals that there may be a problem with the liver.

However, if the above discussion has led you to believe that modern Chinese medical doctors only use these four diagnostic methods and do not make use of any modern diagnostic tools, you would be mistaken! In reality, modern Chinese doctors will also use the results of ultrasound and X-ray exams to inform their diagnosis. Modern diagnostic tools allow Chinese doctors to make even more precise assessments of their patients' conditions and discover issues that traditional forms of diagnosis may overlook. We'll introduce diagnostic equipment used in Chinese medical clinics in Chapter Four!

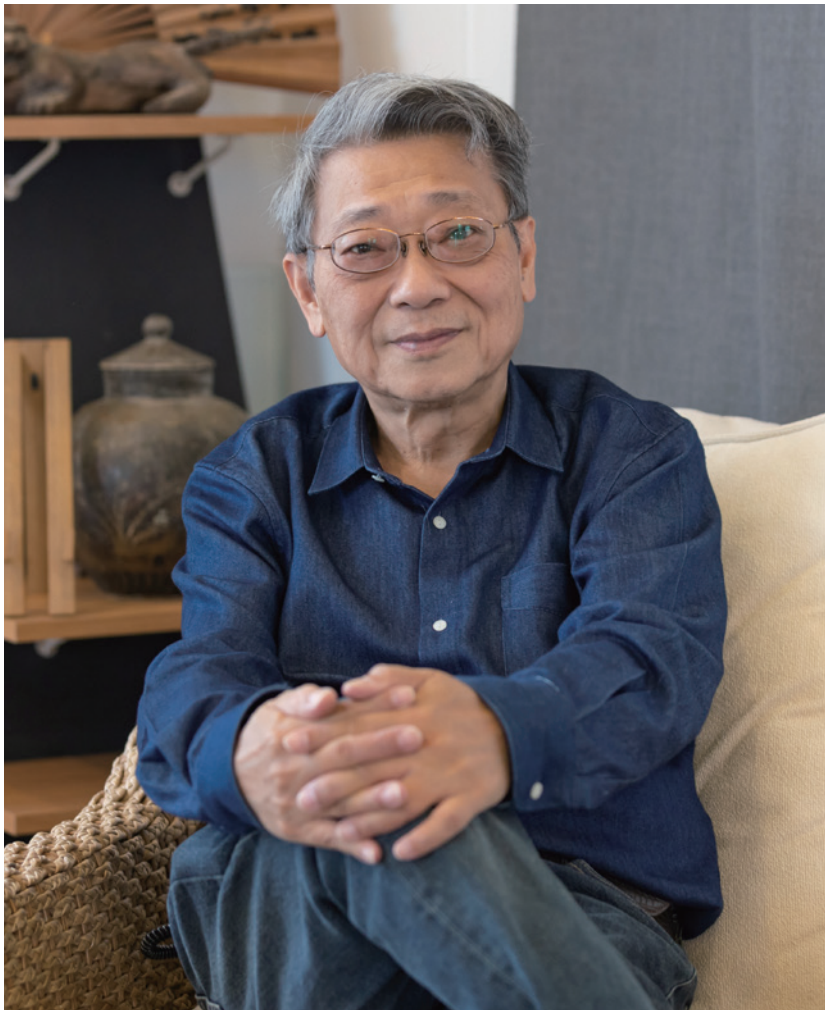
Chinese and Western Medical Collaboration

You might be thinking to yourself, "I knew it all along! When it comes down to it, Chinese Medicine and Western Medicine are just two completely different systems of healing." This is only partially true. The "laws" mentioned in "The Chinese Medical Outlook in the Context of Daoist Philosophy" and the "map" discussed in "How Western Medicine Conceives of the Body" might appear like quite different concepts upon first glance, but be it Western or Chinese medicine, these concepts are all deployed to construct a map of the body – the only real difference is the map's scale. Using Taiwan as an analogy for the body, Western medicine's map zooms in on specific alleyways and details the intricate layouts of individual communities, whereas Chinese medicine's map takes a bird's eye view of the geographic locations of various counties and their relative positions. In this analogy, becoming ill is akin to getting lost – at such times we'll certainly immediately take out our phone and check Google maps, zooming in and out to get a sense of where we are, what's nearby and how to get back on route. This ability to zoom in and out as we please on Google maps is similar to our current situation in the modern medical world where we have the privilege of viewing the body from the differing perspectives of Chinese Medicine and Western medicine to optimize health.

In videogaming, there is a gaming strategy called speedrunning in which players use super-human speeds to play through a game as fast as possible. Imagine for a moment that you want to speedrun a racing game: what would your strategy be? It goes without saying that you would first want to find the shortest possible route, right? Thus, in preparing for a successful run, just working on your drifting skills won't cut it, you'll need to work on something even more important: studying the map. However, if you don't have a map of the entire course, how can you find the shortest route? By the same logic, if you only have Western medicine's "map" to rely on, you might not be seeing how the body functions in its entirety. Combining Western and Chinese medical perspectives brings out the best in both healing modalities while reducing oversights from their respective blind spots.

後中共的中國：當中共政權解體，所

POST-CCP CHINA: AN OVERVIEW OF THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE CCP

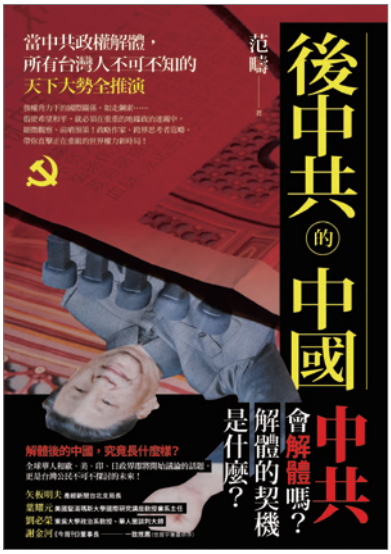


Fan Chou
范疇

- **Category:** Politics
- **Publisher:** Business Today
- **Date:** 10/2022
- **Rights contact:** booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw
- **Pages:** 256
- **Length:** 96,800 characters (approx. 62,800 words in English)

An authority on political and economic risk assessment in the Asia-Pacific region, Fan Chou (1955-2023) received his master's degree in philosophy from Columbia University and founded the InsightFAN online strategic risk platform. Over his lifetime he gleaned insights from over three decades of work experience in the US, Taiwan, China, and Singapore in the fields of cross-border venture capital, organizational risk management, and regional economic planning. He authored numerous books including *If Push Comes to Shove Is Taiwan Ready to Fight?, 2022: Taiwan's Last Window of Opportunity, and Taiwan* and *China: In Conversation with Xi Jinping.*

有台灣人不可不知的天下大勢全推演
POTENTIAL OUTCOMES FOLLOWING



Could the Communist Party of China simply dissolve of its own accord? If so, what would a post-CCP world look like? Risk management strategist and author Fan Chou guides readers through the new world order that could emerge as various actors respond to a post-CCP power vacuum.

The prospects of the collapse of China, or, alternatively, Taiwan being subsumed under communist China's autocratic rule, have been perennial topics of geopolitical debate for over three decades. Given current trends in world affairs, and the lessons learned from the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, it is once again time to question how long China can withstand the unprecedented internal and external pressures it currently faces.

This analysis of the dissolution of China's political regime begins with an assessment of various measures of fiscal health, concluding that the CCP's fiscal framework for maintaining political power has already substantially weakened. Attention then turns to the obstacles and incentives presented by various internal, external, regional, and international factors that will influence outcomes in a post-CCP China, with a focus on how China's internal politics will likely evolve in response, and what form the resulting post-CCP political structure will take. Finally, the author develops a "prognostic strategy" for Taiwan consisting of domestic, foreign, defense, and economic policies that will allow Taiwan to optimally prepare for and respond to a post-CCP world.

Adopting the macro perspective, author and political strategist Fan Chou applies his impressive depth of knowledge to the problem of predicting the political future of China, Taiwan, and the world. Convinced of the inevitable dissolution of the CCP, he walks readers through the most plausible scenarios and geopolitical responses, helping them to understand what to expect from this monumental shift in the world order.

Book Report:
Post-CCP China

By Petula Parris

In *Post-CCP China*, Taiwanese author Fan Chou sets out by clarifying a seemingly obvious point – China is not the CCP. In this book, Fan draws on his own experience and dealings in China – where he spent more than 20 years running various businesses – to unpick the current state of the CCP and make predictions for China's future. Fan views the CCP as an inflexible authoritarian regime approaching the end of its natural lifespan, and thus treats its eventual demise as an inevitability. However, rather than focusing on "whether" the CCP will disintegrate (as was the premise of Gordon Chang's *The Coming Collapse of China* in 2001), Fan seeks to identify the stakeholders – domestic and foreign – that are likely to decide the various potential outcomes in a post-CCP era.

This book contains nine chapters. The first three chapters focus on the book's main premise, China's economic development and status quo, and China's political development and status quo, respectively.

Chapter One aims to define what is meant by the "disintegration" of the CCP. In Fan's opinion, the CCP's political legitimacy largely relies on China's economic performance and wealth creation and, as such, the CCP's fiscal competence is closely correlated to its survival. In his trademark style, Fan mixes hard facts and light-hearted metaphors to prime the reader on China's current economic challenges, for example: *In 2008, China had $375 billion worth of external debt and $1.95 trillion in foreign exchange reserves. In 2021, it was $2.75 trillion and $3.25 trillion, respectively. Put another way, if [my friend] Old Wang had $1.95 trillion worth of cash stashed under his bed in 2008, he owed $375 billion of that to his fellow villagers. In 2021, the pile of cash under his bed had grown to $3.25 trillion, but he owed his fellow villagers $2.75 trillion.*

In Chapter Two, Fan explores why so many people are reluctant to contemplate the impossible: that a political behemoth such as the CCP could possibly cease to function. Fan takes the unexpected fate of the Titanic and Twin Towers as metaphors to identify the most vulnerable point in the CCP's power structure. Again, in his witty narrative, Fan takes the reader through the main junctures of China's stunning economic development and explains why he believes Xi Jinping's policies threaten to speed up the CCP's demise – while also pointing out that it is not too late for political reform.

Meanwhile, Chapter Three walks the reader through China's political development prior to and after 1949. He challenges common rhetoric around the CCP's political ideology (which, in Fan's opinion, is more rooted in Chinese legalism than Marxism), and also points out what he considers to be glaring anomalies in the story of "one China" (such as the fact that Mao Zedong once advocated carving China up into 27 independent states). In this chapter, Fan also analyzes Xi's wavering attempts to settle on an effective ideology for his rule. He warns that by overturning China's presidential term limit and further centralizing his power, Xi is taking China and the CCP into dangerous, uncharted territory.

The book's next two chapters focus on the domestic and international forces that could potentially affect China's outcome should the CCP disintegrate. Chapter Four subdivides Chinese society along a multitude

of political and geographical lines, giving a brief outline of the main traits and importance of each subdivision. In doing so, Fan underscores that China is a vast society with significant cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity. Again, this is not an academic analysis; rather, Fan provides his own sharp – and sometimes provocative – view on the status of each subdivision of China's political system or national territory. For example, he says of the Chinese army in the face of fiscal troubles: "*Nationalism is the only way to hold the PLA together. Shouting about it loud enough avoids a military coup. But soldiers can't eat nationalism. Once the [CCP's] money runs out, the PLA will fragment*." Or on the region of Xinjiang, which accounts for one sixth of China's total area: "*A person's view on Xinjiang can be used as a litmus test for their concept of 'China', as well as to measure their views on a 'unified China'. If you observe carefully or push for opinions, you will discover that many people wishing to see the end of the CCP are, at the same time, opposed to an independent Xinjiang. How does this make any sense? If you understand this phenomenon, you will also likely understand Putin's difficulty in accepting an independent Ukraine.*"

Chapter Five deals with international factors, as it assesses the significance of different countries and regions on China's future. For example, Fan points out how conflict around water sources is a potential flashpoint between India and China, how post-CCP China could learn from the experience of Vietnam's communist government in terms of political reform, and that the success of Taiwan in building a democratic Chinese-speaking society poses one of the biggest threats to the future of the CCP.

Although for Fan the demise of the CCP in its current state is inevitable, Chapter Six begins by summarizing the main arguments for and against the possible collapse of the CCP. This is followed by a "spectrum" of scenarios that might occur should the CCP disintegrate – from minor changes (such as changing the name of the CCP and enacting Vietnamese-style political reform) to major upheavals (such as China becoming a federation). In a similar vein, Chapter Seven discusses various ways China may reorganize itself according to which foreign forces are more successful at vying for influence.

As this book was written for a Taiwanese audience, Chapter Eight addresses Taiwan-specific issues and offers recommendations as to how Taiwan should ready itself for a potential conflict with China. Similarly, the book's final chapter mostly takes the form of a "letter" written to the citizens of the PRC (mirroring the "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan" released by the Chinese government in 1979) from the Taiwanese people.

The author's somewhat provocative take on China and the CCP strikes a similar tone to that of *The Invention of China* by Bill Hayton. However, unlike *The Invention of China* (which makes for denser reading and requires a firm grounding in Chinese history), *Post-CCP China* explains China's political history, economic situation, and cultural matters in a more anecdotal, op-ed style and, therefore, minimal knowledge of China is required to enjoy this book. The book is also structured in short, easy-to-digest sections. As such, this book would be suitable for a general readership with an interest in China.

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POST-CCP CHINA: AN OVERVIEW OF POTENTIAL OUTCOMES FOLLOWING THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE CCP

By Fan Chou
Translated by Petula Parris

Chapter 1: Post-CCP China

What is China without the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)? What happens when it is gone? General political discourse tends to skip these questions. For sure, the "collapse of China" has been debated since the turn of the century – but such arguments generally view the CCP and China as one. This book makes a different assumption: China in the post-CCP era is not necessarily the "China" you know today.

To understand this better, we can look back at post-1949 Taiwan, when the Kuomintang (KMT) Party imposed four decades of martial law over the island. While the KMT's authoritarian methods of governance were, on the whole, less draconian than the CCP's, Taiwan was nonetheless a dictatorship governed by a single political party.

In the 1980s, if you were caught declaring that "The KMT is not Taiwan!", you would have been promptly dragged off the street and incarcerated. Fast forward to today, and such behavior would attract little more than a few curious stares. Indeed, should you wish, you could now quite safely walk the streets of Taipei declaring that "The DPP and Taiwan are not one!" This is because the name "Taiwan" has already evolved far beyond its past associations of one-party KMT rule – and lightyears on from Taiwan's old name "Formosa".

So why, then, do we blur the lines between the CCP and China? Is it because of the blanket control the CCP seems to hold over the lives of ordinary Chinese citizens? Post-CCP China does not automatically refer to China in its current state. We only need turn the clock back on Europe to understand that "Europe" and the "European Union" were never meant to share the same destiny. Similarly, after almost a century as a de facto European nation, the country of Yugoslavia now exists only in history books. Time does not stand still.

As such, we should start asking what shape a post-CCP China might take. How would the current political, social, and economic dynamics at play within China affect the outcome? And what role would international forces play?

Scope and Definitions

It is first necessary to define the overall scope of, and key terms used in, this book. Most of the world's nation states recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a political entity, with the CCP as its steward.

"China" is, in itself, an ambiguous concept – and "Chinese" even more so. Someone talking about "China" may be referring to the nation state ruled by the PRC, a geographical region, or even a cultural tradition; while "Chinese" can encompass ethnic, political, or cultural matters. As such, clarity is required when applying these terms.

For the purposes of this book, "post-CCP" refers to the period *after* the disintegration of the CCP. Anything prior to this will be considered the "CCP era".

What Constitutes the Disintegration of the CCP?

Having studied this topic for years, I have settled on a single indicator to signal the disintegration of the CCP (although there are, of course, many alternative analytical perspectives from which to approach this question). The CCP is a political regime sustained by a power structure that has already entered its final phase – the indicator for this being fiscal competence. We can, therefore, use the CCP's fiscal competence in each of China's provinces and regions to assess whether the CCP is still "breathing".

In 2022, due to geopolitical factors and China's own internal political struggles, only Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Guangdong appear to have balanced their books – with all other Chinese provinces, regions, and cities chalking up deficits. In the meantime, China's land financing and export-led growth models (both keystones of Deng era economic reform) are both rapidly losing steam, which makes it difficult for the central government to prop up local public finances any longer. In short, the Hong Kong-inspired land financing model has already exhausted demand and begun to atrophy, while revenues from China's export-led manufacturing sector (originally based on the Taiwanese industrial park model) have also almost dried up due to US containment efforts and China's zero-Covid policies. In my opinion, even if China tries to revive these models, results will not be seen for at least five years – and the CCP leadership in its current form is simply too unstable to last that long.

Therefore, while the collapse of a political regime necessarily involves various factors, in the case of the CCP, we can take fiscal competence as our patient's "vital sign".

Based on this, I propose the following definition: When more than 80% of China's provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions have been unable to maintain fiscal balance for a period of at least two years, the post-CCP era has begun, regardless of whether this situation is brought on by war, economics, or social factors.

A word of warning: While we now have a quantifiable indicator with which to gauge the CCP's fiscal health, the CCP is prone to "withholding" unfavorable economic data. This makes it difficult to accurately measure its true fiscal position. We should, therefore, not be surprised if China's "fiscal disintegration" presents itself like a stroke patient – one minute the patient seems fine, the next they are struggling to function.

Of course, a post-CCP vacuum may very well see China fumble along in a zombie-like existence, where it becomes isolated internationally and its citizens live in hardship. If such a scenario were to prevail, all kinds of domestic and foreign forces would vie for influence, and it is exactly these forces that this book aims to predict.

Why Can't the CCP Just Print More Money?

One of my friends (he's a little naïve when it comes to economics) asked me why the Chinese government couldn't simply print more money when its coffers run dry. When I heard this, I burst out laughing, and offered him a precautionary tale: "My good friend, Old Wang, was very wealthy until some bad investments left him broke. One day, Old Wang was passing a shoe shop with his young son, when the little boy started nagging him for the latest Nike sneakers in the shop window. 'Daddy can't afford them right now,' Old Wang told his son. 'I'll buy them for you another day when I've got some money.' To which the child replied: 'Can't you just use your credit card, Daddy? Isn't that how you get money?'"

Before delving further into Old Wang's financial troubles, I should explain why I say the CCP engine can only run on empty for two years. Why two years, rather than five or ten? Didn't the CCP shore up its economy during the 2008 credit crisis with a generous four-trillion-yuan stimulus package? If that helped China and the global economy through a sticky spot in 2008, can't the CCP do it again?

The answer to this requires some understanding of the relationship between public finances, debt, and foreign exchange reserves.

In 2008, China's GDP stood at $4.6 trillion US dollars. By 2021, this had risen to $17.7 trillion (the dollar to yuan exchange rate was roughly the same in both years). For the same two years, China's debt-to-GDP ratio stood at 140% and 300% ($6.44 trillion and

$53 trillion), respectively. If we borrow my friend Old Wang here, we could say that Old Wang's domestic and foreign credit card debt was 1.4 times his net worth in 2008, and three times his net worth in 2021.

Next, we look at the relationship between external debt and foreign exchange reserves. In 2008, China had $375 billion worth of external debt and $1.95 trillion in foreign exchange reserves. In 2021, it was $2.75 trillion and $3.25 trillion, respectively. Put another way, if Old Wang had $1.95 trillion worth of cash stashed under his bed in 2008, he owed $375 billion of that to his fellow villagers. In 2021, the pile of cash under his bed had grown to $3.25 trillion, but he owed his fellow villagers $2.75 trillion.

In March 2022, NetEase reported that China's fiscal revenue and expenditure for 2021 were 11.13 trillion yuan and 20.99 trillion yuan, respectively. This resulted in a self-sufficiency ratio of 53 percent, adding some 9.8614 trillion yuan to China's total fiscal deficit (there were some discrepancies between NetEase's figures and those released by Beijing at the end of January 2022). So, in 2021, as the family breadwinner, you could say that Old Wang earned 11.15 trillion yuan and ran up household expenses of 20.99 trillion – meaning his income only covered 53 percent of his costs.

Let's assume that 2022 goes roughly the same as 2021 for Old Wang. He will still have $500 billion under his bed left over from 2021 (that's $2.75 trillion subtracted from $3.25 trillion), but that isn't enough to cover his $1.45 trillion deficit in 2022 (based on 9.8614 trillion yuan and an exchange rate of 6.8 yuan to the dollar). Old Wang still can't afford those Nike sneakers for his son!

Of course, Old Wang could just apply for some new credit cards and keep spending that way. But as soon as his income falls short of his interest payments (which won't be long!), creditors will start knocking at his door. Declaring himself bankrupt is also an option. Either way, Old Wang doesn't have the best relationship with his wife, and so he is probably also heading for divorce. As chance would have it, Old Wang's wife and son have been asking about the family finances – for example, they'd like to know what happened to all the money the family made over these past 30 years. "Look at all this!" Old Wang exclaims, pointing at the expensive marble floor and ornate Italian furniture. "Look at all the things I bought us!" Puzzled, Old Wang's wife digs out all their old receipts from a kitchen cabinet and runs some calculations. "These only account for half our earnings. Where's the other half?" she asks. This is how Old Wang's wife discovers that not only has her husband squandered a good part of the family fortune on living it up with his friends, but he also a string of mistresses and several secret offspring to boot.

This is, to put it figuratively, where the CCP's finances currently stand. How will the Evergrande real estate crisis impact the CCP, given that trillions of US dollars in assets are affected? Now, the future of another Chinese property developer, Country Garden, is also in jeopardy – but what does this have to do with the CCP's own financial standing? The answer lies in the bedrock of the CCP's finances: land financing. Most of China's central and local fiscal revenue is derived from industries connected to the real estate sector, where corruption is rife. The central Chinese government website itself tells us: "In 2021, revenue of local government-managed funds totaled 9.3936 trillion yuan, signaling a year-on-year increase of 4.5%. Of this, revenue from the sale of state-owned land use rights was 8.7051 trillion yuan." Yes, that's right: that's 92.67 percent of the government's fiscal revenue! If China's real estate sector implodes, the CCP's balance sheet and entire Chinese economy can only follow suit.

So where exactly *did* the rest of the money go? It is true that China's infrastructure frenzy consumed vast quantities of cash but (following the wisdom of Old Wang's wife) we should probably take a thorough look through the books. Have you ever heard the Chinese saying: "Take a feather from a passing goose"? Please allow me to elaborate. I once worked out that any business dealing in China involving officials from state-owned enterprises or government departments (at any level) will see around 30 percent of the total deal "skimmed off" into somebody's pocket. When I shared my findings with a prominent Chinese economist, he grinned at me and said: "How naive you are, my friend. Thirty percent? Are you kidding me? It's much more than that!"

I also once attended a meeting where a district governor from one of China's centrally administered

municipalities was discussing an international exhibition project with his staff. Someone from the finance department asked the governor to look over the budget proposal for the project. The governor glanced at the proposal, threw it straight back, and scoffed: "Two hundred million? You expect me to apply to the National Development and Reform Commission with two hundred million yuan? You'd better add a zero to those numbers and make it two billion!"

The CCP is running out of money. Public servants are having their pay slashed; local governments are setting up "salary reduction departments"; teachers are being asked to sign promissory notes for unpaid wages (taking them back to the IOU era of the 1980s and 1990s); companies in Shenzhen are holding "salary reduction competitions", where employees propose their own salary cuts, with only the lowest bidders getting to keep their jobs; the number of unemployed college graduates has reached the tens of millions; small businesses are going under due to supply chain disruptions; mortgage defaults have caused the number of property foreclosures to skyrocket; banks are setting limits on cash withdrawals; the government is preventing citizens from leaving the country; China's army of PPE-clad workers (the very same ones who were berated endlessly during the Shanghai lockdown) are now taking to the streets to protest against unpaid wages; temporary workers in Shenzhen are accepting hourly rates of just five yuan an hour (seven yuan in Suzhou); and local officials are simply opting to *tang ping* or "lie flat". Indeed, the money is gone, but to where exactly?

I therefore predict that, should such financial conditions persist, the CCP regime will be unable to function in its current form for a period of more than two years.

Chapter 2: Fiscal Troubles Will Lead to the CCP's Disintegration

When people tell me the CCP won't fall, I ask them to consider the September 11 attacks in New York. Prior to September 11, 2001, no one in the world (least of all the architects involved) thought two airplanes striking the Twin Towers with the force and at the floor levels they did would be of enough consequence to bring the two buildings down.

The CCP is a giant political apparatus that governs 1.35 billion people and a territory of 96 million square kilometers, with its vertically integrated administration maintaining a firm grip on Chinese society at all levels. Could such a mammoth machine really come to a standstill?

In my opinion, it certainly could, and may do so sooner than people think. I say this for many reasons: First, on what core, guiding principle is the CCP regime built? In my opinion (and I have mooted this point for several years), the CCP runs on a principle of "power", which permeates the behavior of all social organizations and individual citizens.

This is the concept of "Powerism" I have referred to repeatedly over the years – and this also happens to be the CCP's structural weak spot. The CCP relies on centralized power to operate its state machinery, unlike capitalist countries and market economies such as the United States, which have adopted decentralized power and checks and balances as the basic structure with which to safeguard their state and political systems.

Consider the following scenario: If the US president were assassinated tomorrow, how would the country's political system respond? To what extent would US national security and social stability be compromised? And what if it happened in China? If the leader of the CCP was assassinated tomorrow, how would this impact the PRC as a nation state and all those living within its geographical borders? We only need make this comparison to understand the differences between the two political systems.

When the disintegration of the CCP occurs, it will be caused by a hit to the CCP's weakest structural link. Some people believe the CCP could fall after a single, black swan event; others view its disintegration as an inevitability. Regardless of who is right, the fatal blow will occur at the weakest point in the CCP's power structure.

BOOKS FROM TAIWAN