
BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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文化部 MINISTRY OF CULTURE REPUBLIC OF CHINA (TAIWAN)

TAIWAN CONTENT PLAN 臺流文化黑潮計畫

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Non-Fiction

ABOUT MINISTRY OF CULTURE

The Ministry of Culture of Taiwan (Republic of China) was established on May 20, 2012.

As a member of the Executive Yuan, the Ministry oversees and cultivates Taiwan's soft power in the areas of arts and humanities, community development, crafts industry, cultural exchanges, international cultural participation, heritage, literature and publishing, living aesthetics, TV, cinema, and pop music.

The logo of the Ministry is an indigo-dyed morning glory. The indigenous flower symbolizes a trumpet heralding the coming of a new renaissance, in which cultural resources and aesthetics permeate all corners of the nation. The morning glory also represents the grassroots tenacity of Taiwan's diverse culture, a yearning for the positivity, simplicity, and warmth of earlier days, and a return to collective roots and values.

ABOUT BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

Books from Taiwan is an initiative funded by Ministry of Culture 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.

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. A maximum of 2 applications can be submitted per period.

- Conditions:
  1. The so-called Taiwanese works must meet the following requirements:
     A. Use traditional characters;
     B. Created by a natural person holding an R.O.C. identity card or by a foreigner holding a work permit issued by the central competent authority of the R.O.C. (unless otherwise stipulated by the Employment Service Act);
     C. Has been assigned an ISBN in Taiwan.
     i.e., 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, and detailing the rights and obligations of both parties, such as the term and renewal, royalty and advance, etc.
  3. A translation sample of the Taiwanese work is required (no restriction on its format and length).
  4. In principle, the translation of application should be directly translated from the original language. The translator's CVs must state whether he or she has mandarin translation experience.
  5. If applications use the fully translated English version of the book selected into "Books from Taiwan" to be published directly, or uses its excerpt translated English

version to translate the entire text into English for publication, please state it in applications. It is still necessary to provide documents certifying that the copyright holder of the Taiwanese work consents to its translation and foreign publication.

6. 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. Promotion fees (limited to expenses related to R.O.C. writers participating in overseas promotional activities, not including advertising fees; applicants for this funding must propose a specific promotion plan and complete the implementation before submitting the grant project results);
     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 Golden Picture Book Award, and the Taiwan Literature Award, books written in endangered languages of the R.O.C., books on Taiwan's culture and history, or series of books.
  3. Applicants who have a record of winning international awards for translated and published Taiwanese books will receive more grant.
  4. Grant recipients who use the fully translated English version of the book selected into "Books from Taiwan" for publication, the grant does not cover translation fees; for those who use the excerpt translated English version, the translation fee is limited to the length of the book that has not yet been translated, and its grant amount will be adjusted based on the length of the entire text.
- 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

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Dear Readers,

Everyone knows a novel that seems to define an era. It might capture the zeitgeist of the times, as *The Great Gatsby* did for the Jazz Age. Or, perhaps it gave us a character who is emblematic of an era, as the deeply disturbed Patrick Bateman embodies a mercenary and morally adrift 1980s in *American Psycho*. Novels can even gift us names for entire historical milieus – think Dickensian London, or the Gilded Age (courtesy of Mark Twain). What is critical is that the setting must so deeply inhabit the novel – integrating itself into the plot, molding the thoughts and behaviors of the characters, providing a palpable ambience – that even if we were not initially familiar with that historical time and place, by the time we are finished, we feel as if we know its essence.

In this issue of Books from Taiwan, we are delighted to present a handful of books that will immerse you in the varied eras of Taiwan's modern history. Modern Taiwan history is a baffling subject for outsiders, with its succession of regimes and rapid economic and societal development, but with these books, no preparation is required. Readers can dive straight to the depths of an era, seeing it from the inside out, perceiving it directly through the concerns of the characters.

We begin our chronological journey through the eras of modern Taiwan with *End of Days*, by Huang Wun-Syuan (see volume 2). In the final weeks of the Pacific War, Taiwan, as a colony of the Empire of Japan, faces Allied bombings and food shortages. Questions of survival haunt those at home as well as the sons of Taiwan sent to fight for Japan in the Pacific. The Khóo family faces this atmosphere of desperation and uncertainty with resigned fortitude, clinging to the hope that they all can survive, and eventually be reunited at the war's end. Rich with historical detail, and praised for bringing a neglected era of Taiwan's history vividly to life, *End of Days* builds a complete portrait of the lives of colonized people on the eve of Japanese surrender.

Fast forward to the 1970s: in the wake of the Chinese Civil War, Taiwan is now the last remaining territory under Republic of China's control. Stinging from their defeat at the hands of communist forces under Chairman Mao, the Nationalist party in Taiwan rules over a police state bent on quelling dissent and rooting out communist spies. Mutual suspicion and jingoistic propaganda are bywords of the era, but so are optimism and hope as Taiwan's "economic miracle" continues to gain momentum. More importantly, brave

individuals, at great personal risk, are laying down the roots of a democracy movement that will flower in the decade that follows. Against the international backdrop of the cold war and the space race, the complex and contradictory currents of this era are poignantly captured in Huang Chong-Kai's *Anti-Gravity* (volume 1), a collection of short stories in which the struggle against the oppressive weight of authoritarianism is likened to overcoming the Earth's gravitational pull to achieve the freedom of spaceflight.

The aforementioned democracy movement finally comes to fruition in the 1980s, closing the curtain on nearly forty years of martial law, and transforming Taiwan politically. The generation that heads off to university at the close of the decade experiences unprecedented freedom of thought and expression. Inspired by the success of the democracy movement, and eager to maintain the momentum of reform, their university years are marked by passion, idealism, and wave after wave of political movements. The collective memories of these times form one half of the dilemma at the heart of *From Tomorrow, I Will Be a Happy Person*, by Hu Ching-Fang (volume 1). The other half is the reality of the ordinary middle-class lives this generation must adapt to when the fierce idealism of youth begins to fade. The novel carries readers through nearly two decades of societal change, but it is the heady world of the late 1980s and early 1990s student movements that is most evocatively conjured, forming the spiritual touchstone for a generation.

When it comes to our current era, it becomes more difficult to pinpoint a novel that captures the spirit of the times. Often, an epoch-defining novel is only discovered later, after the passage of time grants sufficient hindsight. However, were I to hazard a guess as to which work of fiction in our catalog will be seen to represent something quintessential about contemporary times in Taiwan, and perhaps the world, I would point to Chan Wai's *Trivial Acts of Violence* (volume 2). An homage to Edward Yang's postmodern masterpiece *The Terrorizers*, the novel constructs a fraught web of relationships spanning Taiwan and Hong Kong, through which tremors of violence, aggression, and oppression are transmitted, leading to distant, unforeseen consequences. The backdrop of forced tranquility provided by pandemic controls complements the novel's theme of dark currents moving beneath the banal surface contours of society. The fallout from the political crackdowns in Hong Kong is also felt, providing an important foil to Taiwan's tenuous geopolitical status, while also linking the interpersonal transgressions of the title to the larger transgressions of political repression. If the pandemic marks the beginning of an era of increasing uncertainty, then *Trivial Acts of Violence* seems to capture the ways in which the pressure of that uncertainty spills over into our personal lives, and is passed along (and possibly magnified) by the staggering interconnectivity of contemporary society.

With that sobering reflection, I urge you to read the book descriptions and samples for all of the selections in this edition of Books from Taiwan. Alongside these four novels, each steeped in the rich atmosphere of a Taiwan era, you will find a host of works that represent the best that Taiwan's authors have to offer. From self-help (*You Deserve to Shine*, volume 1) to feline fiction (*Taro, the Pensive Puss*, volume 2) you are sure to find something to enlighten and/or entertain readers from your market.

Era-tically Yours,

Joshua Dyer

Editor-in-Chief


BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

FICTION

髒東西
DIRTY THINGS

photo © Wu René

Chen Po-Ching
陳栢青

- **Category:** Literary Fiction, Short Stories
- **Publisher:** Aquarius
- **Date:** 6/2024
- **Pages:** 336
- **Length:** 123,809 characters (approx. 80,400 words in English)
- **Full English Manuscript Available**
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Born in 1983, Chen Po-Ching is a graduate of the National Taiwan University Graduate Institute of Taiwan Literature, and recipient of the Global Youth Chinese Literary Award and the United Daily News Literature Award. Writing under the pen name Yeh Fu-Lu, his novel *Small City* was awarded the Chiu Ko Fiction Prize and a Chinese Nebula Awards Silver Prize. *Unitas: a Literary Monthly* has named him one of Taiwan's most promising novelists under forty.

With this first short story collection, one of Taiwan's most celebrated contemporary writers, Chen Po-Ching, dissects the provocative status of gay men in society through eight stories that weave together fact, fiction, sex, and politics.

Dirty Things, the first short story collection from author Chen Po-Ching, collects eight queer tales spanning 1960's Taiwan under martial law to the present era of democracy and legal same-sex marriage. More than just sketches of individual affection and desire, these stories are a microcosm of the modern history of sexual minorities in Taiwan. With incisive and unadorned prose, Chen Po-Ching confronts readers with the ambiguous nature of his literary enterprise: is *Dirty Things* an unvarnished depiction of natural desire? Or, of the ways in which natural desire has been systematically thwarted, denied, and repressed by society?

The first four stories take place in contemporary times. "The Stomach of the World" weaves together sexual and culinary fantasies in the milieu of a gay sauna in Thailand. When a man intent on death spends the night with the idol of his youth in "How to Die Young in Tokyo", will the fulfillment of his dream result in exaltation or misery? Taking place at a time when homosexuality was still grounds for exemption from military service, "The Off-Base Oracle" looks at the various ways that young soldiers attempt to "pass" as something they are not. "A Brief History of Robin" uses comic book allusions to probe the boundaries between male friendship and desire.

Introducing elements of Taiwan's unique historical circumstances, the final four stories highlight the societal pressures imposed on gay men while excavating the silent voices of the past. In "Good Night, Mr. President, Good Night", a challenge to authoritarian rule unfolds against the backdrop of the AIDS crisis. In "A Man Is Born", the racy short films secretly shown midway through main features in post-war Taiwan provide an unlikely avenue for a homosexual projectionist to out himself. The freedom that is sought in "The Anti-Communist Wives Club" turns out to be the freedom to love as one chooses, regardless of gender. Finally, "A Complete History of Taiwan's Star Wars Program" uses the metaphor of games to explore issues faced by homosexuals in the era of authoritarian rule.

With its seemingly offensive title, *Dirty Things* challenges the conventional social order while bringing a soothing warmth to the wounds of the past. Projecting himself into unseen corners of society, author Chen Po-Ching casts a spotlight on hidden failures and repressed desires. Transcending its "queer literature" label, *Dirty Things* is a book that gives voice to anyone who has ever felt confined by the narrowly defined roles in which society permits them to live.

DIRTY THINGS

By Chen Po-Ching
Translated by Mike Fu

> "The eight short stories of *Dirty Things* reflect various time periods and aspects of Taiwan, but share a common focus on the sexual orientation of the gay men illuminated within their refracted images. Notably, the doubts, anxieties, isolation, and queerness that one would rationally assume to belong exclusively to this minority group, with the right perspective, become emblematic of the majority. Chen Po-Ching's no-holds-barred prose drips with characteristic intransigent wit, his taste for the absurd and daring leaps freeing *Dirty Things* from the restraints of convention. At the same time, his writing is an astonishing record of the ordinary world and its inhabitants, its puns and earthy jokes melding insight with self-mockery."
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

The Stomach of the World

Change countries for a change of weather. Change names for another identity. Sometimes you have to become someone else to be more like yourself. It's the day of the water festival. The street's full of beautiful gays. All of them looking to get wet.

Mu Shu's going to tell Hsiao-Ho about his first time here, so many years ago. They're clinking glasses in the canteen of a sauna. They were drinking separately until Mu Shu reached across the table to stop Hsiao-Ho. Hey, that's not how you drink Thai liquor. How do you drink it then? You mix it with something. Whiskey and soda, beer with ice cubes. Thai people use bottle caps, Mu Shu says. They dilute their drinks one capful at a time. And then the guy goes on to order a bottle of Chang beer, popping it open. A plume of cold smoke wafts out, the rush of being in a distant land hitting in an instant.

Mu Shu pours one out – the canteen still uses the same cheap plastic cups as it used to – telling Hsiao-Ho that he was around the same age the first time he came to Bangkok, around twenty years old. Thrumming with energy. He'd come because he'd heard about how fun the water festival was. Know what I mean, he winks at Hsiao-Ho. People can get wet legally and get naked in public during the water festival. The more naked people you see, the wetter you get. Everyone's got a water gun shooting load after load in the street. The street's full of quivering pecs, pink nipples trembling with droplets of water on the verge of falling. The best part is that all the bodies are so wet that you can't tell what's sweat and what isn't. Bake under the Bangkok sun a bit longer, and it's absolutely transcendent when the heat and moisture trapped beneath your skin escape through your pores, offering sweet relief.

And on top of that, there are the gays. Bangkok in these moments is the stomach of the world, Mu Shu says.

What do you mean by that?

You definitely know what I mean.

It's always like this. No matter how many pics there are on the hookup apps, how many partygoers, faces red and eyes glazed on the dance floor, swarms of ripped men in chest harnesses and short shorts grinding and grinding, each and every one drinking themselves into oblivion, drinking till they puke on the street, an Instagram Story of a flock of men screaming their heads off as they cross the street…

Hashtag water festival. Hashtag BKK. Hashtag you are loved.

But then you put down the phone, and come back to reality. Reality is the plastic cup in Mu Shu's hand, filled to the brim until it reaches surface tension. While everyone else is flowing. Everyone's wet, in pairs or foursomes or fivesomes and sixsomes, haphazardly coupling up, except for you all alone, you're always the last one left.

Why don't they choose me?

Why is it always me, only ever me left all alone?

That was the moment, Mu Shu tells Hsiao-Ho, yes, on the night of the water festival so many years ago, that he decided to come to the sauna.

It was a rash decision, of course, and a kind of gamble, with himself as the bargaining chip. All his chips on the table. The young Mu Shu counted up his coins and pushed them across the counter. In return he got a key, and stuffed everything about who he was before this day into the locker. He pulled his underwear up, then pulled himself up, and with a brusque movement of the hand he poured himself into the depths of the room like upturning a bucket of water.

That was my first time in a sauna.

Mu Shu says the space was different than he'd imagined.

But he couldn't really say what a sauna should have looked like either. He discovered then that he didn't know where the bath was or anything. It was a labyrinth in there, with so many tiny rooms like grottoes. Skin taut in the blast of air conditioning. A modern sauna isn't a water village of Chinese antiquity after all, more like the caves of Dunhuang, so dry they make you thirsty. Inside each cave was a stone Buddha with his face shorn off, a man's face covered in shadow. If you had a Dharmic connection, he'd take you on a journey, bring you to the brink of oblivion and then back again. Even if he didn't fill you with enlightenment, he'd still make you feel right as rain.

Mu Shu found out back then that the sauna had a canteen. Hearing this, Hsiao-Ho says he read online that they hired a chef from a five-star hotel to run the kitchen. The canteen's buffet was advertised on the website. The boss really knows what his customers are looking for. If you can't win over a man's heart, you can at least satisfy his stomach, it's always good to eat your fill.

But isn't this absurd, Mu Shu cuts in. Who would hire a five-star chef just so people could stuff themselves? Who cares, replies Hsiao-Ho. People don't come here looking for food. The patrons all know where the real buffet is.

The performance was on Thursday night at 8 p.m. That's what it said on the flyer Mu Shu saw by the entrance. The flyer was an advertisement for an O party, which Mu Shu read as a 0 party, zero being the colloquial term for bottoms. Naked boys coming down the ladder one after the other, bodies bold and bare, the texture of the cages along the walls imprinted on their skin when the lights flicked on, making them appear as though they were in chains, so everyone reached out their hands. The main stage was like a runway that spanned the entire room, Mu Shu also reached out to touch, like the rest, so many hands in the darkness, bodies given form by touch, tall and short, high and low, crevices and protrusions, from surfaces to lines, pec lines to v-lines, then again from lines to points…

The emcee introduced the boys on stage. Let's welcome boy number one, Godzilla. Godwillya look at those incredible arms, that sexy waist, this hornet, who's horny? Take a good look, let's not even talk about his long-lasting, destructive, hot hot flame, oh oh, he's about to blow.

Next, we have boy number two, Angkor Wat. That's right, my hungry bottoms. And-for-what? A boundless sea of suffering, we need an old monk with a stick to save us. Daddy, please come here to satisfy your boy.

Actually, he was garbling entirely in Thai, Mu Shu couldn't understand a lick of it. But the gist of it

was probably something like this. A boy looking for his daddy, a bottom waiting for his top, the Holy See of Men, Dick Nukem, Bottom and the Beast, Helena Bottom Carter. An epic poem, a comeuppance, hubby I want some more, homonyms and linguistic transferences, everything but a hint. Reading between the lines is a survival instinct for gay men.

So is a 0 party full of bottoms? Hsiao-Ho asks.

Right when the young Mu Shu also had this thought, the formation changed on the runway stage. Go-go boys in pairs, penetrating one another. A kind of classical mechanics, piercing and being pierced, the energy of action and reaction, molten metal flowing out from a shattered silver vessel. Two people together simply fuck, a group of people together is a fuckfest.

Mu Shu felt a dry heat, he couldn't tell whether it was excitement or not, but the shame was clear. He understood in a flash that what had been written on the flyer was not 0 party, but O, it was an O party. O for orgy. Intercourse between everyone and anyone.

A man on stage suddenly reached out a hand to Mu Shu, his fingers long and slender, in a composition like Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*. Mu Shu unconsciously reached a hand back toward him, and the moment they touched he felt as though he were ascending to heaven.

He was about to join the paradise above him.

This should have been the climax of the story.

But right then, Mu Shu tells Hsiao-Ho, I felt someone from behind me hold me back. In an instant there came surface tension. I couldn't go up or come down. The go-go boy on stage didn't need him after all, how quickly and easily he loosened his grip.

So happiness didn't need to come from him, after all.

So, someone cockblocked you?

Yeah. Which one of these bastards was it?

He was so close, but I couldn't make him out.

But Mu Shu did hear a voice speak clearly into his ear. "I'll be waiting for you in the canteen."

That was how Mu Shu ended up barging into the canteen. Since many years ago, you know, people have been eating human flesh with knives and forks outside these doors. It was a feast of the living, gnawing on ribs while yearning to snatch out someone's heart, as though that would make someone call you the apple of their eye. Until someone pushed open the front door to the sauna, and the brisk Bangkok breeze would blow and blow until you were left with no more than bite marks on the meat of your hand. The sauna was full of wonders, preening peacocks, most amazing of all was who would think to put a canteen inside a sauna, right?

Mu Shu raises his glass high, miming a toast to all the people inside the booths around him. That's right, the canteen back then looked just like how it is now, he says to Hsiao-Ho, a long and narrow space with two large rectangular tables in the middle, the light all warm and soft, open the lids of the catering trays and you'll find Thai, Chinese, Western dishes. I bet you that even this many years later, the menu hasn't changed much at all, it's still those same few dishes. Starting over there on the right you've got moon shrimp cake, jasmine rice; then it's sautéed cauliflower, shumai, spinach with tofu, seafood salad…

You're totally right. Hsiao-Ho sizes up the dishes. Mu Shu in his story from many years ago picked up a bottle of Coke and sprawled onto a random seat, looking for the man who spoke in his ear like he was searching for a dish.

He recognized him right away. The man at the table across from him was gazing at him, holding a plastic cup, the bridge of his nose giving his eyes a murky depth. Mu Shu felt as though he'd been sucked right into them.

The man waved at him. He thought he was being invited over, didn't expect that a waiter in uniform would emerge from behind, meander into the kitchen, then come back with a plate in hand.

The plate was plastic, of course, and it had the Thai-style barbecue pork slices that had just been on the table. But something was different about it, beneath the pork were slices of red onion, there was also a dipping sauce, and because of this plating, the brown meat and red onions all fanned out, the scorch marks on the meat were a bit different from what was

on the counter, it was obvious that it had just been heated up, a lovely aroma and presentation thanks to this extra bit of effort, a roadside stall instantly transformed into five stars.

That gentleman wants you to try some of this, the waiter said.

Mu Shu could tell that the plate had been taken into the kitchen to be jazzed up, then brought back out.

So, what did the guy want? Hsiao-Ho asks him.

The story continues: Mu Shu looked up uneasily at the man and the man raised his glass to him. Mu Shu felt compelled to pick up his chopsticks, so as to not be rude, and start eating.

How did it taste?

Mu Shu just shakes his head. It was so long ago that he forgot whether the meat tasted good or not. For whatever reason, he remembers the taste of red onion, which was so pungent that it brought him back to reality.

Snap out of it, time to snap out of it, Mu Shu suddenly thought. What was he even looking for? He should have had his fill already at the O party, where even the go-go boys were going after him. He'd extended both his sense of confidence and his peacock feathers, enough stories to last him a while back in Taiwan. Just like Leng Tzu-Hsing made a speech about the splendors of the Rongguo Palace in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Mu Shu would talk about the sauna, how he'd inadvertently stumbled upon the stomach of the world, like Tang Seng entering the Cave of the Silken Web, so many black holes staring out at him, those fingers like withered limbs like spider legs threatening to pull him in. Right until the moment that someone grabbed him in a movement as swift as the Monkey King slamming down his metal staff…

There would be more sex in his future. He was only in his early twenties, he needed stories to tell. It would be an adventure. Maybe it was all a matter of confidence. The night was still young, he could have a better body if he worked out, he could get a man if he just looked for one…

Actually, the whole point was just to make him eat those red onions.

That piercing sharpness in the throat, and all of a sudden that something became nothing. And because of that nothing, he suddenly knew what he wanted.

A piquant aroma slipped out from his nostrils. He choked, but it only made his eyes all the brighter. Mu Shu made a gesture at the man across the table with his empty plate. The man lifted his empty cup in reply.

The waiter came by again, it seemed he'd been watching Mu Shu eat the whole time. The next dish was ready for him. What was brought to him this time turned out to be a bowl of soup. It wasn't the corn chowder or clear beef soup from the long table, but surprisingly it was a Thai-style soup, a hot and sour tom yum. Even a first-timer like Mu Shu could recognize it, every Thai restaurant in Taiwan had it, what was it called, tom yum kung.

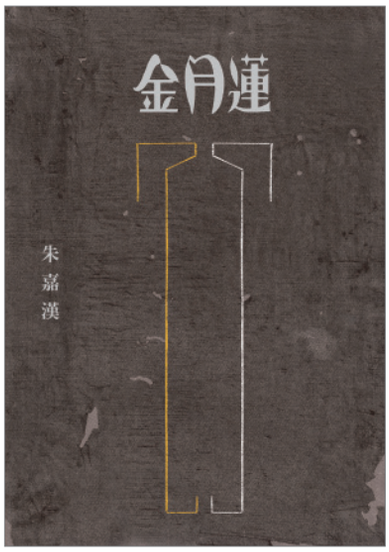
Mu Shu scooped some up with a little spoon, only then did he discover that this soup had also been taken from the main food table and enhanced a bit. The shrimp inside the soup had probably come from the plate of cold shrimp on the metal table. As for the cherry tomatoes and straw mushrooms, well, they probably came from the salad. The soup itself was a clear yellow, indicating that the sauce from the pork curry at the warm food station had been added. He tasted a spoonful, it wasn't spicy, there was even a touch of sweetness to it.

金月蓮
GOLD MOON LOTUS

Chu Ja-Han
朱嘉漢

- **Category:** Literary Fiction
- **Publisher:** China Times
- **Date:** 4/2024
- **Pages:** 320
- **Length:** 134,123 characters (approx. 87,100 words in English)
- **Full English Manuscript Available**
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

After graduating with a degree in anthropology from National Taiwan University, novelist, screenwriter, and literary critic Chu Ja-Han went on to pursue a PhD in sociology from the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences in France. Greatly influenced by Gabriel García Márquez, William Faulkner, and Salman Rushdie, Chu Ja-Han excels at fictionalizing the hidden lives of ordinary people caught up in the vast currents of history.



After World War II, a veteran struggling with the loss of his identity marries a call girl beset by misfortune. As this new family struggles to survive against the conditions of their fate, ordinary tragedies become a mirror to Taiwan's tumultuous post-war history.

In the aftermath of World War II, control of Taiwan passes from the Empire of Japan to the Republic of China. But for Goldie, a Taiwanese soldier who fought for the Japanese army, the celebrations taking place in the streets of Taiwan are meaningless. Robbed of his identity and purpose, Goldie leads an aimless existence until he meets Celine, a call girl.

Celine has been wrestling with fate all her life. Born into poverty, she was sold as a child bride, and eventually forced to make a living as a prostitute. Unwilling to accept these circumstances, she agrees to join the already-married Goldie as his concubine. However, their life together is far from easy. Finally, after a lifetime spent in defiance of the cards she was dealt, the elderly Celine enters a monastery, casting off the restrictive rules of a game she could never win.

The couple's eldest daughter, Lotus, stood by her mother throughout her stubborn campaign against the cruel dictates of fate. At the same time, she watched as her father's voice was silenced by an endless succession of political campaigns and changes of regime. Charting her own course through life, she is neither as combative as her mother, nor as resigned as her father. She only wishes to live. Because only those that stay alive have the strength to resist.

The latest novel from "the new monster of Taiwan literature" Chu Ja-Han, *Gold Moon Lotus* is a family epic that spans the eras of Japanese colonial rule, the White Terror, and, after the lifting of martial law in 1987, democracy and reform. Goldie, Celine, and Lotus each find their own ways to resist being crushed by fate, and when that fails, to rebuild themselves again. In the process, each also finds their own ways to love, hate, and make amends. Setting these ordinary lives against the implacable tides of modern history, the novel uses the intimate realm of individual love and personal memory to reveal the heart of a nation.

GOLD MOON LOTUS

By Chu Ja-Han
Translated by Darryl Sterk

> Every nation, region, and era has that novelist who captures (or perhaps falsifies a meaningful likeness of) the historical period in which they live in the form of a multi-generational family epic, depicting the détente and rapprochement of familial relationships against the shifting political and economic circumstances of the times. The historical slings and arrows suffered by Taiwan over the past century are exceptionally fertile ground for gestating such a work, as we see in *Gold Moon Lotus*. Living through the period of Japanese rule, the White Terror, and the post-authoritarian transition to democracy, the three principal characters of the novel illustrate the misfortunes of one family and the difficult position of women during these times, their individual lives re-enacting the fractures, reunifications, effacements, and restorations of the modern history of Taiwan.
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

Chapter 1: The gaze

1

All that was left was the dream's warmth.

Goldie woke up bright and early and gathered his thoughts in the morning light. Before the dreamtide ebbed, he warmed his soul with the last spot of spume.

He was sitting up in bed, eyes closed, the sun shedding red through the lids. His extremities were limbering up, and the pain in his joints was easing.

It was always hard to get a good night's rest, at his age. He got tired easily and didn't sleep for very long. He'd doze off in his chair, but toss and turn in his bed, with coldness in his hands and feet.

Whenever he felt like complaining about the hardships of old age, he'd reminisce, and count his blessings. He didn't have to head out before dawn to make a living anymore.

He decided to go run an errand.

He heated up half a cup of soy milk and half a bun for a simple breakfast. Then he turned on the radio. Sometimes he listened to a radio drama, sometimes a Shōwa-era hit parade. He had a special place in his heart for those golden oldies, or maybe it was the other way around. Yes, sometimes it was like the tunes were all in the juke box of his soul, had been from the beginning. Maybe that was why it was so easy to sing along, like he'd heard them all before. When he heard one he liked, he pressed record. He'd filled dozens of tapes, which he played in no particular order, indifferent to repetition, careless of categorization. Two years ago, on an outing with his youngest son, they'd stopped at a stereo store. His son had gotten him a player and a Shōwa Greatest Hits collection and taught him how to load the CDs; he'd obliged by pushing the buttons according to his son's instructions. Just two

days later, he'd gone back to his old ways, cassette tapes and radio plays, as if the excitement of a new device had peaked with a rare family visit and fallen immediately off when it ended.

He'd never wondered if he'd live long enough to see the twenty-first century. He'd been around since 1921 after all. He belonged to a different generation, or another world. Many or most of the people he had known were gone; some of them, even youngsters a decade or two behind him had passed along, just like that. He was like a living spirit who remembered his past life; no wonder he treasured old photos more than anyone could imagine.

He never showed them off, just flipped through his albums, alone. He had no mind to share them with anyone or talk about the people and places in them. He was taciturn, including, after years of practice, in his mind. In silence deep, emotions would come back sweet, like the lingering aftertaste of tea. What was left was the best. So why worry, why hurry? He took what was left of time, so that time might leave him be.

This was when time really belonged to him.

He did not believe in fate, and while he did credit karma, he didn't ask many questions, or any; he'd rather not talk about it.

He spent no time mulling over past lives, reincarnation, anything like that, and though he knew suchlike was a consolation to *her*, he'd never said a discouraging word. He owed her that. But it *was* a pity he'd never had a chance to have it out with her, not even about this. They'd rarely if ever argued, preferring the silent treatment. But make no mistake: they'd been each other's nemeses their whole lives.

He had a shred of hope that he might see her that evening, but didn't dare indulge it, because any assumptions he might make, conclusions he might leap to, were just pipe dreams. He just knew it.

She would never agree to see him again, not in this lifetime, no matter what.

He couldn't help but sigh at her bloody-mindedness. But after the pang passed, he knew it was time for him to let go, to stop bothering her.

"It's you," she'd say, under her breath, or in her mind. "It's always been you, making me suffer my whole life." The unsaid words echoed in his ear.

He was the only one who could hear. He assumed what she said was for his ears only, and therefore undoubtedly true. From the moment he heard her voice, he'd lived his life believing in a reality he alone could witness. The collective fantasy had vanished, but the reality that he'd recognized in solitude remained. It was inescapable.

He was willing to live by himself, with his memories for company. The voices that echoed there were all the more affecting.

2

Goldie had been hard of hearing for quite some time. For so long he wasn't sure how long.

He had his first suspicion when he couldn't hear the TV. He complained to Sammy. Sammy boy! The box is on the fritz! Can you come over and have a look? His first-born son had not been blessed in his career; actually the kid had never been able to hold down a job. But he had learned a thing or two along the way, to make a living. Like TV repair. He checked it, found nothing wrong with it, guessed what really might be the matter, and was going to talk about it with his dad, but Goldie just changed the subject and kept checking it himself. When his gracious daughter-in-law came to visit, he nudged it up a notch, or two, then sat there reading the newspaper, pretending he was deaf as a post. When slender Masako served him tea, she turned it back down. He knew that even if she'd guessed it, his secret would be safe with her; she'd always been the best guardian of his meager dignity. Perhaps it was because she was half Japanese that she honored all the most stubborn parts of him.

Yes, he guessed she knew. She'd never advertise, so why should he? Better for them to keep things low key. He noted the numbers on the knobs, so he could maintain a certain volume on the radio and the TV. He practiced speaking at a consistent loudness, and watched his interlocutor's expression to see if he hadn't inadvertently raised his voice. Better too soft than too loud, even if he had to repeat himself.

Don't worry, he said to himself, it's better to speak softly, like an inner voice that carried words where they were supposed to go. The most important things didn't

need to be said.

A man of few words like him could basically shut up and nobody would notice. He could play the quiet old geezer. It was only when he cast himself in this role that he realized everyone around him was already used to his reticence.

He hadn't learned to read lips, but did that matter? When people asked him something, or said something, he could hear them in his heart, and answer with a smile or silence. Most of the time, however, he just said: "Sure." That mostly did the trick.

People were always saying the same thing, no need to get hung up on the significance of this or that remark. An immediate and appropriate reply was more meaningful than any measured response. That was how he put people at ease, why his friends and family members opened up to him, told him what was on their minds, even their deepest, darkest secrets. Their voices had faded away, only the memories remained, which might have made him the best listener in the entire world. He made the best of an apparent contradiction. Somehow in the process of losing his hearing, he'd learned how to focus on what people were saying.

He didn't worry about not being able to communicate, heck, his heart was full of words.

Perhaps one day he'd be able to tell his own story.

Meanwhile, he let his ears go, and enjoyed the peace and quiet. He found the silence of the TV and the radio strangely reassuring. He could guess what the people on TV were saying, and he could recognize the songs on the radio by tune. Sometimes when Sammy and Masako were around, he would grab a tape of Japanese or Taiwanese tunes, put it on, and hum along. When she heard a familiar song, Masako would hum along, too, barely audible, somewhere between speech and silence. How could he feel lonely?

Gradual sensory deterioration was even a kind of consolation. Finally, he had a sense of repose.

His ears were big, his hearing had been keen. In his younger days, his aural nerves had been tormented under Japanese rule up to '45 by the roaring of his taskmasters at school, by the shelling and the screaming when he stepped on the battlefield. The clamor didn't let up after the war, when the Chinese nationalists took over; the slaughter in '47 was followed by an endless stream of stentorian propaganda and Chinese-language education. At the worst, he even suffered from tinnitus and sonic hallucination, particularly in the still of the night. Losing his hearing had been a relief, for his inner voices had quieted down, too, leaving only hers. For the first time, her curses and complaints sounded sweet. After decades apart, her face was hazy, but her voice was clear as a bell, the last remaining memory. That memory hurt, but he didn't want to forget.

When he took things slow, he noticed that many of the things he could make out in a given day did not really need to be said, and it didn't really matter whether you heard them or not. However little you did hear seemed to be enough.

He forgot how long it took, but one day, it just happened: Sammy and Masako came right out and asked, How's your hearing, Pop? My ears had gone to shit, he said, smiling. He didn't put up any resistance, or throw a temper tantrum when they took him to get hearing aids. He wore them for a while; he didn't want to let his son and daughter-in-law down, but found the clarity disconcerting.

He turned the volume down, sometimes off, and eventually stopped bothering to put them in. By that point, folks had forgotten he'd ever had them. He'd accepted the way his life had turned out, but had to be patient. He had to wait until everyone else got used to it, too.

The same was true of old age, the same was true of death, which was waiting, had been waiting there patiently all the while, to give people the chance to get used to losing everything they once had without losing it. He had seen many people his age who seemed puzzled, confused, then angry about increasing decrepitude or imminent death. It was precisely because he was prepared that he looked younger than a lot of his peers.

He washed up, put in his dentures, got dressed up, and put on his hat. He picked up his cane and checked

his hip sack to make sure he'd packed everything he needed for the trip: keys, billfold, pills for his diabetes, and, most important of all, the photo he wanted to have copied.

3

He limped on his cane down a street in Sanchung, the suburb of Taipei he called home, to the nearest photo studio. It had been in business for more than thirty years.

He knew the old owner of the studio, A-Hua, who had been two or three years older than him. A-Hua had retired in his seventies and passed away a few years ago. His son had taken over, but the place still had an old-fashioned atmosphere. Goldie walked in, smelled a distinctive odor, and smiled. It reminded him of those corner grocery stores, particularly the one by his apartment. In their heyday, such shops had lined the streets, but now they'd seen better days. Somehow one or two of them had held on, like old folks who'd lived longer than anyone thought they should. He never saw any customers in this one, and the displays were always the same, as if nothing had sold in the longest time.

The shop itself was an old photo album, the people inside like yellowed photographs. It was like they'd always been that old, and looked just the same as he remembered them from decades ago. Maybe the studio and the owner's son had changed, but he saw them through a fog that had been gathering in his eyes. He'd grown accustomed to it, like sepia-tinted filter on a lens.

Age affects your point of view. When you're young everything that catches your eye is new. In your prime, it's stability and fixity. When you're old, it's disrepair and decay. Goldie was touched to see the son's close resemblance to the father. A-Hua would have looked so much older now, had he survived. But Goldie still had the sense that time had stood still, another consolation.

He imagined himself at the gathering that evening, seeing himself and his wife in their children, and their children in their grandchildren. That warmed his heart, like time hadn't turned its back on him. Or perhaps he'd reconciled himself to the games time plays. He'd come to accept them.

"Uncle Goldie, what can I do for you today?"

"Sorry to bother you," he said, taking the photo out. "Can you make me a few copies?"

"I see... an old photo. I assume you don't have the negative. Okay, no problem, I'll have them for you in no time. How many copies do you want?"

He froze for a second. "Five," he said. "Ah, no, four'll be enough."

He sat in a chair by the door, staring out at the street, his chest on his hands, his hands on his cane. He was in a good mood today. He should be able to have a good talk with the kids. If possible, when he gave them the photo, he wanted to tell them the story behind it.

The story had begun before they were born, before their mother was born, on the day he got ready to go out and meet his maker.

進烤箱的好日子

A PERFECT DAY TO PUT YOUR HEAD IN THE OVEN

photo © Lucien Lai

Lee Chia-Ying
李佳穎

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Lee Chia-Ying, born in Taiwan and now based in Boston, is the author of three acclaimed short story collections – *Barkless*, *47 Wanderers*, and *Mince*. Her debut novel, *A Perfect Day to Put Your Head in the Oven*, won multiple literary awards in Taiwan and has been translated into more than ten languages, including English.

*** 2025 Taipei Book Fair Award**
*** 2024 Openbook Award**

She started writing a memoir because she couldn't write a novel, but the more she writes, the more her memoir starts to look like fiction! With self-reflection and absurdist humor, she maps the terrain between fact and fiction, coming to a new understanding of memory, literary creation, and her own past.

After struggling and failing to write a novel, Tan assumes it will be easier to write a memoir. Nothing could be further from the truth…

She starts in the fourth grade, when, without warning, her parents divorced. Though she maintained appearances as she alternated between living with her mother and father, in truth, the divorce was a horrible psychological blow which left her feeling abandoned. She did her best to find her place socially, but ended up being excluded by her peers. Under the combined impact of her parents' estrangement and her marginalization at school, she adopted the role of an observer, which, after entering a boarding school for middle school, allowed her to explore the subtle tensions in friendships and intimate relationships.

As the adult Tan records these explorations in her memoir, she begins to question the veracity of memory. She contacts former classmates for confirmation, but discovers that the process of writing has already blurred the line between reality and fiction. What she has written in her memoir has consumed her memory of the actual events. Just as American poet Sylvia Plath took her own life by placing her head in an oven, Tan has placed her personal history into the proverbial oven, unwittingly killing off her own past, and allowing something new to grow in its place.

With her distinct brand of absurdist humor, author Lee Chia-Ying takes a deep dive into the challenges of growing up, and into the philosophical conundrums that arise when one is writing about oneself. By writing about writing, she creates a unique reading experience that invites the reader to witness both her story of growing up, and the process by which that story was born. Fans of metafiction, new literary forms, and coming-of-age stories will all find much to appreciate in this fresh and thought-provoking work of fiction.

A PERFECT DAY TO PUT YOUR HEAD IN THE OVEN

By Lee Chia-Ying
Translated by Lin King

> She started out writing a novel, but after pages and pages she discovers she has written more of a memoir. Perhaps it would be easiest just to change course, but first she must contact some classmates she's lost touch with to verify the accuracy of her memories. Then it turns out that many of her old classmates aren't so certain about the past, either, and the ones that claim to be certain seem rather suspect. As the protagonist of Lee Chia-Ying's *A Perfect Day to Put Your Head in the Oven* vacillates between memory, self-examination, and ruminations on the act of creation, the outrageous and cunningly constructed leaps between reality and fiction will have readers howling. When the facts about the past are no longer reliable, could it be that fiction is the one link to reality that remains?
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

Maybe I should just write a memoir instead.

The thought occurs to me as I find myself asking more questions about the nature of fiction.

I've always referred to myself as a fiction writer and harbour a good deal of skepticism toward the genre called memoir. To me, the only difference between fiction and memoir is the element of "truth": a memoirist writes about things that, to their understanding, really happened. "Truth" is the guiding principle of their vocation; they can only write what they perceive to be true. If they cannot stick to this principle – if they were perhaps to lie or to insert some made-up plot – then they are effectively breaching the sole agreement between the memoirist and the reader, and their memoir becomes, essentially, a failure. In such cases, the reader shouldn't be responsible for reinterpreting the work as fiction. A failed memoir doesn't make its writer a novelist. It just makes them a lousy memoirist.

Fiction deploys a variety of techniques for kneading together things that really happened and things that didn't, so the author is never beholden to the question of whether their work is "real". People who ask writers how much of a story is "true" are condemned to live with the inability to ever fully appreciate the wonder of fiction.

To write a memoir is to make a deal with the devil.

The success of a memoir depends on the personal charm or innate gifts of its author, and by "gifts" I mean the things that have happened to them in their lifetime. This explains the common misconception that memoirs can only be written by famous people or old people: the elderly have lived longer and have experienced more things, while the famous are usually blessed with charisma. But, in reality, anyone can write a memoir so long as they don't care whether anyone actually reads it.

The novelist Flannery O'Connor once wrote, "Anybody who has survived childhood has enough

information about life to last him the rest of his days."

In this sense, a memoirist doesn't need to, and in fact *cannot* "hone their craft". What they need is an exceptional gift for recall.

I can't remember the exact moment I began writing a novel called *A Clueless Man Shakes His Thump-Thumping Head*. My document currently has 8,328 Mandarin Chinese characters, which is about fifteen pages single-spaced and, if printed, would probably equal the length of a real estate brochure for a condo development.

The reason I've been so slow is because I've felt like a stowaway, sneaking myself inside the protagonist. By around 5,000 characters, I knew that 72.63% of the protagonist's experiences were my own. By 10,000 characters, his way of speaking, his reactions, the things he chose to observe versus the things he willfully ignored – all of it was mine. When I finally got up to 40,000 characters, I decided that if he was to be autonomous, his interior life would have to remain unknowable. I deleted all instances where he "felt", "thought", "decided", "hoped", or "knew". I also took out "probably", "knowingly", "deliberately", "unwittingly", and any clause that followed. I then deleted all the sections where the narrator is omniscient, then all the familiar figurative language, then all the adjectives like "foolish", "boring", "poignant", "authentic". I even considered removing the word "clueless" from the title.

In the end, less than a quarter of the manuscript remained. I'm now on the verge of giving up completely. Its pages have grown more and more infuriating, like an online influencer who livestreams himself twenty-four hours a day without actually saying anything. He wakes up; he sits at the table; he lifts his chopsticks; he blinks into the mirror; in the middle of his sleep, he yells "Fuck!".

Frankly, it's a shitty story. I'm not sure if my own life is any more interesting, but O'Connor's words do chime with me.

I still want to finish the novel someday. For the moment, though, I feel frustrated by the limitations of the third-person point of view, of circling the same drain, of trying to escape my own narrative principles but finding no new answers. What I want is a clean break from fiction.

Then I had an idea.

Since I can't seem to avoid seeping into my fictional characters, maybe what makes the most sense right now is to start something else.

I'll write a memoir instead.

*

When I was in the fourth grade, my mom and dad got divorced. They'd shown no signs of separating before then. For as long as I can remember, they were always chatty and cheery with each other. It was only on a handful of times when I'd wake up randomly during the night and find them sitting on the couch together, stacks of paper laid out on the coffee table. In those instances, I'd sensed something wasn't right in the room, but had concluded that things only felt odd because the television was off.

This might sound preposterous, but I'm completely serious when I say: until the day my parents announced their divorce, I'd never seen them argue. Not once.

At the time, I had a friend named Chou Ko-Yi who'd sometimes come to school looking visibly cranky. When I asked her what was wrong, she'd say something unbearably *adult* like: "I didn't sleep well last night because my parents were fighting." What fourth grader would care about how much sleep they should get? "Didn't sleep well" simply meant "stayed up late", which among us kids was a form of showing off.

"How come?" I asked her, once.

"Because I was sitting at my bedroom door trying to make sure that my dad wouldn't kill my mom. I only fell asleep after they went to bed."

Her answer so exceeded my powers of comprehension that I couldn't think of anything to say.

Later on, while Chou Ko-Yi and I were playing in her room, stripping the clothes off our paper dolls, I heard her dad shouting in the living room. Chou Ko-Yi's dad spent all day at home while her mom helped out at the self-serve vegetarian restaurant next door. That was how Ko-Yi used to phrase it – "help out", as if her mom spent all day napping, eating, and watching TV, and just happened to be on a leisurely stroll when she was suddenly asked by the neighbor to mind the stove as a favor.

In hindsight, her mom was most definitely a full-time

cook. Not only did she work all day, it was her income that fed their family. If anyone needed to "help out", it was Chou Ko-Yi's dad – he could've done them all a favor just by getting off his ass. Either way, whenever we ran into Chou Ko-Yi's mom, she'd always hand us some ten-dollar coins to buy cold drinks from a vending machine.

That afternoon, her dad had been lounging in their wooden armchair in the living room. Beer cans sprawled across the coffee table and the surrounding floor. Before I could so much as say Hi, Chou Ko-Yi pulled me into her room. The shouting began shortly thereafter. Chou Ko-Yi got up, and I thought she was going to lock her bedroom door, but instead she popped out her entire door handle and revealed a fist-sized hole through which we could see the living room outside. Chou Ko-Yi picked up a stuffed piglet that she'd won at a claw machine and shoved it into the door hole, immediately lowering the volume of her parents' voices. Even so, we could hear every word – there was another hole in the drywall next to her door.

This was my first time overhearing a fight between someone else's parents. You heard a lot about parents fighting, but to actually witness it in real time was about as common as meeting a sea turtle in the act of laying eggs. Adults tend to argue behind closed doors, so most people have only ever heard their own parents shout at each other; in my case, I hadn't even heard it from my own parents. Mr. Chou barked out a sequence of the dirtiest Taiwanese cusses non-stop for at least three minutes, to the point where I felt like the *motherfucking cunt fuck you fuck your mother* began to sound almost musical. Mrs. Chou cried things like, "Why don't you just die?" and "Fat ass" and "I hope you die young", then she'd screamed and screamed until there was only the thumping of heavy objects being thrown.

I looked over at Chou Ko-Yi in terror, but she only shrugged. I thought, *I'll believe anything you tell me from now on*.

My parents' disagreements took a very different form. According to them, they never fought – they *communicated*.

*

In an effort to get closer to the truth, I believe a memoirist should be virtuous enough to notify their subjects.

I had to show Chou Ko-Yi what I'd written about her to confirm she had no issue. The problem was, she and I were only in the same class for two years, third and fourth grades, and I haven't seen her since. The only friend from elementary school that I still keep in touch with is Hsu Wen-Fang, who was in my class from fifth to sixth grade. By "keep in touch", I really just mean that we have each other on Facebook.

In our school, each year had twelve homerooms, so it's entirely possible that Hsu Wen-Fang never met Chou Ko-Yi at all.

I messaged Hsu Wen-Fang on Facebook to ask whether she knew Chou Ko-Yi. To my surprise, she replied right away:

"Nope."

I considered my options. "Are you in touch with anyone else from elementary school?"

"Nope, I'm not."

There were about ten accounts named Chou Ko-Yi on Facebook, but none of the profile pictures resembled my mental image of the Chou Ko-Yi I knew. I messaged three of the users that seemed to be most active:

"Hello. Did you by any chance go to Pai Kung Elementary School?"

Another notification from Hsu Wen-Fang popped up on my screen: "What about you?"

I typed, "Me neither."

Before I hit send, a new idea sparked.

*

Hsu Wen-Fang and I were classmates in fifth and sixth grade. We also lived across from each other – or, to be precise, my home faced the backdoor of hers. Her family sold paint; her dad was always squatting by the backdoor with a paint sprayer, testing products. Turning into our alley, you could immediately smell the lacquer thinner and hear the accompanying *click, tsssst, click-click, tsssst*. Through their family, I first learned that selling paint was a livelihood.

There was a bakery that my mom and I used to drive

to, and along the way there was a paint store with the sign CELEBRITY PAINTS.

For some reason, I always assumed that this was the front of Hsu Wen-Fang's home, somehow completely bypassing the fact that her backdoor was right in front of my front door whereas CELEBRITY PAINTS was a five-minute drive away. Children's imagination is often founded on ignorance. Not *total* ignorance, but the kind where you do your best to connect the dots but find that you can't, so you end up forcing the dots to connect – ignorance stemming from the human instinct to learn.

Sometimes, it can manifest in quite poetic ways.

Hsu Wen-Fang and I had known each other long before we were placed in the same fifth grade class. We used to play together when we were in the lower grades, but she always came to my place while I rarely went to hers – her mom didn't like it when I visited. I'd intuited very early on that Hsu Wen-Fang's mom disliked me. An adult's animosity is always glaringly obvious, especially when you're a child and they don't need to show you any fake courtesy. I never knew why she disliked me. I still don't.

Hsu Wen-Fang and I were very different. She took piano lessons and wore dresses to school on the days that we didn't need to wear uniform. Her hair was always pulled back in a tight ponytail or a sleek half-updo, complete with a ribbon. This meant she always showed her full face – there were never any stray hairs tickling her cheek or obscuring her forehead. Taiwanese people refer to "perfect" oval faces as "goose-egg faces", and whenever I hear the term, even to this day, I think of the young Hsu Wen-Fang. The shape of her face is permanently stamped onto my personal definition of the term "goose-egg face". For a while in elementary school, whenever I had to draw a person, I'd always start with an oval, then add a widow's peak like McDonald's golden arches. As I drew, I was thinking of Hsu Wen-Fang.

She was an accomplished pianist. When I used to call her home to hang out, three out of five times, her mom would say, "Not today, Wen-Fang needs to practice." Over time, we stopped playing together.

On the first day of fifth grade, I entered my new classroom and found Hsu Wen-Fang sitting inside. She was with a few other girls who were clearly her friends from the previous year's homeroom. I waved at her. She pretended not to see.

That summer, leading up to the fifth grade, I would say to myself every night before going to sleep: You need a metamorphosis.

I didn't mean a physical transformation, but rather that I didn't want to repeat the person I'd been in the fourth grade. It was so much *work* to be hated by other girls. In my fourth-grade class, a clique of them had formed an organization named the "Children's Association". Hsueh Mei-Chi was their president, and during the ten-minute recess between classes, they'd hold member meetings in the girls' bathroom. Their association had just one founding principle: to stop me from joining. At first, I would badger Hsueh Mei-Chi, asking her why I was being singled out. Later, after their fiftieth members meeting on the topic of How to Most Effectively Obstruct the Bathroom Entrance with Broomsticks to prevent me from intruding, they released a scrap of paper with a list of ten reasons why I couldn't join. "TEN DEADLY SINS."

二十歲

FROM TOMORROW, I WILL BE A HAPPY PERSON

photo © Emma SY Wang

Hu Ching-Fang 胡晴舫

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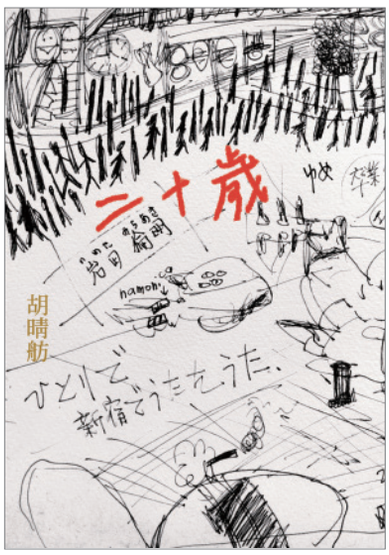
Hu Ching-Fang has published more than a dozen books, including novels and essays. She is the winner of several prestigious literary awards, including the Taipei Book Fair Award and the Golden Tripod Award. Her novel, *Islands*, was made into a TV series available on Amazon Prime, Netflix, and other streaming platforms. Hu's writing explores the nature of identity in a globalized world, the impact of technology on everyday life, and cultural alienation. Hu holds a BA in Foreign Languages and Literatures from National Taiwan University and an MA in Theatre from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



A young woman and her close friends come of age during the political upheaval, rapid globalization, and unprecedented opportunity of 1980s Taiwan. Fearlessly, they set out to pursue their dreams, but it will take decades to finally make sense of the painful contradictions and disappointments they encounter along the way.

At twenty, Yueh-Ching believes her future is limitless. It's the late 1980s, Taiwan is flourishing in the glow of an economic miracle, and as a student at the nation's most prestigious university, she is certain that her life will rise alongside her country's newfound prosperity.

However, as the years pass, her optimism slowly fades as she finds herself eventually reduced to a faceless office worker. Now in her forties, a chance encounter with a former college friend forces her to confront the past two decades and the unsettling realization that she has become exactly what she once feared – ordinary.

Yueh-Ching's life unfolds against a backdrop of global and local upheavals: Taiwan's student-led democracy movement, the Tiananmen Square protests, the fall of the Berlin Wall, China's rapid economic rise and the associated disillusionment in Taiwan, and the haunting collapse of the Twin Towers. It is an era of both turmoil and hope, a time when she and her friends truly believed they could change the world – until life teaches them otherwise.

From Tomorrow, I Will Be a Happy Person is a sweeping and evocative novel that captures a generation caught between the passionate idealism of youth and the sobering realities of adulthood. Through Yueh-Ching's intimate and bittersweet journey, it explores the tension between personal ambition and the unrelenting forces of history, offering a poignant meditation on time, disillusionment, and the quiet resilience of the human spirit.

FROM TOMORROW, I WILL BE A HAPPY PERSON

By Hu Ching-Fang
Translated by Jeremy Tiang

> "Youth holds a nearly unmatched power, which, miraculously, is derived from its very transience and immutability. Set against the backdrop of 1980s Taiwan, *From Tomorrow, I Will Be a Happy Person* takes us into the youth of democracy itself, a time when societal values were undergoing one transformation after another. Clashing with one era, the protagonists of the democracy movement helped to usher in the next, but what would they become once their youthful vitality was spent? What kind of adults would they be after sacrificing their youth to fuel the fires in which a new society was forged? These questions are a painful process of introspection, and point to an understanding that only comes in hindsight."
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

One: Those Who Leave

Snow in April would probably look like this.

Deep blue sky, clear and windless. All living things burgeoned with spring that April day, leaving the campus verdant as jade. Old fringe trees in full bloom, scattering white petals to dance in the air like flurries of snow, landing in a pristine blanket before the brown-brick Literature Building. Maybe because she was born in winter, Yueh-Ching always preferred cold weather, and her personality could be frosty too. Having grown up in Taiwan, a tropical island, she'd never seen snow and was rapt at the wintry landscape outside.

The classroom was stifling. Summer was still a ways off, but already Taipei was scorching, and the students' sweat fell like rain. Handkerchiefs dabbing foreheads, shirts soaked through in the back. Absolute silence as everyone scribbled away at their test papers. Yueh-Ching hadn't expected Tommy to show up for the mid-terms, but still she looked around the room for him. She sat in a corner, distractedly scribbling something on her paper now and then, looking back out as the fallen flowers piled up. Gazing and gazing, slipping back into daydreams.

Time's up. As soon as the TA collected the papers and left, the dam broke and a flood of sound engulfed the classroom, raucous and chaotic. Someone spoke and someone else yelled, What? Then a cry, and others hurried over, some running in excitement, surrounding the person with the news, insisting she repeat what she'd just said. A wave of shrieks arresting the messenger, who honestly hadn't intended to cause such a stir. The noise ebbed swiftly like receding water, leaving a lone voice – Chen Yu-Hui's – to echo round the classroom, landing crisply on everyone's eardrums: "Lai Shui-Yin killed herself."

A burst of shock, and the babble started up again.

"How do you know?"

"It was in the papers this morning," said Yu-Hui. Long face, long hair, and a fondness for long skirts. Her

features were slightly too small for her face, which had the puffy texture of flatbread.

"What happened?"

"Is she dead?" said someone else anxiously.

"Can you kill yourself and not end up dead?"

"I mean, attempted suicide is a thing."

Yu-Hui pushed her hair off her face and tucked it behind her ears, revealing high cheekbones. "She's dead," she said, nodding solemnly.

"That's awful." These innocent college students had fear all over their faces, their chests rising and falling.

"Where did it happen?"

"Her rented room," said Yu-Hui.

"Who found her?"

"Flatmate."

"How did she die?" The crowd held its breath.

"Potassium cyanide," said Yu-Hui. "The report said she took potassium cyanide."

"What's that?"

Yu-Hui shook her head. "No idea."

"It's used for poisoning fish," said Wang Hsiao-Lan, whose general knowledge was excellent. They called her Encyclopedia Wang.

That's right, a bespectacled girl chimed in. You only need as much as your little fingertip, swallow that and you'll be dead within a minute.

"Never mind a minute," said Hsiao-Lan. "You'll start *bleeding from every orifice* right away. Two seconds would be enough."

Bleeding from every orifice – like something from a *Wuxia* novel. Crimson fluid seeping from Lai Shui-Yin's nostrils, ears, eyes and mouth. Why so cinematic? Two girls clutched each other, as if they were watching a midnight horror film. "Swallow it how?" asked one tentatively.

It's a powder you dissolve in water. (Hsiao-Lan mimed raising a glass) Tip your head back and swallow it down – every orifice spurts blood, and in a flash you're dead.

"Like taking cold medicine?" Someone else giggled nervously.

Hsiao-Lan had to laugh at that too. That's right – she held up her right little finger and rested it on her left hand, demonstrating how an amount as little as her little fingernail could poison a whole school of fish. You wouldn't need that much for a person, just a few grains dissolved in water and you'd lose consciousness before you even had time to put the glass back down on the table. Your breathing stops, you feel so disoriented, your heart no longer beats. Potassium cyanide often gets used in military situations. When the Nazis fell, Hitler's girlfriend took cyanide to die alongside him. After the war, Goebbels was sentenced to hang, but two hours before that he swallowed cyanide and they never got to execute him.

"Who's Goebbels?" asked someone, and immediately got ridiculed. "You know, Goebbels! The Number Two Nazi," Encyclopedia Wang explained. "There was Hitler, then right below there was him."

"But – " someone else blurted out. "Who's Lai Shui-Yin?"

More laughter. Imagine not knowing your own classmate! The questioner got annoyed. "Why should I know who she is?"

"She's that girl who got kept back."

"No, not kept back, she took a year off after finishing first year. So we were starting third year when she went back to second, that's why she's now our junior."

"So she's actually our age?"

"Yes, but we're in fourth year and she was still in third."

More pressingly, how had she managed to get hold of potassium cyanide? They chattered away, youthful faces reddening with agitation, eyes gleaming with curiosity, as if they were discussing some once-in-a-century event like a comet crashing into earth. As far as they were concerned, Lai Shui-Yin swallowing cyanide was as momentous an event as South Korea's Gwangju massacre or the Falklands War, headlines to make you tremble – yet too far removed from daily life to really affect them.

In the corner, Yueh-Ching stood, put away her things, picked up her canvas rucksack and walked out. The blazing noontime sun poured down, and the skin on her face felt like it might burst into flame. She reached the main road and hesitated a moment after passing a news stand, then turned back to buy a paper, which she held rolled up as she walked into Fengcheng Cantonese Restaurant. She sat and ordered

soy sauce chicken and roast pork with rice, which arrived with a side of dark green kailan. Turning to the local news, she found the headline, "Co-Ed Swallows Poison in Rented Room, Dies Nude." Apparently Shui-Yin had lain dead in her room for an entire day before her flatmate, concerned at her silence, knocked on her door and found her underwear-clad body, face puffy and dark purple, splayed on the ground bleeding from every orifice, ready for reporters to turn her into a salacious corpse. No one knew why she did it – there was no suicide note – and her parents were on their way to Taipei from Kaohsiung. Yueh-Ching closed the newspaper and gobbled her food. She was always starving after an exam.

The meal done, she stuffed the paper into her bag. She'd planned to spend the afternoon catching a movie at Showtime Cinemas, but now she doesn't feel like it anymore. She was done with exams for the time being. Instead she ducked into the underground space of Tonsan Bookstore and browsed the new arrivals, only to find she couldn't take in a single word. Mostly college students were in there, bristling with arrogance like they were covered in spikes. Probably they'd read all the translated Western theory texts on the shelves; that's why they seemed so impenetrable, completely certain in their own knowledge, ready with definite answers and elevated thoughts on any subject under the sun. Yueh-Ching envied their intellectual prowess. She never felt confident enough to have any answers and got easily confused, plus she was always forgetting things, even things she'd just read.

She climbed the stairs back to street level. The delicious aroma from a nearby pepper bun stall was making her famished all over again. She turned towards Xinhai Road and walked down an alleyway, passing other bookstores, coffee shops, teahouses, snack bars, all filled with young people about her age, some looking like they'd also just finished their college exams, relaxed and joyful as they chatted away, each of their faces radiant as a tiny sun. In the bright daylight, the ground beneath her feet was once the irrigation ditches of Liugongzun, but Taipei City expanded over it, and it had already been filled in before she was born, covered in tarmac and turned into streets. Sooner or later she'd end up buried in the ground, just like forgotten Liugongzun. Time is a river without banks. Like the Chagall painting. Tommy once wrote those words on his dorm room wall. Yueh-Ching arrived at the junction of Xinhai Road. Ahead of her was an enormous elevated highway. Rays of sun fell through gaps in the concrete like darts piercing her eyes, forcing her to squint. For a moment she saw houses floating in mid-air, an amorous pair of lovers drifting past, a white one-horned beast on a purple cloud, a winged fish playing the violin. She'd thought ludicrous images like these only existed in dreams, but actually they were fragments of memory with the bright colors of fairy tales, and as time flowed in all directions they permeated every corner of reality.

This summer, she would graduate from university.

When Yueh-Ching first enrolled, every year group had to produce a play for the school's drama competition. There was this student from Chiayi, Ku Jung-Tang, with a broad, pale face behind glasses with thin black rims, who wrote poetry and had seen arthouse films that no one else had even heard of. Everyone called him by the English name he'd given himself, Tommy, until they all but forgot his actual Chinese name. Tommy was a bit magical. He knew everything and wanted to know everything. He could do anything and wanted to do everything. In their first few weeks, he adventurously joined many societies, got to know huge numbers of people and helped organize plenty of events. When he proclaimed that he would direct the first year show, it felt like salvation – everyone was brand new with no friends yet, still getting lost on campus, with no idea what a play should look like, let alone how to begin putting one on. Tommy's enthusiasm was a lifeline. Everyone let out a sigh of relief and collectively agreed to support him.

God knows how he came across Wilde, but he was nineteen and full of confidence, and so without hesitation he announced that these Taiwanese teenagers would be performing *The Importance of Being Earnest* in English. With much fanfare, he invited any interested classmates to come for auditions. He

spent some time torn between Lin Yueh-Ching and Lai Shui-Yin for the part of eighteen-year-old Cecily, a naïve girl from the countryside, before finally settling on Yueh-Ching, with their classmate Kuo Shih-Wei as her paramour. Tommy solemnly wrote out a rehearsal schedule by hand, allocated everyone their tasks, and told the actors to meet for rehearsal at seven every Tuesday and Thursday in an empty classroom in Sin Sheng Building.

At the start of week three, Shi-Wei stopped mid-rehearsal, script in his hand and despair in his eyes, and quietly said to Tommy, "Hey."

Tommy pursed his lips but didn't respond.

"You need to tell her. Otherwise I can't go on."

Unsure what was going on, Yueh-Ching looked from one boy to the other. An awkward moment. Then Tommy said to her, "Let's go."

She followed behind him, neither of them speaking, to the McDonald's on South Xinsheng Road by the university's side gate. It was the late eighties, and American fast food chains in Taipei were clean and light-filled, offering good food at a low price, with abundant air-conditioning in the summer. The college students had naturally made this their study center. Tommy ordered a milkshake and Yueh-Ching got a hot tea. They sat across from each other.

"Shi-Wei says he can't rehearse if I'm watching the two of you," he said.

"What does he expect? You're the director."

"That's right, I am."

"You're the director."

"He says it feels weird."

"But why does he…" Yueh-Ching frowned.

Tommy stuck the knife straight in. "Because I like you."

Yueh-Ching froze. They hadn't rehearsed this scene; she didn't know how to react.

Tommy smiled in an attempt to lighten the weight of his confession. "Shi-Wei came to my dorm last weekend to complain that I never look at him. He loves acting, and this opportunity means a lot to him, but he thinks I'm not paying any attention to his performance, and I've never given him notes or direction. I focus too much on your part. He says there's something unnatural about the way I watch your scenes: there are two people on stage, but I only seem to see you. He actually used the word besotted. He said I stare at you, your every move, like I'm besotted. So he suspects I have feelings for you, but he has to do a love scene with you, to seduce you with honeyed words and take your hand, maybe even kiss you and make you love him, um, I mean make your character love his character. And there I am, the director, sitting there with my glasses, four eyes staring at the two of you flirting. Shi-Wei says he really can't go on until I've cleared things up with you."

是花季的關係
WISH YOU A LOVED LIFE

Ayri Chang
張西

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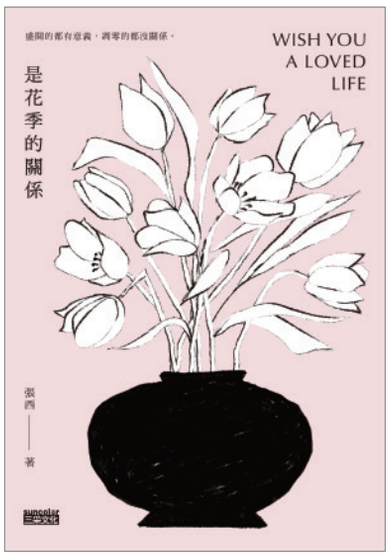
Ayri Chang is widely recognized as one of Taiwan's most influential voices of the post-90s generation. Born in 1992, she is the creator of the *Story Trading Company* Facebook page. Based on the concept of "sharing stories with strangers over dessert", the page has amassed nearly 90k followers since its founding in 2013. Her first essay collection *Drying Your Name in the Sun* was published in 2016. The following year, her follow-up collection *Slowed Down My Time* earned her numerous accolades, including inclusion in Kingstone Bookstore's Ten Most Influential Writers list and Eslite Bookstore's Best Books Awards.



The six stories in this collection from influential post-90s writer Ayri Chang are snapshots at critical stages in the lives of three young women. Taken together, these fictional portraits combine to form a nuanced study of young women in the process of embracing their adult selves.

Since getting her start online, author Ayri Chang has earned praise for her nuanced observations of the interior lives of young women. In this, her latest short story collection, she once again delivers the goods with six snapshots from the lives of three women that will evoke readers' memories of youth, and unveil new vistas for their imagined futures.

A group of high school classmates reunites at age thirty, reawakening yearnings which have been left slumbering for a decade and a half. With the reunion approaching, Hsu An receives a call from ex-boyfriend Shu-wei, who is recently divorced and hopes to rekindle their romance. Hsu An rejects him, but still hopes to understand why Shu-wei broke her heart many years before. The surprising answer rewrites Hsu An's past, revealing that Shu-wei's unwaning affection for her was only thwarted through a series of missed opportunities.

Lu Chen has long accepted that she is ordinary, largely because she perceives others to be far more talented. She had dreams of being an independent freelance illustrator, but in the end, she only gained a modicum of recognition for her work. She occasionally travels abroad, or dines out at a classy restaurant, but only because sometimes a friend is willing to treat. One might consider this a hard life, but not Lu Chen. Rather, all lives are hard, and Lu Chen knows better than to hope she will be the exception.

When her family was beset by misfortune, Lu Pin-han sacrificed much more than the opportunity to study abroad; the tally of her losses includes a respectable career, a comfortable life, and her hopes for the future. As a result, she has been unable to face up to the successes enjoyed by those around her, until one day, by some mysterious process, she suddenly can… and shockingly, it's no big deal. Lu Pin-han discovers that, in truth, she never sacrificed anything – she simply chose to let things go.

Under Ayri Chang's pen, the lives of these post-90s women spring from the page in living detail. Taken at the ages of fifteen and thirty, Chang's snapshots capture the thoughts and dilemmas of women at critical thresholds, when youthful dreams are revealed to be flawed, new choices must be made, and life must be lived without regrets. More than just deft portraits of three young women in transition, these six stories are a tribute to the predicaments, perseverance, and personal growth undertaken by all women as they fully embrace their adult selves.

WISH YOU A LOVED LIFE

By Ayri Chang
Translated by Michelle Chan Schmidt

> "Though her stories confront us with cruel truths, Ayri Chang's prose always conveys a reassuring warmth, which is perhaps the mode best suited to women's writing, and writing about women. In six independent yet interconnected stories, *Wish You a Loved Life* introduces readers to three women making important choices at various stages of life. These stories are a record of, and a conversation about, ordinary life and the uniqueness of every ordinary moment. As comforting as they are accurate, Chang's characteristic turns of phrase flash like gold within these quiet narratives, becoming surprises that are always worthy of readers' anticipation."
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

01/ Angels Never Grow Old

1

From the corner of Hsu An's right eye, a fine line grows.

The late summer evening breeze sighs in through the window. Hsu An stands in front of the mirror, looking at the fate of her body: the parts where age first reveals itself were predetermined long ago. She's never tried to fight against it, but somehow, getting old has started to scare her a little. When she stops overreacting to the traumas of her youth, then she'll be able to accept the vicissitudes of her life, no matter where it goes.

Hsu An rubs her temples, pats her cheeks, then picks up her phone, which has been vibrating for the last while.

Lu Pin-han's name appears, but so does Shen Shu-wei's, a few times in a row.

Was it fifteen years ago or thirteen? The end of first love is already as blurry, as impossible to recall, as his face. Hsu An can more or less guess Shu-wei's reason for calling; six or seven years ago, he'd tried to reach her just as urgently. But she doesn't think any further – she knows she shouldn't try to understand Shu-wei that way. The better she knows him, the harder it'll be for her to avoid her feelings and look clearly at where they stand, and as they've chosen lives that lead in opposite directions, she shouldn't search for any more reasons to get entangled with him.

Let's talk tomorrow, she texts him.

An already-married man who, for whatever reason, finds himself in the middle of the night thinking about a past lover, always spells danger.

2

When she first met Shen Shu-wei, she was fifteen years old.

He had a bright, open face, and at an age when it was still funny to mock other people, Shu-wei had already learned to be considerate of the troubles of being different. It was what had attracted Hsu An to him.

A game called Angels and Humans was all the rage

in school at the time. Students chosen to be Angels had to care for the Human they'd been secretly assigned to, without the Human discovering their identity. So Shu-wei bought a pack of cookies for the class monitor, and got to draw Hsu An's name.

To like someone can be sudden, but never random. Shu-wei and Hsu An had to learn how to read each other's innocent expressions, step by step, to clarify the other's intentions. After two weeks of buying Hsu An breakfast and writing her anonymous notes, Shu-wei couldn't resist any longer.

Hey, he whispered to Hsu An, so, your Angel is me.

That's breaking the rules, Hsu An answered.

Help me keep it a secret, Shu-wei said. Sharing a secret always strengthens the complicity between two people.

The day the game ended, there was a rainstorm. Before the last bell, Shu-wei slipped Hsu An a note, asking if she wanted to go to the bookshop together.

Before a row of reference books, he said: So, um, can I keep on being your Angel?

What do you mean? Hsu An asked, her eyes on the books.

Um. I want to keep being your Angel. You know, the kind without a deadline. Shu-wei looked at her.

You…

I like you.

Hsu An kept staring at the reference books.

I said, I like you.

Outside the bookshop, the storm thundered, and inside, Hsu An's heart pounded. She couldn't hear the music playing over the speakers anymore; all she knew was her angel's gaze on her. First love had begun.

3

When Hsu An and Shu-wei broke up, she was seventeen. It was a month before final exams.

Hsu An carried a box of cake she'd bought from a chain café, its slices arrayed in a semicircle. She and Shu-wei had planned this together: on his eighteenth birthday, they'd celebrate with half a cake, and when she turned eighteen he'd buy the other half, so the two halves would form a whole. But for some immature, embarrassing reason, they'd been arguing the last few weeks. This was a chance to make peace, Hsu An thought.

The bus wound its way from one end of the city to the other. Hsu An carefully balanced the box of cake on her knees. She took out her flip phone and sent a message to Shu-wei:

We promised to celebrate your birthday today, I'm on my way.

Shu-wei didn't answer.

I'm about fifteen minutes awayyy.

Shu-wei still didn't answer.

To break up can be sudden, but never random. There are always omens before the other's intentions become clear. Hsu An deliberately avoided them; she was scared of getting lost in their depths, disintegrating, splitting apart like the slices of cake on her knees. To lose hope is to lose meaning.

I've already celebrated with my mom and dad.

Hsu An sat in the park near Shu-wei's home, on a bench they'd often hung out on. Another message from Shu-wei slid onto her screen:

You should go home.

Hsu An called him immediately, but nobody answered.

Come down for a bit, I'll give you your card, she wrote to him.

Go home. Two curt words. Five minutes later, he texted again:

We're better off as friends.

The line that separates a heartbeat from a heartbreak is a fine one. She wanted to remove the pain stinging every inch of her, but there was nowhere to put it outside the shell of her body. And if there was, she'd have to throw away every memory of Shu-wei, too. Hsu An clenched her hands into fists and released them, clenched them again and released them. The slices of cake, separated from each other, were a cruel joke that he'd no longer care for.

Is there anything in the world with no expiry date? Even angels have time limits.

4

The next time she saw Shu-wei, she was nineteen.

After exams, Shu-wei was accepted to a mid-level national university and left high school early. Hsu An caught a flash of him at their graduation ceremony, then

heard nothing more about him. She tried to sneakily ask their mutual friend and high school classmate, Sun Cheng-yang, for updates, but all Cheng-yang said was, Give him a little more time.

Hsu An wasn't sure what that time was meant for: to fall in love with each other again, or to leave each other in peace and begin to heal. At any rate, when Shu-wei texted her and asked to meet, Hsu An hoped for the former.

They arranged to meet at the McDonald's near their high school. When Hsu An crossed the street toward it, she saw Shu-wei sitting by the floor-to-ceiling window, holding his phone in his hands as though he were typing. He looked unfamiliar, but bright and full of energy. Maybe because he wasn't wearing a school uniform anymore, his new maturity brought a sense of distance to Hsu An. She swallowed.

Shu-wei waved to her as naturally as if they were just old classmates, crossing paths by chance at the corner shop. Hsu An felt awkward: as she sat down, she placed her bag on her knees unthinkingly, then forced herself to seem at ease.

Why did you suddenly want to see me?

Not much, just, since we're at university now, I thought it would be okay to see each other again.

Oh.

Do you have a new boyfriend?

What?

Nothing, I… You need to take care of yourself, you know.

Hsu An gazed steadily at Shu-wei. She wasn't sure if he meant what she thought he meant, if he still remembered what she'd told him about her childhood. Shu-wei looked at her. She held his eye without saying anything until one of their phones, lying on the table, vibrated. It was Shu-wei's.

Hsu An angled her head to look at his screen. A girl's name had appeared.

Instead of picking up his smartphone to unlock it, Shu-wei looked at Hsu An, then looked away.

Do you like cookies? he asked, out of the blue.

Without replying, Hsu An reached into her bag and gripped her phone. Shu-wei pulled a small transparent bag of cookies out from his coat pocket, tied with a beautiful bow.

Here, this is for you, he said. His phone vibrated again. It was the same girl.

Have you got a girlfriend? Hsu An asked. She looked at the packet of cookies, sprinkled with chocolate chips and almond flakes, and her hand in her bag squeezed her phone a little tighter, hiding the name it concealed.

Shu-wei looked away again. No, he said. Hsu An recognized the expression he wore when he wasn't being honest.

Oh, give me the cookies, she said.

Shu-wei nodded as if nothing had happened and pushed the packet towards her. She released her phone, pulled her hand out of her bag, picked up the packet, stood, and made to leave. Shu-wei seemed caught off guard.

Hey, Hsu An! he called. She turned around and looked at him: he'd finally said her name again. She couldn't figure out what emotion should play across her face, so she froze her gaze. Shu-wei still appeared bewildered.

So, he said, get home safely.

Hsu An nodded, and still with a stony face, clutching the packet of handmade cookies, she left the McDonald's. She crossed the street quickly, but when she turned around, Shu-wei still sat there, holding his phone like when she'd arrived.

So he was texting someone when I came, Hsu An thought. She lowered her eyes to the little bag she'd had to accept. He'd already forgotten that she hated almond cookies.

A few days later, Hsu An saw online that Shu-wei had a girlfriend, the girl who'd been texting him. She suddenly realized that maybe what Shu-wei had meant to say that day wasn't *Get home safely*. Maybe what he'd meant was what he'd failed to say when they broke up, and which would never be appropriate to say again – goodbye.

She took out her phone and pulled up Shu-wei's contact information. There, his name wasn't Shen Shu-wei, but Shen Tzu-chen, her sun, her dawn: that was the nickname she'd hidden for him. He'd once said that if he and Hsu An ever had a child, they'd name the child Hsiao-chen, Little Dawn. Sometimes, to be young was also to be

naïve to the point of absurdity. But without experiencing that absurdity, how can anyone grow up?

Hsu An deleted *Shen Tzu-chen* and typed in *Shen Shu-wei*. Three short words.

As simple as it used to be.

5

Hsu An didn't see Shu-wei again. The next time his name appeared before her eyes was eight years later, on a random weekend, just as she and her boyfriend Chung Yu were finally about to break up.

Shu-wei seemed frantic. Hsu An had gone out to get a takeaway lunch and left her phone at home, but by the time she returned its screen displayed five missed calls, all from the same person.

Something's happened, Hsu An speculated, though she and Shu-wei had long since moved past asking the other for help in times of emergency. Even so, she couldn't help but push aside the soup noodles she'd just bought.

What happened, she texted.

Can you call? Shu-wei replied immediately.

Hsu An entered an *OK* emoji in the message bar.

It turned out that Shu-wei was agonizing over getting married.

I just want to hear what you think.

Why are you asking me?

Because, I feel like you've known me so well, this whole time.

No, I don't, Hsu An laughed into the phone. It's been so long since we've talked, how should I know what you're like now?

I'm probably just the same as I was before, Shu-wei said.

Hsu An laughed again. With the years, Hsu An had begun to wonder what someone should feel if they stayed the same despite getting older – proud or ashamed, grateful or fearful.

I think she suits you, Hsu An said. Shu-wei and his girlfriend were old university classmates, and Hsu An had heard that they'd gotten to know each other in their sophomore year, organizing department activities, and later became a couple. Shu-wei and the girl were both the kind of people who stood out in a crowd, as different as possible from Hsu An; she preferred to be low-key.

Why do you think that? Shu-wei asked.

Oh… I didn't get into the university you both went to, Hsu An said. The bitterness of it had been lodged in Hsu An's chest for a long time. That was also why, when she'd learned years ago that Shu-wei and his girlfriend were together, she'd decided to let Shu-wei go. It wasn't because she thought she didn't deserve him, but on discovering that he'd found someone more brilliant than her to stand by his side, how could she not leave him be? Any attempt at subjective comparison was an act of self-harm, but how could she possibly be objective?

And since you've been together so long, you must know each other very well, Hsu An added.

But you know me, too, Shu-wei said.

No, I don't, Hsu An said again, and this time she didn't laugh.

Do you really think I should marry her? Shu-wei's voice gave a faint tremor. Hsu An had never heard him sound like this before.

That's something you should ask yourself, Hsu An said. Is this something you want?

Shu-wei let out a long breath.

When Hsu An opened her lunchbox, the noodles had already congealed into a lump.

She felt a lifetime away from herself.

反重力
ANTI-GRAVITY

photo © Sean Wang

Huang Chong-Kai
黃崇凱

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Huang Chong-Kai is an award-winning Taiwanese novelist whose stories weave together elements of history, fiction, and reportage. His works include *The Broken, Blue Fiction, The Contents of the Times, Further Than Pluto* (French and Japanese rights sold), and *The Formosa Exchange* (English, Mongolian, and Spanish rights sold).

*** 2025 Golden Tripod Award**

There are two kinds of gravity. One is natural, and by opposing it, men take to the heavens. The other is authority, and by opposing it, men land in jail. Set during the political oppression of the White Terror, this collage of multiple viewpoints is a fictionalized history of Taiwan's struggle for democracy.

Set against the backdrop of the White Terror in 1970's Taiwan, *Anti-Gravity* incorporates numerous historical persons into fictional portraits of individuals fighting for democracy under conditions of harsh authoritarian rule – a struggle akin to fighting against gravity.

American astronaut and first-man-on-the-moon Neil Armstrong visits Taiwan during the Chiang Kai-shek regime, and has a brief meeting with a man known as "the old general" who is living under house arrest. This encounter has ramifications that seem to transcend the bounds of space-time, changing both men. The old general's minder, a man called Horseface, is repulsed by the system he serves, but finds comfort in the fantastic imagery of the sci-fi classic *2001*, and in the opportunity to discuss the film with Armstrong.

Pursuing their political ideals, students Paolo and A-Chi choose to study abroad in the US, where they are swept up in the civil rights movement and the political revolutions in South America. As they keep tabs on politics in Taiwan from abroad, their conversations gradually reveal inside knowledge of the 1970 assassination attempt on Taiwanese Vice Premier Chiang Ching-kuo during his visit to the US.

Meanwhile, a college professor and the political dissident Hsu I-wen, endure years of imprisonment and surveillance. The professor eventually flees Taiwan using a fake Japanese passport, causing a major loss of face for Taiwan's secret security apparatus, and Horseface's colleague is demoted during the fallout. While Hsu I-wen serves out his twenty-five-year sentence, some of his fellow prisoners pay for their commitment to Taiwan's independence with their lives.

Momentous political changes inform the background of these stories: the re-kindling of diplomatic relations between the US and communist China, Taiwan's forced withdrawal from the UN, and the Taiwanese people's struggles during the slow process of democratization. Throughout, the space program and the moon landing act as powerful metaphors for progress and hope in the future – the freedom of the weightlessness standing in contrast to the crushing weight of state control. Completed by the author during his time as Artist-in-Residence at Taiwan's National Human Rights Museum, the novel weaves multiple fictional narratives through the weft of Taiwan's political history, depicting oppression and resistance under authoritarian rule. Even as their fates are restricted by the historical times, in their struggle for freedom, the characters in these stories play a role in shifting the axis of history, leaving an impact on the generations that follow.

ANTI-GRAVITY

By Huang Chong-Kai
Translated by Tony Hao

> "There was a unique atmosphere in 1970s Taiwan. The infrastructure program known as the Ten Major Construction Projects was already underway, the US had not yet severed diplomatic relations, and the "economic miracle" was just beginning to gain momentum. One major internal power struggle was safely in the past, and the turmoil of the 1980s democracy movement had not yet begun. This period of stable development, peace, and increasing prosperity for the Republic of China was notable for giving the impression of an honest people ruled by a just government, even as citizens were encouraged to keep watch over their neighbors to help root out communist spies. With its sly choice of observational viewpoints and carefully chosen title, *Anti-Gravity* approaches history with a light touch, taking readers back to these optimistic times while dropping hints of subversion along the way."
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

"First Man"

The year was coming to an end. Following a cold snap, the temperature had dropped to the teens. General arose, cleaned himself, put on a jacket, and went outside for his morning exercise of swimming strokes and golf swings. After his workout, he glanced at the remaining dozen poinsettia plants in his garden. His concubine had prepared mantou egg sandwiches and warm milk, which he and his children ate in haste before heading out. He had the habit of filling his cup with hot water and finishing his breakfast with the milk-flavored liquid. He changed into his workwear and jackboots, wrapped a scarf about his neck, and remembered that he should determine whether his tankan oranges were ready to harvest during his outing to the mountain today. His driver and Aide-De-Camp Lee had warmed up the car and were waiting for him in the driveway.

It was an ordinary day. The car passed the guardhouse by the front gate and headed for the orchard at the foot of Dakeng Mountain. The sky was hoary, as though not yet fully awake. The trio drove past Cheng's handyman shop, which General cast a glance at, before crossing the bridge and ascending the mountain along the serpentine road. Looks like it'll be cold for a while, Lee said, Please take care of yourself, Mr. Sun. General nodded. The driver stopped at a platform on the mountain. General and Aide-De-Camp Lee got out, carrying their bags and canteens, and hiked uphill along the trail by the parking lot.

Seventy-year-old General walked in steady strides, but the dirt road was wet from the rain a few days ago and he slipped nonetheless. Aide-De-Camp Lee hastened forward and lent him a hand, telling him to watch out. General regained his footing and

said, as though nothing had happened, Thankfully the rain wasn't too heavy, the oranges should be fine. They continued their climb in angled steps, with General ahead and Lee in the back, until they reached the orchard shed about ten minutes later. General dropped his lunch bag, took off his coat, put on his string knit gloves, and headed for the fruit trees alone. Aide-De-Camp Lee heaved over a stool, leaned back against the wall, and shut his eyes.

Beneath the brightly lit sky, orange fruits swung gently on the tankan trees. General kept his head raised and examined his fruits for two hours, a pair of pruning shears in his hands, until his neck grew sore. The oranges must be harvested in the upcoming days, he decided, which would require additional help aside from his concubine. He moved through the tankan trees as though reviewing troops that stood at an equal distance, silently bearing fruits. You take good care of them, and they'll repay you with a decent harvest, he thought, Much simpler than swallowing bitter pills and biting your tongue in the military for decades. He hadn't hung up his uniform and retreated to the mountains entirely of his own volition, but he was grateful that he could commit himself to his dozen acres of land. He walked to the edge of the orchard and seated himself in the shade, a canvas bag of discolored and split fruits in his hands, and pondered whether there had been a pest infection or he had mismanaged the irrigation. He thought about his children – his eldest daughter had just entered college, while the other three rascals were still many years away from adulthood. For decades, he had commanded hundreds of thousands, but now, he only oversaw the handful in his household.

General had moved to Taichung fifteen years ago. He had farmed eggs during his early years in the city, with a coop of Leghorn chickens that kept him perennially occupied. He did extensive book research and consulted with farmers; he bought various feeds and blended them together; he vaccinated his chickens, cleaned their coop, and recorded his and their activities every day. He relied upon his physical labor as well as his mental prowess, as he believed that the best chickens and eggs could only be produced through scientific methods. His effort paid off – the chicken coop saw stable egg production. But his space was limited, and the bird population hovered around thirty.

General's concubine pedaled to Second Market every day to sell his eggs, and it did not take General long to realize that his spending on chicken feed had eclipsed his income from the eggs. One time on his way to the tennis court, Aide-De-Camp Lee had said, People in this country follow the herd, they do whatever everyone else does. You see, Mr. Sun, every household we drive by has a chicken coop and sells eggs, but nobody ever asks themselves who'll be the buyers. Aide-De-Camp Wang, sharing their ride, added, Maybe you should raise birds instead. I heard the pet bird market has been hot, even the Japanese are all over it.

After arriving home that day, General made up his mind and told one of his aides-de-camp to sell all his chickens to nearby farmers. He renovated the coop, installed a handful of cages, and replaced the poultry with smaller birds. Then came another round of reading books, buying bird feeds, and cleaning bird shit. Unfortunately, the bird market began to stall when his canaries were still in the coop, and he had divested completely before he could acquire his first finch. Perhaps he had also discovered that it was hard not to reflect upon his own destiny as he raised nestlings for market while living within high walls himself.

And so, General pivoted to plants and dirt. On his 0.41-acre estate, jasmine and rose began to grow profusely along the rims of the backyard, and an unused patch was turned into an orchid shade house. When the flowers were in full bloom, his concubine sold them on his behalf at the market. He buried himself in his botanical enterprise day and night, until he developed a jasmine variety with white and purple petals, the same colors as his alma mater Tsinghua University. His roses became popular in the market, known for their modest fragrance. Thanks

to his mystique as a recluse, it took little time for the reputation of "General's Rose" to spread. He indulged in his new diversion so much that he bought land on the mountain in Dakeng, where he grew lemons, oranges, guavas, lychees, and pears, slowly gaining the semblance of a full-time fruit farmer.

General rose, picked up his canvas bag, and continued to inspect his tankan trees one by one, ridding them of deformed fruits with his pruning shears. It was almost noon when he returned to the orchard shed. He took off his Panama hat and gloves, wiped his sweat with a towel, and sipped some water. He did not find Aide-De-Camp Lee and figured that he must have gone to relieve himself. Aide-De-Camp Lee's voice came from a distance – General saw him ushering forward a short man and a Westerner carrying a sport coat over his arm.

General thought the Westerner looked familiar, but he could not remember where he had seen him.

Aide-De-Camp Lee introduced the short man as a former colleague, surnamed Ma as in "horse", who now worked for the intelligence bureau. General shook hands with Mr. Ma, and the latter said, I've long been looking forward to meeting you. On orders from above, I've brought you this honored guest. General and the Westerner shook hands. Mr. Ma and Aide-De-Camp Lee headed toward the fruit trees, as though making a point to offer them space. General finally recognized his guest and felt his heart skip a beat – not long ago he had seen this man's photo on the cover of *LIFE* magazine.

"Commander Radford asked me to visit you on his behalf, sir."

"President Chiang doesn't allow me to meet any foreign guests. Please convey my gratitude to him."

"I carried President Chiang's words all the way up there," said the American, sweat beads gleaming on his forehead, "In fact, leaders from seventy-two other countries also gave us messages."

"All inscribed on a silicon disc about the size of a half dollar. Did Buzz – if that's what you call him – is it true that he almost forgot to leave the disc up there? I read about it in the magazine."

General thought it was quite peculiar – he had never met the American in front of him, and yet he felt as though he already knew him very well. He had seen a photo of his family of four in a magazine, he had watched him and his colleagues complete their mission live on TV, and he had read about them following their return, but he had no idea how to start a conversation without coming across as presumptuous. General let his thoughts travel a full orbit before asking the same question that hundreds of thousands already had.

"What did it feel like being up there?"

"I got a long-distance call from the President of the United States. It felt special."

General found himself feeling somewhat at ease.

"You're quite different from what I read in the magazine."

"You mean, something like '[he] answered with his characteristic mixture of modesty and technical arrogance, of apology and tight-lipped superiority'? Or, 'he also had the sly privacy of a man whose thoughts may never be read'? Or perhaps, 'he was extraordinarily remote'?"

"So, you've read everything."

"That writer mistook me for someone far too complicated. After all, there're always unforeseen circumstances on these missions, and no one can guarantee that everything will go smoothly."

"So, your famous quote, did you come up with it well in advance?"

"Well, you know, NASA signed an agreement with *LIFE* and gave them the exclusive rights to report on space missions. So, of course, they had someone write our speeches for us. Nobody wants to say something wrong and cause a PR crisis, after all," the American sneered.

"Oh, I see," General nodded.

"I was just joking," said the American, "I knew that quote would be broadcast across the world. But actually, it didn't take me too long to come up with it.

Think about it: if I had spent too much time thinking about it ahead of time and then we botched the landing, all of that thinking would've gone to waste. Thankfully we completed the landing, so I had a few hours to think about what I'd say. My idea was simple: what would you say when you set foot on somewhere new? It's gotta have something to do with 'steps', no?"

"That quote will live forever."

"But I forgot to add an 'a'. I probably sounded like an idiot."

"You'll be alright. People will add it for you."

"I thought about it later. Maybe it was because I had the motto of my college frat drilled into my head, 'One man is no man', and that's why I didn't say the 'a'?"

"You're also a Phi Delt?"

"You as well? I know you went to Purdue."

"I was only in Indiana for two years, but I was probably the first ever Chinese Phi Delt. Back then, Lindbergh hadn't crossed the Atlantic yet."

"The last time I saw him, he warned me not to sign autographs for everyone. It's been over half a year since I went on my tour, and I finally understand what he meant."

"I was just about to ask you to sign an autograph for my children."

"I have a better idea." The American retrieved an object the size of a cufflink from his pocket and carefully placed it in General's hand. "I brought this all the way up there with me. I should probably send one to the Phi Delt Headquarters in Ohio someday."

General studied the icy metal pin on his palm: a coat of arms with three tiny Greek letters, laid over a sword strung on a thin chain.

"I deeply appreciate your gift, it's precious." General put the pin in his pocket. He couldn't help but ask, "I can imagine you on the moon, in America, or anywhere else. But I still don't understand what brought you here."

"The White House recruited me to join Bob Hope on his tour with the USO. This is our second-to-last stop."

"The comedian? You're performing with him?"

"Well, Bob's been doing this since World War II. I just stand next to him on the stage, and I only have a handful of lines at most. No need to wear my space suit, no need to sing or dance."

"And what are your lines?"

"Um, Bob might say something like, 'Everyone knows you've been on the moon. Tell us, what was up there?'

And I'd say, 'There were lots of rocks.'

And Bob would say, 'Was there any beer?'

I'd say, 'No.'

'Were there any women?'

'No.'

'Were there any forms of extraterrestrial intelligence?'

'I don't think so. At least Buzz and I didn't run into any.'

'So why on earth did you go all the way up there?'

'President Kennedy made us go.'

'You didn't see him up there, did you?'

'Unfortunately, no. And by the way, we didn't see Marilyn either.'

'Did you bring back any souvenirs?'

'Just some rocks.'

Or, Bob might say something like, 'Look at you, landing on the moon. What a remarkable achievement. But it only ranks second on the list of the most dangerous things someone did this year.'

'So who did the most dangerous thing?'

'The girl who married Tiny Tim.' And then everyone would burst out laughing."

"I don't get it," General said, "Who's Tiny Tim?"

"I don't know either," said the American, "I think he's a musician? But people always laugh at Bob's jokes. He runs the show, and all I need to do is show up. But something happened during our last stop in Vietnam, and it caught Bob off-guard."

神鬼當鋪
THE OTHERWORLD PAWNSHOP

© Chang Kuo-Li

Chang Kuo-Li
張國立

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A former editor-in-chief of *China Times Weekly*, Chang Kuo-Li has won numerous awards for his writing. A linguist, historian, military expert, sports fan, food critic, as well as poet, playwright and novelist, he is truly a Renaissance man. He has over sixty published works to his name, mostly mystery novels, including the recent *The Otherworld Pawnshop* and *The Spirit Medium Detective* series. Outside of Taiwan he is best known for *The Sniper* series, which has been translated into Dutch, German, French, English, Russian, Turkish, Vietnamese, and Japanese.

After his father's sudden death, a high school student takes over the 400-year-old family business – an unusual pawnshop that trades goods between this world and the next. As he investigates his father's death, he probes the shop's deepest mysteries, and acquires first-hand knowledge of the spirit world.

When his father dies unexpectedly in his pawnshop, seventeen-year-old Chieh has to take up the reins of a business that has been in the family for eight generations. By tradition, the pawnshop only opens at night, and this is just one of many unusual rules of operation. Occupying a narrow, run-down storefront, the shop boasts a massive underground storage room for pawned goods: everything from clothing to motorcycles to Ming dynasty antiques to… astrological birth charts. Like the store, the customers also have hidden depths, and, according to the rules, Chieh must uncover the real reasons behind their visits before they can redeem their pawned items.

From there, things only get more bizarre. The dark shades that haunt the shop seem to be looking for someone… could it be the proprietor? But Chieh's father is already dead… After a Daoist priest fails to exorcise the spirits, Chieh uncovers what he believes is the real reason for the hauntings in the pawnshop's ancient records.

Meanwhile, a police detective discovers that a series of seemingly ordinary deaths in an elder care facility may have actually been murders. Three years after turning himself in, the killer was executed, but the items he stole from his elderly victims are all still in hock at Chieh's shop, and the killer was a friend of Chieh's father…

With one foot planted in the mind-bending world of the supernatural, and the other in the legal and psychological realities that follow the death of a loved one, *The Otherworld Pawnshop* illustrates what it takes to get through tough times, and what it means to die well. Packed with family secrets and folk superstition, this coming-of-age/supernatural mystery mashup will charm readers with its distinctive characters, dry humor, and otherworldly suspense.

THE OTHERWORLD PAWNSHOP

By Chang Kuo-Li
Translated by Roddy Flagg

> Every item in a pawnshop has its value, and a story. The owner of a pawnshop, if he is to see these things clearly, must have a very special eye. In *The Otherworld Pawnshop*, readers encounter a 400-year-old pawnshop that only operates at night, and a high school student who is forced to run the shop in the wake of a family tragedy. Not yet an adult, and with a horoscope laden with otherworldly influences, he finds himself embroiled in a murder case, and then discovers that the store he has inherited hides further secrets. Packed with humorous dialogue, superstition, folklore, and social observation, *The Otherworld Pawnshop* is a captivating construction.
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

Chapter 1: The Chain-bearer, the Light-bringer *or* Natural and Unnatural Deaths

November 2020

It was six months and seven days since Mr. Tsai's son had placed him in the long-term care center. Winter's first wave of cold air had descended over Kamchatka, leaving snow in its wake over Beijing, Pyongyang, Seoul, and Tokyo, before continuing south, over the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea, and to Taipei, where it turned noon's 32°C to midnight's 11°C. Did Mr. Tsai feel the sudden drop in temperature? It seemed unlikely: he was seventy-seven and had been bedbound for three and a half years; motionless bar the five times a day the nurses rolled him about.

And that explained the flurry of activity in the building when, on the 15th of November, he raised a hand and began to speak. Not that all the rushing about did Mr. Tsai much good. At 3:42 a.m. the following morning he died.

*

And that was the time of death recorded by Officer Yao, dispatched from the local police station. Not that Officer Yao himself had been sat at the bedside, his watch in one hand and Mr. Tsai's wrist in the other, watching the display flick to 3:42 a.m. as the man's pulse stopped.

He hadn't even arrived until 4:52 a.m. The nurse, still in shock at the bedside, didn't respond to the question until the third asking:

"3:42 a.m."

"Why 3:42 a.m.?"

The plump woman pointed to the clock.

"I checked the clock after."

He didn't ask how long after. You get born, time of birth gets written down. You die, naturally a time of death gets written down. The accuracy of that time was not a police matter. He entered the information into

the correct box on the form, demonstrating a basic commitment to his duties.

"So, he's been a vegetable for three and a half years, then yesterday he suddenly says something?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"There you are."

"'There you are?' Had you just arrived?"

"Oh, not to me. To the ceiling. Two of us quit recently and they can't find replacements. I'm meant to watch eight beds on the second floor, but at night I have to cover the third floor as well. I was already on the stairs when I heard the alarm go off. Didn't even get to the restroom."

"So, he was unconscious for three and a half years, then he looked up at the ceiling and said: 'There you are'?"

"Then he asked: 'What's that you've got?'"

"And what did you have?"

"Nothing."

"So, he said 'There you are' even though he didn't expect to see you, and asked you what you were carrying even though he wasn't looking at you. What did you say?"

"I said 'Nothing.'"

"And he never looked at you?"

"He was looking at the ceiling. Then he asked: 'Are those chains?'"

So, on the 15th Mr. Tsai had come to, seen a familiar face up on the ceiling, who may have been carrying chains.

"Then?"

"Just now? I was covering the third floor, on my rounds. I came in, checked his pulse, no, checked if he was breathing, no. He didn't say anything."

"And this was 3:42 a.m.?"

"3:42 a.m. by that clock on the wall. I saw the minute hand tick over."

So, the day previous, Mr. Tsai had seen a "you" he recognized, a "you" carrying chains. This made Officer Yao think of the statues of the chain-bearing Black Guard and his White Guard companion in the City God Temple, both of whom are charged with escorting souls to the underworld. All Taiwan knew of the two guards, the Black and White Impermanences, who crept in in the dead of night and dragged the souls of the deceased away in chains.

What book was the story from? Some man, a seer, his mother at death's door, rushed to the temple gate. He waited for the emissaries of the underworld to emerge on their official business, stopped them, offered to buy them a drink. He had no money or influence with which to protect his mother, but that man could drink. And he drank them under the table, buying his mother a few more days of life. What was the moral of the story? That even death's emissaries can be corrupted? Or that they can't hold their drink and had to delay their work several days due to hangovers?

"Must have been delirious, seeing and hearing things. A last gasp, imagining some relative or other," concluded Officer Yao, in the same tone of voice he would use to tell a colleague he had had a McDonald's Filet o' Fish, no fries, for lunch.

So, the Black and White Guards turned up and were somehow corrupted into going away and giving Mr. Tsai one more day. Seventy-seven years – that's a lot of life to see flash before your eyes, movie-style, before taking your last breath free of regrets. Officer Yao did not tap these thoughts into his police-issue tablet; the death certificate did not require witness statements or theorizing about the cause of death. This wasn't a crime scene. Although—

"Who took the oxygen mask off?" he asked, still thinking of the two deities staggering around stinking of booze. Both had tongues hanging down to their chests. Did that make it hard to drink?

"Wasn't me."

"Did he do it?"

"Who knows. It wasn't on when I got here. His tube had been pulled out as well. Look, all the lines from the machines are out. Wasn't me, though."

Officer Yao glanced at the dead man's withered hands, resting by the sides of the bed. A long illness followed by heart failure. He couldn't resist a sniff though. The room stank of alcohol. Then, he couldn't help but peek at the ceiling. Nobody carrying chains up there.

*

The doctor was quick to agree: simply put, Mr. Tsai's heart hadn't been pumping enough blood. Like a car running out of fuel, he had shuddered to a halt. Like a drone running out of battery, he had crashed into the ground. Not that Mr. Tsai had really crashed, as such. He'd simply stopped moving.

The deceased's son arrived before the medical examiner, pushing his blank-faced mother in a wheelchair and followed by an entourage of relatives. Nobody was crying. One, perhaps a grandson, was still texting away with both thumbs. A cellphone engineer once said that, in theory, at least, cellphones would never break, just get regularly updated. The batteries, though, would fail. Mr. Tsai had been alert enough to talk to the Black and White Guards yesterday, so he hadn't been broken then. His battery, though, had failed just an hour ago.

"They can hear," the nurse said, eating a zongzi.

Officer Yao hadn't eaten zongzi for a long time, thanks to his cholesterol levels. He didn't miss them, but eating one of the big lumps of stuffed glutinous rice right in front of him seemed excessive.

"Hear what?"

"Dr. Yang, he says they seem like vegetables but their brains are still working. The brains go last."

"Last?"

"Yeah." She swallowed half her zongzi and didn't wipe her mouth. "Heart stops, body goes stiff, breathing stops, but the brain doesn't, it keeps going a while. You're only dead when your brain's dead, the doctor said."

He recalled the question his wife always directed at him: "Do you even have a brain?" Maybe she wanted to know if he was still alive?

"I'm always careful what I say around the unconscious ones. They hear it all, you know, and remember it. What if I say something and they wake up and come looking for me? What would I do then?"

Now that he thought about it, his wife did prefer accusing him of being brain-damaged, despite his being perfectly able to hear her.

*

No son remains filial through a long illness, they say. Unfairly, though. Mr. Tsai had been unresponsive for three and a half years and the grief had already been felt. The dying had finally died. And while Officer Yao couldn't say it, it was true that death is sometimes a liberation for those left behind. And for the dead too.

Why couldn't a battery simply get updated, like a cellphone?

"You must be Mr. Tsai's wife?" he said, approaching the lady in the wheelchair.

"My mother, yes, but she has dementia," answered the man pushing the wheelchair. "I'll take care of whatever needs to be done."

Officer Yao lowered himself to one knee and patted the lady's hand: "Sorry for your loss, ma'am."

The old woman looked at him, unseeing. Or as if she saw someone else? But who? Could she hear the clinking of chains? Officer Yao glanced at the ceiling again.

His cellphone, its battery not yet dead, rang. Another matter he had to attend to, he explained to the center director, who nodded: he didn't need a policeman right now, anyway, just the undertaker.

Thoughts of what Mr. Tsai might have seen up on the ceiling lingered in Officer Yao's mind. The mention of chains naturally led to thoughts of the Black and White Guards and, while he was no Christian, he knew he personally would prefer an angel than that terrifying presence. He had dealt once with a case involving a man who had come back from the dead: forty-seven seconds after being declared dead his heart had started beating again. The doctor had made a big show of his surprise to distract from his inaccurate diagnosis of death and asked the patient what he recalled. Gasping for breath, the patient talked of blinding lights shining from a hole in the sky.

"What kind of light?"

The patient immediately explained: "Like the floodlights at an evening baseball game."

Officer Yao wasn't a Buddhist either, but wasn't the bodhisattva Guanyin meant to take the dead

to paradise? She didn't come with floodlights or flashlights though – just a jar of pure water in one hand and a willow branch in the other. So where had the light come from?

Finishing the report only meant his doubts plagued him more insistently. He called the center director.

"Hello, Officer Yao here. Could Mr. Tsai have removed those tubes himself?"

"You saw his hands, right?" the director asked with a sigh. "All withered up like that with age and lack of use, muscles withered. He couldn't have raised them two inches, never mind pulled out those tubes or taken his mask off."

"So, the patient couldn't have done it himself," he confirmed. A professional habit.

"No." Officer Yao could now smell the sesame oil chicken noodles through his cellphone. "The drip was keeping him alive, but no more. He couldn't have lifted so much as a pair of chopsticks."

Officer Yao's doubts remained, but what had happened? A man had died after a long illness; the family had no concerns. He finalized the report and hit the send button. It flew off on invisible networks and, several seconds later, squeezed itself onto the full-to-bursting police server. If the duty officer wasn't napping, it would be printed out a few minutes later and passed to the station chief who, if he wasn't napping, would check that the names and suchlike matched before sending it on to the district and city offices. Once the medical examiner had completed the autopsy the case would be closed.

That's you filed away, Mr. Tsai. Best of luck in the next life if there is one. Or if there's a God and a Heaven, may you be happy up there instead.

He stopped his bike in a gloomy alley, by a takeaway sesame oil chicken noodle place. He hadn't covered all the possibilities, he realized. *May the King of Hell take account of your labors in this life and permit you a return, rather than condemn you to the eighteen hells.*

Were there really so many hells?

Hsieh, with his one bar and four stars, was at the entrance to the apartment building, next to the ambulance. Waiting for him.

His cellphone pinged. Mr. Tsai's son, asking if he had noticed a ring in his father's bedside cabinet. He tapped out a reply: "I didn't look in the cabinet. If anything is missing you can file a report at the station."

He stepped into the building and noticed joss money still glowing in a burner. He glanced at Hsieh, who shrugged: "Got to pray to get protection."

腥紅速寫

A SKETCH IN SCARLET

Karasumi
唐墨

- **Category:** Crime, Thriller
- **Publisher:** Links
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Stand-up comic, university lecturer, podcast host, editor-in-chief of the Office of Historical Suspense Investigation and Research website, and ordained Shingon Buddhist monk, Karasumi is also a writer of mystery novels and essays whose work has been awarded the Lin Rung San Literature Award and shortlisted for the Taipei Literature Award.

A child killer awaits the outcome of her insanity defense from prison. Outside, a criminal psychologist catches a shocking tell in a news reel: as the killer lowers her head to avoid questions from reporters, a self-satisfied smirk momentarily appears on her lips…

A series of child murders upends life in a southern fishing village in 1980s Taiwan. The female killer sits in prison as her insanity defense plays out, but a death sentence seems inevitable. With time running out, criminal psychologist Wang Yueh-hsueh visits death row to interview the killer and collect a first-hand account for her research.

From the court records, Yueh-hsueh knows the killer used her status as a "friendly neighbor" to ingratiate herself with local children before giving them poisoned candy. The records also show that she looked on, expressionless, as the children were rushed off to the hospital. Yueh-hsueh uncovers further facts about the killer: she became infertile after an illness, and when she was a teenager, her mother forced her to marry a man twenty years her senior. What was the truth, then? Was she a meticulous and calculating serial killer, or a woman who had lost her mind after suffering too much trauma? In their meetings, Yueh-hsueh tries every means of gaining her research subject's trust, all to no avail. Finally, when she mentions her mother, the killer points to an empty corner and says, "You can see her, too, can't you!" What unfolds from there will leave Yueh-hsueh questioning her own sanity as much as the killer's.

Based on true events, author Karasumi conducted extensive archival and field research before adapting the notorious case of Taiwan's first female serial killer into a crime/suspense novel, incorporating both details of the investigation and real-life controversies surrounding capital punishment. If not via the death sentence, how can a society discourage the most heinous crimes? If the legal system isn't the solution, how do we address the social problems that lead to criminal behavior? More than just a crime thriller adapted from true events, *A Sketch in Scarlet* addresses social issues that will keep readers thinking long after the book is returned to the shelf.

A SKETCH IN SCARLET

By Karasumi
Translated by Jim Weldon

> "Drawing material from Taiwan's first random serial killer case, the novel *A Sketch in Scarlet* features both a woman serial killer and a woman scholar of criminal profiling who investigates the case. Aside from providing stark foils to one another, this construction allows author Karasumi to highlight the pressures and condemnation faced by all women, regardless of their social and economic backgrounds. This isn't one of those murder cases that confounds readers with cunning criminal schemes; the investigation instead revolves around determining the mental state and motive of the murderer. When the female investigator squares off against the killer, she is not only solving a crime, she is confronting the limitations of her own predicament as a woman within the social milieu of 1980s Taiwan."
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

"Professor, Professor! Daydreaming, are you? Or thinking up some more of your bullshit to try and trick me?"

"I'm giving hard thought to the question you asked, because I want to give you a proper answer." Yueh-hsueh knew she was overthinking things; it simply wasn't possible that Chen-Lin Shu-fen knew about all that stuff from her past that even Ching-fang wasn't necessarily aware of. Yueh-hsueh had pickled all those wounds thoroughly by now, with great fistfuls of rough salt and fine sugar, with her career and achievements, with life's little compromises and small loves and joys. Even if she were compelled to recall that past, by now it had become rinsed out entirely in the passing of the years, ripening to a savor that mixed both salt and sweet, sufficiently palatable that you would not choke over how hard life was, which is always the case anyway. A past that only became more flavorsome the more you chewed it over was never going to retraumatize her spirit a second time around.

"What question?" It was hard to work out if Chen-Lin Shu-fen was putting on an act with this deranged behavior, but whatever the case, the way her thoughts appeared to leap about seemed sufficient to prove her mental state was something other than normal.

"You asked if I missed home."

"What, missing home? Oh, have you got no home? That doesn't matter, come on, you're welcome, very welcome, to come to my home, treat it like your own." Chen-Lin Shu-fen laughed and raised both hands, using one to point at Warden Liu, "Seen them two, have you? One's my driver and the other's my butler. So, treat it like your own home, no standing on ceremony."

"What about you, have you got used to living here?"

"It's a two-story house looks out on the harbor, see,

you get a sea breeze blowing every day; look what it's done to my hair." Chen-Lin Shu-fen ran her fingers through her ponytail. "It's turned so grey; have I gotten old?"

"I know, I've been to see it."

"Why didn't you stop a while then; have a cup of tea before you left?"

"I did, though; it so happened you weren't home, but your mother did make me a cup of tea."

"Oh, that's all right then. Oh yes, I remember now, I'd gone to collect the kid from school."

"Your son?"

"Hah, don't talk utter shite!" At the sound of the word "son", Chen-Lin Shu-fen burst into crazed laughter, wagging an accusatory finger in Yueh-hsueh's face. "Talking shite! I was collecting Huang Jung-wang's girl, wasn't I? He asked me to go and pick up his daughter for him; look, see, she's squatting just over there."

Just as Yueh-hsueh was thinking they'd have to terminate the interview because Chen-Lin was becoming deranged again, she had unexpectedly brought the conversation back round to something directly relevant to the case. Yueh-hsueh gave a quick glance back at the prison officer behind her to the right, to confirm that the recorder was running. Only after Warden Liu had given a nod to indicate that she could proceed did Yueh-hsueh push the microphone a little closer to Chen-Lin Shu-fen. Yueh-hsueh dared not look back to her left; if she really did see the little Huang girl squatting there, it would be her turn to lose her mind.

All of them there in the visiting suite were acutely aware that any part of the conversation to follow might well reveal Chen-Lin Shu-fen's motive.

"So, you went to pick up his daughter; when exactly was this?"

"Yesterday morning, wasn't it? He asked me to go and meet his daughter and bring her to the market." Chen-Lin Shu-fen had suddenly become, to all appearances, entirely normal; answering the questions just like any ordinary person, the only difference being her confusion about time, describing something that had occurred almost six months ago as having happened the previous morning.

"Then after that?"

"Then after that I bought some hairtail off Huang Jung-wang; he gave me an extra piece too, pretty decent of him, eh?"

"Do you often buy fish from Huang Jung-wang?"

"We live by the sea, so of course we eat a lot of fish. I buy big fish heads off him too, and stew them at home; grass carp, size of those heads, well, a whole one's probably about the same weight as a five-year-old child." As if she was saying it deliberately to make Yueh-hsueh and Warden Liu uncomfortable, Chen-Lin Shu-fen laughed and continued, "Do you know how heavy a five-year-old child is? Very, very heavy."

Having never held a child in her arms, Yueh-hsueh was at a loss to answer, but she was also considering whether Chen-Lin had asked deliberately to put them off the scent somehow. Answering quite normally one minute, then incomprehensible babble the next, it meant you couldn't tell at all what she was thinking. One of the thresholds for determining the mental state of a serial killer, besides the rape or sexual abuse of the corpse, was necrophagic compulsions, but Chen-Lin had not defiled her victims in this way. Going on the evidence available to date, she had most likely not even touched their bodies, nor had she kept any clothing or body parts as trophies. She was a killer who just liked to watch her victims die; she wasn't even mentally unbalanced.

But what if she had done something? Were all the children's bodies intact? Had she in fact cut something from one of the bodies that had not yet been given an autopsy?

Before Chen-Lin caught on that her mind was racing wildly, Yueh-hsueh quickly made a show of answering the previous question, "I don't. I've never picked up a child."

"Very heavy, oh yes; every time I have to carry a fish head home it makes my arms ache, but the fish head stew I make is something else, oh yes. You can try some next time you come by, see for yourself if it's true."

Why did Chen-Lin keep talking about fish heads? That dish of stewed fish head they'd had the night before last must have weighed a good thirty catties at least, sliced along its length without completely

severing it in two, then pressed flat but still whole, boiled in vinegar until the bones went soft, then served as a well-stewed fish chowder. Yueh-hsueh recalled that she hadn't picked out any fish meat with her chopsticks and Hsieh Wen-che had noticed. He kept encouraging her to try, and had ended up picking out a piece of meat from by the mouth and putting it in her bowl. Yueh-hsueh had swallowed it down as best she could. Hsieh Wen-che had handed her the prisoner visitation permit as they left the Japanese restaurant that evening. She had contacted Warden Liu the following day, and come here to Nanhai Prison with Ching-fang shortly after that.

Was it all just a simple coincidence? Or had Hsieh Wen-che let something slip about their dinner when he came to interview Chen-Lin Shu-fen?

Yueh-hsueh saw a child, not breathing, half suspended upside-down in a ball pit, with Chen-Lin Shu-fen holding one foot; the fish knife flashing in her other hand, slicing the child clean in half, then cutting the body into parts that she set out on one of the white tile stalls at the fish market, adding a price tag written in colored pencil for good measure. Chen-Lin, wearing a white apron and still gripping the knife, looked jubilantly at Yueh-hsueh as she cried out, "Fish heads for sale! Special price just for you!"

She stabbed the knife into the fish head, its thick lips still opening and closing, but from them came the plaintive wailing of a child, "It's burning! My throat's burning! Auntie, my throat is burning!"

In a bid to stop her mind running on like this, Yueh-hsueh took a deep breath. Doing her best to conceal her wild imaginings, she followed up on the topic of Huang Jung-wang, "So did you ever cook fish heads for his daughter?"

"You'd have to ask mother about that." Chen-Lin Shu-fen looked behind herself as she spoke, staring at the blank wall. "Where's mother? Strange, she was here just now. Where's mother?"

Yueh-hsueh planned to stay detached while Chen-Lin played out her little drama, but the next moment Chen-Lin turned sharply round and slapped both hands down on the table. She stared directly into Yueh-hsueh 's eyes and rose until half her body reached right across the table. The listlessness she had just displayed must have been an act. She spat out her next words one by one through tightly clenched teeth, "Mother… is… right… here!"

Yueh-hsueh told herself she must not fall for this sort of cheap playacting, and she certainly wasn't going to lose such an excellent opportunity by allowing herself to get rattled, so she focused her attention on Chen-Lin's wrinkled skin, no doubt the result of spending all her days out in the ocean breezes, and on her hair, which seemed to be turning grayer by the second. Her hair was naturally thick and she'd had her roots permed, which is why it looked so full. The whites of her eyes were as clouded as those of a dead fish on the market stall, as if they had a film over them. Although you can't diagnose a person as mentally ill based solely on external appearances, it did serve as supplementary evidence; sharing the same sex, Yueh-hsueh felt that the frequency with which a woman washed or cared for her face, the shine in her eyes and sheen of her hair, were at least some sort of basis for evaluating how that woman saw herself.

Yueh-hsueh had longed for a chance for their eyes to meet like this for so long she had made herself ill with it. The only thing that was making her uncomfortable now was thinking about how Chen-Lin's crazed babbling had by chance touched on all the things that had been weighing on Yueh-hsueh's mind recently, as if someone had been here in advance to inform Chen-Lin.

With that thought, Yueh-hsueh felt the need to turn back to Warden Liu and ask for a short break.

"Could you tell me where the bathroom is?"

"Ah, it's on the first floor. You go and we'll take a little break here, that's no problem."

"Great, thank you." Yueh-hsueh glanced quickly at the prison guard there to help with the recording. She raised her chin slightly twice as a way of signaling to him to keep the recording running.

Yueh-hsueh rose from her seat and walked out almost as if she was trying to avoid Chen-Lin Shu-fen's gaze.

"Hah, Professor's talking shite again! You off to look for your mother?" Even after Yueh-hsueh closed the door to the little visitor suite behind her, Chen-Lin's voice reverberated down the corridor. Yueh-hsueh hurried off to head downstairs. She wanted to splash some water on her face to restore her nerves. Chen-Lin Shu-fen had already brought up Huang Jung-wang today, so Yueh-hsueh felt she must at least find out why Huang's daughter had become Chen-Lin's first victim.

Yueh-hsueh had turned into the stairwell and was midway down the first flight when she felt her eyes start to swim. She was forced to grab the handrail and feel her way downward step by step. The further she went, the more it seemed like the temperature was steadily dropping. By the time she reached the second floor it was so cold Yueh-hsueh sneezed. She felt she had no time to think about what was happening. She just had to get to the bathroom and wash her face and things would be fine. She kept repeating this to herself, but at the bottom of the stairs it seemed she wasn't on the first floor but had somehow come out on some intermediary level. She looked back to check and there were stairs leading up behind, while ahead of her was a flight heading down. It was as if the building had grown an extra story. Yueh-hsueh could only imagine that she must be remembering things wrong and continued her descent, but at the bottom of the flight she found the same thing; she had once again come to an intermediary floor. She had already traversed five stories, and the endless stairwell was making her knees weak. Now starting to panic, Yueh-hsueh dry-heaved several times.

She decided to chance it and go down one more flight, but once again she found herself on an intermediary floor. She stopped in the stairwell and looked at the steps leading up and those leading down. The material had changed into a metal mesh that she could see right through; looking up, she saw no end, and looking down, no bottom either. She kept repeating to herself what Warden Liu had told her, and the layout of the prison grew clearer in her mind with each repetition, but somehow, she couldn't break out of the ever-repeating loop. Yueh-hsueh grabbed the handrail and saw it had begun to steadily rust. Yueh-hsueh gritted her teeth and decided she would stop trying to descend, nor would she turn back; she was going to leave the stairwell and go into the corridor of whatever floor this might be.

Just as when she had arrived at the prison, there was a row of cell doors to either side in pairs facing each other, each made of thick, solid steel with a small window and below that, an opening for passing in meals.

Yueh-hsueh walked past the cells to the far end, where there was a wall with a small window. She wanted to try clambering up to the window so she could see exactly what floor she was on. She had just got her hands onto the window frame and was getting ready to pull herself up when a loud alarm bell began to ring and a red warning light on the wall lit up. The reflector in the light began to revolve so that the red light flashed across the walls. Only now did Yueh-hsueh realize why they painted these walls in green and white stripes: when the red warning light shone on them it made it very easy to spot anything moving.

The alarm bell still ringing, Yueh-hsueh watched as the doors to the two rows of cells all opened simultaneously. She recalled what Warden Liu had told her earlier about the women's wing; there would be around twenty cells on each floor, ten on each side of the corridor, and now they were all open. The nearest of the cells was only three paces away and there was nowhere for her to retreat to; Yueh-hsueh pressed her back hard up against the wall, not knowing what sort of people might be coming out from the cells.

The alarm bell and the flashing warning light sent Yueh-hsueh into a panic, but then she caught hold of herself, thinking most likely she was in the grip of some nightmarish delusion. She tried repeating her calming exercises, clenching her teeth and breathing deeply. The alarm bell, however, showed no signs of stopping, so Yueh-hsueh summoned her courage and decided to walk to the closest cell.

套條子
COP CATCHER

Yen Yu
顏瑜

- **Category:** Crime
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- **Pages:** 392
- **Length:** 188,603 characters (approx. 122,500 words in English)
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- **Rights sold:** Film

A native of Changhua County, Yen Yu is a graduate of Taiwan Police College, a former police officer, and a member of the Crime Writers of Taiwan. Proficient at incorporating social issues into his writing, his works span a range of genres, from crime to romance, sci-fi and fantasy to comedy, though his police novels remain his most representative works. In 2022, he was awarded the Mirror Fiction Million Dollar Award. A number of his works have already sold rights for television and film adaptations.

While working on a stolen car case, a female cop and her half-brother are transported twenty years back in time where they assist their model police officer father on a gang war case. As the investigation deepens, they discover that the killer they seek might be one of their own.

Eager to make her mark and break the stereotypes surrounding women cops, officer Yang Yu-ting sets out to crack a stolen vehicle case with trainee Chou Ming-hsien in tow. Unbeknownst to others at the department, the two are actually half-siblings – their deceased father was also a police officer, the renowned recipient of a national Exemplar Medal for meritorious service. While investigating the stolen vehicle case, the siblings are accidentally transported back in time to assist their father on a gang war case that involved over thirty killings. When they return to the present, they discover their stolen vehicle now hides an important clue to solving the twenty-year-old case. It turns out the police are not only implicated in the three-way gang conflict – the murderer was actually an undercover cop!

As the lines between good and evil blur, an internal power struggle at the police department raises the stakes, forcing everyone to choose ideological sides, and calling into question the trust at the foundation of the police force. None of these developments can be separated from the siblings' paternal legacy; once seen as a deadbeat dad who cast off his wife and children, their father turns out to be a man of principle who had his reasons for keeping his distance. As the truth gradually comes into focus, all of their assumptions will be challenged, from what it means to serve as a police officer to their personal definitions of justice.

Author Yen Yu makes use of his own experiences as a police officer to lend realism to a police novel that challenges the conventional divisions between good guys and bad guys. The sci-fi element of time travel is seamlessly woven into the plot, establishing a link between cases separated by two decades while also highlighting thematic questions relating to loyalty, justice, and personal gain.

COP CATCHER

By Yen Yu
Translated by Eunice Shek

> Most people suppose there is a large gap between reality and fiction. For example, we feel fairly certain that the police officers we pass on the street aren't anything like the ones we see on movie screens, or in the pages of a crime novel. But what if an actual police officer were to write a crime novel focused on the lives of cops? What kind of story would it be? Yen Yu is a graduate of Taiwan's police academy, and his novel *Cop Catcher* has no shortage of realistic detail about police work. Caught between the forces of justice and corruption, between the victims and the perpetrators, and faced with the realities of an unfair class society, the main characters are appealing, interesting, and well-matched. What can a police officer do in this situation? What *should* they do? The answers are all contained within the pages of this novel.
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

Chapter One

"Be honest with me – how many vehicles have you stolen?" asked Chou Ming-hsien as they headed back to the main road. He was riding an unregistered, dubiously acquired scooter. The scooter had both a weak engine and a flat tire, jolting him up and down with every bump in the road as if he were riding a camel. His back was killing him. "This isn't your first time, is it?"

"This *is* the first time, and we're *not* stealing it." Yang Yu-ting emphasized, rolling her eyes. "This scooter doesn't belong to that police officer; it belongs to a civilian. What does it matter if we're the ones to return it instead of him?"

"Okay, sure, why don't you go ask him if it's the same or not," Chou Ming-hsien said tartly. "He'll definitely thank you for solving the case and taking credit for his hard work."

"I'm warning you – don't you dare breathe a word of any of this when we get back to the station. Just say we found it by the side of the road."

"You mean the police station? We're taking this thing all the way back there?" asked Chou Ming-hsien, unfamiliar with standard police procedures.

"Of course. Unregistered vehicles must be transported to the station."

"And then what? Who taught you these sus methods? You're just a rookie; how would you know this stuff?" Chou Ming-hsien asked suspiciously. Even a low-grade hooligan like himself balked at the thought of stealing an unregistered vehicle, to say nothing of his older sister, the cop. "Is this because of Dad?" he asked bluntly.

"No."

"It's definitely because of him." Chou Ming-hsien spoke with certainty.

Yang Yu-ting and Chou Ming-hsien's father

had also been a cop, and not a typical cop at that. He had been a renowned police officer who had been awarded the national Exemplar Medal, and had solved countless major criminal cases. He was called Yen Tsung-min, Clever Yen; every cop knew his name, because he used unique methods to catch criminals. He thought outside of the box, and was absolutely fearless, even daring to go after corrupt public prosecutors. Thus, he was held in high esteem.

But Yen Tsung-min had passed away almost seven years ago now. Even upon his death, he had never been promoted, remaining a basic beat cop from beginning to end. He also secretly left behind two children: Yang Yu-ting and Chou Ming-hsien.

"'Secretly left behind', my foot. He didn't stash us in a corner somewhere. We're the products of his affairs," Chou Ming-hsien would say. Whenever his older sister reminisced about their father, he couldn't hold back a rebuttal: "What's there to respect about a cheating scumbag dad like him?"

Half-siblings with different mothers, Yang Yu-ting and Chou Ming-hsien were both "Renowned" Police Officer Yen Tsung-min's illegitimate children, born out of wedlock. Neither of them had ever been officially acknowledged, so both of their families were single-parent homes. Before Chou Ming-hsien began elementary school, he saw his father twice a year at most; afterward, that number dwindled. As a result, he felt almost nothing toward his father.

Yang Yu-ting's situation had been about the same. Neither family was Yen Tsung-min's legal family, so although they knew of the other's existence, the two mothers rarely contacted each other. From Chou Ming-hsien's perspective, he and his mother only had each other for survival, so renowned police officer or not, to him it was all a pile of dog crap; he loathed this absent playboy father.

It was only after Yen Tsung-min died that the two families' circumstances took a turn for the better: their mothers – two women whose fates had been filled with trouble and misfortune – began to connect. It was only then that Yang Yu-ting and Chou Ming-hsien met. Chou Ming-hsien recalled that he'd been in ninth grade when he had been taken out of school to attend his father's funeral. During the ceremony, he and Yang Yu-ting had surreptitiously glanced at each other; from then on, it was as if some invisible wall had come down and they saw each other frequently.

Chou Ming-hsien's hatred of his father also gradually diminished. His father was already gone, after all, and the man did have a bit of a conscience in the end, leaving a few million yuan to the two families. For Chou Ming-hsien, this was an unexpected windfall – his father's legacy falling into their hands was like winning the lottery.

It wasn't just money, either; many of their late father's belongings had also been left to the "mistresses". Among these belongings were a number of journals about the cases he had solved, as well as some outdated official documents. Chou Ming-hsien had seen these things at his sister's house, and he felt that her behavior today had something to do with their father – even her decision to become a police officer was because of him.

"Don't study his dubious methods," Chou Ming-hsien said coldly. He thought he understood everything now: his sister had surely read their father's crime-solving journals – that must have been how she learned underhanded tactics like stealing an unregistered vehicle out from under another cop's nose. "They'll eventually come back and bite you in the ass."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Yang Yu-ting played dumb.

"You're all so weird. As soon as Dad died, everyone changed their tune about him. Ridiculous." Chou Ming-hsien snorted.

He wasn't wrong. It seemed to him that as soon as his father died, it was as if everyone forgave the man. His sister had unexpectedly become a cop, and when Chou Ming-hsien's duties were randomly designated for his mandatory military service, to his shock and dismay, he was assigned to the police substitute service. It was simply bad karma!

"Stop babbling and take the scooter to the underground storage area," said Yang Yu-ting, unwittingly releasing the unregistered scooter's accelerator and causing the scooter to lose speed.

They had arrived at their destination: Bridgeside Police Station.

The siblings currently served at Bridgeside under the jurisdiction of Xinzhuang Precinct, New Taipei City Police Department. It was situated on a river embankment beneath the bridge that supported the largest road connecting Xinzhuang and Banqiao, hence its name.

Yang Yu-ting had been stationed here for over a year already, while Chou Ming-hsien had been posted here for only two months. They both kept a very low profile: no one knew that Yen Tsung-min's two children, who had taken their mothers' surnames, were currently working together in Xinzhuang Precinct.

"Yu-ting, you actually found an unregistered vehicle?" At that moment, a portly male cop walked out of the station entrance. He spoke loudly, attracting the attention of the other male officers, who all ran outside.

"*Woooow*, you really did find an unregistered scooter. Where was it?" someone else asked.

"It's no big deal. We found it while patrolling the river embankment." Yang Yu-ting scratched her head sheepishly.

"Not bad, sweetheart." Even the Deputy Chief of Police had hurried outside. He adjusted his glasses as he sized up the scooter, then rebuked the others: "Look at you all! Even this little lady here found an unregistered scooter – what are the rest of you lazing around for?!"

"Yu-ting really is a star, huh."

"This month is crackdown month. Each of you must bring in at least one vehicle. Miss Rookie here has already met her quota. The rest of you had better do the same," the Deputy Chief warned again.

"Yu-ting, show us where to look!"

"Yeah, show us!" The male officers began to jeer.

Embarrassed, Yang Yu-ting smiled mildly, smoothed her bangs, and lowered her head. Only Chou Ming-hsien remained seated on the scooter, chin resting on his hand as he coldly observed the scene before him. It was as if he didn't exist; as everyone praised the discovery of the scooter, their eyes beheld only Yang Yu-ting.

"That hypocrisy was *rank* as hell," Chou Ming-hsien said after the crowd dispersed.

"What do you mean, 'that hypocrisy was rank'?" Still buoyed by everyone's praise, it took a moment for Yang Yu-ting to process her brother's reaction.

"Are you really dumb enough to fall for their flattery? Ugh, *yawn*. Those pungent pigs only like your face; they couldn't care less about your actual abilities."

"You're just jealous. And anyway, I *did* find that scooter."

"The biggest hypocrisy is that you clearly know how fake they are. They just like to sit on their asses and watch female cops do the actual work, but you still intentionally play right into their hands. Otherwise, would you have worked so hard to find that scooter?"

Yang Yu-ting's face fell. "Anything men can do, women can do too, okay?"

Chou Ming-hsien shot back, "But when male cops find unregistered vehicles, will they receive the same treatment? You heard how the Deputy Chief spoke just now: 'Even this little lady here found an unregistered scooter, tee-hee!' It's like the standard for female cops is lower. So you reek of hypocrisy *and* so-called 'feminism'."

"What B.S. are you spouting now?" Yang Yu-ting's mood soured as she strode over to glare at Chou Ming-hsien. "I *found* that scooter. It was *me*!" She slapped her chest for emphasis. "I just want to prove that police*women* are not inferior to police*men*!"

"You're finally 'fessing up, huh? So what you're doing was never about job performance, you just want to prove that feminists are right."

"What's 'feminism' got to do with this? You gross straight guys just spout that word to cover up the sad fact that you can't get a girlfriend."

"Hey! Don't try to change the subject. I can get tons of girlfriends." Chou Ming-hsien fixed his gaze on his sister, smiled, and spoke bluntly, landing the fatal, finishing blow: "You shouldn't have used

Dad's secret techniques. If you'd had the guts to rely on your own capabilities to get that scooter, I would have believed you. Do you know what 'fake feminism' is? It's when you find an unregistered vehicle and show it off at the door, eager for all the world to know. That's not impressive, that's just obsequious crowd-pleasing. Everyone still thinks you're just a pretty face."

Chou Ming-hsien's words left Yang Yu-ting speechless with rage. She could only stare numbly at him as her brother pushed the scooter into the underground storage area, then leisurely walked away, vanishing into the station.

Her brother had ripped the rose-colored glasses from her face, flooding Yang Yu-ting's mind with the reality of the outside world, a truth that Yang Yu-ting did not want to face.

Serious gender discrimination existed within the police force. This discrimination was not actually called "discrimination", but was instead made up of deeply ingrained, seemingly reasonable stereotypes: When a criminal case occurred, the commanding officer would invariably dispatch a male officer, not a female one, because female officers, as women, were inherently small and weak; they couldn't chase down thieves or win a fight against a criminal suspect. Even the grannies at the markets knew to find a male officer to report a crime – men could be counted on to get the job done, female officers needn't bother.

The jobs that female cops were allowed to do were extremely limited. Female officers were best suited for clerical work: preparing official documents, taking notes, modeling for PSA posters. If a fight broke out within a precinct's jurisdiction, the female officers should under no circumstances enter the fray – what if they got injured? Female officers were also not allowed to participate in high-speed car chases; it was best if the women remained at the station to await orders, and obediently answer the telephone.

Such was the fate of female cops. Although they were technically police officers, after receiving an official posting, there were very few paths open to them; if they weren't office clerks, they joined the Women's and Children's Protection Division. You never saw a policewoman with a submachine gun, nor did you ever see a policewoman join the Criminal Investigation Division. Such was the reality of being a female cop, a rare and special existence within the police world.

Yang Yu-ting had been a cop for over a year; naturally, she was well-aware of this fact. The Chief of Police had expressed concern for her many times, asking if she wouldn't rather be an office clerk instead of going out on late night patrols; after all, wasn't it dangerous? But Yang Yu-ting had refused every time.

Although this "protectionism" wasn't exactly discrimination, it still made Yang Yu-ting very uncomfortable – for one particular reason: her father had been a renowned police officer. She wouldn't dare say that she wanted to become someone like her father, but at the very least, she wanted to be worthy of his respect.

Chou Ming-hsien had been right about many things. Tonight's bizarre "unregistered scooter heist" was indeed taken from her father's playbook. Yang Yu-ting had squirreled away many of her father's belongings, including all of his crime-solving journals and official case photographs; she kept boxes upon boxes of them in her room. Since becoming a police officer, she hadn't once tidied them away.

In the past, her father had arrested a public prosecutor, hunted down a drug cartel, and even apprehended a superior officer and sent him to prison. Yen Tsung-min had been a legend, and many traces of his words and deeds could be found amidst his belongings.

Her father had also once stolen an unregistered vehicle. In his journal, he had amusingly described it thus: *"I had my junior imitate a dog barking across the way, and succeeded in capturing the target's attention. I then sailed away on the motorbike."*

幻日之時
PARHELION

Fourone
肆一

- **Category:** Mystery, Heartwarming
- **Publisher:** Sun Color
- **Date:** 1/2024
- **Pages:** 368
- **Length:** 128,000 characters (approx. 83,200 words in English)
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Bestselling author Fourone is a writer of novels, essays, and picture books that address topics connected to love and healing. The movie adaptation of his essay collection *Do You Love Me as I Love You* was a box office smash-hit in Taiwan. His works have sold foreign rights in Vietnam and Thailand.

After being transported back in time, a social worker meets a police officer who helps to investigate her sister's murder case, and possibly prevent it from ever happening. The trail of clues, however, leads to further unsolved cases that force them to question their motives for altering the past.

In 2012, Lin Hsin-Yu's big sister was murdered. With no witnesses, a lack of evidence, and no obvious suspects, the case was never solved. Twelve years later, during an atmospheric phenomenon called a parhelion, an office-building elevator transports Hsin-Yu, now a social worker, back in time to 2012. There she meets police officer Chang Yen, who also lost a beloved sibling. While Hsin-Yu's sister was murdered, Chang Yen's brother killed himself after being framed for a crime. The two begin working together, not just to seek justice for their departed siblings, but to see if they can change the past entirely!

Soon, however, other cold cases emerge: a missing girl, a battered wife, victims of sexual abuse at the hands of a religious cult. As Hsin-Yu and Chang Yen follow the trail of clues deeper, they begin to think that all of the cases might be linked. Altering one will have implications for all of the others. In that case, could changing the past have undesirable consequences? What if the past, despite its tragedies, was already the best possible outcome?

Starting with the understandable urge to right the wrongs of the past, *Parhelion* gradually guides readers into more philosophical terrain. Within the framework of a mystery/suspense novel, author Fourone poses questions about the structure of time, our relationship to the past, and the acceptance of loss. Lovers of contemporary fantasy and suspense will follow the unfolding mystery with relish, but the heartfelt questions and welcome doses of warmth and healing that are sure to satisfy readers of any stripe.

PARHELION

By Fourone
Translated by Lee Anderson

> In and of itself there's nothing innovative about time travel in fiction, but depending on how it is approached, this familiar plot device can help authors open up new lines of inquiry into various issues. *Parhelion* makes an excellent example. When the protagonist of the novel encounters a police officer who seems displaced in time, she discovers that she may have the opportunity to stop the tragic crime that took her sister's life. But is it the right thing to do? Putting aside the usual discussions of the dangers of altering the past – the protagonist isn't anyone significant enough to change the course of history – the novel instead explores the ways in which we are shaped by past experience. If you were to alter your past, would you still be the same person you are today?
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

01 Make something of yourself

July 18th, 2024

"Has business been good lately, Mr. Hsu?" Hsin-Yu smiled at the seventy-year-old man across from her. Breezily dressed for the heat, her hair was tied back in a neat ponytail and her black purse, from which dangled a sun and goldfish pendant, was placed by her feet.

"Mm-hmm." Mr. Hsu grunted so quietly that Hsin-Yu wasn't sure it was a response. He wasn't even looking at her.

"You're looking well. Is your hand feeling better since you sprained it?" Hsin-Yu ploughed on undeterred, the smile still clinging to her face.

"Mm-hmm." Another muffled grunt.

Sensing she wasn't going to get much out of him today, Hsin-Yu's gaze flicked to her surroundings. She was sitting just inside the entrance to an old-fashioned grocery store, one of those ones that sold an array of colorful candy right next to towers of sun-faded toilet paper. The small, dingy store was how Mr. Hsu made his living, but it didn't bring in much and more often than not he had to rely on hand-outs. A little further down the street was one of those shiny new convenience stores that left outdated places like Mr. Hsu's deserted, save for a handful of elderly neighbors who'd been coming here for years.

At twenty-four years old, Lin Hsin-Yu was freshly graduated from college and currently working as a social worker for vulnerable families, which included providing assistance to those in crisis. The elderly gentleman before her was the first case she'd received when she started, and today was her regularly scheduled home visit.

Hsu Hung used to have four other family members living with him – his son, daughter-in-law, and their two daughters – who all helped take care of the store until the death of his eldest granddaughter, Chia-Chen,

twelve years ago. His son and daughter-in-law then died in a fatal accident not long after, leaving just him and his twelve-year-old granddaughter to depend on each other for survival.

That was when the Family First Foundation had become involved, and his case was passed from worker to worker until it eventually landed in Hsin-Yu's lap. Being the same age as the granddaughter and having lost her older sister at the same time, it had felt like fate.

What we call social services are in actual fact the long journey to heal wounds that do not easily heal. The subtleties of the human heart differ from those of the body; it's not simply a question of waiting for the scab to fall off, but more of an ongoing emotional tug-of-war with yourself. What social workers do is help you traverse the transition period when you can't see where the end is.

The sudden death of her sister twelve years ago had torn Hsin-Yu's family apart, and she'd felt like a piece of her heart had been sliced off ever since. Her sister's killer had never been found, and every detail of that morning was seared forever in her memory. To this day she was still awoken by nightmares from time to time.

"Where's Chia-Ju today?" Hsin-Yu asked, referring to the granddaughter who was the same age as her.

"Oh, who knows? She'd rather hang around with that bunch of good-for-nothings than get a real job. I hardly ever see her." The mention of his granddaughter's name finally got Mr. Hsu talking, but his tone was full of reproach and regret. "She's going to wind up like Chia-Chen sooner or later—"

"Don't talk like that, Mr. Hsu. Chia-Ju is Chia-Ju. She's not her sister," Hsin-Yu offered in an attempt to defuse Mr. Hsu's anger. "She'll be fine."

"I just don't know what she's going to do when I'm gone—"

"And you can stop talking like that as well. Didn't I just say how well you're looking? Just keep taking your medicine like the doctor tells you and you'll be around for many more years to come, don't you worry." Hsin-Yu glanced at the packets of pills scattered on the table, and took the opportunity to change the subject. "Did you finish taking all the medicine the doctor prescribed you last time? When's your next check-up?"

"I haven't finished it yet. And what's the point me going to the hospital? I feel fine. It's going to the hospital that makes you sick."

"That's no excuse not to take your medicine."

"Yeah yeah, OK. Just get off my back, will you?"

"Deal. Right, it's time for me to be off, Mr. Hsu. I'll be back to see you next month."

"Mm-hmm." Mr. Hsu, clearly tired of talking, dismissed her with a wave of his hand.

"Bye, Mr. Hsu."

Hsin-Yu's smile dropped the second she left him and, expressionless, she walked over to the bus stop, her cold demeanor at complete odds with the person she'd just been. She found a shaded spot in which to wait for the bus, then fished a notebook from her purse and began to record the outline of her conversation with Hsu Hung, how the atmosphere had felt, and points to bear in mind for the next home visit. After jotting down a few key takeaways, she pulled out a handkerchief and lightly dabbed the tiny beads of sweat gathering on her neck and forehead. The pendant hanging from her purse caught her eye as it flashed in the sunlight. As she looked at the goldfish and sun, symbolizing the nicknames that had been given to her and her sister, Hsin-Yu's thoughts drifted back into the past.

August 20th, 2012

Hsin-Yu was standing before her sister's memorial altar, tears streaming down her face. On top of the altar, a photograph of her sister was framed by a wreath of white flowers, and all around her were the comings and goings of people whispering things like "She was so young", "What is the world coming to?", and "I'm so sorry for your loss". But Hsin-Yu remained rigid as a statue, transfixed by her sister's photo as the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Now now, your sister would be sad if she saw you crying like this," a woman said, her hand gently patting Hsin-Yu on the head. Which only made Hsin-Yu cry even more.

"Here, take this. This way your sister will always be by your side." The woman pressed something into

Hsin-Yu's hand – a pendant bearing a goldfish and a sun. Hsin-Yu looked up in surprise. She'd never seen this woman before, but something about her face was familiar.

"Your big sister will always be there to watch over you," the woman continued. "You need to grow up and make something of yourself."

Hsin-Yu accepted the gift through her tears, and it was true that the pendant had accompanied her through life every day since.

The arrival of the bus forced Hsin-Yu to shake off her memories. Once on board, she took out her phone and started scrolling through the day's news, a habit she'd developed since starting her job as a social worker. One item caught her attention:

There will be something different about the sun over the next few days. It will be surrounded by a halo, and if you look carefully you'll see what looks like an extra sun on either side. This natural phenomenon, known as a sun dog or parhelion, is as rare as it is beautiful; the last time one was observed was twelve years ago. With the Central Weather Administration forecasting a particularly dry summer, scientists are saying there might be multiple parhelia visible this year, so remember to keep an eye on the skies over the coming months….

Hsin-Yu's chest tightened as she was once again reminded of that morning twelve years ago. Her face remained as impassive as before, but there was an almost imperceptible twitch in her cheek. That had been a summer too, and there had been parhelia that day… A surge of grief washed over her and she felt tears coming to sting the corners of her eyes. Quickly tilting her head back, she took some deep breaths to try and regain her composure, then turned her attention out the window. There was only one sun in the sky. Not three.

At her stop, Hsin-Yu disembarked and entered the office building on the corner of the street, then pressed the elevator button for the fifth floor: the Family First Foundation, where she worked.

DING!

No sooner had she walked through the elevator doors than she heard someone call her name.

"Hsin-Yu, are you busy right now? I was hoping you could pop over to the police station." It was her boss, Hsu Hsiu-Hui.

"What's up?" Hsin-Yu asked, the smile instantly returning to her face.

"It would appear that Chiang Shang-Lin's gotten himself in some trouble."

"Shang-Lin? He's a good kid… What has he done?" Hsin-Yu's mind conjured up the face of the sixteen-year-old, who was another one of her cases.

"The Shengsan station can't get hold of his mom, and I know you've got a good relationship with him, so I was hoping you could go to the station and find out." Hsiu-Hui's fingers danced across her phone as she spoke. "I've just sent you the name of the officer in charge. Oh, and the old police station is undergoing renovation works so they've temporarily relocated to the third floor of the building next door."

"OK, I'll head over there now." After checking she'd received her boss's message, Hsin-Yu turned and left the building again without even making it back to her desk.

As soon as she stepped out of the taxi at Shengsan police station, she was immediately assaulted by the summer heat. The freshness of the morning had receded and the sun hung high in the sky, blinding and fierce.

Just as she was about to enter the building housing the police station, she suddenly noticed the clusters of people in the street angling their phones to the sky. She slowly looked up in the direction of the cameras, using her hand to protect her eyes until they'd adjusted to the harsh sunlight, then gradually spreading her fingers so she could see between the gaps.

Parhelia.

Just the same as it had been on that stifling hot day twelve years ago. The sun flanked by two smaller

suns, connected by a halo of light.

"Whoa, it actually looks like there are three suns in the sky!"

"It's like the sun is wearing a ring."

"I heard this only happens once every ten years or something."

Hsin-Yu stood there in a trance, emotion rippling beneath her calm exterior until the voices of those around her brought her back to the present. She turned and scurried into the building in front of her.

Where is everyone? There was no one occupying the front desk, nor the office space behind it. Papers and stationery were strewn across the desks, and a pile of cardboard boxes were stacked in one corner.

Her worry for Shang-Lin surpassing her initial confusion, Hsin-Yu hurried over to the elevator and pressed the button for the fifth floor. As it began its slow ascent, she suddenly remembered what her boss had told her: the old police station had temporarily moved to the third floor of the building next door. She'd instinctively pushed the fifth floor because that was the floor her office was on. She quickly jabbed the number three button, but the elevator had already passed that floor; she was going to have to go all the way up then come back down again.

"It's because I was distracted by the sun," she muttered to herself.

DING!

The elevator doors opened on fifth and she was greeted with the same emptiness as downstairs. No evidence of human activity, just four ash-colored walls. It struck her as odd; had there actually ever been anyone on this floor? As the doors began to close, she pressed the third floor button again to make sure she'd definitely end up in the right place.

The elevator descended slowly. She couldn't see that it was, but she could feel the downward pull of gravity. Hsin-Yu's mind played out possible scenarios about what could have happened to Shang-Lin, not really paying attention to the movement of the elevator.

DING!

Now the doors reopened on an office dimly lit by a dull fluorescent light. Rows of shelving units holding cardboard boxes and folders ran along the edges of the room, and there was another pile of boxes in one corner. An old TV set was showing the news. In the center of the room were some desks, their lamps spilling a sickly yellow light over their scattered paperwork.

At least it actually looks like somebody works here, Hsin-Yu thought to herself, although she still couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't quite right. It just didn't look how she'd have expected a police station to look.

"Hello? Is anyone here? I'm a social worker," she called out as she exited the elevator, but there was no reply.

She approached the shelves to see if there was anyone hidden behind them, but the place was completely deserted. Just as she was turning to leave in the belief that she must be in the wrong place again, her eyes were suddenly drawn to a whiteboard on which was written a name she knew: Hsu Chia-Chen. A photograph of a young girl had been pinned up next to it.

Isn't that Mr. Hsu's granddaughter?

She walked over for a closer *look* and found there were other names and photographs on the whiteboard, including Hsu Hung's, with various lines connecting them. It looked like an evidence wall right out of a crime movie.

And Hsin-Yu recognized every single one of the people on this board – they were all connected with Chia-Chen's death. When she'd been handed Mr. Hsu's case, she'd read over his files a dozen times and knew every detail inside out. And besides, you never forget your first case.

What's this doing here?

嘎啦
GALA

photo © Lucien Lai

Chiang Tai-Yu
姜泰宇

- **Category:** Horror
- **Publisher:** Aquarius
- **Date:** 6/2024
- **Pages:** 304
- **Length:** 84,481 characters (approx. 54,900 words in English)
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Chiang Tai-Yu is the bestselling author of nearly a dozen novels including *You Turn Around and I'll Go Downstairs*. *Car Washers*, his memoir about losing his eyesight and working at a car wash, was shortlisted for the 2019 Taipei Literature Award, while his short story *Thirty Miles Due East* was a recipient of the 2024 Lin Rung San Prize. He also writes under the pseudonym Fumijiang (Spreading Rice Milk).

*** The film adaptation of the same name was released in 2024**

Three generations of terror are linked by a forbidden ritual and the shocking events in a soldier's diary. When the dead are called back to life, a horrific price must be paid in this stylish horror novel that echoes with cultish chants and the gnawing of flesh and bone.

"A horrific price must be paid by those who force the dead to return."

In the aftermath of the Chinese Civil War, a few battalions of Republic of China soldiers escaped into Burma where they continued to conduct cross-border raids on communist forces before they were finally evacuated to Taiwan. In *Gala*, the diary of one of these soldiers is passed through three generations, cursing its author and all those who come to possess it.

The novel opens in the borderlands of Burma, where four lost ROC soldiers struggle to survive after being left for dead by their units. On the brink of starvation, they harbor fantasies of cannibalizing one another to stay alive. A strange boy whose face is always covered guides them to a village. As soon as they arrive, the villagers strike up a wild ritualistic chant, and the soldiers begin slaughtering one another before realizing that, in this ritual, all of them will become the sacrifice. These bizarre events are recorded in a soldier's diary which is carried back to Taiwan by a political warfare officer, where another bone-chilling saga begins to unfold.

Decades after the incidents in Burma, a Daoist priest conducts a ritual to drive away evil spirits that have been haunting a construction site of vacation homes in Taiwan. Midway through the ceremony the priest is suddenly assaulted by memories of his mentor, who, while serving as a soldier in Burma, had been asked to conduct a ritual to pacify the spirits of the four lost soldiers. This interference from the past transforms the ritual into something else entirely. Instead of driving spirits away, they are called back to life, a process which demands human sacrifices. As the malevolent spirits exact their toll, not a single worker at the construction site will be spared.

In the present day, a group of vloggers is invited to film at a resort built on the site of the unfinished vacation homes. Their videos go viral after supernatural events are caught on camera, motivating the vloggers to delve deeper into the dark mysteries of the resort, and thereby exposing themselves to a blood-debt that is yet to be fully paid.

With its dark cults, forbidden rituals, and acts of self-cannibalism, *Gala* is suffused with a Lovecraftian atmosphere of dread that will test the nerves of even the most cool-headed readers. Author Chiang Tai-Yu relates events in ghastly detail, but resists giving a full explanation of the terrifying hauntings, instead focusing on the human tendency to subjugate ourselves to desire, thereby laying the seeds of our own destruction. In the end, readers can only guess whether the terror will ever truly finish.

GALA

By Chiang Tai-Yu
Translated by Sarah-Jayne Carver

> “Four lost soldiers venture deep into the mountains in a desperate attempt to rejoin their battalion… a construction site is plagued by strange and frightening events… five young vloggers explore an abandoned vacation village, their viewership virally increasing as they put themselves into greater danger… These three seemingly unrelated stories are revealed to be connected by a soldier’s diary. In addition to sinister storytelling and dramatic tension, *Gala* incorporates historical elements from the close of the Chinese civil war. The despair of the lost ROC soldiers wandering on the Burmese borderlands casts the events of the novel in a tragically introspective light, layering this tale of horror and suspense with historical resonances and reflections on human nature.”
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

Part One

Chapter One: The Blown-Up Bridge

Mou Chang-tsai dropped to the ground on the path beside the mountain. He wanted to keep going through the grass, but his legs had stopped listening to him. He used to run like this as a child when he was stealing vegetables from the woman next door. More recently, he hadn’t been able to outrun the Nationalist government so now he’d been drafted and was fleeing from the Japanese. He had spent the last few days slogging through muddy water after his squadmate from his hometown, Feng Wan-chen, whom they all called Second Steed, had insisted they should head for higher ground. It was the only way to escape the mud. Anyone who fell just a few steps behind would find their feet engulfed in the torrent of muddy water. Mou Chang-tsai stared at the mud-covered soldier behind him, but before he could make out who it was, there was a bang, and the man was gone.

Who could have known the bridge would just explode out of nowhere?

The small bag of rations he’d been carrying was almost empty and there didn’t seem to be any other supplies. Second Steed was staring blankly up at the sky like a fried grasshopper. It was a dark grey color that filled them with a deep sense of unease. Their comrade, Lu Ming-pao (known as Big Loot) had foolishly started to pee right next to Second Steed, so Second Steed got up and slapped him in the face. Unperturbed, Big Loot smiled and rubbed his cheek as though he was completely unbothered by it all. Mou Chang-tsai emptied the muddy water from his canteen into his helmet. The small, primate-like child they called the Monkey Ghost was standing next to a tree and making a campfire. He had kept his face covered all day, with only his eyes showing.

Second Steed saw Big Loot staring straight at their few remaining rations, so he hastily gathered them

to his chest and went to kick Big Loot again. Big Loot dodged him and kept smiling even as he nearly fell into the fire.

"There aren't any villages up ahead," said Pan, appearing on the road in front of them. They saw his bare feet, then his tattered, blackened uniform, then finally his rifle still firmly slung over his shoulder. When he first heard Pan's voice, Mou Chang-tsai had been biting into his tasteless, mud-soaked rations and thinking about how there was a particularly desolate air to the smoke from the campfire. Pan was from Ningbo but spoke with a Beijing accent. He was very tall and carried his gun with him at all times. He never told them how many bullets he had left.

Big Loot drank the remaining ration-flavored mud water. Nobody wanted to move. Other than the Monkey Ghost who'd been inexplicably following them, they each sat slumped against a tree hugging their legs, or lay flat on their backs in the same grasshopper-like way Second Steed had done earlier. The Monkey Ghost was nowhere to be seen, but no one went looking for him. Big Loot seemed like he hadn't eaten enough, and was mumbling to himself about knife-cut noodles, braised noodles, and green beans. His words made them all hungry. After a short while, the Monkey Ghost came back carrying something they didn't recognize in his jacket. He threw it into a helmet that had a layer of mud at the bottom and stared wide-eyed at what was inside. Second Steed went over to see what it was and discovered that Big Loot had drunk all the leftover soup. He was so angry that he rose to his feet as if to kick Big Loot a few more times, but thankfully Pan stopped him.

It smelled pretty good; it must have been meat. No one asked the Monkey Ghost what kind of meat it was, and they wouldn't have got an answer anyway. For the most part, the Monkey Ghost didn't speak and kept his face covered at all times. It seemed he'd fled with everyone else on that second day, and he'd been following the four of them in silence ever since. When he first joined them, Second Steed hadn't said anything about it since they still had enough canned food. Back then none of them could have imagined that they'd end up having to flee this far, so Second Steed told the Monkey Ghost he could join them. The Monkey Ghost didn't make any effort to be polite and sat far away from the rest of them while he ate. There wasn't anything specifically bad about him, and he was helpful when it came to building fires and finding water. Muddy water, that is. It meant they weren't too concerned about having an extra person join them, except for the time when he got overly enthusiastic and tried to help Pan by grabbing his gun. He received a strong reprimand from Pan which they weren't sure if he understood, but he kept his distance from Pan for a while afterwards.

Mou Chang-tsai hugged his knees to his chest for a bit, then lay down on the ground. Big Loot was still shouting about Shanxi noodles, and from the other side of the path. Pan said with a smile, "Look at us acting like we barely have a care in the world. We've had enough to drink and now we're just lying around. We don't even have to rush to rejoin our regiment." He pulled a cigarette out of his pocket and turned to Big Loot, "When I first joined the army, the food was nowhere as good as what we get here in the Expeditionary Force. I went hungry for so long that I lost a few centimeters off my height. The food we get here is so much better. With these C-rations we get from the United States they give us beef every day, as well as tea, cigarettes and vitamin tablets."

Mou Chang-tsai licked his lips, remembering the slightly bitter effect of the tart tea brewed from the leaves, which always felt like gulping down something solid. He touched the cigarettes in his breast pocket and thought to himself, *I'll save them for later, we don't know when we'll rejoin the regiment or when supplies will arrive*.

Pan was so used to keeping watch that he didn't shake the others awake until the night was already half over. When he was shaken awake, Mou Chang-tsai's hand went to his breast pocket and found that his bayonet was still there. There was no moon that night and the light of the stars wasn't enough to see by, so he accidentally stepped on Big Loot who mumbled something before lying back down again. Big Loot's real name, Lu Ming-pao, carried connotations of luminous treasure. As Mou Chang-tsai continued to stroke the bayonet in his pocket, his eyes tried to make out Big Loot's neck in the dark but he couldn't see it

clearly.

He couldn't really see anything at all.

*

"Why the fuck are you writing a supervisor's log at a time like this?" Pan snorted, striding over to Mou Chang-tsai and staring him down.

Pan's full name was Pan Te-sheng, meaning "to triumph over an opponent". He had a long scar which ran from under his left eye to his lips which he insisted was a cut he'd gotten from a strange tree on one of his marches. No matter how you looked at it, the scar seemed more like a knife cut, but even though all the others saw it, they never said anything so that Pan wouldn't lose face.

Early the next morning as they prepared to leave, Pan declared that if they couldn't meet up with the regiment, they would have to head for Honghe or Mengzi Airport. He'd received word that they needed to prepare to retreat.

"What kind of retreat? And retreat to where?" asked Big Loot, but Pan couldn't explain himself. In any case, they would have to go to Mengzi because the Yuanjiang Bridge had been blown up. They had no way to retrace their steps, and would have to take a huge detour.

Also, was Second Steed getting sick? He was up early, or more accurately he'd been the last one of them on watch, and his face looked puffy and sullen. When they were eating the boiled rations, Big Loot had wanted more but Second Steed had berated him for it. Second Steed told him that when they'd first received the crackers, some people who hadn't known any better had eaten too many in one go and then drunk a lot of water. The mixture had blocked up their intestines and caused them to vomit everything back up again.

Mou Chang-tsai touched the blade in his pocket again. The wind had picked up and a sandstorm was rolling in. Southern Yunnan winters were piercingly cold, and even though the last few days had been warmer, there was still a slight chill in the air as they gradually moved into the mountains. Mou Chang-tsai found himself looking at Big Loot's neck again, but it made him feel even colder.

The Monkey Ghost was right at the front of their small squadron. Not that Mou Chang-tsai particularly cared who went first, but he did wonder if the Monkey Ghost was leading the way, whether intentionally or not. Maybe he knew where Mengzi was? Mou Chang-tsai held the pen cap in his mouth while he packed up the logbook and carefully put it away. The cover read: *Supervisor's Log: 414th Infantry Division of the 95th Regiment*. Mou Chang-tsai figured that if they ever rejoined their regiment, they would need to show it to their division commander. The wind whistled around them. Pan was at the head of the group, and the Monkey Ghost, who seemed to be native to the region, was following along beside him and looked like he was sniffing something. They were followed by Big Loot and Second Steed, with Mou Chang-tsai bringing up the rear.

Mou Chang-tsai froze for a moment, suddenly remembering that the Monkey Ghost hadn't simply started following them. In the beginning, it had just been Mou Chang-tsai and Second Steed left struggling through the mud together. They had been running and that was when they'd seen Big Loot, who was from a neighboring squadron. It was just the three of them for a while, and then they'd been joined by Pan, but they weren't sure which division he was from. He'd brought the Monkey Ghost with him. Now they didn't have enough food, so what was the point of dwelling on where the Monkey Ghost came from or when he arrived? Mou Chang-tsai shook his head. There definitely wasn't enough food, and they didn't know if Pan actually had any bullets. It was also January, which meant they hadn't seen any wild animals, not even a roe deer, so even if he did have bullets in that gun, there wasn't anything for them to kill. The wind kept whistling. They had been walking towards the forest for most of the morning, but it seemed like they would never reach it. There were no other sounds beside the wind, their own breathing, and Big Loot muttering about the pain in his feet. His shoes might have been

pulled off his feet during the flood, or he might have just thrown them away.

Once the exhaustion had passed, only numbness remained. Mou Chang-tsai thought about how the word for numbness, 麻木, was made up of so many characters for the word tree: 木. It made him wonder, *why the hell were there so many goddamn trees?*

*

The group lay down when they got to the edge of the forest. They were going to wait a while before going in because it was getting late and there would be a lot of snakes and the air would be thick with miasma. On the verge of nightfall, Mou Chang-tsai and Big Loot went into the forest to gather firewood and it was already slightly damp for some reason. Big Loot began gathering firewood from the ground, while Mou Chang-tsai took out his single-edged blade and hacked away at some branches, figuring they would be drier than the wood from the ground.

"Why are my hands so weak?" muttered Mou Chang-tsai to himself.

Big Loot was talking loudly about how the deputy commander was from a village near his hometown so if they linked up with the regiment again, he'd be able to get them extra food. Mou Chang-tsai tried to remember the deputy commander's name while he sliced through the branches. Was it Tan Chung? As he was hacking away at the branches, he suddenly heard something behind him to his left. Big Loot was standing around idly up ahead, so Mou Chang-tsai turned around to look.

It was so quiet.

In a split second, everything had gone silent and Mou Chang-tsai felt a cold shiver run through him like he'd been on the receiving end of a practical joke. His hand tightened around the blade, and he scooped up the branches he'd been collecting under his left arm. What if there was a demon living in the forest? Mou Chang-tsai told Big Loot they had to get out of the forest as fast as they could. It didn't matter if they didn't have enough firewood.

"Shouldn't we get more?" asked Big Loot cluelessly, looking doubtful.

Mou Chang-tsai didn't know how to explain, so he just yelled, "Deputy Commander Tan Chung says you have to get out of here right now!"

Satisfied with this, Big Loot grabbed the firewood and staggered after him, breaking into a run.

As soon as they got out of the forest, they realized Second Steed and Pan had gotten into a fight, and now Second Steed was lying on the ground.

"Stop! What the hell are you guys doing?!"

Mou Chang-tsai threw down the firewood and rushed over to stop Pan.

"The kid was spouting nonsense like he was possessed, how could I not hit him?!" shouted Pan.

It was hard to pull Pan away. His big, strong body was sitting on Second Steed's stomach, and it was impossible to tell how many punches he'd thrown already.

Pan sprawled on the ground, gasping for breath. Second Steed lay flat on his back staring up at the sky, then he rolled over and spat out a tooth.

The nearby forest was like a spectator watching the whole thing unfold, and the whole group of disheveled, hungry, foul-smelling men had no idea what to do. The Monkey Ghost was gone; maybe he'd gotten scared and run away.

Second Steed hadn't spoken since spitting out his molar. Mou Chang-tsai looked at Pan.

"We were making a fire," said Pan resentfully. "I wanted to go out hunting, but then out of nowhere Second Steed said the bridge had been blown up by Commander Sun of the 237th Infantry Division. He kept saying that everybody had died in the explosion, and Commander Sun hadn't spared a thought for us. He said we'd never find our regiment, that we'd never make it back." Pan was a member of the 237th Infantry Division. He had been in the vanguard when they crossed the Yuanjiang Bridge.

福島漂流記
DRIFTING FORMOSA

Tsai Yi-Chen
蔡易澄

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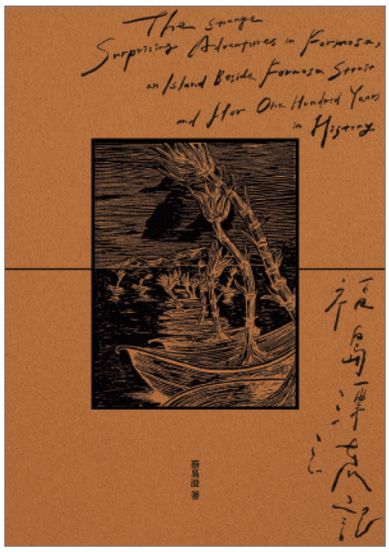
A PhD student in the Graduate Institute of Taiwan Literature at National Taiwan University, Tsai Yi-Chen has received numerous literary awards for his novels. After receiving support from the Ministry of Culture's Youth Creative Fund, he began planning the ten history-based stories that became *Drifting Formosa*, his first short story collection.



What if Taiwan had joined the US as the fifty-first state after World War II? What if the 1999 Jiji earthquake had split Taiwan into four islands which each developed their own politics? These ten stories are alternate histories that each provide an imaginative mirror to Taiwan's current reality.

Cutting-edge novelist Tsai Yi-Chen re-envisions the pivotal moments in Taiwan's modern history with daring imaginative twists, producing a speculative chronology that spans a wide range of literary forms and styles. Like a visionary time-machine, this short-story collection transports readers to alternate histories that nonetheless ring true to the world we know.

Brimming with the sights and sounds of a rapidly industrializing colony, "Travels in Taiwan" is a faux travelogue written from the perspective of an Englishman visiting Taiwan under Japanese rule. "Night Flow" takes the form of a ghost story, but the strange mutterings and exotic tongues heard in the night are the grievances of those dispossessed by the transition from Japanese to Republic of China rule. In "Please Close Your Eyes" Taiwan becomes the fifty-first US state at the end of WWII, and a parallel post-war history of the Asia-Pacific region unfolds. A love-letter to Formosa, "Last Case" is a detective story steeped in the paranoia and tension of a 1980's authoritarian police state.

The final story, "Drifting Apart", is the bold imagining of a Taiwan split into four landmasses by the 1999 Jiji earthquake. As the islands drift apart over the following years, so do the thoughts and worldviews of their inhabitants. In an attempt to promote national unity, short stories from across these islands are compiled into a collection: the nine preceding stories of *Drifting Formosa*! The fictional plot device of drifting islands is a powerful metaphor for contemporary Taiwan, whose citizens struggle to reach consensus on the critical issues faced by their country.

In the classic vein of alternate history fiction, author Tsai Yi-Chen poses "what if" questions that reframe reality, constructing new perspectives on Taiwan's past, present, and future. His meticulous handling of historical sources grounds the speculative plots and fictional characters, allowing for meaningful re-interpretations of the events that forged the real Taiwan.

DRIFTING FORMOSA

By Tsai Yi-Chen
Translated by Jim Weldon

> "These ten stories begin from Taiwan at the crossroads of the 19th and 20th centuries, and then unfold in a sequential journey towards the present. A few make use of historical incidents like the Capture of the Tuapse, which even most Taiwanese are unaware of. Others construct an alternate history, such as a post-war concession of Taiwan to Japan, raising the question of retrocession, as was faced historically in Hong Kong. By excavating Taiwan's forgotten past and envisioning its problematic future, *Drifting Formosa* poses analogies to Taiwan's present circumstances, delivering a fresh reading experience with layered meanings to ponder."
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

The Journey Begins: First Impressions of Formosa

Should the opportunity present, I would heartily recommend any traveller harbouring a yen to experience the exotic customs of the Far East to come themselves and take a look around Formosa. Here, one can enjoy the assault of a panoply of varied cultures, be it Chinese, Japanese, or that of the local natives; for the traveller making their first visit to the Orient, there is no better way to step into its world of mystery and wonder. Of course, should one have already journeyed to lands such as China or Japan, here is still an excellent next destination, perhaps allowing one to savour with finer attention how the cultural mores of diverse nations have taken root in this place and begun to sprout and grow anew, to present a vista of an altogether different kind.

This is all very much connected to the historical experience of this isle. Formosa was once ruled by the Manchu Qing Empire, with that changing only very recently; it is now governed by the newly-risen power of Japan. Interesting to relate, China never seemed to set any great store in the worth of Formosa; their historical records of the isle are scanty in the extreme and they never included the place in their territorial charts. Neglect of this sort saw the island occupied for some time by rebel forces, a source of no small irritation to the then Manchu emperor, until he was able to dispatch troops sufficient to make a fist of wresting back control and at last formally establish a local administration. As we all know only too well, the Chinese bureaucracy is always marked by a great passivity, and it adopted a laissez-faire posture in all affairs, allowing the island to decline into a hellscape of savagery and tyranny, to such an extent that sailors were unwilling to so much as mention the island by name, fearful of running aground here to fall subject to the abuses of the Chinese soldiery or be simply murdered outright by the native head-hunters. In an

abrogation of their responsibilities, Chinese officials even went so far as to profess, no doubt with a view to avoiding any associated duty of compensation, that the dwelling places of the natives lay beyond the Pale of imperial civilisation, thereby stating that close on half of the island fell outside their jurisdiction. Most other nations were left helpless in the face of such scoundrelly brigandage from the Chinese, with only a few, such as Japan, able to seek redress for their subjects by sending soldiers to attack the island natives. Although the Ching instituted a number of reforms, claiming to be about to begin regulating the natives and steadily bringing their mountain lands under administrative control, any effects were hardly apparent. Now it is Japan that exercises complete powers of government in Formosa, exploiting the very sort of rich colony they have long dreamed of owning in a manner now marked by its rigour and vigour.

The most encouraging facilitator of our happy sojourn, besides thanks being due Baron Janssen and Doctor Williams, has been the Office of the Governor-General of Taiwan, which has displayed assiduous care for us throughout. Some little while ago, I received a telegram from the Rohr Chamber of Commerce requesting I travel from Hong Kong to Formosa to assist Baron Janssen in the handling of certain matters of business. Here I must also express my gratitude to the British Consulate, whose staff provided a letter of recommendation expressing the hope that the Office of the Governor-General could look after me as appropriate during my trip, a request to which the Office of the Governor-General happily acquiesced. As I noted previously, the air of savagery prevailing in Formosa after long years bereft of any civilising endeavours has meant that few indeed have been such travellers rash enough to come to the island. On this trip, I have been treated with the greatest solicitude by the Office of the Governor-General, and it has been their hope that I might write an account of my sojourn, in the manner of a news reporter, doubtless with the aspiration that this might sweep away the dark shadows of the past and set forth how they have transformed a savage land into a fairy isle by the excellence of their governance. Here, I must state frankly that it will not be every visitor who receives such splendid treatment. If you do find you interest piqued by this place, my advice is that you repair here with all haste; once the stated aims of the Governor-General's administration are achieved, they will perhaps be less concerned with accommodating the foreign traveller.

On the second of November, the day somewhat chill, I arrived at the Port of Keelung. This was, it seems, in itself something of a rarity, Formosa being famed for the oppressive hotness of its climate, while the frequent rains of Keelung only add to a visitor's sense of stifling heat; when the trade goods of the various nations are dispatched here, they must also consider the costs incurred due to decay caused by the damp. To be able to commence my visit in such rare good weather was, naturally, the very best of beginnings. Even so, the constant gusts of cloying sea wind gave me a sense of how this port city feels after long years soaking in fine rains. Looking out, one saw how the Chinese houses rose up alongside the narrow streets, their grey walls marked with various water stains. Puddles and water-filled hollows were evident all about; clearly a heavy rain had fallen overnight and the sun only recently shown its face. The architectural style of this place was the product of its year-round damp and overcast, the sloping roofs built to let the water run off, grey-tiled eaves always extending well beyond the body of the house itself and joining together until they seemed like some mass of dark cloud lowering over the streets. The moment I set foot in the place, my fancy turned unbidden to envisioning the fresh and bracing air of Formosa's mountain districts. They were to be the ultimate objective of this trip, the magnificent primal landscapes of the uplands allowing the visitor to understand from direct experience the origins of the name The Beautiful Island.

Charged with receiving us was a fellow from the Foreign Affairs Department of the Office of the Governor-General by the name of Morita, a rather thin and weedy specimen. Just as we have come to know about the Japanese, they have a particular dedication to the most finicking details of politesse and protocol. The moment he set eyes on us, Morita proffered a polite bow, before asking us to wait a brief moment whilst he personally handled the various customs documentation on our behalf. That done, he

hurried us off to the newly-constructed railway station, where we were due to take a train that would reach Formosa's most developed city, Taihoku, in something over an hour; he showed not the slightest inclination of allowing us time to drink in the scenes of the little town of Keelung. When I expressed my dissatisfaction on the point, Morita stated, with a note of apology, that because Keelung was so frequently inundated, its streets were very rundown and there were issues with hygiene. His superiors had instructed him to bring his guests away from the place with all dispatch, though recently plans had been set in motion for a renewal of the urban area. Compared with the shame he clearly felt talking about the as-yet unfinished new street facades, Morita was much keener to tell us all about the newly-instituted north-south cross-country rail line, and he was interested in hearing our views on it too. I thought it a very fine thing, though of course still much inferior to the railways of Britain. We were, however, in Asia; so having a train one might take at all was already most impressive.

Morita did his very best to show us that side of Formosa where progress has been at work, efforts that did not go to waste. I must state in all truthfulness that, among all the cities of the Far East I have visited to date, Taihoku is the one that has made the deepest impression upon me. When one steps out of Taihoku Railway Station, it is hard to avoid having one's gaze captured by the three-storey edifice of the Railway Hotel, sporting a Mansard roof of the type so common in Paris and with a most imposing portico serving as its entrance. The red brick with white decorative striping is entirely after the fashion of Norman Shaw, putting me at once in mind of the Savoy Theatre in London. If one turns back at this point, one finds the railway station has adopted the same design: black tiles, red brick and white stone, seemingly modelled after Amsterdam Central Station, while leaving out the overly ostentatious Gothic ornament. It could be described as a plain copy in miniature.

Any mention of a city inhabited by the Chinese will most likely not evoke thoughts of cleanliness and good order, but the reforms instituted by the Japanese have achieved just such a thing. Morita took us on a tour of an ordinary leisure and entertainment district, its arrow-straight streets lined to either side with buildings in the traditional Japanese *washitsu* style. There are theatres dedicated to the performance of Japanese-style stage plays, and work is due to be completed next month on a public market, which will then go into operation. Everything appeared exceptionally neat and orderly. There were none of those dark and gloomy districts where chaos breeds here; an excellent drainage system keeps the streets free from puddles, and there is no call to spend all one's days fretting over problems of health and hygiene such as malaria. I imagine this is connected to the solemnity and nervous disposition of the Japanese. Their militarised governance means they find no impediments when it comes to the business of tearing things down, allowing them to carry out programmes of renovation on a grand scale. As well as demolishing the old houses in the Fukien style, at the same time they tore down the wall of the old city and its great west gate, not even sparing the tombs. They display not one iota of softness in either intent or methods when treating with the Chinese inhabitants of their colony, yet they have set this city on the road to development in the shortest order.

It is the colonial rulers who determine the overall demeanour of a conurbation. Compared to the Japanese, we British are somewhat more enlightened, having more of an eye for freedom of trade and commerce, and less exercised by any desire to assimilate our colonies. Although Hong Kong is neither so neat nor orderly as Taihoku, it has a vitality and is a city of much greater enthusiasm. Of course, if one's object is to experience the mysteriousness of the Orient, then I would suggest Taihoku as the better choice. In Hong Kong, after all, the Western faces all around and the familiar sounds of English can only serve to spoil the mood. By contrast, in Taihoku one is sure to experience that same sense of shock and wonderment that struck Lafcadio Hearn on first arrival in Japan – how exquisitely delicate everything seems, as if one has landed in a Lilliput. Now, as the denizens blink at you with their long narrow eyes, appraising

the man from foreign parts with curious gaze and whispering in one another's ears in their ancient tongue, their speech unfamiliar and their writing like so many arcane sigils, you truly do experience the sensation of having set foot in a strange land.

Morita had arranged accommodation for us in a high-class Japanese-style hostelry that catered specially to foreign travellers. Although I was greatly interested by the newly-opened Railway Hotel, its palatial exterior was a faithful reflection of the cost of staying there, not something within the means of the average traveller. That said, our rooms in a Japanese-style hostelry did not come cheap either. The cost of a night's stay here would suffice to pay for four or five nights' accommodation in Shanghai. On first hearing, that might seem excessively expensive, but it is no easy matter to find a hotel room that meets Western standards of hygiene when in the Far East. I am sure no-one would be willing to stay in the rooms of the Chinese, who go such a long time between baths, the sort of places that even have chamber pots or bedpans, the thick stench making it absolutely impossible to get a good night's sleep. As anyone would agree, such times when travelling are not the best moments to be experiencing the local culture, especially the sort that will likely make you ill. And of course, looked at another way, to be able to experience a genuine traditional Japanese hostelry in the course of one's visit to Formosa can only be no bad thing. The hostelry was apparently translocated wholesale from Japan; its wooden beams and supports, the tatami floor mats and the sliding doors all exactly as one would find there. I suppose they spent most of their money on preservation; after all, in such a hot, damp island clime, preventing termites boring into the woodwork is no simple affair.

As soon as I had my luggage stowed as it should be, I headed downstairs to the bathhouse, to avail myself of the pleasures of a good long soak. The hostel maids were most attentive in their duties, showing me how to make use of the various bathing accoutrements, and cautioning me to be careful of the discomfort that might arise should the water be too hot. I wrapped myself in a bath towel and set to studying the lovely *ukiyo-e* woodcut on the wall, a mist-wreathed white crane standing perfectly still, yet seemingly come alive before my eyes. After a little while, I decided I would come out of the hot water and sit with my legs crossed in meditation, wishing to sample that Oriental notion they call Zen. It was something I had learned previously from temple monks during a trip to Japan. They say to do such can bring inner calm and relax the body, and moreover, bring a man to a state of realisation of the emptiness of all things. I copied the posture just as I had been shown, and while I can hardly be said to have achieved so rarefied a sensation, it still went some way to aiding my relaxation, allowing me to shed the weariness attendant on a long time spent shipboard.

I mention here in passing, that a visitor from foreign parts might feel they lack for any privacy here. This has always been the case, something to do with the locals' Oriental cultural mores, which appear bereft entirely of any concept of personal space; the sliding doors of the rooms are for the most part left half open. Another part of it is how infrequently they have the opportunity to set eyes on foreigners here. While in the bathhouse, I encountered two Japanese guests. They first fled the room in panic, then proceeded to hide behind the door, peeping out from its cover to watch me. Any lady or gentleman who would find such behaviour especially objectionable would be best advised to give additional consideration before visiting, elsewise such vexations will make any enjoyment of their travels impossible.


BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

NON-FICTION

不假裝，也能閃閃發光：
停止自我否定、治癒內在脆弱，擁抱成就和讚美的幸福配方

Jill Chang
張瀞仁

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- **Rights sold:** Japanese (Diamond)

Currently a strategic philanthropic advisor, Jill Chang works on a multi-national team that serves the needs of international philanthropists and corporate clients. Her previous book, *Quiet Is a Superpower*, has been translated into seven languages. The English version topped the category best-seller list on Amazon's US site, and won the prestigious independent publishing award Forward INDIES. The Japanese version won #1 of Best Three Books of the Year (translated, non-fiction) in 2022 and sold 210,000 copies, making Jill Taiwan's top selling author in Japan.

YOU DESERVE TO SHINE:
HOW TO OVERCOME IMPOSTER SYNDROME AND EMBRACE YOUR TRUE POTENTIAL

*** 2024 Top 100 Bestseller in Business & Workplace on Books.com.tw**

Do you feel like your successes are mostly due to luck? Do you feel undeserving of praise? Do you avoid highlighting your accomplishments for fear of being called out? Let bestselling author and accomplished businesswoman Jill Chang show you how to stop negating yourself and embrace your capabilities and talents.

In spite of their accomplishments, many successful professionals are plagued by the feeling that they're just getting by on luck, and that their next project could be their undoing. Known as imposter syndrome, this condition can have a negative impact on our careers as we pull away from important opportunities for fear of being exposed as a fraud. Author Jill Chang, a self-described "extreme introvert" who inspired more than 200,000 readers with her previous best-selling title *Quiet Is a Superpower*, now returns with *You Deserve to Shine* to address this common problem. Once again drawing on personal experience and honest self-examination, she shares the tools and techniques she used to deal with her own imposter syndrome.

The first half of the book shows readers what imposter syndrome is, how it operates, and why it afflicts certain people, breaking down common misperceptions and helping readers understand the value of a positive sense of self. The second half guides readers through practices and techniques, including a practical step-by-step program for addressing imposter syndrome. Readers will learn how to silence their inner critic, build self-esteem, restore confidence, seek out positive support networks, and detox from the negative influences of social media. Specific strategies are provided for readers working in various industries, roles, and stages of their careers. Whether you are a recent graduate at your first job, a high-level manager, or someone transitioning to a new career, you will find targeted advice to meet your situation.

Despite her impressive accomplishments as an author and philanthropic advisor, Jill Chang also found herself struggling with imposter syndrome. Integrating her personal experiences, practical techniques, and research-backed insights, Jill gently guides readers through their struggles with self-doubt, encouraging them on a path of personal growth towards a satisfying work-life where they can let their talents shine.

YOU DESERVE TO SHINE: HOW TO OVERCOME IMPOSTER SYNDROME AND EMBRACE YOUR TRUE POTENTIAL

By Jill Chang
Translated by Petula Parris

> "This book is an essential read if you struggle with imposter syndrome."
>
> — Dr. Jessamy Hibberd, clinical psychologist & author of *The Imposter Cure*

> "No matter how often you come across a feeling of "I don't deserve it" or "I will fail", you can always come back to this book and find your solution."
>
> — Dr. Michaela Muthig, author of *Und Morgen Fliege Ich Auf*

Part 1: This is What an Imposter Looks Like

When I wrote my first book, *Quiet Is a Superpower*, it hit the bestseller lists in multiple countries and scooped up annual book awards in both the United States and Japan. That should be a *big deal* for any debut author… But, do you know how it made me feel? It left me wanting to curl up in shame.

"Most writers are consistently churning out new works – and here I am droning on about the same book after four years!" I thought. "And why do they keep calling me a *writer*? Richard Powers and Haruki Murakami are writers. Not someone like me…"

When I first learned that Diamond Inc., a well-known Japanese publisher, had acquired the rights to my book (for quite a hefty price), I couldn't quite match my agent's enthusiasm. I panic called my cousin in Japan: "What's happening? That publisher usually publishes successful authors. They've made a mistake. This is going to backfire!"

During my multi-country book tour, my suitcase was almost bursting at the seams with all the clothes and accessories I'd planned for each interview. Nevertheless, I still made sure to pack a copy of my book. I figured that, if I got stuck on a question, I could quickly flip to the right page and consult my scribblings for an answer. In hindsight, it's kind of sad that I felt the need to refer back to my notes… seeing that I'd written the book in the first place!

How did I become like this? Should I blame my gender, my blood type, my zodiac sign – or is it my family's fault, or just my personality? Was one-year-

old Jill already like this? What about eight-year-old Jill? Did something go awry during puberty? Or maybe it was upon entering the workforce? As it turns out, the reason behind this all is: the **imposter experience**.

Wait! Who are you calling an imposter?

Imposter experience isn't exactly a *condition*. Think of it more as a passing, or sometimes chronic, *state of mind*. It's when you feel you don't deserve that lucky break, or when you tell yourself you aren't clever or capable enough.

Other people view you through a filter

When Gillian's company informed her that her contract wouldn't be renewed, she started stressing about finding a new job. She called her former manager, Jason, to complain: "They're restructuring and decided to let me go. But I don't feel I'm good at anything… How on earth am I supposed to find another job?"

Jason and Gillian made a great team. Even though they were based in different countries and rarely met in person, they had completed several tough projects together. They had co-interviewed many of their teammates, and although they were no longer colleagues, they remained close friends.

"Well I'd do anything to work with you again!" Jason told her. Gillian knew he was just trying to comfort her, but still, it felt good knowing someone was on her side.

"Did you know Adam came out to the West Coast to visit me recently?" Jason added. Adam was one of their former teammates. After moving to another city, he'd changed jobs and was now managing a team across at least a dozen countries. "When we met up, we kept saying how great you are. It's a shame you weren't there! You'd have heard for yourself how much we enjoyed working with you."

Gillian couldn't imagine there was much good to say about her. She was simply trying her best to get through each day without messing up or drawing too much attention to herself. She wasn't even after a promotion; making it through to the end of each day was more than enough. When interviewing new hires, she quietly thanked her lucky stars that she'd joined the workforce earlier. She knew there was no way she'd be able to compete with the talented candidates nowadays. Likewise, each time she took on a new project, she feared something would go wrong. She was sure she'd make a mistake or overlook something. Even when things went well, she preferred it when no one noticed. She didn't want anyone to realize she had simply gotten lucky.

"Everyone has moments of self-doubt. What you're experiencing is known as imposter syndrome. Most people go through it at some point or other – including me," Jason assured her.

Even those at the "top" grapple with self-doubt

Michelle is the kind of person everyone wants to be friends with. She's cool. She's smart. She graduated from an Ivy League law school. But rather than following the typical route to Wall Street or a top-tier law firm, she opted to work as a human rights lawyer at a nonprofit, fighting against injustices on behalf of undocumented immigrants.

Michelle's mind works at the speed of light. On top of juggling multiple jobs, she's had a book published, volunteers for different organizations, and even runs her own newsletter. She is full of warmth, incredibly empathetic, and keenly aware of sociocultural issues.

Once, we happened to be in Taipei at the same time, so we arranged to meet for dinner at a cosy Japanese spot. As we were chatting, I asked her when she was going to write her next book. To my surprise, she lowered her gaze and said: "I don't

think there'll ever be another one. It's just too hard. I mean, the writing process is tough enough! But then when it's out, and people come compliment me on it, I just can't handle it. I want to tell them: 'Wait, no, you've got it wrong – I just wrote down what I saw!' It makes me want to disappear."

I stared at her in disbelief. Seriously? But that was exactly how *my* mind worked! How could someone as accomplished as Michelle think that way? But then it hit me – if even *Michelle* felt like this, then maybe so did a lot more people…

Hi, I'm Jill – poster child for imposters everywhere!

I'm curious. Do you ever feel uncomfortable when people congratulate you?

There was a time when I got promoted at work, and I became the first manager in the company's history to be promoted from Asia to the US headquarters. Later, my book was published in the US, landing on the Amazon bestseller list, and I became what people call a *bestselling author*. Invitations to speak started to pour in from all over the world, and my LinkedIn was flooded with connection requests from people in various countries.

But honestly, I felt terrible.

It all felt like one big misunderstanding. Whenever anyone congratulated me, I'd force a smile and say, "It's not that impressive! I just got lucky."

Most people would respond with encouragement: "You're too modest. You need to learn to take a compliment!"

But what they didn't realize was that deep down, I truly believed I'd used up a whole lifetime of luck just to get this far – which meant I didn't have any luck left in the bank to keep the act going. I kept thinking, *Any second now, they're going to find out it's all fake. The more they get to know me, the more they'll see I'm incapable. I'm slow, I'm bad with numbers, I even get nervous talking on the phone.*

I felt torn and anxious. Part of me wanted to keep up the act to avoid disappointing everyone – and, of course, for the sake of my career prospects. But another part of me was convinced that tomorrow, or maybe even within the next hour, someone would figure out I was a fraud. Actually, that's not even fair: to call myself a fraud implies there's something there. Whereas I felt I had nothing at all.

So I carried around that guilt and self-doubt at work, always anxious, always hoping no one would see through me.

As I got older, I started to wonder what was at the bottom of all this. Was it a lack of confidence? Was I too sensitive? Too introverted? Or maybe it came from the East Asian values I grew up with – ones that emphasize humility over taking personal credit.

It wasn't until I came across the work of psychologist Dr. Jessamy Hibberd that I learned there's a name for this: **imposter syndrome** – or as some call it, the **imposter experience**. In this book, I also sometimes simply refer to it as **the imposter**.

You aren't alone – imposters are all around

I much prefer the term **imposter experience**. As I pointed out earlier, **imposter experience** isn't exactly a *condition*, but more like a passing, or sometimes chronic, *state of mind*. It's when you feel you don't deserve that lucky break, or when you tell yourself you aren't clever or capable enough.[01]

According to Dr. Jessamy Hibberd, imposter experiences vary in intensity. For some, it's occasional worrying about not being able to complete a task; for others, it's the constant fear of being exposed as a fraud.

01 Clance, P. & Imes, S. (1978). "The Imposter Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention." Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice, Fall, 15(3): 241-247.

Some people only feel this way in certain situations, such as when they find themselves in a totally new environment. Other people carry a deep sense of insecurity with them wherever they go. Even at home, these people are afraid that everything might suddenly fall apart.[02] Research shows that up to 70% of people have felt this way at some point.[03]

Data from the Imposter Syndrome Institute shows that the **imposter experience** is especially common among leaders: 84% of entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized business owners and 80% of CEOs report having felt like an imposter or unfit for their roles.[04]

So when your boss is confidently laying out next year's goals in a meeting – or berating the team in front of everyone – they might secretly be thinking, "What am *I* doing here? How did *I* get to be leading this team? How long until these guys realize I'm not really qualified for this salary or position?"

That's how common the imposter experience is. Even Grammarly's blog has a quiz called "*Which kind of imposter syndrome do you have?*"[05] This goes to show that the people who seem perfect, powerful, or polished might also be using grammar tools to figure out how to phrase their emails, or asking ChatGPT how to deal with certain situations, or taking imposter syndrome quizzes online.

The imposter experience isn't black and white. It ebbs and flows. Sometimes everything feels calm, while at other times the waves are overwhelming.

Back to the story we began with: Did Michelle give up writing completely because of her imposter experience? No. She continues to publish her brilliant newsletter, with many readers now supporting her financially. She's even started her next book, about her struggles across different cultures. Michelle found a way to live with her imposter experience – and kept going. We can too.

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02 "The Imposter Cure: Escape the mind-trap of imposter syndrome" (2019). Jessamy Hibberd.

03 "You're not fooling anyone" (2007). John Gravois.

04 https://impostorsyndrome.com/infographics/youre-not-alone/

05 https://www.grammarly.com/blog/imposter-syndrome-quiz/

戒不掉的癮世代：
臺灣的毒梟、大麻、咖啡包與地下經濟

A culture reporter for Mirror Media, Cheng Chin-Yao has published numerous works, sometimes under the pen-name "Tiger Balm". He is best known for his essay collection *The Nonexistent Man* and his nonfiction book *Take Out Lunch*, winner of the 2019 Openbook Award.

Cheng Chin-Yao
鄭進耀

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CAN'T QUIT:
MARIJUANA, DRUG DEALERS SMUGGLING, AND THE UNDERGROUND ECONOMY

Equal parts in-the-trenches reportage and sociological inquiry, this new account of the illicit drug use in Taiwan challenges traditional approaches that treat addiction as a crime.

Solutions to the drug problem in Taiwan have long been hampered by simplistic approaches that view drug use as a moral failing and a criminal issue. Questioning this logic, *Can't Quit* goes straight to the source, using interviews and field research to paint a complex portrait of drug use that defies categorical judgements of right and wrong. In this novel analysis, drug use is not simply a legal issue. It's a problem whose origins are embedded in the very structure of contemporary society.

Divided into three parts – "The Sea", "The City", and "The Web" – the book begins with the history of Taiwan's position as a node in the maritime flow of narcotics through Asia. Moving to "The City", the book looks at the drug stores, night clubs, and middle-class drug users of the contemporary metropolis. Finally, "The Web" reveals the role of the dark web and social media in exposing people to drugs. From cold syrup to narcotics smuggled in instant coffee packets, from musicians to construction workers, author Cheng Chin-Yao introduces readers to the invisible drug problem that exists right under our noses. When it comes to users, these aren't drug-addled madmen or narco kingpins; they are ordinary people quietly slipping through the cracks of the system.

Adopting an objective and non-judgmental view, author Cheng Chin-Yao enters juvenile detention facilities, prisons, work sites, nightlife districts, and rehabilitation facilities, recording the life stories of addicts from a range of backgrounds. When did they first come into contact with illicit drugs? Why do they feel the need to use? How could society and the system have better served them? Rather than confront drug users with the question "Why can't you just quit?", the author instead confronts readers with the question "What labels have we imposed on drug users, and why?"

This human-centered account of contemporary drug use in Taiwan is equally a sketch of a system that perpetuates drug abuse, revealing that addiction is not the result of individual bad decisions – rather it is the result of systemic factors rooted in the history, culture, medical systems, and economics of contemporary society.

CAN'T QUIT:
MARIJUANA, DRUG DEALERS SMUGGLING, AND THE UNDERGROUND ECONOMY

By Cheng Chin-Yao
Translated by Chris Findler

> "In addition to being a strategically important hub of conventional trade in the East Asian island chain, Taiwan is also a significant relay station for illegal drugs. Case in point, one of Taiwan's most prolific drug chemists is currently serving a prison sentence in Indonesia. Despite the exhortations of Taiwan's police agencies, drugs of every kind permeate Taiwanese society at every level, especially Taiwan's schools. *Can't Quit* reports on the drug phenomenon from every angle, tracking the places where drugs are part of the fabric of daily life, the people who are using them, and their reasons for doing so (spoiler: almost no one is doing drugs because they want to be an addict), revealing the true face of substance abuse and capturing a snapshot of the drug market in contemporary Taiwan."
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

Chapter 1 "It" arrived by sea

As we drive along a deserted road in Lu'ermen, the scorching sun high in the sky overhead, the occasional fish pond and farm field can be seen dotting the flat horizon. The driver confides in a tone reminiscent of a storyteller sharing a local legend, "Around here, outsiders like you don't want to be out in the streets at night."

Back in 1661, Koxinga, roused by translator He Bin who claimed that Taiwan was rich in fertile land and only defended by a handful of Dutch, mobilized his army to sail into the Taikang inland sea to attack the "red-haired" occupiers there.[01] They landed in Lu'ermen, but much to his consternation, the strike didn't go well and his troops suffered severe casualties. Koxinga blockaded the entire Taikang inland sea and, as a result, tens of thousands starved to death in the Dutch base of Fort Provintia.

Koxinga attacked Taiwan primarily as a means to secure a stable base of operations to support his fleet. Beginning with his father, Cheng Chih-lung, the Chengs of Fujian controlled China's southeast coastline. All ships had to pay for the right to transit, making the Cheng family extremely wealthy.

Ships sailing northward from the Dutch East India Company's base in Jakarta to engage in trade in Xiamen and Japan had to pass by the strategically-located island of Taiwan. In addition to spices, tea, porcelain, and deerskins, their cargo included opium, a product that sparked clashes, both social and political, in the 20th century.

Ship manifests of the Dutch East India Company

01 Tonio Andrade (2017), *Lost Colony – The Untold Story of China's First Victory over the West*, China Times Publishing.

indicate that Taiwan might have been the first location in the Qing Empire to come in contact with the drug. Local country records in Fujian also frequently mention it, stating that unrighteous men and heartless women gathered alongside roads in Taiwan to smoke opium.

Opium, the "source of ten thousand evils", is not just a drug.

In 2021, business at a run-of-the-mill cold noodle shop in Jiangsu suddenly began booming. After receiving a tipoff, police investigated and discovered that the proprietor had laced the chili oil with poppy pods, an opium precursor.[02]

Similar incidents are reported every few years. These "urban legends" suggest that eateries use this forbidden ingredient to addict diners to their fare, so they will keep coming back for more. But is there any truth to rumors that poppy is being regularly used in restaurant fare?

Opium is made from poppies. The pod, which is left on the stem when the flower withers and drops off, is scraped with a knife to extract a white liquid – a sedative, painkiller, and the raw material for opium and morphine. To produce large quantities of opium efficiently, poppy husks (the dried pods and stems of the poppy) are boiled together and refined into opium.

Poppy seeds contain low levels of papaverine, an antispasmodic, but they are not harmful. Many countries allow poppy seeds to be fried or added to foods, and the oil that's left over from deep-frying the seeds can be used to produce animal feed. Almost every part of a poppy plant has economic value.

The thought of an opium-laced hot pot might seem shocking, so we queried some addictionologists and received a range of answers. Can a person become addicted to the "opium" that is added to hot pots and chili oil? They said it depends on a variety of factors, such as the concentration of addictive components in the poppy husks, the number of husks added to the hot pot, and how frequently that person eats hot pot. Without the answers to these questions, it is difficult to estimate an individual's risk of becoming addicted.

Poppy husks are controlled substances in most countries, so how is it that these hot pot restaurants seem to be able to obtain them as easily as they acquire hot peppers? Let's look into the earliest origins of the "opium hot pot" urban legend.

The first such story, which appeared in Taiwan newspapers in 1988[03], reported that a restaurant in Neijiang, Sichuan Province was charged by the local government health unit with serving hot pots laced with poppy husks. In 1994[04], similar incidents were rumored to have occurred in Shanghai, Luoyang, and other places. In 1999, Hong Kong's *Apple Daily* reported that the soup base of a hot pot restaurant in Shanghai had tested positive for papaverine.[05]

China Xinhua News confirmed in 2004 that 215 dining establishments in Guizhou Province were using poppy husks in their soups and hot pots. All were forced to shut down. In 2014, a journalist with China Central Television entered the kitchen of a Sichuan hot pot eatery with a hidden camera. The owner, whose face was blurred, pulled out a burlap sack stuffed with poppy husks and whispered confidentially, "Our hot pots taste better, because we add these. But they're illegal. The cops are out there busting people."

There's something fishy about these "opium hot pots" that we keep hearing about. First, poppies have long been a controlled item. They're hard to obtain and expensive. It would be costly to use them as a seasoning for hot pots. Second, it would be difficult to eliminate the risk of customers becoming addicted to opium hot pots since it's almost impossible to determine how much hot pot somebody would have to eat before they got hooked. It wouldn't make sense for shop owners to take such great legal risk just to have customers keep coming back.

To determine the veracity of this urban legend, we need to study the historical development of opium, understanding the various uses of the substance

02 Ma Jiajia (2021), Voice of China, "Man becomes addicted to cold noodles. Police discover shop used poppy!" (https://www.shanwei.gov.cn/swkjj/zhuanti/x_s/content/post_761007.html)

03 *United Daily News* (1988), "Are Diners Getting Addicted? Hot Pots Laced with Poppy. Sichuan Shop Owner Has no Conscience", *United Daily News*, February 25, 1988, p. 5.

04 Liu Feng-chiu (1994), "Poppies Really Spice Things Up," *United Daily News*, February 8, 1994, p. 20.

05 *United Daily News* (1999), "Hong Kong Newspaper Claims Shanghai Shop Owners Secretly Lace Food with Poppies, Customers Addicted", *United Daily Evening News*, January 31, 1999, p. 4.

and how it became viewed as a drug. You might be surprised to learn that it has deep historical connections to Taiwan.

On the corner of Liangzhou Street and Chongqing North Road in Taipei City is an expansive parking lot that was once the site of the two-story, red-brick Hong Chi Hospital established by Dr. Lin Ching-yueh in 1910. Taken over by the Taiwan Governor-general's Office in 1930, it became Taipei Geng-Sheng Hospital, the principal center for opium-addiction treatment in Taiwan. At the time, its rehabilitation methods were considered the most advanced in the world.

The hospital's founder, Lin Ching-yueh, was the first doctor in Taiwan to systematically study opium addiction, conducting a survey of opium users during the period of Japanese occupation. In a paper written in 1913, Dr. Lin pointed out that addiction is a spectrum, and that only a small portion of addicts lay in bed all day smoking opium, or were consumed with cravings. Many of the addicts Lin studied actually had normal jobs. He even found that some individuals had been using the drug for up to seven years without ever becoming addicted.[06]

This would indicate that opium, which has been around for centuries, is not as addictive as morphine, heroin, or other modern drugs. Returning to the hot pot problem: it seems that one would have to consume several opium hot pots every day for a decade or more to get hooked. Yet, it is also true that shops that add opium to their food do see business improve. It is speculated that customers aren't actually addicted; rather, the tiny amounts of papaverine in the hot pots might simply stimulate the sense of taste, warm up the body, and give customers a slight high.

Restaurateurs who insist on adding poppies to their dishes aren't necessarily trying to get customers addicted. A more fundamental reason is that poppy husks have a long history of use in China as a medicinal herb and food seasoning. When added to food, it gives it a distinctive appeal, like other seasonings. In this sense, historically it is a food, not a drug. Residents of the mountainous border regions of southern China even make tea out of poppy husks.

Today, opium is indisputably regarded as a drug, but how this medicinal herb and seasoning became a drug is rarely discussed. Exactly what zesty flavors did this "drug" impart? And why did it later dwindle in popularity? In 1945, after helping the last batch of opium users quit, the Taipei Geng-Sheng Hospital, by then known as the Taiwan Provincial Cessation Center, declared that the opium problem in Taiwan had been successfully resolved and closed its operations. When people discuss opium hot pots today, more than seven decades later, they still do so from the perspective of drugs and addiction, ignoring the complexity of the issue. Opium is not only a medicine and a narcotic, it is a culinary ingredient and seasoning.

Prior to the 1930s, opium wasn't just a drug. According to Taiwanese scholar Liu Mingxiu, also known as Ryu, Meishu, records from the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty indicate that Taiwan was the first area in Greater China to use opium. Dutch East India Company records also indicate that it engaged in opium trade with Taiwan in the later years of the Ming Dynasty.[07]

Opium was first produced in Persia, but as global trade expanded, the Dutch brought it to Batavia, Dutch East Indies (now Jakarta, Indonesia). There, tobacco was soaked in liquid opium and then smoked. In the late Ming, as Taiwan began to play a role in trade along China's southeastern coastline, it became the first stop for merchant ships carrying opium to the region.

Due to the trade relationship between Taiwan, Kinmen, and Xiamen, opium arrived next in southern China and from there, it spread throughout the Middle Kingdom. Many negative accounts of opium use in Formosa were left behind by the Qing Empire. Local histories describe Taiwanese as shameless junkies that could be seen smoking opium on roadsides everywhere. According to Hsu Hung-bin, associate

06 Hsu Hung-bin (2002), "The Images of Opium in Taiwan: from the Traditional Opium Gentleman, to the Experimental Sample in Geng-Sheng Hospital", doctoral dissertation, History Department, National Tsing Hua University.

07 Liu Mingxiu (2008), *Japanese Rule in Taiwan and the Opium Issue*, Avanguard Publishing House.

professor with National Cheng Kung University's History Department and scholar of the opium issue in Qing Dynasty Taiwan, these accounts represent a biased view of the periphery from an imperial-centered perspective: "At the time, Taiwan was populated by migrants pioneering the land. Many single males crossed the sea to get here and when they gathered together, there wasn't anything else to do, so smoking opium was likely a pastime. These individuals were 'unreliable' precisely because they had left their homes and families and had no one to 'rely' on. In the eyes of officials at the empire's center, they were dope heads that didn't produce anything, out-of-control troublemakers that stirred up uprisings and engaged in gang fights."

Negative images that link particular ethnicities with drug use are common across the world. In the 1930s, the US blamed the marijuana problem on criminal behavior by Blacks and South American immigrants.

So who in Taiwan used opium? "Everybody from gentlemen and farmers to workers and businessmen," Professor Hsu states categorically.

Due to its unique geographic location and social climate, opium was widely used in Taiwan. According to Dr. Lin Ching-yueh's research, opium was not just a "drug"; it had exerted any influence on many aspects of society. This view of "drugs" was ahead of its time in Dr. Lin's era, and remains so today.

In the late Qing, farmers and soldiers in Taiwan used opium to prevent fevers and miasma, and wharf coolies used it to relieve stress. After work, they would head to nearby opium dens where they would smoke it and spend the night. Night workers used opium to cope with the mental stress of working odd hours.

Since the outflow of silver was a serious issue in the late Qing, farmers also used opium as a currency. As an important transit port off China's southeast coast, a range of opium products from around the world were available for purchase in Taiwan. Among mainstream opium products, the highest grade was produced by the British East India Company. This was followed by Indian opium. Mid-priced Persian opium was the most popular worldwide, while the cheapest came from China's Wenzhou and Sichuan.[08]

Late Qing intellectuals also used opium for socializing and entertainment, mostly in brothels, but some wealthy families employed individuals to prepare opium in their homes. During one field study, Hsu Hung-bin learned about an older woman from a wealthy family in the Dadaocheng region of Taipei who purchased and prepared her own opium. "Her family remembers that a peculiar smell filled her room."

She often reclined on a *kang*, a traditional heated platform, where she would smoke and chat with family members, old and young. "Nobody in the family was allowed on the *kang*. She only permitted her closest friend on it and the two of them shared her pipe." What's more, she wasn't a weak, sickly junkie. Everybody remembers her as an exuberant and cheerful woman.

"She wasn't the exception to the rule. Many wealthy people indulged. They had opium prepared for them. It was considered a normal social activity. Lin Hsien-tang's journal, for example, indicates that there were opium users in the Lin Family in Wufeng," Hsu explains.

Under Japanese rule, the colonial government decided to set up an opium monopoly system in Taiwan. Addicts needed certification from a doctor and the local government to obtain a permit to use opium legally. Although opium was strictly forbidden in Japan proper, it was allowed in the colonies, but could not be sold to Japanese serving in the military. Scholars of nationalism believe that this shows that Taiwanese were viewed as second-class citizens of the Japanese empire.

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08 Hsu Hung-bin (2018), "Hidden Paradise Behind the Curtain? Opium Use and Smoking Spaces in Colonial Taiwan", published in *The Underprivileged Under Japanese Colonial Rule: Taiwan and Korea*, Institute of Taiwan History, Academia Sinica.

夜遊：
解嚴前夕一個國中女生的身體時代記

photo © Chen Yu-Chung / Openbook

Fang Hui-Chen
房慧真

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After pursuing PhD studies in the Department of Chinese Literature at National Taiwan University, Fang Hui-Chen worked as a reporter for publications such as *Next Magazine* and *The Reporter*. Now a full-time writer, she excels at integrating personal memory into her observations of society-at-large. She has published numerous works including *Specks of Dust*, *Strawberries and Ashes*, and *A Reporter Like Me*.

BEFORE DAWN:
INNOCENCE IN A TURBULENT TAIWAN

*** 2025 Golden Tripod Award**
*** 2025 Taipei Book Fair Award**

Adopting the perspective of embodied memory, the author looks back on an adolescence that spanned the final years of martial law and the first glimmers of democracy, discovering the shadows of history imprinted within her still-forming sense of self.

Born into an Indonesian-Chinese family, author Fang Hui-Chen grew up in 1980s and 1990s Taiwan, an era of momentous changes in Taiwanese society. Shaped by a childhood and adolescence situated between the memories of authoritarianism and the hopes for the new tide of democratic reform, she was, by rights, as Taiwanese as they come. Yet, as the daughter of immigrants, she was always labeled an outsider. With a perspective that places her outside the mainstream narratives of Taiwan's history, she looks back on the memories and feelings of displacement that marked her experience of a pivotal era.

The nineteen essays of *Before Dawn* unfold chronologically, using physically embodied details and sensations to describe the lived experiences that fail to align with historical narratives of the times.

On June 4, 1989, as tragedy is about to unfold on Tiananmen Square, the author is a middle school student far removed from the spotlight of history. Her body, heavy with fatigue, impels her to turn away from the events being watched so closely by the world, and find a quiet patch of grass to nap on…

Hoping for a promotion that will take them back to Indonesia, the author's father applies for Indonesian passports for the entire family. Forced to accept a decision over which she has no control, the author must practice her signature for the passport under her father's critical gaze...

Confined within the oppressive atmosphere of authoritarian rule at her middle school, the author isn't even aware of the burgeoning student movement taking shape beyond the campus walls – a movement that will soon transform the nation.

The title, *Before Dawn*, taken from the author's long-established habit of taking night-time walks, is also a metaphor for the attitude she adopted to public affairs – if mainstream historical narratives are the light of day, then the author has always occupied the periphery, watching from the darkness of night. At the same time, her "night wandering" is more than a literary device. Her walks are an opportunity to re-examine those difficult experiences that could never be adequately addressed or understood by her younger self: the immigrant experience, her sexual awakening, the missed opportunity to participate in a movement that would shape Taiwan's politics for decades to come, and the disillusionment of growing up in the fading shadows of an authoritarian regime. Through the microscopic lens of individual memory, the author recounts the ways in which the great currents of society impact the formation of personal, ethnic, and gender identity, seeping into every corner of a self still in the process of growing up.

BEFORE DAWN: INNOCENCE IN A TURBULENT TAIWAN

By Fang Hui-Chen
Translated by Marianne Yeh

> In the 1980s, thirty years after the end of the Second World War, the generation born in the wake of the war became parents themselves. Taiwan was increasingly prosperous, but unrest was on the rise as numerous social movements shook the foundations of an authoritarian regime. Many in a generation on the threshold of adolescence were coming to accept a new understanding of their country. Fang Hui-Chen's memoir of this era contains accurate social observation and objective self-reflection. *Before Dawn* is both a retrospective of one girl's adolescence and a front-row view on Taiwanese society in the period just before and after the end of martial law.
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Joshua Dyer**

Becoming an Indonesian (1): Airport Manager

Autumn, 1986

The green passport cover featured an eagle with outstretched wings, intricately traced in gold thread. On the eagle's belly hung a shield displaying five symbols: chains, a banyan tree, a bull's head, rice and cotton stalks, and a star in the center. The passport was issued in Bangkok on December 12, 1986. In the photo, I had just turned twelve, having graduated from elementary school and about to enter junior high. It was still the era of hair restrictions, and getting a haircut for junior high was a big deal – hair had to be three centimeters below the ears and not touching the collar. With my naturally curly hair, the awkward-length bowl cut style made my hair roots look even more unruly. "Steel-wool head", "rice noodle head", and "explosion head" were nicknames that followed me throughout my three years of junior high. In the photo, I had a forlorn expression – furrowed brows, downturned mouth, and gloomy eyes. For the ID photo, I had repeatedly used hair gel to fix the "steel wool" across my forehead, which somehow gave me a tropical look, like vines sprawling in a jungle, exuding the damp heat of a swamp. The person in the photo looked Indonesian, an identity further confirmed by the passport. This was the 1980s, before Taiwan had imported large numbers of Indonesian migrant workers. My father was taking us against the tide, in the opposite direction.

My father spent considerable money and effort to obtain Indonesian passports for my mother, sister, and me. Before getting the passports, there was a distinctly solemn atmosphere at home, as if something was about to happen but hadn't yet – turbulent undercurrents brewing beneath the surface. Father made me practice my signature for the passport repeatedly. He first wrote my English name in cursive on a blank sheet of paper. My father, a graduate of National Taiwan Normal University's English Department, wrote with the flourish of flying dragons and dancing phoenixes – it looked beautiful. When I tried, however, it became crooked

and distorted, the flying dragon grounded and reduced to a wriggling snake. Father was very dissatisfied and repeatedly flicked my temple with his finger. Practice and more practice. Only on the day we applied for the passports, when I finally signed my name, did I feel like my burden was lifted. Thirty years later, looking at the long-expired old passport, I see that the crooked signature lacks excessive embellishment and exudes a kind of childlike innocence. Somehow, this simple signature had me in complete agony at the time.

In 1986, my father was approaching fifty. After passing the recruitment exam for China Airlines, he remained in entry-level positions due to his lack of social skills, never advancing to management. The year I graduated from elementary school, my father encountered a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity – a vacancy for the position of China Airlines' Jakarta Airport Manager. As an Indonesian Chinese immigrant, my father was fluent in Indonesian, Malay, English, and Chinese, making him the most suitable candidate. He fought for this position with great determination. Having long struggled to adapt to Taiwan's workplace culture, the chance to relocate our family back to Indonesia couldn't have been more perfect.

The airport manager position and the Indonesian passports progressed simultaneously. By late 1986, when I was in my first year of junior high, we finally received our passports. However, my father's dream of receiving the promotion never took flight. His education, language skills, and local advantages were no match for the web of personal connections that shaped the China Airlines workplace, much like a government bureaucracy. With no influential connections and a timid nature, my submissive father had always kept his head down. His slight, barely five-foot-three stature made him appear even smaller, like one of those humble, low-ranking clerks from a Gogol or Chekhov story, hardly the commanding presence one would expect of an airport manager. Having failed to secure the promotion, he was demoted back to the cargo department, a cold, desolate corner of the company where no passenger interactions were required. My father never transferred to China Airlines' headquarters on Nanjing East Road – the center of power. Only during annual summer vacations, when applying for free tickets to visit relatives in Indonesia, would he enter that towering building. Even then, he would bow, nod, and smile pleasantly, turning the benefits he was entitled to into favors bestowed from above. Until his retirement at sixty, my father rose early every morning, leaving home at five-thirty to catch the first shuttle to work at Taoyuan Airport. In that era, it wasn't called Taoyuan Airport but Chiang Kai-shek International Airport, just as there were still Chiang Kai-shek Roads throughout the country at the time. My sister attended a prestigious school, Chiang Kai-shek Junior High School, right across from Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall. The authoritarian naming spread like cancerous cells, proliferating everywhere.

My father's workplace, the airport, was familiar territory to us. We traveled to Southeast Asia every summer. During peak seasons, securing free tickets often meant being on standby, and the airport became our extended intertidal zone of waiting. My father, burdened with unspoken grievances, his face creased with frustration, negotiated with colleagues at the ticket counter. My mother stood guard over our hefty luggage while my sister and I turned a baggage cart into a makeshift scooter, zipping through the terminal in carefree delight. It wasn't until after college graduation that I learned how to take a train, yet flying was something I knew from before birth. Mother said I had flown while still in her womb. From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, we traveled abroad annually. Thinking back, this was quite unusual for that time. Taoyuan Airport opened in 1979, the same year limited tourist travel abroad was permitted (men aged sixteen to thirty were excluded due to mandatory service obligations; and for others, tourist visas were restricted to two applications per year). Before that, overseas travel was only allowed for purposes such as study, family visits, or business, all requiring approval from government agencies like the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Ministry of Education, or the Overseas Community Affairs Council. Prior to 1972, border control was tightly held by security and intelligence agencies like the Taiwan Garrison Command.

In the isolationist 1970s, our family traveled extensively – Hong Kong, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Jakarta all bore our footprints. Father could only leave the country under the pretense of visiting

relatives, with permission from the Overseas Community Affairs Council. Our family travels spanned both the martial law and post-martial law periods, though I was completely unaware of that red dividing line as a child. I only remember that when we traveled abroad as kids, airports didn't have X-ray scanners for luggage. Security checks were a laborious ordeal; suitcases had to be completely unzipped and laid bare, with every piece of clothing pulled out for inspection. Our entire family's underwear was exposed to customs officers and fellow travelers alike. In those days, when traveling abroad was a rare privilege, it was like celebrating the New Year. Everything had to be new, even our underwear. Any holes or yellowing fabric would invite embarrassment, so we made sure our garments were all fresh and pristine so they could pass through customs "respectably". On the way home, the adults would always take advantage of a layover in Hong Kong, staying a day or two to stock up on so-called "Communist Chinese goods" like Yunnan Baiyao (a well-known herbal medicine used to stop bleeding and reduce inflammation) and Baifeng Wan (a traditional Chinese medicine marketed as a general tonic for women's health). At the dried goods and specialty products shops in Sai Wan, always adorned with shark fins hung out to dry, my mother would pick up a few extra boxes of coconut candy or walnut jujube paste sweets. She'd carefully peel off the candy wrappers and use them to disguise the contraband medicines, bringing them back to Taiwan to resell for profit.

In the early 1980s, the number of people traveling abroad for tourism hadn't yet exceeded 500,000 annually. By 1987, the year martial law was lifted, that number had surpassed one million. In 1986, I received my Indonesian passport and became an "Indonesian", yet due to my father being denied his promotion, I escaped the fate of returning to my "ancestral land". In Polish director Krzysztof Kieślowski's film *Blind Chance*, catching or missing a train creates diverging destinies, with each outcome being both random and predetermined. Train stations, airports, and docks are places where farewells and reunions unfold, points where fate converges. If, in another parallel universe, "she" had departed with that Indonesian passport, not to return anytime soon, what would her destiny have been?

Having just finished elementary school, I loved *Journey to the West, The Count of Monte Cristo*, as well as Arsène Lupin and Sherlock Holmes adventures. I had just started reading *Dream of the Red Chamber*, reaching the part where Daiyu buried flowers. Moving to Indonesia would have meant uprooting plants that had grown north of the Tropic of Cancer and transplanting them to the equatorial Southeast Asia. In Indonesia under Suharto's regime, where Chinese language education had been banned for years, I would have had to abandon Chinese, learn Indonesian instead, adopt an Indonesian name, and become a true "Indonesian" in a household with domestic helpers who cleaned and cooked. Would Indonesian, picked up midway through life, have been sufficient for me to later become a journalist, a person who lives by the written word? With Chinese abandoned halfway, remaining at an elementary school level, would I ever have finished reading *Dream of the Red Chamber*?

Transplant aborted, the plant remained in place. In autumn 1986, I became a junior high student. The formulaic selections in Chinese textbooks left me uninterested, and I quickly turned my attention to heavy metal rock and Hollywood films, becoming obsessed with Guns N' Roses and Al Pacino. The unfinished *Dream of the Red Chamber* would remain incomplete until I studied Chinese literature in college. A year before martial law ended, my junior high campus was still oppressive and stagnant, with no sense of the wild atmosphere beginning to emerge on the streets outside. In our small family headed by an Indonesian Chinese father, we were "late immigrants" who, following the first-come-first-served priority order, arrived after the mainlanders, and were thus further disconnected from the pulse of Taiwanese society. Father would rise early every day to take the shuttle to his airport job. On November 30, 1986, he must have experienced inconvenience at work, but after returning home that evening, he didn't mention it.

In 1986, a year before martial law was lifted, blacklisted individuals who had been stranded overseas for years unable to return home began testing the limits of the government's restrictions. Leading the charge was Hsu Hsin-liang, the former magistrate of Taoyuan County. On November 30, a large crowd gathered outside Taoyuan Airport to welcome Hsu, who had been in exile overseas for many years, as he attempted to return to Taiwan. Hsu had gained widespread support when he left the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) to run for Taoyuan County Magistrate in 1977. To prevent the kind of electoral fraud that had long plagued Taiwan – and to avoid the fate of Kuo Yu-hsin, who had lost the election, his supporters took it upon themselves to monitor the vote count on election day. Clashes broke out between election officials and the crowd, escalating into a riot. Protesters surrounded and set fire to a police station in what became known as the Chungli Incident. Despite the turmoil, Hsu was elected Taoyuan County Magistrate. In 1979, former Kaohsiung County Magistrate Yu Teng-fa and his son Yu Jui-yen were arrested on fabricated espionage charges – a clear act of political persecution. In response, Hsu, along with activist Shih Ming-teh and others, organized a protest march in Qiaotou, the first demonstration of its kind since martial law had been imposed. The government's retribution for the 1977 Chungli Incident came two years later. In 1979, Hsu was suspended from duty for two years by the Public Functionary Disciplinary Commission on the grounds of "unauthorized absence from post" because he participated in the Qiaotou protest march on a workday. When the Formosa Incident occurred at the end of that year, Hsu, who was Formosa Magazine's president, was in the United States at the time and escaped arrest. However, he was unable to return to his country until his attempted return by air in 1986.

The police got wind of the plan and set up barricades and barbed wire along the highway leading to the airport, blocking the road in front of the transit hotel. Anyone departing the country, as well as airport staff, had to present identification, a passport, or a plane ticket before being allowed through, one by one. Travelers with luggage were forced to disembark early and drag their heavy bags on foot for a long distance to reach the terminal. The blockade caused massive disruptions, throwing the airport into chaos that day.

That was a time and place completely beyond my reach, an event I had never heard of. My father, returning from the "war zone", never brought home the faintest trace of gunpowder. It wasn't until 2016 that I finally caught up, seeing the scene on the other side of the barbed wire through footage captured by the Green Team, an independent documentary group that courageously filmed social movements and protests during Taiwan's martial law era. What I saw was nothing like the cold, polite orderliness that typically prevailed at the airport where my father worked. The advance team set out from the Chungli headquarters of Hsu Kuo-tai, the younger brother of Hsu Hsin-liang, who was planning to run for legislator at the end of the year. The crowd was surging, drums and gongs resounding as if it were a temple festival procession rather than a political demonstration. The massive procession set off, and among them was Yu Teng-fa, who was already in his eighties. Upon hearing that Hsu Hsin-liang, whom he had once aided in a time of crisis, was attempting to return, he made the trip north from Kaohsiung. He insisted on walking the entire route from Chungli to Dayuan on foot, despite needing support on both sides. It took him more than three hours to reach the police barricades, where he was met with high-pressure water cannons. Those around him quickly raised clothing and flags to shield him, protecting the elderly man from being knocked down. A photograph of this moment remained posted in the Green Team's studio for a long time afterwards.

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