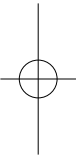
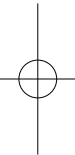
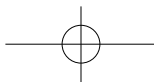
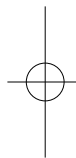
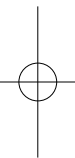
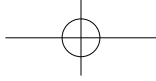




BOOKS FROM TAIWAN







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EDITOR'S PREFACE: TO AND FROM THE SOIL

Dear Readers:

Here we meet the Earth God. He lives enshrined under a hundred names wherever Chinese communities have put down roots, husbanding the soil and the people who subsist on it. He is compassionate, a partisan protector, and though he sits on the lowest rung of the Chinese divine pantheon, his immediate influence over his people's welfare makes him vitally important. "Heaven is high and the emperor is far away," but the Earth God is right under your feet.

This issue of *Books from Taiwan* is no exception. In Chang Kuo-Li's *Beyond War*, we unearth a skeleton beside the Earth God's shrine; in Huang Chun-Ming's *Put to Pasture*, a group of children discover his living incarnation; and in the money-crazed village of Kevin Chen's protagonist in "Ghosts in the Toilet," the villagers have relocated the Earth God's shrine to make way for real estate development, a clear sign of their unhealthy dislocation from reality.

Our children's selection also pays tribute to the earth and its guardians – growing trees, shining pools, muddy roads on which we walk bare-footed. Even in the world of irreality, as in *Did You Fall Asleep?* and *Lie to Me?*, the fundamental themes involve or find symbolism in changes to the earth itself.

We didn't plan it this way, but the coincidence is fortunate. When the Chinese talk about engaging dynamically with a community, they use the phrase "*jie di qi*" – "to receive the energy of the earth/locale." All successful inter-communal projects in Chinese communities accomplish this, and publishing is no exception. In this issue, we present remarkable works of new fiction, non-fiction and children's literature from Taiwan, recreated in English by professional translators in order to make that local energy accessible to the world – to allow you to visit the Earth God on common ground, if you will. (No obeisances required, of course.)

Canaan Morse
Editor-in-Chief



MINISTRY OF CULTURE, REPUBLIC OF CHINA (TAIWAN) TRANSLATION GRANT PROGRAM

Books from Taiwan supports the translation of Taiwanese literature into foreign languages with the Translation Grant Program, administered by The Ministry of Culture of Taiwan. The grant is to encourage the publication of translations of Taiwan's literature, including fiction, non-fiction, picture books and comics, and help Taiwan's publishing industry to explore non-Chinese international markets.

- Applicant Eligibility: Foreign publishers (legal persons) legally registered in accordance with the laws and regulations of their respective countries, or foreign natural persons engaged in translation.
- Conditions:
 1. Works translated shall be original works (including fiction, non-fiction, picture books and comics) by Taiwanese writers (R.O.C. nationality) in traditional Chinese characters.
 2. Priority is given to works to be translated and published for the first time in a non-Chinese language market.
 3. Applicants are not limited to submitting only one project for funding in each application year; however, the same applicant can only receive funding for up to three projects in any given round of applications.
 4. Projects receiving funding shall have already obtained authorization for translation, and be published within two years starting from the year after application year (published before the end of October).
- Funding Items and Amount
 1. The subsidy includes a licensing fee for the rights holder of original work, and a translation fee.
 2. The maximum funding available for any given project is NT\$ 500,000 (including income tax and remittance charges).
- Application Period: From September 1 to September 30 every year.
- Announcement of successful applications: Before December 15 every year.
- Application Method: Please apply via the online application system (http://booksfromtaiwan.tw/grant_en.php) after reading through the Translation Grant Application Guidelines (available online).

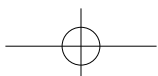
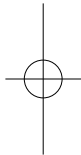
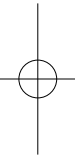
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Or contact: books@moc.gov.tw



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN





PUT TO PASTURE

放生



©Big Fish Children's Theater

HUANG CHUN-MING 黃春明

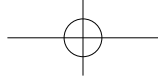
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-

Short fiction writer and playwright Huang Chun-Ming is a Taiwanese literary legend. In over half a century of work, he's published books of short stories, essays, children's books and plays, and even poetry and film scripts. His best-known short story collections include *Watching the Sea*, *The Sandwich Man*, *Sayonara – Goodbye*, *Put to Pasture*, and *This Platform Has No Timetable*. Several of his works have been adapted for film and television. He has won several awards, including the Wu San-Lien Award and the China Times Literary Award, and was named a "Living National Treasure". His work has been translated into several languages, including Japanese, Korean, English, French, and German.



This collection of short stories from one of Taiwan's greatest living authors focuses on the elderly, and the quiet spaces they inhabit. Huang Chun-Ming turns his gaze to the paddies and porches of Yilan, his countryside home, and to a cast of brilliantly interesting characters, such as the newspaper reader, "Mr. At-This-Minute," the blind Ah Mu, and an unnamed, bearded old man whom the local children were convinced was their local Earth God incarnate. Huang Chun-Ming describes these members of his generation with compassion and honesty, and readers of all generations can empathize with these people who are filled with love, yet set aside.

Put to Pasture represents a high point in Huang Chun-Ming's storied literary career. Here, as he finds himself in the lives of his compatriots, his style comes into its full power.



FLOWERS IN HIS BEARD

By Huang Chun-Ming. Translated by Eleanor Goodman.

It rained constantly that spring.

The days were extremely humid, and when people curled up under their heavy, clammy quilts, they had to curl up to stay warm. By the time their body heat had finally driven the moisture out and they felt comfortable, the sun would rise. To top it off, everything in the village started to mildew. Table and chair legs and the columns of pigsties sprouted mushrooms like little umbrellas.

The houses in the village belonged to farmers, so as long as the wells didn't run dry, everything was fine. No one cared about the humidity or the mildew. Uncle Jung's old joints had started to hurt the day before the rains came, and his family wanted to take him to the doctor. But he hated to spend money, and insisted that it wouldn't help anyway. He said he'd feel better as soon as the sun came out. But the rain fell without stopping. Each morning he took a trip to the small local shrine at the village entrance, shuffling along with umbrella in hand, to go to light some incense. The incense left in the shrine wouldn't light anymore, and he never remembered to bring three sticks of fresh incense from home as he'd planned. This time, his old joints weren't cooperating, so he couldn't just turn and go back. He stood in front of the shrine, and stuck his head and hands inside to light some incense. It refused to catch. He tried again, only giving up when the lighter's metal head burnt his fingers. He stood in the rain, holding the umbrella over himself and the waist-

high shrine. He waited, paying attention to how his body felt. When his joints told him he could go, he would return home to get some incense. But his joints were stubborn, and just standing was an effort. Uncle Jung could only lift his right hand, and idly examine where the lighter had burnt him. Over the past few years, people in the village said he had grown to look more and more like the Earth God. That made him happy, as it was a kind of honor. The rain continued, and he looked up at the sky, whispering to himself, *You want to rain, then go ahead and rain. You've been raining for so long, I don't think you can rain for much longer.*

A few days later the sun came out, and Uncle Jung's joints stopped hurting. He shaded his eyes and squinted into the sun, whispering cheerfully, *I didn't believe you'd never come back out.* The villagers brought out their tables and chairs to let the legs air out, and of course hung out their quilts and clothing as well.

Children had their own world back as well. As soon as there was some sunlight, it seemed there was nowhere they couldn't go. Some of the bigger kids ran into town to get snacks or bubble tea, from the village girls who worked there, while others went to get ice cream and stroll in the sunshine. The kids who were still small enough to play house went outside to the nearby fields to play. On a sunny day after a long spell of rain, no one wanted to stay in. Even the chickens, ducks, cats, and dogs each found their own sunny corners, warming their bones in the sunlight.



The flowers and insects were the same – the pink woodsorrel, yellow dandelions, purple and white wildflowers, all opened overnight to cover the banks of the irrigation ditches. Honeybees and yellow-and-white butterflies fluttered among them, chased by the children. Five or six children each picked a bouquet of pink woodsorrel to take to the banyan tree beside the shrine. But they came too late – the tree was occupied by an old man with a full, white beard, leaning against the trunk to take a nap. They didn't want to disturb him, but when they heard his tremendous snore, they got curious, and gathered around.

“Whose grandpa is he?”

“I've never seen him. He's probably not from the village.”

“Right! He isn't from around here.”

After they had decided that the old man wasn't from their village, their voices got quieter, and they retreated a step.

“His face is so red, and his beard is so white!”

“His nose is even redder.”

“He's got more wrinkles than my grandpa.”

“Look at how big his ears are. It's weird.” This child's grandmother often complimented him on how big his ears were, and what a lucky sign that was, so he especially noticed other people's ears.

“He's laughing in his sleep. How funny!”

They all laughed.

“Shhhh!” one of the little girls said, reminding them to be quiet. Their semicircle had tightened so much they couldn't step forward another inch or their heads would bump together. Seen from behind, the old man's torso and legs were completely hidden.

Then one boy cried, “I've seen him before!”

“Where?”

He wasn't sure. He said, “I've seen him more than once, lots of times.”

“You're making that up.”

“At...at...” the boy tried to think where. His feeling soon began to affect the other children,

and their faces no longer showed suspicion.

“I...I think I've seen him too.” The child was afraid the others would accuse him of lying too, so he spoke nervously.

To everyone's surprise, in the end, four children had the same feeling.

“Does he maybe look like the Earth God from the shrine?” another child queried.

When the others heard this, they echoed him in unison.

“Yes! He looks like the Earth God!”

The sudden shout startled the old man. The children had long since woken him, but he'd pretended to be asleep so he didn't disappoint them. He had been enjoying discussion.

The children knew they had been too loud and had certainly woken the old man. They started in fear and backed up a few steps to observe him. To reassure them, the old man shifted position, and snorted loudly through both nostrils so that his white beard trembled like a puff of cotton candy.

That put the children at ease right away, and they cautiously gathered close again. One of them whispered, “Look! He really is the Earth God.”

They all agreed. That's how belief is: awe follows fear.

“But – but the Earth God wears a special outfit. This guy's wearing the same clothing my grandpa wears.”

“Yeah. The god wears boots too. And he's barefoot.”

“Let's go see if the Earth God is still there, and then we'll know for sure,” one of them recommended.

They ran happily over to the shrine. As they approached, their footsteps slowed until finally they were tiptoeing forward. When they were five or six steps away, no one dared go further. They clung together in a group, bending forward to stare at the shrine. The sun was so bright they couldn't see clearly inside.



“Hey! It’s really gone!”

“It really is!”

The children in the back pressed forward, pushing the ones in front down to their knees.

“It’s there! I see it,” one of the kneeling kids cried excitedly. He’d been about to complain about getting knocked over, but now the pain was forgotten. “Look!”

The children squatted down to see better and spied the statue of the Earth God in front of the air vent. “I see it! It’s there!”

At that point, the spirit that had been scared out of them by that mystical feeling returned to their bodies. They quickly squeezed together in front of the shrine.

“I want to see if he really looks like the god.”

The entrance to the shrine was so narrow that an adult could barely fit his head and torso through, so even two small children was pushing it. Two had already stuck their heads in together, and the ones outside heard them talking.

“Do you think it looks like him?”

“It does and it doesn’t.”

“So does it look like him or not?”

“Not really.”

“Not really?” His voice was questioning.

“Um, a little.” He sounded doubtful. “Actually, now I think it does.”

“It’s weird,” said the other, a bit downcast, “now that you say it looks like him, I feel like it doesn’t.”

They went on like that, making the children outside felt more and more impatient.

“Hurry up, it’s our turn to look.”

Before the first two had even pulled their heads back out, the others were pushing each other for a place in line.

After everyone had taken a good look, they came to the conclusion that the old man was not in fact the Earth God. He sort of looked like it, and sort of didn’t. And no one had ever seen him before. He wasn’t from around there.

Curious, they returned to the old man under

the tree. When the old man saw them coming, he feigned sleep again, and started to snore. He found them adorable and wanted to keep the game going. The children felt the same way: the half-familiar old man was wonderful fun. They cautiously gathered around him again.

“Look, his beard is so white and so long, it looks so much like the Earth God.” One child couldn’t help but lean over and gently touch it. He stroked it a few times, while the old man pretended to be fast asleep. Once the first succeeded, they all took turns patting it carefully, stifling their laughter.

One child who still held some woodsorrel suddenly had a thought. He tried weaving a flower through the beard. Everyone liked this idea, and followed along. They were at an age where they had just learned to tie their own shoelaces, but this was a different material altogether and trying to thread flowers through a beard wasn’t easy, especially with the clumsiness of their youth. Had the old man not truly loved children, it would have been quite a trial for him as well. Unified by their collective risk, the children felt stimulated by the tension. Risk-taking often ignores consequences and plays with danger. At the beginning, they had paid attention to where the hairs attached to the face. Threading the flowers in was hard enough, let alone finding a spot for each one, especially while being jostled by the other children. In the end, they forgot that the beard was attached to flesh, and some ended up yanking out the hair. The old man could take the gentle ones, but when a rough one had a go at it, he moved a bit and pretended he was waking until the child let go and retreated. He knew that the instant he woke up, the game would be over, and he would feel their disappointment as his own. He didn’t have grandchildren, and this was a chance to enjoy the company of children for a while. So the children watched as the old man seemed to slip back into sleep with a loud snore. They circled



around him again to continue their creation: pink flowers woven into a silver beard.

Those who hadn't yet had a chance watched the others clumsily tucking flowers into the beard while they stifled their own urge to scold them for being rough. They also continued observing the old man's face.

"Look! He's crying," said one of the older girls anxiously, tapping one of the flower-weaving children on the arm.

They all focused on the old man's face. It was true: two glittering tears trembled at the crusty edges of his eyes. The children stopped and stared in silent remorse.

"He isn't really crying, is he? He's still smiling!" The child fervently hoped that the strange old man wasn't crying. Although the beard hid the upturned corners of his mouth, his round, high cheeks showed the children he was smiling.

Seeing this dispelled their nervousness. Stifled laughter began to burst forth again. Of course, the old man was aware of the entire scene, and his awareness became a kind of satisfaction. Those two tears, distilled from his emotion, were forced out by more behind them, like two children preparing to race each other down a slide. The children watched as the two tears ran down from the corners of his eyes toward his nose, crossing over the smiling cheeks and sliding into his nostrils, where they paused before burrowing into the forest of his beard.

One of the children said in surprise, "He is crying."

"He's not crying. He's smiling."

As the tears rolled past his nostrils, some got sniffed up into his nose. There was nothing he could do; they choked him. He wanted to hold it in, but suppressing it only made his eventual sneeze all the more explosive. The children were so surprised they didn't have time to run, but could only hide behind the tree. It was too narrow to conceal all of them, but they crowded

there anyway, whispering.

The old man sneezed again and again. Having pretended to be asleep for so long, he was now stiff and sore. He knew the children were behind the tree, but he pretended not to notice. He finally stood up and stretched, and then began to walk toward the shrine. His white beard was threaded with many pink flowers, and as he walked, they swayed in the breeze and shone in the sun, as though he were bringing the lively scenery with him wherever he went.

The children stole glances at him and saw how happy he looked, and they felt moved. They followed him with their eyes as he receded from view. When his shadow slipped behind the shrine, it was as though he had disappeared. They ran to the shrine, to the bamboo grove, to the canola fields, back to the tree, and to the shrine again, but couldn't find him.

Feeling sad and unwilling to accept that they'd lost him, they took turns searching the shrine. Of course the old man wasn't there, but they all felt that the Earth God's expression seemed more kindly, its laugh lines a bit deeper.

Soon Uncle Jung came up from the village. He wasn't limping, since his joints no longer hurt. He wanted to tidy up the shrine, and change the incense.

"Are you here to make off with the offering cakes again?" Uncle Jung asked them cheerfully before sticking his head into the shrine to attend to his business.

The children didn't dare bring up the strange old man, but they wanted Uncle Jung to check whether the Earth God looked different.

One said, "Uncle Jung, do you know why the god is smiling?"



MY ENEMY'S CHERRY TREE

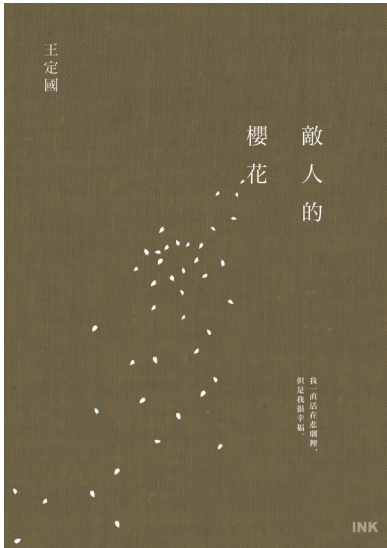
敵人的櫻花



WANG TING-KUO 王定國

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-

One of Taiwan's most celebrated fiction writers, Wang Ting-kuo began writing short stories at the age of seventeen. Though his early work was powered by youthful energy and idealism, his later stories took a political turn, mixing reportage with fiction and focusing on socially marginalized groups of people. After many years of not writing, he returned to the literary stage with the novel *So Hot, So Cold* and the short story collection *Who Blinked in the Dark*, both published to critical acclaim. Wang Ting-kuo has won every major literary award in Taiwan, including his third Open Book Award in three years, setting an unprecedented record.



* **2016 Taipei Book Fair Award**

* **2015 China Times Open Book Award**

* **2015 Asia Weekly Top Ten Chinese Novel of the Year**

* **2015 Eslite Bookseller Award for Book of the Year**

Literary prodigy Wang Ting-Kuo's newest novel takes the reader on a winding journey down the deceptive alleyways of emotional conflict. After the novel's unnamed protagonist lost his wife to a wealthy, well-regarded gentleman named Lo Yi-Ming, the jilted husband quits his office job and opens a small café by the seaside. One day, Lo Yi-Ming (known to the protagonist as "my enemy") walks into the café by accident. The two do not engage each other, but after Lo Yi-Ming returns home, he falls ill, and even attempts suicide. While the community blames the protagonist for the death, Yi-Ming's daughter visits the café, looking for both answers to her father's illness and for a chance at redemption. Yet what she finds is much, much more complicated.

My Enemy's Cherry Tree is an enticing mix of suspense, psychological intrigue, and pure intellectual exploration.



MY ENEMY'S CHERRY TREE

By Wang Ting-Kuo. Translated by Pamela Hunt.

Chapter One

If you aren't ready, we don't need to start.

There were no customers in the café that afternoon. He was the first. He wore a dull brown fisherman's cap, which he failed to remove as he entered, so surprised was he to find that this was just a one-man business, no assistants. Only me.

And so, flustered, he sat in the chair nearest to the exit, his cap still perched on his head, his face turned towards the bicycle he had just ridden over here, eyes staring without seeing. An unreal, illusory quality hung over us. A sudden gust of wind blew, and the windowpane quivered. It sounded as if the earth below us was trembling.

In the silence, there was none of the usual order or response. Mechanically, I moved to get a cup. The bean grinder clattered and squawked for an instant, and then the little café fell into a strange stillness.

He had drunk less than half his coffee when he stood up.

I stepped outside first, not wanting to hear him speak or see him pay the bill. I walked to the crossing outside, and waited for him to leave. After a long while, he still hadn't emerged. Going back, I discovered that although he had gone through the glass doors, he had then sat down alone on the raised flower bed by the front porch. He was sucking frantically on a cigarette, dragging it down to the filter, until his cheeks

caved in. He bit down on it, clinging on like a gambler who has lost everything but refuses to give up.

1.

I hear that after Lo Yi-Ming finished that cigarette and returned home, he fell ill.

He climbed onto his roof. He liked going up there; he'd sit on a metal folding chair to read the papers and look out at the distant mountains which curved around and extended away from the river bank. I suppose it wouldn't have been too late in the afternoon when it happened, but I also heard it said it took place at dusk, while a female neighbor was taking in her laundry on her own balcony. She saw Mr. Lo stand up from his chair abruptly, as if he had just received orders from above. He had climbed over the balustrade in an instant.

The woman cried out. One after another, Lo's neighbors came running out of their homes; the neighborhood watch was brought out too, but the police car could only wait and watch at the small alleyway's entrance. As Lo Yi-Ming was led down by the arm, his face white and his legs trembling, he gave no answer to any of the questions put to him. The only sound was the sobbing of the neighbor as she described the events to the police officer, over and again: she had first noticed a flock of pigeons...in her five years in this neighborhood, she had never before seen so many pigeons take off suddenly like



that...

I went to the market a few days later. Shopkeepers, normally friendly, now acted somewhat aloof, and vendors selling goods along the roadside were reluctant to look me in the eye, even as they conducted business with me. It was only after I had finished with them and was out of their line of sight that they turned their heads to speak to one another. It was as if the entire population of this small town were all quietly engaged in some kind of collective protest. All I could do was lower my head and leave the scene, like some kind of criminal.

There were several occasions in which I was approached by total strangers. Though neither of us knew the other, they all voiced the same opinion. They expressed their concern for Lo Yi-Ming, declaring him to be the great philanthropist of the town, relating the kindness and the mercy with which he conducted all of his affairs, describing the vagrants who congregated outside of his home so that they could receive the food that he would personally hand out to them.

Tales of Lo Yi-Ming's charity were not unfounded. A friend working in the volunteer sector once told me that in the past few years, Lo would withdraw a sum of money every month and apportion it into envelopes. With the exception of relatively distant public welfare organizations, to which he sent the money by registered mail, the rest were put into a postbag and into his own bicycle's basket. He delivered them himself, as if he were an industrious Father Christmas, distributing an almost festive cheer to this small coastal town.

Another touching story, shared approvingly from person to person, involved a new postman who had come to deliver a letter to Lo's home. Lo himself was out at a wedding banquet, but his neighbors came out as the postman called for him. Looking at the envelope, they realized it was a receipt for an anonymous donation. Thus

the new postman cemented Lo's fame as a kind-hearted man, who had been doing good for its own sake, seeking virtue as its own reward.

After Lo fell ill, these sentiments collected together like leftovers once cold but now reheated, single cries of admiration joining together into a clear melody. It sounded through the small town day and night, growing ever more stirring – even though it left me with a very different, mournful aftertaste.

To be sure, when I first met Lo Yi-Ming I admired him as fervently as everyone else. I even believed that without him our society would be incomplete; without him, we would never have known such benevolence.

Even after later events occurred – events which destroyed a life I had only just built up – I never told the outside world the truth. The outside world needs harmony; if a small town basked in the light of its local hero, all I could do was go along with it. I could only wait for him. I could only live for the moment when he would waken to the taunts lingering beneath that applause, to the torments that misery can bring, and when he would remember that there was one person in this world who would never forgive him.

And so, in that moment when I heard he had fallen ill, to be frank, I felt an uneasiness in my chest, an aching in my bones. And more than that: I was broken-hearted.

2.

I had visited the Lo residence. It was one of the old buildings, rarely seen these days, with no ceramic on it, but made instead entirely of steel, antique wood, and black tiles from Yilan. Several short pillars rose from the foundations, upon which two stories balanced. A long covered walkway cut across the front courtyard. As you walked along it the boards creaked and groaned.

When we first met five years ago, I remember



Lo Yi-Ming saying the house was capital left behind by his ancestors. It's not mine, he said, I'm only looking after it. I want to retire as soon as possible, so the bank won't keep shunting me from place to place, and I can finally make this my home.

He was an unassuming man, but I still admired him for his achievements, for the position of responsibility he held in a bank that dominated the financial industry, controlling the credit sector for the country's entire central region. Yet this senior manager who wielded such authority frequently slept in the bank dormitories, only coming back to his own home in the village on his days off.

Lo Yi-Ming spent his days off in this house, but only stayed one night a week, giving him one morning to put things in order. When Autumn and I visited he had already raked the fallen leaves into a pile in the courtyard and swept the ground. Now he was crouched next to the pond, hurriedly washing his hands, preparing to take us through the covered walkway and into the house.

He wiped his forehead as he spoke to us. Sweat had soaked through his striped shirt, and his feet were still encased in yellow rubber boots. As we followed him into the house, he disappeared for a moment, emerging soon after in fresh black trousers and a white shirt. He had done up the top button at his Adam's apple, so that when he spoke the interlaced creases on his neck writhed and moved just above the shirt collar.

He struck me as both grand and guileless, the kind of person who you could tell from just one look was utterly clean. At first the atmosphere that pervaded the house left me bewildered; but I felt still more keenly a deep gratitude towards him for the attentiveness with which he received us. I don't know what kind of qualities a person needed to be welcomed into that kind of house, but I knew that at the very least Autumn and I did not have them.

I had only looked around me a couple of times when a thought occurred to me, swift and contemptible: if only he were my father. I couldn't say where this laughable idea came from, only that from a young age I had known what it was to have a dream shattered, and that a shattered dream was something that my real father could never repair.

Autumn seemed even more excited about our visit than I. Our invitation into the home of the wealthiest family in the region came about because she had heard in a photography class that he provided free tutorials. You couldn't say that Autumn was the most glamorous woman in all respects, but she had a singular perseverance when it came to her studies. Photography tutorials inspired a childlike happiness in her, and brought a twinkle to her eyes. She never realized that that lens, nestled deep and serene inside the camera, could not always see life's most troubling problems. I think it was precisely that purity drew Lo Yi-Ming to look on her as a daughter. Otherwise, I do not believe that we – or anyone – could have walked into that residence so easily.

Autumn was not the only one who delighted in his tutelage – fearing that I was too unsophisticated, I also tried my best to enjoy it. All we needed was another cordial invitation from Lo Yi-Ming, and it was impossible to say no; I would find a way to hurry back to Taichung from my workplace in Taipei and race down the coast with Autumn. On the road, in the high winds, we would cry out in our excitement, our voices louder than the motorbike's engine. We cut through the wind at a frantic rate, Autumn's arms around my waist, drawing on the boldness of newly-wedded love.

Autumn normally sat on the left-hand side of the drawing room, beside the telephone. Lo Yi-Ming's armchair was on the right-hand side of the room. The two of them would gesticulate from time to time over a photo album, the atmosphere lively and intimate – two fish



steaming together in a pot. Lo Yi-Ming would tell anecdotes about his early years at photography school, laying out prints that he was proud of until the drawing room table became a miniature display board. Newspapers and ashtrays were all swept aside, just as I, too, was willingly swept aside on occasion.

He was not ungenerous in his teaching; amidst his explanations of photographic concepts and techniques, he would often snatch up a negative and hold it up to the light, a kindly patrician, standing solemnly at the bright window. He faced the sunlight as he spoke, like he were delivering an engrossing lecture. It was rather moving to see him standing there, immersed in his teaching, his short hair mottled grey.

Photography is an art form that requires a real passion in order to benefit from it; in those days, I was a dilettante, and could only observe from the outside. The house was enormous, vaster than anything I could have dreamed of. Its Japanese architecture lent it the feel of a grand official residence, and I could smell the delicate fragrance of antique wood. How might a regular person react to this kingdom? With disappointment, perhaps, or with a deep, irreconcilable sense of shame. Not me. Of course, I too was capable of jealousy, but I was placated by the strength of my imagination. I wasn't yet forty then; I had another twenty years to catch up with him – if he stopped and waited, that is.

And so I would sit with my wild imaginings on the one hand, and wait for Autumn, the good student, on the other. Sometimes she would ask the strangest questions: do you need to wear dark clothing to enter a darkroom? If you had just photographed a colorful bird like a barbet, but you were using black-and-white film, what could you do? Autumn's curiosity exposed many of her weaknesses, but they were weaknesses borne from naïveté, from the same artlessness that you

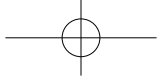
could see in the bare skin, fresh and pure, at the nape of her neck, or in her face, as clean as a new piece of paper.

But I liked my Autumn that way. A little slowness was better than quick thinking, because there it meant she could still be enlightened by others, while a clever brain would stagnate in its own selfish calculations. At any rate, she was not stupid; all you could really say was that she had a slight foolishness about her. This quality only made me love her more, because I had already lost it myself. Her brightness illuminated my shadows, and lightened the heaviness of my own life.

I couldn't be without Autumn. I only felt happy when I saw her smile, and when someone praised her, I felt proud too. She would grip her cup of hot summer tea, quietly listening to her teacher speak, eyes blinking, face glowing, and from time to time putting down her cup to pick up a pen: Sir, won't you speak a little slower? I want to get it all down.

I believe Lo Yi-Ming was moved by her, too. Though he had a natural, graceful bearing, there was something rather reserved about him. When he was happy, he would smile gently, lips still covering his teeth, as though his pleasure flowed not outwards but down into his dry throat. It was getting on noon the first time we met him, and when he kindly asked us to stay for lunch, Autumn and I looked at each other. We knew he lived alone.

If that had been the end of it, then all that would have remained of that day was a cherished memory. What a shame, then, that we called on him again not long after. It had not yet reached blossom season; the large cherry tree outside was still covered in green leaves, its dark purple trunk reflecting a mysterious light in the shady courtyard. The tree still hadn't blossomed by the time Autumn left me. Together, we lost an entire spring.



THE RIVER DARKENS

黑水



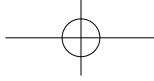
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PING LU

平路

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-

Ping Lu is a fiction writer and syndicated columnist who has firmly established herself as a prominent voice of social criticism in Taiwan. She is known for her critical assessments of well-known characters from history, which push readers to understand those characters in a new and more nuanced light. Her best-known novels include *Love and Revolution*, the story of Sun Yat-Sen's late romance with Song Ching-Ling, and *The Story of Teresa*, about the famous pop singer Teresa Teng. Her work has been translated into English, French, Japanese, Korean, and Czech.



*** 2016 Golden Tripod Award**

Dubbed by some national media as Taiwan's version of *In Cold Blood*, Ping Lu's novel *The River Darkens* is a fictionalized retelling of the famous Mommouth Coffee double murder case that occurred in Taiwan in 2013. The author goes beyond media hype to re-examine the case's two most important female agents: the prime murder suspect, Chia-Chen, and Mrs. Hung, one of the two victims. Ping Lu's brilliant exposition humanizes both characters, exposing desires and secrets, making their roles in the case more complicated and more intriguing.

With its masterful blend of fiction, psychological analysis, and social commentary, Ping Lu's novel stands out clearly as a landmark of Taiwanese contemporary fiction.



THE RIVER DARKENS

By Ping Lu. Translated by Jeremy Tiang.

New Taipei City, Tamsui River
March 15th, afternoon

It's a little warmer by the river, she said.

She reached out and covered his liver-spotted hand with hers. This was a few minutes before that cup of coffee arrived.

"Do you remember the first time you came here, before buying a place, before there was a bike path," she murmured.

Still room for retreat, still the possibility of continuing. At that moment, she wanted to tell him, but didn't in the end.

A last ray of sunset reflected on the water gilded the river with a soft beauty.

*

Chia-Chen hesitated. Her hand shook as she brought it over, spilling two or three drops of the latte.

A customer, about to pay her bill, rose from her chair and headed to the toilet. In the passageway, she brushed past Chia-Chen. She paused at the magazine rack, her back toward the two guests.

A little earlier, the owner had brought over a couple of tall glasses of beer, brewed on site.

Chia-Chen laid the coffee cup on the table and looked up at the wall clock. Twenty-two minutes past five.

I. That Day

Many months later, Chia-Chen remembered that day.

In the morning, she called to place several orders for supplies.

At noon, she stood at the sink, washing a plate sticky with cake crumbs.

Placing the plate on the drying rack, Chia-Chen picked up the phone and dialed a number, inviting a couple of regular customers to the shop that afternoon. They'd mentioned it last time: Mr. Fang's kid just turned a month old, come have a slice of cake to mark the occasion, plus there'll be Fang's new beer, and sticky rice from that place on Chien-Cheng Circle.

It's quieter after four, come anytime after. Chia-Chen's voice was festive.

*

Afterwards, what did Chia-Chen remember?

Chia-Chen remembered the gravel path, and supporting a dazed Mrs. Hung towards the abandoned factory building.

Staggering through the grass patches, by the old dock, she felt the burden on her shoulder grew heavier, so she wasn't so much supporting as carrying another human body forward.

It was very quiet. She could hear the soles of her shoes splashing through puddles.

What else did Chia-Chen remember?

She remembered the fog that evening,



the wetness of cold sweat down her back. She remembered blood pouring out, splashing onto the ground, sinking into the mud. Wisps of its odor rising through the drizzle.

Then the rain stopped.

Stepping through the mud, Chia-Chen returned to the riverside. Left foot in, then the right. Blood leaving strange, thick shapes in the dark water.

*

Chia-Chen didn't remember too many details. Marked by generations of collective memory, the human heart has all kinds of ingenious defense mechanisms.

Back in the day, human beings were club-wielding hunters. When they encountered danger, when a sharp-toothed predator overcame them, the instant those teeth closed over the hunter's head, a mental gate would slam down. The brain flipped its own shut-off switch, so that at the moment of death, there would be no need to experience the pain of being torn to pieces.

Another vestige of evolution appears when human beings encounter a scenario they can't accept, and automatically filter it out, a vacuum cleaner turning a corner in the mind. What happened? Memory shatters, images disappear, not a speck remains. And the vacuum cleaner hums away, bustling into every corner, leaving the scene spotless.

*

Chia-Chen remembered the next morning.

For several seconds, images flashed quickly across her brain, a disordered jumble one after another. She recalled blood surging from the space between her thumb and forefinger.

Did she have something sharp in her hand? A knife blade? Shimmering flashes of light, like a kaleidoscope, came together to form pictures

she couldn't explain.

Just moments before, her dream had featured another series of disconnected scenes. The images were unclear: someone reached out a hand, flung her into the mud by the river. She tried to open her eyes, to sniff, and found the stench of river water still in her nose. Then she was hugging her pillow, waves of cold emanating from beneath the bed. Before sunrise, Chia-Chen drowsed, teeth chattering as she shivered.

The next time her eyes opened, sunlight seeped through the gaps in the curtains. She pressed the button on her alarm clock and sat up in bed.

*

In her dream, Chia-Chen saw herself standing in the river, up to her ankles in water.

This was exactly the time when the tide came in. As the water rose, the leaves and stems of mangrove plants poked from its surface, the tree roots around them still submerged.

At a certain point the dream stopped, then restarted.

In the next instant, Chia-Chen was walking from the shop to the housing block. In the darkness, she tried her best to make out the little alleyway, now unfamiliar to her. Drizzling rain wetted her clothes so they clung to her backbone. The stink of fresh blood floated through the mist.

The streetlight on the corner had blown out, and she hurried ahead quickly. If she turned back, who knows what might be crawling out of the river, following her.

Along the river there were many sounds in the dark.

*

What Chia-Chen didn't expect was that for many nights afterwards, she'd wake up again and again,



her clothes soaked through.

Lying in bed, she'd slide back once again to that night.

In the dreams, the water was up to her chest. Chia-Chen sensed that she was trapped on a sandbar. All around her was mud, brownish yellow bubbles rising from puddles both shallow and deep.

An arm extended at an odd angle from a puddle. Who was calling for help?

One time, the water rose over her chin – salty, foul, filled with grit, swirling into her nostrils. Chia-Chen tried hard to breathe. Her mouth opened wide, and air bubbled up against her cheeks. In that moment, she couldn't tell whether she was alive or dead, as river water gushed down her throat and instantly filled her lungs. Through the haze of the dream, she heard a rasping sound in her chest.

*

What happened in the darkness?

Chia-Chen remembered Uncle Hung calling her nickname over and over, "Lovey, Lovey." Then he muttered something incoherent, maybe wanting to know where he was. The old man raised his arms and flailed around, trying to grab Chia-Chen's shoulder, but finally gave up.

His chest rose and fell, like a water-bird flapping its wings.

The blade slid in, and Uncle Hung's face twisted. A few seconds later, his eyes flicked open and he stared at Chia-Chen, who squatted beside him, incomprehension in his gaze, as if blocked by some inscrutable question.

Chia-Chen sensed a sound in the dark. Was it a wild goose or duck by the riverside? Frogs in the grass? Or her own ragged breathing?

When Chia-Chen left, the two bodies on the ground were still warm.

*

Later, Chia-Chen remembered standing by the tap, washing her shoes. With a finger, she traced the grooves on their soles, digging out clods of dark brown earth.

Back in her flat, Chia-Chen stood in the bathroom, her body covered in suds, washing them off with the shower head. Left hand, right hand, scrubbing away the dirt beneath her nails, her movements meticulous and focused.

The next day, Chia-Chen stood in the shop, a little dazed.

The March weather was unpredictable, and not many people were cycling. The coffee shop wasn't seeing much business. As Chia-Chen stood by the sink, soapy water splashed the front of her blouse, and in the shock of sudden cold, Chia-Chen remembered more details about the day before, by the river.

*

What else did Chia-Chen remember?

It was late February, her day off. She watched Japanese soaps at home that afternoon, then at night went with Hsien-Ming to the usual place for barbecue. They'd met like this once a week for the past year, a moment of relaxation for both of them. Hsien-Ming, who could never hold his liquor, always ordered a Taiwan Beer and drank a glass on an empty stomach. He seemed to need this bit of alcohol to release his creativity and allow him to plan for the future with Chia-Chen.

"A spiral-shaped lamp, turning, covered in clusters of shells," said Chia-Chen instinctively.

That afternoon, the pair of them hunkered down in Chia-Chen's flat, downloading an entire season of a Japanese soap. Sitting in the barbecue restaurant, Chia-Chen swirled her beer glass, sad that the heroine hadn't got to marry the man who loved her. Just like in all of these shows, there was a scene where the two of them sheltered themselves against night breezes below



a ferris wheel. Why did they always need a ferris wheel? Chia-Chen and Hsien-Ming were in high spirits after the last episode, and discussed it over a table full of grilled meat.

“It’s ritual behavior,” said Hsien-Ming, popping a piece of mackerel in his mouth “The two things are connected in our consciousness. The ferris wheel represents happiness.” As he spoke, he placed the last piece of water bamboo shoot on Chia-Chen’s plate.

Chia-Chen furrowed her brow. She felt like Hsien-Ming had to be making a point every time he opened his mouth, like he were writing an essay. After a moment, she replied earnestly, “It’s true, whenever the MRT goes past Miramar Park and I see the ferris wheel, I feel happy.”

Hsien-Ming said nothing in response.

“It’s a pity I’ve never been on it,” she pouted.

“You get to the highest point, and then you have to come down. What’s there to be happy about?” muttered Hsien-Ming, taking another swig of beer.

Chia-Chen thought Hsien-Ming ought to remember agreeing to take her last Valentine’s Day, though he never did. This was how it often was with them: Chia-Chen would mention some place she wanted to go, or suggest an enjoyable excursion, but it usually never happened.

After more than a year, they usually ended up going the Peacock Clam by the pier or to the barbecue restaurant. Dates didn’t normally take them any farther afield than around the river. Even when they went to Sun Moon Lake, they came back the same day. They hadn’t been able to make any longer journeys. Chia-Chen knew this was because of Hsien-Ming’s mother. As she saw it, his mother exercised a kind of invisible control over her son. A little beer remained in her glass. Looking apologetic, Hsien-Ming mumbled, “When we’ve got our own place, we’ll buy that lamp with shells.” He was repeating the words she’d used earlier.

Raising her glass, Chia-Chen clinked it

against Hsien-Ming’s and downed the remainder. In that instant, looking at the incandescent light bulb hanging from the ceiling, the cry of the Japanese serial echoed around Chia-Chen’s head, “You’ll definitely be happy.”

*

“Good coffee, good life.”

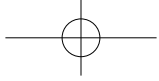
-Riverside Coffee Shop’s motto

First, the current here turns in an eddy back to its starting point, so they weren’t washed too far away, and the clothing was more or less intact. Secondly, the culprit did not return after the incident, so the scene hasn’t been tampered with. These two factors together made solving the case possible.

- forensic officer at the scene

I don’t want to talk about that anymore...

- snack bar owner, ferry dock



BEYOND WAR

戰爭之外

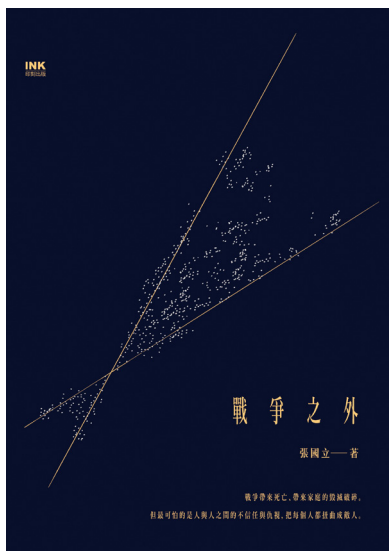
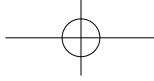


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CHANG KUO-LI 張國立

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-

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



One dark, rainy night, Yu Ching-Yang gets a knock on his door. It's the police, claiming they may have found his father's body. But that can't be right – Yu Ching-Yang's father, Yu Kuei, was cremated and buried years ago after being crushed by a train. No, the police reply, we found his remains on a mountainside, complete with his heirloom watch. Moreover, the body crushed under the subway had had a bullet hole in the forehead.

How could this have happened? Amidst the trauma of this new discovery, Yu Ching-Yang does his best to help the police by looking back through his mother and father's early history. But some of what he finds does not want to be uncovered – secrets of the Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War, dark connections to Wang Jing-Wei and the Japanese puppet government in Shanghai, eerie coincidences that somehow brought the young man and young woman together. But, as Yu Ching-Yang has found out, bodies never stay buried...



BEYOND WAR

By Chang Kuo-Li. Translated by Eleanor Goodman.

1.

Just as in previous years, rain fell nonstop over Taipei. Longjohns hidden in closets turned yellow with mold, and people's throats constantly threatened to close up. The TV admonished viewers that low temperatures from the polar regions had arrived and all of December would be wet and cold. On Christmas Eve, a man in his thirties stood beside a service vehicle, its blue and red emergency lights flashing. His head and shoulders were already soaked, but he opened an umbrella anyway. He pulled out a handkerchief to mop his face, and then strode over to an apartment on the ground level of an old four-story building on the fifth section of Minsheng East Road and rang the bell. *Ding, ding* – it rang a dozen times before the door opened. A tall, thin man appeared, still yawning. His hair was gray, and he wore striped pajamas beneath a long, black windbreaker. The man outside pulled out his wallet and flashed his ID card. "Police. Are you Mr. Yu Ching-Yang? Is your father Yu Kuei?"

Yu Ching-Yang's mouth hadn't completely closed from his yawn as he looked at the ID and then back at the policeman.

"Is your mother at home?"

"She's already asleep. She's not so young anymore." Yu closed his mouth.

"I'm going to need you to come down to the station."

Yu looked back inside the house. "This late?" He shrank back a bit. "Is something wrong?"

The policeman hesitated, then said, "Don't worry. It has nothing to do with you." He paused. "Well, it does have something to do with you. We need your help with a case." He pushed a few strands of wet hair from his forehead. "We might have found your father."

Yu Ching-Yang stared at the policeman. He was completely awake now.

"Is this some kind of a joke? Officer, my father is lying in the columbarium at Shandao Temple. He's been there for forty-one years. Now you show up in the middle of the night to tell me that you've found him?"

"It'll take a bit to explain. You'd better come with me, maybe you can tell us what's going on." The policeman began to turn back, motioning Yu in front of him.

"Okay, okay. Give me a minute."

Yu disappeared inside the house, and then reappeared a few minutes later in different clothes and a down jacket. He was followed by a middle-aged woman in a nightgown who held a TV remote in one hand and a cell phone in the other.

She glanced at the policeman coldly, then said to Yu Ching-Yang, "Do you want me to call a lawyer?"

Yu didn't have time to answer before the policeman interrupted, "Are you Mrs. Yu? There's no need for a lawyer. We just want Mr. Yu to come identify an object for us. I'll bring him back in an hour."

Yu patted the woman on the back and said,



“It’s okay. Go to bed, and don’t wake up Mother. If anything comes up, I’ll give you a call.”

Yu squeezed into the back seat and turned to wave out the rear window as the dim lights of the apartment building disappeared behind the closed door, into the misty rain and darkened alleyway. “So, Officer, your name is Lei Meng?”

“Impressive, Professor Yu! Most people don’t know how to pronounce my name. It’s spelled like ‘men,’ but with the added ‘g,’ and pronounced ‘mung.’”

“I know.” Yu continued, “It’s an old word for ‘roof.’ The old poem says: ‘Adjoining houses are connected by their roofs, a thousand wings and ten thousand rooms.’ Are you the eldest son?”

Lei Meng turned to Yu from the passenger seat and smiled, “Yes, I am. In fact, I’m an only child, and my father hoped I would protect the Lei family like a roof protects a house.”

“Every name has a meaning.” Yu spoke so quietly no one else could hear him.

They fell silent. The streets were empty, and they traveled quickly, soon turning into the police station near the intersection of Chonghsiao East Road and Keelung Road. Lei took Yu in the elevator up to the third floor and led him to a small office at the end of a long hallway. The door was open; inside, three young officers busied themselves with files and folders. They paid no attention to them. Lei pulled over a rolling chair and said, “Have a seat.”

He turned on the computer on the desk and clicked the mouse to show Yu some photographs. He looked at the screen as he asked him, “Do you recognize this man?”

On the screen was a picture of an older man in his seventies.

“I’ve never seen him before.”

“Do you recognize the place?”

It was somewhere in a bamboo grove, next to a shrine dedicated to a local Earth God.

“I’ve never seen it before.”

“And the watch?”

The watch, which was spattered with mud, was of simple design, with a coffee-colored wristband and analog numbers. It showed no date, day, or month. The gold finish on the face had already been rubbed off, showing the plain metal below.

“It isn’t digital, so it doesn’t need a battery,” Yu said. “It’s an old kind of watch that has to be wound every night before you go to bed. If I’m not mistaken, it’s my father’s watch. His name would be engraved in the back.”

“Yu Kuei. Yes, the name Yu Kuei is engraved on the back. That’s how we found you. And that name was the first thing that made us wonder.” Lei clicked through a few more photographs. “We dug some bones out of this bamboo grove, and we think they might belong to Yu Kuei.”

Yu’s face didn’t change as he looked at the photos. “It looks like my father’s watch. My father wasn’t wearing it the day it all happened. It had disappeared. But the bones can’t be his. Forty-one years ago, I went with the police to the railway hospital to collect his remains. We had him cremated at a funeral parlor in Taipei. Then we buried him in a sandalwood urn my mother bought, and laid him to rest in Shandao temple.”

“I understand how confusing this must be.”

Lei pointed to the sign over the door. “Department of Unsolved Crimes,” he read. “This newly established division will deal with unsolved cases, as well as cases that have been closed but contain unresolved questions, especially those from 1949 to 1979 whose materials have not yet been digitized. We must seek out the questions, and try our best to find the answers.”

The three other policemen in the room had paused in their work to watch Yu.

“Your father Yu Kuei is part of our caseload. The suspicious part has to do with the fact that his body was ripped apart by the 128 train from Keelung to Changhua...I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have put it that way.”

Yu shook his head. “It happened a long time



ago. I've gotten over it."

"According to the investigation, the body was totally destroyed by the time all eleven train cars ran over him. But the case was classified as a suicide when the clothes and the ID in his pocket were identified by your mother as belonging to Yu Kuei."

"How did it get labeled a suicide?" Yu agitated the chair beneath him. "I remember the police telling us that my dad had crossed the tracks by mistake and been hit by the train."

Lei Meng looked down at the dusty pile of files in his hand. "Mr. Yu, please don't upset yourself. Your mother will surely know better what happened. She was the one who signed the statement back then."

Yu looked at his mother's youthful signature, "Shan Chian-Ping" signed in a careful hand.

"The forensic report also uncovered some curious information. For instance, Mr. Yu's skull had been crushed, but they found something like a bullet hole in the middle of his forehead. Look," Lei Meng clicked onto a new page, "we scanned the original records into the computer, and this is it. See, the two words 'something like' have been scribbled in between 'there is' and 'a bullet.' We couldn't find sufficient evidence to show the hole had been fully examined, or whether it could have been from something other than a bullet."

He didn't give Yu a chance to interject before he continued.

"The skull is very hard, and theoretically, if it had been a bullet, it would have remained in the bone. What's strange is that none of the evidence mentions the discovery of a bullet or casing on the scene. So maybe the bullet went through the forehead, traversed the brain, and continued out through the back of the head. But unless he was shot from very close range, the bullet wouldn't have been able to pierce both sides of the skull."

"My mother never told me any of this."

"I just mentioned that there was no bullet

or casing found at the scene," Lei continued, ignoring Yu. "What's unfortunate is that the skull of the deceased was crushed by the train, and with the technology of the time, they had no way of reconstructing the bone from what was left. In May of 1974, the Taipei police and the railway police both signed statements agreeing that the case was a suicide. It wasn't that senior officials didn't have suspicions. After all, if the deceased had shot himself, where was the gun? Where was the bullet that killed him? Someone who kills himself can't very well hide the gun after he's dead. Let's see: It was the last train of the night, the 10:42 southbound from Keelung. It had just passed Songshan Station. In the 1970s, everyone went to bed early, and there wasn't a late night scene around there like there is now. Plus, it was raining so hard, no witnesses were ever found."

"What are you saying?" Yu finally managed to get a question in.

"Going through this old case, we all had the same question. How could the gun not be near the scene of the death? How could it just disappear? If it had also been run over by the train, there would still be a fist-sized chunk of iron somewhere. It wouldn't be impossible to find. But we never even found the bullet or the casing." He looked at Yu. "What I mean is, your father's death is suspicious. In July we opened the case again and made it the top priority for this division. We haven't yet given a report to our superior officers, but coincidentally, yesterday the Hsinchu Police Department sent over a case. They found a skeleton in the mountains near Chienshih, and it was wearing a watch on its left wrist. The watch was inscribed with Yu Kuei's name."

"Hsinchu? In Hsinchu? So you've brought me to the police station in the middle of the night so I can collect my father's watch, which you found out in the mountains?"

"Not just that." Lei stood up and stretched. "We'd like you to do a DNA test, and if the bones



prove to be your father's, then – how long has it been? – we can start to reinvestigate a case that's been cold for forty-one years.”

“If the tests show that the bones really are my father's, then who was killed by that train forty-one years ago?”

Lei didn't look at Yu. He clasped his hands behind his back and paced over the computer cords in the tight space between the small messy desk and the file cabinet. He said, “That's a good question, Professor Yu. And it's the second question our division hopes to answer.”

Lei Meng dropped Yu Ching-Yang at his home on Minsheng East Road at 4:32 in the morning. The emergency lights were off, but as they stopped the police car, the door was already open. Mrs. Yu stood there in her raincoat and holding umbrella. “Why didn't you call me?”

Lei and Yu ducked under the umbrella, not knowing which one of them Mrs. Yu was scolding.

The lights were on inside. A frail, white-haired old woman sat in the middle of the room. Lei turned to leave as Yu went to greet her, but Mrs. Yu caught one of Lei's sleeves and said, “You can't leave yet. Weren't you looking for Mom? Now she wants to talk to you.”

The interior was arranged like a professor's home. The walls were hung with calligraphy and paintings. Lei recognized one scroll in the middle: “Let the sounds of wind, rain, and words all enter your ear; let family, national, and world affairs be your concern.” Hung on the wall across from the door was a small altar that held a memorial plaque and a few offerings. He couldn't see the name on the plaque. The incense had already burned halfway down, meaning the old woman had been awake for a while. To the left was a television and a set of Kenwood speakers; on the table were some porcelain bottles of sorghum liquor from Kinmen and Matsu, as well as *Maotai* and *Fenjiu* from mainland China.

The right side of the wall was taken up entirely by books, and in front of the bookshelves was a rattan couch covered by a cushion.

Lei Meng suddenly wanted a drink.

The old woman was wearing a thick, pink-checked nightgown. When she saw Yu Ching-Yang she levered herself up with the arm of the chair. Embracing her, her son sobbed, “Mom, they found Dad's watch.”

Lei had never seen a mother and son seem so close. Yu hugged his aging mother, whispering to her, and her expression changed with his words. At last, the old woman broke out of his embrace, and walked daintily toward Lei. She held out her tiny hand, “Officer Lei, I am Shan Chian-Ping, Yu Kuei's wife. Is what Yangyang just told me true?”

Lei nodded. The hand he held was so warm, it didn't seem like an old person's hand. He remembered seeing on an old household registry form that Shan Chian-Ping had been born in the fourteenth year of the Republic, 1925, which meant she was already eighty-nine years old.

“Yangyang wasn't very clear about the last part. Come,” she said, taking his hand, “let's sit down and have a good talk.”

The old woman said to Mrs. Yu, “Hsiao-Fen, bring us two bowls of rice dumplings in osmanthus wine. Officer Lei has been working hard.”

Lei knew that he wouldn't be able to go back home to sleep it off before daybreak, but when he heard the name of the sweet dish, he nodded instinctively and smacked his lips.

“His watch was in the mountains near Chienshih in Hsinchu? There was just a skeleton, not even a casket?”

Lei nodded.

“Why wasn't there a casket? Lord, what did he do to make you punish him that way?”

And before Lei Meng could even take a bite of his dumplings, Yu led his sobbing, shaking mother out of the room.



THREE WAYS TO GET RID OF ALLERGIES

去過敏的三種方法



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KEVIN CHEN 陳思宏

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Kevin Chen began his artistic career as a cinema actor, starring in the Taiwanese and German films *Ghosted*, *Kung Bao Huhn*, and *Global Player*. Now based in Germany, he is a staff writer for *Performing Arts Reviews* magazine. He's published several novels and short story collections, including *Attitude*, *Flowers from Fingernails*, *Ghosts by Torchlight*, the essay collection *Rebellious Berlin*, and other titles.



Three Ways to Get Rid of Allergies takes us on six adventures into locked or broken spaces. We peer into the dark houses, haunted toilets, and cracked bedrooms of the author's rural hometown of Changhua, where we find squelched desire, unspoken pain, and frustration on great and small scales. Flannery O'Connor would have understood and admired Kevin Chen for all the uncomfortable humanity he has found beneath the surface of the mundane.

The six stories of *Three Ways to Get Rid of Allergies* explore several different areas in which “the injury of the other,” as one critic claimed, is clearly felt. We witness an old woman's slow descent into insanity in her lonely house (“Ghosts in the Toilet”), participate in the bitter clash of egos among school children, and feel the frustrated desires of a transgendered individual in a town too small for anonymity. Chen celebrates the stunted and unfinished – or, if he doesn't celebrate it, he accepts it as an inevitable aspect of human life.

Prepare for a strong dose of rural reality in Kevin Chen's first collection of short stories since his celebrated novel *Attitude*. The only way out is escape.



GHOSTS IN THE TOILET

By Kevin Chen. Translated by Jennifer Feeley.

1.

The locksmith was grating on his nerves: if only he'd just open the door already. The mouth chewing betel nut kept opening and closing. He tightened his shoulders and bent over; what began as a low, metallic grumbling deep in his throat erupted without warning into a flood of diatribe before the locked metal door, blasting red question marks all over the ground.

Oh, you haven't been back in a while? It's been a long time since your mom's gone grocery shopping, huh? You don't even remember me, your uncle? Your mom used to sell fruit in the market – my shop was next door – have you completely forgotten? How come you don't have a house key? It's not that I don't want your money, but don't you want to try calling again – maybe your mom has the air on and is fast asleep? Have you tried ringing the doorbell a few more times? It's so hot, maybe your mom doesn't feel like moving, doesn't feel like opening the door – who'd want to?

It was hot, really hot. He rang the doorbell again and tried the phone one more time. He pounded on the metal door, his palms leaving prints of sweat on its surface, but still no answer. The old lady next door sat in her wheelchair, fanning herself as she surveyed the scene. In a small town, it was rare to see such commotion – way more exciting than afternoon television. In her days, this row of houses was the newest construction project in town. The mayor lived in one of them. During his years in office, his so-called political achievements included chopping

down the old bishopwood and banyan trees, bulldozing a traditional three-sectioned house, relocating the Shrine of the Earth God, widening the road in front of the new houses, building a concrete-floored public park, blocking off the road on Monday evenings for the night market, and screening movies outdoors during the weekend. Now the road was in a sad state of disrepair. This morning it must've rained heavily, as mangy stray dogs were rolling around in potholes filled with stagnant water. Local flower and betel nut farms had failed to keep any young people around, leaving all the houses in the hands of the elderly. The night market and the outdoor movies both disappeared. Some houses didn't even have windows or doors, their verandas piled high with old furniture, emitting a musty odor on hot days.

It really had been a long time since he'd come back. He'd called home on Tomb Sweeping Day, the Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and the Lunar New Year; after a brief exchange of greetings, his mother had said everything was fine, *it's okay if you don't come back*. Mother and son both knew that an over-the-phone relationship provided the best kind of distance. After he'd left for Taipei, his mother had begun living alone. *Being alone is great*, she once said to him, her tone even, practically emotionless. Only her son knew her words were heartfelt.

Last month he'd gone to Finland. The hotel gave him a free postcard, but he couldn't think of anyone to send it to, so he ended up writing



down the address of his old home. When he came back to Taiwan, he called his mother: no one picked up. Maybe she'd gone on a pilgrimage? Maybe she was visiting relatives? But his mother hated crowds, and didn't like going out; living alone gave her peace of mind. Last year when the family next door had moved to the city, his mother had happily said: *Good, one less family – that baby made such a racket!* Last week, when she finally answered the phone, she said she'd received his postcard from a decade ago – she'd never thought that she could still receive it ten years later. The next-door neighbors' landlord wanted to kick them out so he could take back the house, harassing them by phone every day. She expressed her support for them, and so her own phone now rang nonstop. The kitchen range hood was broken, but that didn't matter since she didn't feel like cooking anyway. She'd heard that the guy who'd built the high-rise was coming home to host a wedding reception for his son. *I think it's better if you don't come. A lot of bad people are out at night. Make sure you lock the door and don't kick off the blankets. Don't eat banana peels. When Taipei gets droughty remember to head home a little earlier...* His mother kept jabbering – the story seemed somewhat connected but was beyond his comprehension.

Mom, I'm coming home next week.

His mother didn't answer but kept on rambling. *You musn't go to the free wedding banquet. There are a lot of bad people. If you eat you'll get fat. There's a typhoon – something could fall and crush you to death.*

He'd asked the coffee shop where he worked for some time off. He didn't bring anything with him, planning to return the same day. His hometown seemed mostly unchanged. The fields lay untended. A half-built farmhouse stood nakedly in the middle of a field. The traffic light was out and hadn't been fixed. There were considerably fewer shops on the street, and only the coffin shop was doing regular business. He

walked home from the bus station, looking at the betel nut fields. Far beyond the rice paddies stood a high-walled, flickering gold palace. He didn't have time to confirm whether this was a hallucination – he'd hurry home, make sure his mother was okay, then grab a meal and say he needed to rush back to Taipei. His apartment there was a studio with an old air conditioner that spat out noisy ice-cold air when switched on. At least it made enough noise to muffle the sound of the cars outside and the lovemaking of the university students next door, allowing him to sleep soundly, without dreaming.

For two hours he shouted in the hot sun, but to no avail. His mother didn't answer the door. The old lady in the wheelchair next door phoned the locksmith, saying she'd occasionally see his mother go out to buy food, but hadn't noticed her recently.

The locksmith got to work. Ocher rust spots had devoured the sky-blue overhead door of his childhood memories. Sky-blue as the sunny memories of his childhood. His father was preparing to go to China. His mother sold produce at the market. His family had just purchased a large TV. In elementary school he often won awards that he'd tape to the wall when he came home. Sky-blue was always bright, at least until the ghost in the bathroom appeared.

The locksmith spat out a few profanities along with another mouthful of betel nut juice. The stubborn old lock loosened, and the metal door rolled up. What a stench.

A hot, foul stench escaped the building and assaulted them. The locksmith said a few more dirty words. The odor wasn't just thick, it burned – he felt like all of his nose hairs had been singed. The living room was on the first floor, lit dimly by sunlight. His mother's bike had fallen over. The floor was strewn with carry-out boxes, plastic bags, and uneaten food that had rotted in the hot and stifling space. He noticed excrement on the sofa. A dog emerged from under the sofa



and charged outside. He covered his nose and went in quickly, stepping over the trash, and hurried up the stairs. His mother's bedroom door wasn't closed, and that room stank, too. His mother lay flat on the bed, windows shut tight. He shook her. *Mom, Mom, Mom, it's me.* The locksmith also came up, asking if they should call an ambulance.

His mother's eyes suddenly opened. She saw the locksmith, recoiled sharply, then saw her son. A dry croak came from her throat. He gave her water, opened the windows, and fanned her, looking closely at her face and body: all skin and bones, severe hair loss, eyes unfocused. But she still recognized him.

The locksmith said if everything was fine, he was going to head out. Today they were putting up a big tent in the road out front. The truck was due to arrive any moment, and he was going to help out. *Just because they're successful doesn't mean they've forgotten us. They've come back to put on their son's wedding, and they're paying good money to those of us who are helping.*

He had no idea what the locksmith was talking about. He stared straight at his mother, all the while thinking about that little studio apartment in Taipei.

The locksmith took his fee for unlocking the door, chuckling: *Oh, have you forgotten? Your next-door neighbors from when you were a kid, the former mayor – they built a big department store in Taipei. Didn't they just have their grand opening? My daughter says the shopping's good, lots of people. Their only son is getting married. Tomorrow they're coming back for the wedding banquet. You came back just in time. No need for wedding gifts – everyone's invited.*

A large truck loaded with round tables pulled up and stopped at the gate, surrounded by howling stray dogs. He looked down from the second-floor window: the scale was immense. They'd already set up at least a hundred tables.

The locksmith covered his nose and left, leaving the room quiet. His mother suddenly got

up and asked in a loud voice: *Where'd your Dad go? Don't go to the wedding tomorrow. Tell your Dad to take care of the money. He said he wants to eat fish tonight. The dogs outside need to be fed – there's one that's gotten really skinny. Your Dad's gotten too fat. He says he's going to kill me.*

2.

He took his mother to the only clinic in town. Before the exam, she told him the doctor there violated medical ethics and wanted to kill her. The doctor said she was slightly dehydrated and malnourished, but her blood pressure was normal: she needed to pay attention to her diet and get enough exercise. He grabbed the medication and left his mother in the waiting room, telling the doctor: *My mom's acting strange – she's talking nonsense.* The doctor was busy reading the gold-embossed, bright red wedding invitation on the table, gushing about how considerate the family was, how they'd come back to build such a large house, even decided to have the wedding here. *Are you going to take your mom to the wedding tomorrow? It's right in front of your home.* The doctor saw him staring blankly and said: *Don't worry; your mom's getting on in years. She'll be fine after having a few good meals; at the wedding banquet tomorrow, have her eat a bit more.* The perfume on the wedding invitation overpowered the medicinal smell of the clinic.

His mother refused to take the medicine, claiming there was a ghost living in the pills. If she took them, the ghost would invade her. There had been a period of time after his father left when his mother liked to scare him by talking about ghosts. *There's a ghost in the bathroom – if you don't behave I'll lock you in. There's a ghost in the refrigerator – don't open it too often. There's a ghost in the books – stop reading. There's a ghost on the rooftop – you can't go up there. There's a ghost in the coffee – you're not allowed to drink it. There's a ghost in the box – you're not allowed inside. There are*



surely even more ghosts at school – just don't go this term. About a year later, when they got the news that his father's body had been found, his mother stopped talking about ghosts. He was unclear about a lot of things from his childhood, but he remembered that Sunday morning. His mother started cleaning. She pulled down the curtains and tossed them in the washing machine. She dragged the mattresses into the street to bathe in the sun. Every room smelled of soapy water and disinfectant. He was hungry, and pleaded for something to eat, so his mother locked him in the bathroom. He kicked the door with all his might, crying: *There's a ghost there's a ghost Mama you said there's a ghost in the bathroom.* Outside the door, his mother calmly replied: *There's no ghost, no ghosts at all – I lied to you, I've been lying to you this whole time. Your dad and I both liked lying to people. The ghosts are all gone. Tomorrow's Monday; you'll go to school.*

There was a ghost living in the pills the doctor gave her. The old doctor had paid more attention to the wedding invitation than to his mother. He threw together a prescription for her, and if she refused to take it, oh well. They sat down at a food stall – his mother was starving – for noodles with broth. By the time she'd finished, her body was drenched in sweat: her summer blouse clung tightly to her skin, and she wore no bra. When the vendor saw, he spilled broth onto the floor. The vendor asked him: *You haven't been back in a while – are you married? What do you do in Taipei?* The vendor directed his questions to him, but his gaze remained trained on his mother.

He hadn't remembered the vendor's face, but the taste of the noodles was familiar. He'd grown up eating them. He said nothing, but simply paid and walked his mother home. He hadn't deliberately not answered or meant to hide anything – he just had nothing to say. He was nearing forty, still working in a coffee shop and as a copywriter. He had several filmmaker friends who asked him to buy carry-out for

the film crew and do cleaning; occasionally a director would ask him to fill in as an extra. In fact, these “filmmaker friends” couldn't really be considered his friends at all – they weren't in regular contact, and the reason they asked him for help was that he was cheap and didn't say much. Once he served as a body double for someone jumping into the ocean. They ran him over time without paying extra, but he didn't complain. His Facebook account wasn't much to look at; he had no incentive to post pictures, and no one chatted with him, “poked” him, or “liked” anything on his page. His cell phone was an older model; once in a while it'd ring faintly, but it always turned out to be other servers from the coffee shop asking him to cover a shift.

The coffee shop kept its air conditioning on high, and served as a refuge for all sorts of crowds – a quiet crowd all wearing big headphones, giggling and typing away on their laptops; another loudly discussed their boyfriends' and girlfriends' big dicks and big boobs; yet another group that recited poetry were part of a university literary society. None of the noise, chatter, or poetry had anything to do with him. His skills were neatness, making coffee quickly, carrying piles of dishes without shaking, and standing quietly behind the counter when no one was ordering – a pale, thin presence, ignored by everyone, feeling totally free.



TOMATO STREET AND OTHER WAR ZONES

番茄街游擊戰

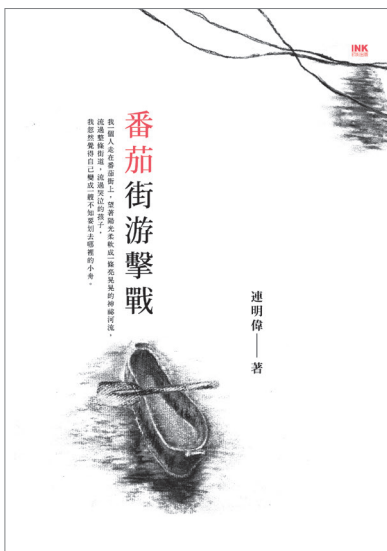


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LIEN MING-WEI 連明偉

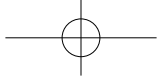
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-

Young author Lien Ming-Wei taught Chinese for one year at the Philadelphia School in the Philippines before beginning his career as a writer. He has won nearly every single important prize for literature in Taiwan, including the China Times Open Book Award, the China Times Literary Award, and the Lin Rung-San Literary Award.



This trilogy of novellas tells tales of the Philippines in the voices of Chinese immigrant children. The first two, “Tomato Street and Other War Zones” and “My Yellow Brother,” take us through the streets and back alleys of Manila, where young students from a Chinese-language private school fall into traps set by themselves and by others. The last story, “Lovers,” describes the sex trade of small, by-the-hour hotels, the effects of prostitution on families, and the turbid waters of early sexual awakening.

Based on the author’s own experience teaching Chinese in the Philippines, *Tomato Street* takes us on a tour of emotional battlefields, like personal and collective identity, ethnicity, culture, and sexual orientation. His writing surprised Taiwan’s literary world with its boldness, distinctive voice, and piercing insight. This is a book for everyone who has not known how to answer the question *Who am I?* – which is to say that it’s a book for everyone.



TOMATO STREET AND OTHER WAR ZONES

By Lien Ming-Wei. Translated by Natascha Bruce.

Names

My name is Dela Cruz, Albert Bradford T.

I live on a little alley off Tomato Street. Every morning, Tomato Street is crammed full of jeepneys spewing out filthy exhaust fumes, turning the air black. With so many people and so many cars, I've often thought, if we squeeze many more in, we might actually squeeze out some tomato juice.

Tomato Street is on the north side of Dalayan village. If you head southwest, you get to Manila, which all the newspapers call Metro Manila. Going east leads to Munous, a mid-sized town and transport hub where there are a lot of thieves and gangsters. I call it Boob Grope in Chinese, because it sounds the same when I say it out loud, *Mo-nai-zi*. Also on the east side is Frisco, a tiny town I call Thief-Go, *Huo-li-si-kou*. I hate all these screwed-up English names, and I hate how so many of the words here come from Spanish, with all those rolled "r's" and the words running together like some blathering rap song. I really don't understand how the natives can remember them so easily. Back when we first moved here from Taiwan, everything was totally unfamiliar and the language made no sense. The streets around here are a mess and I got lost all the time, so I remembered places by sounding out their names in Chinese.

There are no tomatoes growing on Tomato Street.

"How come it's called Tomato Street?" that

lard-ass Seung-seon once asked me. Alicia and Peter gave me a look, because obviously they knew. I mean, anyone who lives on Tomato Street knows: the road is officially called Delmonte, which is a famous brand of tomato sauce. Hence the nickname Tomato Street. Idiot fatso Seong-seon was the only one who didn't know.

During the day, it gets baking hot and there's nothing much going on. Back then, I would head for Tomato Street, or wander into Dalayan in search of something fun to pass the time. That's where my school was. In English, our school was called the Philadelphia School, but its Chinese name was Shang Ai High School, which translates as the "Noblest Love High School." When I first started, I thought it was weird; why would a school be named after an American city? And, even weirder, why didn't they just use the Chinese word for Philadelphia in the Chinese name, rather than this totally unrelated "Noblest Love"? It was a school for overseas Chinese, which means the fees were higher than normal public schools and they taught Chinese, on top of English and Tagalog. It's also a bit weird to say it was a high school, because it actually had kids from kindergarten all the way on up. It was a huge, noisy melting pot, a total mash-up of all ages. A lot of my sixth grade classmates were ethnic Chinese. A few were from South Korea, and there were a few the Chinese teacher from Gansu referred to as "purebred natives."

I found out from Peter that the school's name came from the New Testament of the Holy



Bible, from Revelation, Chapter 3, Verse 7, and actually had nothing to do with the American troops stationed in the Philippines. Peter knew this because he went to the Bible Study class run by the headmistress. The old bag explained that the name came from two Greek words, “Phileo” meaning love, and “Adelphos” meaning the familial affection between church members. I never understood why Peter kept going to those classes; apart from the cheap cookies and powdered juice the old bag handed out at the end of the sessions, there was nothing to gain. Especially since, if he was hungry, all he had to do was climb a tree and pick a green mango or a star apple.

Peter would just frown and say, “My mom makes me go.”

I didn’t dislike Zhang Xin, Peter’s mom. She was pretty cool. I called her Auntie Zhang. She had very white skin, her hair was permed into big, bouncy curls, and she liked to wear really short, skin-tight jean cut-offs, which clung to her big ass. Her high heels clicked when she walked, and she always smelled faintly of artificial roses. It made me dizzy whenever I caught a whiff of it. Her Chinese wasn’t too good, so she would speak to me in Hokkien – but her kind of Hokkien wasn’t all that similar to Taiwanese, and I could only understand about half of what she said. When I was tired of trying, I’d just switch to English. Auntie Zhang didn’t like speaking English, though, and usually just carried on speaking to me in her incomprehensible Hokkien.

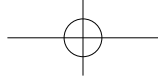
Whenever I went to Peter’s house, she’d bring out Taiwanese snacks for us – things like *Wang Wang* brand rice crackers, ginseng candy, and *Kuai Kuai* cookies. These snacks are really expensive over here on the Native Island; they don’t sell them in the ordinary grocery stores, so you have to go to the import shops in Chinatown. Auntie Zhang would also offer me Lipton milk tea, *I-Mei* milk tea and *Hey Song* soda, making sure I knew they were all imported from Taiwan, insisting that this meant they tasted better. She’d

bring all the sweets out very proudly, totally convinced that, if they were from Taiwan, they were bound to be delicious. I liked going over to Peter’s house. Auntie Zhang smelled so good and the house was very beautifully decorated, every room done up with white ceramic tiles. Plus, there were two maids for us to order around and Auntie Zhang with all those Taiwanese snacks. It reminded me of the old days.

Seung-seon, Peter, Alicia, and I decided that, in the summer, we’d go on a rowing trip to a secluded creek. Alicia said it wasn’t too far from Quezon, only an hour’s ride south on the bus. She and her mom had discovered it on a river cruise. She told us the riverbank was lined with fishermen’s huts, the water was a lush emerald green, that you could catch a dozen big fish with one cast of a net and that there were two big waterfalls upstream. The fishermen lived in their boats, rocking back and forth all day, like those pirate ship rides in amusement parks. Alicia said that when summer came we should tell our parents we were going away to camp for three days and needed two thousand pesos for travel expenses. This way, we’d get out of filthy, noisy Quezon, and be free to explore the river. We could row our boat, look at the stars, and eat barbecued fish.

“We need to get a little boat,” she said, her imagination running wild.

She said we could either let ourselves float downstream or put some effort in and paddle upstream against the current. The three of us stared at her, her hair pulled back into a ponytail, as though she’d just dropped down from outer space. She told us not to worry; it wasn’t like there were any scary animals like tigers in the jungle or any headhunting tribes. At worst, we might run into a couple of crocodiles, or a python. She laughed at us, making sure we were scared, and then she kept shooting us sneaky glances, as though to say, I know you don’t dare, you bunch of chicken-shits. I thought it was a great plan, though, and immediately started to



join in, saying we should build ourselves a boat – then it would really be summer.

Summer hadn't even arrived and we'd decided to build a boat.

The Headmistress & Mr. Yan Ping from Gansu

That term, two new faces appeared at school. One took over as Director of the Chinese department, a position which had been empty for a while. The other was Mr. Yan Ping, a volunteer teacher from mainland China. The Director was Taiwanese. He was about fifty, potbellied, double-chinned, and boorish; from a distance, you could mistake him for an angry lion. I heard he'd married a native. Mr. Yan Ping was a young guy from Gansu. He had very dark skin, and a flat, featureless face. He looked like a farmer, even when he was wearing the school uniform, which was pretty respectable. He had been specially requested by the headmistress, who wanted us to have a Chinese teacher from China. He had been on all sorts of joke teacher training courses, each of which came with its own sketchy certificate.

Mr. Yan Ping taught Chinese to the fifth- and sixth-grade students. When he first started, he was very enthusiastic, trying everything to hold the class's attention. It was no use. Before long, students were taking naps in class, or stretching out their toilet breaks by stopping in the cafeteria to buy cookies. Or, at their most brazen, taking out homework for other subjects. Mr. Yan Ping couldn't really speak English, and he had no Hokkien at all, so in class he was like a chicken trying to speak to room full of ducks. It made a terrible racket – him doing his thing, trying to talk over us as we did ours. He used to press me into translating his Chinese into English and Hokkien for my classmates. I didn't like doing it because it made me seem like a teacher's pet, and no one likes one of those. Before every class

I had to yell "Stand up!" "Sit down!" "Salute!" and so on. My classmates always completely ignored me, and I certainly didn't need that. Mr. Yan Ping's Chinese wasn't very standard. He didn't have those crazy "r" endings to his words like Beijingers do, or the soft "s" of a Southerner. He spoke a crude inland Chinese that sounded like someone chewing sand, or talking with a mouth full of boiled eggs. And he talked fast, with machine-gun speed, and it didn't take long for him to gun down the whole class.

Peter and I thought he was an idiot. How could he teach Chinese if he couldn't even speak it clearly?

One afternoon in Chinese class, the headmistress suddenly burst in out of the blue. She threw open the doors and eyed every student in the room. Then she pointed at Ji Xiang and asked him, in her punchy Chinese, "How many people in your family? How old are you? What's your favorite color? What time do you go to bed? Are you a boy or a girl?" Her questions were really basic, but there was something odd about them. In Taiwan, I would never just ask my friends "are you a boy or a girl." Her questions crept me out. Alicia and I exchanged a glance; clearly, more of us would suffer. Sure enough, after the headmistress had picked on several other classmates, it was Seung-seon's turn. He was huddled in a corner and stammered over his words the way a fat mouse gnaws on food, eventually getting out that there were five people in his family. Then the old bag asked who they were. He said there was him, his dad, his mom, his little sister—

"So there are only four of you?" The headmistress stared at Seung-seon, and then started to hurl insults at Mr. Yan Ping. "What are you teaching them? Why can't they even answer these simple questions?" Then she turned on her heel and stormed out. The Director skulked out behind her, giving us a look that said we'd better watch out. Chinese class got a whole lot harder after that.



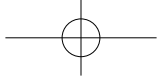
After school, Alicia, Peter and I pressed against the outside of the Chinese office and stealthily cracked open the door. We wanted to find out what punishment had befallen our classmates. Mr. Yan Ping, Ji Xiang, Seung-seon and the rest of them were standing in front of the Director's desk, heads bowed, brows furrowed, looking as sorry for themselves as if they'd had their faces rubbed in cow shit. Even once Seung-seon was let go, Mr. Yan Ping was still there being yelled at. I handed Seung-seon a Dalayan star apple in an attempt to calm him down, telling him that the headmistress was probably just depressed because she was going through menopause. He looked miserable, his eyebrows drawn tightly together and his narrow, squinty eyes looking almost like they'd been sewn shut. Alicia and I dragged him along to the school basketball court, and asked what exactly the Director had said. Seung-seon ripped open the star apple and licked out the white juice, then devoured the rest of it. He told us that, before the weekend, he had to memorise a twenty sentence presentation about himself, otherwise he'd have to stay behind for a cram class on Saturday. Peter went to get four milk ice creams; these cheered Seung-seon up. As we ate, we drilled him in Chinese; we couldn't let a silly little thing like this hold up the much more important matter of building our boat. At five-thirty, Seung-seon's family driver was by the school gates, standing very straight in his western suit, quietly insisting, "Young sir, it's time to go home." I fished out some chocolate biscuits from my bookbag and gave them to Seung-seon, while Alicia produced two pieces of mango candy from her pocket. We didn't want Seung-seon to stress over some meaningless twenty-sentence presentation in Chinese.

Alicia's Market Cry

Seung-seon, Peter, and I walked over to Thief-Go. Once out of Dalayan, we followed the dead-

straight Tomato Street due east, crossing the filthy San Francisco River and heading towards Frisco Place, up a steep asphalt road. A row of tricycle taxis waiting for customers crowded the left shoulder, the drivers lazing across the back seats, yawning and lethargic. To the right quite a few little lanes led off to Damayan and San Francisco del Monte. Both these areas are technically part of Thief-Go, although they aren't officially recognized as such: they aren't properly enclosed, don't have twenty-four hour guards on duty, and there's garbage strewn all over the place. Peter's mom was always warning him not to go there; she said it was a dangerous slum and an easy place to get robbed.

I walked ahead, with Seung-seon and Peter trailing nervously behind. We turned down one of the small lanes on the right. Thief-Go is definitely not a slum, just a place where a lot of the natives live. They let the pavement and houses fall apart, let their trash spill out in the street and go to the bathroom wherever they feel like it. It was a hot day, and the local men had stripped down to their underpants. The women were more restrained, but still went around in crop tops and tiny shorts that showed off their sturdy thighs. And the little kids were running about bare-assed, not a stitch on them. As we got closer to Thief-Go, the jeepneys started to thin out, while the crowds of tricycles and people increased. By the side of the street, an old man hugging a pile of fresh coconuts napped underneath a telegraph pole, while another group of old people pushed tricycles loaded with bananas into a shady corner. The women who ran the grocery stores were cooling off in front of electric fans. Greasy black smoke rose up from the barbeque stands, filling the air with the delicious smell of roasting meat.



AVALON'S QUEST

H.A.



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XERSES

薛西斯

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Xerses is one of the most exciting young novelists in Taiwan's science fiction/mystery community. Deeply inspired by Soji Shimada's *The Tokyo Zodiac Murders*, Xerses is dedicated to incorporating the finest logical intrigue into her stories. Her novel *Lotus Reborn* won a Bronze Medal in the 2013 Kadokawa Fiction Awards.



*** Shortlisted for the 2015 Kavalan Soji Shimada Mystery Award**

Full virtual reality has come to the world of online gaming, and the mother of all MMORPGs, a game called H.A., is still sitting on the sidelines. Li Shih-Chuang, the game’s Executive Producer, has locked horns with a new production consultant hired from outside, Chu Cheng-Bi. The two decide to let the game settle their dispute: The winner becomes the new producer, and the loser leaves the company.

Li and Chu, together with their own teams, venture into the virtual world of H.A. to start up a game of detectives and assassins on a global scale. The “assassin” and her two associates have to make targeted hits without being discovered, while the “detectives” must do everything they can to stay alive.



AVALON'S QUEST

By Xerses. Translated by Josh Dyer.

Prologue

Do you know what death feels like?

The world goes quiet. You no longer hear the wind. You are no longer aware of your body. The transparent sky seems coated with peppermint syrup. Clouds rise and fall in the vaulted heavens. All that is left of you is a pair of eyes suspended in space.

The last thing Chu Cheng-Bi saw was a dragonfly that had landed on the tip of her nose. The intricate lattice of its glassy wings split her world into a thousand shards. Her vision blurred, and she felt she was sinking in a pool of quicksand. All colors slowly melted together until, finally, even the eyes hanging in space disappeared.

Chu Cheng-Bi yanked out her data link and pushed open the capsule door.

Her body was damp with a light coat of sweat, and her mouth felt dry. An unpleasant odor hung in the air, though it was so faint that she hardly noticed. She went into the changing room, and, after patting herself dry, changed back into her original clothes. She checked her messages. One missed call and a message from Anah: "I'm waiting in the main hall."

Outside the capsule room, Sun Cheng-He from the design department waited to escort her out, passing the time by playing marbles on his

pad. Seeing Chu Cheng-Bi exit, he switched off the screen and greeted her.

"How did it feel this time?"

"Are you trying to sell this game to Buddhist monks?"

Sun Cheng-He laughed. "What do you mean?"

"After I died I lay there for a full five minutes. Talk about transcending life and death. If that's not enlightenment, tell me what is. Or maybe it's just that *petite mort* thing the French are always talking about."

"No need to talk dirty." Sun Cheng-He laughed, as cheerful as ever. "In any case, it couldn't have been that long. Eight to twelve seconds at most. Once the payment system connects you should see a popup asking if you want to resurrect. It has to be quick, because that's how we make money in H.A.."

"My recommendation is that you disconnect the visuals during the wait. It's pretty gross to sit there and watch a dragonfly nibbling on the nose of your corpse."

"If the player is already dead I'm not sure I see the point." Sun Cheng-He laughed before continuing. "I, for one, am glad you died. If you had finished the game without dying I'd have to pack up shop and leave the business."

"Relax. Even in action games I'm only rated S-level."

Sun Cheng-He escorted Chu Cheng-Bi to the main hall on the first floor, where she immediately caught sight of the back of a familiar figure seated in the reception area. Anah



looked dressed for a funeral, with his usual stiff black overcoat, and raven-black hair cut just above his shoulders. He and Chu Cheng-Bi were old colleagues, and comrades-in-arms.

“It looks like someone is waiting for you.”

“He’s a friend.”

“All right, I’ll leave you here, then.”

Sun Cheng-He made some polite parting remarks then returned to his office. Chu Cheng-Bi walked up behind Anah and tapped him on the shoulder.

“You cut your hair.”

Anah took out his earphones. They hadn’t seen each other in about two months; Chu Cheng-Bi had heard he was overseas on sabbatical. Though he had been in the south, he didn’t have a tan. If anything, he was paler than before, even to the point of looking sickly.

“Yup. Everything seems lighter since I cut it. Even my mood.”

“That’s good.” Chu Cheng-Bi smiled. “You always have to look to the future.”

They left Building 1. Behind them the silver tower gleamed in the sunlight like a chrome-plated machine, cold, sharp, and silent. Anah swiped his card at a turnstile and a few minutes later a black Rolling-Sprinter pulled into the loading zone. Anah opened the door and waved Chu Cheng-Bi into the car.

The Rolling-Sprinter flew along the roads through the heart of the metropolis.

“So, how was the game?”

“The balancing was very good. The level of detail is staggering, especially the rendering of characters. You can hardly tell who is a real person.”

“Maybe they need to make some kind of Voight-Kampff test¹ for the GM tools.”

Chu Cheng-Bi turned away to laugh. “No

need. I’ve got my own Voight-Kampff test.”

“Really? How does it work?”

“You ask them, ‘Are you human?’ If they are another game tester, they’ll answer with an earnest, ‘Yes.’”

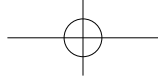
“And if they’re an AI?”

“Then they stare at you like you’re completely crazy.” Chu Cheng-Bi smiled faintly. “They’re just fish in a tiny aquarium, but they think they’re swimming in an ocean.”

Of all the characters in the game, Li Shih-Chuang’s favorite was undoubtedly the templar Avalon, also known as the Silver Unicorn. He was said to have a touch of fairy blood – hence the long, tapered ears, and the head of soft golden hair. An ornamental horn adorned the front of his helmet. Some said it was there to cover the actual horn that grew from the heads of the fairy folk. This and the silver armor he wore earned him the epithet the Silver Unicorn. The appellation described more than just his appearance – the unicorn was also a fitting symbol of Avalon’s lofty and dignified temperament.

Li Shih-Chuang didn’t know why he found Avalon so appealing. Perhaps it was because Avalon was the first character his teacher had designed. Perhaps it was Avalon’s righteousness and gentle demeanor. Or maybe it was simply that Avalon had left such a strong impression during their first encounter inside H.A.. Li Shih-Chuang had been playing a knight serving under Avalon. The templar had said little, but when he spoke, Li Shih-Chuang payed close attention to his blue eyes. They sparkled like sunlight on the surface of a clean, blue sea, making Li Shih-Chuang a bit dizzy, as if he was about pitch forward into their depths. That was his first impression of Avalon.

¹ The Voight-Kampff test is a fictional test used to distinguish humans from life-like androids, first introduced in the sci-fi novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Phillip K. Dick, better known through the film adaptation *Blade Runner*.



Intermission – Game Rules

1. The Detective and Assassin groups each consist of three players.
2. If all surviving Detectives reach the City of Nine Wolves in the North, the Detectives win.
3. The Assassins must kill the Detectives in the PvE zone where players cannot normally be killed. If a kill takes place in a PvP zone, the Assassins automatically lose.²
4. The Assassins can only carry out a kill while the victim is online.
5. Every time the Assassins perform a kill, the Detectives will have seven days to determine how the assassination was carried out. If they are able to crack the case during this investigation period, the game continues. If they fail to crack the case, the Assassins have won.
6. If any Detectives remain alive when the game ends, the Detectives win.
7. If all Detectives are assassinated, the game ends. The Detectives will still be allowed seven days in which to investigate the final killing. If they can determine how they final killing was carried out, the Detectives win.
8. During the seven-day investigation period, players on both teams must cease all activities unrelated to the investigation. No players are allowed to move toward the City of Nine Wolves, or within any other game area during this time.
9. Detectives cannot resurrect after death.
10. Detectives are forbidden from accessing the gamelogs of any of the six heroes played by either group. Should the Detectives violate this rule, they forfeit the game.

² PvE denotes “Player vs. Environment.” PvP denotes “Player vs. Player.” These terms designate game areas in which combat between human players is either forbidden or allowed. PvE areas allow weaker players a safe zone in which to build their skills and experience playing against graded AI opponents without fear of being attacked by more powerful players.

H.A. Referee and Executive Producer, Sun Cheng-He

Act 1

Feast Day for the Punishment of the Silver Unicorn

“This is the Capsule Room, where they keep all the machines for beta testing. In the back there is a special lab set aside for our project.”

“A special lab...”

“Yes. The servers for H.A. are kept separate from all other products.”

Chu Cheng-Bi raised her gaze slightly towards the cameras embedded in the ceiling. A bell sounded as the cameras captured a retinal image, and a crack appeared in the fortified wall in front of them. A robotic voice spoke: “ID Number 20144, H.A. Special Project Producer Chu Cheng-Bi.”

“Show your fingerprints to register,” Chu Cheng-Bi said.

Lynx and Anah raised their right hands. The reinforced glass wall split and rotated like a set of vertical blinds, revealing a dozen or so openings, each wide enough to admit a single person. They entered the inspection corridors and the results of infrared body-scans appeared on screens in front of them.

“A little heavy-handed on the security, don’t you think?”

Like travelers in customs, they passed through a few more inspection stations before finally entering the 6th floor Capsule Room. Snow-white VR capsules stretched out in front of them, like a row of gleaming coffins stood on end. It was only fitting that the man stationed in front of the capsules should be dressed in a somber black suit.

Li Shih-Chuang glanced at Anah and Lynx. “So, this is your team?”



Chu Cheng-Bi nodded.

Lynx couldn't pass up a quick jab: "What was the point of all that security if you're going to interrogate us in person?"

"Have them get changed. If their street clothes are too restrictive they won't be comfortable in the capsules."

"Shouldn't I introduce them first?"

"That won't be necessary. It's not my business whom you've selected for your team, as long as they've signed the non-disclosure agreements. Nothing you see here today can be leaked outside. Understood?"

Chu Cheng-Bi wasn't pleased with Li Shih-Chuang's lack of decorum, but if he noticed her anger, he didn't show it. He motioned her team towards the changing rooms, and turned to her. "You run along, too. You'll sweat to death if you enter the capsule all dolled up like that."

It was true, she was dressed to the nines. When she wasn't meeting with the Board of Directors, Chu Cheng-Bi preferred cocktail dresses, high heels, and heavy makeup.

"Worry about yourself and that funeral director monkey suit you're wearing!"

Li Shih-Chuang peeled off his coat gracefully, revealing a heavily starched white work shirt.

"Don't worry about Shih-Chuang. He is quite accustomed to his perversely uncomfortable fashion choices."

It was only then that Chu Cheng-Bi noticed the two others in the room – most likely Li Shih-Chuang's team. The tall thin man who had spoke introduced himself with a smile.

"You can call me Ah Yi. And this is Lao Ju. We're Shih-Chuang's team, all design engineers. Shih-Chuang and I work in AI, and Lao Ju is a topographer."

Lao Ju, shorter than Ah Yi by a head, greeted Chu Cheng-Bi with an uncomfortable nod.

Chu Cheng-Bi felt herself relax somewhat. It looked like these two would be much easier to

get along with than Li Shih-Chuang.

"Nice to meet you both. I'm the new producer, Chu Cheng-Bi. My teammates are Anah and Lynx."

Ah Yi smiled playfully. "Li Shih-Chuang told us quite clearly that you are only a producer if you survive the competition!"

Chu Cheng-Bi returned the smile. "That is true, technically."

At that moment, Lynx emerged from the changing room. She had dressed casually, and only needed to swap her jeans for a pair of loose cotton pants.

"Aren't you changing, Cheng-Bi?"

Chu Cheng-Bi pulled off her heels in a huff, looking for all the world like a child beauty pageant star standing barefoot on the tile floor. "I'll be fine like this," she said.

"Put your heels away," Li Shih-Chuang said coldly.

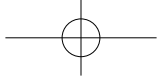
Anah had changed both his shirt and pants. Standing by one of the white capsules he couldn't help but reach out and trace its smooth surface with his hands.

Lynx sighed in disbelief. "What year is this, anyhow? I never thought we'd be using these old-style capsules."

VR-MMO equipment had long-since evolved into an extremely light and portable form. 3D monitors could be installed in a pair of eyeglasses, and the latest ZBOX console fit on a pair of bracelets. As long as you didn't mind looking like a fool, you could enter a fantasy universe on any street corner you wanted.

"These things are straight out of early 21st century movie. What was the name of that one? They put a guy in one of these old capsules and he woke up in a big blue alien body..."

Chu Cheng-Bi knew the movie Lynx meant, but she didn't respond.



THE ROCKING SKY

天空的情書



©Luke Huang

TOMMY TAN

譚端

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-

Tommy Tan is a man who wears many hats: reporter, historical researcher, documentary filmmaker, translator, and bookseller. He is the author of *Torches, Exile, and Old Officers*, which describes the lives of enlisted men in the early Taiwanese army. He translates crime fiction and fantasy, and has opened Taiwan's first genre fiction bookstore, Murder Ink.



The Taiwanese documentary *The Rocking Sky* tells the story of the airmen of the Chinese Republican Army who battled the Japanese in World War II and covered the retreat to Taiwan during the ensuing civil war. Of that whole first cohort of courageous pilots, fewer than ten survived into the 21st century. Documentary filmmaker Tommy Tan set out to ensure their stories survived.

The Rocking Sky is Tan's own written account of the making of that documentary. He tells the stories of his filmmaking team members and of the filmmaking process, a painstaking task similar to building a mosaic piece by piece. Into this story he weaves his own historical research of the war years in China, as well as the very personal tales told by the aging pilots and their families.

With its multi-faceted narrative, deeply nuanced historical perspective, and beautifully empathetic human connection, *The Rocking Sky* is a moving, inspiring companion work to one of Taiwan's best-known historical documentaries.



THE ROCKING SKY

By Tommy Tan. Translated by Roddy Flagg.

Hangzhou South Road, 2014

The production office for *The Rocking Sky* was on the top floor of an office building at the corner of Hangzhou South Road and Xuzhou Road. The building stands near the heart of the Republic of China government, not far from the Legislative Yuan, the Executive Yuan, the Control Yuan, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education.

Twenty-four years ago these streets bore witness as democratic reforms transformed Taiwan. When legislators who had held their seats for half a century were finally ushered out to make way for a new generation, they left to the shouts of student protesters outside Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall. The Xinhai Revolution may have broken out in Wuhan, the government founded in Nanjing, but it was here that the Republic of China saw democracy truly take root.

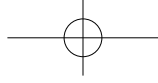
This city was at the vanguard of those reforms. The first true representatives of the people since the Wuhan uprising were chosen here, and after years of hard work, people could protest on these streets without fear of violent suppression. For the first time there was freedom of speech, and a new generation of citizens emerged.

The student protests of the Sunflower Movement were only a month gone when we started filming *The Rocking Sky*. For more than two decades these

streets had seen it all – new ideas, new opinions, new ideologies. Taiwanese society is used to these voices now. Victorious electoral candidates, no matter their ideological stance, come here to show what they can do, how they can use their views to change the nation, yet each stands opposed to the use of violence to achieve their aims. After a century of learning and the sacrifice of countless lives, Taiwan's constitutional democracy now stands firm.

But Taiwan is home to vastly different experiences of our nation's past. Some regard our history on the Chinese mainland as irrelevant. Others appear to have been desensitized to the feelings of the native Taiwanese by their own historical trauma, as evidenced by the insensitive and inappropriate slogans that fill official speeches on memorial holidays. To be fair, this government would have faced even more complex cultural, territorial, demographic, and ethnic problems on the mainland than in Taiwan. Taiwan's new generation of citizens simply cannot see the trials its government has experienced over the last century.

That forgetting, that selective memory marks a reversal for democracy, not an advance. The old era dissolves as that generation passes on, while the new era remains uncertain and unpredictable. Ever-changing forms of new media fragment our attention; social dislocation leaves a generation unsure of its identity; differences between individual and collective memories cause further identity issues.



If we object to the Republican government's total removal of all traces of Japanese colonialism, we must also bemoan Japan's earlier destruction of the temples and walls of an ancient Chinese city, which they replaced with a semi-modern city that kept the Taiwanese themselves at the margins. As in every other dynastic change in Chinese history, they demolished the relics and rules of the old government and ghettoized its people. We should not close our minds to our own history, but much less should we impose our own views on those who do not share our experiences. We should listen attentively to each other's stories.

The research team for *The Rocking Sky* was made up of both native Taiwanese and those of mainland origin. Realizing that none of us were over fifty years of age, we guarded against problems our lack of knowledge or perspective might cause. There was plenty for us to learn.

CNEX is a non-profit organization funded by donations and staffed by documentary lovers from mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. It has already recorded, both on film and in writing, much of the development of Chinese society.

But money was limited, so the organization avoided excess and practiced frugality. Our office was an older building, dating back to the 70's or 80's, and dimly lit by flickering fluorescent strips – think 1960's Hong Kong as portrayed by Wong Kar-wai. The water-damaged wallpaper peeled at the corners; anything with paint on it was speckled and discolored. Summer downpours would flood the balcony; if the rain came too fast and heavy it would wash into the office, forcing us to mount relief efforts.

From one side of the balcony you could see all the government buildings; from the other, the concrete jungle of office buildings stretching from Zhongzheng to Daan District. When the rain came, the city would be lost to mist.

The office was crammed with young filmmakers, all throwing themselves into this early 21st century documentary movement. Perhaps they felt, as I once did, that to record is to lay the foundation for science and civilization. One could compare films they make to the collected miscellanies of the pre-modern age: when future historians find no more reliable sources, they will take these as evidence.

“We need to make a list of interviewees, get in touch with them, then carry out a phone interview and make a first assessment.”

Chang Chao-Wei lays out project assignments and a projected schedule. Chang is a workaholic, one of the few people I know who's been doing this for years and not lost sight of his ideals. You'll rarely, if ever, hear him express complaints or disappointment. He's one of those who channel positive energy, always enthusiastic about documentaries and whatever is happening in society. His work brings him into contact with all types of people, and he treats each one with genuine kindness and respect, whether he likes them or not. I know no other filmmaker who is so easy-going and friendly.

Documentary-making is a huge, disorderly process, but can be divided roughly into pre-production, production, and post-production. Pre-production for *The Rocking Sky* required gathering and analyzing historical material. Chang Chao-Wei has a background in historical research, but it soon became apparent there was no way he could master the history of the Sino-Japanese War and the Air Force's role in it quickly enough. He needed a Japanese speaker and a historian to bring the team up to speed, and that's how Mao and Japanese scholar Li Shang-Lin joined the team. Mao had done research for an earlier documentary, *Attabu*; Li Shang-Lin was an assistant professor of Japanese. They helped Chang identify key historical documents.



The team got to work, some of us tracking down documents, others tracking down people. Any possible lead we followed up, any possible favor we called in. Chang compiled a list of possible interviewees – those who had been pilots in the early years of the war – and was able to get some help from various organizations.

Once all possible sources had been located he drew up a list and laid it on the table. There were fewer than ten names. Some we were unable to reach, perhaps because contact details could be years out of date. There was no way of knowing how many of these men were still alive. Veterans of that war have long since bowed off the stage of history – indeed, society has changed so much the stage itself has moved.

Chang's first interviewee was Wei Hsien-Wen, aged 97. Any documentary filmmaker knows that elderly interviewees need to be spoken to as soon as possible. This one became the team's top priority.

Wei lived in public housing in Taipei's Songshan District. He welcomed the film crew with a smile from his reclining chair. He was in good health for a man approaching one hundred, but we regretted not arriving several years earlier. It's not just the body that goes as your age – the memory goes with it. Even in our seventies, some of us begin telling stories over and over. Perhaps the gradual failure of memory and cognitive capability in old age causes our perception of the outside world to fragment, and thus we tell and retell stories in order to confirm what we know to be true.

Chang settled in and began the interview: "How did you come to join the Air Force?"

Wei's hearing was poor, and family members sitting beside him repeated the question more loudly. He recalled a Japanese-occupied Beiping, but his mind soon took him back to Taiwan – his memories were overlapping, blending into one another with no sense of sequence. I saw Chang

was as lost as I was, but we soon realized our elderly interviewee's memories were confused.

We were able to pick out those parts that made chronological sense and rearrange them: In early 1937 he had traveled from his Shanxi home to take university entrance exams in Beiping. The inn he was staying at was busy, and he realized the other guests – Japanese-speaking, clad in civilian clothes but with military haircuts and bearing – were Japanese soldiers. Wei, only 18, was shy and spent his days reading, and they left him alone. But he felt frustrated at the sight of his own country occupied by foreign forces. The streets of Beiping were becoming increasingly volatile, and Wei decided it was too dangerous for him to stay there alone. University would have to wait – he packed up and headed home.

In Taiyuan the Air Force Academy was recruiting. It didn't take him long to decide; by that point the Japanese had garrisons throughout China and were to be seen everywhere, to the indignation of patriotic young men like Wei. He signed up. Not long after he enrolled, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident occurred.

Taiyuan was a parched and desolate place, sandwiched between loess hills and a muddy river. Coal soot blackened the face of anyone who spent a day outside. Rain turned the roads on the outskirts to rivers of mud, but at least made the air cleaner. The Japanese were advancing further, the war spreading. The Imperial Japanese Army's Fifth Division, led by Seishiro Itagaki, had taken Datong and would soon capture Taiyuan. Panic was everywhere. An uncertain future, approaching war, and streets filled with unruly soldiers prompted many to flee for safer locales. Their single and unlikely hope was that their government could repel the Japanese, but it wasn't enough to risk staying. The roads clogged with refugees, the old and weak, women and children, all being dragged onwards.



The thunder of explosions from the nearby hills rolled over them in waves, punctuated by the screaming of car horns and engine whistles. The sight brought righteous tears to the cheeks of the Shanxi people. Young men like Wei decided it was time to show what they were made of.

Still only eighteen, on the eve of the war he reported to the air force academy, which had relocated to Nanchang. At this point in his recollections Wei became confused – had he gone to Nanchang first, then Yunnan, or to Beiping and Shenyang? (Beiping and Shenyang were in Japanese hands at that point, so that wasn't possible.)

“My first time in a plane...it was terrible, two other planes were hit. One didn't make it back, the plane was lost, the pilot was lost, the field it crashed into was lost. It was autumn then, who knows where the plane ended up.”

Wei's recollections were almost poetic – full of overlapping images and repeated memories, like a film edited to produce some particular effect. We became caught up in his retellings of missions over occupied territory between Beiping and Shenyang. But we were having trouble making sense of it all, until...

“We were in Shenyang for a year or two, fighting on Siping Street, then we retreated to Beiping and kept going south, to Hankou and then Taiwan.”

Then it became clear – he was mixing up memories of the war against the Communists and the war against the Japanese.

Chang Chao-Wei returned to the present and looked over at me. I could see what he was thinking: Wei's memories were a mess, sometimes clear and sometimes confused. But he was also one of the few surviving veterans of the Fourteenth Air Division, and we couldn't just give up. And then suddenly Wei came back to us:

“I was single then, no commitments. I had no home – few of us did at that time. The Japanese had taken them. I didn't know what

had happened to my family. Out of every ten of us, five or six had no home to go back to. So we followed the army – that was home, and we went where it went. You couldn't get a letter from anywhere held by the Japanese, so I went six or seven years with no word from my family. After we won the war I went home once, but just a day or two later I had to leave again. The civil war had started and I had to get back to my unit before it was moved, or I wouldn't know where to find it.”

Zhang jumped in to take advantage of this moment of coherence: “Were you scared when you were flying missions?”

“When we were flying Russian planes, they weren't so good, the engines kept smoking,” Wei answered, his voice clear despite his age. “The American B25 we were unsure of at first, but it proved itself a fine plane. But I wasn't worried about whether I'd live or die, didn't think about what might happen on any particular mission. If you came back you came back. If you didn't, you didn't.”

Wei also found love in that time of war. His future wife had been in her final year at Guangxi Middle School when the province fell and she fled to a friend's place in Chongqing. Later Wei's squadron was posted to Liangshan County, a day's journey from the city by river. “We met a few times in Chongqing and she set her heart on me, so we got married.”

Their wedding photo shows two Chinese youths, both aged beyond their years by the hardships they'd seen. They were married in 1945; by the time we had finished our documentary, the two had been together for seventy years.



CATS OF THE FLOATING WORLD

浮世貓繪



©Luke Huang

MS. CAT 貓小姐

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-

Famed pet columnist and cat lady Ms. Cat is also an award winning cartoonist, and her experience raising cats informs and enriches every detail of her images. She has published several illustrations in various magazines, as well as other books, such as *Behind Your Cat's Back*, *The Kitty Purchase Platform*, and *Kitty Instruction Manual*.



Ms. Cat's latest work of picture book purr-fection is a pictorial narrative of the feline world in the style of medieval Japanese *ukiyo-e*, the colored woodblock prints of everyday life that are famous throughout the world. Follow our cat characters through all four seasons – spring, summer, autumn, winter – as they live, work, learn, and play.

The aesthetic brilliance of this book's presentation makes it a delight for young people and adults alike. Simple, strong lines and bright colors invoke an ethereal world, in which readers can immediately lose themselves.



Kitty School

All at home is quiet, because the kitties have gone to school.

Lesson number one has started:

How to eat a fish.

*How to lick it clean from head to tail,
one perfect skeleton for teacher, to prove you've done it well.*

*But there are too many distractions for a kitty,
frogs and butterflies and flowers and falling leaves.*

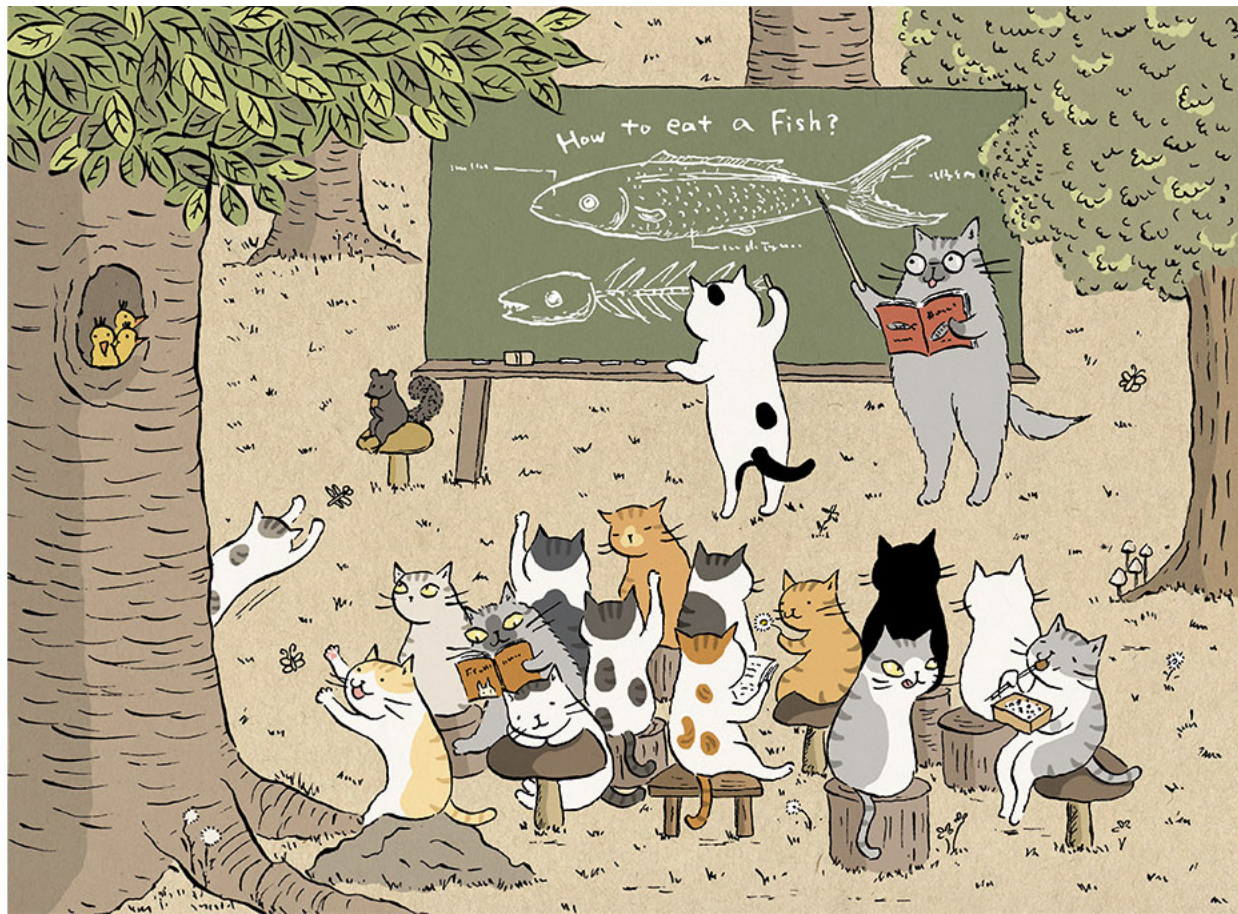
*Not to mention the delicious smell of the food that Mama Cat made.
Two hours left 'til lunch? Kitty takes a little bite.
The fish, Mama can do for me.*

Moggy's Fruit

*So many kitties want to work at
Moggy's Fruit, they'll even do it for free.
They come for interview and try to impress the boss,
all because they want to make
empty crates, their beds.*

*Cherry , mango , watermelon,
in small, medium and large.
Once the fruit is stacked, the crates are filled
with contented sleeping cats.*

*Five for eighty, thirty for a pound.
Eyelids grow heavy to the sound of
offers being made.*





Let's Get Away

*The tinkle of the wind chime wakes
the cats from their summer slumbers.
A shiver of pleasure from nose to tail, paws
outstretched.*

*Up whips the wind, eyelashes defend
as autumn ruffles through their coats.
Before soft fronds are carried away they turn
to invite falling leaves to join them.*

*Autumn is perfect for going travelling,
so thinks the little kitty.
But he doesn't move because
for cats, the smell of barbeque and the taste
of an afternoon nap,
are enough to take them to the Temple of the Sphinx
or out into the universe.*

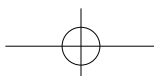
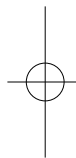
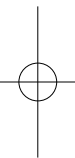
First Snow

*The first dusting of snow
falls during the silent hour of dawn.
Push back the paper door, take your place on the veranda,
pour a cup of tea and nestle under a blanket:
the best place from which to take in the scene.*

*Only the most sensitive of kitties
can hear the sound of flakes
settling on the pine, the rocks and the water's surface.
Make a wish, and legend has it, the snow will make it true.*

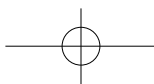
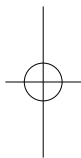
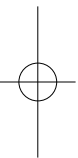
*Kitties warm their paws
by the under-table heater.
The only sound to break
the silence,
is the snap and crumble of wafers.*







BOOKS FROM TAIWAN
Backlist Highlights





SICHUAN PEPPERS

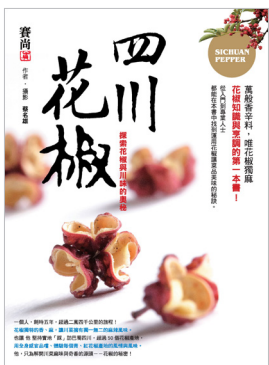
四川花椒



TSAI MING-HSIUNG

蔡明雄

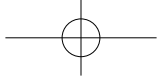
Tsai Ming-Hsiung is the founder of the publishing company Tsai's Idea, and one of Taiwan's premier food photographers. He has been involved in the design of several cookbooks and food culture books, including *Five-color Eating for Health*, *Cheng Yen-Chi: Taiwan's Master Chef*, *Simple Ingredients*, *Healthy Food*, and others. He's received several Gourmand World Cookbook Awards.



Any Chinese food connoisseur knows that true Sichuanese spiciness isn't just heat – it's that tingling numbness on the lips and tongue which sets the stage for other flavors. That sensation, known in Chinese as *ma*, is produced by chemicals from the Sichuan peppercorn. Understanding this tiny treasure is Tsai Ming-Hsiung's mission: he interviewed chefs and scientists, and traveled to over fifty farms in Sichuan province in order to learn everything he could about the Sichuan peppercorn. He presents us with his findings here, in this beautifully-designed volume.

Find everything you need to know about this jewel of Chinese cooking, defined in scientific terms and displayed in beautiful photographs. Is your mouth watering yet? Start cooking!

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- Rights contact: Grace Chang (Books from Taiwan)
booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
- Pages: 320
- Length: 200,000 characters (approx. 13,000 words in English)



SICHUAN PEPPERS

By Tsai Ming-Hsiung. Translated by Jojo Chen.

The Science Behind the Spice

From a scientific standpoint, the Sichuan pepper owes its fragrance and flavor to the chemical makeup of its essential oil, known to chemists as a volatile oil, and as part of a larger group of aromatic oils. It is composed primarily of terpenoids and aromatic compounds. The aromatic compounds are themselves quite complicated, and include chemical structures such as linalool, sabinene, β -myrcene, α -pinene, limonene, α -thujone, α -thujene, 4-terpineol, β -pinene, geraniol, α -terpinolene, α -terpineol, nerolidol, linalyl acetate, piperitol, β -thujone, and several other micro-constituents.

The oil's mouth-numbing spiciness (*ma*) is produced by compounds known as sanshools, the building blocks of the infamous hotness-rating scale called the Scoville Scale. Sichuan pepper oil contains α -sanshool, β -sanshool, γ -sanshool, and α -sanshoamide, along with volatile elements such as piperitone and palmitic acid.

These aromatic and flavonoid compounds generally account for 4% to 7% of the weight of an individual pepper.

In the section that follows, we'll be classifying the flavor of the Sichuan pepper under five different headings: pomelo, citrus, orange, lime, and lemon. One may ask, why are they all citrus fruit flavors? The answer is simple: plants of the genus *Zanthoxylum* and genus *Citrus* both belong to the Rutaceae family, and their flavonoid makeups are similar. Differences between them are determined by chemical ratios or made distinct by certain components.

For instance, the essential oils in citrus peel contain limonene, myrcene, α -pinene, β -pinene,

α -Terpinene, linalool, and so on. Many of the aromatic components are also found in Sichuan pepper oil. The difference in smell between the two is the result of different compound ratios. Take linalool, a crucial aromatic compound in both oils, for example: Sichuan pepper oil is mostly linalool, and the ratio of linalool to limonene (another important aromatic compound) is nearly 5:1. Citrus peel, by contrast, is mostly limonene; its ratio of linalool to limonene stands around 1:8.

Given this principle, the best way to recognize and classify unfamiliar aromas is to contextualize them in terms of familiar ones.

The same process applies in our quest to better understand the multitude of flavors the pepper provides. After five years of on-site research at pepper farms in Sichuan, I've established nineteen different aromatic/flavor categories that can be recognized comparatively by most of us. These categories should make it much easier to detect and understand the Sichuan pepper's distinctive bouquet.



MEIYI'S "MAMA STYLE"

徐玫怡的 Mother Style



HSU MEIYI

徐玫怡

Hsu Meiyi is a maven of creative invention. She is a songwriter, an illustrator, DIY expert, columnist, and professional mother. Her 1998 picture book, *Diary Exchanges*, done in collaboration with Chang Miao-Ju, was so successful in Taiwan that the two continued it for eighteen subsequent volumes. *Mama Style* is a collection of Hsu's syndicated column "Toys for the Home," which appears in *Parenting* magazine.



Taiwan's #1 writing housewife Hsu Meiyi's newest book describes her experiences moving back from France to Taiwan with her French husband and young son. Conflicts abound for this young mother as she settles herself and her son in her parents' home: interacting with his grandparents, finding him a good school, even getting him out of bed all develop into colorful dramas full of excitement, compassion, and blood-boiling frustration! Hsu Meiyi's own illustrations throw the many vicissitudes of motherhood and family life into vivid, sometimes hilarious detail.

Listen up! Taiwan's queen of creative homemaking Hsu Meiyi has stories that will ring true for anyone who has ever been a parent.

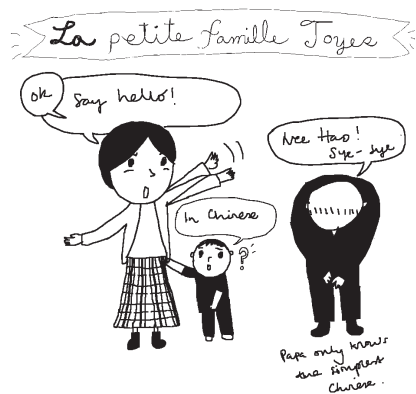
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MEIYI'S "MAMA STYLE"

By Hsu Mei-yi. Translated by Kao Ai-Ying.

Style 01 Back in Taiwan



It wasn't easy bringing my son back to Taiwan, but after seven years away from home, I can finally be with him in a place I know best.



Of Course It Matters!

Readers who haven't lived overseas before probably don't know, but shrewd Taiwanese girls like me who live abroad usually possess excellent foreign language skills and incredible professional capabilities. Otherwise, we end up staying home studying recipes.



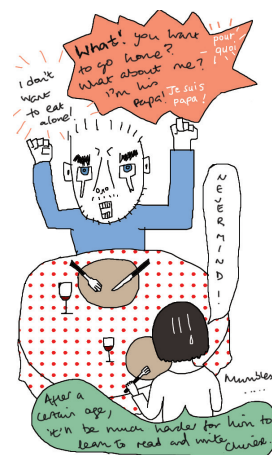
I lived like this for several years. As my son slowly grew up, I couldn't escape feelings of regret.

I felt like my son only saw one version of his mother. The other version – the free, localized, liberated side – had remained concealed.



I didn't care; I was going to bring my son back to my hometown so he could see and experience the place I loved.

But this kind of decision requires willpower. There was no way that I could get my husband to go to Taiwan. This was a major obstacle right from the start.



With my plan already set, I looked on retreat as a prelude to advancement.

