



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

<http://booksfromtaiwan.moc.gov.tw/>

Published by Ministry of Culture (MOC)

Minister | Yuan Li

Deputy Minister | Ching-Hwi Lee

Director | Ting-Chen Yang

Deputy Director | Yu-Ying Chu

Organizers | Wen-Ting Chen, Yu-Lin Chen, Chu-Yun Chiang

Address | 14 F., No. 439, Zhongping Road (South Building), Xinzhuang District, New Taipei City, Taiwan

Website | <https://www.moc.gov.tw/en/>

Telephone | +886-2-8512-6000

Email | bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Editorial Team of Books from Taiwan

Managing Director | Gray Tan, Jade Fu

Editor-in-Chief | Joshua Dyer

Editor | Jeff Miller

Translator | Jeff Miller, Joshua Dyer

Production Manager | Itzel Hsu

Copyeditor | Bernie Yang, Itzel Hsu, Rita Wang, Wan-Ling Cheng

Editorial Consultants | Emily Ching-Chun Chuang, Joanne Yang, Kim Pai, Patience Chuang, Sean Hsu, Ting-Chen Yang, Yu-Ying Chu

Cover Design | FLICCA Studio

Design and Layout | Wei-Jie Hong

Issue | Issue 20 Vol.2, Autumn 2025

Publication Date | November 10, 2025

ISSN | 2410-0781

© Books from Taiwan, Autumn 2025

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior permission in writing of Books from Taiwan, or as expressly permitted by the law. Inquiries concerning reproduction should be sent to MOC (+886-2-8512-6000).

CONTENTS

About MOC & Books from Taiwan	6
Grant for the Publication of Taiwanese Works in Translation	8
Editor's Preface	10

Fiction

PHANTASMIC PERFUME	14
by Ku Nai-Fang • translated by Qing Zhao • published by Yuan-Liou	
TRIVIAL ACTS OF VIOLENCE	20
by Chan Wai • translated by Fion Tse • published by Ecus	
BOUNDLESS HORIZONS.....	26
by Kuei Chun Miya • translated by Mary King Bradley • published by Linking	
MORE THAN WORDS	32
by Kit Fang • translated by Catherine Xinxin Yu • published by Yuan-Liou	
END OF DAYS.....	38
by Huang Wun-Syuan • translated by Sahana Narayan • published by Gaea	
ADORABLE ENEMIES	44
by Hsieh Yi-An • translated by Sahana Narayan • published by Locus	
THE SHATTERED SLUGGER AND OTHER STORIES	50
by Chen Shang-Chi • translated by Joel Martinson • published by ThinKingDom	
TARO, THE PENSIVE PUSS.....	56
by Wang Yu-Hua • translated by Jack Hargreaves • published by Yuan-Liou	

THE INNER VOICE SHOP62
by Misa • translated by Helen Wang • published by Crown

SEX PESTS AND RAPISTS68
by Linea • translated by Alex Woodend • published by Fantasy Foundation

Non-Fiction

OVERFITTING.....76
by Terao Tetsuya • translated by Kevin Wang • published by Linking

FOG ALERT.....82
by Yang Limin • translated by Catherine Xinxin Yu • published by Chiu Ko

HANDBOOK FOR HEALING88
by Chiang Pei-Chin • translated by Marianne Yeh • published by Locus

NATION ON ICE94
by Chen Fei-Fei • translated by Petula Parris • published by PsyGarden


THE REPORTER FILES 3: LOW-TEMP RELATIONSHIPS..... 100
comics by Huihui, text and photos by The Reporter • translated by Chris Findler • published by Gaea

ABOUT MINISTRY OF CULTURE

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

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

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



ABOUT BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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

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

GRANT FOR THE PUBLICATION OF TAIWANESE WORKS IN TRANSLATION [GPT]

MINISTRY OF CULTURE,
REPUBLIC OF CHINA
[TAIWAN]

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

- Applicant Eligibility: Foreign publishing house (legal entity) legally registered or incorporated in accordance with the laws and regulations of their respective countries. A maximum of 2 applications can be submitted per period.
- Conditions:
 1. The so-called Taiwanese works must meet the following requirements:
 - A. Use traditional characters;
 - B. Created by a natural person holding an R.O.C. identity card or by a foreigner holding a work permit issued by the central competent authority of the R.O.C. (unless otherwise stipulated by the Employment Service Act);
 - C. Has been assigned an ISBN in Taiwan.
i.e., the first 6 digits of the book's ISBN are 978-957-XXX-XXX-X, 978-986-XXX-XXX-X, or 978-626-XXX-XXX-X.
 2. Applications must include documents certifying that the copyright holder of the Taiwanese works consents to its translation and foreign publication, and detailing the rights and obligations of both parties, such as the term and renewal, royalty and advance, etc.
 3. A translation sample of the Taiwanese work is required (no restriction on its format and length).
 4. In principle, the translation of application should be directly translated from the original language. The translator's CVs must state whether he or she has mandarin translation experience.
 5. If applications use the fully translated English version of the book selected into "Books from Taiwan" to be published directly, or uses its excerpt translated English version to translate the entire text into English for

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

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

- Grant Items:

1. The maximum grant available for each project is NT\$600,000, which covers:

A. Licensing fees (going to the copyright holder of the Taiwanese works);

B. Translation fees;

C. Promotion fees (limited to expenses related to R.O.C. writers participating in overseas promotional activities, not including advertising fees; applicants for this funding must propose a specific promotion plan and complete the implementation before submitting the grant project results);

D. Book production-oriented fees;

E. Tax (20% of the total award amount);

F. Remittance-related handling fees.

2. Priority consideration is given to books that have received the Golden Tripod Award, the Golden Comic Award, the Golden Picture Book Award, and the Taiwan Literature Award, books written in endangered languages of the R.O.C., books on Taiwan's culture and history, or series of books.

3. Applicants who have a record of winning international awards for translated and published Taiwanese books will receive more grant.

4. Grant recipients who use the fully translated English version of the book selected into "Books from Taiwan" for publication, the grant does not cover translation fees; for those who use the excerpt translated English version, the translation fee is limited to the length of the book that has not yet been translated, and its grant amount will be adjusted based on the length of the entire text.

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

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

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

For full details, please visit: https://grants.moc.gov.tw/Web_ENG/

Or contact: books@moc.gov.tw

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Dear Readers,

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

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

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

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

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

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

When it comes to our current era, it becomes more difficult to pinpoint a novel that captures the spirit of the times. Often, an epoch-defining novel is only discovered later, after the passage of time grants sufficient hindsight. However, were I to hazard a guess as to which work of fiction in our catalog will be seen to represent something quintessential about contemporary times in Taiwan, and perhaps the world, I would point to Chan Wai's *Trivial Acts of*

Violence (volume 2). An homage to Edward Yang's postmodern masterpiece *The Terrorizers*, the novel constructs a fraught web of relationships spanning Taiwan and Hong Kong, through which tremors of violence, aggression, and oppression are transmitted, leading to distant, unforeseen consequences. The backdrop of forced tranquility provided by pandemic controls complements the novel's theme of dark currents moving beneath the banal surface contours of society. The fallout from the political crackdowns in Hong Kong is also felt, providing an important foil to Taiwan's tenuous geopolitical status, while also linking the interpersonal transgressions of the title to the larger transgressions of political repression. If the pandemic marks the beginning of an era of increasing uncertainty, then *Trivial Acts of Violence* seems to capture the ways in which the pressure of that uncertainty spills over into our personal lives, and is passed along (and possibly magnified) by the staggering interconnectivity of contemporary society.

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

Era-tically Yours,

Joshua Dyer

Editor-in-Chief



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

FICTION

香鬼

PHANTASMIC PERFUME



Ku Nai-Fang
古乃方

-
- **Category:** Literary Fiction
 - **Publisher:** Yuan-Liou
 - **Date:** 6/2024
 - **Pages:** 248
 - **Length:** 84,301 characters
(approx. 54,700 words in English)
 - **Full English Manuscript Available**
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Born in 1992, Ku holds a BA in Finance from National Taiwan University and MA in Economics from the University of Edinburgh. She is the creator and owner of the fragrance brand Eau de parFang, for which she also serves as chief perfumer. Her vivid imagination and finely honed senses continue serving Ku well in both her literary and perfumery pursuits, the fruits of which include her most recent novel *Phantasmic Perfume* as well as several novel-inspired perfumes.



The narrative thread spun here by professional perfumer and author Ku Nai-Fang, beguilingly seasoned with the vagaries and aromas of life, turns funk into fragrance and does wonders with rubbish. The gems in this story, capped and sealed, effervesce with the true essence of self.

Up-and-coming perfumer Peipei transforms a rental flat in Taipei into a home-cum-perfumery studio. Her only companion, An, an orangutan who had broken out of an experimental laboratory, is blessed with an uncanny knack for fragrance aesthetics and creating alluringly unique olfactory configurations. An's deceptively capricious blends always seem to end in something surprisingly wonderful. But this mutually advantageous relationship is not immune to conflict and, one day, Peipei is the catalyst that ends An's life.

An's loss traps Peipei in a circle of anguish and memories of their time together. But it is when their fragrance wins a long-coveted major award and she is unable to recreate the formula on her own that she finally realizes she must blaze her own trail forward. She restarts her life and studio in a new location where she meets a man who, like An, had been abandoned as a child by his mother. With so much in common, they explore a dense, magical forest in search of new aromatics together. Although Peipei feels in their closeness a baffling sense of distance, his subsequent betrayal hits her as a complete surprise.

The protagonist's solitary journey, partially inspired by the author's own life experiences, centers on honing her perfumery skills and, in the process, finding herself and pondering the true meaning of life. While the effect of aromatic perfumes on the senses may be pure magic, their chemical compounds, aromatic oils, and medicaments are all worldly substances. The joining of these two dimensions give perfumes their undeniable allure, while the entwining of experience and imagination nourish the soul and open the door to self-realization.

PHANTASMIC PERFUME

By Ku Nai-Fang

Translated by Qing Zhao

“While sense of smell shapes how we all recognize and remember our experiences of the world around us, the nuance and subtlety of aromas are difficult to capture in words. Thus, *Phantasmic Perfume* achieves something rare in the literary space not only by describing a generous sprinkling of aromatic scents in incisive and lusciously vivid detail but also by weaving each as a distinct and salient thread into the storyline. The depth that author Ku Nai-Fang brings to both the protagonist, a Taipei perfumer, and the overall story, which whimsically includes an orangutan master fragrance formulator, reflects on her own lived experience as a real-life perfumer. Fragrant smells move the story forward toward an end flush with self-awareness and acceptance.

— Readmoo / Translated by Jeff Miller

01 Verdant Beast

The stairs were long and steep and, above them, swallows were busily building nests in the beams. Spring must be on its way, Peipei thought. She moved quickly past the management office and slipped into the courtyard garden, where a shimmer of mist hung above the evening shrubs. Her eyes, still adjusting to the light, stayed half-closed. Guided by memory, by scent alone, she climbed the side staircase. The studio, with its small sleeping loft set above a scent-blending workspace, was located on the second floor of the duplex. There was no doorbell. No matter. They were always able to tell whoever approached...they always knew.

The long wooden table was cluttered with brown bottles, each labeled with the name of a different fragrance ingredient. Plant specimens were soaking in three conical flasks: moss in pale green, violet leaves steeped in lake blue, and paper-thin, coffee-

brown feathers suspended in a bark-colored tincture. A ceramic lamp, the room's only source of light, hung above the table. At night, it was just the two of them - a woman and a beast - seated at the table. Upon closer examination, the beast's features - eyes, nose, mouth - were notably hidden beneath a dense layer of brown hair. An orangutan sat upright in a chair, feet dangling just above the floor. Peipei was standing beside him, placing drops of fragrance onto scent strips, her narrow hand like the stem of a delicate flower as she waved the paper in front of his face.

"An," she said, "this...is May rose. Not as spicy as Damascus rose; more of a honeyed sweetness." She called him An. His nostrils fluttered, like a breeze catching the hem of a skirt, and then he let out a low, contented hum. He shook the table, and a few empty beakers tumbled to the floor. Fortunately, Peipei had already covered the tiles with crumpled newsprint and bubble wrap. Only one shattered. None struck their feet.

An was never overwhelmed by scent. Even when Peipei's nose went numb from volatile aromatics and alcohol, An could continue inhaling. Mastering the ability to distinguish the fragrances of various aromatic ingredients is the first step to becoming a perfumer. To tell stories through scent, you must first memorize the vocabulary. Smelling masterworks is also essential, like watching American TV drama series without subtitles. Over time, the meanings begin to stick. Scent often reveals itself through visual imagery. You unscrew the heavy lid of a perfume bottle and, as the top notes rise, an image begins to flicker across the wall. Tonight's scent film was *Rose Nacrée du Désert*, a discontinued Guerlain.

"The first note is oud," Peipei said, eyes closed. "Middle notes are rose and patchouli...a classic combo. One flower, one herb. I still don't see why this one's so popular." She waved the scent strip in the air. Peipei had explained it to An before: the best perfumes know how to transform. Hops, for instance, can smell like shrimp shells – fishy, slightly funky. But pair them with rose, and that stench becomes a wild fizz; sexy as hell. Guerlain was a heritage house. Most of their blends leaned conservative, floral. Flowers, after all, were already fragrant by nature.

There wasn't a single risky note in *Rose Nacrée du Désert*. It was like heavy silk brocade – easy to wear, but never as daring as a cut-out design.

When An smelled a perfume he liked, he flailed his limbs in excitement. It was his one way of expressing joy. Sometimes Peipei would quiz him, asking him to replicate a master's work. That night, the challenge was *Bonsai*, last year's AOA winner; translucent, green, with a touch of Zen. The perfume world had gone mad for it. A Japanese garden in a bottle: wisteria, chrysanthemum, incense, black copal, cypress... But the one note that had everyone guessing was alligator juniper. She had searched everywhere, asked every distillery she could find. No one had heard of it. Even if you found the source, the proportions remained a mystery.

An stood on tiptoe, sniffing the rows of bottles on the metal shelf. The studio, aside from the single light over the table, was nearly dark. Light, after all, carried away the air, and with it, the scent. Peipei turned the

bottles, trying to read the names on their labels. An had already picked out a few: juniper, rosemary, aglaia flower...

"Huh. No rosemary on the note breakdown," Peipei murmured. "No aglaia flower either." She didn't stop An, though. She was curious to see what he'd come up with on his own.

The ingredients he chose were whimsical: bergamot orange, lime, Buddha's hand, orange blossom. It seemed he had no intention of grounding these airy scents with sandalwood. He was unraveling the traditional fragrance pyramid, casting aside fruity tops, floral hearts, and woody foundations.

The orangutan's face appeared in the curved glass beaker – small light brown eyes, flared nostrils... fleshy cheeks framed in dry, wiry hair. An poured 50 milliliters of moss tincture into the beaker. Then, while adding aglaia flower, he lost his grip and dumped in the entire ten-ml bottle. Peipei winced. That was one of her priciest materials. A blast of longan honey rushed out. For a moment, it felt like they were standing in an orchard. As he stirred, the longan note faded and the juniper lifted. A translucent green note swept in. The amber liquid shimmered under the light – pure and unclouded, like a pot of honeyed oolong tea. An had recreated *Bonsai* perfectly. But it was too spontaneous. He couldn't write down the formula.

He flailed his limbs again to show how much he liked the scent. Then he pounded his chest, and his stomach let out a loud grumble. He always got ravenous after blending a perfume. The rosemary in *Bonsai* made it worse. He crawled across the floor to the fridge, rummaging for a raw egg. Peipei stopped him. "Not until it's cooked." When she brought him a bowl of udon noodles with a soft-boiled egg on top, An reached out with both hands and began scooping up the noodles.

"Use chopsticks," Peipei said. An fumbled with them awkwardly. With his rough, oversized hands and a body just 130 centimeters tall, managing two slender sticks of bamboo was no easy task. Whenever Peipei wasn't looking, he simply used his hands.

An was drawn to the scent of Peipei's skin – a blend of May rose and frankincense. Whenever she called his name, he would crouch down, flare his nostrils, and

inhale her scent in deep, greedy breaths. He also liked it when it thundered, making Peipei shiver, her skin giving off a scent of warm cereal with a hint of carrot. When Peipei wasn't home, An would go out to the garden to eat snails and pee next to the flowerpots.

Peipei loved the jasmine scent on An's skin, what perfumers called "indole" – a nitrogen compound. At high concentrations, it gave off a sickly-sweet, musty staleness, like excrement or urine. But in trace amounts, it blossomed into a faint, soul-stirring jasmine fragrance. Fragrance enthusiasts said indole was the scent of decay in bloom, the final breath of a flower before it's buried in the earth. To Peipei, the presence of indole turned a flower feral, stirring the beast that slept deep within.

On summer nights, Peipei and An liked to pick jasmine blossoms. They would bring out a silver aluminum tray, spread it with cold fat, and layer the flowers on top. After about five days, they replaced them, repeating the process ten times or more. The fat, saturated with jasmine's breath, became a precious pomade – later steeped into tincture, the DNA of a floral perfume.

An had great stamina. He memorized scent materials in the morning, sorted them in the afternoon, and studied masterworks at night. During breaks, he liked to eat udon noodles with eggs, slurping away as he flipped on the TV to watch the animal channel. An picked things up fast. Once shown the categories, he could break down any scent sample at hand. Ink from a ballpoint pen smells like plastic mixed with bitter orange. Soy sauce, when broken down, reveals caramel, black spruce, and vanilla. Cedar carries a woody sweetness – ambergris does too – with a nutty undertone that pairs surprisingly well with soy sauce.

An was a natural at perfumery. Every day brought new discoveries and insights. But he never wrote down his formulas, throwing materials together like a wild animal, driven by instinct. Peipei had started young, at nineteen. Now she had ten years of experience and a solid following, mostly overseas. Taiwanese don't tend to support local fragrances, falling in tow with the widespread belief that scents from beyond the

island simply smell better. Peipei's most loyal followers tended to come from Europe and America. The one-human, one-beast household got by on selling perfume. Perfume could be traded for money, and money for udon noodles and eggs. That was how An understood it.

"Miss Wei, sending out more packages?" said Mr. Wang, the building manager. Five or six boxes blocked Peipei's face as she made her way down the stairs. "Business is booming!" he added – just as he always did, though he never once offered to help carry anything.

Afternoons were always for packing and sending out orders. All Peipei could hear was the rustle and snap of tape as it peeled from the roll. She liked to cut it clean with a Swiss Army knife and, when the work was done, she would absentmindedly slip the knife into her pocket. By the time everything was shipped, she was spent. She'd step out into the courtyard garden for some air. One whistle, and An would come running down. He'd crouch at her feet and sniff the rose scent clinging to her ankles. When they went out walking, groups of middle schoolers in uniform would stare at An in disbelief. Then the laughter would invariably start, and one of them would swing their arms low, lurch forward in mimicry, and scratch their body theatrically. An didn't realize they were imitating him. He would even laugh along. When he walked, his arms dangled so low they nearly touched the ground. Once, on the way back from a walk, Mr. Wang pointed at An and said, "Why do you keep such a strange-looking dog?" Little did he know, An could understand him. He snapped, tearing through the garden and knocking over every flowerpot in sight.

Stems broke. Strange fragrance burst forth. Grass twisted and bled green.

Scent unlocked something in An. Soy sauce seeped into his thoughts and settled deep in his body, wrapping him in a sense of home. To him, it carried the feeling of a door swinging open and a voice saying, "You're home." Two weeks after they met, he created his first soy-sauce-themed perfume.

It was 100 milliliters; an eau de parfum at twenty percent concentration. The caramel note was overpowering – sharply aggressive. Top, heart, and base arrived out of order, crashing through in thick, uneven waves. Peipei called it interesting but rough, like bold strokes of paint slapped together without gradation or depth. Primitive, she said. Even the ancient Egyptians had more refined methods. An poured *Dashing Soy Sauce* straight into a round perfume bottle and held it up to the lamp. Light slid across the thin glass, softening time. Then he sprayed.

"Caramel is supposed to be a finishing note," Peipei said. "You've drowned it. Perfume needs structure – top, heart, base. This is just a heap of smells."

She picked up a pen and began sketching a formula. "One percent caramel, three percent guaiac wood, five percent black spruce, one percent vanilla... something like that."

She paused, then added, "But most important is the mood you wish to convey or the story you're trying to tell. Just because you like udon noodles with soy sauce doesn't mean you need to make a soy sauce perfume. That's just indulgent." An made a face, tugging down his eyelid with one big, calloused hand. His pale brown eyes bulged, unsettling and unreadable.

For his second attempt, Peipei set up the workspace. On the wooden table, everything was neatly laid out: labeled ingredients, clean beakers, tinctures, a pen, and a notebook.

"Write it down this time," she reminded him.

But An was restless. He bounced in front of the television like he was trying to shake something loose. Peipei put on *Drums of Death*, a field recording of a funeral rhythm made in Ghana. As the drums began, An climbed onto the chair and beat his chest. The ceramic lamp swayed. Bottles trembled on the table. As the rhythm quickened, sweat poured down his body. With a final groan, he reached for the brown glass bottles on the cart, grabbing each in time with the beat.

Buddha's hand. Moss. Moss. More moss.

Labdanum. Buddha's hand. Tobacco, tobacco, tobacco. Cedar, cedar, cedar. Labdanum.

Peipei tracked the labels on the brown bottles, jotting down his scent score. She could almost hear what he heard. The crisp snap of the drumhead felt like Buddha's hand. The thud against the drum's wooden rim echoed the resin of labdanum.

An picked up a beaker and followed his own score, adding materials with no measure. He added moss three times in a row – too much, too little, whatever felt right. He didn't care for proportions. He worked by instinct. While stirring, he gripped the glass rod too hard. It snapped in his hand. Shards fell into the beaker. He knocked it to the floor. The scent burst into the air – wild, delirious, haunted by the singing of dark spirits. Peipei bent down and drew up what she could with a dropper. This one was a step forward; the notes no longer surged in clumps, each molecule swimming at its own pace. The overall impression was lighter, more transparent; a leisurely sketch of the countryside.

Maybe by next December, they'd be ready for AOA – the Art and Olfaction Awards. The Oscars of independent perfumery, held every year in the U.S. If they won, the recognition might drift back to Taiwan. Maybe then, Peipei thought, people here would finally believe in their scents.

When Peipei felt happy, she smelled like lavender mixed with frankincense – soft, airy. An could smell her shifting moods. Anger was saffron: dry and dusty with a trace of pepper. But it was fear he loved most: carrot seed, cereal, and soil. It made his stomach rumble.

The name of the fan page for their perfumery was "BEBE". But when she checked it the next morning, she noticed someone had changed it to "CHABEBE". She took it down immediately.

"Who renamed us Chia Peipei?" she asked. An grinned, baring a sharp little canine. "It's supposed to be 'BE', as in Taipei." She rolled her eyes. "Probably Monica. Hacked into our fan page." Peipei muttered as she scrolled through the login history.

小暴力

TRIVIAL ACTS OF VIOLENCE

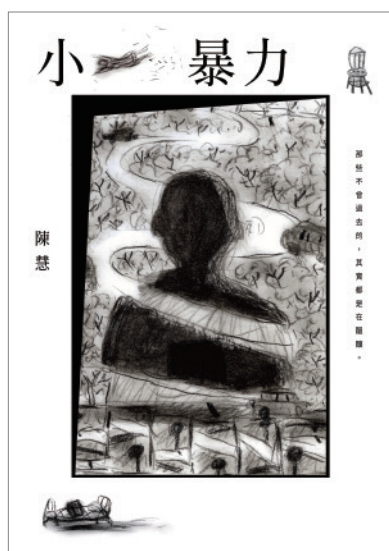


Chan Wai

陳慧

-
- **Category:** Literary Fiction
 - **Publisher:** Ecus
 - **Date:** 10/2024
 - **Pages:** 299
 - **Length:** 82,888 characters
(approx. 53,800 words in English)
 - **Full English Manuscript Available**
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Chan Wai was already an accomplished scriptwriter and novelist when she relocated to Taiwan in 2018. In addition to writing, she currently teaches scriptwriting at the Taipei National University of the Arts. Her recent works include *Trivial Acts of Violence*, *The Memory Keepers in Ashes*, and the 2023 Taiwan Literature Award for Books winner *Little Brother*.



*Taking its cue from Edward Yang's 1986 dramatic film **Terrorizers**, Chan Wai in **Trivial Acts of Violence** casts chillingly dispassionate light on the issue of everyday acts of violence across a collection of intertwined narratives spanning Taiwan and Hong Kong.*

Trivial Acts of Violence is Taiwan Literature Golden Award-winning author Chan Wai's first work set primarily in Taiwan. Inspired by the 1986 film *Terrorizers*, the various narrative threads in this work unfold in Taiwan and Hong Kong in 2020, creating a story that, while paying homage to that earlier film, blazes a trail all its own.

The story opens on a police raid of a bacchanalian party held at the home of a local drug kingpin. An-an, a teen infatuated with the kingpin, who brings him home just before the raid, is arrested after a violent confrontation with the officers but soon released unconditionally after a call from his father, a senior government official. Facing his father's wrath, An-an maps out a way to skip town through an ingenious scheme involving a family heirloom and an author with a secret. Taipei, in the grips of the COVID-19 pandemic and seething with disruptive, dark energy beneath its deceptively placid surface, sends a muddle-headed youth, maverick police detective, enigmatic author, and the son of a mafia boss inexorably into the same orbit.

The complicated narratives, which jump between Taipei, Hualien, and Hong Kong, are connected through the various forms of violence portrayed in each. Will the protagonists be able to recapture their former peace-of-mind or be forever condemned to the web of violence in which they are entangled?

Chan Wai turns her discerning and dispassionate microscope on modern society, examining the shady influence of power, the legacy of anti-authoritarian street protests, the shameless tit-for-tat relations between public officials and academia, and the dark, pervasive shadow of the pandemic. While some readers may find the "current affairs" flavor of these stories a bit "run of the mill", the author's style and pacing encourage readers to reconsider the true substance of "violence" and, in doing so, find new hope for redemption.

TRIVIAL ACTS OF VIOLENCE

By Chan Wai

Translated by Fion Tse

“**M**arital strife, inter-gang feuds, public corruption, drug deal infiltrations, Taiwan and Hong Kong, politics and the pandemic...all these incongruous elements come together in the novel *Trivial Acts of Violence*. As she familiarizes readers with the story's many main characters, author Chan Wai weaves a complex yet naturally flowing tale that is significantly larger than the sum of its constituent parts. Each element, familiar and, at first blush, seemingly extraneous to the narrative stream, neatly capsulizes one of the countless trivial acts of violence that together help define the world in which we all live.”

— *Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller

One: Ku and Ta-shun

1.

They weren't even halfway up the mountain when a cloud of thick fog surrounded them. After another ten or fifteen minutes of meandering up the curving road, the van in front stopped, and Ku pulled over onto the shoulder and turned off the engine. In the passenger seat, his senior blinked his eyes open as the car slowed to a stop. Beyond the windshield was darkness. Slowly, his eyelids closed again.

In the rearview, Ku could see the two other sedans in the squad follow suit and stop on the side of the road.

His senior suddenly spoke. "You should take a nap, too," he said. "It'll be the middle of the night before we start moving again." So, he hadn't been asleep. Ku replied that he would, then turned to assess him. Everyone at the station said they looked alike. When undercover, they played a convincing pair of brothers.

His senior was forty-eight this year. *Is that what I'll be like in twenty years?* Ku wondered. *Resting my eyes any chance I get?*

Ku never slept on the job, never even napped or dozed off. Even if they were on a stakeout, even if it dragged on for more than twenty-four hours – he was resolved not to let anything get past him. He didn't want to miss anything.

It was quiet all around, almost solemn, as the sounds of breathing and traces of motion dwindled. This was Ku's "reaping".

Everyone had their own version of "reaping". His senior's "reaping" was noisy, high-spirited gatherings at rechao restaurants after a case. Ku first learned about "reaping" from his father. His mother, a fierce woman, forbade Ku's overweight father from drinking sugary drinks. One day, however, Ku was shopping for art supplies and, as he left the shop, he looked across the street and saw his father sipping at a cup of boba. He looked completely different: joyous, lighthearted. A wide smile, no longer fleeting, stretched across his

face in slow-motion.

But his father had also seen him, and he waited for Ku outside their front door. In hushed tones, he asked him to keep his secret. Life, he said, had given him that moment of reaping. The exhaustion and suffering he'd endured, the shame and the sacrifice – in that moment, it was all worthwhile.

Ku didn't fully understand, but the word "reaping" sounded like it had to do with grave and serious things. He also couldn't remember whether he had later given up his dad's secret to his mom in exchange for some toy he wanted. It wasn't until after he became a police officer and went out on his first stakeout that he finally understood the concept of "reaping".

2.

There wasn't much of a story behind why Ku had become a police officer. Initially, it was purely because he had seen one too many Hong Kong crime dramas. His dad, ever optimistic, said at least it was better than being a gang member. So, ever since he was young, Ku's response to essay prompts about "My Dream Job" was always the same: "to be a police officer". But he had a proviso to this goal, too – he would be "a police officer who doesn't have to wear a uniform".

Though Ku wasn't the most hardworking, he managed to score within the top twenty or thirty in his grade all through junior and senior high, and his GSAT results secured him a spot to study economics at the National Taiwan University. But, in the end, Ku chose police college. This confused his friends and family to no end. "Why police college and not police university?" his dad asked. "The college is two years and the university is four," Ku said. "That's how you know you'll learn more at the university," his dad rebuffed. To that, Ku simply replied, "If I go to college I'll get two more years of work experience." After that, no matter what his parents said, he refused to budge. One of his classmates even made a social media post asking if Ku's decision was the right one, which stirred up a slight wave of debate.

It was probably the most attention Ku had ever received.

On his first day at police college, one instructor

asked him, "So you're the kid who could've gone to NTU for econ?" Ku nodded, unable to hide a hint of pride. The instructor continued: "I suppose finances must be tight at home?" Ku was a little taken aback, and quickly said no. "You're just anxious to start making money, then?" Although the instructor phrased it as a question, it was one that implied its own answer. Ku was shocked into silence. The instructor snickered. "So it's just pure stupidity, huh."

It turned out that the college was just like high school. How Ku's instructors treated him affected how his classmates treated him. After two years at the college, Ku had made no friends, but he didn't mind. They'd eventually all be assigned to different stations anyway.

He had majored in criminal investigation and passed the internal examinations with an almost perfect score, becoming a lowly fourth-ranked officer. His insignia carried one stripe and three stars, meaning he was on a twenty-four-hour shift schedule. Sure, there was a chance he could be selected for the criminal investigation squad in the future – but what mattered to him now was that he had to wear a uniform. And the worst part was, during his two years of college, he'd developed a habit of waking up at six a.m. and falling asleep promptly at ten. After graduation, he never managed to readjust his sleep regimen to match his new shift schedule, and so he always gave off the impression of being in a foul mood. Everyone agreed: Ku wasn't likable at all.

Luckily, the chief liked him. "Ku's a good kid," he said. "Quiet." Ku didn't completely understand how he'd become a quiet person. But, as long as there was someone who liked him, that was fine. The chief knew he wanted to be a criminal investigator and said his personality was a good fit for the job. "Why not take the exam and transfer into police university?" he suggested. Ku couldn't help remembering how his dad had asked him, why the college and not the university? But now that the chief was the one saying it, there seemed to be an underlying logic that he hadn't seen before. "It'd be another two years, though," Ku had said. "Is that worth it?" The chief replied matter-of-factly that he'd miss out on the overtime pay, but if he studied hard and learned new things, it wasn't

a bad deal. In the end, Ku got in with a seventy-eight in literature, eighty in English, ninety in criminal law, eighty-eight in criminal proceedings, and ninety-three in forensic science. His total score of four hundred and twenty-nine made him first in class.

People who disliked Ku described him looking “like he’d been in line for a while to get into the bathroom.” *I really am in a hurry*, Ku thought at the time. *I’ve been waiting forever.*

The chief had arranged it all. The commander of the division that Ku would be assigned to had been a friend from the chief’s own cohort, and that was that. His was not unlike the situation of many of the classmates he had met in university, who had slipped with ease into positions their fathers or uncles or brothers in the force had arranged. This time, Ku made sure to adjust his sleep schedule and network with his future coworkers. Two years later, he finally realized his dream of becoming a police officer who didn’t have to wear a uniform.

The chief’s friend was stationed in Zhongshan District. Ku liked how busy it was – things were constantly happening, which meant there was plenty of opportunity to make an impression. On his third day, he was assigned to a stakeout. The underboss of the White Dragons was trying to make an escape, and he had bought a condo on Section 1 of Chang’an East Road, near the high-end club in Alley 107, Linsen North Road where his girlfriend worked. Ku was tasked with parking around a corner across the street for the solo mission. A day passed, and then another. Nothing happened and no one paid attention to him, either. Ku knew he was being tested by the division. Late into the second night, a sedan pulled up outside the building. Ku called in a report. No response. Twenty minutes later, two people walked out of the building, a man and a woman. The underboss had been hiding out in his girlfriend’s condo all along. For the first time in his life, Ku sensed the faintly bitter taste of adrenaline under his tongue. He immediately swerved the car out of the street corner and across car lanes, skidding onto the sidewalk and knocking over the underboss, who had just been about to step into the sedan.

After that, Ku held tightly onto the memory of that two-day stakeout. Of waiting, all alone, in his car. Only such bare solitude, such frigid isolation, could adequately contrast the rush and glory of what had come after. It was more than quiet waiting – it was also the unknowable, unpredictable explosion of the finale. And, just like that, stakeouts quickly became Ku’s “reaping”.

3.

It was later confirmed that the detective who had first searched the girlfriend’s home had been in constant communication with the underboss. His defense was that he wanted to be the one to make the arrest. Everyone said it was wasted effort, what terrible luck. Smells like a bribe, Ku thought. He had no evidence, though, and he wasn’t rewarded for his part in the case either. The days continued to pass.

As long as things remained this calm and peaceful, it was all worth it. At one in the morning, his senior, sitting next to him, exhaled a snore, long and low. Suddenly, flashes of blue and red appeared, disappeared, and then reappeared. The lights were winding up the side of the mountain. It was four cop cars, all with their sirens off. Ku woke up his senior, who called the deputy commander. Tonight’s mission was a complicated one: Crime Investigation Section Six was in charge, but they hadn’t sent many of their own people, choosing instead to enlist Ku and his superior from Section Five. The three sedans that had gone up the mountain together also belonged to different sections. This meant they needed a lot of manpower but didn’t want to run the risk of anything being leaked. The familiar bitter taste of rust bloomed once again under Ku’s tongue.

The four cars passed by the other sedans on the case, including theirs, which all proceeded to follow them closely up the mountain. After a number of hairpin turns, the mansion, shrouded in fog and with a few luxury cars parked around it, came into sight. As they pulled to a stop behind the cars, the senior’s phone rang: the deputy commander. A few nods and

yeses later, the call was over. The senior removed his handgun and set it in the glove compartment, then instructed a stunned Ku to do the same.

Light-footed, they snuck out of the cars. This high up, the cold bit into their bones. An officer pulled his jacket in tightly around his shoulders. From behind, Ku saw that his holster was empty as well.

The uniformed officers led the charge. Ku could make even less sense of this. In the darkness he glanced at the rest of the sections and saw confused looks on their faces, too. But the initial air of bemusement seemed to dissipate quickly, as though everyone knew their assignments and their places.

The officers entered through a doorway, and before long the house erupted in screams and cries. Ku was about to rush in when his superior held him back. His vision suddenly blurred, and all he could make out was a dozen or so naked figures, male and female, rushing out from one of the rooms.

It was obvious they were all high out of their minds. The officers easily grabbed hold of them, one in each hand. Like sharks feasting on minnows.

One of them was clothed, and especially aggressive. Ku gave him a good kick, knocking him to the ground. But he crawled back up to take a swing, shouting, "I'm Ta-shun, I'm the one you want to arrest, leave my friends alone; this is my place, the drugs are mine, too..."

Ku recognized him: the son of the White Dragon. He had seen him before on his patrols, at Last Stop. At first glance he could easily be mistaken for a college student, the kind who played basketball regularly.

Two: Ta-shun and An-an

1.

The first time Ta-shun met An-an was at Last Stop. Ta-shun was lounging in his usual booth tucked in the farthest back corner, white powder casually dumped out onto the table. Someone approached and Ta-shun shuffled back to let them take a hit. Good things were made to be shared. Ta-shun didn't feel particularly

positively or negatively about this. People needed habits and vices to stand out, he thought. Otherwise, they'd all be cardboard cutouts of human beings, merely existing. The rush of people coming and going grew too much for him. Annoyed, he pushed past the crowd and stood up. Not really knowing where to go, he went to the bathroom. When he opened the door, a boy was standing in front of the wall. Ta-shun ignored him and made for the urinals. He started at the sound of a chisel scraping concrete, and with speed and precision turned around and grabbed the boy by his collar. A closer look revealed the boy had been writing on the wall with a pen.

He looked like he was in middle school, at most a freshman in high school. He was shorter than Ta-shun by a whole head, and the nib of the pen he was holding was covered in powdery plaster. He probably wouldn't be able to use it on paper again, but he had already left three slanting lines on the wall:

I'm a junkie for love, a little bitch
Taking odd jobs to scratch my itch
I labor without minimum

The boy tossed a disdainful look at Ta-shun, as though to say, *where's the fire?* Ta-shun immediately noticed how small his eyes were: small and dark, catching the light like a hard-shelled seed and shining with the innocence of a woodland creature. *But don't be fooled; it'll grow into a ferocious beast one day.* And yet Ta-shun couldn't tear his gaze away.

"Why do you keep looking at me?" Ta-shun asked.

"You're good-looking," An-an replied. Ta-shun released his collar and turned to look at the words on the wall, then asked, "Do you even know what a junkie is?"

The boy gave him another scornful look, then continued to scribble on the wall. Ta-shun had guessed right: the word he wrote after "minimum" was "wage". The sound of the pen chiseling away at the wall made his scalp go numb, and he all but dragged the boy away from the wall: "Hey now, stop scratching up the walls..." But the boy leaned his full weight onto the wall, like he just had to write, and in the end Ta-shun had to wrap his arms around his waist to hold him back.

邊界 那麼寬

BOUNDLESS HORIZONS



Kuei Chun Miya 桂春 · 米雅

-
- **Category:** Literary Fiction
 - **Publisher:** Linking
 - **Date:** 10/2024
 - **Pages:** 344
 - **Length:** 155,310 characters
(approx. 100,900 words in English)
 - **Full English Manuscript Available**
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Kuei Chun Miya, an indigenous Amis from Taitung County in southeastern Taiwan, currently lives and works in Yunlin. She engages regularly with topics related to indigenous cultural traditions and serves as an indigenous culture lab researcher. Kuei Chun Miya's works span various genres and include the illustrated work *Lokot: The Fish that Lived in a Tree*, which has already been published in translation in English, German, and Slovakian.



A quest to discover her roots in the family's hometown on the Pacific Coast opens the eyes of a Taiwanese-Japanese woman not only to the divide between urban and rural but also to that between older and younger generations. She watches forlornly as both life's familiar comforts and her family's ancestral lands slip away.

Ryoko, born to an indigenous Amis mother and Japanese father on Taiwan's Pacific Coast, spends her teenage years in Japan. However, increasingly alienated from the ideals and expectations of Japanese society, she dreams of moving to her mother's home village in Taiwan.

Ryoko finally makes the move but finds, although surrounded by childhood friends, she is not yet ready to settle down. She slips away without warning to the city and reboots her life again with a new boyfriend.

Several years later, she again abandons urban bustle to return to her mother's home village. But this time, her growing reputation as an internationally acclaimed artist and vocal activism against construction of a seaside resort hotel complex nearby leave many in the community wondering sanguinely whether she is now finally ready to settle down... and whether the romance with her former hometown boyfriend will ignite once more.

Author Kuei Chun Miya's beautifully lithe prose masterfully weaves into this work the vitality of indigenous tales and traditions. The narrative sheds light onto how the area's different ethnic communities and cultures have increasingly abandoned longstanding mutual distrust and enmity in favor of mutual concern and assistance and of standing together against injustice. As the priorities and exigencies of modern "civil society" chip away at this once-remote backwater, the individual compromises made by characters across successive generations end up, in hindsight, helping seal a lamentable fate for the overarching struggle to preserve traditional ways and values. While progress brings good as well as bad, the author invests her passion and sorrows into this work, shedding new light on life at the bleeding edge between traditional society and modernity.

BOUNDLESS HORIZONS

By Kuei Chun Miya

Translated by Mary King Bradley

“Unlike the saccharine depictions of small-town life given in many stories, *Boundless Horizons* takes a quite different and more-realistic tack in narrating the tale of a young woman’s return to her home village in southeastern Taiwan. The protagonist, the daughter of a Japanese father and indigenous Taiwanese mother, feels the call of her childhood home in Taiwan tugging at her heartstrings. But after moving back from Japan, she finds herself inexplicably an outsider again and her sanguine expectations of hometown life at odds with twenty-first-century reality. The author’s own lived experience as an indigenous Amis adds persuasive depth to the unfolding story, making *Boundless Horizons* a rare lens into the complex issues raised at the crossroads of ethnic identities, generations, and expectations.”

— Readmoo / Translated by Jeff Miller

Prologue

Somay ina picked up a white chalcedony and put it in her basket. The coral trees were in bloom, so it was time for another of these white stones to go into the bamboo basket. Each stone represented the start of a new year. She had been a Sikawasay (a shaman) for many years, and had lost count of the exact number of stones now in the basket.

She gazed at the distant sea, which looked especially calm today. Shafts of light shone through the clouds, revealing the sky’s message on the rippled surface of the water. Figuring the time, Somay ina estimated another hour before the black clouds at sky’s edge would cast their shadow over the bay. Now that her equipment was packed, she should be up and on her way; it was still some distance to Fohang. There was a child there who inexplicably liked to eat earth. Most likely they had found no other way to cure the ailment,

and so they had come to her for help. If it weren’t for incurable illnesses, who in this day and age would still have faith in animist traditions? She stood on the very tips of her toes and reached up into the eaves with one hand, groping for a ritual implement: the mandible of a specific kind of animal. She found the bone and put it in her bag, then opened a small window into a beehive by the corner of the house. Several bees came zooming out. While the bees were absent, she broke off a piece of honeycomb and put that into her bag as well, then tied an ancient bronze bell to her waist. Coming out the door that overlooked the path into the valley below, she saw a group of tourists walking towards the terraced fields. She knocked on the wooden box beneath the eaves, and two diminutive birds poked out their heads.

“Malingad to,” she said to them in Pangcah, the language of the Amis. *Time to go.*

The sea reflected the soft light of morning. Driftwood laid on the sandy beach made it easier to pull ashore the flat-bottomed boats, heavy with fish. The weeds to either side of the path were still wet with dew. Somay ina had entered the forest when she saw Ryoko, with her little brother Kolas behind her, the two children following their mother at a discreet distance. Far out at sea, the early dawn light had washed the waves in a violet mist. The people walking down by the bay resembled tiny ants moving on the sand. Fanu the cat walked silently alongside the sister and brother, as usual.

Sudden movement in the forest made Ryoko straighten up instantly, eyes watchful, looking around her. There were many wild animals here, invisible among the trees. Afraid it might be a fafoy, a wild boar, she tugged at Kolas, ready to run for home. Somay ina called the children's names from the dense understory, calming Ryoko's anxiety for the moment. She stepped into view, saw the children's fright. Taking Ryoko's and Kolas's hands, she walked with them towards the village.

"Somay ina o mana ko mialaen iso?" (Somay ina, what's that in your hand?)

Kolas, a curious child, always had lots of questions.

Answering him, Somay ina waved the banana leaf.

"Mi' iyof to fali ato kawasan." (I use it to summon the spirits.)

"Mimaan korira?" (Why?)

"Makesem adada ko faloco' ato tiring no tao'.
(Because a person's soul is wounded.)

"Nima a kawasan?" (Which spirit can do that?)

Kolas and Ryoko stared at Somay ina with big eyes, waiting for her to answer.

"iso." (The whale.)

Somay ina pointed at the sea, where the shafts of light fell from the sky onto the sea's surface. A sea wind blew, its gusts rippling the rice seedlings planted on the flat terraces.

For a long time, this bay had been like an empty bottle with its mouth sealed: legitimate fear had been exploited; the truth of what had happened had been concealed; and passers-through eager to make off with smuggled souls had nonetheless recalled with

longing the gray blue of its sky. Somay ina rested the banana leaf on her shoulder, gazing in the direction the two diminutive white-eyes had flown. She believed the spirits opened windows even for those who had lost their faith in nature, and thus usher in a liberating cosmic wind.

The Cape

The sudden cloudburst forced Haruko to break off what she was doing and duck for cover inside the orchard's thatched house. As usual, she was humming a song she didn't know the name of, its melody turned into an almost tuneless drone.

There were lots of kids in their bayside village, but most of them were being raised by grandparents. Haruko herself was no exception. During the week, she worked in the kindergarten, the children in the yard like a flock of noisy sparrows. The only way to make them settle down was usually the pump organ and a song. Every time Haruko sat down at the school organ, the kids would come rushing pell-mell to surround the instrument the moment she lifted the keyboard lid. They brought to mind small coal tits swooping in from the millet fields. This method of making them quiet down had proven very useful.

On her days off, Haruko mostly kept busy in the orchard. Other than the short period when she had left the village to attend high school, the seemingly endless years of her youth had all played out in this village by the bay. One reason for this had been to keep her maternal grandmother, Alo, company.

For a time, agencies had visited the village, recruiting men to work in Arab countries or go to sea as sailors. They also made arrangements for even the young women to work abroad. In the period that followed, almost no one except the elderly and children was left in the village. Haruko's mother had also gone abroad to work. Less than two years later, the bad news arrived. Her mother's body had been cremated overseas, and her ashes were not sent back to the village. During the first three years her father was in Arabia, he had sent them money for living expenses, but then all news of him stopped. Every time Haruko's grandmother called the agency, the other party

usually said they couldn't get in touch with him, or that the Arabian desert made communication difficult. This was how Haruko had lost her parents. Her only option was to follow in her grandmother's footsteps, selling shellfish from the bay and fruit grown on the mountainside.

In remote villages like theirs, many of the kids left school at fifteen to make a living. Some went to the city to work in factories. A few stayed in the village and became fishers. Haruko had tried everything she could think of to continue going to school. She had sought help from the church, and had scrimped and saved for a basic radio so she could listen to news from the outside world. In the early days, even if someone on Taiwan's eastern coast had a television, they had nothing to watch because of poor reception. Radio had been the only conduit for news from the outside world.

It never rains in Southern California. The song on the radio faded in and out. Haruko gave the dial a gentle twist to change the frequency, but even with static, the song enchanted her. Haruko wished she could tell people in other places about the often brutal sun, the fickle moods of the sea breeze, and the heavy rains in her remote village on Taiwan's eastern coast. Could she, too, get on a bus and go far, far away from the village? Drop everything, and end up in another city where she would miss this barren village forgotten by the world?

But girl, don't they warn ya.

It pours, man, it pours!

Listening to the song, Haruko found herself wondering what to do about the future. She took a deep breath, her eyes drawn to the far side of the ocean. The waves sparkled in the sunlight, and she could see a small black dot in a shaft of light. Haruko remembered that Somay ina would be going out to sea today, to perform a ceremony.

The clouds stretched over the sea to the south like wings, half the sky obscured by a thick blanket of gray. Haruko put away her tools in the orchard and hurried down the mountain. The weather, which had seemed so mild that morning, had undergone an unexpected

change come afternoon. On her way home, she picked some wild greens growing between the fields. A snail wouldn't get very far even if it could run, so she might as well fill a bag to take home. The bitter melon leaves were almost gone, the vines plucked nearly bare. Haruko remembered there had been bitter melon leaves on the table for almost every meal and decided not to pick any today. A blue magpie had pecked the red patch on the bottom of a green papaya and made a big hole in it. Haruko looked all around. Once she was sure the magpies weren't nearby, she quickly snapped the papaya from its stem and made her getaway. Although she had planted the tree, its fruit had become the property of the blue magpies from the moment the birds noticed it. The magpies were too fierce for Haruko to do anything other than pick the papayas on the sly. She just thought of it as sharing, since there was plenty for all, anyway.

Haruko needn't have worried about the blue magpies. At that very moment, the tribe was having some fun chasing a civet. Suddenly, a man she had never seen before appeared out of nowhere and disrupted their game. The human in the hat became the magpies' new target. After the birds had chased him for a while, the stranger evaded them by ducking into the woods. He, too, appeared to find the civet fascinating.

The rain poured down in torrents. Haruko was soaked before she could get inside. Natural gas was a luxury in the remote mountain districts, so her home's water heater was wood fueled. Haruko quickly lit a fire to heat some water; a hot bath would help to warm her up and ward off a cold. The falling rain clattered on the iron roof. She looked at the places where rainwater was dripping through it and sighed, wondering when she would have time to deal with the leaks. The salt carried on the sea breeze in this bayside area corroded the metal roofs quickly, and even finding someone to make the repairs was difficult.

Soaked to the skin, Haruko warmed herself in front of the fire and thought about the nice, long soak she could have once the water was hot. She was shivering.

She heard a dull thudding sound as rain continued to pummel the roof; probably fruit, falling from the

tree beside the house. Because the roof was already leaking and Haruko didn't want the damage to get any worse, she braced herself against the cold rain and went outside to take a look. The noise turned out to be several monkeys using her roof as a throughway. She watched them in something of a daze.

"Koko de ame kara mi o kakusu koto wa dekimasu ka?" (May I hide from the rain here?)

A thin man in khaki with a large pack on his back and a bamboo hat on his head addressed Haruko in Japanese. He stood, a rather pathetic-looking figure, under the eaves to one side of the house.

Haruko stared, wondering if the man had just rolled down the mountain. Why did he look like a fugitive on the run?

"Anata wa chūgokugo o hanashimasu ka?" (Can you speak Chinese?)

"Can speak, very little.... likata ga wakaranai." (Not very well.)

"I know only a little bit of Japanese."

Haruko shivered, realized they were both standing in the rain, and ushered the man into the warmth of her kitchen.

Conversation was somewhat awkward. Haruko had learned Japanese from the village's older generation – mostly simple forms of address, and how to talk about meals or the weather – which made chatting a bit difficult. Her guest spoke in somewhat broken Chinese, but it was far better than Haruko's Japanese. The two of them did their best to understand each other, and mostly just smiled.

"My name Matsumoto. Working in literature and history."

Matsumoto took a notebook out of his pack and looked a bit upset when he saw it was wet. Haruko saw that even his pack was covered in dirt. He must really have rolled down the mountain. When she saw the troubled look on Matsumoto's face, Haruko picked up an empty aluminum kettle and filled it roughly half full of some charcoal she dug out of the stove. She then spread open the wet notebook, placed a dry kitchen towel over it, and used the warm kettle to iron the wet pages. After several passes, the notebook pages were not only dry

but flat. Haruko noticed that Matsumoto had used pencil for all of his notes and sketches. Pencil was less likely to blur in the rain, so Matsumoto must have been taking precautions against this very situation.

"Tapowaray...Dajulai, wakimizu ga arimasu, kono basho." (There is a spring, this place.)

Haruko pointed at the place in the notebook where Matsumoto had drawn a question mark next to the place name Dajulai. She wanted to explain that it was called Tapowaray in Pangcah and what the name meant, but her Japanese wasn't good enough.

"Kono basho ni wa wakimizu ga arimasu ka?" (This place has a spring?)

"Kon'na kanji janai (Not like that). 'Dajulai' means 'place where the spring comes gushing out.' It's a place name."

Haruko gestured broadly as her words came tumbling out faster and faster. She told herself she didn't need to say so much. Her Japanese wasn't that good, and now she was feeling a bit embarrassed.

"Chimei no imi (place name's meaning)! You mean, place name, it's meaning?"

"Yes! I'm so sorry, I don't know how to explain."

"Sō ka." (I see.)

At this point, her grandmother Alo returned from gathering sea snails on the beach. Haruko heard Alo speak before she saw her, and listened as her grandmother gave a detailed account of everything she'd heard at the beach that day. She was talking about the daughter of a family who had married incredibly well in Hualien City a while back, who always drove a luxury car when she returned to the village and *looked* as though she was living a good life, yet every time she came, brought just a few bags of rice and some seafood for her family. Alo's tone was full of skepticism, her words aimed at Haruko and clearly meant to imply that marriage to a Payrang (Han Chinese) was not as good as a person might imagine. Still talking, Alo came into the kitchen, caught sight of the strange man, and was duly astonished. Brows puckered, she gave Haruko a look that chastised her for not exercising proper caution. She looked Matsumoto up and down, observed his polite, intellectual demeanor, and thawed slightly.

腹語山

MORE THAN WORDS



Kit Fang 山女孩 Kit (方妙)

- **Category:** Literary Fiction
- **Publisher:** Yuan-Liou
- **Date:** 7/2024
- **Pages:** 288
- **Length:** 121,269 characters
(approx. 78,800 words in English)
- **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Kit's works, notable for their crisp, emotive storytelling and poetic prose, touch regularly on themes of hiking, travel and lifestyle. The author is followed by tens of thousands on Instagram. Her essays have been published and serialized in *GQ* and *Unitas* magazines and as essay collections in *In Between* and *The Mountain on Your Mind*. *More Than Words* is the author's first work of fiction.



This “coming-of-age” novel weaves together stories of love and hiking in a narrative spanning three distinct love triangle relationships across three generations. On the labyrinthian path to finding each other, the protagonists come face to face with their own self-doubts and bygone traumas.

When Fu Yu-Shan and Lin Hsuan-Yung’s childhood friendship blossoms into reciprocal love in adolescence, their parents step in, forbidding either from seeing each other again. Despite furtive contacts through a friend’s text message account, the two gradually fall out of touch, their love for one another lost in the passage of time.

Years later, a now older Yu-Shan strikes up a friendship with Joe, a dashing handsome colleague, while organizing a hike for their company. She soon learns that Joe not only knows of her past with Hsuan-Yung but that it was his account they had used to keep in touch early on. With Joe’s help, they reconnect, begin hiking together and, well removed from their parents’ shadow, pick up where they’d left off on their romantic journey. But Yu-Shan also harbors feelings for Joe, especially after learning of his own emotional struggles with trauma.

Yu-Shan keeps news of her rekindled romance from her parents because of the complicated relationship they share with Hsuan-Yung’s mother, who is both as close as a sister to her own mother and her father’s lover. Hsuan-Yung, honoring a promise to an old hunter friend, leaves to trek in Nepal. Yu-Shan learns from the old hunter that Hsuan-Yung’s trek is tied to the misfortunes encountered in Tibet several decades ago by a young woman...a story with which Yu-Shan too is connected.

The author imbues the narrative with insights gleaned during contemplative hikes and weaves rich metaphor and imagery into her characters’ inner dialogues. The undulating mountain landscapes described throughout mirror the emotional twists and turns in the plotline, guiding the reader on a trek in which high mountain mist, morning dew, and alpine flora and fauna all take on deeper meanings in the narrative. Read with your heart and discover the truth in what the mountains have to say.

MORE THAN WORDS

By Kit Fang

Translated by Catherine Xinxin Yu

“While in one sense, *More Than Words* spins a tale of three enigmatically intertwined love triangles, in another, it is a story that explores how human interactions and relationships reflect and echo those found in the natural world. Still further, the three figures within a love triangle may be analogized as the three peaks of the mountain range described in the story. While the details of furtive relationships, rising like the layers of a distant mountain ridge, are often first voiced by others, little doubt is left regarding their origin.

— Readmoo / Translated by Jeff Miller

Chapter One: The Mountain House That Lost Its Water Source

“I have to see that mountain with my own eyes,” I said. With the rain pelting down, I was worried I wasn’t speaking loud enough, so I even stressed my words.

1.

The morning I said that, the rain blew in from the sea. Gray clouds, gray ocean, and the wind slowly blurring the boundary between them into an indistinct expanse of fog. Dense staccato raindrops fell on banana leaves large and small, each tapping out a distinct sound, some crisp, some dull, like a prepubescent boy trying to deepen his voice – now thin, now low.

He said he’d come over.

He phoned me to ask what food was left. I went downstairs and opened the fridge to check: a bundle of creeping foxglove and three free-range eggs. Worried, he said he’d get some groceries in town once

he returned from the mountain.

“But the weather is expected to be unstable over the next few days. If it rains too hard, I might not be able to get down.” He said.

Ever since hearing he might come, I’d been waiting for him in the house. As usual, his blue Volkswagen would be parked outside the lush banana orchard, clearly visible from the second floor. Like a cat, I bent my knees and tucked my legs into my body, shivering slightly as I curled up in the rattan chair with a shawl wrapped around my shoulders. From time to time, I craned my neck to peer outside, but my expectant gaze was met only by the heavy rain.

When I last saw him a few days prior, he looked completely different from the first time I met him. He had outgrown the physique he had back in Taipei. He was tall with a straight posture to start with, but his return to the countryside had suddenly buffed him up. His arms, which he once used to type code with his shirt sleeves rolled up, had become tan and firm. Someone close to the earth would have a physique different from someone who exercised on machines in

an air-conditioned room. Now, his well-proportioned frame and muscles looked sturdy and unobtrusive.

His black-framed glasses suited him well, as if they were a natural extension of his facial features. Without them, his long, slender eyes seemed defenseless, as if the slightest word might hurt them. A few days ago, he had come to my place to help fix my boiler. He climbed up and down, getting all sweaty. After a hot shower, he stretched out his long legs and reclined comfortably on the tatami with one arm propping up his head. I stared at his large feet and stubby toes. I thought one foot to be extraordinarily wide.

"Oh, you're looking at that? You didn't know I had six toes on my right foot?" He swung his foot in my direction and stretched out all six toes, waving them showily. I couldn't tear my eyes away from that sixth toe.

"Did it ever bother you?" I asked.

"Of course, but only when I was a child." He sat up, pushed his glasses higher on his nose, and examined them closely with me. "I didn't dare take off my socks in front of people, and I was even reluctant to join the swimming team because of this. Still, everyone saw it eventually."

He said he had always been tall and strong. The other boys didn't dare mock him. However, when they lost a fight, they would roast him about it.

"They all said I won because of my extra *lan-tsiau*...like a third leg." Tongue in cheek, he gave me a sideway glance, and I laughed out loud. I replied saying it was really quite something.

"But in the summer of my first year of middle school, Hsuan-Yung asked me whether I could run so fast because of my extra toe," he continued.

"He said when I pulled a fast break, I was like a bolt of lightning. From that moment on, the sixth toe was my weapon, my source of strength. After that, whenever I came across any difficulty, I would tell myself, I'm someone who possesses a bolt of lightning!" His eyes were fixed on his toes as he spoke.

I couldn't help wondering what it had been like the first time they had met. That summer, in a sports field melting under a torrid sun, one boy looked up at the other, and those words that struck his heart like a bolt of lightning were spoken. They would influence this tall

boy for the rest of his life and anchor every event to come.

As I was thinking, an inexplicable conviction slowly came over me, telling me that I was there with them. I saw myself walking towards them, our three shadows gradually overlapping in the sun.

Night fell. I kept staring at the banana orchard. The rain continued to pour. He still hadn't come, and he would never know all the thoughts swirling in my mind.

2.

I was twenty-nine years old. I had left my first job and moved into Lin Hsuan-Yung's place in Taitung. Come to think of it, this was my sixth day here.

Hsuan-Yung was two months older than me, and we'd been born in the same hospital in Taipei. His parents got divorced when he was three. Because a woman in her twenties looking for a job in Taipei with two infants in tow was such an insurmountably sad story, his mother decided to keep only his newborn baby sister by her side. He on the other hand, who could already walk, was sent off to live with her maternal family in the Amis village of Piyoxo in Taitung County.

It was because of this that Hsuan-Yung harbored complex feelings towards his mom. She smelled nice, and had dark hair that fell to her shoulders, beautiful nails, and a thin diamond necklace. But she always seemed annoyed, perhaps towards Taitung, perhaps towards Hsuan-Yung. After long periods apart, she would often arrive bearing gifts, new clothes or new shoes; but she would also bring lots of new rules that Hsuan-Yung didn't understand, like no running at home or use a handkerchief to wipe your sweat.

"Can you imagine an indigenous boy taking out a hankie to wipe his sweat dry? I'd rather throw myself into the sea than be seen doing that." I can still remember how fifteen-year-old Hsuan-Yung would pose in a way that advertised all of his inbuilt adolescent rebelliousness; even the rhythm of his breath conveyed impatience. We lay side by side on the tatami, listening to the Pacific waves washing ashore in the distance.

"How come you didn't say this to Auntie Ting-

Ting?" I asked.

"It's not like you don't know her. Would she listen to me? I tried to communicate with her a few times, but we always ended up arguing until Grandma pulled us apart."

Whenever Hsuan-Yung talked about Auntie Ting-Ting, his expression would vacillate between stormy and overcast; a sharp contrast with how he looked when talking about his maternal grandmother.

Granny Kao was only sixty, but her hair had already turned fully white, and was thick as snow atop a high mountain. She was a skilled cook, and was good at acting cute too. When she laughed, the wrinkles around her nose would snuggle together. Men who entered her house, regardless of age, would almost never want to leave. They would help her change light bulbs or build pallets, or willingly pick up hoes to weed her field. Young lads would carry bundle after bundle of bamboo poles all the way from the city for her, and spend days going "heave-ho, heave-ho" to build a long fence at the edge of her field to keep mountain monkeys from descending upon her rice paddy at dawn and wreaking havoc.

Women, all crying about men, would visit her under the moon. In the bathroom, Granny would fill a large basin with hot water, sit next to the bathtub and pour her herbal infusion over each woman's trembling shoulders to warm them up, like watering soilless trees. As a child, I was allowed to sit by the bathtub on a little wooden stool to listen to the women's broken sobs while I caught termites attracted by the light. When Granny Kao realized I was growing up and beginning to understand what the women were saying, she sent me away to play with my little sister.

"Kui doesn't like me."

Granny Kao lowered her voice and corrected me. "Nonsense. Kui is just afraid of you."

I didn't speak. I just silently severed the termites' cellophane wings to thwart their attempts to fly. They were like burst bubbles under my fingers. I rinsed away heaps of corpses with a water scoop, shoals of them drifting with the current, becoming beached on the bathroom floor, forming some sort of pattern.

As I scrutinized it, I was overtaken by a sudden sense of fear. I turned away anxiously, and asked the woman in the tub whether she had seen it. She squinted through the steam and said hesitantly in Amis, "Is that a fish's tail?" Feeling like I was being choked, my heart dehydrated and beat frantically. Panicked, I scooped up some water and splashed it. The corpses swayed their tails and swam into the sea. Granny Kao sighed, saying how kids would play with anything, with no respect for life. She didn't see me holding back tears. She just coaxed me to get out and go help the other adults.

But I was like all of the other children: in that we just wanted to orbit Granny, now asking to eat this, now asking to eat that, tricking her into bathing us, or scooping our ears clean. She always found ways to accommodate everyone, like the fairy godmother who magicked the pumpkin carriage. Whenever she came out of the kitchen carrying something in her hands, everyone would stop what they were doing, and docilely gather around the big wooden table.

I regularly witnessed such scenes as a little girl. Granny would gently listen to everyone, never asking any questions, nor offering any advice; the answers just seemed to come to her. She just quietly refilled the teacup, like a mother in everyone's dreams.

When Hsuan-Yung talked about his granny, a sweet expression invariably took over his face. I fully understood because, whenever I thought about her, I probably had the same expression.

This was also why Hsuan-Yung couldn't understand Auntie Ting-Ting's disdain for Taitung and for living by the sea. She would wonder why spoiled things weren't tossed away, and how expired food could still be eaten.

"Food comes from the earth and isn't ruled by use-by dates. What's the point of expiration dates on plastic packages? Stuff naturally tells you whether they're spoiled or not. But Mom never cared to know." He went on staring at the ceiling, while moonlight trailed the sound of waves and poured brightly through the window. We stayed silent for a while.

My fifteen-year-old self couldn't think of any words

that might comfort Hsuan-Yung, because my family was different from his. Maybe because my mom was my best friend, or rather, I wanted to be her best friend.

Hsuan-Yung inhaled deeply, turned on his side to gaze at me, and squeezed out a raspy voice from his thin chest.

"What she didn't care to know, that included Dad, and me."

3.

The summer he got into high school, Auntie Ting-Ting suddenly told Hsuan-Yung that she had a stable partner. But that was the only time. She would never mention the man again. He didn't ask either, knowing that his mom didn't want him to live with them in that secluded hillside mansion in Xindian. She rented an old apartment for Hsuan-Yung near the botanical garden and within walking distance from his school.

At the time, Hsuan-Yung was eager to go to Taipei and didn't find anything objectionable with the arrangement. There was no obligation to get to know that man, and he could live an independent life free from the adults. He thought nothing could be more perfect. Nobody was there to discipline him, he had more pocket money than he could imagine, and he could run or shout in his own apartment as much as he wanted, without anyone interfering. It was just that every Wednesday, Auntie Ting-Ting would bring Kui with her to the botanical garden apartment to have a meal with Hsuan-Yung, and he had to play the role of a clean and well-behaved high school student. No matter how ridiculous and slovenly his other days were at the moment, come Wednesday morning he would jump up by reflex, diligently pick up the vacuum cleaner and showerhead, and clean his flat and the plants until everything was spick and span.

"I mean it! Not just the sheets, but also the sofa cover and curtains. I'd remove them all to wash them." Many years later, by Chiaming Lake, twenty-nine-year-old Hsuan-Yung told me about those days for the first time. In the midst of shining his headlamp on the camping stove, head cocked and listening for the faint

hiss of leaking gas, he shared the experience with a smile.

"Wow, Lin Hsuan-Yung, you really managed to do that?"

"Don't you find it amazing? Back then, I thought it was a real blast." We were sitting on a vantage point some distance from the camping ground, looking at the tents glowing in the dark like giant wombs, the silhouettes inside moving like fetuses.

"I only had to be proper for one day per week, and then I could spend six days however I wanted. I could go all out playing bridge, or play video games way past midnight. I could sleep, or not sleep, I could choose to be awake, or not to be. Compared to all this, Wednesday was like the one little dead bulb on a dazzling Christmas tree. It was that insignificant."

"That might be true, or maybe not. Maybe you never saw this," I expressed myself quietly. "It's possible that, because of Wednesday, you deliberately squandered your other six days in reckless abandon."

He lit the gas canister in the dark. Blue flames rose up. He clipped the pot to the canister-top stove, let out a brief sigh, and smiled embarrassedly.

Back in high school, the only person he felt sorry for was his little sister. Sometimes Kui visited him alone. She would change out of her gray private-school uniform, put on a checkered mini skirt and thick makeup, and stay out until dawn. Hsuan-Yung knew perfectly that his mom was too busy with work to spend time with Kui. But the two of them had been separated for so long that he didn't know how to be a good big brother. Most times, he would just cover for her, and he only asked about it once. Kui shrugged and gave him a blank expression. "It'd freak you out if I told you."

盡日

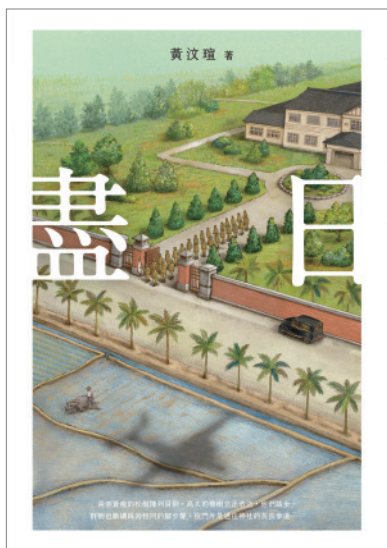
END OF DAYS



Huang
Wun-Syuan
黃汶瑄

-
- **Category:** Literary Fiction
 - **Publisher:** Gaea
 - **Date:** 8/2024
 - **Pages:** 272
 - **Length:** 110,425 characters
(approx. 71,700 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

The author, born in Taoyuan in 1988, holds a degree in History from National Dong Hwa University. *End of Days*, Huang's debut novel, won honors at the second Taiwan Historical Fiction Awards in 2017. The author hopes his story, inspired by events from his own family's history, helps preserve memories of a historical time now fast fading from social consciousness.



This poetically penned, emotion-gripping novel centers around the life of a Taiwanese family in the final weeks before Japan's surrender and the end of the Pacific War. Dispersed, hungry, and in regular danger, all cling to the hope of survival and reuniting once again.

Despite his degree in History, Huang set all of his initial literary efforts in the present. *End of Days* marks the author's first excursion into historical fiction and novel writing. Inspired by his grandmother's childhood memories, Huang views this work as an opportunity to capture and preserve authentic memories and experiences from wartime Taiwan.

This story centers on the Khóo family, which now has only its elderly, women, and children at home to endure the American air raids, incessant hunger, and deep-set concern for family members far away. The family's eldest son, who has a wife and daughter, is with the Japanese Army on some unknown Pacific island. Their youngest son, although still a student, was conscripted as well and is serving somewhere in the prefectural capital. The son-in-law too, compelled to leave his pregnant wife behind, is with a trench-digging brigade someplace faraway. Four stories unfolding in four places collectively chronicle the experience of a Taiwanese family during the final weeks of the Second World War.

Huang's detailed literary style vividly captures in rich detail the sensorial landscapes of both the Taiwan countryside and remote tropical islands and impresses onto each character a tangled complex of thoughts and emotions. What he has realized in *End of Days* is an emotive microcosm of the cruelty of war, interethnic conflict, and human entanglements. More than a family epic inspired by real events, this work offers insights that shed additional, authentic light onto this increasingly forgotten period in Taiwan history.

END OF DAYS

By Huang Wun-Syuan

Translated by Sahana Narayan

“For the average person, pivotal events in history have little to no immediate effect on day-to-day existence. Declarations of war and peace take time to filter through a population, while declarations of “victory” are never accompanied by the jubilant sound of trumpets. *End of Days* touches on this self-evident truth. Although readers know the story opens on the final few days of the Second World War, the family at the center of this story is completely blind to what is to come. With its members scattered by wartime needs and realities, the family remains united by the will to survive and be reunited at some point again in peace. This tale of fortitude and survival is one readers are sure to find emotionally gripping and highly relatable.

— Readmoo / Translated by Jeff Miller

Shōwa Year 20 (1945)⁰¹

July 31st

1.

The storm raged on into the night. The chickens’ clucking, the dogs’ barking, the grass and leaves’ fluttering, even the mud splashing – all were silenced by the storm’s howls, its push and pull. Following the wind’s screams, the rains flowed from black night into the low-lying air raid shelter, slowly rising toward the wooden boards at its ceiling, forming a larger and

larger pool. It felt as if the whole world was flooding.

Inside the shelter was a kerosene lamp, its flame thin and brittle, casting a weak light over the wet interior. So only by the time its light reached Auntie A-mī’s graying hair did Khóo Guát notice she’d entered the shelter. Khóo Guát had been lying on the bamboo bed, her air raid hood next to her, a thin blanket covering her eight-month-pregnant belly.

“’s the roof leakin’?” asked Auntie A-mī.

“Nah,” said Khóo Guát, slowly sitting up, turning to face her mother. “S’t that a typhoon out there?”

“Yeah. Been hollerin’ the whole night. Big winds and rains.” The sparse lamplight glistened against the raindrops on Auntie A-mī’s neck and forehead, casting a shallow imprint of Khóo Guát’s shadow against the shelter’s walls. Auntie A-mī walked up to the bed, one hand picking up the used bowl and chopsticks, the other touching the back of her daughter’s hand. “Y’alright?”

Khóo Guát gently drew her hand away from Auntie A-mī’s grasp.

⁰¹ Translator’s note: This work blends three languages (Mandarin, Taiwanese, and Japanese) seamlessly to work as a time machine, taking readers back into the past. It starts with mandarin, but gets progressively involved with Taiwanese and even Japanese terms in the dialogue, the lingua francas at the time. Then, even the description becomes Taiwanese. When you read it, you cannot help but get sucked in to that specific world. It is hard to find analogues for three separate languages in English in a Taiwanese context. I have tried to substitute accents to respect different character voices, and throw in enough Taiwanese context for it to be recognizably Taiwanese while also maintaining the tone that native readers will experience in reading the original.

"Something up in th' house?"

"Nah...s'fine."

Her limbs were still icy, Aunt A-mî thought to herself. She should whip something up to help her gain some strength.

Torrent after torrent crashed into the ground, occasionally accompanied by the sound of crazy winds, twisting and breaking the bamboo. The air-raid shelter was too low – all they could see was the rain, even as its spreading vapors soaked the threadbare blankets. They weren't sure how long the storm would continue, though it didn't look like it would stop anytime soon. Khóo Guát urged her mother to return back to the house. With the thin, lingering scent of kerosene still hanging in the air, Aunt A-mî took one last look around the shelter. She lowered her head and left, taking the bowl and chopsticks with her.

The night was pitch-black, only the barest shred of light peering out from inside the shelter, their neighbor's thick-growing bamboo luckily smothering the rest. If the local air raid warden caught sight of it, Aunt'd for sure get an earful.

The storm was as vicious as ever. The flowers from the white champak tree in their backyard had been blown clear off, making a pale white slush on the ground. This flower mud was slippery, and Aunt A-mî clung to the bamboo as she carefully made her way back. She proceeded along a side wing of the house⁰² and past the open space in the front where they dried newly harvested rice to the tightly shut wooden door at the center.

Uncle A-tsâi was inside, seated on a bench against the wall. His cheeks were sunken, his face a tangle of wrinkles, a dark shadow clipped against his frame. He closed his parched mouth and his eyes and listened in silence to the storm rattling against the roof and against the windows slathered in thick, black paper. It felt as though everything might come apart at a moment's notice. Bîng-tsu was sitting next to the oil lamp, her small body casting a large shadow on the wall. Twist, fold, move hands! She cast a

birdie, soaring through the sky, against the lamplit wall. The wind suddenly blew through the main door. Uncle A-tsâi opened his eyes to see Aunt A-mî enter. The dark earth trembled behind her, the lantern flickering in the sudden wind.

Aunt A-mî shut and bolted the door, and the house fell back into quiet. She wiped her hair with a hand, unleashing a flood of water. Uncle A-tsâi let out a tiny sigh. A-mî glanced at him, then made her way to the kitchen.

The kitchen echoed with low sobs. Aunt A-mî could hear them over the violent wind. She waited by the door, then coughed ever so slightly. The sobs abated until they stopped altogether. She entered the kitchen and saw her daughter-in-law, A-tsîng, bent low, her face where the light could not reach, returning the dishes to their cupboard. Aunt A-mî knew she was thinkin' 'bout the letter Sin-á had sent back a year ago from down in Nanyo. Aunt A-mî couldn't read Japanese, so A-tsîng read it out to her. It was short...just a quick description of the war. Later A-tsîng had taken the letter and hidden it – under her bed, under the water tank, behind the Shinto shrine. She'd take the letter out and read it, then hide it elsewhere, over and over. There were spots aplenty to hide her letter, but her worry could not be contained.

And where was Gî-á, for that matter? Aunt A-mî thought of her younger son.

Uncle A-tsâi had also heard A-tsîng's feeble cries when the wind rested between blows. He wished he couldn't hear, but these days, circumstances forced him to listen for even distant murmurs at every moment. To survive, he had to pay close attention to things he'd rather not know. Even while dreaming, he had to focus like mad to differentiate whether those enemy planes were in his dreams or actually in the sky above. He realized that in that age, everything of value belonged to others. All he could claim was weakness, resentment, and panic.

The flame flickered along with the wind outside. Bîng-tsu's fingers came together, then spread apart, shadows shrinking with the light and then elongating toward the kitchen. On the wall she made a shower of clouds, large and small at the same time. She raised her hands up and up, bringing the clouds with her, until they burst above her head, streaking away with the wind.

"A-kong, is it *kamikaze* wind?" Bîng-tsu turned to ask Grandpa A-tsâi. Her voice was delicate against the rough

02 Translator's note: This is a *sanheyuan*, a traditional type of Taiwanese house. It has a large courtyard, often used for drying rice, which is surrounded by a main building and two side wings. The sides of the courtyard are known as protecting dragons or *hsiang fang*, where the younger generations of the family would live. The oldest would live in the main wing, close to the kitchen and common room.

wind. "Uncle says kamikaze comes when it's bad. When Japan's losing, kamikaze comes and blows the English and Americans away! Then the emperor gets happy."

Uncle A-tsâi said nothing.

The light brightened, the shadows on the wall went out. Aunt A-mî emerged from the kitchen with A-tsîng, whose eyes were still red; though, mercifully, it was hard to tell in the gentle lamplight. The typhoon would pass, but they'd still need to get up early tomorrow. A-tsîng came up to Bîng-tsu and gently coaxed her daughter to bed. "Time for night night," she said. Only Uncle A-tsâi and Aunt A-mî were left in the common room. The old couple said nothing, giving their silence over to the storm's yells.

"Yer daughter alright?" asked A-tsâi, breaking the silence.

"When d'you care?" responded A-mî. "A-guât's limbs're still cold. Her blood's still blocked." A-tsâi whistled back. "You're wetter 'n a dunked dog. You should change."

"Ah know."

Klack, klack. Someone was on the move, their footsteps moving further away, the storm coming back into focus. A-tsîng couldn't sleep, the room without a fire, the wind across the wall striking so close. The common room had gone quiet. A-tsîng knew Bîng-tsu was still awake, her eyes closed, tossing and turning. The empty bed was too cold, even for summer. She lifted their blanket slightly, reached over and patted her daughter's back. Bîng-tsu could feel Ma's fingers shaking ever so slightly. Maybe Ma felt cold? She opened her eyes a crack, moving her part of blanket over to Ma, though Ma would always give it back. She'd just ate, but Bîng-tsu could feel the hunger in her belly. It started there and went out. Soon it was all over. She wanted next morning's breakfast. But even when it came, she'd still be hungry.

A gust of wind suddenly rocked their earthen hut. Bîng-tsu shut her eyes tight. The hut had not even the faintest light, darkness encircling. In another room, Uncle A-tsâi ground his teeth, the uppers against the lowers, a sound like *kelikeli*, making such a racket that aunt A-mî couldn't sleep. She shoved Uncle A-tsâi until he silently opened his eyes, peering out at the dark room - and only then did she fall asleep, her breaths deep and even. Uncle A-tsâi listened to the sounds of the night. It was only as

the winds began to quiet did he finally slip off, exhausted. He ground his teeth again, waking his wife. So it went the whole night.

It ended. Far cries of chickens piled up, and Aunt A-mî opened her eyes. She could already hear her daughter-in-law in the kitchen, stacking kindling for the fire. Aunt A-mî got up. She swept her hair, made chaotic by her sleep, into a tight bun. She left her room and opened up the front doors, then made way for the kitchen. Storm's set, black clouds like soot in the sky. Aunt A-mî let out a sigh as she entered the kitchen, ready to help her daughter-in-law make breakfast. A-tsîng was starting a fire in the old stove, a thick smoke emerging from its maw, a pot on top. The first was slow to start, as the night's storm had soaked most of the firewood. Aunt A-mî took a couple sweet potatoes from a bamboo basket. They had almost started to sprout. She sighed and skinned them, then cut them into chunks on the cutting board. She took rice from a ceramic urn, then added it carefully to the pot - but, with a second thought, she snatched some rice from the pot and put it back in the urn. A-tsîng finally started the fire. The water in the pot slowly hissed to a boil, smoke spitting skyward. Uncle A-tsâi casually made his way over to the kitchen. He stopped at the vegetable cupboard, bent down, and secretly pulled the door open.

Hidden in the bottom drawer of the kitchen cabinet was an altar to their household deity, Sîang-tè-kong, who had been worshipped for three generations already. He sat on an altar made of camphorwood, one foot stepping on a turtle, the other a snake. He held a mighty sword, an intricately carved crown firmly perched on his head. His pa had brought this god into the house. In the old days, villagers would come seeking answers to their troubles. But when those Japanese started the war with China, A-tsâi hid the god away. He didn't want trouble with the authorities. Black smoke crept about the kitchen, onto the god's face, melding with the darkness of the cupboard. He struck a match, lighting incense and praying, his mouth full of incantations. He put the incense in its burner. Uncle A-tsâi did not close the door immediately, instead letting the breeze enter, making the incense burn brighter, illuminating the god as if it was really sitting there. Aunt A-mî placed the pot on the top of the stove, wiped her

hands on her clothes, then pressed her palms together, closed her eyes, and silently prayed to the god. More smoke came from the maw of the stove. Uncle A-tsâi closed the door of the vegetable cupboard, the hidden god and its incense still sputtering, his power in check for the time being. He walked to the common room, its light weak. On the table once reserved for his god now lay a shrine to Japanese gods. Even their ancestral tablet had been replaced. There was no incense burner. Uncle A-tsâi did not know how to pray, and had no reason to. They were not Japanese; the Japanese gods would not help them. He turned toward their ancestral tablet, bowed to generations of ancestors past, then straightened his back, meeting their gaze in silence.

Someone in the kitchen hollered to come eat. The pot was filled with a very watery sweet potato porridge. Uncle A-tsâi's bowl was on the table. Bîng-tsu, just woken up, had gone to the air-raïd shelter to give the aunty there her breakfast while Aunty A-mî sat at the table, taking small bites out of her bowl. A-tsîng left the kitchen, carrying a bucket full of dirty clothes. She headed toward the pond beside the house. She'd finish it while the day was still young. Branches and leaves floated in the pond, scattered by the night's storm. The water's surface reflected a sunless sky full of black clouds, the world hanging low. A-tsîng squatted next to the water's surface, beating at the family's clothes, then carefully scrubbing them clean. Her washing shattered the dark sky in the waters, shimmering and shifting as she stayed steady, breaths calm, immersed in her work. Soon, Bîng-tsu stepped into the messy, rippling world of the pond. She crouched down, watching her mother. A-tsîng paused her work. The world slowed, stopped, reflecting mother and daughter alone.

"Ma...have you eaten?" asked Bîng-tsu.

"Not hungry yet," she replied. "You go first. Eat with A-kong and A-ma."

Bîng-tsu glanced at her Ma. She reached out and gently brushed aside a few strands of Ma's hair. They were fallen across Ma's forehead. She wanted to help Ma dry the clothes. Ma said, "No need...Go eat." Bîng-tsu hugged her knees and watched the leaves traveling the clouded waters before getting up and walking to the house. As she came back, Uncle A-tsâi stepped through

the door. Seeing his granddaughter coming toward him, he furrowed his brow: "This kid don't eat when it's time! Where'd she run off to?"

The wind had calmed. The champak tree by the earthen hut and the stretch of bamboo stood still, unmoving, the sky pausing at its tips. Uncle A-tsâi looked up at the sky, then lowered his head and crossed the yard in front, circling past the bamboo. In an instant, the fields beyond filled his view. Following the irrigation ditch, he walked on, stopping near the rice paddies. Most of the rice had already ripened but, after a night of wind and rain, many stalks had been flattened, whole patches were now pressed against the earth. It was harvest season, but the rice had been planted late. Uncle A-tsâi wanted to wait a bit before harvesting it, but the typhoon had taken it all before he could. He shook his head. *Can't do nothin'. No one to lend a hand. Back then, we'd all pitch in, young and old, men and women...one family.* Side by side, gripping buckets full of seedlings, they'd moved through the flooded fields, planting rice shoots across the land with Uncle A-tsâi in charge, yelling orders and instructions. It was only at noon, sitting beneath the bamboo, that he and his sons leaned close – sharing lunch from the same bucket. But now, there wasn't anyone to be found to work the fields. Uncle A-tsâi realized he'd grown old. He wanted to speak but had no energy and, on those occasions when he did speak, only the bamboo was there to hear him. Might as well shut up and keep going.

可愛的仇人

ADORABLE ENEMIES



Hsieh Yi-An 謝宜安

- **Category:** Historical Fiction; Metafiction
 - **Publisher:** Locus
 - **Date:** 8/2024
 - **Pages:** 328
 - **Length:** 124,329 characters (approx. 80,800 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Hsieh Yi-An was born in the historic town of Lukang, graduated from National Taiwan University, and now lives in Taipei. As a core member of Taipei Legend Studio, Hsieh researches, conserves, and promotes local legends centered on monsters and mysterious happenings. She is a contributing writer on the *Daemon Tales* book series and helped develop the eponymous tabletop game. Her recent work covers both non-fiction, including *Taiwanese School Ghost Stories* and *Where They Come from*, and *Taiwan Urban Legends* and *Where They Come from*, and novels such as *The Snake Lord: Bride of Pearlesque Bluff* and *Adorable Enemies*.



This metafictional novel follows the journey of a dedicated historian on her journey collecting, translating and editing five little-known historical documents dating from the late-nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries, hoping to bring to light the voices of women from that period.

A Japanese expeditionary force dispatched to Taiwan's remote southern cape in 1874 in reprisal for the massacre of shipwrecked Okinawan fishermen captures an injured indigenous girl. Curious about the potential of "civilizing" Taiwan's Austronesian natives, they take her to Japan for schooling. A contemporary news illustration of her in a kimono is captioned with her adopted Japanese name – Otai. Repatriated to her home village in Taiwan, the sad news breaks just several years later of her ostracization and suicide.

A historian, inspired by Otai's story, turns her attention to five obscure documents from the early twentieth century centering around the female experience in colonial Taiwan. One, a long essay work, follows the furtive romance of the author (a Japanese architect) and a "woman of mystery". Next, a letter from an indigenous Taiwanese participant in the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition details the reasons why she has chosen to reject a proposal of marriage from a Japanese academician.

The last three are works of fiction. The first, written by a Japanese author caught between two cultural landscapes, centers on Taiwan's *shim-pua* (child-betrothed) marriage traditions. The second, penned by an author who was once a *shim-pua* bride herself, narrates a young Taiwanese woman's knotty relationship with a Japanese policeman. The final work, written by a former subject of Japanese-ruled Taiwan, learns Mandarin in the postwar era and weaves a narrative centered around the knottingly entangled, ill-starred relationships between two Taiwanese comfort women and a Taiwanese man serving in the Japanese army.

In actuality, all five documents are works of fiction. Societies colored by patriarchal norms generally leave little room for female perspectives on history, making it only natural for women's experiences to be filtered and interpreted through the men who wrote about them. In rejecting the imperial, patriarchal mores of the time that mask the true experiences of women such as Otai, Hsieh Yi-An's ruminations in *Adorable Enemies* help readers ponder and empathize with the experience of womanhood in colonial Taiwan.

ADORABLE ENEMIES

By Hsieh Yi-An

Translated by Sahana Narayan

“Drawing on actual historical events, *Adorable Enemies* works on several levels. On its surface, it tells the tale of a scholar’s discovery and sharing of long-lost firsthand historical writings. One layer down, it weaves anecdotal tales of romantic love crossing the bounds of ethnicity and class in colonial-era Taiwan. Deeper still, it explores social repression, interethnic prejudices, female self-consciousness, and the oft-excessive approbation given to prominent figures from history. Although each of the “found” historical writings is unique, they all share commonalities that together paint a satisfyingly relatable picture of a now largely overlooked and untold era in Taiwan history. Moreover, the historical figures and events framing the narrative lend believable credence to the protagonists and narrative flow in this novel.

— Readmoo / Translated by Jeff Miller

White Termites

Translator’s Note

This manuscript was found among the personal effects of the late Nakai Megumi. It was discovered by my colleague, M, while researching the architectural history of the Japanese colonial period in Taiwan. While looking through Nakai-shi’s diary, they found this manuscript, and shared it with me. Curiously, this was not included within the diary itself, but as a separate series of pages under the heading “The Termites’ Rampage” with the subtitle “Recalling the Construction of the Governor-General’s Office”. I am translating it here for research purposes.

From its contents, it is clearly meant as a personal recounting of Nakai-shi’s time during the construction of the Governor-General’s office, the seat of power during the Japanese Colonial Era. The building still

stands and now serves as the Office of the President. His account begins after the unveiling ceremony for the Commander Saigō Jūdō Monument (located in present-day Mudan Township, on the Hengchun peninsula), which took place on March 15th, 1936, meaning the manuscript was likely written sometime later that year. The narrative then circles back to the past, centering around events occurring between 1910 and 1915, Nakai-shi’s first years in Taiwan. This manuscript was found in an envelope, along with a postcard of the Governor-General’s office printed at the time of its unveiling.

Nakai Megumi (1879 - 1944) was an architect. He was born in Gifu, and graduated from Tokyo Imperial University with a degree in architecture. After graduation, he joined the Tatsuno-Kasai Architecture Office and worked under the famous architect Tatsuno Kingo. He first came to Taiwan in 1910, to assist in the construction of the Governor-General’s office. During his tenure in

the colony, he designed many buildings, and indeed became one of Taiwan's most important architects. While some parts of the manuscript match up with events in Nakai-shi's career, much of it doesn't jibe with his contemporaries' impressions of him at the time, making it difficult to tell how much is a true recounting of the facts. Perhaps Nakai-shi was writing a short story inspired by his own life experiences. However, he wasn't otherwise a writer of fiction. If it is factual, the child in this story must have been born into this world around 1915, and thus has most likely passed from it.

The sun glistens against the slopes. My perch is high. I can see the whole country at a glance – flat farmhouses scattered across the mountains, mountains surrounded by valleys that give way to even steeper mountains in the distance. Sixty years ago, there was a war here.

This is the view from Ishimon at Kōshun-gun, Takao Shū. I designed this monument. It was unveiled days ago, on the 15th of March. The monument stands at the top of a towering mountain. The view is breathtaking. Enough to set a heart to aching.

I originally hoped that the completion of this monument would let me finally lay down my troubles. But alas, they continue floating to the fore. I had thought that twenty years of life would let my heart digest it all. I did not anticipate it would simply deepen my longing.

These notes should not exist, but I have written them down anyway to escape from my memories. They are for myself alone, existing in the freedom of this moment alone. Aside from that, they should not, and cannot, mean anything else.

If you happen to be the unfortunate reader of these notes, please treat them as fantasy. And when you finish reading, burn them.

★

What kind of place is colonial Taiwan? In the past, I could not help but fantasize over this question. Like

my many senpai before me, I graduated from Tokyo Imperial University and joined our mentor Tatsuno-sensei's architectural firm. Afterwards, some of us made our way to Taiwan, and became the architects of this new world.

Perhaps it was not us who chose this colony, but rather the colony that chose us. The year I entered Tatsuno-sensei's firm just so happened to be the year of an era-defining architectural competition. This competition was a topic oft-discussed but never realized in the mainland, yet it happened here in our colony. Who would have ever imagined such a thing? And such an unbelievable goal it set...to design none other than the colony's seat of power: The Governor-General's Office.

The winning blueprint, made by the labor of one's own hands, promised to be more than a building; it would be a symbol for all of Taiwan. As an architect, what could be a greater source of pride? If you could best the competition and stand out from amongst the pack, your name would be recorded in the annals of history. Even though I was doing my military conscription service at the time, I couldn't stop my heart from fluttering. I had no time for preparations of my own, but I nevertheless could not help but bask in the glory of the moment, bearing witness to the grandness of it all. The newspapers carried advertisements for applicants and gatherings were abuzz with talk of who would take the top prize. The architectural association even released a booklet, "Applicant Guidelines", of which I obtained a copy. The information within was incredibly detailed. Inside was a scale map of the reserved site as well of the surrounding area. It even included a stratigraphic cross-section of the site.

Was this to become sacred grounds? Whereupon a grand building would be erected, reflecting pride down upon the entire island?

I had never been to Taiwan, but with this booklet in hand, I felt my fate become inextricably entwined with it. I read through these guidelines multiple times. Just knowing that this competition was to be the

battleground for the finest Japanese architects was enough to set my heart to trembling with excitement. If only I'd been released from military service earlier... The competition deadline was set for just a month after my discharge. I could only watch my senpai from the sidelines as they fought for glory on this marvelous stage.

The review stage lasted for a long time, and first-round results were released the following year. Moriyama-senpai, a senior who had made a name for himself during his time at Tokyo Imperial University, had made the cut. Moriyama-senpai was one of Tatsuno-sensei's disciples, and also an architect I respected greatly. At the time, he was working in the colonial government, and when Tatsuno-sensei visited Taiwan for the second review, he received Moriyama-senpai's welcome and personally inspected his work.

"That pump station was beautiful. Drinking water supplied from there will fill people with joy."

"And the train station hotel here, designed by Matsuzaki-san - truly a representative work in the colony. The efficiency of this government is staggering. What would normally take three years was completed in a mere fourteen months. Such a beautiful building. It could not have been easy."

So said Tatsuno-sensei. He even told me: "Nakai, Moriyama has gone to a good place. My recommendation of him to Chief Goto was definitely the right choice. I firmly believe Taiwan is a stage where my students can flex their talents."

Moriyama-senpai was a blinding star, born to nobility and a talent known to all. But he was also a playboy, and a famous layabout. Tatsuno-sensei had expressed worries about him numerous times. Knowing all this, I could fathom just how much my mentor's consideration meant.

Not long after, the results of the competition were announced. Moriyama-senpai's plan had not been selected. In fact, no top prize was named, and the second-place honor went to the plan submitted by Nagano Uheiji-sensei. Because the Governor General's office was not fully satisfied with Nagano-sensei's

design, the Civil Engineering Bureau drew up a revised building plan using Nagano-sensei's plan as their basis. Then, in a twist of fate, the colonial government appointed Moriyama-senpai as construction supervisor for the project.

"How does a loser become construction supervisor?" This naturally sparked an awkward controversy which, in no small part, led to my move to Taiwan. Tatsuno-sensei tapped me to go and assist Moriyama-senpai in his work. This is why I first came to Taiwan.

*

Tatsuno-sensei would frequently say that most designers neglect Taiwan's natural conditions in their work, leading many buildings, which would have been fine for the home islands, to fare poorly in the colony's tropical climate. Even after studying the "Applicant Guidelines", many would remain willfully ignorant of this issue.

The mountainous landscape of my birthplace in Gifu is reminiscent of Taiwan. However, Gifu's mountains get biting cold, while Taiwan's flatlands are scorching hot. New arrivals on Taiwan consistently protest that the heat here is enough to send one into a drowsy stupor, a state of complete ineffectiveness, a totalizing burn. I could not help but laugh at the notion: do we architects not have readily available methods to combat such heat? Balconies and more - how could humans ever be truly without an effective response?

However, my first impression upon arriving in Taiwan in September was not of heat; it was of never-ending feasts.

In my professional capacity, my first months in Taiwan were a whirlwind of welcome banquets, farewell parties, new-years parties, staff appreciation dinners, celebrations, exhibitions, dinner parties... I had no notion of refusal, and foolishly accepted a rash of invitations. Thus began an indigestible torrent of banquets. At one such event, I ran into Murakami-kun, a classmate of mine at First Higher School. I would never have expected to meet him in Taiwan, of all

places. Murakami-kun was well-versed in these types of affairs, and would introduce me to all sorts of people: "this is *so-and-so* commissioner and his wife, *so-and-so* entrepreneur and his wife." It was an endless parade of officials and their wives... Murakami-kun was tall and talkative, and the madams all loved him. As for me, just a few feasts in and my head was spinning towards the floor. I don't believe I could remember anyone's name, even if pressed.

I expressed my desire to retire to Murakami-kun. In the future, unless absolutely necessary, I would very much like to put an end to these exhausting soirees and enjoy the company of my books instead.

"It's necessary! This one is of the utmost importance!" Murakami-kun would say.

According to Murakami-kun's standards, every banquet had an absolutely unique and vital reason to attend. And yet, in reality, I was a new official of no particular importance. It's not as if I were a senior section chief! Not a single social event required my presence.

"Listen to yourself! Are you not the scion of a reputable family, the descendant of a distinguished Waka poet?

"You must be joking."

"Alright, but the Emperor's birthday celebration is being held at the Governor-General's residence! There will be many higher-ups!"

I could never manage to decline Murakami-kun's invitations, and thus agreed to attend. The chance to see that residence, designed by Fukuda Tōgo-sensei, provided at least one good reason to go. At the insistence of former Governor-General Kodama, no expense had been spared in its construction, exhausting much of the treasury and provoking public resentment.

The party began at dusk, delicate rosy clouds wafting in the darkening sky. Bright lamps had been lit, so many as to dazzle the eye, making the space brighter, I imagined, than at midday. Their light fell upon the residence's many tropical plants and fresh flowers, revealing colors more vivid than possible

under sunlight – so dreamlike as to be surreal. And in the midst of this fantastic white light was the stone gray façade of the residence itself – the richest of all imperial beauties, beauty enough to leave one breathless. To me as an architect, such beauty is truly worth any expense.

The guests assumed their seats. There was a stage before them, specially erected for the occasion. The madams wore kimonos of terrific beauty, with glittering accessories to match. Salaries in the colony were high, which helped explain the splendor.

Murakami-kun, sitting at my side, must have seen my gaze drawn to the ladies. As if to instigate something, he told me: "There will be geisha tonight." I knew he was making a big deal of nothing. After all, I'd been to the ryōtei many times, enough that they had long since lost their luster. And yet, I had heard that officials displayed a level of impropriety in the colonies unheard of in the home islands, a situation not even their wives could rein in. Murakami-kun had told me once that even Governor-General Kodama had once taken a long-acquainted geisha to bed in the residence itself, resulting in a thief running off with his clothes.

斷棒

THE SHATTERED SLUGGER AND OTHER STORIES



photo © Huang Lei Ling

Chen Shang-Chi
陳尚季

-
- **Category:** Literary Fiction, Short Stories
 - **Publisher:** ThinkKingDom
 - **Date:** 6/2024
 - **Pages:** 272
 - **Length:** 83,806 characters
(approx. 54,400 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Born in 1996, Chen holds a bachelor's in Sinophone Literature and master's in Creative Writing from National Dong Hwa University. With the exception of three years during junior high school, Chen played league baseball from elementary school through university, with his eyes set on going pro. Since abandoning his dreams of a career in baseball, he has refocused his passions on writing. *The Shattered Slugger and Other Stories* is his first short story collection.



*Finding his dreams of playing professional baseball on the rocks, the author of *The Shattered Slugger and Other Stories* switched course from playing to writing about baseball. Chen Shang-Chi's eight baseball-themed stories in this book touch on the beauty and warmth that thrive both despite and because of life's imperfections.*

Chen Shang-Chi's dream since childhood of a career in major league baseball is scuttled by an onset of the yips and injuries suffered while at university. Hoping to turn lemons into lemonade, he explores other career opportunities that will still keep him "in the game". The short story collection *The Shattered Slugger and Other Stories*, Chen's maiden literary effort, revolves around the joys, sorrows, discouragements, and hope wrapped up in this sport off the diamond.

Protagonists in the five short stories set in Taiwan include a retired ball player who in his retirement handmakes furniture from broken baseball bats; a cash-strapped trainer who dreams of training kids to play ball; a man who in dedicating his life to the game loses his mother, wife and child in the process; two Americans who leave their minor league careers for better money as pro ball players in Taiwan; and the last remaining employee of a Taiwan-based baseball glove manufacturer. Of the three stories set outside of Taiwan, one narrates the experiences of a Taiwanese serving in the Japanese Army during the Pacific War, one follows the spiritual journey of the son of a professional MLB player, and the last weaves a sad tale centered around a Taiwanese who left home and country for the United States, where he ends up playing the mascot for an MLB team. These stories and their characters shed light on the game of baseball beyond the floodlights and on the everyday lives and turmoils of those in baseball's orbit.

None who have played the game have not tasted the bitter flavors of defeat. In the playing fields conjured up in *The Shattered Slugger and Other Stories*, Chen, rather than explaining his protagonists' regrets away, shows how they have learned to accept and coexist with them. This, after all, may be this former-ball-player-turned-author's greatest gift to his readers.

THE SHATTERED SLUGGER AND OTHER STORIES

By Chen Shang-Chi

Translated by Joel Martinson

“**A**uthor Chen Shang-Chi’s lifelong dream of landing a career in the major leagues was brought to an abrupt end because of injuries suffered while playing on his university team. *The Shattered Slugger and Other Stories* is thus much more than a collection of baseball-inspired short stories; it is a distillation of the author’s experiences both on and off the diamond. Most center around the life-changing power of baseball, touching on such disparate topics as the rise and fall of Taiwan’s baseball glove industry and the unfair pressures placed on the son of a failed pro-baseball hopeful. These stories not only shed light on Chen’s own life and experiences but also reflect and offer relatable lessons on life in general.

— Readmoo / Translated by Jeff Miller

Story #1

In the community near the Hakka settlement – at least in my childhood recollection – the narrow, winding cement road leading up the hill was where I played with my friends. I lived in the first house at the foot of the hill. It was just me and Grandad and, of course, poor little Ba, who would have died in a recycling bin if Grandad hadn’t heard its cries one day and taken it home.

Most afternoons, my classmates’ grandparents would wait for them at home, sitting outside chatting, drinking or occasionally straightening up. My grandad was a little different. He did carpentry at home, sometimes spending the entire day at it. He also occasionally took construction work at the behest of friends or did odd jobs at the village center.

Before starting elementary school, I would play together with the older neighbor girls and boys. We’d hit paper balls with sticks we found along the stream

and splash around in the water, leaving me absolutely filthy every day. Once I started going to school, the rules said I had to wear a skirt, and a pink one at that. I didn’t like pink and I didn’t like skirts. I told Grandad it felt weird with nothing between my thighs, so he had me talk to an older neighbor girl, who took me to buy undershorts. Once I had grown a bit older, Grandad moved two cabinets between our beds, and I no longer let him wash my clothes.

In my early years in elementary school, Grandad took me to school on a white Dio scooter that belched black smoke. He’d help me with my yellow helmet but didn’t wear one himself. When school let out, I’d find him parked under a palm tree to the left of the main gate, smoking a cigarette and watching sparrows take to flight. My school wasn’t far from our street so, once I was in the fourth grade and began walking to school with my classmates, he stopped shuttling me back and forth.

To this day, I haven’t seen my mom or dad in

person. Even photos are hard to come by. In the one picture of them that Grandad stuck to the fridge, their faces look like two glossy eggs. Once, when Grandad opened the wardrobe to get a coat, I saw a rusty metal box that subsequently lingered on my mind. So one day when he went out to see a friend, I dug it out of wardrobe and went over to the window to open it. The force with which I opened it sent the contents scattering across the floor like popcorn – postcards, photographs, and objects I didn't recognize. I picked up a few black and white photos, which were definitely of Grandad as a young man dressed in a black baseball jersey and spotless white baseball trousers, with two big words, "Black Tide", emblazoned across his chest. His teeth gleamed as he stood, hands on hips, smiling at the camera. The contrast with Grandad's now-wrinkled face was hard to wrap my mind around. The one thing that hadn't changed from the photo was his eyes, which were as round and bright as little Ba's.

A month or so earlier, Grandad had suddenly collapsed at a meeting. Fortunately they were able to rush him to the hospital. I hurried over as soon as I got the news, my mind a blank. "What happened, Grandad?" He was conscious when I arrive at his side, but he just smiled, patted my arm, and told me not to worry... "Just a dizzy spell, that's all." That day marked a turning point in my life: every Saturday morning I got up first thing to take daily essentials to the hospital. Time moved slowly there...so slowly that all of Grandad's ailments came to light. The doctors told me he might gradually lose track of time and that he should regularly work to recall certain key memories to delay the onset of that condition.

Would Grandad eventually forget even his name? In the village, everyone called him Suming, which meant "charcoal" in the Amis language. His Chinese name was Huang Chiang-sen, but few people called him that. To help delay the inevitable, I decided to put the house in order and bring out a few mementos.

Once I started straightening up, new odds and ends sprang up like weeds. Although I had no idea where I'd put them all, I knew I had to finish it all before Grandad's discharge to make it a comfortable place to convalesce. Growing up, I had never done much housework. Whenever I returned home, everything I

had moved was back in its original location. I donned a mask and the work gloves Grandad usually wore and hauled dust-covered belongings from what seemed like a cave.

I emptied the big wardrobe of all of Grandad's clothes and sorted through them, putting everything he rarely wore into see-through plastic storage crates. Aunts and uncles in the village graciously helped me assemble the new wardrobe when it arrived, and also helped haul the old one to the roadside for pick up and disposal. Then came the heavy plastic crates, which I opened one by one. They held trophies and medals and yellowed certificates – all for pitching. As far back as I could remember, I had never seen Grandad play baseball for real, although the village head once said he had been the village's best pitcher in his younger days. That was no lie, it turned out. Judging from those trophies and certificates, he really was an ace. I just never saw him pitch, and probably would never have the chance. I decided to put the unnecessary items into wheeled plastic suitcases for storage in Grandad's shed, keeping just a few still-legible trophies and medals, which I had polished till they gleamed and then set out on the cabinet top to display.

I opened the shed door with effort, and the light streaming in through the gap in the doorframe to the left gave me a momentary, clear glimpse of broken baseball bats. I pushed all of the well-organized plastic crates and black plastic bags stuffed with clothes far back into the deepest reaches of the shed. Those broken bats had come home with Grandad after he and the village head went off to play ball. He had amassed quite a collection without meaning to.

I have a memory from when I was about five years old of eating breakfast in the yard and watching Grandad emerge from the shed with a few bats that he then took to his workshop. To be fair, it wasn't much of a workshop, just a section of moss-green metal roofing where he had his carpentry tools laid out... woodcutting equipment, chisels, a workbench, and tools for smoothing. When he wasn't off working jobs, carpentry was Grandad's primary activity. He gazed at that piece of wood in his hands as if it were translucent jade. By the time the sky turned purple, he handed me a little chair as a birthday gift. I could sit on it to eat or

do homework, I learned how to lean back on two legs, and could drag it around like I was taking Ba for a walk. The chair was constructed from several unvarnished wooden baseball bats, squared off and cut down into regular rectangles that were then smoothed and nailed together to make a seat. Holes had been sunk into each corner, and four short, red-barreled bats... handles down...had been repurposed as legs. After the chair, Grandad had made a low bookshelf and a round table. The last piece he made before his illness, a rocking chair, had consumed even more of his broken bats. That rocking chair was great for relaxing, and he tended to nap on it regularly after lunch on Saturdays. When the cool wind blew, I'd cover him with a light blanket.

Straightening up took me more than a week, and I didn't finish until Friday, the day I brought Grandad home from the hospital.

He stood rooted in place looking over the rearranged house until the wall calendar, fridge, tail-wagging Ba, and the little wooden chair on the floor confirmed it was indeed his house.

Except on Mondays, I'd turn the TV on everyday so that Grandad could eat dinner while watching a baseball game. Watching baseball was the only time his eyes had a spark. Moreover, he'd leave lots of dinner leftovers on non-game days. After a week, his speech started to return, albeit haltingly at times. Whenever his expression let slip he was having a hard time answering, I'd write down what I wanted to say and let him read it over slowly as if contemplating a philosophical problem.

"Grandad, can you tell me about when you were a pitcher?"

"A pitcher..." Grandad's eyes remained on the TV.

"Yeah. I want to hear your pitching stories."

"Back then when I played in the Provincial Games, I was the best left-handed pitcher in Hualien. The Thumb." He stuck up his thumb.

"Really? That's awesome!"

"Few people were better than me. Even fewer lefties."

"How fast could you throw back then, Grandad?"

"I don't know. But everyone said I was really fast. Like a..."

He paused for a long time, seemingly unable to find the word he was looking for. I said, "Grandad, I've always wanted to ask...Why did you collect all those broken bats? They're no good for hitting. Did you really bring them back for woodworking?"

"Those can't be thrown out. Some things stay important even after they break. Can't throw them out."

"No, I mean - I don't want to throw them out. I'm just asking why you brought them all home."

Like a machine stopped in its tracks upon being unplugged, Grandad went slack, his face a picture of incomprehension, and then fell into a lengthy meditation.

Evidently those bats were very important to him, almost as if losing them would mean he too would disappear. As he watched TV, he made sounds like he was talking in his sleep.

The slack corners of Grandad's mouth drooped under the weight of his saliva and he drooled onto his clothes. A post-stroke symptom, said the doctor. The hippocampus, which governs memories, had been injured so, little by little, Grandad was losing so much of his past and sometimes couldn't even remember whether he'd eaten dinner. Whenever I said, "You've already eaten your fill. You still want more?" he'd say, "Yes." On those occasions, I'd give him a little cracker, but it wouldn't be long before he was asking again.

I brought out the collated photographs and, sitting at his bedside with his right hand clasped in mine, I showed him the pictures in hopes they would spark conversation and awaken memories.

Now Grandad's manner of speaking changed again. He started saying, "I don't know" or "I don't remember," as if parts of his world were oxidizing and crumbling apart.

"Grandad, do you still remember what happened in these pictures?" He said he didn't, but then his attention was grabbed by the light-vented bulbul outside the window and he watched as it alighted on the branch and flew off again. His remaining memories

were like a broken water bottle that constantly leaked; once the silence had stretched passed five minutes, I would figure again that he had fallen asleep. Sometimes he would remember, and then launch into a string of past events. When I brought out the photo with the Black Tide jersey, he said it was from the first time he played baseball after returning to Hualien.

"So where did you go before returning to Hualien, Grandad?"

"Japan. And then some other place. Far away. I don't remember."

"Wow! Was it America?"

"I think it was America. I went to play baseball. I was a great pitcher."

"Sounds like you were pretty good."

"I used to have a dream. I went to pitch. Oh, how I could pitch."

Grandad was probably around my age when he went to play in America. I really wanted to ask why he went so far away for baseball, but it was hard to hold his attention. When I asked him again for the story of the photo, he said he couldn't remember.

Grandad's memories were hidden in every corner of his house. I found a few old uniforms in the wardrobe, plastic crates, and bedside tables. The highest concentration of his memories centered on an old Adidas shoe box chock full of photos and letters.

The cardboard lid was bent out of shape from all the letters and photos and other small objects stuffed inside. Unlike the metal box I had found in the wardrobe, this one held mostly photos and letters from Grandad's time in the army, plus badges and armbands, matchbooks, a Coke bottle cap, and what fascinated me the most: a letter with a photo.

A black man holding a broken bat stood next to Grandad on a baseball field. The letter was written in English cursive. The man's teeth hadn't yellowed with time and still reflected the sunlight from that bygone day. They were wearing different uniforms. The black man's shirt was emblazoned with "Indians #10", while Grandad's read "Phoenix #15". When I learned his was the uniform of a Triple-A affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds, I couldn't help but wonder whether that was where

Grandad had gone to play. Written on the back of the black-and-white photo was a date, March 15, 1973. From reference materials, I learned this was part of Major League Baseball's minor league.

The minor league was divided into classes. Starting from the Rookie League, the ranks ascended from Single-A to Double-A to Triple-A, and then to the majors. Each level was home to hundreds of players. Grandad was just one of these hundreds, a migratory salmon dodging danger as it sought an opportunity to spawn. Maybe that was also the case for the black man. I didn't know who he was. The hundreds of other players would have come from all over the world, and those white teeth and bushy eyebrows gave me no clue to his name.

Hey, man. I think about our days in the minors all the time. Not long after you left the US, the Reds called me up. I thought I'd see you here, and the next time we met, we'd find out if my batting was faster than your pitching. I got the news you'd left and it was like my mind was hit by a pitch. I was a wreck for days. Now it's been three years. I've tallied 420 hits but none of them have been off of you. You were always so icy cool. With that pitching, you could totally have made the majors. I have yet to meet your equal.

My friend, you're the reason I know there are lots of great pitchers out there that I've never even seen. Will I ever get a chance to see you again? Maybe when you've recovered, we can have another matchup.

Ken Griffey

November 23, 1976

憂鬱的貓太郎

TARO, THE PENSIVE PUSS



Wang Yu-Hua 王幼華

- **Category:** Literary Fiction, Vignettes
 - **Publisher:** Yuan-Liou
 - **Date:** 2/2022
 - **Pages:** 288
 - **Length:** 66,775 characters (approx. 43,400 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
 - **Rights sold:** Malay (Biblio)
-

Born in 1956, Wang Yu-Hua holds a PhD in Chinese from National Chung Hsing University and is a current professor in the Department of Taiwan Language and Communication at National United University. His essays and short stories published since the late 1970s have spotlighted the character and changing tapestry of society and culture in Taiwan. Recent novels include *Taro, the Pensive Puss*, *The Blank Flag of Formosa*, and *The Graceless God*.



How do cats living in Taiwan's sleepy countryside villages spend their days? What do they think of us? In the spirit of Natsume Sōseki's I Am a Cat, this work in 113 literary vignettes construes everyday life through a feline lens, providing a plethora of quirky insights to ponder.

This whimsically cat-centric novel is inspired by a real-life housecat who, as part of its daily routine, would spend hours basking in a windowsill across from the author's apartment, clearly curious about his comings and goings. After being cast out into the street by its family, he would see it roaming the neighborhood with fellow street cats and, on occasion, find it once again in the window across the way, staring as before into his room. His whimsical wonderings about what that cat did all day and what must be on its mind flowed naturally from his mind onto paper.

Taro, the Pensive Puss unfolds as a first-person narrative through the eyes of "Taro", a plain-looking, chronically low-spirited cat. In name, appearance, and propensity for roaming the surrounding neighborhood, he is indistinguishable from the five cats preceding him as Heng Chang General Store's tomcat. He regularly hangs out on the store roof, watching passersby and gossiping with his chums, who include a tabby that loves spinning outlandish stories, a calico that can't let a chance for mischievous fun slip by, and the cynical, philosophically minded young shop cat from Black Stache Café.

Through the eyes of Taro and his friends, the everyday world of the humans around them – its small dramas, comings and goings, political wranglings, family relationships, and popular trends – just always seems somewhat off, and ridiculous and downright silly at times. The aging Taro has a penchant for pondering the meaning of existence, freedom and bondage, truths and falsehoods, and infirmity and loneliness; a trait he wonders whether he might share with his elderly owner. But even the chronically jaded and cynical Taro still finds in the gloom of life pockets of beauty and joy that let him, like the humans he regularly watches, occasionally put aside his fretting about illness and death.

TARO, THE PENSIVE PUSS

By Wang Yu-Hua

Translated by Jack Hargreaves

“*Taro, the Pensive Puss* is not your “ordinary” cat story. Eschewing fawning praise over feline ingenuity and charm and sidestepping well-trodden stories of their prideful and mysterious ways, this engaging tale centers on the life and times of Taro, the old and world-weary watch-cat of Heng Chang General Store. As the sixth in a long-line of Taros to stand watch over the comings and goings at his master’s general store, he naturally sees himself to be the sole embodiment of the “prestigious” Taro franchise. Our Taro is not just intimately familiar with his neighborhood and its myriad details; he is a discerning observer and critic of all that transpires around him and a frequent companion of the cats living up and down his street. *Taro, the Pensive Puss* was inspired by and pays homage to the turn-of-the-twentieth-century Japanese work *I Am a Cat*. ”

— Readmoo / Translated by Jeff Miller

01

A Very Ordinary Cat

As a rule, people can’t so much as spot a cat in the street without letting out a squeal.

“A cat! A cat!”

“Oh my gosh, it’s so cute!”

“Can you believe how gorgeous that fur is?”

Of course, those people are never talking about me. I’m not chunky or chubby or in the least bit adorable. My fur is like many others’. I’m just an ordinary cat, the sort people call a tabby or a Dragon Li.

Not that we cats have any idea *what* cute is. That’s on the humans. Only they can make us cute in just the way they’re looking for.

02

And a Mucky Cat Too

I’m too lazy for regular grooming, so my fur gets matted and scraggly and ends up falling out. Call me mangy – at least people keep their distance. It must be my serotonin levels. I get in these mental slumps occasionally, or I might feel depressed or angry for no apparent reason, and go looking for trouble.

My little brother Crochet says Dad killed himself. He says he did it in a moment of weakness. Any normal cat would cling to its nine lives at all costs.

03

Aka the Heng Chang General Store Cat

Before Fukang Street was Fukang Street, it was called “Lunglai Keng”: Dragon Gully. It stretches two hundred-

plus meters end to end, with the middle hundred or so being where it's liveliest. There are thirty-odd stores on either side in this section alone.

My home sits smack-dab in the middle: Heng Chang General Store. It's the shop with the couplet "Here dwell men of honor and smarts, A house of stout hearts" pasted outside. It's an old establishment. Uncle A-Ting is the second-generation owner, and he is in his sixties himself. Every day he slumps half-asleep in his rattan chair in front of the TV. Years of diabetes have covered his swollen-looking body in red and white splotches. He's not quite with it anymore.

The store is some 500 square feet and sells cigarettes and alcohol, disposable tableware, plastic bags, firecrackers, brooms, and the like. It even sold betel nuts for a while. Sis A-Hsing from Indonesia is usually the one who greets customers when they come in the door. A-Ting's children live in their own homes now, most of them not too far away, and they still visit every so often and check in on their old man.

It doesn't feel right to call me "the Heng Chang General Store cat", though. The store isn't even half of it. I'm more the Fukang Street cat, because every inch of it is my domain. Time was when people kept cats just to catch mice. They left us to our devices: no cuddling, no grabbing. We could come and go as we pleased. Total freedom.

They say I'm the sixth generation at the store – like all the others, a steel-gray tomcat with white streaks. My humans pulled out some old photos once and pointed at me, saying, "Heng Chang General Store has only ever had tomcats like this. Every one has been called Taro." Like I've spent a whole six lives at the same store. Who knew?

04 A Princely Seat

The names Fukang and Lunglai both come from a Qing Dynasty Manchu noble called Fuk'anggan, who, rumor has it, was the illegitimate child of the Qianlong Emperor. So, though not a crown prince, he was still a "son of the dragon". He came to Taiwan to squash

Lin Shuangwen's rebellion and stopped by here with his army for a rest. To this day, two russet-colored stones still mark the place he once planted his princely buttocks.

The tops of the stones were later cut flat and smoothed over with lacquer; perfect for a sit down. Thanks to village chief Mr. Yan and the badgering of several local cultured folks, the town hall requisitioned around 355 square feet of street space where a yellow-tiled pavilion was built, two camphor trees were planted, and a stainless steel plaque reading "Crown Prince's Seat" was installed.

Together with the small patches of turf laid there, the spot just about passes for a small park. Some people go so far as to call it "Prince's Park". And, ever since Fuk'anggan's stone seats were declared a tourist attraction, cats and dogs have been forbidden to loiter, let alone cock a leg or pop a squat. Don't get me wrong, plenty have tried; most having no idea the rules were so strict. They'd saunter over, all curious, for a sniff, and just as they were about to take one step further, they'd get yelled at or beaten away, or maybe have something thrown at them. So, they'd scramble for safety, their excretory organs suddenly clamped shut with panic. The on-duty guard, it turns out, always has several cameras fixed directly on that spot and takes no prisoners. The slightest movement in the wrong direction is enough to get him on your case.

The only one who ever refused to be hurried along was Old Burma. He would just eye his pursuer and plod lazily away. When kicked over or sent tumbling, he would climb nonplussed back to his feet just as slowly as if nothing happened.

He even pees in slow motion. He holds the pose for an age before anything even starts to come out and, when finally it does, it's in fits and spurts. Then there is always an awful lot of dripping before he's finally finished, at which point his whole body is trembling.

Anyway, we still go to the stones for a little sit or lie-down...in and out as quickly as can be. Cats have to be the masters of human behavior, after all. We can't not do things just because a human says so.

06

Pet Names

Some thirty cats call Fukang Street home: black cats, white cats, calico cats, Bengalese, fold cats, Siamese, Persian, Maine Coons, ginger cats, tabbies, Russian Blues...we're all here. There are a dozen dogs, too: Taiwanese mountain dogs, pugs, Labradors, Dachshunds, Pomeranians, Shiba Inus, Huskies and Chihuahuas. Most of us have been neutered and microchipped. There's a pet store on the floor above KueiFei Beauty Salon that has a vet come by every so often.

As for babies and young kids, there are only six or seven on the whole street. The spirit medium from Xiao Wangye Temple down the road came into Heng Chang General Store once and said the next generation of reincarnations will all be four-legged.

Having kids is just too much trouble. They have to be taught their manners and their three R's, and that's hard work. Any kids that manage to do okay for themselves don't look after their elders, either. It's only the failures who stick around home, to mooch off their old folks. But humans just seem to like children. They want to spoil them, hug them, kiss them, talk nonsense at them, and, to our great misfortune, cats and dogs seem to make acceptable replacements. With a pet, should anything go pear-shaped, humans only feel bad for a little while, and no one is at fault. But once kids are in the picture, it's day-in, day-out looking after them, dragging them everywhere, burning through money like crazy. There really is too much to worry about.

07

Food, Glorious Food

What a glorious time I live in! My days begin at Wen-hsing bakery with a small block of cheese from Mr. Yeh. Real cheese – something French, Spanish, or German, or even something he's made himself. None of that heavily processed stuff – Mr. Yeh knows I don't eat trans fats, and I won't even sniff at hydrogenated oils. He has tried them on me in the past, and it's a hard no from

me. He has had to learn my tastes and my particular palate.

Next, I go to Wanli Self-Service Cafeteria, where my usual is some fish or sausage. West Tajen Pharmacy then sometimes gives me a cat treat, the top-shelf kind, of genuinely good quality. But that's just a snack, an amuse-bouche to whet the appetite. And after that, it's on to Fairyland Fruit Seller. The boss lady there has a special corner where she leaves overripe fruit. I like bananas best once they're brown. They're so sickly sweet...what I call good bananas – full of multi-layered flavor. When they're not as ripe, they're too tart, don't you agree?

Occasionally, one of the other stores will have something good to eat, too, or a passing tourist will feed us. But they seem to think that cats scarf absolutely anything...peanuts, rice crackers, fries, dried tofu.... They believe that as long as they're offering, we won't refuse. Imbeciles!

08

The House My Host Built

Parasites that we are, we cats pay special attention to the environments our human hosts build.

Heng Chang General Store, no. 35 on the street, was constructed just before the Japanese era came to an end, around the time a few of the other places started to pop up: Shun'an Apothecary at no. 49, Brushstroke Stationery at no. 45, Yijin Rice and Sundries at no. 57, and Fuwang Joss Paper Store at no. 38. The slanted roofs of these buildings are all Taiwanese in style and capped with red tiles that threaten to shatter with a touch of the paw. The structures themselves are mostly brick, with the beams, doors, interior walls and floorboards all made of timber: cypress, Chinese fir or Formosa conifer. Shun'an apothecary, Rice and Sundries, and my general store are the only two-story buildings from back then that are still standing. The rest are single-story.

The most imposing of all the older buildings is the abandoned mansion. It has Baroque ornamentation on top, roughcast walls, and black roof tiles as well as

panels decorated with flora and fauna and Chinese symbols for happiness, prosperity and longevity. It's a real showstopper.

Almost everything else here is a rebuild, the originals having long been torn down. The two- and three- story buildings came first, followed by the taller additions later. No. 40 Fukang Convenience Store and no. 46 Feixiang Mobile Shop both have five floors but, disappointingly, no elevator. It's why floors four and five of no. 46 have stayed vacant. No one wants to rent them.

Buff Hardware Store, Yisuda Telecom, Pin-chiang Florist, West Tajen Pharmacy, Jili Scooter Shop, Sheen Hair Salon, and Hungya Tailors are all two- and three-story places. There are more of these than anything else. Some, like Breakfast Together Shop, Fairyland, and District Fried Chicken, are just the old buildings with sheet metal shacks plopped on top. So is Pearl Snack Shop, next to the temple.

The temple is the oldest, largest and most handsome building. It gets a facelift every twenty or thirty years and is now solidly built in reinforced concrete. The walls and beams are painted with stories from the *Paragons of Filial Piety*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and *Investiture of the Gods*, while the yellow roof tiles teem with pictures of immortals, dragons and phoenixes. No other place on the street even comes close.

Tung-hsing Tower, no. 29, is the tallest building, though. Seven floors with four residences each, and two elevators. This is where most of the out-of-towners choose to live, but they come and go. There are residents there that even Mr. Yan can't name.

If it is space you want, your best options are the coffee shops: Black Stache at no. 30 and Wild Spirit at no. 47. Black Stache rents what was once a grocery store warehouse from Mr. Yan, and Wild Spirit is spread over three and a half floors. A large family of a dozen-plus used to occupy it before the younger generation split, leaving it empty for ages. It wound up in quite a state, so the rent was dropped. Both shops are 1500-ish square feet. They're popular among the young folks.

09

My World

On the roof of Heng Chang General Store in front of the altar room is a pocket haven of open space. The stone planters here were once full of flowerpots and all types of flowers and shrubs, but after Uncle A-Ting no longer had the strength to go up and tend them, the little garden in the sky withered and died.

I like to sit or lie on the empty planters, grooming myself and watching life go by. My friends from the street come over to chat and hang out, wending their way across the neighbors' balconies, gutters and rooftops to get here. We watch the clouds and stars, the people on the street below. At some point, we started calling this spot our "Carefree Retreat". Friends have suggested we drop the first part and go with, simply, "The Retreat". I like it with "carefree", but I can't quite put my paw on why.

Each of us who hasn't been turned into a house cat, kept under lock and key, has their own daily beat around the neighborhood, myself included. Setting off from the general store, I head up to Prince Park, where I cross the road and turn back, taking the other side of the street down, from the vacant lot where no. 20 used to be, then past Mr. Yan's home at no. 22 and by a long line of storefronts, until I come to the temple at the bottom of the street. There, I cross over again to Jinbao Buddhist Supplies and Yijin Rice and Sundries - nos. 59 and 57 - and finally make my way home.

Cats can be very territorial when they want to be. The surlier types on the road insist on dividing everything into upstreet and downstreet, left and right, and they aren't opposed to using force to stake their claims. Things can get ugly between individuals, with fights breaking out. But then...bird, human, dog, lizard - it doesn't matter - we're all guilty of this. Honestly, it's not that serious.

心聲販賣所

THE INNER VOICE SHOP



photo ©Misa

Misa

- **Category:** Women's Fiction, Heartwarming
 - **Publisher:** Crown
 - **Date:** 8/2024
 - **Pages:** 256
 - **Length:** 81,105 characters (approx. 52,700 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Misa is a bestselling author working in the genres of romance, horror, and fantasy whose work has been enthusiastically embraced by young adult readers. Her books have sold over 420,000 copies in Taiwan. Her novel *My Best Friend's Breakfast*, based on a true love story posted on an online forum, was made into a movie released in Taiwan in 2022. Rights to her other works have also been sold in multiple countries.



After making a wish in her dreams at the Inner Voice Shop, a young girl gains the power to hear her family's innermost thoughts. But after the initial thrill, can she now keep her mind from drowning in the cacophony of thoughts surrounding her?

Eleven-year-old Ching-jih's resentment over the attention her parents lavish on her younger brother makes her prone to angry tantrums. After retreating to her room following a particularly nasty outburst with her parents at dinner, her mind drifts to something a friend told her...that saying a certain prayer at bedtime would let you visit the Inner Voice Shop in your dreams. She tries it out and, along the shore of a magically beautiful pond, the shop's pixie-like proprietor grants her urgent wish to listen in on her family's thoughts.

At first, hearing her parents' unspoken worries and praises lifted Ching-jih's spirits. Even her brother seemed not as bad as she'd thought. But after a while, the smattering of critical thoughts and cynical takes floating in the minds of her outwardly amiable parents brings her argumentative nature once again to the fore. Even worse, she hears in the thoughts of her deceptively cherubic and innocent-looking younger brother a wish for her damnation to hell. It was then she realized even the closest of kin can think and say hurtful things to one another.

Ching-jih now wanted desperately to silence the voices in her head...to never hear those inner voices again. But she remembers her willing acceptance of the shop proprietor's offer to grant her four wishes. With no escape clause to fall back on, Ching-jih knew not only that she would visit the Inner Voice Shop another three times but that she would forever be vulnerable to the wayward thoughts of others.

This book explores the relationship that resides in the "mind's eye" between the self and others, with Misa capturing perfectly her protagonist's psychological journey. Although most at some point have ached to read the thoughts of others, Ching-jih's story raises a subtle reminder - When probing others' innermost thoughts, never lose sight of your own inner voice.

THE INNER VOICE SHOP

By Misa

Translated by Helen Wang

“On the surface, *The Inner Voice Shop* reads deceptively similarly to a modern Japanese light novel, with the protagonist being granted her wish by the Inner Voice Shop’s proprietor to be able to listen in on the thoughts of others, and that wish subsequently turning into much more of a problem than initially expected. However, the focus of the narrative, rather than on the wish, centers on how actually listening in on the inner voices of others affects her and ultimately changes her attitudes toward family and life for the better. This allows the story to loop back and shine light on the reader’s own unexceptional, everyday experiences and on the issues we all encounter and observe in daily life.”

— Readmoo / Translated by Jeff Miller

Chapter 1: The Secret Garden

The first time I heard this urban legend was on a very rainy afternoon.

A typhoon-like storm had blown up out of nowhere and, as almost none of us in the class had an umbrella, the teacher told us to wait in the classroom either until the rain had stopped or our parents came to collect us.

I was a latchkey kid. Both my parents worked, and my grandparents lived in another city, so I knew no one would be coming to bring me an umbrella. My only option was to wait in the classroom with the other latchkey kids until the rain stopped.

This may sound a bit sad and lonely now, but I was quite happy with my status as a latchkey kid. I mean, it sounded good, right? Like I was independent and cool! I was among a select few in my class with keys to their house.

Although it could be annoying at times (like

when you forgot something, and there was no one who could bring it to school for you, and you were waiting to be told off), I’ve always thought of it as an important stage in training myself to be more independent.

Anyway, it had already gone five, and the rain was showing no sign of stopping. More than half the class had been picked up by their tender loving parents, and we latchkey kids were the only ones still at school.

“It looks dark outside,” said Kong Yu by the window. He was frowning as he looked out.

“That’s because it’s raining. The sky often looks dark when it rains,” said Lu Sunyi. It wasn’t completely true, but no one tried to correct her.

“It’s so boring, how much longer do we have to wait?” said Lai Hsiao-ping, pursing her lips. She had already finished her homework, and reviewed all the work we’d done in class that day, but the rain still hadn’t stopped.

I reminded everyone what the teacher had told

us ten minutes earlier. "Didn't the teacher just come and say that if it gets to six o'clock and it's still raining, she'll take us all home herself?"

"But it's ages until six o'clock." Kong Yu looked at the clock on the blackboard, "I wanted to watch a cartoon at five."

"*The Adventures of Toby*, right? It'll be on again later, you can watch it then," said Lu Sunyi.

"Hmm, my dad will want to watch the news then," sighed Kong Yu. "I'll have to wait for the repeat on Saturday," he sighed again.

"We could tell each other ghost stories while we wait!" said Lai Hsiao-ping, her eyes suddenly lighting up. "A dark classroom on a stormy night...Perfect for telling ghost stories, right?"

"Sure is," said Kong Yu, who was also looking at us excitedly.

"Count me in, I'm not scared," I said. I was certainly brave enough to watch ghost movies on my own at home.

Lu Sunyi nervously checked the corridor, then scanned the classroom, "Are we all agreed, then? There's just one thing: there are only four of us, and I once heard that if there are fewer than five people left in a classroom, it's quite likely a ghost will come out; and if we're telling ghost stories, it's even more likely one will join us to listen in. Perhaps it's not such a good idea..."

The three of us looked at each other for a second, then burst out laughing: "Thanks for starting us off with the first story, Lu Sunyi!"

"What? That wasn't a ghost story! I was just trying to warn everyone! It wasn't a ghost story at all!" Lu Sunyi leapt to her feet and kept turning around, protesting to whoever happened to be in front of her.

"I've also heard that if you go to the girls' toilets on the fourth floor and knock on the seventh cubicle, a ghost will answer," Kong Yu said earnestly. The three of us, all girls, just rolled our eyes at him.

"There are only six cubicles in the girls' toilets on the fourth floor. There isn't a seventh one."

"And the ghost-in-the-toilet, Hanako-san, is Japanese."

"Try thinking before you speak."

Under fire from all three of us, he turned red and

complained, "How would I know? I'm not a girl!"

"Then don't tell ghost stories targeting girls," Lu Sunyi told him off.

"But that's the point of ghost stories, isn't it? Boys aren't scared of ghosts," he said, rolling his eyes at us.

"I know a legend that has nothing to do with ghosts..." said Lai Hsiao-ping, peering round at us. A sudden clap of thunder outside added to the mystery of what she was about to say. "Do you know about *The Inner Voice*?"

"The Invoice?" said Kong Yu.

"The Inner Voids?" said Lu Sunyi.

Lai Hsiao-ping tsked at their suggestions.

I shook my head...I didn't know about it either. "But I think Lai Hsiao-ping said *The Inner Voice*?"

"I thought you said you'd never heard of it." Lai Hsiao-ping asked, surprised that I'd shaken my head.

"Is there a reason I should know about it?" I asked.

"No, but at least you got the name right. You're smart, Ching-jih, that's why you get good grades." Lai Hsiao-ping was so insulting.

"That's outrageous! We get good grades too."

"That's true, we do."

"Okay...okay...so what is it?" I wanted them to be quiet so we could hear what Lai Hsiao-ping had to say about *The Inner Voice*.

"Well, I heard there's a special shop called *The Inner Voice*."

Her explanation was as clear as mud. The three of us glanced at each other and shrugged.

"I overheard my sister and her friend talking about it one day. They said if you pray before you go to sleep for the ability to hear what someone is really thinking, you can enter the *Inner Voice Shop*. Then, when you wake up, you'll be able to hear that person's inner voice."

"Do you mean it's a kind of superpower, like mind reading?" I didn't believe it for one minute.

"That's impossible!"

"It sounds like something out of a cartoon!" agreed Kong Yu.

"Or perhaps your sister was taking you for a ride."

Rebuffed by all three of us at once, Lai Hsiao-ping's face flushed red, "I told you...I was *eavesdropping*! How could they have tricked me if

they didn't know I was listening?! They said someone had actually visited the shop, and that their prayer had been answered. Afterwards, they could really hear that other person's thoughts!"

"As if! It's impossible! And where is that shop? In their dreams?" Kong Yu said loudly and with a dismissive wave of his hand that matched the disbelief on his face. That simply infuriated Lai Hsiao-ping even more.

She raised her voice: "Like I said, you have to pray before you go to sleep if you want to go to the shop!"

"So it really is in your dreams!" Kong Yu replied, raising his voice in return.

"No, it's not in a dream! It's in the world of magic!"

The ongoing downpour had made the humidity of that summer afternoon feel even clammy, which, together with the slightly overheated argument, had made everyone a bit irritable.

"Okay, calm down.... Let's get back to telling ghost stories," said Lu Sunyi, "I'll go first. I heard this one from a boy in the next classroom. One day, when everyone had gone home and only he was left in his classroom, he heard the sound of footsteps in the hallway heading in his direction. They stopped suddenly outside the classroom door, but when he looked out, no one was there. He went out into the hallway to check, but there was no one there either. Then, he heard those footsteps coming up close behind him, and someone whispered in his ear: 'Are you looking for me?' That's it! The End."

This short and uninspired ghost story was Lu Sunyi's attempt at defusing the situation...and it had worked! Kong Yu and Lai Hsiao-ping had stopped fighting. Looking at Lu Sunyi, Kong Yu blurted out, "Well, that was bor..."

But before Kong Yu could finish, we all heard footsteps in the hallway coming towards us. Kong Yu abandoned his critique mid-sentence, and the four of us looked at each other.

"Did you hear that?" asked Lu Sunyi, her face white.

"Shh!" I held my index finger against my lips and listened carefully.

The sound of the rain was so loud it was possible we had misheard. But then again, if the rain was so loud, wouldn't it have drowned out the sound of those footsteps?

We had all heard it very clearly...the sound of footsteps in the hallway...the sound of shoes clacking on the floor.

"It must be the teacher, coming to take us home..." said Lu Sunyi, grabbing my arm.

"The teacher said six o'clock. It's only five." Lai Hsiao-ping tried to speak with authority, but the wobble in her voice betrayed her.

"I'll go and take a look, then we'll know for sure!" said Kong Yu. As the only boy there, he was keen to look brave.

"Don't! Wait a bit first. If you go out now and there's no one there, it'll be even scarier, won't it?" said Lu Sunyi. Her words gave us even bigger goosebumps, and in an instant we moved closer to each other, almost huddling up as we listened to the sound of shoes coming nearer.

Just as they were about to reach our classroom, the footsteps stopped. But there was no one there. By this time, we were on the verge of tears, almost unable to breathe.

"Now then..." As the teacher's head suddenly peered round the door, all four of us screamed.

"Aagh!"

"It's a..."

"It's a ghost!"

The teacher was shocked to find us in such a state. "What on earth's going on? Calm down! I'm a teacher, not a ghost!"

I was the first to regain my senses. I realized our reaction was over the top, and quickly stroked Lu Sunyi's head. Her eyes were squeezed tight, and she was clinging to me, wailing. I also nudged Kong Yu, who had curled over in a squatting position and was covering his head with his arms. Once Lai Hsiao-ping realized I had stopped screaming, she stopped too.

"It's the teacher," I said.

The teacher watched, stunned, and waited for everyone to calm down. Then, she asked: "Have you

been telling ghost stories?"

We nodded, embarrassed. She shook her head: "Don't talk about creepy supernatural things. They're not true, and you'll only frighten yourselves."

"Yes, Miss. We're sorry." We were *still* in primary school, so it was quite natural to apologize like that.

"Miss, are you here to take us home?" Lai Hsiao-ping asked, wondering why the teacher had come back so soon, when she'd originally said six o'clock.

"I still have some things to finish up. I came to tell Ching-jih... your mother phoned just now."

"My mother phoned? Is she going to pick me up?" For a moment, this latchkey kid couldn't have been happier.

"No, she said you're to go and get your brother, so that you can wait together. She's coming to collect you, but she'll be a bit late."

Hearing that made me instantly annoyed, and the smile slipped from my face. "But wouldn't it be better if Chaoyang stays in his classroom? With his friends?"

"Your mother would like the two of you to wait together." I could tell from the irritated expression on her face that she was just passing on the message from Mum, and that I had to do as I was told, though I wasn't happy about it at all!

At home, generally speaking, I always had to put my little brother first and go along with whatever he wanted. At school, I cherished having my own time and my own friends. Now, he was going to deprive me of my time and occupy my space here as well.

"Your family must love sunny days!" said Kong Yu sarcastically. He was making fun of my name meaning "Bright Sun" and my brother's meaning "Sunrise". I had no intention of answering.

"I get it," I said to our teacher and, although no less annoyed, I thanked her.

"Shall I go with you?" Lai Hsiao-ping volunteered.

"Okay. But don't be surprised if I'm not all smiles with him."

"I understand. I have no patience with my brother either."

Lai Hsiao-ping had a little brother too, and it seemed she really did understand how difficult it

could be.

The two of us left the classroom, went down two flights of stairs and turned left.

"What year is your brother in?"

"Um, second grade."

"I'm so jealous. Mine's in fourth grade."

"Why are you jealous?" I was puzzled by what she'd just said.

"You only have to stick it out through primary, then you'll never be at the same school as him again! My brother's just a year younger than me so, when he gets to middle school, we'll probably be at the same school again."

I opened my eyes wider than usual. "You're clever, I never thought about it like that. Now that you've put it that way, I feel so much better."

"And... somehow... I feel so much worse," said Lai Hsiao-ping, finishing off with a couple of laughs.

As we approached my brother's classroom, I was surprised the room was dark. "That's strange," I said, "why haven't they turned the lights on?"

When we reached the classroom, I peered in through the corridor window, and was alarmed to see Chaoyang sitting in his seat, all on his own.

"Why didn't you turn the lights on?" I asked as I pushed the door open. Chaoyang almost jumped out of his skin. One minute he was reading quietly; the next he was shaking like a leaf.

"Hi, Ching-jih." He smiled when he saw me, and immediately put the book into his bag. "Have you come to take me home?"

SIN 原罪 1： 性 · 掠食者



Linea 苓菁

-
- **Category:** Paranormal Suspense
 - **Publisher:** Fantasy Foundation
 - **Date:** 4/2024
 - **Pages:** 336
 - **Length:** 125,518 characters
(approx. 81,500 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Known as “The Queen of Supernatural” in Taiwan, Linea is famous for her portrayal of the darker side of human psychology and her unflinching examination of society. A bestselling author and blogger, her works include the *Urban Legends*, *Bad Fairytale*, and *Dark Dark Sounds*.

SEX PESTS AND RAPISTS: CARDINAL SINS 1



With over 200 bestselling novels to her name, Taiwan's "Queen of Horror Fiction" now invests her authorial talents in a new series of works centered on the seven deadly sins. Her first, on lust, plumbs the depths of sexual predation, victimized high school girls, internet celebrity, media reporting, and more.

Wu Ju-Yin's dramatic suicide in front of her parents is made all the more baffling by the note she leaves behind: "I won't go back to hell." The tragedy is headline news. However, while most reporters chalk it up to a revenge suicide, Ju-Yin's consistently good grades and seemingly doting parents just don't add up.

In the days that follow, Ju-Yin's classmate Hung-Chia is confronted by Ju-Yin's ghost, who asks, "Why do you still say nothing?" Although Hung-Chia remembers seeing Ju-Yin in the back seat of a well-known cram school teacher's car as it turned into a motel, that was before the two had even met and, after all, there was no evidence to prove what she'd seen. The mangled spirit continues badgering her and torturing her dreams. What does Hung-Chia have to do for Ju-Yin to finally let her be?

Around the same time, reports of missing and victimized female students begin cropping up in the same school district. Surprisingly, the brutalized bodies of the purported predators are found at several of the crime scenes while, at another, a cryptic "crop circle"-like pattern is found. Expert pundits weigh in, calling it a daemon's circle... But what, if anything, do demons and evil spirits have to do with these cases?

Author Linea weaves demonic elements and a familiar bloodstained landscape into this visceral work of horror fantasy on sexual predation. This story also shines a harsh light on crime reporting in the media and blind spots in traditional family and educational systems, and asks how society may better prevent crime and support its victims. While all books in this series share similar characters, each is its own standalone story.

SEX PESTS AND RAPISTS

By Linea

Translated by Alex Woodend

“*Sex Pests and Rapists* is the first installment in the “Cardinal Sins” novel series by Taiwan’s “Queen of Horror Fiction” Linea. The fabric of the blood-drenched and bizarre plot is interwoven with threads dyed in the recent worldwide #MeToo movement, giving this work of creative fiction an almost “too close for comfort” air of authenticity and relevance. Although many works of horror fiction have traced the most horrific acts of violence and terror back to the machinations of the human psyche, the focus in this work on sexual abuse and assault gives this conclusion even greater weight.

— *Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller

Prologue

The clean, tidy room was mildly fragrant. Completed homework was stacked neatly on the desk, and the schoolbag hanging next to it was already packed with textbooks and materials for the next day. Hanging on the hook behind the door was a meticulously ironed uniform, its black skirt as dark as her life.

She sprayed perfume into the air. She’d always liked the scent, though it was a bit strong. The idea that it could cover up all the disgusting smells of her body was comforting.

She sat on the edge of the bed, staring blankly at the uniform hanging on the door. Her tilted head made her tears puddle before sliding down her right cheek. She didn’t wipe them away, but let out a sniff and a chuckle instead.

Fine, it’s like this then.

She slowly raised her head and stood up, not forgetting to smooth out the wrinkled bedsheets, then bent down and pulled a storage container packed with out-of-season clothes from under the bed. Reaching

deep inside, she found a coil of rope and took it out.

“Turns out I needed you after all...” She examined it, noticing it still bore the marks she had made with a permanent marker, and gave it a loving caress.

From the window beside the bed came the light of a street lamp. She stared at it and sighed. That suffocating light was not what she wanted. She wanted a brilliant, blinding light...the kind of light she never seemed to find in this lifetime.

After carefully straightening the clothes in the container and sliding it back under the bed, the girl changed into her precious high school uniform, tightly grasped the rope, and quietly opened her bedroom door.

The staircase to the second floor was to her right. Ahead to the left was a bedroom door with light shining through the gap at the floor. She glanced at it briefly, then tiptoed to the stairs with steps so soft her parents didn’t hear a thing.

“You don’t think she has a boyfriend, do you?” Her father suddenly put his phone down.

The woman doing her beauty routine at the

dressing table paused, then turned toward her husband lounging on the bed. "No way, right?"

"Why else would she be so against being tutored? She's never been so disobedient before! Especially because it's Mr. Chiang. He's the reason she tested into the district's top high school!" Mr. Wu scrambled to his feet. "Mr. Chiang tutors high school students too, and she actually said she *wouldn't* go! Does she think she became a gifted student by herself?"

"Don't get so excited, I'll have a proper talk with her!" Mrs. Wu turned to the mirror and continued her routine. "Think about it. It makes sense. After all the effort it took to finally get into high school, being asked to immediately start tutoring again must feel overwhelming!"

"You think she can just take a break? I hear a lot of students were tutored over summer break. She's smarter than the rest, but only by a little. Does that give her an excuse to be lazy?" Mr. Wu was at a loss. "It's her attitude that upsets me most! Why's she being hysterical? It's not like we're not asking her to kill someone or rob a bank. How can she say she'd rather die than continue going to after-school classes? Is she trying to threaten us?"

The woman sighed and looked at her husband pacing by the window. She knew how much it upset him. Their daughter had always been so well-behaved, never questioning their decisions or talking back. When it came to tutoring, however, she had made her position clear. That she had refused so fiercely today, to the point of yelling at them, had shocked her husband and her both.

There wasn't much chance she had a boyfriend. Her attitude could be the result of having new classmates or being in a new environment. High school had only been in session for one month, after all. *Maybe some of her new friends were the kind who...* That concerned her the most. Even at the district's top high school, there was no guarantee there wouldn't be children of poor character who nevertheless managed to make good grades. You are who you associate with, and she didn't want her daughter to be corrupted.

"Don't talk to Ju-yin yet. Your attitude will only make things worse now," Mrs. Wu advised. "Let me talk to her."

The man by the window was so angry that his chest heaved visibly. He looked at her and said, "I'll make this very clear now. She has to go to tutoring no matter what!"

"I know, I know!" Mrs. Wu stood, hoping to calm him down more when a black shadow appeared outside the window - *whoosh, bang*.

"Ahh!" the couple shouted at the same time. The wife couldn't tell what it was...just a black shadow rushing toward them. The husband was so startled by the sudden noise that he clutched his ears and dropped to the floor.

Thud...Thunk, thunk - more knocking on the glass. The man crawled to his wife, trembling, then faced the window again.

It was cracked in a radial pattern. Because the glass was thick, it hadn't completely shattered, but the crimson bloom spreading across it horrified him.

Thunk, thunk... Someone outside was swaying and knocking against the cracked window.

"Ahh! What is that?" The wife held her head and stumbled backward.

The husband tried to steady her. The crimson bloom that blocked their view of whatever was on the other side streamed downward, pushed by gravity. They heard neighbors opening their windows and a chorus of screams.

"Someone hung themselves!"

"What?! Someone jumped off the building!"

Wait - hung or jumped? The man looked at the black shadow swinging outside their window in terror. *Was that a person? They lived on the twenty-sixth floor, and the building had twenty-eight, so...someone had tied a rope on the top floor and jumped to their death?*

Who would go through so much trouble? Wouldn't it be simpler to just jump straight down? Why end the fall outside of their window?... The man frowned, suddenly sensing the figure hanging outside looked familiar....

A gust of wind swept past the building, causing the hanging figure to slam against their window again.

This time it was face-first.

Although her neck was broken, and her face was pierced by fragments of glass and covered in blood, there was no mistaking her. It was his daughter.

"Nooooo, Ju-yin!"

Chapter One: The Suicidal Classmate

Dozens of bicycles moved in an orderly fashion down a street shaded by verdant ginkgo trees, pedaled by students – some alert, some sleepy – steadily making their way toward school.

But the entrance was unusually crowded today.

"Why so many reporters?"

The students were taken aback by the news vans clustered around the entrance. Several reporters hovered around, finding little corners to report from.

Nieh Hung-chia jumped off her bike, taking in the spectacle with a confused look. *Had something happened at their school?* She had scrolled through several social media apps before leaving home and hadn't seen anything of note.

School rules prohibited riding bikes on campus, so the students all walked them in. It was difficult to know, however, which route would best skirt the crowd of reporters.

"Could you all please move to the side? The school day's starting, and you're blocking our way in!"

"When will they give us access?"

"Could the head of student affairs come out for comment?"

"What about the Class 6 homeroom teacher, Mrs. Chang?"

Huh? Hung-chia quickly rolled her bike onto campus. *Class 6 homeroom teacher Mrs. Chang? What a coincidence.* She was in Class 6, and her homeroom teacher was Mrs. Chang. Had something happened to one of her classmates?

She hurried to the bike shed, parked her bike, and grabbed her bag. Walking to her homeroom, she saw clusters of fellow students, faces pale with shock, staring at their phones.

The mix of guilt and excitement in their eyes left no doubt that something had happened.

"Did you hear? It's Wu Ju-yin!" one said to another as they walked up the stairs.

"Huh? I heard a senior didn't make it home

yesterday.... Is she missing?"

"No, I mean she..." The voice became quieter, but Hung-chia saw the student draw a finger across their neck.

"Really? How is that possible?"

Wu Ju-yin was, in fact, her classmate, and she wasn't just well-known in their class; she was a gifted student whose fame had spread as soon as she enrolled. She entered as the number one student, ahead of even Hung-chia in District S, where they both lived.

"School just started, and her grades are so good. What could get to her so much?"

"I don't know. She's always quiet. I didn't notice anything off."

Hung-chia slowed down and followed her classmates into their homeroom. Sure enough, it was in chaos. Everyone was discussing the shocking news about their star student. She walked calmly to the very back row, sat in the last seat, and quietly took her phone out of her bag to check. The news was everywhere now:

Gifted Student from District S Jumps to Her Death at Midnight

Just One Month into School, Gifted Student Jumps from Home to Her Death

Midnight Horror: Local High School Student Commits Suicide by Hanging!

Hmm. Hung-chia scrolled. *Was it hanging or jumping? Why the contradiction in reporting?*

She got a Line message from the boy she'd lived next door to her whole life: "It's your classmate!"

"Yeah, was just reading the news. Some say hanging, some say jumping. It's confusing."

"Not confusing. Both are true."

"Both? Jumping and hanging are two very different ways of killing yourself!" Hung-chia frowned as she waited impatiently for the next message. But the bell rang first. The whole class sighed, stood reluctantly, and walked to the front desk to put their phones in the "hibernation box."

Once all phones were secure, the class monitor placed the box securely under the podium. The

students continued to discuss the shocking case. Hung-chia gazed at the empty seat near the podium. There were books and supplies still in its drawer, but their owner would never be seen again.

Even though the bell had rung some time ago, their homeroom teacher was still nowhere to be seen. She was probably delayed by the incident. The class monitor had to step in to maintain order and prevent the noise from their class spilling over into the others.

But once the chatter had quieted down, the sound of sobbing became clear.

The girl whose desk was to the left of Ju-yin's as well as the one who sat diagonally in front of Hung-chia were crying uncontrollably, their heads pressed down on their desks. Hung-chia didn't know much about the personal dynamics of their class, but she guessed they were close to Ju-yin.

"Kai-ting!" Several teary-eyed girls rushed to comfort the girl, who also had excellent grades, with the desk next to Ju-yin's.

"Yesterday...yesterday she was fine. We even had plans to meet up on this weekend..." Kai-ting said, sobbing. "There's no way she committed suicide, it's impossible—bwahh..."

She broke into tears before finishing the sentence, giving the others a lump of emotion in their throats.

Hung-chia frowned. She didn't appreciate the sad, suffocating atmosphere. But their classmate had died, and so it was normal they felt this way.... It was just that she wasn't used to it.

"Chieh-hsin..." The girl who sat diagonally in front of her, now crying so hard that her whole body shook, was also being comforted.

The sadness infected the entire class, and many began weeping quietly. Hung-chia could only take a deep breath and look out the window to her left. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. Such nice weather!

She knew no one would come over to talk over things with her. She was the class loner...not because she'd been bullied or harassed. She had just made herself as quiet and invisible as possible. She hadn't connected deeply with anyone or joined any of the cliques. Her one reason for being here was to study...

to get an education. She really didn't care about anything else.

The sound of footsteps in the hallway came at last, and Hung-chia saw the weary figure of their homeroom teacher walk past the window.

Mrs. Chang walked to the podium, eyes and nose red from crying. She forced herself to meet the gazes of the similarly affected students. She began to speak several times but had to stop, her fingers gripping a textbook so tightly they had turned white.

"As you all probably know, Wu Ju-yin...left us forever yesterday." Mrs. Chang struggled to contain her grief, each word choked with emotion. "I know it's sudden, even I can't believe it yet, but..."

"She wouldn't kill herself! That's not who she was!" Kai-ting wailed. "She told me all the things she wanted to do in the future. How could someone with so many dreams possibly commit suicide!"

Mrs. Chang, a tear sliding down her cheek, looked at Chou Kai-ting and could no longer speak. Turning away from the class, she covered her mouth and stared at the blackboard, but her trembling shoulders made it clear how upset she was.

After the deeply sorrowful mood of the morning independent study period, the classroom devolved into a tourist trap for students from other classes. Some, eager to engage in gossip, asked if anyone knew why Ju-yin had killed herself.



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

NON-FICTION

努力是癮

OVERFITTING



Terao Tetsuya
寺尾哲也

- **Category:** Memoir, Essay Collection
 - **Publisher:** Linking
 - **Date:** 8/2024
 - **Pages:** 224
 - **Length:** 48,557 characters (approx. 31,500 words in English)
 - **Full English Manuscript Available**
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Terao Tetsuya holds a bachelor's in Computer Science and Information Engineering from National Taiwan University and a master's in Software Engineering from Carnegie Mellon. He formally launched his authorial career after working for eight years at Google in the United States, Taiwan, and Japan. His maiden effort *Spent Bullets* won the Taiwan Literature Awards for Book - Golden Book Award and New Bud Award and, in 2025, was published in English by HarperVia. A film adaptation of *Spent Bullets* is currently in development, and a comic version of *Overfitting*, his latest essay collection, is in production as well.



The thirty-five essays woven into this work draw upon the real-life sacrifices, hard work, and affectations the author himself, a former California-based engineer at Google, experienced and applied in ascending the rungs of an unapologetically merit-based culture that warps personal values and ruins one's closest relationships.

Following up on *Spent Bullets*, Terao's 2022 short story collection centered around the deleterious psychological effects of high-pressure corporate culture on a talented team of young engineers, *Overfitting* picks up on the rampant thirst for success and approbation running through the high tech industry. *Overfitting* fleshes out further the universe established in *Spent Bullets* and, in addition to previously met male love interests and engineers, readers come to know the main characters' parents, female friends, and followed celebrities.

In this book in four parts, the first takes readers along the difficult path followed by most overseas engineering students studying in the United States, which often leads for the most zealous to a lucrative Stateside job offer and enviable career prospects. But the accompanying emptiness is sometimes sated in ways "normal" society simply cannot fathom. The second part lifts the lid on how engineers, constantly driven to outperform and outdo, actually feel about their corporate organizations and unmask the cynicism roiling beneath a placid veneer. In the third part, the spotlight turns on overfitting in other contexts, including the heel-turn a group of brand-name-chasing women make when they discover a woefully plainly dressed woman in their cooking class is married and living in the United States and the showstopping suicide of a startup mogul. In the final part, drawing on his own stories and experiences, the author dissects the family, cultural, and educational roots of the overfitting phenomenon that fuels high-tech "hustle" culture today.

The author's well-honed and direct style gives the stories within, while reflective of Terao's owned lived experience, a lively pace and strong literary appeal, and chips away at some of the tech industry's glamorous sheen to reveal the pervasive resentment and anxiety within. While high tech's lauded engineers bent on overfitting at all costs come off as pitiable, the narrative shows that, despite the high cost in terms of physical and mental health, these high-paying jobs still afford a good life for them and their family. After all, one's chosen path in life, one's work ethic, and how one chooses to live their life all reflect a deeper personal truth.

OVERFITTING

By Terao Tetsuya

Translated by Kevin Wang

“In *Overfitting*, author Terao Tetsuya challenges the stereotypical view of engineering professionals held by most people and parroted in the media. This “inspired by true life” tale reveals not only the folly in putting engineers on a pedestal but also that life for most engineers with “lucrative” careers in the private sector is far from rosy, with many turning to increasingly perverse acts of excess in hopes of feeling “human” again. Despite the witty prose underpinning the narrative, *Overfitting* delivers an emotional gut punch that will have readers both heated over the cruelties baked into modern corporate culture and sniggering at the clear absurdity of it all.

— *Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller

Womb-Prison

All the furniture was from IKEA. Not only that, every item had to be the cheapest available. Every apartment ended up looking the same: a floor lamp that never cast enough light, a skeletal bedframe, plastic table and chairs, a flat-pack bookshelf. Within a year, the shelves would be sagging in the middle, the screws on the plastic chairs would be loose, and everyone would wake up with aching backs from their mattress.

It was a burrow home for foreign students: our second womb, where we were born again.

When I first arrived in California, I squatted for a while in the living room of an older classmate’s apartment. One day, a couple who were friends of his came to visit. The wife saw the sleeping bag I had spread out on the floor, the suitcase lying open nearby, and my scattered belongings. She offered a few words of astonishment and pity.

“Everyone starts out like this,” her husband said

immediately.

Every foreign student who came to the American West lived like this at first, stranded in a wasteland.

We biked long distances to the supermarket, hanging two or three heavy bags over each handlebar to cut down on trips, until the bikes could barely turn. We rode back in the dark. The riverside path had no lights and we would charge blindly forward, praying to every Buddha in heaven we wouldn’t fall into the river.

Once, on the way home from the DMV, a brittle pinecone punctured one of the tires. It ended up taking three hours to drag the bike back.

We ate the cheapest microwave meals from the supermarket, one dollar a box. Once heated, the mashed potatoes smelled disturbingly like feet.

During a break in class, the teacher jokingly asked us what kind of car we wanted to buy after finding a job. The girl from Kazakhstan said with a bitter tinge to her voice: “The most expensive one.”

I nearly applauded.

My friend P invited us out to eat at a Taiwanese restaurant in the East Bay. It was only a twenty-minute drive on the highway, but without a car, it felt farther than the edge of the world. After much pleading, we finally found enough older classmates to drive everyone there, squeezed around a round table.

We ate the meal with a mixture of reluctance and indulgence. Every bite felt like the last. In fact, every bite was the last. After the plates had been scraped clean, P called the waiter over and asked for the menu again. "Anything you want," he said. We passed the menu from hand to hand, flipping its pages back and forth. In the end, wearing looks of tortured politeness, we declined to order anything more.

It was like being a kid in a convenience store again. Crouching in front of the shelves with a coin burning in your palm, reading the prices over and over, only to buy nothing as you slip out of heaven through the sliding doors. During military service, we'd felt the same way at the base exchange.

"We'll be back," we told ourselves. A long time from now, but not that long.

The Taiwanese restaurant was an oasis in the barren American West. However, this brief indulgence only made the craving worse afterward.

Every Friday, a group of Taiwanese students gathered at P's apartment to play mahjong and board games. One night, looking around at us, P sighed: "Is Taiwan even real? Or is it just a place we all imagined?"

In her essay "Hard is the Way", Ko Yu-fen mentions a foreign student who committed suicide during the frozen depths of winter. She wasn't discovered until weeks later, and only because the open window in her room had been draining heat from the dormitory.

This kind of loneliness - being cut off entirely from the world, grinding through each day until finally breaking through to graduation and a job offer - perhaps resembles what Buddhists call the "womb prison." But what comes next is the suffering of birth, when the infant squeezes through the narrow gate of life and breaks into the world crying. After the suffering of birth comes the sufferings of aging, sickness, death, wanting what you can't have, dealing with people you hate, and saying goodbye to people you love. Starting

work and making money in California was another kind of birth. At least by then, we'd slowly grown a hard shell: enough to call out the rules of this world, drift around, take what luck we could find, and get through life without much sorrow or joy.

During our time as foreign students, P talked the most about "going back to Taiwan as soon as we graduate."

After landing a summer internship, he switched to saying "I'll work for a year, then go back to Taiwan." And then...

"I'll go back to Taiwan in three years, when my H-1B expires."

"I'll go back to Taiwan once I've saved enough for a townhouse in Kaohsiung."

"I'll go back to Taiwan once I can buy a building in Taipei."

Although he'd once vowed never to apply for a green card, he ended up filing the I-485 with his wife.

Every year when we met up, he'd still bring up his dream of returning to Taiwan after reaching some milestone. The rest of us just gave each other a knowing smile.

People rarely keep the promises they make when they are young. It's nothing to be ashamed of.

Surveying P's luxurious single-family house, I saw designer furniture everywhere. Sunlight poured through the tall glass walls, and the reflecting pool in the front-yard was clear as a mirror. He had come a long, long way from the IKEA burrow he used to live in.

"I've started jogging along the riverside path," P said. "The one where you'd almost wipe out every time you biked home from the supermarket."

"Oh?"

"During one jog, I smelled something burning near that empty lot by El Camino."

"What was it?"

"That smell hit so hard I almost started crying."

"From the dioxins?"

"No," he said. "It was the smell of burning joss paper."

The room fell silent.

Ah. No matter how long you live, some memories from the past life stick with you.

No More Playing Weak

M hated when people pretended to be weak.

It started after a math competition. He'd bombed a problem set and went around asking classmates how they'd solved it. Each person would put on a show of self-pity: "I totally blanked. I suck. I'm trash. My goose is cooked." Yet, at breakneck speed, they'd walk him through a stunning solution. Although their thinking was as clear as a glass slide under the microscope, without missing a beat, they'd return to the same broken refrain about what worthless idiots they were.

"That's not humility," M said, furious.

This kind of treatment was degrading to M. After all, when people like that called themselves trash, what did that make him? Worse yet, it created an in-group in which only the best students had the right to play weak. What began as an individual act became a way to bind this group together under an unspoken rule: if you can't play weak, you don't belong.

There are many possible explanations for these false declarations of weakness. Our culture is one that overvalues modesty as a virtue. When we do fail, our lowered expectations provide a preemptive defense against wounded self-esteem. But in my friends, I sensed another explanation.

I once came across a theory that says our key developmental tasks before adulthood are all aimed at answering two questions: *Who am I?* and *Am I good enough?* Teenagers hailed as geniuses on the competition circuit receive the answers to both questions too soon, too easily. Their "genius" identity may not even be true to who they are. But seeing their peers still drowning in confusion and self-doubt may stir up guilt: *I can't be the only one ahead.* Out of sympathy and not wanting to hurt their friends, these prodigies act as though they too are struggling in a performance that may be construed as "playing weak".

Soon after we began working, a few university friends and I were driving to downtown Mountain View for dinner. We were discussing cognitive ability. As the car bumped over the Caltrain tracks, Jie-Heng suddenly admitted his computer science skills had always been orders of magnitude above everyone

else's.

If I hadn't been driving, I might've turned around and screamed. Finally. You. Admit. For fuck's sake, you've been playing weak for ten years!

Maybe we were finally old enough, with the struggles of adolescence behind us. Now that we had other sources of identity and self-worth, Jie-Heng could plainly admit to us *yes, he really was a genius* without hurting anyone.

M, who was several years my junior, was still caught in the storm. I could tell him: it's okay if you don't do well in competitions. It's okay if you don't get validation from someone like Jie-Heng. But he would probably just give me a quiet look of contempt, as though I were a washout. In the end, I said what I could.

Dreams of an Unfilial Son

I don't know what sort of life advice others get from their fathers. My father had only one motto, which he repeated day and night while he was alive: "Never be a guarantor."

His sermons typically began with third great-uncle, fifth great-aunt, or the wife of a friend of a coworker of my eldest cousin-aunt. They had all let their guard down, agreed to be a guarantor, and signed where they shouldn't. The person they'd trusted ran off and disappeared from God's green earth. Just like that, the victim's family was stuck with tens of millions in debt, the remainder of their lives ruined. Although the characters in my father's stories changed, the plot never did. He was like a zealous missionary with no new bits to perform for his long-weary listeners.

One day, he called me and my brother over to tell us another "never be a guarantor" story. We'd heard it so many times that the moment he opened his mouth, we already knew the words that would come next. We could even mimic his shifts in tone and the face he made when he sighed.

Seeing my impatience, he said angrily: "You think it's all so simple now, don't you? Just imagine that kid Gao from your class in twenty years. When he's kneeling in your living room, crying and begging you to be his guarantor, will you sign or won't you?"

Gao was my crush at the time.

All of a sudden, I felt my world shatter. My father's made-up tragedy had punctured the pink bubble of my teenage fancy, damaging it irreversibly. Despite its hypothetical framing, it had sent my crush's glowing face skidding across reality's coarse surface. There was no going back to how perfect he once seemed.

What my father meant, at least in hindsight, was to stress the importance of protecting yourself no matter the situation. Don't be a fool. Don't make sacrifices. As the proverb goes: Man's mouth summons ruin. But his casual mention of Gao's name had unknowingly hit a nerve. His boring old sermon was suddenly elevated, and he succeeded in engraving this belief into my bones.

My father died in a car accident when I was nineteen. The one lesson he had left behind wasn't "be an honest man" or "it doesn't matter how much money you have" or even "take good care of your mother." It was: "if you want to survive, grow a heart of stone."

My father saw the world through a lens of bitter indifference, which had something to do with how he grew up. He went to a bottom-tier public high school, where an honor roll in the entry hall was regularly posted with the names of top exam scorers. However, after university exams one year, he discovered nearly every one of the students on that list had failed to place. From then on, he stopped going to class and began studying on his own at the library every day. This story about effort was one of his favorite brags to tell me and my brother.

During that time, he had bought a pocket-sized English dictionary printed on Bible paper. He memorized it page by page, tearing out each after he had finished until only the cover was left. My eldest aunt backed up his story. When his siblings tested him on the torn pages, they found he could recall them all, just as he claimed. Like an ascetic monk, he had forcefully engraved the entire dictionary onto his memory.

When I started high school, it was no surprise when he bought me the same kind of dictionary, expecting me to follow suit.

Obsessive, monstrous effort. That was his creed.

"If a door won't open, keep ramming it. Don't stop, even when you're mangled and bloody." But I never wanted to memorize the dictionary. I couldn't even be bothered to learn the vocabulary lists printed in *Studio Classroom* magazine.

My father was disappointed. He thought I was nothing like him.

I didn't learn until much later that 不肖 *bú xiào* meant "unlike," even though the word sounded identical to 不孝, "unfilial." A 不肖子 *bú xiào zǐ* is a child who doesn't resemble their parents.

I've never understood why so many parents want their children to turn out like them.

When I was in kindergarten, my father regularly took me to school in the morning. We'd leave the house and cross an empty lot. On the side facing an alley was a flimsy iron gate. That's where he parked his scooter. Many people lived in the neighborhood, and even finding a parking spot for a scooter was a fierce, daily battle. My father had laid effective claim to that little lot behind the gate through brute persistence.

Still, something managed to go wrong every day. Sometimes the gate was rusted shut, needing just the right bit of push and pull to open; sometimes junk was piled in front of it; sometimes the scooter wouldn't start.

On winter mornings, I'd watch him try again and again to start the engine, coaxing a few grumbles each time before it went quiet. As the minutes passed, he lost his patience and began to curse. The curses weren't directed at anyone. They were rather the accumulation of small everyday failures, spurting out at this unlucky hour in tongues of flame.

"Wǒ cào."

"Kàn-ní-niâ."

"Fuck."

濃霧特報

FOG ALERT



Yang Limin 楊莉敏

- **Category:** Memoir, Essay Collection
 - **Publisher:** Chiu Ko
 - **Date:** 2/2023
 - **Pages:** 224
 - **Length:** 85,011 characters (approx. 55,200 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Yang Limin, born in 1985 in Taichung City, holds a bachelor's in Chinese Literature from Tunghai University and currently works as a civil servant. As a student, Yang earned multiple domestic awards and recognitions for her literary works and essays. She sees writing as a vehicle allowing her to stand up to her own shortfalls and weaknesses. Her works include the essay collection Wild World and Fog Alert.



* 2024 Golden Tripod Award

*Award-winning author Yang Limin returns to the literary stage after a multiyear absence spent building a career in Taiwan's civil service. In **Fog Alert**, her second published work, Yang sharpens her acerbic pen on the everyday minutiae of life and explores the relationships among youthful ambition, reality, and literature.*

An impassioned author working a low-level civil service job finds herself trapped in a bureaucratic machine's soulless grind. Her dream of writing while earning a regular paycheck is shattered when she finds her life's new stability and predictability have dulled her literary ardor and sensibilities. She only finds her stride when starting to write in pensive, world-weary terms, about the landscape of everyday life. Mirroring Kafka's keen fixation on the absurdities and rich emptiness of life, Yang re-finds her penetrating literary insightfulness and recaptures her lost passion for writing when she begins picking apart and making sense of the farce and foolishness in her everyday existence.

Weaving her lived burdens into the narrative, the author writes of convoluted family secrets and city neighborhood legends that put the lie to an everyday life that, while deceptively normal and pleasurable, is emotionally and spiritually toxic. In gray-cast, dispassionate prose, inner truths and coveted hopes shine through her dreams of overseas travel and memories of her parents, hinting somewhat expectantly at true hope for redemption.

Yang's latest work explores the struggles involved in balancing family, friends, reality and aspiration as well as the frustrations, apathy, and exhaustion wrapped up in everyday life and work. Writing may indeed be the author's respite from the fog-bound pressures of life, or perhaps writing is the breath of fresh air just strong enough to part the fog and let a little sunlight through...just enough to reenergize, regroup and press on ahead again for a while.

FOG ALERT

By Yang Limin

Translated by Catherine Xinxin Yu

“Words written in the heat of frustration may end up being just a momentary emotional dalliance or may in fact spotlight unanswered emotions roiling in the author’s belly awaiting a fair hearing and resolution. Yang Limin’s *Fog Alert* bears shades of both. At the surface, the narrative does indeed read like the work of an author venting some much needed emotional steam. However, the story, rather than expressing acrimony, reflects an open and accepting attitude toward life’s absurdities and pitfalls. Yang’s descriptions of the dark corners of everyday existence neither shirk from the ugliness nor turn to self-reprobaton; instead, she takes the high road – *Darkness exists. Seeing it for what it is makes it much less distressing.*”

— Readmoo / Translated by Jeff Miller

Fog Alert

On my way home from a driving lesson, just a bit past eight in the morning, the fog lifted quickly, leaving my field of vision so clear that even a dead rat crushed by car tires on the asphalt was glaringly visible. As the fog cleared, the cramped and chaotic streets near the morning market appeared in front of me. Crowds swarmed out, looking utterly bored and exhausted. I didn’t want to see this too well, so I pressed my scooter’s throttle to speed ahead.

I bought breakfast on the way, arrived home, ate, and then it was time to go to work. On days that began like this, my mood was usually awful, with the cumulative effects of lack of sleep, the driving instructor’s foul temper, and the tiresome triviality of work sinking my mood to the rock bottom. Nothing could be done about it though. These days were

neither calamitous nor unpredictably eventful, just itty-bitty minutiae, drip-drip-dripping along the eaves. Life wouldn’t get broken through, only riddled with invisible punctures.

For instance, at lunch break around the end of the year, when I scrolled through social media on my phone, I would see people posting their annual lists of top songs or best movies, which wrapped up their interests throughout the year. This always gave me a jolt, because I knew practically nothing about them, and I wouldn’t make the effort to look them up. I would swipe past, and that was that. They just existed, but I no longer attached any meaning to them. I felt strange because, in the past, through the things I liked, I had faith that the world still held something precious and unique, something worth seeking, and some vague unknowns waiting for me to distill or destroy. But now I was impassive. I would read the words, absorb the

information, and move on.

Whenever I opened the door, I wouldn't necessarily hit the wall, but the short passage leading to that office desk was indeed narrow. Then I would sit in the cubicle, work, eat, and that was pretty much all.

At dinnertime, when the home phone rang, it usually was for my mother. As soon as she found this much-needed outlet, my perennially fretful mother would dish up all the worries and fears in her heart and, no matter who the caller was, she would always go on for an hour or two about the recent troubles in my older sister's husband's family, or her two grandsons who would never speak, or my older brother who didn't have a stable job. These dramas, according to her, were the reasons for her nightly insomnia. She would ruminate and lament over her lot in life, so unfavorable that she could never dispel the fog of misery in her heart. At this point, someone would always try to offer a solution – *this ritual master in such-and-such a temple works wonders, it's pay-what-you-want, and who's to say if you won't get a pointer that'll solve all your troubles?*

These narratives were also repeated in a loop to me over dinner or before bedtime, as if my mother feared that others might mistakenly think she was happy, or forget about the immense distress in her heart. By weaving these unhappy discourses, she was conveying her *raison d'être* to those around her; that the weight of the whole world fell upon her alone and so she must constantly remind all the blithe souls out there that someone was still suffering.

I would feign sleep, not responding to any of my mother's words or sighs. After a spell of silence, she would return to her room, play the *Heart Sutra* on her phone, lie down and try to fall asleep. At this point, I could no longer pretend I was still fumbling through a smog of unhappiness. Fate had given me a lot, and beyond the fog lay the shape of life. Misfortune and pain, these overly dramatic words only made me uneasy, as if I was undeserving of their heft.

One day at work, I received a text from Sunflower saying that she wanted to give me a call. If memory serves, we hadn't been in touch for almost four years. The last time we'd seen each other was at her wedding banquet. I rushed there to give her

the wedding gift and, as I was about to leave, she suddenly asked whether I could stay and help her out as her bridesmaid. I was shocked that she, despite being a popular person, had no one to help her on this important day. But I also found the request rather abrupt, so I declined and went back to the office for overtime. Life went on as usual. A year later, she gave birth to a daughter. I received the news during a government ministry review meeting. After sending a brief message to congratulate her, I went back to work and we pretty much lost contact thereafter.

That long phone call was the next time I heard from her. After her marriage, she had moved north close to where her husband's family lived and, apart from caring for her child, she often read books from a nearby library. One day, she saw my article in a literary magazine and was suddenly reminded of her friend... me, who had written in a book about conversations that didn't resonate with her at all and our fading friendship. That was why she wanted to get in touch: to tell me she hadn't noticed my feelings back then and was sorry about that. Faced with her sudden frankness and apology, I guess I was a bit flustered. I skirted around the issue, as I was prone to do, and changed the topic. We chatted about her family and her child, and I probably talked about some trivial things in my life to fill in the blanks over the past few years. In the end, we bid each other goodbye and ended the call.

How should I put this? It was just a performance in words. I wasn't even sure, in this act of self-baring, if I had exposed my genuine pain or even truly thought and lived as I had written. Why had those words made her feel sorry? Perhaps her friend was just a self-indulgent fraud.

After the fog dispersed, those girls were no longer there. That was all.

Dead-end conversations eventually became the everyday norm. The dense fog no longer obscured the itinerary of words. Rather, the sun shone bright and I should have been able to clearly see my path forward. But, I just felt tired, stripped of even the pretense of ambition; neither wind nor rain, dry and exposed to the point of being barren.

A message from my boyfriend popped up: a screenshot from an app that recorded the distance and

route of his late-night run. Usually, I wouldn't see this kind of message until the morning after waking up, and after he had just gone to sleep. Our different routines meant our conversations were often postponed until noon, when our schedules finally synched up. Other than what I was planning to eat for lunch, I was generally unsure what to talk about. Most discussions drifted to topics like how the cat was or my experience with a recent stomach ache. Then we would end these routine chats, both of us returning to our respective work.

When we met up, I probably mentioned Sunflower had gotten in touch with me. But, more often than not, conversations about my life ended quickly, followed immediately by my boyfriend's endless outpours and anxieties. Our time together revolved around his state of mind. Sometimes, meeting up for a meal, with a bowl and chopsticks in hand, before taking even one bite, he'd launch into a lengthy account of every last detail about himself, including the contents of his various classes, conversations with others, books he'd read and movies he'd watched, and self-affirming or self-hating speeches. He would repeat himself multiple times without skipping a beat. He would just soldier on, regurgitating his recent experiences at torrential speed, as if he were opening the floodgates to let everything out. Even after I reminded him to eat first, he'd hold his untouched bowl and keep saying the same things.

At times like this, I always felt like I didn't exist. His eyes never truly met mine. Instead, they would look past me and gaze at some unknown void. I was just his reflection, and looking at me was a convenient way to project himself. My function was to let him keep repeating himself. All of those words, rather than conversing with me, worked to obliterate my existence, and replace it with his.

It was the same when the spring haze had dispersed and summer had come. We were strolling together on a clear and sunny day, and he would still mention how a novelist he admired had passed away at the age of thirty-nine, and how he was already thirty-eight, leaving him only a year left...and so on and so forth. That was when it dawned on me. Come rain or shine, whether the fog lifted or not, deep down he

knew clearly that it was only he who existed, and that the whole world and all its sufferings were but his own projection.

On the other hand, I was just plain worn out. All I wanted was to plant my feet on the ground and live an ordinary, effortless life.

After my father passed away, my family slipped into vacation mode, idle and peaceful, the days easy to get through. But the old house, seemingly set on following my father into demise, began showing signs of decay. The strong monsoon brought humidity, breathing its watery breath into the house's walls and porous foundations. Cracks became larger and more numerous, like wild creepers invading the innards of our house, replacing its skeleton with some sort of living organism, crawling inside parasitically, growing wild and strong.

I kept feeling fed up, utterly uninterested in old things, unable to read their historic significance and the traces of time. I felt nothing for them. They were just extra hassles. For instance, my father had repaired the drainage ditch in the bathroom many times, but holes of varied sizes quickly began to appear in the concrete wall, one after another. At first, I had no idea what they were, simply assuming concrete should naturally crumble as it turned brittle. Then, one rainy day, I found a centipede crawling in the bathroom, rapidly scaling the wall then quickly descending, as if in pursuit of something. I took a closer look, and then I realized it was hunting a cockroach. Maybe sensing my human presence, it quickly abandoned its prey and slipped inside a hole in the ditch. In its wake, the hole seemed dark and dead, as if the chase that had ended only moments ago was just a hallucination.

So I took all the insect repellent left in the house and sprayed it at the hole, unsure if it would work or not. Unlike my father, I had no plans to patch these new holes up. I would let them multiply wildly, let them eat away at this house until it crumbled. This way, it would cease to be a home, no longer something supposedly precious. It could then be disposed of without a qualm, like an alien object; no need to look back or care for it anymore.

Towards Happiness

I saw on a television program a flightless bird like a chicken or a heron living in a jungle in some faraway country. It was all alone, running around in its forest. The narrator said it was an endangered species in heat, so it ran and squawked, looking for a companion. But days and nights passed, and still no member of its own species had responded to its call. It hadn't even come across another male bird agonizing as he was about finding a mate. It kept running and squawking. Time flew, and there wasn't even a ghost of a mate in the whole forest. It was a lone bird.

So, I thought, maybe there was something to write about here. It couldn't even fly, stumbling around clumsily; so, why perpetuate the species? But this thought was soon replaced by the fatigue of work. Then I thought, maybe I'd write when I had a day off. But once I was on leave, a holiday languor washed over me; invitations to dine out, shop, and hike as well as other material distractions multiplied thanks to having a stable income; so, the matter of writing was once again postponed. In the end, as time lapsed, I no longer felt the need to write.

I used to imagine that once I had secured a good livelihood, I would perhaps be able to write more freely. With this naïve thought in mind, I chose a job that had nothing to do with literature. As I saw my account balance go up every month, and my parents no longer blaming each other or fighting over money, I felt joy. I had suddenly become a provider. I even gained a certain confidence, as if I had a better understanding of the gap between life and living, the impossibility of stitching together ideals and reality, the lack of choice, the fact that the rest of my life would be nothing more than the product of compromise. In this way, I thought having work experience was tantamount to broadening my life and horizons. It would allow me to comment on literature unabashedly, write without feeling constrained – everything would be perfect.

Once I no longer had to fret like a fool over my livelihood, I would work diligently every day within limits, and at night would lie in bed without a single

thought and quickly fall asleep. I thought this was life, that it was getting better, and that once it was "good", everything else would also improve. So I kept waiting, waiting for my imaginary self in literature to improve as well, to catch up and move forward with me.

But what was it, after all?

One night, I lay in bed worrying about trivial issues at work, and also finding such worries utterly meaningless. Bureaucratic systems are always rife with trifles that, while seemingly urgent, are in fact pointless and illusory. They would flatten people just to fit them inside the folds of this mundane world. Don't think, just roll with the days...that was all it took. I was suddenly panicked by the realization that my days had morphed into an unexpected shape, so I quickly began to ponder how I used to live, and about the future I had once envisioned. Yet even the starting point was uncomfortable to remember.

I heard people say this about the birth of a literary work: when inspiration visits, the heart becomes more perceptive and guides the author to a brand new realm. But I had never experienced it. When I first began studying literature, reading and writing came side by side. There was an abundant desire to showcase myself through words, so I wrote quickly. I had zero metacognitive awareness, yet deemed my work flawless once I had finished. I rarely edited, couldn't tell good work from bad, and always felt underappreciated. Reading was rather insipid too. I just kept chewing over the few books I liked, quietly copying down some quotes, job done. I never considered whether literature could be my vocation or profession. In fact, I thought about nothing, did nothing, and yet kept feeling rejected by the whole world. Thinking back now, maybe that kind of posturing was my way of convincing others I was taking a serious stab at life despite the hindering hurdles.

修復事典

HANDBOOK FOR HEALING



Chiang
Pei-Chin
江佩津

-
- **Category:** Memoir, Essay Collection
 - **Publisher:** Locus
 - **Date:** 12/2022
 - **Pages:** 236
 - **Length:** 52,000 characters (approx. 33,800 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Chiang Pei-Chin, a prolific writer across a diverse range of genres, holds a bachelor's in Agricultural Chemistry and an MBA from ESSEC Business School in France. A seasoned journalist, Chiang Pei-Chin has recently jumped tracks into a career in software engineering. Her literary works, including the essay collections *Uncover the Shell* and *Handbook for Healing*, draw on her lived experiences and contemporary social issues and concerns. She holds numerous domestic literary awards and has, more recently, participated in several author-in-residence programs in the United States (Santa Fe Art Institute, New Mexico) and Spain (Can Serrat, Barcelona).



This book explores how the bereaved family of a survivor of suicide learns to deal with what has happened and begin the process of healing as they restart their lives and find hope and joy again.

After her mother, gradually losing ground against terminal cancer, chooses to take her life and end her suffering, author Chiang Pei-Chin sinks into a morass of shame, guilt, and grief. She turns to her love of writing for solace, to extirpate her deep-set pain, and to let healing begin; the remaining scars testifying to that dark page in her life.

In this book in three parts, the first, titled “Things”, centers on the physical remainders of her mother’s life – her organ donor card, insurance policy, prepaid cell phone card, a prized jade pendant, and other items now all tucked safely away in a mini storage unit. While all part of her mother’s coherent being in life, they now exist as dispersed, disjointed pieces of her former existence.

Next, “Emotions” dives into current theory on psychological well-being. She first plumbs the scholarly consensus regarding strategies both for resolving the roots of pain and sadness and for navigating one’s way back to psychological health. Then, the author documents heartfelt discussions with others who, like her, have lost family members to suicide to explore how their path to reassemble the pieces of their lives and continue moving forward overlaps with and, potentially, strays from academic theory.

“Life” returns the narrative to the author’s own story, discussing her journey of healing in overseas travel, author-in-residence experiences, and creative writing; in encounters with new people, things and experiences; and in reflections on life, discovering in the process that love resides in the acknowledgment and acceptance of pain.

This book explores the physical, psychological, and practical shrapnel taken by those experiencing the suicide of a loved one. The author’s lived experience, told in a refined and emotive writing style honed through her practiced, reporter’s mind, is much more than an autobiographical missive; it offers supportive companionship and comfort on the reader’s personal journey to healing. The narrative in this book takes multiple perspectives to show those left behind a potential way forward to coexist with their pain and restart their lives.

HANDBOOK FOR HEALING

By Chiang Pei-Chin

Translated by Marianne Yeh

“*H*andbook for Healing touches on something that must be experienced to truly be understood. While we may ponder why someone could take their own life and even look for signs of suicidal ideation in those around us, few consider the state or needs of the survivors of suicide loss. Weighed down by a deeply perceived sense of loss and self-reproach, they are often expected to pick themselves up and proceed with life as normal. In *Handbook for Healing*, author and suicide loss survivor Chiang Pei-Chin embarks on an empathetic journey with fellow survivors, sharing her own emotional journey out from the shadow of her mother’s suicide and offering many practical suggestions to help others along on their own healing journey.

— Readmoo / Translated by Jeff Miller

Mini Storage

I’ll always remember that faint smile at the corner of my mother’s lips. I didn’t understand the source of the confidence or acceptance in that smile at the time, but I did the next day.

Looking back at the messages on my phone from that day, I mustered the courage to open conversations with close friends: “It’s stiffened”...“Smells like smoke.” I tossed these words out as if doing so might take the memories away with them. But those unprocessed memories remained there, and in my mind, day after day.

Not long after, I went back to work, found a new place to live, and put my life back in order. I took on a few projects that just managed to cover my expenses while, perhaps more importantly, keeping me busy and distracted from what had happened. Fortunately, interview days were always bright and sunny; unfortunately, that also meant each interview left me

drenched in sweat after hours of waiting at stations, hoping to find subjects with compelling stories, then following them wherever they went – up into the mountains or down to the sea.

One day, after wrapping up an interview, I sat with a few senior cameramen at a shaved ice shop beside the old southern train station. We could finally set our equipment down and relax rather than worrying about what shots we still needed to get or what soundbites we had to capture.

“I thought your mom passed away because of an illness?”

To fill the silence in our conversation, I had brought up the topic of my mother’s passing. One of the cameramen hesitated for a moment before asking the question. I used my metal spoon to cut through the shaved ice in my bowl, chipping at the frozen chunks piece by piece, making a soft, sandy crunch. “Yeah,” I replied. “I guess so.” When it comes to death, this might be one of the most difficult ways of leaving for people to accept. Sudden departures always leave people

stunned, not knowing what to say. I've grown used to the silence and discomfort that follows whenever I mention the word.

In any case, a full year afterward, I finally opened a blank document on my computer and began writing about that final day, rather than the cold, lifeless days after everything had already happened.

Earlier that day, my mother had a smile on her face reminiscent of how she looked after I would take her to and from the hospital. Before that, the nurse had given her an anti-nausea injection and an IV drip to replenish the strength she had lost after days of vomiting and barely eating due to the side effects of chemotherapy. But before that medication took effect, she didn't even have the strength to remove her shirt and bra for the CT scan. So, I went into the changing room and stayed with her in that tiny space, helping her undress.

A black checkered blouse, a delicate lace bra that had become somewhat loose. It was the first time my mother and I had ever been this physically close. It would also be the last.

We waited for a while in the ER, learning finally that the scan looked normal and that she didn't have a fever; both readings were considered good for a cancer patient. I breathed a sigh of relief. The ER doctor told us we could go home; no need for hospitalization.

My mother's head hung low, as if she was about to fall asleep, or perhaps she really did doze off for a bit. I called an Uber and took her back to my grandmother's house. When we arrived, she lay down on the couch while I went to the kitchen and lifted the lid on the Tatung rice cooker. Inside was the pumpkin porridge my grandmother had made, with bits of shredded meat. I was still committed to eating vegetarian then, so I picked out the meat from my bowl and placed it into hers. She ate, smiling as she did, all the while urging me to hurry along to meet up with my friends. Then she handed me a business card from a secondhand dealer, telling me to contact them later to sell anything of value in the house. Pushing back, I tried to refuse. I remember feeling a little irritated when replying, "No need, there's no rush. If you want to sell something, you can do it later." But she insisted, so I took the card. It was from a dealer on Liouhe Road in Kaohsiung who, the text

claimed, "specialized in vintage liquor, antique coins, and stamps".

My mother smiled at me from the sofa. That was the last smile I remember from her. I turned and left to meet up with my friends.

I heard that soon after I left, my mother had followed in my footsteps downstairs and told my grandmother, "I'm sorry, I've been a failure as a daughter." Then, she went back to her own place where she lived alone. When my grandmother called, she told her she was with friends and not to worry.

Twenty-four hours later, she was found lying in her windowless bathroom; her body cold, her smile gone.

I never used the secondhand dealer's business card my mother had given me. Instead, I packed everything into boxes, one by one. I moved out, sealed it all up in storage bins, telling myself I'd deal with it another day. At that time, I didn't have enough courage to throw away or sell all of my mother's belongings. The only thing I could manage was canceling the lease on her apartment. Feeling completely lost, I ended up packing everything away, including all of the possessions from the life I shared with my mother, in a mini storage unit.

I had known early on I would be a mini storage user. With no permanent home and living freely without knowing where I'd be the following month, mini storage units were more of a necessity than a house ever could be. Some people have told me, "Someone without roots should practice letting go." But even in letting go, I still wanted to keep a few scattered remnants I could hold on to. Perhaps they were memories I hoped to be brave enough to face someday. So, I sealed up box after box of what proof remained of my mother's existence - her ID card and passport with the corners cut off, personal seals that no longer held any meaning, and old photographs she had worked so hard to preserve.

Each time I opened the storage unit door, I felt a faint, almost imperceptible sense of home - the kind of place that gave people the strength to carry on.

"Because we still have a chance," I told myself, "to rebuild the life we once loved."

But did we? I remember how my mother kept several rose salt lamps and pieces of fossilized wood. These were items from the department store counter

where she had worked before it went out of business. To keep her monthly sales figures from looking too bad, she would buy the merchandise herself to boost her numbers. Many of the unopened decorations she had at home were things she had once tried selling to others. "If we had our own place, we'd finally be able to display these," she sighed one day as we sorted through her things, looking for items we could sell. I agreed with my mother. For the countless objects now confined in mini storage, I held out hope that one day I'd have a home of my own where there'd be a place for them all, as if she had never left, as if we were still living together.

One year after my mother's passing, I finally mustered the courage to visit that secondhand dealer on Liouhe Road. The owner had probably long forgotten the masked woman in a bucket hat who had once stepped inside his shop asking for a business card and perhaps had lingered long enough to exchange a few words. None of that mattered anymore. When I reached the storefront, I found the shop shuttered, its metal gate locked tight. This street ran through what was once the city's most prestigious district. Now, after a slow and steady decline, just a handful of long-standing family businesses were still operating. Due to the pandemic, the nearby tourist night market was also sparsely populated, with vendors running their businesses only intermittently.

I still kept that business card deep inside my mini storage unit.

"How much are you paying for that unit, anyway?"

Friends would ask occasionally. When I told them the amount, some would stare at me in disbelief. But it was more than just the storage unit; I also needed a bank safe deposit box for valuables and items I had no idea how to store.

And every time, I'd find myself asking reflexively, "Is it *really* so expensive?"

I always felt having a place where I could keep what little was left of my home to be worth the cost.

I went through a period of time when my sense of material value was off-kilter. I wasn't spending recklessly or in some kind of retail therapy trying to numb the pain; I had simply stopped forcing myself to count

pennies. For example, I rented an entire floor for myself with three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a living room. Indeed, it was too big for just one person, but I was desperate to move out of the place my mother had rented and to clear out the household items, and didn't want to spend money furnishing a new home. I wanted a place where I could move in with nothing but a suitcase. All I needed was a space with good lighting, a window that opened to the outside world, and a bed where I could get a good night's sleep. That was what I thought; and yet, in the world of rentals, that most basic of needs was still a luxury.

Some people would choose to continue living in the house where their loved one ended their life by charcoal burning. I think, if not for relatives and friends urging me to terminate the lease and move out, I might have made the same choice – to continue living in that apartment, wanting to climb into the same bathtub my mother had lain in. Maybe on that day, she had changed her mind. Maybe she climbed out, ended up on the floor, slowly suffocating as the air thinned. Part of me wanted to run from this place of sorrow as fast as I could, but another part of me actually longed to lie down right there, to witness the last bit of the world my mother had seen.

At the time, I escaped in the quickest way possible, yet I couldn't help wanting to return to that familiar way of life.

After facing death so directly, it seemed like nothing mattered anymore, like I could live more freely. But in reality, I found I still pushed myself too hard. When life felt overwhelming, when I just wanted to lie down and give up, I found myself questioning: *Is it okay to be this lazy? Is it okay to stop moving forward? Is it okay not to become "better"?* I told myself that every single day I lived after my mother's passing was something her death had brought me. What she left behind for me might be money, or good fortune – a kind of blessing that allowed me to grow up safely. That thought alone always took my breath away, as if I were trapped inside the bell jar Sylvia Plath wrote about, struggling to breathe in air that just wasn't there.

I believe my mother's smile had perhaps been meant to tell me not to worry. That she had made her

choice, and that I should make mine, too.

I opened the library reservation system and typed in the keywords: healing, grief, suicide. In addition to reading, I joined a Facebook group for suicide loss survivors. I hesitated but eventually signed up for events to meet others who had been through experiences similar to mine. I just wanted to know how people like me, the ones left behind, would make it through the rest of their lives.

Here in Taiwan, two to three thousand people die by suicide each year, with 3,656 deaths by suicide officially recorded in 2020. That's twelve out of every 100,000 – higher than the global average. Although it seems everyone I know has at some point experienced the death of someone in their lives, whether close or distant, and that death should by now be accepted as "ordinary", I seem to remain trapped inside it. All I can do is read and write, hoping only to let others who might be going through the same thing know that life is like this. There's no need to worry. And if you do worry, that's okay too.

This is what life looks like for those of us left behind.

In the Car

Now, having already walked through the final journey of saying goodbye to my mother, I find that the memories often seen as ominous or inauspicious are, in fact, incredibly precious.

It may be because during those forty-nine days of mourning – or even just the first seven days, or up until the funeral – I still had my mother's physical form to watch over, still had upcoming rituals to look forward to. Whether I was willing or not, I was pushed forward by the next task at hand. Looking back now, as someone who has lived through it, I can't help but wish I had taken more time and been a bit more composed. I wish I could've taken the time to carefully choose the flowers for her farewell ceremony. I wish I had spent more time at the altar, speaking to her. I wish I had used my camera more to capture what that day looked like. But all of that was beyond me then, when I was desperate to escape the shadow of death.

I still returned to my hometown, that city where I had grown up but no longer called home, several times during that year. After my mother passed away, I cleared out the home we had shared, packed up our belongings, and officially changed my household registration. For a brief moment, it felt like I had bid my final farewell to that place and would never return.

I'd travel an hour and a half alone on the high-speed rail, catch a taxi and, upon reaching my destination, lean forward and quietly ask the driver: "Would you mind waiting for me here for a bit?"

The cemetery area was so desolate, with no signs of life for miles around except for the people selling ceremonial paper money. If this cab left, there was no telling whether I'd be able to find another driver willing to accept a pickup request from here later.

This was the only place where I could still speak to my mother – or maybe it wasn't. I believed that whenever I wanted to speak with her, no matter where I was, she would listen. She was no longer bound by the limits of a physical body. Two years after the so-called "tree burial" (eco-friendly burial), the cemetery staff would turn over the soil, dig out new spaces, and place new ashes there. Her ashes had been held in supposedly biodegradable paper bags. I still remember them looking just like McDonald's takeout bags. However, an adult's ashes are much heavier than a McDonald's meal. The ashes, along with their paper bag, would enter the water cycle with the rainfall. The substances leached from the soil would spread throughout this world, cycling through it again and again.

Therefore, perhaps speaking to my mother in this particular place didn't mean that much after all. Maybe she wasn't even here anymore.

Still, whenever she crossed my mind, I wanted to come back to this place, to see her again.

圖博千年： 一個旅人的雪域凝視



This professional author's rich resume of travel experience includes multiple journeys to Tibet, southwestern China, and Southeast Asia. Her travelogues include *Singing All the Way*, *Nepal and Its Deco Buses*, *Must-See Ladakh*, and (her latest) *Nation on Ice*.



Chen Fei-Fei 陳斐翡

- **Category:** Travelogue, History
- **Publisher:** PsyGarden
- **Date:** 12/2023
- **Pages:** 640
- **Length:** 250,000 characters
(approx. 162,500 words in English)
- **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

NATION ON ICE: A TRAVELER'S OBSERVATIONS ON TIBET'S TODAY AND YESTERDAY

* 2024 Openbook Award

* 2024 Golden Tripod Award

Driven to test and overcome her limits as a writer and adventurer, travel author Chen Fei-Fei has made multiple visits to Tibet over two decades, witnessing its changing cultural and social tapestries and using history to better understand this ancient nation's history and the desires and aspirations of its people.

Nation on Ice is the culmination of over a dozen years of work and exploration by seasoned traveler and author Chen Fei-Fei. When protests and demonstrations erupt across Tibet in 2008, she scraps a nearly finished manuscript on her experiences in the region to truly research its rich culture and history. Her return visit in 2019 focuses on bringing to light the heritage treasures of this once-proud nation and on witnessing the changes over the past twenty years.

This work tracks Chen's 2019 return journey through Tibet, recording chronologically her observations and interactions at each stop on the way as well as how things have changed over just two decades. By comparing and contrasting her own observations with the oft-differing perspectives of Western and Chinese scholars on the details of Tibetan history, she crafts a refreshingly readable, honest, and enlightening take on timeless Tibet.

Her 2019 excursion through the Roof of the World overlaps with both Chinese and Tibetan New Years – a time of year rife with social and political tensions when Chinese public security agencies

closely monitor the activities of both Tibetans and foreign visitors. Different from 2008, she finds temples bereft of monks, former grazing lands occupied by shopping arcades and mines, rich touchstones of Tibetan heritage and culture trinketized for tourist consumption, and local history contorted and skewed to fit the official Party line. Tibetans, now second-class citizens in their own country and concerned about losing even more, are clearly more guarded about voicing their true feelings.

Chen Fei-Fei writes of Tibet's present and past and about her own observations over two decades in flowing, well-constructed prose. Today, China's heightened restrictions on travel to the region make it difficult to explore. The palpable image of Tibet presented in *Nation on Ice* gives readers rare insight into a land too-often off today's travel radar, creating new and emotive connections with the outside world.

NATION ON ICE

By Chen Fei-Fei

Translated by Petula Parris

“In the two decades between her first and most-recent trips to Tibet, author Chen Fei-Fei studied extensively the history, heritage and people of this once formidable Himalayan kingdom. This was also a period during which both Tibetans and visitors fell under increasingly onerous restrictions and surveillance imposed by China’s state security apparatus, leaving Tibetans few options outside of self-immolation protests to express their discontent over Chinese government repression and draw international media attention. *Nation on Ice* crystallizes Chen’s many personal experiences in Tibet, her related studies, and her thoughts on this nation’s past, present and future. Rejecting the modern-day Chinese framing of Tibet as the regional home of one of China’s many “minority” populations, Chen plumbs the historical record and draws on her own lived experiences throughout the Tibetan world to present Tibet in a significantly more authentic and objective light and to document the true fate of Tibet’s culture and people under PRC dominion.

— Readmoo / Translated by Jeff Miller

Foreword: Please Write Your Name

“For he who no longer has a homeland,
writing becomes a place to live.”

– Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

It was in 2019 while en route from Labrang to Rebgong⁰¹ that I crossed paths with Yongten. This young thangka artist – still only in his twenties – informed me that he already had his own thangka painting studio, as well as a number of apprentices.

Yongten’s eyes lit up the minute he learned we were foreigners. He wanted to find out all he could, with his constant stream of questioning covering everything

from our hometown to world affairs. He asked about our usual modes of transport, the weather, our religious beliefs, national holidays, and art galleries. He appeared spellbound by all we told him. Of course, we were equally fascinated by his work as a thangka artist. At one point, Yongten stopped the car he was driving, took out his phone, and brought up several photos of his paintings, explaining each one to us in great detail.

During this heartwarming exchange, Yongten couldn’t help saying that he “lacked culture” and “wasn’t very cultured”. While, at first, I took this as a sign of humility, it wasn’t long before I realized that he truly meant it. In his eyes, he had spent too little time in the formal Chinese education system.

Since he was a boy, Yongten had been immersed in the study of thangka. He was also required to study Buddhist scriptures and was thus well-versed

⁰¹ Rebgong is called Tongren City in China’s official administrative system.

in the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as the meanings of the myriad of symbols and colors used in thangka paintings. But Yongten was raised in a society that equates culture with fluency in Mandarin Chinese and with higher education received from mainstream Chinese institutions. I was immediately struck by how this concept of “culture” was entirely disconnected from the cultural heritage of Tibet.

Speaking to Yongten that day made me question my own inherent beliefs. I started to wonder: “What biases have I unknowingly acquired over the years as a result of the culture that raised me?”

Changing Places: Adopting a Different Cultural Stance

In the summer of 2005, I was eating at a Tibetan *momo* and noodle restaurant in Dharamsala, India. An image from that day remains etched in my mind. In the restaurant, as I started to chat in Chinese, I immediately noticed a sudden change in the face of an *amala* – an elderly Tibetan woman. Gone was the warmth in her eyes. Instead, her new expression conveyed an awkward mixture of surprise, revulsion, and pain. Later, when I bumped into her again around town, she made a concerted effort to avoid eye contact and simply ignored me. After this, one of my local friends, Konchok, told me how this *amala* had lost countless family members and friends in Tibet in the 1950s as they fled the Chinese army.

Konchok was working for a Dharamsala-based NGO. Born and raised in India, he is a second-generation Tibetan exile who speaks fluent Tibetan, English, and Hindi as well as a smattering of French and Chinese. He was working several odd jobs at the time: web developer, translator, and graphic designer – and he would even occasionally help out as a server and baker of vegetable flatbreads at his friend’s café.

Konchok was forthright, open, and unfailingly generous in answering my questions about Tibet. He was also unafraid to ask me equally probing questions in return. “What is the difference between *zhōnghuá* culture and Han Chinese culture...and why do some

Chinese speakers call their language *huáwén*? And if *zhōnghuá* refers to Chinese civilization as a whole, then does *huáwén* include other languages spoken in China, such as Uighur, Mongolian, and Tibetan?” He didn’t stop there. “If *zhōnghuá mínzú* means the ‘Chinese nation’ or the ‘peoples of China,’ and includes different ethnic groups, such as Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan, then don’t you think school textbooks in China ought to not only teach the tenets of Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, and Zhuangzi but also the Quran of China’s Hui Muslims and the sacred Lamrim Chenmo of the Mongols and Tibetans?”

Though I had long been aware that the Confucian texts I had memorized at school and the national identity I had been spoon-fed throughout my youth were both part of a narrow, ethnocentric education, hearing these questions out loud felt deeply jarring. I could feel my scalp tingle and my cheeks flush with color.

2005 also happened to be the year I first read the Orkhon Inscriptions.⁰² More than a millenium ago, these ancient Turkic texts were carved onto stone monuments to commemorate the lives of Bilge Khagan and Kul Tigin, leaders of the Turkic khaganate that once governed the Central Asian steppes. The inscriptions not only lauded the military achievements of these men but also served as a stark reminder to all Turks of why Han Chinese were their eternal foes: “Because of want of harmony between the begs and the people, and because of the Chinese people’s cunning and craft and its intrigues, [...] they brought the old realm of the Turkish people to dissolution, and brought destruction on its lawful kagans. The sons of the nobles became the bondsmen of the Chinese people, their unsullied daughters became its slaves...”⁰³

However, Chinese historical records paint a totally different story – one of unity and friendship. Emperor Xuanzong, ruler of the Tang Dynasty at the time, had supposedly formed a “father-son alliance” with Bilge

02 The Orkhon Inscriptions are Old Turkic texts carved into stone memorial steles that were erected by the Göktürks in the Orkhon Valley (now part of modern-day Mongolia) during the eighth century.

03 Saunders, 2001.

Khagan. He even supplied the stone stele for the Turkic leader, inscribing upon it the following heartfelt words: "Kul Tigin, the Khagan's younger brother, and the Khagan himself, are as sons to me [...] Both are beloved as sons. I am moved once more by deep affection; hence this monument is erected."⁰⁴

Is There Ever a True Side to History?

Here we have the same stone pillar: on one hand dedicated as a proud symbol of imperial greatness for China's Tang Dynasty, while on the other etched with a narrative lamenting the suffering of the Turkic people. More than twelve hundred years on, this stone monument stands as a testament to the fact that history is never one-sided. No matter how plentiful or detailed Chinese historical records may be, they provide only one perspective and, as such, should not be taken as historical gospel.

Meanwhile, as the Turks became subservient to the Imperial Tang – as "a son to his father", another steppe-based empire was on the rise, namely the "Kingdom of Bod" (better known in English as the Tibetan Empire). Tibetan steppe forces first encroached on the central plains of Tang Dynasty-controlled China in 638. Yet, over the centuries that followed, Chinese historical discourse routinely brushed the Tibetans into a corner as the peripheral "other", without ever according them a voice of their own. In the modern era, politics have interfered even more, further stripping Tibet of its right to speak.

I heard this sentiment echoed again and again – not only by my friend Konchok in Dharamsala, but also by the many other Tibetans encountered during my travels. Here is but a sample of the many things I heard: "In 1959, when the People's Liberation Army entered Lhasa, we Tibetans lost our country"; "Tibetans are Tibetans, Chinese are Chinese"⁰⁵; "Tibetan culture

is distinct from Chinese culture – it's certainly not part of it"; "When Han Chinese speak of their history, what they describe is different from our Tibetan history."

Despite the paucity of first-hand historical records from Tibet, it is notable that scholars outside of China often present versions of events that diverge distinctly from the traditional Chinese narrative. Take, for example, the marriage of Princess Wencheng to the Tibetan King during the seventh century. Was this a cordial bestowing of marital ties by the Tang Dynasty, as described in the *New Book of Tang*, or rather an attempt by the Tang Emperor to broker peace once his army had been besieged by Tibetan forces? Christopher I. Beckwith, a prominent scholar of Tibetan history, certainly interprets it as the latter based on his research into ancient Chinese, Arabic, and Tibetan texts.⁰⁶

Interactions between the Tang Dynasty and Tibetan Empire – wars fought, treaties formed, political alliances pledged through marriage – are recorded by Han Chinese historians in works such as the *Books of Tang* (new and old) and the *Zizhi Tongjian*. Viewing history through either a Tang-tinted historical lens or a more modern Chinese perspective (purposefully constructed in the early twentieth century with new political objectives in mind) gives us a narrative that differs starkly from those posited by non-Chinese scholars such as Beckwith. This difference in perspectives is by no means an anomaly. The same is true even when we travel back two millenia and look at how Chinese historical records describe interactions during the Shang and Zhou dynasties between the Han Chinese of the central plains and the nomadic Xianyun⁰⁷ tribes to the north.

Cultural critic Edward Said argued that all cultures create a binary structure to distinguish the "self" from the "other": "Heroes and monsters, founding fathers

04 "The Biography of the Turks" in the *Old Book of Tang*.

05 The original sentence, spoken in Mandarin Chinese was: 博是博，加是加 Bó shì bó, jiā shì jiā. Here, 博 is a phonetic rendering of the Tibetan word "bo", meaning Tibetans; while 加 is a phonetic rendering of the Tibetan word "rgya", meaning "Han Chinese". The speaker therefore intended to convey that "Tibetans are totally different from Han Chinese."

06 Beckwith, 1978.

07 Xiányūn (獫狁) was a term used during the Shang and Zhou dynasties to refer to nomadic tribes in the north. In the *Book of Songs*, a poem titled "Gathering Wild Ferns" laments: "No house, no home – all because of the Xianyun." The original meaning of Xianyun is "dog." *Shuowen Jiezi* (說文解字), a Chinese dictionary from 100CE, defines the first character "xián 獫" as: A dog with a long muzzle. Also, a black dog with a yellow head.

and barbarians... This kind of binary opposition does well in shaping national identity and patriotism, but falters due to its crude chauvinism, xenophobia, and exclusivism.”⁰⁸ Therefore, if we don’t view the world through the eyes of others and thus fail to understand and respect their historical perspectives and subjectivities, we are simply creating roadblocks to communication. This in turn, of course, makes it harder to gain a rational and objective understanding of ourselves.

Travel and Writing

Travel – much like reading – is an exploration of the human condition. More than simply visiting a foreign land, travel compels us to consider within the broad river of history our own brief journey, the journeys of others, and the journeys we share with our contemporaries. Travel also encourages us to revisit the questions and reflections left by those who came before us.

I began traveling independently a little over twenty years ago, when I started out from Gyalthang⁰⁹ on the southeastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau, crossed through border checks to travel onto Lhasa, and continued westward into Ngari Prefecture. On a separate occasion, I entered Tibet from the north, passing through Amdo and the Tsong Chu Valley and then across the northern Tibetan Plateau back down to Lhasa. I have also taken a southern route, leaving Tibet via the Nepalese border and visiting Sikkim, Darjeeling, Ladakh, and Dharamsala (home to the Tibetan government-in-exile). I once even went to Saint Petersburg to visit the Datsan Gunzechoinei¹⁰ – Europe’s oldest Tibetan Buddhist datsan! Along the way, I recorded a myriad of new experiences and self-reflections, and noted how these clashed with my cultural background.

08 Said, Liang Yongan 梁永安 (tr. 2010). This quote has been translated from Chinese translation of the original English quote.

09 Gyalthang, meaning “the Royal Plains,” is called Shangri-La City (Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province) in China’s official administrative system.

10 The Datsan Gunzechoinei, meaning “Source of Buddhist Teachings and Compassion,” opened in 1915.

My original intention for this book was to write about my travels through the greater Tibetan cultural region. In fact, my initial manuscript was already pretty much complete by the end of 2008. Then, during the Tibetan New Year of 2008, intense protests erupted across Chinese-ruled Tibet. Unarmed Tibetans raised their fists and chanted “Free Tibet”, with some even embracing the added risk of raising the Tibetan Snow Lion Flag. What was it that had driven Tibetan nomads, monks, senior citizens, and children to march in the streets in the face of the Chinese military and police? Perplexed, I shelved my almost-complete manuscript and dove headfirst into all the historical literature I could find. Through two millennia of history, from the *Records of the Grand Historian* to the *History of the Qing Dynasty*, I gradually worked out the origins of the dissonance between Chinese and foreign narratives – the dissonance, that is, between the historical perspective of the Tibetans and the Chinese version of history that I was taught.

When I first began traveling and writing, my goal was to answer my own deep questions. However, as I journeyed through unfamiliar lands, the endless experiences I amassed gradually shifted my perspective away from “myself” toward a common “us”...an “us” that witnessed, respected, and embraced the culture of others. What I mean by this is that, through my travels, the “self” with whom I had been trying to converse expanded into a much larger “us” (an “us” that may be understood as a shared society, culture, history, or ethnicity).

This book combines what I have discovered by both traveling through and studying modern-day and historical Tibet, along with reflections on my own culture. Thus, contained herein are three distinct journeys. The first overlaps with the Tibetan New Year in 2019. The second draws on my experiences gained over multiple stays in Tibet over the past twenty-odd years. The third is a historical narrative beginning 1,300 years ago in the ancient Kingdom of Bod and continuing up through the early twentieth century (a critical period in the establishment of Tibet as a modern nation) and the Chinese invasion until the present day.

報導者事件簿 003: 無體溫關係



Comics by
Huihui
漫畫／廢廢子

Huihui is a graduate of the Department of Fine Arts at National Taiwan Normal University and the Experimental Animation Program at CalArts. She has staged multiple solo exhibitions of her work in Taipei, and was a featured artist in the Taiwan Pavilion at the Angoulême International Comics Festival. Following the publishing of her first graphic novel, *Blowing-Up Adventure of Me!*, Huihui collaborated with playwright Chien Li-Ying to recast her script *Tender Is the Night* as a graphic novel. *The Reporter Files 3: Low-Temp Relationships* published in 2024, is her most recent co-authored work.

Text and Photos by
The Reporter
文字及攝影／《報導者》團隊

Established in 2015 as Taiwan's first non-profit online media outlet, *The Reporter* is dedicated to investigative journalism and in-depth reporting in the public sphere.



THE REPORTER FILES 3: LOW-TEMP RELATIONSHIPS



-
- **Category:** Social Science, Reportage
 - **Publisher:** Gaea
 - **Date:** 2/2024
 - **Pages:** 102
 - **Length:** 29,517 characters (approx. 19,100 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

This sweeping exploration of interpersonal relationships in the digital age is led by the author, who works as an investigative journalist for the independent Taiwan-based non-profit news organization The Reporter, and Huihui, a vanguard comic-book illustrator and long-term observer of non-mainstream relationships.

Since its founding, the non-profit media organization *The Reporter* has worked to expand the scope and range of media coverage, shedding light on relevant, timely issues overlooked or superficially covered by mainstream outlets. In pursuit of its mission, the group has also dipped its toes into publishing. Each book in *The Reporter Files* series, apart from breaking down a real-world story in words and pictures, includes an abridged version in comic strip format to further draw readers into the narrative. While similarly edited and formatted, each volume stands well on its own.

Low-Temp Relationships, the third book in the series published in 2024, explores the recent proliferation of non-traditional “low-temperature” relationships, many of which see face-to-face interactions, promises of fidelity and even long-term stability as optional. The book is presented in four main sections, including manga, in-depth reporting, every picture tells a story, and the epilogue.

A few of the many subtopics addressed in the narrative include post-pandemic trends such as sleep calling and eatgethery apps, dates for rent, AV girl photoshoots, and digital-only love. Expert takes add objectivity and depth to each social phenomenon, while photos bring visual depth and character to the stories. Starting from recent innovations in the silicone sex doll industry, this work plumbs the true value of relationships and intimacy.

Comic strip images crafted by a talented manga artist Huihui add impact to the topic and interview narratives and breathe form into reader imaginations and honest realism into stories.

While learning about the latest trends and changes in the intimate relationship landscape, readers’ eyes are opened to the uniqueness of the individual human experience and encouraged to expand their horizons when exploring new friendship and intimate relationship possibilities.

THE REPORTER FILES 3: LOW-TEMP RELATIONSHIPS

Comics by Huihui; text and photos by The Reporter
Translated by Chris Findler

“Comic-book illustrator Huihui previously demonstrated her finely honed ability to capture in graphic form the rising sense of alienation and changing face of relationships in the twenty-first century in the graphic novel *Tender Is the Night*. In her most recent collaboration, *The Reporter Files 3: Low-Temp Relationships*, Huihui invests both her artistic talents and relationship insights to capture in comic-strip form the authentic experiences of people engaged in non-traditional “low temperature” relationships, helping readers better relate and empathize. This book explores why individuals who, while able to make and keep friends and to develop intimate relationships, choose technology rather than face-to-face interactions to sate their need for physical and emotional intimacy.

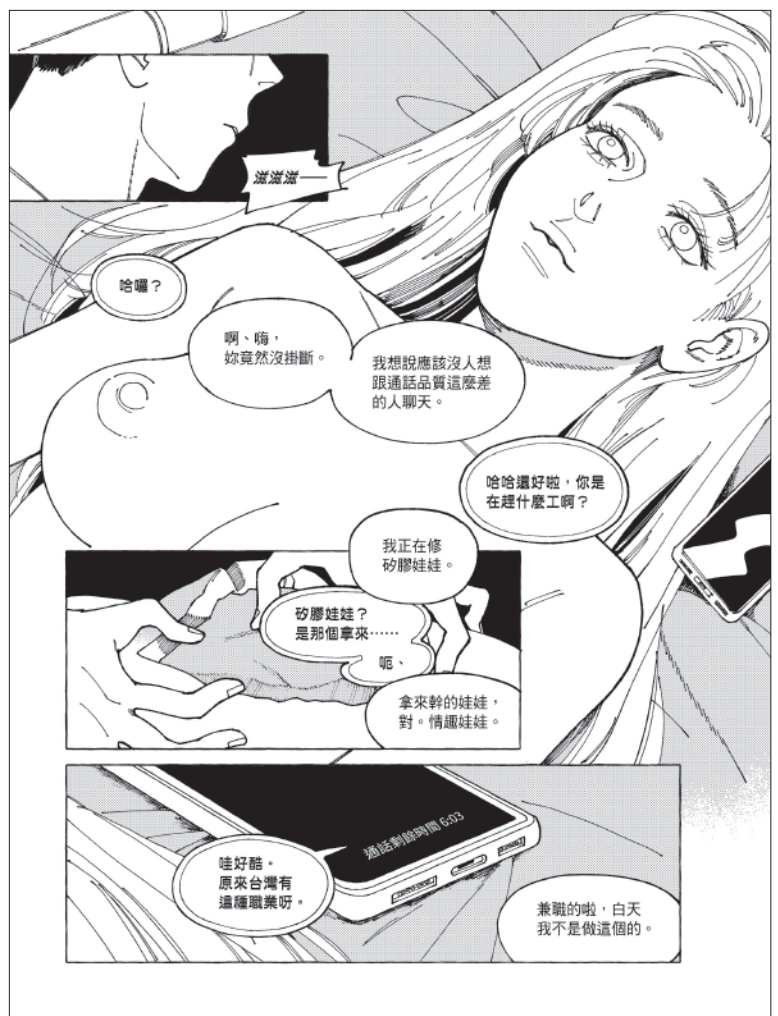
— Readmoo / Translated by Jeff Miller

Editor's Report: Low-Temp Relationships Beyond Morality

In the spring of 2019, William Kung, a journalist for *The Reporter*, diligently tracked down dates for hire, sleep calling, dating apps, and porn star studio shoots. Phenomena like these reflect the new face of intimate relationships, so I chose to name this series “In Pursuit of Low-Temp Intimacy” to set them apart from traditional relationships in which individuals sought soulmates and long-term bonds.

COVID-19 and the post-pandemic world did nothing to stop or even slow the advance of these trends. In fact, in interviews and field studies, we discovered that other types of intimate relationships continued to emerge.

We recently interviewed A-Jen, a 42-year-old gentleman, who was a mailman for nine years, later sold books, and now drives a truck



for a logistics company. Considerate and quick with a smile, he was with three women in relationships that lasted an average of five years each. When the topic of marriage came up in our discussion, however, A-Jen became visibly distraught: "I work long hours. I have to drive on weekends and even during the Lunar New Year. When I got home, I used to dread that my girlfriend would want to go out to see a movie or something...or on New Year's Eve, that she'd want to drive around and check out the sights... (After dating a few years,) girls yearn to get married, but things like wedding gowns, rings, and photos cost a lot. And after kids come along, life only gets harder."

In the end, A-Jen dropped out of the dating scene, opting instead for Yun Yun, his silicone doll girlfriend. 163-centimeters tall and tipping the scales at 34 kilos, she has real waist-length black hair, big greyish-green eyes, and skin so realistic you can see veins. A-Jen takes good care of Yun Yun, even buying her a new outfit online every month and hiring a beautician to change her make-up from time to time. He says that when he gets home after a tiring day at work and sees his beautiful Yun Yun standing there waiting for him, it's as if she's asking: "How was your day?" So he gripes a bit about work, gives her a big hug, and says, "Thanks". On his days off, they drive around, spend the night out, and do a photo shoot.

A-Jen lives with his parents and shows pictures of Yun Yun to friends and colleagues just like you would in any relationship. He says now that the pressure has been lifted, he is no longer anxious about finding a marriage partner. "It's like your luck has changed. There's none of that negative energy."

At this point, you might be wondering if an atypical relationship like his can truly replace intimacy with a real person.

There are actually many individuals who, like A-Jen, obtain comfort and confidence in "low-temp relationships".

Are we witnessing the fading out and watering down of intimate relationships? How should we think about this?

It's not that people don't long to love or be loved; companionship is a universal need, but maintaining an intimate relationship in which you feel comfortable and

at ease is, for many, out of reach.

Life is stressful and urban living spaces tight; we are spending more time working and worrying about how we are perceived online; and unnerving pestilences and wars keep erupting around the planet. Faced with challenges like these, it's no wonder that many people find it difficult to muster up the time and energy to manage romantic relationships and deal with the emotional issues they bring.

So how should individuals build emotional bonds? How should emotions be understood? What can satisfy the demand for relationships that are just right, that don't overheat, or that don't require any temperature at all?

In *The Reporter Files 3: Low-Temp Relationships*, we profile some of contemporary society's "isolated-yet-connected" intimacy modes, such as silicone mannequins (including the silicone mannequin industry and fan clubs), charge-by-the-hour dating, 90-second private studio photo shoots, online dating, and sleep call apps, all of which advocate intimacy with temperature-less objects and digital tools.

We interviewed people from all walks of life - truck drivers, warehouse personnel, chefs, office workers, and engineers; some single, some celibate, some unhappily married, and some who experience difficulties finding partners due to disabilities. The diverse companionship services and products we investigated were created to satisfy a range of needs. Some individuals utilize them purely for sexual release, but even more use them for emotional bonding and to fulfill the ritual of having a companion for special days, like the Lunar New Year, Valentine's Day, Christmas, and birthdays.

We've seen advances in technology that enable silicone dolls to be sculpted to look like a particular individual and others that let people converse with AI programmed to use the voice of loved ones who have passed, thereby allowing love to continue and encouraging survivors to carry on.

We prattle on about decreasing marriage and birth rates being national security issues, insist that people "try and find their special someone", and urge individuals to tie the knot and have kids to carry on the family line; however, we seem to forget that physical

and mental well-being should be our first priorities. In this modern era of ours, where everything seems purposely designed to suck the spirit out of you, pushing people to pursue traditional approaches to intimacy is a moral dogma ripe with negativity.

Of the 9.16 million households in Taiwan today, 3.22 million consist of people living alone. Today, many roads can lead to self-fulfillment. In addition to getting married and having kids, other respectable choices include knowing how to be alone and take care of yourself, pursuing your own version of happiness, and enjoying diversified social relationships.

Sleep Calling, Eatgetherring, Painless Socializing - The Internet Generation Uses Companionship Apps to Deal with Loneliness

Graced with beautiful eyes, Hsiao Yi is approaching thirty and left her most recent relationship a year ago. She has been unable to find a suitable partner and her relationships tend to end quickly, so her anxious parents want to help her find prospective mates. Faced with pressure from all sides, she has thrown herself into the arms of dating apps.

Hsiao Yi now has five or six of these app on her phone with algorithms designed to find one-on-one matches. They include Tinder, an old-fashioned dating app; the female-friendly Coffee Meets Bagel; and Yuanquan, which utilizes condition-based screening to increase match rates. She's been using some of the apps for as long as five years, making her an old-timer of sorts in the dating community.

Hsiao Yi has never taken a break from her dating apps. Although she generally uses them less when she's dating someone, she never actually goes cold turkey. She confides that she has figured out a way to "maximize" her efforts. She scrolls through her dating apps and clicks on "get to know" for as many people as possible.

She posts cheery outdoor selfies of herself on each of her accounts and, whenever she has a spare

moment, opens one up and scrolls through photos of the guys. She says she regularly spends two to three hours each day on dating apps, especially when she's alone.

Early Maturation and Late Marriage Creating Today's Online Companionship Culture

Hsiao Yi, who spends a great deal of time gazing at her screen, explains that on Tinder, swiping left means "Nope", while swiping right indicates "Like". When she swipes right, she's usually completing a match, meaning she and the gentleman have "clicked". Whenever that happens, the scene from the 1995 romantic drama *Before Sunrise*, where Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy exchange glances, pops into her mind and she finds herself fantasizing about love once again.

There was a time when the dialog section on Hsiao Yi's accounts seemed to go on forever. Her phone would "ding, ding, ding" incessantly with notifications of successful matches and no matter how much she scrolled down, she could never reach the end of her messages. It seemed like every few hours, somebody new wanted to get to know her. The dating apps would bring a smile to her lips and boost her confidence.

"When I get a notification, it means somebody out there might like me. Dating apps are like a treasure trove for me," Hsiao Yi explains. In the real world, she's been an inveterate loser in the game of love; however, in the virtual world, she's a winner. As she searches for new relationships, expectations build. She strives to establish connections with people on dating apps to find companionship and, more importantly, gradually repair her self-identity.

Online relationships like Hsiao Yi's, however, are nothing new.

The Wall Street Journal interviewed Stephanie Coontz, historian and emeritus professor at Evergreen State College in the US, for a 2019 article titled "For Teens, Romances Where the Couple Never Meets are Now Normal".

Coontz, who researches American families and

intimate relationships, points out that young people today are using technologies at their disposal to deal with a relationship landscape marked by earlier puberty and later marriages, with the gap between the two now roughly fifteen to twenty years. This is a period young people are now using to experiment more flexibly with their options for sex and intimacy.

Coontz also discovered that, whereas previous generations tended to engage in physical interaction, youth today prefer interacting online. She shares an example to illustrate her point: In 2018, 23% of Americans between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine had yet to have their first sexual experience; in the early 1990s, the number was about half that.

This “sex drought” has flipped relationships on their head and online-only relationships have become more common.

Hsiao Yi explains that only about 1 in 400 of the people she meets on dating apps ends up becoming a friend in real life. She realizes that dating app relationships can be fake, but says when you meet strangers online, you can reply to them if you like or just ignore them. In any case, there are tons more out there waiting to meet you. Dating like this comes with “zero burden”.

The way Millennials (like Hsiao Yi) and the younger Generation Z use the internet and interact on social media differs from older generations and they no longer use it just for work. They use social media platforms to connect with large numbers of strangers and the massive population of users is driving the new online “companionship culture”.

100 Million Minutes of Loneliness, Sleep Calling with Strangers

Goodnight is a voice-chat dating app that debuted in Taiwan in late 2015. Users don’t have to post images or personal data and are matched randomly. System-matched contacts chat one-on-one for seven minutes before deciding mutually whether to “friend” one another.

In our interview with Goodnight founder Andy

Huang, he reveals that Goodnight had over three million registered users in 2019, with an average of 400,000 calls made over the app each day. Customers, about 90% of which are below the age of thirty, log in on average three to four days a week, connecting with four or five strangers to chat. In the wake of the pandemic, membership soared to 14 million, with an average of 800,000 calls made each day.

This huge number of users spurred a new phenomenon known as sleep calling.

“Sleep calling” allows users to take advantage of the anonymity of this voice-chat app to talk with somebody until they fall asleep. This can be done with a regular or randomly-assigned partner. You can shoot the breeze or simply listen to the sound of their breathing or other background noises.

When sleep calling came up in our conversation, Huang, himself a dating app aficionado, pointed out, “This novel phenomenon is trending. Monthly call minutes on Goodnight increased from 40 million to 60-70 million in two years (2017-2019), indicating that users are no longer using the app for short calls only; they are using it for companionship, talking with somebody until they fall asleep.”

In 2023, Goodnight’s monthly call minutes rocketed to 110 million. Huang believes this to be due to increases in both new subscribers and sleep calling. “Everybody needs the sound of a voice,” he explains.

Growth in this area is something he had not foreseen. Huang notes the Goodnight app was developed to provide clients “authentic” connections in “real time”. He wanted to help people establish connections with others without pressure and, hopefully, become friends in the real world. That’s why the app is voice based and, unlike most dating apps, does not focus on graphics and physical appearance.

On the other hand, the app also helps people deal with the issue of “ubiquitous loneliness”.



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

<http://booksfromtaiwan.moc.gov.tw/>



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN