
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 | Itzel Hsu, Maja Liao, Rita Wang, Wan-Ling Cheng
Editorial Consultants | Emily Ching-Chun Chuang, Jiun-Lung Huang, Kim Pai, Pen-Chen Wu, Shang-Yeh Lu, Ting-Chen Yang, Yu-Ying Chu
Cover Design | FLICCA Studio
Design and Layout | Wei Chieh Hung

Issue | Issue 21 Vol.2, Spring 2026
Publication Date | March 5, 2026
ISSN | 2410-0781

文化部 MINISTRY OF CULTURE REPUBLIC OF CHINA (TAIWAN)
TAIWAN CONTENT PLAN 臺流文化黑潮計畫

CONTENTS

About MOC & Books from Taiwan 06
Grant for the Publication of Taiwanese Works in Translation 08
Editor's Preface 10

Fiction

TERUO THE ORANGUTAN 14
by Chang Ying-Min • translated by Jun Liu • published by Ecus

THE BLACK METEOR OF ANARCHY 20
by Ema Yuyuan Tong • translated by Tim Tim Cheng • published by Gaea

HUNTING CAPTIVE WOMEN 26
by Chen Qian-Wu • translated by Lee Anderson • published by Locus

TAINAN REQUIEM 32
by Wu Hsin-Han • translated by Cheng-Yi Tsai • published by Yuan-Liou

THE PRIMORDIAL VOICE SINGING TO OUTER GODS IN SUPER-GALAXIES 38
by Lucifer Hung • translated by Joel Martinson • published by Gaea

THEY ALL HAD A SECRET 44
by Zuiliuli • translated by Alex Woodend • published by Gaea

ON MY WAY TO THE END 50
by Kurt Lu • translated by Petula Parris • published by Yuan-Liou

SIŬ-MOI 56
by Chang Chih-Hsin • translated by Jenna Tang • published by Yuan-Liou

SOMEWHERE IN TEA 62
by Xuan Jun・translated by Sahana Narayan・published by Ever Glory

Non-Fiction

EATING TAIWANESE 70
by Tēnn Sūn-Tshong・translated by Beverly Liu・published by Yuan-Liou

WALK WITH MAZU 76
by Huang Chu-Ping・translated by Jun Liu・published by Locus

BYCATCH AND WILDLIFE 82
by Lin Jing-Feng・translated by Hongyu Jasmine Zhu・published by Locus

A BLAZING STAR 88
by Liu Ka-Shiang・translated by Grace Najmulski・published by Taiwan Interminds

CARAPATTEUR 94
by Huang Ching-Jen・translated by Genevieve Feest・published by Taiwan Interminds

BEFORE THE DAWN 100
written by Lee Tuo-Tzu, illustrated by Ruan Guang-Min・translated by Elliott Cheung・published by Taiwan Interminds

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,

Lately, I've been looking at various definitions of the occupational novel, because there appears to be quite a few of them coming out of Taiwan these days, depending on how you define the genre. If, for example, your definition involves dreary corporate settings, cynical paper-pushers, and cut-throat office politics, then Taiwan misses the mark. However, if you extend the boundaries to include fiction that prominently features distinctive occupations – say taxidermy, floriculture, or magic tea sellers – Taiwan is absolutely ready to deliver. In fact, in this issue of Books from Taiwan, we have a handful of titles that easily fit that broader definition, and a few more that could be shoehorned in without too much effort. Before I begin running down the list, take note that a few of these titles also align well with popular trends like healing fiction and culinary fiction, so make sure you stick around until the end so you don't miss out on some great titles.

Southern Taiwan has a number of agricultural communities that specialize in growing ornamental plants, and the literary collection *The Last Gladiolus* delivers us right into the heart of one of them. Through interconnected stories, readers are immersed in life on small family farms and nurseries, and introduced to a catalog of ornamental plants which, through their unique characteristics, supply apt metaphors for the lives of their caretakers. Author Chen Erh-Yuan was raised in a floricultural community, so while we reasonably expect authenticity of these stories, one must read them to appreciate just how effectively he recreates this unique milieu within his writing (see vol. 1).

Continuing in the vein of occupation-as-metaphor, we turn to a work of historical fiction, *Teruo the Orangutan* by Chang Ying-Min. Set in the Japanese colonial era, the story follows an assimilated indigenous Taiwanese who works as a taxidermist, preserving specimens for the Taihoku (Taipei) Zoo and training his sons to follow in his footsteps. The differing fates that await his two sons, however, are determined by the Empire of Japan's insatiable drive to conquer Southeast Asia (vol. 2). With regard to its setting, and its discerning eye to the impact of colonialism in Taiwan, this literary novel echoes Taiwan's most recent international success story, the award-winning *Taiwan Travelogue*.

Another collection of short stories linked by an occupational theme is *Melody of the Recorder* by Liu Ting-Yu, a musician in a professional recorder ensemble. The form of the instrument itself provides an important structuring element to the stories, while the pieces of music referenced within supply emotional and thematic cues. By and large, the central characters are recordists, but relatable themes and stylish prose ensure broad reading appeal (vol. 1).

For the sake of equity and fairness (and to extend our list), let's acknowledge "housewife" as a bona-fide occupation, albeit an unpaid and often unchosen one. This obligatory form of female labor is given the spotlight in *Siŭ-Moi*, author Chang Chih-Hsin's literary tribute to her grandmother, whose story is retold through twenty-one dishes of Hakka cuisine symbolizing the significant events of her lifetime. Though the injustice of the limited options afforded to women of previous generations resonates throughout the novel, so, too, do glimmers of caring warmth passed from one generation to the next (vol. 2).

The traditional tea shop setting of *Somewhere in Tea*, by Xuan Jun, contains no shortage of realistic detail concerning the tea trade and tea preparation, but there is a magical plot twist – the proprietor of the tea shop knows how to prepare a special tea that alters memory, either by enhancing recall, or by speeding the process of forgetting. When the young protagonist of this healing novel learns that her memories have already been altered by this mysterious process, she is confronted with the question: is it better for her to face the difficulties that lie in her past, or let them remain forgotten? And how will this choice impact the development of her budding romance (vol. 2)?

Finally, let's visit a title that could be considered "occupation adjacent", even if, strictly speaking, it doesn't belong on the list. *The Coffee Truck Playlist*, by Wales Xie, combines three of the most healing things imaginable – coffee, music, and heartfelt conversation – creating a reading/listening experience that will touch readers with its patient wisdom. While these stories have a workplace setting – a mobile coffee truck – the focus isn't the work of slinging coffee. Rather, it's on the personal stories told by customers to the attentive proprietor, and the proprietor's knack for playing classic songs that mirror his customers' dilemmas (vol. 1).

Of course, with thirty titles spread across two volumes, this issue of Books from Taiwan has far more to offer than just works of occupational fiction. A broad range of reading interests are covered, including crime and mystery, crossover thrillers, historical fiction, light romance…and that's just the fiction side of things. On the nonfiction side we cover cuisine, nature writing, biography, art, and religion, among other topics. So, rest assured, no matter what your readers' preferences, you are sure to find something worthy of "occupying" their attention.

Best wishes,

Joshua Dyer

Editor-in-Chief
Books from Taiwan 2.0


BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

FICTION

猩猩輝夫

TERUO THE ORANGUTAN

Chang Ying-Min
張英珉

- **Category:** Literary Fiction, Historical Fiction
- **Publisher:** Ecus
- **Date:** 1/2025
- **Pages:** 272
- **Length:** 99,729 characters (approx. 64,800 words in English)
- **Full English Manuscript Available**
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Chang Ying-Min earned his MA in Fine Arts from National Taiwan University of Arts' College of Applied Media Arts. An accomplished author of essays, novels, screenplays, and children's literature, Chang is the recipient of numerous major literary awards. The young-adult story *Blue Runners* and historical fiction works *Sakura* and *Teruo the Orangutan* rank among his better-known literary efforts.

This emotionally gripping work of historical fiction tells the story of an apprentice taxidermist who comes to believe his brother, killed in battle in Southeast Asia, has magically returned home as an orangutan brought back to Taiwan by returning soldiers.

Takayama Kazukimi, the Taihoku Zoo's chief taxidermist, lives in a humble home close to his work together with his two sons Teruo, the oldest, and Masao, the youngest. Although ethnically indigenous, Kazukimi is an assimilated citizen of the Japanese Empire with little knowledge of his "aboriginal" heritage, having lost his home and family at a young age, grown up under Japanese tutelage, and trained as a taxidermist under an experienced Japanese master. Both sons grow up learning the taxidermy arts by their father's side but, despite his initial inelegance, it is Masao alone who ultimately chooses to follow in his father's footsteps.

Although elder brother Teruo excels in both academics and sports, his strikingly "aboriginal" features make him a target of colonial prejudice and derision. Against his family's wishes, he joins the colonial Takasago Volunteer Corps hoping through heroism in battle to extirpate his family's ethnic "shame" and finally make them truly Japanese. Too little to understand his older brother's motivations, Masao simply prays for his safe return home. Instead, what arrives at their doorstep is the news of Teruo's untimely death in war.

Masao's stubborn refusal to accept his brother could truly be gone is sharpened when he sees Taihoku Zoo's newest addition – an orangutan brought back by the Japanese Army from the jungles of Southeast Asia. Feeling a strange closeness and finding the orangutan able to "write" him messages using blades of grass arranged on the ground, Masao confidently accepts him as his returned brother. But how can Masao make sure he won't lose his older brother again?

This work won a 2023 Taiwan Historical Novel Award for Unpublished Fiction. The author's smooth-flowing narrative style makes immersion into the story's somewhat obscure historical framework easy for readers. Young Masao's emotions and thoughts throughout, while fantastical, are endearingly sincere, reflecting the true power of both love and loss.

TERUO THE ORANGUTAN

By Chang Ying-Min
Translated by Jun Liu

> *Teruo the Orangutan* centers around protagonist Masao's intriguing notion that an orangutan recently delivered to the Taihoku Zoo from the jungles of Southeast Asia might somehow be Teruo, his brother who had just recently died in battle in the Dutch Indies. It "writes" him messages and even eerily resembles his dead brother. Framed around taxidermy, the story opens windows into indigenous craftsmanship, specimen-making, and Taipei's old Taihoku Zoo and examines, in the character of Teruo, how, why and where Taiwanese served in Japan's military during the Pacific War. The historical details woven into this work of fantasy infuse a rich and satisfying sense of realism that make this novel not only a universal tale of family affection but also a mirror into a unique time in recent Taiwan history.
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller**

Chapter One: In the Taxidermy Studio

Ten-year-old Takayama Masao, his wide, deep-set eyes sparkling, was enraptured by the Formosan yellow-throated marten preserved inside the gleaming cypress cabinet and bathed in the brilliant wash of the noonday sun.

Through all the years that would follow, across every chapter of his existence, Masao carried with him the indelible memory of their family's first floor studio. It was home to a menagerie of creatures great and small frozen in time, where the very air seemed to breathe with the deep, leathery richness of processed pelts. At the center of it all was that cabinet, and each of its nine chambers cradling a silent inhabitant. To Masao, none was more precious than the marten in the leftmost frame – a work of love born from his brother Teruo's patient hands.

A common sight in Taiwan's foothills, the marten wore its sleek, lithe form like silk, adorned with that telltale golden bib across its throat. Remarkably, though the weasel-like mammal should have been stiff and lifeless, Masao could sense the creature's natural fluidity captured in its pose. The way the marten's glass eyes caught and held the window light like liquid crystal always gave him the feeling it had merely paused in mid-motion, as if suspended in a photographic moment, and would readily spring back to life the moment time resumed and dart behind the cabinet in pursuit of mice.

In the early spring of 1943, during the eighteenth year of the Showa era, the Japanese military's grip on the mountains of Taiwan had loosened. Lowland residents could now hire tribal guides for hunting expeditions and mountain climbing trips into native territories. This newfound access made it possible once again to purchase wild mountain animals at will, creating abundant opportunities for specimen preparation. Masao's father, Takayama Kazukimi, plied his trade as a

taxidermist, called hakuseishi in Japanese. It was at his well-known but secluded corner studio at Maruyama Zoo in the provincial capital, Taihoku, that he handled all of the zoo's taxidermy work.

Now that Masao had reached ten and his frame had filled out, Kazukimi thought it was time to apprentice his son in the delicate art.

"Masao, are you ready?" Kazukimi was meticulously scrubbing his hands at the washbasin. After drying them thoroughly with a towel, he walked slowly to the large wooden table. His calls echoed unanswered until the spell of the specimen before him finally released its hold on the boy.

"Hai, Tousan, I'm coming."

However, Masao lingered in the cabinet's orbit and his eyes, while free of the marten, took to wandering hungrily across the other members of that silent assembly. Next to the cabinet, two leopard cats on the floorboards, frozen in time, were in the midst of playing a now never-ending game of tag. Masao tenderly swept his feather duster across their rosette coats. Turning, he spotted a sambar deer shoulder mount on the ash-gray wall. Its magnificent antlers, once the terrible instruments of rutting season's fury, spread majestically like gnarled lightning from its forehead. The malice blazing in the eyes of the hundred-pound wild boar on the floor made it seemingly poised to explode into motion, ready to gore a hunter's femoral artery with its dagger tusks and unleash a warm, unending torrent of blood… In the corner stood a full-body mount of a massive sika stag fitted with Tokyo's latest, most luminous glass orbs – cutting-edge craftsmanship that gave the deer its lifelike presence and bright gaze, currently trained on Masao.

While admiring the stag, a menacing shadow in Masao's peripheral vision unleased a jolt of terror. He spun to face the titan in the corner. It was a Formosan black bear rearing to its full, terrible height of six feet, with that distinctive V-shaped white chest patch. Its razor-sharp claws were raised as if ready to rip Masao apart in the next instant. The very sight turned his marrow to frost… Oh, how fervently he prayed that Daitotei tea merchant would dispatch his men soon to spirit this specimen away! Time and again this sentinel of shadows stole his breath away, leaving him gasping until his hammering heart remembered how to keep time.

Yet amidst all of these refined mounts, it was his Tousan's first career-defining work that caused Masao to contemplate what made something a true "work of art".

At the very center of the cypress cabinet was a Taiwan least weasel, a creature rarely seen on the plains. It had been captured by a Vonum hunter at Tataka Pass on Mount Niitaka, the highest peak on the island. This particular specimen was extraordinary for its petite frame, measuring merely seven inches from nose to tail tip, its snowy white belly a striking departure from the muddy yellow-brown that cloaked its common cousins. The Vonum hunter had spoken of this rarity with reverence, saying this weasel could be found only in pine-peppered meadows above 6,500 feet in elevation. As his foundational piece, Tousan had crafted it with all his heart, and because their family name, Takayama, meant "high mountains", this mount took on added significance. That was why Tousan had placed it at the center of the cabinet.

After admiring the tiny weasel for what felt like hours, Masao slipped into a waking dream. Out of the corners of his eyes, the mounted creatures began to stir, their tails flicking with grace, bodies twisting to snatch at invisible prey, beaks tapping against the wooden walls. Each seemed to pulse with hidden life in every shadowed nook, their whispering growing louder and bolder: "*I'm right here.*" "*I'm still breathing.*" "*Don't you see me?*" Yet the moment his gaze swung toward them, the illusion shattered – specimens returned to stillness, the magic nothing more than peripheral trickery. Most of these masterworks were commissioned and bore a hemp-tied "sold" tag, without which any visitor would surely fall under their spell.

Storm clouds swallowed the sun whole, casting the workshop into sudden twilight, accentuating the completed specimens, all fixed in a forward gaze. Strange as it was, ten-year-old Masao had already grasped a profound truth – these beasts had surely spent their final earthly hours wracked by illness or bleeding out from hunters' bullets. Yet after death, all traces of suffering had vanished, replaced by forms both powerful and alive with grace. Each time his eyes wandered over this silent congregation, he marveled at the aptness of the ancient wisdom: "A man leaves his

name; a tiger, its skin."

"Tousan, I'm coming." Masao finally tore himself away from his sojourn, exhaled deeply, and crossed the studio to the work table.

For Masao, having a taxidermist for a father meant this work table was his textbook about animals. From a young age, he had acquainted himself with animals from their still forms – pangolins, black bears, leopard cats, sambar deer, muntjacs, serows, black kites, and crab-eating mongooses. One time, they had even received a river otter, a rare catch in Taiwan's streams. Helping Tousan finish a specimen once ensured he would recognize that species forever. On this particular day, however, sunlight streaming across the table illuminated a puzzle that gave him pause. Dogs were a common sight in Taiwan, but the one on the table was a Shiba Inu from Japan, a breed he had never seen before.

"Tousan…shall we begin?" Masao asked, approaching his father.

Kazukimi, a moderately-built man nearing forty, stood lost in thought beside the work table. Under furrowed brows, his penetrating gaze studied the canine corpse at length, while tiny dust motes floated and glittered around the dog's form, drifting gently as he moved closer.

"Stiff as a board…" Masao found he couldn't budge the dog's front or back legs, or part its jaws. As a child of a taxidermist, Masao knew the signs – this dog had been dead for quite some time.

Without warning, a lion's roar resounded across the zoo grounds. Masao found himself turning toward the window and the brilliant sunshine blazing outside.

Their studio occupied a corner at the edge of Maruyama Zoo. At half past twelve, the sun hung directly overhead, pinning every visitor's shadow to the ground. The bright light reminded Masao that, despite the early spring season, Taiwan's capricious subtropical heat could surge without notice. They were in a race against time to keep the dog's corpse from rotting and its fur from absorbing odors no amount of soap could wash away. With the Takayama family's living quarters on the second floor, directly above the workshop, any stench of decay rising from below would prove unbearable – even for a taxidermist. Such smells would keep them tossing and turning sleeplessly through the night.

"It was paralyzed by illness for two days before dying, then left for another two days before being brought to us…" After long deliberation, Kazukimi gestured with his index finger toward a photograph on the work table showing the dog as it had been in life.

The laborer who delivered the canine remains told them this Shiba Inu had served Mr. Fujita, a Japanese coal merchant of some standing. The faithful hound had made the arduous voyage from Tokyo to Taiwan years earlier. Fed well and tended with devotion in the family courtyard, it had attained the remarkable age of ten years. Such longevity was exceptional among household dogs of the era, when parasites and diseases routinely claimed animals in their prime. Although the Shiba Inu had died peacefully from old age and was initially meant for cremation, elderly Mr. Fujita's grief over losing his steadfast companion ran so deep that he couldn't bear to eat. Seeing his despair, worried friends and family made a gentle proposal – let the dog's body be transformed into a lasting memorial, an eternal companion for his twilight years.

Kazukimi circled the corpse, his hands constantly reaching out to measure, palms and fingers serving as living calipers in an endless dance of assessment – a ritual both fascinating and unsettling to watch. Prying open the muzzle, he discovering teeth thickly encrusted with stone-like deposits and, in particular, canines that shifted when touched – clear signs of advanced age. Yet when he tested the hide, his fingers found a cushion of fat – proof that this creature had never known hunger. In an era when even pigs struggled to fatten up and most barnyard animals carried little more than hide stretched over bone, a well-fed dog from a prosperous household was a marvel to behold.

After finishing his measurements, Kazukimi turned to jot down figures in his notepad.

"This dog…truly was…fortunate," the words escaped as his pen scratched across the paper.

Hearing this, Masao looked up to see Tousan's thoughtful face.

"Perhaps this Shiba Inu enjoyed a life…even

better…than I can ever have…" Kazukimi muttered.

After this whispered reflection, the taxidermist closed his eyes briefly. He picked up a pencil and began sketching in his notebook. Years had honed his hand to swift precision, mere strokes captured the dog's essential form before blossoming with the delicate topography of fur and flesh.

Within minutes, he passed the notepad to his son. "Masao, what do you think?"

The page was filled with over a dozen Shiba Inu poses, each radiating such life that Masao found himself absorbed in their silent stories. These studies revealed a fundamental truth about four-legged creatures – while dogs bear little resemblance to elephants or lions in proportion or contour, they all obey the same invisible master – the pull of gravity toward Earth's center. It is a constraint that the force of the world places on all living things.

"Listen well, Masao, a dog's eyebrows dance with feeling. It's the secret behind their human-like faces – writ large with joy, fury, grief, and delight. No other creature wears its heart so plainly on its features, you see?"

"Then…let's go with this one," Masao suggested with a confirming nod aimed at Tousan. His finger had settled on one particular sketch – a Shiba Inu seated on its haunches, head tilted and brows creased as it gazed into the distance. Masao could already envision the finished work gracing an entrance hall, where every homecoming would be met by that questioning look asking, "Where have you been so long, Master?" An eternal guardian still alive with concern.

"Ah, this one…fine choice, fine choice indeed." Kazukimi's features softened at his son's selection. Without delay, he slipped into his work apron, then scoured and sanitized his hands until they gleamed, leaving them to air-dry in ritual preparation. Masao followed suit, pulling on rubber gloves as protection against the toxins that death would release when steel first pierced flesh. Then Masao unwrapped a kraft paper package containing an assortment of knives. Every tool had been boiled and sterilized to perfection, for the taxidermist knew the slightest contamination would cause the specimen to rot from within.

On one corner of the wooden table, the unfurled kraft paper revealed its treasury of steel: curved blades both broad and delicate, shaped to part bone from flesh and sweep fat from beneath the skin. Clustered nearby, pointed forceps waited to coax hide from muscle, while rows of needle-thin steel pins were ready to pierce and anchor the emerging form. This metallic battalion lay in perfect formation, awaiting their master's command.

"Scalpel." Kazukimi had mapped his path of incision and stretched out his palm in expectation.

"Hai, Tousan." Masao, a mere ten years old, knew well he had yet to earn the privilege of wielding the blade. He carefully extended the instrument, its cold steel glinting in the sunlight that streamed in from the window.

The practice of taxidermy is divided into two primary disciplines: skeleton and skin mounts. The world gravitates toward the latter, for naked bone carries death's chill too openly for common comfort. Yet herein lies taxidermy's most profound magic – one fallen creature can yield two perfect specimens from its hide and skeleton. Who could imagine that after death, one creature could be "reborn" as two versions of itself.

This knowledge gnawed at Masao's young mind and chiseled worry lines across his brow. Of "skin" and "bone"… which represents the "true" self?

"For this work, we're removing only the pelt… Mind that you never breach the organs. Keep your blade shallow – better still if you never pierce the muscle beneath."

Tousan began his careful instruction in the blade's art: start with the scalpel's point and find the precise spot near the navel to make the first incision. Wary that heavy-handedness might puncture the delicate organs nestled below, he tested his touch with each gentle probe after the steel entered the dog's hide, seeking that perfect depth – deep enough to cut, shallow enough to preserve. With measured strokes, he drew a lengthy seam across the skin before angling the blade to separate hide from muscle.

安那其的黑色流星

THE BLACK METEOR OF ANARCHY

Ema Yuyuan Tong
童育園

- **Category:** Historical Fiction
- **Publisher:** Gaea
- **Date:** 3/2025
- **Pages:** 264
- **Length:** 84,035 characters (approx. 54,600 words in English)
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Born in 1996, Ema Yuyuan Tong graduated from National Chengchi University's Graduate Institute of Taiwanese Literature. Her essays occasionally appear in the *News & Market Supplement*. *The Black Meteor of Anarchy* is the author's first novel.

This gem of historical fiction centers around a short-lived secret anarchist society, a young man eager to resist brutal authoritarianism, and an era echoing with calls for liberty and freedom.

The failure of multiple armed uprisings against Japanese colonial authorities led Taiwanese intellectuals in the 1920s to advocate for a non-violent, public activism path to achieving local autonomy. Contemporary literature, art, and literary clubs and speech events became platforms touting democratic ideas and ideals and, in some cases, anarchist principles. The story in this book draws inspiration from the youth of this period.

Receiving a long-lost sketchbook of his in the mail in 1989 opens for Huang Che-pin a floodgate of memories that sweep him back to 1925 and to Ozawa – a Taiwan-born Japanese friend he had met during his college years in Taihoku (Taipei). As a veterinary student in Japan, Ozawa had joined an underground anarchist group and, upon returning to the island, became friends through a speech event with a circle of likeminded friends, including Che-pin – at the time a fervent, budding young artist.

The secret anarchist society Black Youth Alliance Ozawa founded with two friends in Taiwan in 1926 began distributing pamphlets and recruiting new members, of which Che-pin was one of the first. Ozawa's two friends headed, respectively, to central and southern Taiwan to further grow the Black Youth Alliance's ranks.

Catching wind of this seditious movement, colonial police threw an island-wide dragnet that ended up mostly arresting people with no connection to the Alliance. Che-pin, detained for his speech event participation, was soon released because his sketchbook and its incriminating cache of Alliance pamphlets had fortuitously gone missing. Nonetheless, the police crackdown succeeded in snuffing the Alliance's flame before it had a chance to shine.

The simple, easy flowing narrative wraps readers into 1920s Taiwan; a time when youth were testing the limits of freedom in Japan's tightly controlled colony and a few dreamed dreams of an anarchist future. Like shooting stars, they rose from the darkness and, loathed to hang bright in the sky, fell to earth as steeled, jet-black stones that would survive to inspire like-minded, freedom-seeking people for generations to come.

THE BLACK METEOR OF ANARCHY

By Ema Yuyuan Tong
Translated by Tim Tim Cheng

> Founded in 1926, the leftist "Black Youth Alliance" is a rare example of an anarchist organization operating in colonial-era Taiwan. While its influence on the island's politics would be long-lasting, the alliance itself dissolved after a brief few months. What was the appeal of anarchic ideas to contemporary intellectuals, artists and social activists? What did this alliance actually accomplish? The story unfolds around several main characters, a Taiwan-born Japanese idealist and his Taiwanese student peers, offering a lens into the cultural zeitgeist and ideas circulating among contemporary young, educated circles. The author's easy-flowing narrative approach handily takes on a serious topic couched within the colors and textures of colonial Taiwan in the mid-early twentieth century.
>
> — ***Readmoo*** **/ Translated by Jeff Miller**

Chapter One: Post-Earthquake Ruptures and Rebirth

1

It was gloomy and wintry outside the window. The scent of paper and paint wafted in the dry air inside the six-tatami room, with Ozawa sitting alone at the center and Huang Che-pin crouched in a corner, holding a sketchbook.

It was from 1927. Che-pin had made these drawings of Ozawa before his friend's army service in Chiba.

Ozawa lolled on the floor in his gakuran, his body lean and relaxed. Che-pin's gaze reached him through the empty easel.

He used a pencil to lightly trace Ozawa's sullen neck and sharp cheekbone. Disparate lines formed his body – an anarchic body. That was Ozawa in Che-pin's eyes. Since first learning to draw, he had never wanted to draw someone this much. His delicate sketches recalled Ozawa's hesitation and words and his breath and expression in the moment.

"You'll be stronger when you return."

"Yes."

Che-pin imagined military service as a process of taming – entering the operation of the nation and army, re-sculpting the inertia of body and mind. To an anarchist, a black youth, training for national defense was perhaps but meaningless torture, a form of spiritual destruction and reconstruction. Over the decades that followed, he never forgot that wintry morning. It was the last time he saw Ozawa.

Che-pin had always assumed the sketchbook was gone, perhaps confiscated by the police during the raid. The marks and contours left by timespace had faded to the point that he doubted whether young Ozawa and the Black Youth Alliance had truly existed. That was, until more than fifty years later he received

a parcel from America. He opened it and saw a letter in neat Japanese handwriting. A friend who did life drawing with him as a student had returned the sketchbook.

Dear Che-pin,

It has been so long since we last met. I have always wanted to return this sketchbook to you. I got hold of your address and updates coincidentally only after half of our lifetimes had passed.

We went on a lot of field trips for life drawing when we were younger. I was envious that you could study drawing under the guidance of Mr. Ishikawa at Taihoku Normal School. So, I took your sketchbook to study at home and discovered the promotional flyers from the Black Youth Alliance. I heard that you had been caught during the Black Youth Incident. I was worried I might be dragged into all this, so I never returned the sketchbook. I must apologize. I escaped to Japan due to unforeseen circumstances, then relied on support from family and friends in Los Angeles. I don't know if I will be able to return to Taiwan. Hopefully, this sketchbook will be in your hands once again.

Best wishes,
Kuo Ching-shui
1989.4.12

The navy blue cover of the sketchbook had faded, its edges frayed. It was a snapshot from a long-distant time in his life. Che-pin used his weathered hands to carefully open the sketchbook.

Memories of youth rose to the surface. Familiar scenes of past drawing lessons spread like ink.

Turning the leaves of the sketchbook, he saw mountain fog and trees, street views, bicycles, red-brick houses, and the Sōtokufu. Suddenly, the clouds behind the central tower of the Sōtokufu began to shift, as if timespace had been deployed and summoned.

2

He looked out the window. The railway disappeared behind mountain ranges and the shore to enter the metropolis. The unfamiliar scenery was full of wonder for Che-pin. The spring morning was cool and damp as the train headed to Taihoku. He unclenched his fists. His palm beaded with sweat; his anticipation accompanied by faint anxiety.

In the station, people came and went. So many youths with buzz cuts looked like him, green and weighed down with luggage.

Che-pin graduated from public school (kōgakkō) in 1924, after which he left his hometown in Taichū to study at Taihoku Normal School.

Applying to Taihoku Normal School was Mr. Yasuda's idea. Fully funded by the government, while Che-pin wouldn't need to worry about tuition or dormitory fees, he was obliged to take up a teaching position at a public school after graduation. Of the more than five hundred young, poor islanders who took the entrance exam, Che-pin was one of only fifty who made the cut and were offered admission. Mr. Yasuda not only believed Mainlanders and Islanders should enjoy equal status, but he also encouraged Che-pin to pursue further studies and appreciated his drawing talent. Mr. Yasuda was an impactful teacher who Che-pin respected.

The day the offer letter arrived, Mr. Yasuda paid an excited visit to Che-pin's home. Che-pin then learned the admission notice and message for preparation had first been delivered to his public school, where it was being treated as a major cause for celebration.

His mother stopped her tailoring work at hand, formally thanked Mr. Yasuda for his assistance, and went over to the stove to boil water for tea.

Mr. Yasuda discussed housing arrangements in Taihoku with Che-pin and told him he would need to enroll and move into the dormitory in about a month's time. Also, Mr. Yasuda advised, Che-pin would need a male elder or guarantor to accompany him during the registry process in Taihoku. Che-pin worried that he had no relatives who could help him in Taihoku.

"Kawasaki, a friend from my prefecture, is teaching at Taihoku Higher School. He is very passionate, kind, and generous to friends and students. Perhaps I could write him a letter to ask if he could accompany you to the registration at the Normal School? I think he'll say yes, with pleasure."

"Oh really! This is so kind of you, Mr. Yasuda. I don't know how I should thank you."

"Not to worry! Learn a lot in your new school. I'm so proud of you," Mr. Yasuda placed his hand on Che-pin's shoulder, his face gentle and kind.

Enrollment day approached quickly. Che-pin, excited and nervous, got off the train at Taihoku Station with his luggage. Leaving the building and stepping out into the city, he took a wide-eyed look at his new surroundings. He saw the clocks on the wall. It was earlier than his scheduled meeting with Mr. Kawasaki. So, he stopped walking, adjusted his mood, and waited at the train station entrance in silence.

In front of Taihoku Station, rows of fountain palms lined Omotechō dori. Their wide and delicate leaves glowed in the sun.

"Are you Huang Che-pin, the student?"

"Yes, I am. And you are Mr. Kawasaki, right?"

"It's so good to meet you. I asked a few students if they were you. I thought I was late."

Mr. Kawasaki wore a lightweight, casual, short-sleeved shirt and a Panama hat made of shichito matgrass.

They walked together down the bright and wide street. Mr. Kawasaki took obvious pleasure in introducing him to the city's infrastructure, museums, parks, the Sōtokufu, the Observatory…as well as shops, banks, clubs, hostels, and Niitakado Bookstore until they finally reached Taihoku Normal School.

Kawasaki saw him through the enrollment registry, and took him and his luggage to the dormitory.

Then, as he needed to wait for the dormitory supervisor to sign him in and list the ground rules, Che-pin bid a prudent and gracious goodbye to Mr. Kawasaki.

"Walk across the school to the Monopoly Bureau Building, then proceed down that street past three intersections. My home is the second wooden house on the right," Kawasaki said, pointing vigorously in the direction of the school's main gate. "Come on Sunday. I'll introduce you to the high school students I'm hosting – all local islanders."

Che-pin promised he would visit, bowing slightly both to express his gratitude and to bid the teacher farewell. Taihoku Normal School required all students to live in the dormitory to foster a disciplined, communal life.

Every morning, students in the dormitory lined up at the sinks to freshen up, then headed to the school grounds to join the morning assembly, do gymnastics, activate their bodies, and renew their spirits. Afterward, they returned to the canteen for a quiet breakfast.

After class at 3 p.m., students would work the small patch of soil allocated to them by the school, water the vegetables and flowers they had planted, and put into practice the agricultural knowledge learned in class. Before dusk, they would wash up in the dormitory shower room and take a short break before retiring to the study room to review their lessons in subjects such as Japanese, history, mathematics, and general taxonomy.

The courses and agricultural practicum at the school were designed to equip future high school teachers with farming techniques as well as the pedagogy for national language, mathematics, history, and geography education to cultivate the island's children.

Almost all of Che-pin's classmates at Taihoku Normal School were local islanders. Upperclassmen also helped him acclimate to dormitory life. The learning atmosphere was motivational and harmonious.

The first friend Che-pin made in this new environment called himself "Rock". Rock was a young man with darker skin and a sincere, matter-of-fact manner. Che-pin not only studied in the same class with him, but was also assigned the same dormitory room. They were both newcomers.

In the dormitory's first floor study room, Rock was eager to share his feelings, in an appropriately muted mixture of Taiwanese and Japanese, with his new friend … "Mr. Shiomi's history classes are so much fun! Time just flies by. I'm really looking forward to more stories in the next class. What do you think, Huang-kun?"

"It's fascinating, indeed. I like Mr. Ishikawa from yesterday's drawing class too."

"Oh… I'm not too good at drawing. The geometric shapes I drew yesterday were wonky. I don't think I'll ever be able to be such a graceful gentleman as Mr. Ishikawa," Rock said with an expression that was both serious and humorous. Che-pin almost laughed out loud in the quiet study room.

Rock was a little blunt but, as the son of a farming family, he always aced the agricultural practicum. He was also lithe and skillful in gymnastics class, naturally catching everyone's attention. Che-pin appreciated him very much.

A week flew by with a full curriculum and dormitory life that filled up most of Che-pin's time.

With no class on Sunday, the students queued up to report to the dormitory supervisor, beaming with joy over the imminent start of their holiday. None could wait to discuss where they'd be going next. But, before leaving to enjoy free time outside, each turned his nameplate, located at the main entrance to the dormitory, over on its backside.

After breakfast, many of the students went first to the study room to finish up on that week's coursework or notes before heading out for relaxing and joyful leisure activities in the afternoon. Some took a walk in the park with friends, shopped, or watched a movie. Some senior students headed out on bicycles in pursuit of outdoor adventure.

That afternoon, Che-pin fulfilled his promise to visit Mr. Kawasaki. Wearing his brand new white summer uniform and school hat, Che-pin took wide strides down the city's streets, his youthful face radiating a confident glow.

Mr. Kawasaki, an open, passionate, and bookish speaker, served as the history teacher at Taihoku Higher School. His family included Mrs. Kawasaki, his four-year-old son Kyōichi, and a female maid. The Kawasakis resided on the first floor of their two-story home, which included a spacious dining room, a bedroom, a tiny maid's room, and a bathroom. The two six-tatami rooms on the second floor were regularly rented out to the high school students they hosted.

During his visit, they all drank tea and ate snacks around the tea table. Wang Yung-te, a rare local islander student of General Studies at Taihoku Higher School, sat across Che-pin. Mr. Kawasaki praised him as being a smart and hard-working student. Wang Yung-te returned the compliment with a reserved smile that failed to hide the air of smug self-satisfaction.

Che-pin straightened his back unconsciously. He looked up to notice the shelves in the dining room were full of Mr. Kawasaki's book collections, which included novels by Natsume Sōseki and Kikuchi Kan, complex volumes such as Nishida Kitarō's *An Inquiry into the Good* and *Art and Morality*, and fashionable books from the Mainland that Che-pin had heard of but knew little about.

"Mr. Kawasaki's book collection is so big!"

"I remember having several books that introduce the arts from around the world. You enjoy drawing, right?"

"Yes, let me take a look," Che-pin flipped through one of the books, eyes glowing.

"You're welcome to read here. My students occasionally borrow books from me," Mr. Kawasaki said proudly.

Che-pin held and examined the colorful pages and paintings. Wang Yung-te joined in too.

Mr. Kawasaki was talkative, generously sharing information from his reading notes and collection and discussing famous literary figures and philosophers. Although Che-pin was unfamiliar with many of the famous people Mr. Kawasaki spoke of, he still enjoyed the conversation. Yung-te, sitting next to him, seemed to have read the books mentioned and raised his own reflection and questions. Che-pin was excited by the inspiration and, feeling somewhat in awe of Yung-te, felt motivated to read more extensively to absorb more knowledge of the age.

The setting sun shone on Mr. Kawasaki's courtyard, sending golden light flickering among the leaves. The gradually dimming sky marked the end of a joyous conversation. Che-pin left Kawasaki's home exhausted and contented, and walked back to the dormitory on his own. He secretly looked forward to discussing new topics and works with Kawasaki and Yung-te.

獵女犯：
台灣特別志願兵的回憶

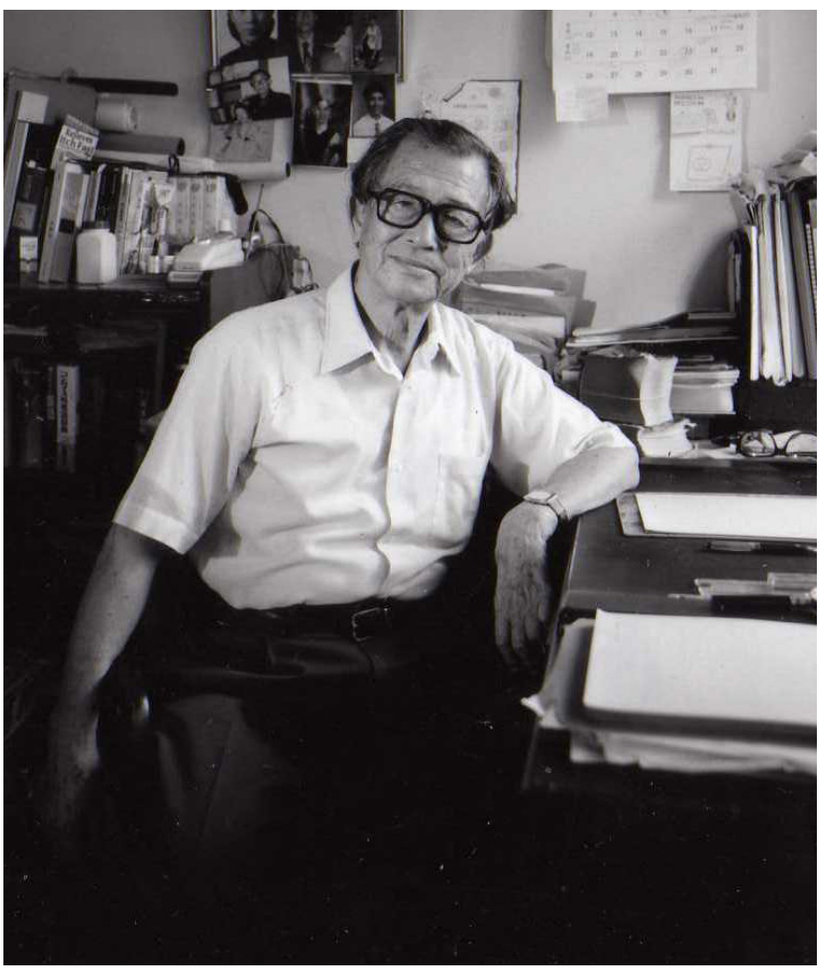


photo © Taiwan Chen Qian-Wu Literary Association

Chen Qian-Wu
陳千武

- **Category:** Literary Fiction, Novel-in-stories
- **Publisher:** Locus
- **Date:** 4/2023
- **Pages:** 432
- **Length:** 196,590 characters (approx. 127,700 words in English)
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Chen Qian-Wu (1922-2012), aka Huan-Fu, was a poet, novelist, and translator. He wrote in Japanese prior to and during the Second World War. After Japan's defeat and Taiwan's handover to the Republic of China, Chen learned modern Chinese and re-entered Taiwan's literary world in 1958. Renowned as a poet, Chen was a charter member of Taiwan's Li (Bamboo Hat) Poetry Society and, later in his career, translated many Japanese poems into Chinese and vice versa. *Hunting Captive Women* is his best-known work of fiction, and one chapter was transcribed into the musical *Angel of the Tropics*.

HUNTING CAPTIVE WOMEN: MEMORIES OF A TAIWAN SPECIAL VOLUNTEER FORCE

Based on the author's life experience, the short stories in this collection narrate the despair, confusion, and mental angst felt by so many of the Taiwanese compelled to fight in the jungles of Southeast Asia as part of the Imperial Japanese Army.

Hunting Captive Women, written by Chen Qian-Wu, an author best known for his works of poetry, owns a special place in Taiwan literary history because of its semi-autobiographical descriptions of the author's lived experiences as an Imperial Serviceman fighting for Japan in Southeast Asia during the Pacific War.

Protagonist Lin Yi-Ping's background as a high-school graduate initially serving as a private 1st class and later as a lance corporal in a heavy artillery unit mirrors that of the author's. In addition to the sixteen discrete stories surrounding Yi-Ping, *Hunting Captive Women* includes five additional stories centered on war and the anti-colonial struggle that also capture true elements and aspects of the author's life.

The stories of Yi-Ping begin with "Semaphore", a chapter on the new recruit's boot camp experiences in Taiwan and end with "Summary Sketch", a chapter that revolves around the disposition and self-discipline of soldiers after Japan's unconditional surrender. Stories plumb Yi-Ping's thoughts on life and death, the absurdity of war, and the role of personal identity in mechanized warfare. The narrative also takes on the indelible sense of remorse felt by Yi-Ping for participating at the order of special attack units in the abduction of women from Japanese-occupied islands for enforced servitude as military "comfort women".

The narrative captures in relationships between people and things the complex face of human nature and of lust and also highlights the dignity and confusion surrounding Taiwanese identity. But the suffering and ambivalence of these characters thrown into conflict reflect a universality that, despite their discomforting textures, must be a part of any reflection on the true cost of war.

HUNTING CAPTIVE WOMEN

By Chen Qian-Wu
Translated by Lee Anderson

> Author Chen Qian-Wu was "volunteered" into the Japanese army at twenty years of age and served in the military juggernaut that brought much of Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific under Japanese control. *Hunting Captive Women* draws inspiration from Chen's own lived experiences from that period of his life. The short stories within plumb issues such as the disparate treatment of Japanese and Taiwanese conscripts, the terrors of aerial bombings and faraway battlefronts, homosexuality in uniform, and the army's pitiless exploitation of captured "comfort women". Apart from its firsthand realism, Chen's honest interpretation of the inequity, danger, and depravity surrounding him through the compassionate lens of a colonial subject give this work lasting relevance and value.
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller**

Semaphore

1

"All troops mobilize and assemble at the training ground at sixteen hundred hours."

The whip of the Japanese order lashed across the backs of the recruits like an electric shock, spurring them into frenzied action. Most of them had been snoozing, and now they had to finish up all of their duties: wash their clothes, carry out repairs, and, in particular, shine their boots until they were as slick as if they'd been lifted out of a deep fryer. And, after all that, they still had to polish their Type 38 rifles and bayonets. A gun is a soldier's soul, and so must be attended to with the utmost care.

It was late September and the recruits, who had arrived on base six months ago, had not been expecting exercises that afternoon. Another general mobilization order lashed out, cementing the glum mood.

"Is this an emergency drill?" asked Kinjō, the Okinawan private, turning to look stupidly at Lin Yi-Ping. Lin arched his eyebrows in surprise at the question.

"Baka! It's more serious than that. We're leaving!"

"Leaving?"

Kinjō, fumbling clumsily with his rucksack, started. His usual dopey expression vanished. He now looked shocked, a strange and nervous look in his eyes. Lin couldn't help but chuckle at the pitiful sight before him. "Are you really that dumb? Why do you think the squad leader ordered us to pack up our personal belongings, burn our letters, and wash all our clothes? And didn't HQ just issue us brand new equipment? Not to mention all the extra food they've given us these past couple of days. Didn't you think it was weird they were treating us nicely for once?"

"What's so unusual about getting new kit and extra food? It could just be their way of rewarding us for

all the hard work we've been putting in every single day…"

"It's supposed to be hard. This isn't a vacation, and we're not civvies. Everything the army does has a strategic objective behind it. Didn't it ever cross your mind that we could get sent out into the field?"

"Crap! What do we do? I haven't even let my sister know…"

Lin grimaced at Kinjō's naivety. He didn't have time to notify his own parents in Taichū, let alone Kinjō having enough time to get word to his sister in Okinawa…. But Kinjō continued to protest as he wrapped the puttees around his shins.

"I mean, if they're really sending us to the front line, they should've told us in advance."

"Baka! That's a military secret."

Soldiers are simply tools of war, required to obey orders without question and carry out the duties in their remit without reflection or criticism. Such was the ironclad rule of the Japanese army. Someone as dim-witted and obedient as Kinjō should have made the perfect soldier. Frequently bewildered by his various orders, he somehow seemed enlightened by Lin's words and said, "Ah, maybe you're right. That horse-faced squad leader has started being nicer to me these past couple of days. He hasn't hit me once, or even shouted at me…"

Kinjō, long inured to the near-daily physical and verbal abuse he'd received from the squad leader over the past six months, couldn't help but smile at the thought of the miraculous transformation that had taken place in the last few days. However, he quickly gulped it back down and his expression gave way to fear and confusion.

"Kinjō, what's up?"

"No, it's nothing. I was just thinking about my mom. She passed away just before I signed up."

A wisp of sad truth clouded his vacuous face and struck Lin's senses like lightning, pain pinching at his heart.

2

The thought of his own mother filled Lin Yi-Ping with pride. Well-versed in Chinese history yet unable to understand Japanese, all she could manage was a mangled "arigato" whenever the patrols came to inspect her household registration documents. Her mantra was, "We're Chinese mainlanders from Fukien. Never lose hope. Have the courage to face reality. See your surroundings. Respect yourself without ever deceiving yourself." She'd repeated those words of encouragement to him from the moment he'd been chosen as a Special Volunteer until the day he departed. Even though he had never seen her shed a single tear, he knew his leaving was like a constant knife to her heart. Young Taiwanese men were under no obligation to join the Japanese Army, but they could become Special Volunteers by having their application form "specially" stamped under the supervision of the village chief. Of course, these "volunteers" did not volunteer of their own free will, although they were accorded the same duties and near-equal rights as Japanese citizens upon becoming honorary Japanese soldiers. One of these so-called rights was the glory of "being ready for death" in the name of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor. Lin's mother didn't cry when she learned this was to be her son's fate, but his father, an agricultural technician at the township office, cried on a number of occasions, often attracting her criticism and comfort in equal measure.

"Serve your country and Emperor with loyalty," proclaimed the mild-mannered village chief and mustachioed headman in unison at Lin's farewell dinner, despite the fact neither of them spoke Japanese with anything approximating fluency. To their mind, these were the best parting words they could offer. There were no slogans Lin loathed more than the corny "Eight corners of the world under one roof" and "Imperial subject; Public service", yet his parents never parroted them at him. All they wanted was for him to maintain the stoicism befitting a "Chinese".

3

Lin snapped back to the present day and said, "Hey, you'd better hurry up, Kinjō. The bugle's going to call any minute now. Do you want me to give you a hand?"

He had moved quickly, and had been ready for a while already.

"No, it's fine. I'll make it." And it was true – Kinjō had already packed up, and all that was left was for him to pull on his jacket and hang his blade from his belt.

"Yi-Ping?"

"Yeah?"

Kinjō's brand new uniform, immaculate and well-fitted, matched his slender features handsomely. He was holding a faded photograph up for Lin to see.

"Look what I found when clearing out my trunk. I thought I'd lost it ages ago. It must be a good sign I found it today."

Lin looked at it and understood what it meant to Kinjō. His face brightened up to match the other's excitement.

"Isn't that the photo of your sister you keep saying you want to show me?"

Kinjō was forever prattling on to Lin about his older sister. He'd always claimed she was pretty, but had never been able to find the photo of her he'd brought with him when he'd enlisted. As one of his most treasured possessions, perhaps he'd squirreled it away so thoroughly that, what with the hardships of military training, even he had ended up forgetting where he'd put it.

"See, I wasn't lying, was I? Isn't she beautiful? Loads of guys in my hometown were after her, but her boyfriend was sent to China to fight and it broke her heart. Then Mom died, and then her only brother was conscripted. I can't imagine the pain she went through. And now, I have no idea what she's up to."

"She really looks like you," Lin said. He took the photo and held it up next to Kinjō's face, discovering that Kinjō's unremarkable features were actually quite pretty and elegant when transplanted onto a woman. It was slightly unsettling.

"Everyone always says how much we look alike. Now, I really want to let her know that we're moving out into the field."

Kinjō looked like he was getting worked up, but Lin replied calmly, "Wouldn't it upset her even more to know that?"

"No, her heart has already been broken as much as it can. War is cruel, but whatever happens now can't make her any sadder than she already is. She told me she just wants to know where I am and what I'm doing. Whether I'm alive or dead doesn't even come into it…"

In that moment, Lin felt a deep connection to the women subjected to life under military rule, living in uncertainty and anguish as bloodthirsty Japanese warlords exterminated all their hopes of survival. He wondered whether his own mother hadn't cried when he was conscripted because she too had already borne so much pain.

Suddenly, a bugle cried out. Lin held the photograph out to Kinjō and said, "Here you go. It's a lovely photo, make sure you take care of it."

"I will. I know she'd love to meet you one day."

The bugle seemed especially loud and long today. Soldiers are particularly sensitive to deployment orders, which is why the blaring sound was even more disconcerting than usual, adding to the tension the recruits were feeling.

"Let's go!"

Lin jogged over to the heavy machine gun and flanked it with Hiratsuka. The two men hoisted it onto their shoulders and carried it over to the barracks where the platoon was due to convene. Everyone was in position in under three minutes. First Lieutenant Suzuki emerged and gave the orders, and the gunners in the four squads, each carrying four heavy machine guns, ran toward the training ground.

4

A regiment comprises three battalions of three rifle platoons and one heavy weapons platoon each and one artillery platoon. Currently lined up in rank and file on the vast training ground, the fully equipped regiment made for a magnificent sight. The troops were being reviewed by the lieutenant colonel personally. When the commanding officer gave the order to salute, the bugler began to play the *Commander's Salute* twice in succession. Lin, standing with the second heavy weapons platoon, murmured funny lyrics along to the tune while he saluted like the rest of the recruits:

聯隊長の奥さんは間抜けで，抜けても知らずに天井見て腰廻す。

(The colonel's wife is so confused / She doesn't even know she'd taken them off / She's staring at the ceiling, wiggling her ass.)

Soldiers come from all walks of life – academics, managers, farmers, poets, and painters, so it was never difficult to cobble together sarcastic lyrics for most trumpet songs. Passed down from veterans to rookies, these acted as coolant to the strictly disciplined existence of the non-commissioned rank-and-file and provided self-deprecating comfort.

After finishing his inspection, the lieutenant colonel, as expected, announced that the recruits who had completed six months of training would be promoted from private to private first class. This was a standard promotion and nothing out of the ordinary, but he still went through the formality of offering his congratulations followed by a motivational speech that gave special mention to the "Taiwanese Special Volunteers", who accounted for one-fifth of the new recruits and were exhorted to treat the Japanese soldiers with mutual love and respect on the battlefield. These boilerplate precautions were, in fact, unnecessary. The Japanese often claimed to treat everyone equally as a way of highlighting the Emperor's imperial authority. But, in reality, there were divisions between the mainlanders, the Ryukyu islanders, and the Taiwanese. The existence of different "levels of equality" was widely accepted, yet no one wanted to say anything that might infringe upon the militarist general-mobilization regulations. It was the smart choice.

Lin tuned back in for the end of the lieutenant colonel's speech, just in time to hear, "I wish you long-lasting military fortune, and victory in our holy war." He wondered how many batches of recruits this reserve forces' commander had sent off into battle, blankly repeating the same speech every single time without ever thinking how many of them would actually have the "military fortune" to come home alive. If he thought this hypocritical speech was motivational, he was just as clueless as the song purported his wife to be.

With a final cry of "Long live the Emperor!" led by the commanding officer, the deployment ceremony came to a close. The freshly promoted privates first class, led by the regimental headquarters, marched solemnly out of the fourth Taiwan Infantry Regiment Camp on their way to the Tainan Railway Station, the first battalion ahead of the second. It was already evening by the time they reached the deserted platforms.

5

The military train trundled into the night fields. It was a slow, loud train. The recruits crammed into the carriages could hear nothing but the rumble-rumble of the iron wheels. All of them had their eyes closed out of frustration, no one saying a word. It was as though they had all come to the same realization and, like pigs being sent to the slaughterhouse, now sat obediently, allowing the carriage to sway and rock them.

Kinjō was sat restlessly next to Lin, his eyes closed one minute, then taking his sister's photo out to look at the next. Because Taiwan was a Japanese colony, Taiwanese people could only serve in its army under very special circumstances. Soldiers on active duty were different from military porters and support staff. They were fully-fledged soldiers endowed with the traditional bushidō spirit, and the Japanese regarded spiritual honor as nobler than all else. In this sense, those from the Ryukyu Islands were the same as Japanese from the mainland. However, differences between them still existed. Different concepts of family status gave rise to contempt and discrimination. Kinjō, who was the slowest in training, and Lin, who was the most agile, were more than just fellow recruits from the same intake: they were closer in spirit thanks to this difference that marked them and, as such, they had bonded over their sense of mutual sympathy and understanding.

西來安魂
TAINAN REQUIEM

Wu Hsin-Han
吳欣翰

- **Category:** Historical Fiction, Fantasy
- **Publisher:** Yuan-Liou
- **Date:** 8/2024
- **Pages:** 320
- **Length:** 143,341 characters (approx. 93,100 words in English)
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Born in 1989, Wu Hsin-Han works by day as an engineer in the Hsinchu Science Park and, in his off hours, enjoys reading books on history and historical fiction. *Tainan Requiem* is Wu's first novel.

When colonial exploitation breaks the limit of endurance, a spirit medium steps forward to lead a resistance movement that quickly snowballs into Taiwan's largest anti-colonial uprising. The dual narrative in this fantasy-tinged novel plumbs the hopes and struggles of all who fight for liberation.

Modest Xilai Temple in Tainan City owns an outsized place in the history books, for it was from here in 1915 that Xilai's spirit medium Û Tshing-Hong launched an anti-colonial uprising that left over 10,000 dead or wounded and 2,000 executed. While many see superstitious beliefs driving the rebels, author Wu Hsin-Han suggests a more fantastical force might have been at work.

In the 1970s, the god of Xilai Temple tells Tsìng-Hiông his paternal grandfather is now a god in the immortal realm. Perplexed, he is told his grandfather was once the temple's spirit-medium facilitator and one of the few survivors of the "Xilai Temple Incident". The *what* incident? With this historical event having long faded from living memory, the temple faithful settle in to learn the full story firsthand from the god through his medium.

In 1912, seriously ill labor camp inmate Û Tshing-Hong is miraculously healed by an old man who tells him his destiny is to "walk with the gods". Û subsequently fulfills his promise to the old man to serve as Xilai Temple's spirit medium. Together with a prominent local businessman, Û grows the temple faithful. However, the ulterior motive is to prepare for an uprising against Taiwan's colonial oppressors timed to take advantage of a series of disastrous setbacks for the Japanese predicted by the temple god.

In *Tainan Requiem*, author Wu Hsin-Han not only interweaves his unique spiritual perspective with real-world history but also complements the main colonial era narrative with a sub-narrative set during Taiwan's postwar Martial Law era. Unfolding in two distinct historical periods, the dual narratives highlight that autocratic governments of all stripes share much in common and that the subjects of such rule all yearn to be happy and free.

TAINAN REQUIEM

By Wu Hsin-Han
Translated by Cheng-Yi Tsai

> "The 1915 Tapani Incident, Taiwan's largest anti-colonial uprising, is the literary scaffolding used in *Tainan Requiem* to ask the question: If gods truly existed and influenced human affairs, how might they have shaped the face of Taiwanese resistance to Japanese colonial rule? The story follows actual historical figure Û Tshing-Hong's transformation from small-town intellectual to temple spirit medium, and spins a creative tale about how Û and anti-Japanese guerrilla leader Kang Tīng together inspired and then lost this popular insurrection against their island's colonial rulers. *Tainan Requiem* breathes vivid new life into a footnote in history, and examines a people's determination, and ultimate failure, to change their destiny."
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller**

Prologue

Winter Solstice, 1912
Karoran Furōsha Labor Camp

The crescent moon hanging in the night sky shone upon the sea and the shore, rugged and rocky. Waves of wind and tide battered the gaunt stones on the coast, splashing sprays into the air. At a twenty-minute walk away from the coastline, in a desolate stretch of land, stood a lonely cluster of barrack-like buildings erected in the Japanese style. Flickering lights shone out from a few of them, feeble and insignificant before the majesty of nature.

"Cold...still so cold..." Curled up, Û Tshing-Hong shuddered from the chill. His fellow inmates had already collected every piece of ramie cloth they could find and covered him with them from head to toe. Even the vent built into the brick wall was blocked by their own bodies in an attempt to shut out the piercing, ever-present chill. None of it helped.

"He's having a fever. These worthless pieces of cloth the Japanese dogs gave us don't keep him warm at all. He'll die if it goes on like this," said Little Ông, an inmate who was once a medicine-man, shaking his head.

Dominated by the harsh summer sun during one half of the year and by howling wintry winds during the other, the east of Taiwan was a harsh land. Even well-equipped Japanese policemen struggle to withstand its fury. The inmates, having nothing better than rough-spun linen, fared even worse. They labored long and hard for the Empire of Japan each day under close watch, be it surveying native land, building roads for guards, or digging up precious mineral resources – gold dust, copper, nickel, phosphorus, marble, and Taiwan jade. The men, both young and old, also had to toil unceasingly every season in the barren alluvial loess outside the walls of the labor camp, painstakingly cultivating fields of rice and yam.

A few steps away from the electrified chain link

fencing lay the pigsties, chicken coops, and vegetable patches. Every day one of the inmates would come and water the tubers, greens, melons, and beans. Even though the inmates could manage to feed themselves, the dilapidation of their dwellings, as well as the extreme scarcity of medical resources on this unforgiving coast, made it very unlikely they would survive their stay and return alive to their homes on the west coast.

"Has anyone asked Old Ong for help? Maybe he can do something?" Old Ong was the eldest among the inmates and had been there for as long as the labor camp existed. It was said the man was arrested when he, at that time a resident of Tsumuna in the mountains, protested Japanese incursions on land with ancestral, spiritual significance. They came to blows, after which he was arrested and sent to the labor camp.

"I heard he's a priest and has the gift of the third eye. Maybe he'll be able to tell whether young Û is afflicted by sickness or if it's something less wholesome," murmured Little Ông with hope in his voice. "He lives in another building, though, and someone will have to risk getting caught to fetch him."

"I'll go!" cried Little Ting, who had known Û Tshing-Hong since they were both young men making their ways in the world on the streets of Kiâm-Tsuí-Káng in Tainan. "The worst that could happen is the guards beat me for breaking curfew. But, for him, it's his life on the line here. I have to help him!"

Furōsha, a Japanese term not unlike the more antiquated and local *lô-hàn-kha*, refers to individuals without fixed dwellings or occupations. They were considered by the Japanese police force as a potentially negative influence on public order and mores. These Furōsha, despite not being criminals, were regularly detained pre-emptively by the Empire of Japan, which sought to "reform" those "indolent and shiftless" individuals through regimented labor and community living.

Life in a labor camp was not as strict as in prison. While inmates were forced to work by day, their time during the night was relatively unrestricted. And so Little Ting snuck out during night-time roll call and found Old Ong, a man of remarkable appearance – lean as a beanpole with eyes the color of jade and an aquiline nose – who surprisingly agreed without hesitation to visit his dying fellow inmate.

The arrival of the mysterious elder aroused much interest amongst the crowd, which quickly surrounded him and his patient. They were eager to see how the situation would resolve.

By that point, Û Tshing-Hong had fallen into a coma, his body hot to the touch like a furnace. In the cold room housing the inmates, clouds of vapor rose up from his body before dissipating into the air.

Old Ong took a stick of charcoal, which the inmates regularly made themselves from scorched branches, and drew a talisman on a piece of paper. Muttering incantations none of the assembled could decipher, he ignited the charm with candle fire, held it between his fingers, and circled Û Tshing-Hong's body with it again and again until the charm had burnt down to ashes.

"The gods have marked his fate. He must not perish here," croaked Old Ong in his coarse voice. Asking for water, he proceeded to write words on his patient's forehead with it.

Û Tshing-Hong gradually awakened, but still clung to life by a thread. The old man crouched down and whispered into his ear in Hokkien, "There is something special about your constitution that makes it a fit vessel for a great undertaking. My family has a special medicinal recipe that could turn you into a shaman, after which a serendipitous spirit or deity may be willing to lend you their strength. Are you willing to throw the dice?"

Û Tshing-Hong nodded weakly and replied in the same language, "I have lived a spiritually pure life and accrued much good karma by helping others..."

"Excellent!"

Standing up, Old Ong took a quick glance across the room. "Tomorrow, on your way to work, look for acacia trees and peel off the bark, all the way from branch to root if possible. Avoid peeling too deep into the juicy parts, and bring back the peeled bark in rolls."

"Acacia tree bark can be used as medicine? We've been chopping those trees up for firewood," stated Little Ông in curiosity.

"You cannot simply boil the bark. A certain secret ingredient is needed." Old Ong carefully took out from his wide sleeves a small, square package of medicinal herbs wrapped in many layers of waxed paper. Inside,

small, dark brown seeds sat quietly.

"These are harmel seeds from Tibet. Boil them together with a good deal of acacia bark, and you'll have a potent medicine in your hands."

The inmates, out of a feeling of fellowship forged from shared hardship, agreed readily to this simple request. They immediately began to prepare the hides needed for wrapping the bark as well as to plan how to cover for each other so they'd have enough time to sharpen the stones needed to strip the bark from living trees.

The next day, after their labors were done and the sun had dipped below the horizon, the temperature dropped precipitously. Inside the house, Û Tshing-Hong could not stop shuddering from the cold, his teeth clattering audibly. Greatly weakened, he was hanging onto to life by the thinnest thread.

This was when Old Ong returned with a bowl in hand full of foul-smelling medicine, viscous and deep black, that repelled the curious crowd with its odor. "This is acacia soup. Drink it," murmured Old Ong in a faint, breathy voice.

As his patient obediently drank, the crowd, worried and curious in equal measure, gathered to witness whether the mystery medicine they had all helped make would work. After an hour, Û Tshing-Hong continued to lie still on the bed, torpid and unresponsive.

Suddenly, he started shouting, shaking his limbs wildly as if they were on fire. His fellow inmates made to help him, but were held back by Old Ong's gaunt fingers. "Do not touch him! This is when his fate shall be decided!" he warned.

Once again, Old Ong lit his charms and circled his patient with ash and smoke, all the while chanting loudly his cryptic spells. With all his might, he staked his claim and banished all of the unseen spiritual influences from his patient's body. Moaning in anguish, Û Tshing-Hong fell from the bed and rolled to and fro on the ground vomiting, immobilized by fatigue.

"They come! The Lords of Blessings are here to save you!" exclaimed Old Ong with an undertone of joy in his voice.

It was then that Û Tshing-Hong, his body emaciated and his consciousness drifting, heard a clear voice in his head–

Part One: The Wheel of Fortune

Chapter One: The Tâng-Ki

Late Summer, 1970
Gû-Buâ-Āu, Tainan

As night fell, the hubbub of the city died down, and people returned to their homes. But in a certain temple, a growing crowd was gathering. Taiwan Xilai Temple, relocated and rebuilt on a new site after the Second World War, sat along Lane 28, Ximen Road. It was not particularly big. The east-facing, 70-square-meter main temple building was connected to a south-facing 17-square-meter annex that was dedicated to an affiliate deity.

Most of those gathering in the small square in front of the temple had brought their own benches to sit on. Chatting away, they tried to ward off the late-afternoon heat with hand fans.

As per usual for Friday nights, the experienced tâng-ki of the temple – Tēnn Tsín-Khìng, better known by his nickname Tsuí-Peh, was here to channel the temple's patron deities and answer on their behalf petitions from the droves of eager faithful who had come. This weekly ritual often took up his entire evening all the way until midnight.

"It's been a while, Tsìng-Hiông! How have you been?" Before the man even stepped into the temple, he was greeted warmly by Mrs. Tân in Hokkien.

"Good, thank you. Are you here to petition His Excellency too, Mrs. Tân?" Tsìng-Hiông, a man around forty years old, was the third-generation proprietor of Ganweitang, an old, famous bakery in Tainan.

"That's right. Rats have been making a hell of a ruckus late at night in my house the last few days, so loud that nobody can sleep! I'm hoping His Excellency would help make them leave. Anyway, come, sit!" Mrs.

Tân pointed at the chair in front of her.

"Well, I'm sure His Excellency won't say no to taking care of something so simple. I'm going to go pay my respects now – let's talk later."

Following the corridor on the right, Tsìng-Hiông entered the main hall, performed his worship with incense, and went out into the temple courtyard, where the censer was, greeting people all the while. He had attended this temple ever since his grandfather first took him along as a child, so most worshippers there were familiar faces to him.

The faithful came in all sorts – men and women, young and old, rich and poor. The petitions varied as much as their petitioners. Some asked for success, others for love, yet others for the just arbitration of disputes…No matter the trouble, all seemed to end up petitioning the temple's patron deities.

The will of these deities is expressed in a myriad of ways – through medium's pens, ouija boards, spirit writing, palanquin writing, and so on, with priestly interpreters tasked to read their will from the signs given. But the most direct means of communion is no doubt bilateral communication via tâng-ki, through whom the faithful can pose queries and receive answers.

Tâng-ki, the Hokkien name for this particular type of medium, are able to summon spiritual beings into their own bodies, serving both as bridges between the supernatural and the mundane and as spokespeople for their deities. Such individuals are extremely rare. Although innate talent is required, tâng-ki initiates must painstakingly practice the art of synchronizing themselves with the deities they seek to channel.

In 1970, when Taiwan had only around 3,800 temples serving a population of 14.8 million, temples with tâng-ki possessing both sufficient skills and the requisite affinity with supernatural beings were still few and far between.

That evening, the temple was busy all the way up to midnight as usual, leaving Tsìng-Hiông waiting in the vestibule until the lively crowds of worshippers had departed. Tired from working at his bakery the whole day, the man was quite confused.

How strange, I'm only here for my usual request of a good-luck charm for my business, so why am I the last?

As the thought crossed his mind, the interpreter shouted, "Faithful Tsìng-Hiông, His Excellency will see you now."

"Finally!"

He crossed the dragon-marked door to the right of the central gate and knelt reverently, incense in hand, before the robe-clad Tsuí-Peh, who had already begun channeling his patron.

The lean, old man, nearly seventy years of age, had served at the temple for seventeen years with great dedication. In everyday life, the old man was ordinary, timid, and reserved. But when channeling his deity for petitions at night, he was self-confident, energetic, and spirited – a vital pillar of the religious community. Lacking a successor from the younger generations, he had been unable to retire, as he desired, for a long time.

Tsìng-Hiông, just about to make his petition, was stopped by the deity with a gesture. "Are you here to petition me for a charm of fortune?"

"Yes, that's right, I was hoping Your Excellency would bless my business with prosperity and success," Tsìng-Hiông said with a deep bow.

The deity responded with a faint smile, "That is a simple matter. However, I've delayed your petition for this opportunity to speak with you."

Confused, Tsìng-Hiông replied without thinking, "I'm ready to hear your wisdom, Your Excellency."

"It was twenty years ago that your grandfather passed, was it not?"

"Indeed it was, I paid my respects in a memorial service for him just last month," said Tsìng-Hiông with faint surprise.

"The Jade Emperor, in recognition of his deeds during his living years, has decreed that he be deified and made a military officer of the senior fourth rank under my command."

洪荒瀰漫超銀河

THE PRIMORDIAL VOICE SINGING TO OUTER GODS IN SUPER-GALAXIES

Lucifer Hung
洪凌

- **Category:** Fantasy
- **Publisher:** Gaea
- **Date:** 10/2024
- **Pages:** 336
- **Length:** 147,012 characters (approx. 95,500 words in English)
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Lucifer Hung holds a PhD in Cultural Studies from The Chinese University of Hong Kong and is currently a professor in the Graduate Institute for Gender Studies at Shih Hsin University. Hung's main research interests include science fiction literature, paraliterature and film, cultural studies, Palestinian issues, queer theory, erotica, national identity, and inter-species politics. With a career spanning academic writings, cultural criticism and works of literature, *The Primordial Voice Singing to Outer Gods in Super-Galaxies* is Hung's first novel in eight years. Also, the Japanese rights have recently been sold for two of Hung's previous works – *Dancer of the Chaos*, *Dance Your Never-ending Abandonment!* and *Fugues of the Black Sun: Collected Stories*. Hung is also a translator of multiple works, including *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

A five-gender world nourished by wuxia chivalric and Taoist mythological elements is something only sci-fi prodigy author Lucifer Hung could pull off with such aplomb.

Supreme super gods residing in a hidden realm of our universe exist in five genders, namely alpha, beta, delta, gamma, and omega, and in fluid facets for which human terms such as "she, he, it" and "father, sister, brother" fail utterly to capture or convey. Each gender has its own unique pheromone profile that exerts its own unique effects. In interactions with other genders, these pheromones elicit the full spectrum of emotions ranging from love to hate and affect the martial prowess of those so enmeshed.

Main protagonist Chieh Shietou is the Sword Emperor and highest among all gods. Returning to his capital after a century-long journey, he is beset by a seemingly endless series of provocations and conspiracies. Some involve plots for his usurpation, some involve vassals plotting to control her, while some involve blade masters looking to best it in battle. The onslaught is so hot and heavy that even their personally programmed agent is embroiled in a plot to replace them! Overwhelmed by this emotional whirlwind, the day of reckoning is nearly at hand.

In this work, author Lucifer Hung interweaves long-running interests in queer theory, erotica, national identity, and inter-species politics with their love of sci-fi and wuxia fiction. Within Hung's sumptuous narrative settings, seemingly incongruous elements meld seamlessly to create a breathtakingly expansive, magnificently grandiloquent

THE PRIMORDIAL VOICE SINGING TO OUTER GODS IN SUPER-GALAXIES

By Lucifer Hung
Translated by Joel Martinson

> "While bringing zir trademark narrative virtuosity, practiced sci-fi acumen, and multifaceted gender perspective to *The Primordial Voice Singing to Outer Gods in Super-Galaxies*, Lucifer Huang adds new elements of chivalric wuxia and Taoist mythology that, once readers acclimate to the quirky authorial style, invigorate the uniquely textured literary landscapes that populate each and every chapter. Deceptively chaotic, the narrative is tied together by the "information game", which subtly yet effectively reflects upon and challenges the information flows that saturate and define today's worldwide internet. This work is as expansively brilliant as it is desolately lonely."
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller**

Prologue: The Dashing Sword Emperor in Ecstasy

A crimson afterglow flooded the vast misery and shone on the once-splendid fortifications, redolent with the burnt desolation peculiar to Class-y planets of the Desert System. Chieh Shietou set his empathy pulse to its lowest setting, but that only applied to carbon-based life. As Sword Emperor, his sensory resonance field could detect the form, will, and spirit of any sword.

Though he cherished the thousand peerless swords around him and planned to do his utmost to protect them, his receiver was reading in the environment around him an enormous yearning and despair, like the lament of infinite reversions.

Like a flaming snowstorm, the killing urge erupted in awful wonder from his silver-inlaid black robe, eager for a dance of eternal destruction. His eyes, elaborately and dreamily lined in ice, breathed murderous intent and exuded scarlet luster, while his floating lissome frame was a knife-point ready to slice through every universe.

Without warning, he crossed his slender arms and reached back to withdraw the twin celestial fire swords from their sheaths in his cervical vertebrae. The pine and spring dew of their supreme will filled the air. Chieh Shietou and the swords moved as one to sweep a perimeter encompassing the ruin's coordinates.

Tuned to him, the twin swords broke through their safety pre-sets and emanated an inner universe from the tip, an all-encompassing black rainbow of mad passion. The trigger for destruction would be a moment of slightly furrowed brows and total clarity of blood pupils.

However, far from a frontal attack, the line traced by his twin bladework did the reverse. Low Tower blazed like a neutron star and transformed into countless white-hot thermocurrents, while Spring Rain's coolly resonant song blended into the heartbreak petals below the

clavicle and near the heart to lay bare the Eternal Destruction of All Things, to which even the highest gods were fated to succumb.

Non-physical pain presented as a self-mocking smile. Chieh sent the twin swords outward, sweeping through a star formation that seemed to transform into vast, snow-white flames in the starfield, activating the Accord of Heaven and Earth willed by the ultimate sword-mind.

Not exactly a force, this state was the Nandina Super-Galaxy's original mystery, the utmost will of the everlasting Sword Emperor to freeze everything, including the profoundly bloodthirsty, nirvana-esque self.

Waiting in ambush in the sixty cyclic positions as swordlight dawned, the finest martial groups of the hidden five clans were drawn to the circular ruin of antimatter that spouted from the tip of Chieh Shietou's swords. Faster than thought and quicker than an instant, the soul cores of every supreme warrior were unbodied, melting away under the twin swords' combined snow and fire strike, Asura's Eternal Farewell.

This grand killing blow capable of severing Basic Continuity caused a thousand blade masters to perish forever before they could utter even half a cry for help. Relying on numbers, they imagined they could surround this sword master and issue counsel.

What counsel? Baseless provocation. They thought Father was a restrictive tyrant. To the contrary: he was the Purple Phoenix of All Existence, one of the three pandimensional Supreme Physicians. The tedium of low-level powers was beneath contempt. The need to retune for the Nandina Super-Galaxy made Purple Phoenix ill at ease absent an incarnation in the Super-Empire's ninety-eighth generation.

With keen-eyed indifference, Chieh Shietou spoke not a word and moved hardly a muscle. Malicious noises listening patiently had grown excessive, their conniving and high-minded demands the trigger word for extinction. This was the ultimate liquidation, the final rite of an heir apparent: the tomb of swords must be opened to offer this fifth-dimension super-galaxy a cleansing sword dance.

The Sword Emperor of Blood Magic's last duty before assuming the throne took but a few split seconds. Afterward, he sent cold fire burst of soul-stealing beauty and sang with joyful clarity, consoling the thousand sacred weapons that remained safe and unharmed.

Ready to begin his reign, Chieh Shietou purified the surroundings with a song of "Nowhere", drawing a final curtain on a 300-year daemonic war on a barren planet in the Nandina Super-Galaxy frontier.

Finished at last! With tender affection, Chieh Shietou and the beloved heavenly flame swords of snow and fire soared at leisure, until Father, ever the doting one, conveyed telepathic concerns, rendering impossible any further absence from the capital.

Receiving Spring Rain and Low Tower into their shoulder sheaths, she[01] was ready to blink back when there was a dramatic shift. A horse-knight practically designed to suit her preferences materialized with a speed that defied description.

Its mane wild and fiery, its right eye a limpid pool, and its left an Abyss Crystal no black hole could consume. Across the rider's back lay Yasgard the Castigator of Gods, the lance that symbolized demon-slaying chivalry. The tall, slender body was fused as one with the unrivaled divine steed, wings unfurled.

Chieh Shietou's knowledge of the gods of the Fifth Quadrant was superfluous for recognizing individuals whose aspects announced their identity. The one before him now was the pandimensional wild horseman super-god famed for breaking barriers and borders, the supreme deity of Canaan.

He gave an almost imperceptible nod of his spellbinding face and eyes. His expression revealed no emotion but suggested appreciation. For the first time since arriving on this planet, Chieh Shietou spoke to a non-weapon entity and uttered the newcomer's name.

"Baal."

Horse and rider saluted as one. Eyes laden with an ancient gale gleamed, radiating passionate love and

01 Third-person pronouns are used randomly in this book; the universe's five-gender structure is represented by α, β, γ, δ, and Ω.

respect.

"Honestly! With the pandimensional poems amassed into this sword, that crew must have found ecstasy in extermination! Blood Magic Emperor Chieh Shietou; eternal, primordial-born god-emperor; the gods' most coveted and feared lord of the three primeval realms: you are all of these, but these are not all of you. These facets do not equate to godhead without equal, the beauty of ethereal terror, and…your voice…

"Aeon, the ode to the First Cause! That alone is your true original name, the native name of the Primordial."

Reining in intense shock, Chieh Shietou immediately engaged in complex, high-speed mental calculations. What had been overlooked? For such a young super-god to have learned that original name defied understanding. Even more unbelievably, Baal had not recognized her in her role of Primordial Sword Emperor; rather, it was the Voice of Aeon that prompted true recognition and memory.

To be identified by sound – as if they were never strangers at all!

He remained blandly vacant but for a hint of a smile playing at the edges of his mouth. A variable. Chieh Shietou always enjoyed the unexpected.

"Chieh. That too is our name. A nickname from the birth of the Primordial."

Refined but uninhibited, considerate yet stubbornly reckless, Canaan's mounted high god refrained from teasing. Baal gazed thoughtfully into those most comely of scarlet eyes, raised the little sixth finger of a thin left hand, and gave a chaste, gentle kiss.

Without fixating on names or seeking consent, Baal acted with empyrean swiftness to pull Chieh Shietou into the saddle and, in a twinkling, departed the stellar system.

Where had this individual heard my voice? Chieh appreciated a good mystery.

"Now that the tone has been engraved on the divine core, Chieh is the one for whom my principle of 'In Love's Service' applies. Whether or not you remember Canaan's primal divine storm, you ought to make my service complete."

As blood night fell on the nexus of waxing and waning quarters, Chieh Shietou lapsed into a marvelous memory.

"Since Canaan's Wind Horse Lord is willing to serve us, why not conduct a contest in the moonlight? The ten greats at the pinnacle of martial arts now count among their number only one divine dual master of the polearm and bow. All others wield but sword or saber.

Clearly, the only option was for personal companion Interesting Time Game (ITG) to message Father, Tien-yüan Shietou the Purple Phoenix, incumbent emperor of the super-empire. With no one left in the way, why not go wild for once?

Chieh had originally intended to return to the home world to put Father's mind at ease before paying a visit to Hsien Dugu, a Saber Lord who's reputation rivals even that of the Sword Emperor. But that would have to wait for another time because of the sudden, inexplicable acquisition of a supreme knight and marvelous, love-fated steed, as well as…

Long, long afterward, every last duty had been finished. The floral ichor and sword blades that stuck from His body got on splendidly with His wind-riding counterpart. Chieh Shietou was pleased but melancholy. It was true that Baal had appeared because of the voice.

As the exclusive knight of the Primordial Sword Emperor, Baal tore through boundaries and trampled perpetual tribulations underfoot to aid Chieh accomplish a narrative of redemption and revision. Together, they mended chaos, wiped out tyrannical and scandalous godheads, repaired the substance of the Cosmic Horror Realm, recovered Chieh's first beloved, retrieved generationally traumatized divine beasts… and, by the end, completely rewrote the fabricated origins of the super-empire.

Clinging to the beloved steed as the rider in back suckled a plum-flower gland bursting with enough supreme α pheromones to whip the gods of the Fifth Quadrant into a frenzy, Chieh was touched and moved. But whether this was from relief or sadness was impossible to say.

Prior to that marvelous encounter, Chieh and his higher-dimensional calculation partner ITG were about to complete the quantum frame computation of variables too numerous to count. This was one option he had not anticipated during the exhilarating sword trial. The exuberant, roguish, knightly man-horse ultimately caused the Primordial Noumenon to abandon a tuning scheme that would have eliminated all impurities and reset to the origin.

Chapter I: Primordial Master of the Super-Gods

1: A Story Full of Swords and Romance

Year 67,319 of the fifth-dimension superstar calendar, capital star cluster of the Nandina Super-Galaxy: Pool of Southern Broken Jade.

On the capital world Falconpearl, circled by the night sun, the hibernating insight of Acting Emperor and princely emissary Ti-kuan Shietou jolted awake from her lucid dream of overturning the altar of the Fifth Quadrant Sorcerer's Guild.

Immediately upon returning to the fifth-dimensional here and now, she zipped into a new body. The bright and endearing form of a girl of eighteen she had maintained for the past hundred years changed instantly into a bubbly child of just seven years old in the superstar calendar's reckoning. This was her most powerful dual-track sorcerer. A divine, true body at peak combat strength.

The lucid dream hit Ti-kuan Shietou hard and affected several companions in the acting emperor's royal lodgings as well. Naturally, the fiery youth who swept the sweet-faced petite figure into an embrace was the first witness.

Despite having experienced the spectacle of his lover stretching into a new form on many occasions, this transformation was still cause for concern. The Fire Witch King of the Eastern Sky let white flames blossom at the back of his eyes, thought issuing from the star cluster and conducting a mental survey at a speed that left in the dust the revolving stalactite resonance read by the Earth Elf King at his side.

"Patience, Emberdrink. Too much haste can disrupt the energy flow. You don't want to offend the Misty Flower Emperor with your lack of restraint, do you?"

That lightly mocking tone clearly came from the third participant in the night's activities, the Water Elf King Kuan Liu-ch'ih.

With an impatient sniff, the Fire Witch King relayed the message.

"I'll never be faster than the Nandina Fire Dragon, the advance-deployed royal guardian under your sole command…"

The Water Elf King giggled, delighting in the mockery but not denying the jealousy. That little dragon truly enjoys the protection of heaven and earth!

"The Infernal Dragon King, that larval super-god, is a fire wielder nonpareil, second only to His chief romantic rival Baal, the maverick hunter who grinds the towers of the world into dust. Ah, how can four elfin demigods match the rebellious, frenzied force of that Alpha-plus, His mind obsessed with that blood magic majesty toward which he squirms – apologies for the creepy-crawling imagery – toward which he jauntily treads on sanguine flames."

The Fire Witch King interrupted the congenital mischief-maker with a potent flame of annoyance.

"You talk too much. Keep a lid on it, wet one. Don't make waves and celebrate too early. Unknowns still remain, so wait for Ti…the acting emperor to perform calculations in Babel Tower, and for ITG's self-replicating hundred-dimensional quantum frames to resonate in sync. Judging from the present parity, they've already established contact!"

She coded using bracing blue-fire luster, and withdrew her companion firebird from within her willowy frame. Instructions were unnecessary – the bird's spirit flame read data and emotions and took wing at once for the princely palace in the northwest corner of the capital world.

夜觀神

THEY ALL HAD A SECRET

Zuiliuli
醉琉璃

- **Category:** Thriller, Folk Horror
- **Publisher:** Gaea
- **Date:** 8/2024
- **Pages:** 256
- **Length:** 84,660 characters (approx. 55,000 words in English)
- **Full English Manuscript Available**
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Zuiliuli is a best-selling author of light novels that often incorporate elements of Eastern myths and legends. A gifted writer of supernatural thrillers, she writes in a broad range of styles, including lighthearted, humorous fantasy-adventure stories set on school campuses. Her representative works include the popular series Agents to the Gods, Night Whispers, and I, the Elf King, Need Cash! *Scarecrow*, one of the books in her Night Whispers series, is currently being developed into a TV series by Eightgeman Ltd., a Taiwanese company co-founded by award-winning directors.

Twenty years after dying in the midst of playing a paranormal game with his classmates, letters signed in his name are received by the four remaining friends, inviting them to a reunion. In deciding to attend, none could have imagined the dangers awaiting them that stormy night.

Shao Ying-chieh meets up with four of his middle school classmates in the middle of the night to play "Broom Spirit". But after Fang Chih-hua, the most easygoing of the bunch, actually becomes inspirited while standing knee-deep in a stream, his friends callously abandon him. Hearing the next morning that Chih-hua had drowned, the four make a pact to keep the whole affair a secret. Through the intervening years, they gradually fall out of touch.

Twenty years later, Ying-chieh, now co-host with his girlfriend of a paranormal livestream show, is a regular interloper at haunted houses and folk-religious ceremonies. One day, he receives a letter threatening to reveal his "secret" should he fail to return to his old family home in Lukang at an appointed time and date. After learning his other co-conspirators had received the same invitation, all four agree to see if their friend Chih-hua had indeed returned from the dead for revenge.

Ying-chieh's girlfriend, eager to explore the folk-legend landscape of Lukang, and his horror comic illustrator sister tag along as well, bringing props and paranormal game equipment in expectation of filming another livestream episode of their show. But that night, with a storm raging outside, little goes according to plan. The planned livestream falls through, one of Ying-chieh's classmates unabashedly harasses his sister, and another seems unable to stop abusing his own teenage son. The whole affair collapses into chaos and, by the time dawn finally breaks, not all are lucky enough to leave the house alive.

Blending elements of folklore and paranormal horror, Zuiliuli's standalone mystery novel shines light on the fractures that threaten the very foundations of asymmetrical interpersonal relationships and vindicate, albeit with anguish, their ultimate disposition.

THEY ALL HAD A SECRET

By Zuiliuli
Translated by Alex Woodend

> "The simple rituals involved in using spirit / Ouija boards to summon advice and favors from the "other" realm have led to both their gamification and incorporation into popular horror stories. By weaving the Lukang spirit board game "Broom Spirit" into *They All Had a Secret*, author Zuiliuli both adds local color and introduces readers to a now-obscure folk tradition. Twenty years after a late-night clandestine gathering to play Broom Spirit ends in tragedy, a group of long-estranged middle school classmates gather together once again at the behest of an odd letter puzzlingly sent to each of them. This horror-steeped work carries the glinting allure of an eloquent low-key mystery."
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller**

Prologue

The sleeping girl frowned as a buzzing sound passed by her ear.

It didn't let up, and her frown deepened.

Annoyed, Shao Hsin-hsin snapped her eyes open, reached out, and swatted, but hit nothing but air in the darkness.

The sleep-interrupting mosquito had long since flown off to who knew where.

"Stupid…" Hsin-hsin muttered. "Stupid mosquito… Next time you come, I'll kill you…"

She felt an itch on her neck and found a small bump. Her little face fell as she realized she'd been bitten.

She pressed her fingernail into the bite twice, making a cross-shaped mark, then grabbed the alarm clock on her nightstand: It was already almost three o'clock in the morning.

If it weren't for the stupid mosquito, she'd still be sound asleep.

Hsin-hsin wanted to settle back into her blankets. But knowing the mosquito could return at any moment dissipated the wave of sleepiness.

She got out of bed and turned on the light, revealing a simple, sparsely decorated girl's room.

Petite Hsin-hsin stood on the middle of the bed, eyes open wide, searching in all directions for any sign of the mosquito. She looked until her eyes were sore, but found no trace of the annoying insect.

Hsin-hsin let out a dejected sigh, turned off the light, and gave up.

"Or…do I sneak the bug zapper up from the living room?" she wondered.

The bug zapper was kept in the living room on the first floor. Mrs. Shao didn't like anyone moving it, so they all resorted to using mosquito coils on the second floor.

Hsin-hsin didn't like the smell of those coils – actually she hated it – so she never lit them in her room no matter what.

After hesitating a while, she decided to sneak

downstairs, bring the bug zapper up, then set an alarm so she could return it before her mother woke up and avoid getting caught.

That's it!

Hsin-hsin jumped out of bed and ran barefoot to the door of her bedroom, which she always kept locked.

She had opened it just a crack when the door next to hers opened too: her brother's room.

Did he get up to use the bathroom?

The hallway lights were off, but the one in the stairwell was on. In its faint glow, she saw her brother, who was five years older, leaning halfway out and looking to his right.

That's where their mother's bedroom was.

Ying-chieh then stepped out of his room, closed the door behind him, and hurried down the stairs.

The whole time he never noticed his little sister peeking through the crack in her doorway, watching his every move.

She was shocked. The way he was dressed meant he was up for more than just going downstairs to use the bathroom!

And so late…Where could he be going?

A thought flashed through her mind, and she completely forgot about the mosquito and the bug zapper. Hsin-hsin hurried back to her room and came out with a jacket on, its pockets bulging.

The Shao house had both front and back doors, and everyone mostly used the one in the back.

Hsin-hsin rushed out the back door and saw Ying-chieh had just removed the heavy lock on his bike and was about to swing his leg over the seat.

He didn't notice the back door opening until Hsin-hsin herself called softly:

"Bro."

Ying-chieh's body jolted, and he turned his head, wide eyes reflecting the image of his little sister, who he often teased for looking like a bamboo pole.

At first he thought his mind was playing tricks on him. But after blinking hard, Hsin-hsin was still standing in the doorway, canvas sneakers on her feet, hair somehow tied up in two ponytails.

"Why aren't you asleep in your room?!" Ying-chieh hissed. "You know you have school tomorrow."

"You do too!" Hsin-hsin shot back. "Where are you going? I want to go too!"

"Why? Go back to your room and get some sleep!" Ying-chieh had no intention of bringing the little brat along. "It's men's business. Little kids have to stay out of it."

"You're not a man, you're only in middle school," Hsin-hsin corrected her brother in a hushed tone, "and …you said 'men'…So it's not just you? Who else is going? And why so late? I want to go too!"

"Why do you have to be such a nosy brat? Anyway, hurry up and go back to bed. I'll buy you a soda tomorrow."

"No, I want to go too. Take me with you!"

"You're so annoying…Then just go tell Mom, if you dare to knock on her door this late," Ying-chieh threatened. "Who was she scolding yesterday for having messy handwriting?"

Hsin-hsin flinched.

They were a single-parent family, and Mrs. Shao was pretty strict. Hsin-hsin in particular was afraid of her stern, impatient looks.

Knowing his sister wouldn't dare disturb her this late, Ying-chieh grinned smugly, pressed a sneaker onto his pedal, and left her behind, riding alone into the dark of night.

Thanks to his sister holding him up at the back door, by the time he really got going down the street, it was already after three in the morning.

"Damn, it's all her fault…" Ying-chieh muttered, glancing at his watch. He pedaled harder, afraid he would get to the meet-up point too late.

He had indeed arranged to meet a few friends.

They were going to Old Port Creek, usually called "Stinky Ditch," for an adventure.

That late at night, cars passed only occasionally through the streets of Lukang before vanishing in the distance. The pale glow of the streetlights in the

darkness created an atmosphere of desolation. It was silent all around. The houses along the road were locked up tight, their windows pitch black.

Ying-chieh pedaled as hard as he could. He had just turned from Gongyuansan Road onto Fuxingnan Road when he caught a foul odor wafting on the night breeze.

It was Old Port Creek.

The creek ran along Fuxingnan Road, its banks overgrown with vegetation. People say that many years ago it had been a clear stream.

Later, as the channel narrowed and residential wastewater was increasingly piped in its direction, its flow became so polluted that it reeked year-round. Now, pretty much everybody avoided it when they could.

Ying-chieh had heard all that from the adults. As long as he could remember, Old Port Creek had been a big, smelly drainage ditch and had always been called Stinky Ditch.

He never went there if he could avoid it. It was pure torture on his nose.

That made it a place with very few people around during the day and even fewer in the middle of the night, making it the ideal spot for getting up to no good.

A bell suddenly rang out behind him, and someone called, "Hey, Ying-chieh!"

He turned and saw a friend approaching on his bike.

Fang Chih-hua, a fair-skinned boy who seemed like and was in fact a model student, grinned as he panted.

"Knew it was you from your silhouette…Think Ho-tien and Yu-ting are there already?"

"No idea." Knowing Chih-hua had less stamina, Ying-chieh slowed down a little so their bikes could travel side by side. "Anyway, we'll find out when we get there…By the way, you said you were going to hide some treasure at my house."

"Already did, when you weren't looking, somewhere even you won't find it," Chih-hua said with pride. "I'll go dig it up later."

*Dig? So, it's buried…*Ying-chieh didn't want to tell his friend about this accidentally revealed clue. He didn't plan to go looking for it anyway.

Ying-chieh suddenly glanced at the back of Chih-hua's bike. "Weren't you supposed to bring the broom?"

"Ours is plastic. Yu-ting said his family has a bamboo broom he'll bring."

"Hope he doesn't forget it, or this will all be a waste." Thinking of his awkward exit, he couldn't help but complain: "My sister caught me leaving."

"What? It's so late. Why wasn't she asleep?" Chih-hua asked.

"How should I know?" Ying-chieh also wanted to know why she was up in the middle of the night. "She even whined about wanting to come along. No way! We're doing serious stuff here. Can't let some brat come. Having someone else around would be a headache."

Chih-hua smiled. "If you had let her come, I would have given her a ride."

"Come on! I'd never let that crybaby tag along." Ying-chieh said with exaggerated flourish.

"It's fine. She's quiet and cute." Chih-hua had been to the Shao house to play, and his impression of Hsin-hsin was of a sweet, well-behaved girl.

"If you think she's so cute, go ahead and take her – free of charge." Ying-chieh patted his chest with confidence as he steered the bike with one hand.

Chih-hua laughed. "No worries, I already have a sister."

"Right." Ying-chieh said, remembering this.

Chih-hua was in a single-parent household too. By the time Ying-chieh had met him, Chih-hua's parents had been divorced for a long time. His mother had left with his sister, leaving him behind.

Ying-chieh had never met Chih-hua's sister, only heard she lived in Taipei and was about the same age as Hsin-hsin.

"If your sister had stayed in Lukang, she could have played with my sister, and she wouldn't always be trying to tag along," Ying-chieh said, emphasizing the

last phrase.

"Hsiao-hua's nice. She definitely would've gotten along with Hsin-hsin," Chih-hua said with a touch of regret.

Ying-chieh understood Chih-hua missed his mother and sister very much. That's why he studied hard…to try to win awards so he could visit them in Taipei during summer vacation.

Over the course of their chat, the two got closer and closer to the meeting place.

The buildings lining the street had changed from houses to sheet metal factories, their pale green panels, under the interplay of streetlight and shadow, taking on the appearance of steel monsters lying in wait.

In the distance, they saw three bikes parked on the bank of Old Port Creek. Across the back of one lay a bamboo broom.

The three figures standing beside the bikes recognized them and waved.

Ying-chieh and Chih-hua braked and hopped off. They didn't greet their friends, just shouted in unison: "It stinks!"

"Please! You knew it stinks and still made us wait this long. Are you trying to kill us?" Liang Yu-ting, who had the sturdiest build, looked very upset, his wide eyes fierce. "We said three. You're ten minutes late!"

"Big Liang here thought you were going to stand him up," Yuan Ho-tien, Yu-ting's scrawny lackey, said. He always flattered him by calling him "big," indulging his desire to be the boss.

"I didn't mean to. It's not my fault my sister was up so late," Ying-chieh explained. "You chose this place anyway, Yu-ting. It's not like you didn't know how much it stinks."

"Oh, so you're complaining now?" Yu-ting raised his voice, glared even more fiercely, and raised his fist.

"Enough, enough. We wanted a place that stinks so no one would come," Chung Ming-liang piped in. His face was riddled with glistening acne that made his glasses slide down his nose. "That's why Yu-ting chose it. We all agreed, right?"

Agreed? … Yu-ting forced everyone to agree, Ying-chieh silently fumed.

They hung out a lot as a group, but Yu-ting, with his dominating personality backed up by his family's wealth, always ignored everyone when it came time to make decisions.

Chih-hua sensed Ying-chieh's irritation and nudged him with his elbow to keep him from starting a fight.

Since his mother worked at Yu-ting's family's factory, Ying-chieh didn't dare push things too far.

And apart from having a short fuse and acting like he wanted to fight everyone when he got mad, Yu-ting was usually very loyal. He often spent his allowance money buying everyone sodas.

The thought made Ying-chieh's simmering anger cool.

Sensing the tension ease, Ming-liang took the opportunity to remind everyone of the purpose of their outing by asking who would invoke the broom spirit first.

They'd previously agreed that everyone would take turns and that whoever didn't was a wimp.

"Rock-paper-scissors is fast. The four of you play one round, and whoever loses goes first," Yu-ting said, raising his chin.

"Wait, what about you?" Ying-chieh said. "Shouldn't all five of us play?"

"I'm going to hold the incense first. I brought the broom, so it's only fair," Yu-ting said in a matter-of-fact way that left no room for argument.

句號那麼近

ON MY WAY TO THE END

Kurt Lu
盧建彰

- **Category:** Literary Fiction
- **Publisher:** Yuan-Liou
- **Date:** 4/2024
- **Pages:** 344
- **Length:** 117,883 characters (approx. 76,600 words in English)
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Kurt Lu is an author, poet and advertising director whose career accomplishments include stints as creative director at both Ogilvy & Mather and J. Walter Thompson. He is the author of over twenty published works spanning poetry, essays, novels, and marketing tutorials. And he has used current affairs, public issues, and sporting events in his novels – *Library Before the Prosecutors Office: A Troubled Time*, *You Are Sick*, *The Dark Cloud*, and *The Ace of the Bench* – to frame his contemplations on Taiwan's future. *On My Way to the End* is his fourth novel.

A flight-of-fancy road trip across Taiwan taken by the protagonist and his recently departed bestie and dog (which only he can see) wends, as might be expected, between reality and imagination. As in life, exceptional encounters are experienced and absorbed along the way.

This pseudo-autobiographical travelogue follows a protagonist who, while never identified, shares a background similar to the author's. Both are from Tainan, lost their fathers at a young age, have a mother with dementia, and have a best friend named Michael who died on a mountain trek and a recently departed pet dog named Fruit. The underlying premise of this story is: *If I took off on a road trip now with Michael and Fruit, what adventures might we have?*

It is because Michael and Fruit, who died just a few weeks from each other, oddly continue lingering around that the protagonist decides to take them on a road trip. While uncertain of what to expect, he is intently curious about what they'll be discovering together. Along the way, besides interacting with locals such as an indie bookshop proprietor and country doctor, they cross paths with individuals like "Ms. Huang", who can see Michael and they suspect of being a yellow-throated marten in human form, and "Leopard Cat", a beautiful woman who drops by a café looking for someone to jump rope with. With each encounter, the protagonist ponders another facet of life and death.

As the narrative unfolds, we learn his thoughts on life and death spring from awareness he has brain cancer and his decision not to seek treatment. He is making this trip as one last "hurrah" on the way to the "full stop" of his life. But, will this increasingly off-the-rails vacation help or hinder our protagonist's plans to depart this life with no regrets?

Weaving together iconic Taiwan scenery, character, and culture, this highly imaginative travelogue follows a lonely and damaged protagonist through a series of whimsical encounters peppered with nuggets of philosophical insight and wisdom.

ON MY WAY TO THE END

By Kurt Lu
Translated by Petula Parris

> “This is more than just a self-indulgent story about an imagined joy ride the author takes across Taiwan with his recently departed friend Michael and dead dog Fruit. It brings into sharp focus both the author’s “Taiwan curiousness” and his love of travel. The result is a wide-ranging story that spans space and time to capture the fullness of Taiwan in its vivid colors, historical experiences, and social mores. Backed by extensive documentary and site research, Kurt Lu transforms a story about a flight-of-fancy road trip into a deep-dive exploration into Taiwan’s varied topographies and ecologies as well as luminaries past and present. In bringing closure for himself, the author hopes to help lighten the multigenerational unease of his nation.”
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller**

To die is to be strong. But to love, that’s even stronger yet.
– Michael Lin

1

> Coconut palm (*Cocos nucifera*): An evergreen member of the Aceraceae family, with a single, upright trunk free of spines and internal growth rings. Historically a valuable cash crop, it is also popular as an ornamental plant.

“I’ve noticed something, you know? Detective novels always seem to kick off with a death, while in *other* novels, characters always die, or are pretty much ready to snuff it, at the end.”

After divulging this information, I eye Michael, who gives me a slight nod.

Fruit is ensconced in the rear seat of the car. Michael has the front passenger seat. I hold the steering wheel firmly and keep my eyes trained on the road.

The three of us are taking a trip.

The sun is out in full force.

As Fruit stares ahead, the brisk wagging of her tail produces a brushing sound against the leather seat. You might easily mistake that sound for waves crashing over and over, endlessly.

I dial back the sunroof and sunlight streams in, straight onto Fruit’s intent face. The rays of light form a patch of gold on the top of her head, turning the brown fur there white. She looks incredibly wise all of a sudden. If you keep travelling down her forehead to just above her eyes, you’ll find a Cintamani pearl.

The Cintamani pearl crops up in one of Louis Cha’s wuxia novels, *Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils*. There’s a character (he seriously overestimates his martial art skills, by the way) with a small lump on his forehead. In Buddhism, there’s also a deity named after the Cintamani pearl.

(I’m guessing most people won’t know what I’m talking about. But that’s not going to stop me from

talking…)

Sitting beside me, Michael sneaks a grin. Just like before.

Fruit is a canine, with a lumpy growth on her forehead.

We're in no great hurry. The road unfurls ahead of us and the blue ocean to our right plays a game of peekaboo as I navigate each turn. Whenever the ocean ducks out of sight, everything turns completely green. It's the mountains.

This stretch of our journey is all blues and greens, a stark contrast to Taipei at this time of year.

Michael has a smile on his face. The sun probably teased it out of him, I tell myself.

I'm not the slightest bit tired. I need to stay focused on my driving, for sure, but I'm also enjoying hanging out with my two companions. Then there's good old Miles Davis, with his brassy jazz melodies providing the perfect accompaniment to a gloriously sunny day.

As white road markings slip away silently behind us, the green mountains forge on in front, bulging like a quilt on a bed. Smooth and inviting.

When I pull into the ocean-facing car park, the emerald blue sea and sky take up the entire expanse of my windscreen. This would be such a romantic place for a date.

In the parking spot in front of me, a woman (I reckon she's in her sixties) stands with a wide stance, cellphone in hand. She appears to be taking a photo of her friends. The view is, without a doubt, picture-worthy. The problem is, she seems to have neglected the fact she's standing in the middle of a parking space, which is not a particularly safe spot for taking photos.

I bring the car to a halt with the nose only about a third of the way in. My rear end is hanging outside the grid line, exposed. I'm left with little choice but to wait.

With my hands still on the wheel, I study the blue strata in front of me. Then, my neck slightly stiff, I slowly turn my head to one side.

"Are you done yet?!" a voice booms, making me jump in my seat. Fruit also springs to attention in the back seat and looks fearful.

It then dawns on me that the voice is coming from right beside me.

It's Michael.

Michael is hollering through the car window. His expression belies a man of high morals, although it's also possible he's just angry… The woman, apparently blissfully unaware of anyone else's feelings on the matter, has occupied the parking space for nearly a minute already.

Outside the window, said woman is still glued to her phone. She doesn't seem to have heard a thing. In a rush to roll the window down, Michael fails to locate the right button, which sends his fingers flailing over the entire door in a desperate search. All in all, it's a pretty chaotic scene.

"Don't worry! I'll handle it," I say, raising my right hand to calm him. Behind me, Fruit responds with a "Mmm…," seemingly also in an attempt to soothe Michael.

"Don't fret, Fruit, let me go speak to her." I reach back to give Fruit's head a gentle stroke, but my hand touches a waiting tongue. Not really in a mood to be licked, I retract my hand hastily.

As he watches this, Michael cracks a grin and nods toward the dog.

I figure I'd best get out and confront the woman before Michael does.

I undo my seatbelt and push the door open, all the while pondering what I should say to her. How would "Excuse me! Could you hurry up with your photo?" sound? Or would, "Sorry, I need to park. Do you mind moving?" be better? I simply can't decide which would be more appropriate…. I guess there's another one that might do the trick, "Hey! Are you blind or something? Get out of my way!"

If I did go for the latter, I'd probably elicit the same response as Michael would.

I shake my head and keep walking.

Looking back, I see Michael's stern stare through the windscreen. I give him a wave.

Even when I'm standing right beside her, the woman's attention to her phone doesn't waver. I see that the faces on the screen are largely obscured by messy blasts of hair blown in all directions. That said, I can still just about make out their ages. Again, around sixty-something. So, I guess I should call them "Elder Sisters…"?

I take a step forward, say a few words to the woman,

and they all walk off. Just like that.

Feeling triumphant, I return to the car, nudge it into Drive, and complete my journey into the parking space.

"What did you say to her?" Michael asks impatiently.

"I said, 'Could you guys show a little more common decency? How about considering the rights of others when you're taking up parking spots?"

Michael nods his approval and smirks.

Or, should I say, this is my imagined version of events…

Now. Please allow me to reach back and stroke my dog's head for a second. Then, I'll tell you what *really* transpired.

*

Looking back, I see Michael's stern stare through the windscreen. I give him a wave.

Even when I'm standing right beside her, the woman's attention to her phone doesn't waver. I see that the faces on the screen are largely obscured by messy blasts of hair blown in all directions. That said, I can still just about make out their ages. Again, around sixty-something. So, I guess I should call them "Elder Sisters…"?

Having finally detected my presence, the woman turns to look at me.

"Elder Sister… Do you need some help taking your photo? I can take a hundred for you if you'd like, or maybe you need a thousand? Oh yes, and would you be interested in joining my online investment group? It's a LINE group. I'll just need to take your account details."

Feeling no shame whatsoever, I contort my face into a smile. I must look like a freak. Luckily, I'm standing with my back to Michael, so he can't see.

The woman stares at me with disgust and mutters "psycho" under her breath. She grabs her two friends with the hair-devoured faces, and they stride off together.

"Sorry? Did you say your LINE ID is 'Psycho'?" I take another step toward them, which sends them scurrying.

I glance back at Michael and Fruit and flick a peace sign at them.

A line of sturdy, towering coconut trees stands before me, so erect they appear to be holding up the sky. No, let me rephrase that…. What's really happening is that they are pushing against the blue ocean, and parting it, so as to *form* the blue sky.

Magnificent. Like a picture on a postcard.

No wonder that lady wanted to take a photo here.

*

To one side of the trees is what appears to be a hotel. I've already lost track of how many days we've been travelling, but the weather today is splendid. A spotless blue sky. The blue ocean. A perfect place to spend the night.

Michael passed away at the end of September last year.

Fruit left the world in late December.

Was this supposed to signal a change of season?

My happiness, it seems, was also displaced by this seasonal transition.

But displaced by what exactly?

2

Gray-faced buzzard (*Butastur indicus*): A medium-sized raptor measuring 41-48 centimeters in length. Featuring a distinct central throat stripe, dark brown plumage, a black beak, white supercilium, yellow eyes, grayish cheeks, and tightly spaced, dark brown barring on its breast and abdomen.

Was it sorrow? Or loneliness?

Or both?

I ponder this question as I watch the waves froth.

In Chinese, "pass away" and "be born" are both written as two characters.

No, actually, they can each be expressed using just *one* character.

Birth, shēng, 生 .

Death, sǐ, 死

*

My first-floor room is the only one left. Just like me.

Room 110 comes with an impressive floor-to-ceiling window, outside of which is a small, private garden adorned with a few rocking chairs on a jadeite green lawn. Beyond this lies the sandy beach.

An unfettered ocean view.

I plonk my luggage down and push open the enormous window through which the call of the ocean sails in to greet me. Unable to resist, I head straight outside and take my place on a rocking chair. I sit facing the sea with my legs outstretched. Swaying back and forth, I imagine I'm sitting on a swing atop the waves. I toss away everything for good.

Then, I spy a green blob on the beach.

Could it be the People's Liberation Army? My head whips around to look at Michael. "Look! What the heck are we supposed to do now?" I blurt out.

For a second, I completely forget Michael is my senior.

All island residents know full well that China's military, the People's Liberation Army, might show up at any time. But not everyone will get to witness their arrival. I certainly never expected to, especially not while simply minding my own business, gazing out at sea…

(That said, the odds of spotting the PLA while staring out to sea are obviously higher than when not because, presumably, that's how they'll travel over from their side.)

If I'd known this, I would have made a point of looking at the mountains instead. What mountains are around here, anyway? Is it the Shizi Mountain range?

While still deep in thought, Michael gets up and yells, "Look! Let's go fight him!" In just a couple of strides, he's already left the grass and is sprinting down the beach. You'd never guess he was already in his seventies.

For some reason (I'm not entirely sure why), Michael's movements gradually lose momentum until he's running in slow motion. While I can tell he's pumping his thighs with all his might, his progression is painfully slow. A live recording of Mal Waldron's "Searching in Grenoble" 1978 solo piano concert becomes his soundtrack in the moment. Jazz progressions scatter down around me. Some parts sound like a flurry of mistaken notes, while others are played with the utmost care and precision. Surely, wouldn't anyone listening be moved to tears?

Beneath Michael's orange shorts, I can clearly make out the contours of the muscles in his bare legs as he kicks up a bluster of sandy dust.

Fruit is not far behind, with her little legs, sleek brown torso, and tail held high. On the tip of her tail is a pinch of white fur.

*

Just as Fruit leaps down from the rocking chair, I feel a sudden tremor closely followed by a loud muffled noise in the distance. Cannon fire?

My mind drifts back to the famous Hakka singer I met a while ago who liked to boast about being a master marksman during his army service days.

"The first time I took a shot, I got clipped on my head," he told me.

"What do you mean?"

Breaking into a smile, the man explained, "After I missed that first shot, my company commander told me to aim again while he watched. As I was trying to aim, he whacked the back of my head, all the while cussing me out. 'I knew it!' he screamed at me. 'Who taught you to do it like that?! You have to take your specs off first, so you can get your eye right up close.' It's like this. Look!"

The singer popped off his frameless glasses and curled his right hand into a cylindrical shape. He held it up to one of his eyes to show me.

As I watched him, I couldn't help wondering if any of his fans had seen him perform this particular party trick…

秀梅
SIŬ-MOI

photo © Vincent Sang_Mirror Fiction

Chang Chih-Hsin
張郅忻

- **Category:** Literary Fiction
- **Publisher:** Yuan-Liou
- **Date:** 10/2024
- **Pages:** 336
- **Length:** 117,000 characters (approx. 76,000 words in English)
- **Full English Manuscript Available**
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Born in 1982 and currently residing in Taoyuan in northern Taiwan, Chang Chih-Hsin is a seasoned writer of narrative reportage, reflective essays, and stories couched in family history. She has published several essay collections, including *Away from Home and Back: My United Family, The Ocean I Carry*, and *The Child in Me*, and four novels, two of which, *Weave* and *Siŭ-Moi*, were Taiwan Literature Award (TLA) for Books finalists and one of which, *Mountain Mirrors*, is a 2024 TLA for Books award-winner.

Born into an impoverished family, Siŭ-Moi interprets her fate through the lens of a lifetime spent in different kitchens and, in twenty-one dishes, shares stories of her misfortunes, attachments, affections, and notable life experiences.

Regret over her disinterest as a young girl in her grandmother Siŭ-Moi's tales of her own difficult and capricious life inspires Chang Chih-Hsin three decades later to sift through and revisit her remembrances of these stories and then weave them into an "inspired by true events" novel. *Siŭ-Moi*, a loving tribute and belated "sorry" to her grandmother, opens an emotion-filled window into the world experienced by many women born into poverty and hardship in early twentieth-century Taiwan.

Centered around the various kitchens she'd worked in, the narrative shares important memories and relationships in the life of protagonist Siŭ-Moi in parallel with twenty-one meaningful dishes. The first of these, delicious chicken soup made in her adoptive family's threadbare kitchen, frames memories of her ill mum and wartime scarcity and marks the start of a lifetime of cooking.

To escape a marriage arranged by her adoptive father, Siŭ-Moi returns to her birth family at sixteen and learns to pickle vegetables and prepare complicated dishes. Two years later, she is married and responsible to care for her parents-in-law and her husband's siblings as well. Then, after her husband takes work overseas, she continues cooking three daily meals for her extended family while caring for her young children. Even after her kids marry and she has daughters-in-law to make her meals, she continues to cook as an expression of love.

This saga spotlights the unjust treatment of women in traditional society. Siŭ-Moi, unschooled and constrained by contemporary social mores, can only select from the choices given her. While imperfect, her determination and goodness bring wisdom. Her loving devotion to home and family mirrors the experience of many women in real life. Siŭ-Moi's path in life helped create what we are today and help frame tomorrow's possibilities.

SIŬ-MOI

By Chang Chih-Hsin
Translated by Jenna Tang

> *Siŭ-Moi* weaves the life story of a Hakka woman of the same name around twenty-one meaningful dishes. While the narrative centers on the toil and struggles experienced by many women in traditional Taiwan society, its underlying message celebrates the kitchen, the traditional "realm" of women in the household, as a vital source of self-discovery and renewal. Aphorisms such as meals being "a fixture of everyday life" and full stomachs being essential to happiness, provide context for both the plight and redemption of characters in this story. Interestingly, one of the twenty-one dishes at the center of this tale isn't a "dish" at all, but an ingenious twist readers must discover for themselves.
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller**

Kitchen at the Hilltop

"Hurry up! Boil some water!" A-Ba bellowed.

The hen, splayed on the ground, struggled for its last bit of life, and Siŭ-Moi finally loosened her grip. Blood continued streaming out from the hen's neck into a bowl on the floor.

Siŭ-Moi, her hands splattered with feathers and bloodstains, ran to the kitchen to fetch a wooden ladle behind the brick stove and scooped water to rinse her hands. The main brick stove with a long chimney attached to its top stood at the center of the kitchen. With a thin, long wooden stick, Siŭ-Moi stirred the cluster of ashes in the stove, letting the wood chips rekindle the remaining sparks before throwing a few new pieces of firewood in.

Gripping the wooden ladle with both hands, she scooped up water and poured it into the iron pot on the stove until it was three-quarters full, then squatted in front of the burning firewood. The smog that came to her nose made her cough.

"Are you done?" A-Ba's voice echoed from outside the house.

"Almost!" Siŭ-Moi immediately responded.

The iron pot began to bubble up – it was finally boiling. A-Ba, noticeably impatient, gripped the hen's neck and dashed into the kitchen, tossing the hen directly into the boiling water. The once puffy, beautiful feathers became a mess in the hot water, emitting a horrible smell. Siŭ-Moi almost retched.

She wasn't sure whether A-Ba was right about chicken-slaughtering. The kitchen had been A-Mei's territory, and Siŭ-Moi had just been the one helping with trivial tasks, washing vegetables, picking out stems, and tending the fire in the stove. Her A-Mei would hum and sing while cooking, and then set aside

a small portion of freshly made food for Siŭ-Moi to taste.

They waited for the water to cool down, then A-Ba pulled the chicken out from the pot and placed it in an iron basin, starting to pluck the feathers. Holding back her discomfort, Siŭ-Moi joined him. Feathers began to pile up on the floor like a spread of dirty, tawny tablecloth. It was hard to imagine that pile had been a hopping, energetic hen not so long ago.

The naked hen was splayed across a heavy, wooden cutting board. Raising a kitchen knife, A-Ba split its belly, took out its organs, and chopped off its head, wings, and legs. He then sliced the belly into halves and then chopped those into chunks. Swiftly, A-Ba placed the soup pot on the stove and tossed the chicken chunks in, boiled it for a few minutes, scooped up the floating foam, tossed a few slices of aged ginger into the soup, and then sprinkled the broth with salt. The pungent smell was immediately covered by the scent of ginger. A-Ba poured some of the chicken soup into a bowl, blew across its surface a few times and took it into the bedroom.

The sun began to set, making the dark room even darker.

A-Mei was lying face-up on the bed. Strands of gray hair splayed on her pillow. Since Siŭ-Moi's first days in this house, A-Mei had asked her to pluck her gray hairs. Back then, those strands were well hidden under her dark hair, and it would always take Siŭ-Moi quite a while to find a few. But after a year or two, gray began covering her dark hair in increasingly large patches, and A-Mei's face toughened up like a tree bark, which made strangers mistakenly think that they were looking at an elderly A-Pó rather than a woman in middle-age.

A-Ba approached A-Mei's bed and called her in a tone of gentleness rare for him: "Gŭi-Mŏi! Have some chicken soup." A-Mei didn't budge, so A-Ba called her again, yet A-Mei's eyes remained tightly shut. A-Ba sat by the edge of the bed and caressed A-Mei's face. Getting no reaction, he tremblingly placed his hand under A-Mei's nose, the bowl of chicken soup spilled over. Just as Siŭ-Moi was about to take the bowl from him, the bowl slipped from A-Ba's hand, fell to the ground, and shattered on the floor, leaving pieces of chicken scattered everywhere. A-Ba covered his face with his hands and began to whimper.

Siŭ-Moi spaced out for a few seconds, then came up close, reached out her tiny hand and placed it on her A-Mei's hand, which had the feel of a hollow branch. It was cold, without a sliver of warmth left.

A-Ba wiped away his tears and tucked A-Mei properly into the quilt. Slowly, he ran his hand over her face, combing away the strands of hair that had fallen over her forehead. He turned to Siŭ-Moi: "Your Mei's gone. She's not having chicken soup. It's going to waste." A-Ba stepped over the splinters and left the room, leaving the space looking ever more shattered.

Siŭ-Moi stepped closer to her A-Mei. As always, she once again placed her head against A-Mei's chest, listening for a heartbeat that was no longer. A-Mei just couldn't bear to let Ren-Chih go, Siŭ-Moi thought to herself. She has left so quickly to see him on the other side of the world. Siŭ-Moi's tears began to stream down her face but wasn't sure if it was because she was sad to let her A-Mei go or because she resented how her A-Mei had abandoned her, her A-Ba, her second brother, and her third brother.

"Siŭ-Moi!" A-Ba was calling her again. She had to leave her A-Mei and head to the living room. She watched A-Ba take the pot of chicken soup, place it on a square table, and scoop two fresh bowls – one for Siŭ-Moi, and one for himself.

Siŭ-Moi lowered her head, unsure if she should start eating. She looked at her A-Ba, who proceeded to take a chicken leg from his bowl and take a huge bite. He saw Siŭ-Moi in a daze and said: "Quick, dig in. It's getting cold." Siŭ-Moi finally picked up a piece of breast meat and shoved it to her mouth. As she chewed, a strange feeling began to take over – she could still feel the hen's vigorous struggles in her hands during its last moment of life.

She emptied her bowl and, this time, her A-Ba scooped another bowl for her, surprisingly adding a chicken leg. That was the first time she'd ever eaten a chicken leg, which she found, different from dry breast meat and bony chicken wings, to be juicy and full of texture.

After downing around bowls in a row, Siŭ-Moi couldn't eat anymore. She was covered in sweat. A-Ba

had made this pot of chicken soup for A-Mei but, when it was ready, A-Mei wasn't able to eat it.

A-Ba spread out a straw mat in the living room and then changed A-Mei into a set of fresh clothes. He carried A-Mei in his arms and placed her gently on the mat. It was surrounded by a mosquito net, and incense was burning in the pot.

Then, both went to sit outside the house, and A-Ba lit a cigarette. Incense wafting from inside the house intermingled with the acrid smell of the cigarette burning between A-Ba's fingers. Siŭ-Moi looked up at the moon goddess. It loomed big and round under the darkness of night, just like it was on that day.

Chapter 1: Snowflake Rice

Back in that day, Siŭ-Moi was sitting on the threshold, gazing at the moon above head. She clasped her hands, and sent up a small prayer: "Please protect my A-Mei and let her recover soon." A-Mei wasn't her biological mother. When she was five, Siŭ-Moi had left her real parents and was taken into her current family by her A-Ba.

"Gŭi-Mŏi, I just took the little kid back home."

Siŭ-Moi stepped into a house completely foreign to her. She traversed the living room and larder before finally reaching the kitchen. There was a woman standing in front of a large brick stove. Steam and smoke hung in the air, and a distinct fragrance tickled her olfactories. After half a day of walking mountainous roads, Siŭ-Moi's stomach began to growl.

"Come here!"

Siŭ-Moi approached the skinny woman. Her face was thin and long, and her body was skinny as a bamboo pole. Her face blossomed into a smile as she asked, "How old are you?"

"Five!" Siŭ-Moi stretched out her five short fingers.

"What would you like to eat?"

"Anything!" Siŭ-Moi liked everything. She felt lucky whenever she had a chance to eat.

The woman slid a pan-fried egg into a pottery bowl with a hot spatula and sprinkled soy sauce on top of it. She brought the bowl to Siŭ-Moi and reminded her: "Be careful, it's hot."

Siŭ-Moi lifted the bowl with her two little hands and gazed hungrily upon the slightly singed, crispy edges of the egg white and half-cooked egg yolk. She took a pair of chopsticks and poked them into the yolk, sending it streaming out from the center. Siŭ-Moi took a bite. The burnt fragrance from the edge of the egg and the yolk-slathered egg white, coalesced into a crispy, savory treat on the palate.

"Is it good?"

"So delicious. Thank you, Auntie."

"What Auntie? You should call me your A-Mei."

Siŭ-Moi lifted her head and stared at the skinny woman, then quietly called: "A-Mei."

"I don't have any daughters, and now you're going to be mine!"

From that day forward, Siŭ-Moi constantly followed her A-Mei, like a chick following a hen. When A-Mei headed to the creek to wash clothes, Siŭ-Moi would carry the basket and follow her; in the family garden, Siŭ-Moi would help with the weeding; when A-Mei started cooking, Siŭ-Moi would instinctively begin washing the vegetables and picking out stems.

Siŭ-Moi's favorite time of the day was after dinner, when she would chill on a little stool outside the house with her A-Mei.

"Come over here." A-Mei commanded.

Obediently, Siŭ-Moi climbed onto her A-Mei's lap. A-Mei was awfully skinny. The bones on her lap felt like bamboo joints and were uncomfortable to sit on. Even so, Siŭ-Moi loved being hugged by her A-Mei, albeit briefly out of a fear she'd crush those brittle joints.

A-Mei's health was deteriorating. Sometimes, after cooking for a while, she had to sit down and pause for some time before standing up again. A-Ba asked a doctor from down in the valley to make a house call, but the doctor just shook his head, saying, "Liver disease…we can't do much about it." Siŭ-Moi's tears streamed down from her face as she eavesdropped. Even though A-Mei was not her real mother, she treated her like she was her real daughter. Every time the brothers mistreated her, her A-Mei would appear immediately and punish them. Like a hen protecting

her little chick, she'd let Siŭ-Moi hide behind her. It was hard for Siŭ-Moi to imagine a world without her A-Mei. All she could do was to pray in earnest to the moon goddess.

Siŭ-Moi suddenly became aware of lights glowing and flickering on the opposite side of the mountain.

Those flickering flames couldn't be the beginnings of wildfire, as they were moving in a seemingly purposeful manner, inching their way toward her side of the mountain. Is that ghost fire? Siŭ-Moi was terrified, suddenly remembering a ghost story Ren-Chih, the eldest brother, had told her.

"Siŭ-Moi, do you know about Tiger Aunt?" She shook her head, only to see Ren-Chih sneering: "Then you'll hear the story from me. There's a tiger monster living higher up these mountains called Tiger Aunt." Seeing fear grow on Siŭ-Moi's face, he raised his hands in imitation of a tiger stretching out its claws and howled: "The Tiger Aunt would turn herself into a human, and she looooves eating children like you."

Siŭ-Moi's round little face immediately turned pale, and was so scared that she even peed a bit into her trousers. After shooting her a glare of disgust, Ren-Chih cheerfully whistled and departed in self-satisfied triumph. Looking at the back of her eldest brother, Siŭ-Moi clenched her fists, grit her teeth, and thought: Oh yeah?? … Being swallowed by Tiger Aunt is still better than marrying someone like you.

Was Tiger Aunt really coming to get her?

Those faraway flames had now grown to the size of a round plate. Siŭ-Moi was so terrified that she started trembling. She didn't want to be eaten. Scrambling and rolling back into the house, she yelled out: "A-Ba, A-Mei! Tiger Aunt is here!" A-Ba, barefoot and drowsy, emerged from his room almost immediately and launched into a scathing scolding: "Screw your Mei! What's all this fuss about?"

Siŭ-Moi, scared speechless, pulled at her A-Ba's shirt and pointed outside. His anger still at full boil, A-Ba walked to the side of the gate and looked out. The flames were still on their slow approach. Initially sparkling like stars in the sky, they were now the size of half-moons. Their light lit up Siŭ-Moi's frightened pupils. A-Ba rubbed his eyes to confirm he wasn't still dreaming. The flames were moving further up toward their house from halfway up the mountainside. Very quickly, A-Ba woke Ren-Chih and then grabbed an iron rake and bamboo broom from the storage room. Father and son, now each with a weapon in hand, took up defensive positions astride their home's main door like a pair of Door Gods. Siŭ-Moi hid inside the doorway, her tiny body overcast by the shadow of her A-Ba. She felt reassured – Even if Tiger Aunt shows up, she may be scared away by A-Ba's iron rake.

After another half hour, what ultimately emerged from the trail wasn't Tiger Aunt and her bloody mouth but, instead, was a solitary soldier in Japanese military uniform. A-Ba dropped his iron rake and ran toward the man. Ren-Chih and Siŭ-Moi followed closely behind.

The soldier, wearing a pair of round, dark-framed glasses, straightened his back. Behind the clear lenses, his eyes were sharply defined in black and white. Although he looked to be about Ren-Chih's age, his eyes reflected a distinct hint of world-weariness. He looked haggard and exhausted. If it were not for his military uniform, the soldier, already shorter than A-Ba, might have looked tinier still. His appearance was nothing in comparison to their expected Tiger Aunt.

Half a head taller than the soldier, A-Ba bent down at his waist and listened to what the young soldier had to say. He spoke Japanese and Siŭ-Moi did her best to catch what he was saying. She knew that 寝る meant sleeping; ご飯 meant snowflake rice. What's this about sleeping and snowflake rice? Siŭ-Moi didn't understand a thing. She had never attended school and spoke only Hakka. When she had the chance to go to school, she would finally be able to learn more Japanese. Siŭ-Moi looked expectantly at her A-Ba, hoping to get answers from him. However, all her A-Ba did was keep bowing, pointing at the storage room where they stored tea leaves, and repeated over and over again: "はい！はい！" The soldier nodded and returned to his troop. A-Ba bent over to Siŭ-Moi and said: "Go clean the floor in the storage room. They will spend the night here."

憶，茶時

SOMEWHERE IN TEA

Xuan Jun
絢君

- **Category:** Heartwarming
- **Publisher:** Ever Glory
- **Date:** 10/2022
- **Pages:** 400
- **Length:** 205,918 characters (approx. 133,800 words in English)
- **Full English Manuscript Available**
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
- **Rights sold:** Russian (Eksmo)

Web fiction author Xuan Jun has won a substantial popular following for her works in the young adult romance genre that tackle serious topics with an appropriate dose of humor and whimsy. Works in her recent literary catalogue include *Life is Like a Sunset after Rain*, *Somewhere in Tea*, and *Bloom in the Crack*.

A multigenerational teashop in Taipei has teas able to evoke as well as bury memories. A university student's chance visit not only changes her life but also helps her realize the tea-drinking experience echoes the complexity of memories and that true understanding blooms only from experience.

Soon after remaking the acquaintance of Mr. Wu at her grandfather's funeral, still-grieving university student Cheng Ai finds her way to Mr. Wu's teashop in Taipei's old Dadaocheng Quarter. Not long after, she moves back to her family's old home in the district and begins helping out in Mr. Wu's shop.

The secret of memory manipulation, passed down through the Wu family for generations, allows Mr. Wu to preserve memories for his customers in his shop's tea leaves as well as wipe clean those they wish forgotten. When Cheng Ai drinks tea brewed by Mr. Wu, long-forgotten memories of her grandfather resurface in her mind. She also sometimes glimpses further back in time to "see" events from long before she was even born. The customers Cheng Ai meets while working in Wu's tea shop include both those with a passion for good tea and those wanting to tinker with remembrances in one way or another.

After the romance budding between Cheng Ai and her similarly aged colleague Shen Yi stumbles, she comes to realize that the fuzziness clouding her childhood memories has something to do with Shen Yi's own past. Should she try to get to the bottom of it all? And…if she does, how might what she finds affect their chances for a future together?

Author Xuan Jun thoroughly researched Taiwan's traditional tea industry before weaving this sumptuously imaginative tale of local tea culture, palpitating romance, and the estimable journey of individuals dedicated to their craft. Those who enjoy ducking into culture-steeped alleyways in search of quaint shops and memorable stories are sure to find comfort in Dadaocheng's tea-aroma-steeped embrace.

SOMEWHERE IN TEA

By Xuan Jun
Translated by Sahana Narayan

> Smell and taste, two senses deeply entwined with memory, are taken to their extreme in the teas served up in *Somewhere in Tea*, a novel in which tea leaves are magical storehouses for memories that people wish to either safeguard or forget. The protagonist stumbles into the prospect of a budding romance when she starts helping out in a small Taipei tea shop. While speculating over his feelings for her and pondering their interconnectedness, she deals with the everyday issues of shop operations and learns more about how tea, memories, and emotions are made. The complex, bittersweet flavors in this story leave an enticing aftertaste – much like a cup of good tea.
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller**

Prologue

It was a busy morning in Dadaocheng. Sunlight swept through the mulberry trees and down the sidewalk. Teresa Teng's "All I Care About is You" was playing on an old radio as workers emerged from a tea shop with baskets of freshly roasted tea, setting them in the courtyard to cool. The smell of tea sauntered through the alleyways. Two old men with white hair entered the courtyard. One, standing stick-straight in a suit, smiled: "Now I remember where I put my old master's scissors! It's all thanks to your tea. Thank you so much, Wen-Kuei."

Wen-Kuei smiled at his friend and said, "It was nothing! You were just talking about your old master; of course you remembered where you put his gift. Anyways, how was the tea? Did you enjoy it?"

"The taste isn't important – you've even somehow managed to capture the way my old master used to chew me out! Were you trying to frighten me to death?"

The two men chuckled heartily. Suddenly, they heard a voice, singing along to that song on the radio. They listened in, their conversation forgotten. The man in the suit glowed with happiness as he recognized the singer. "That's my granddaughter! She's always singing. Maybe she'll be a singer when she grows up."

His granddaughter, sitting on the stone steps outside the door across the street, was singing with muddled words and unshakeable conviction. Though her tender singing was not as sweet as that of a songbird, it was enough to stir the curiosity of the tea shop workers nearby. They temporarily abandoned their baskets of cooling tea and circled around to the backyard to watch the young girl with pigtails sing, unable to contain their smiles. "Ai-ioh! So young to be listening to such old songs! You sing so loudly, but do you know what the lyrics mean?"

The girl puffed up her cheeks and bobbed her head. She said solemnly: "It's about love, right? My A-Ma told me!"

The workers burst into laughter. They copied her

tone, singing along with her. She broke out into a big smile too, revealing the big gap in her teeth. Wen-Kuei watched over them, a smile tugging at his lips. He told the girl: "Remember this happiness. One day, when you're all grown up, you might forget."

In that moment, time froze. The streets of Dadaocheng stayed busy, shopkeepers shouted along Chongqing North Road, and cars rumbled over Taipei Bridge in the distance. But the sunlight on the leaves, the laughter brushing her ear, and that soft scent of green tea in the air slipped quietly into memory.

She will never forget.

Part One: In This City I Found You, Lost

Chapter One: The Tea-Scented Alley

"Namo avalokiteshvara…"

"Our dearly beloved patriarch Cheng Chung-Wu departed this realm on the third of April, 2021. He spent his life dedicated to the humble profession of suit-making. With open arms, he always supported his children and his grandchildren…"

"A-Kong, safe travels!"

"A-Kong—!"

The funeral passed in flashes, like scenes from a film. The dead had passed; it was now up to the living to carry their memory forward. Cheng Ai was sitting on the rattan chair on the stoop, her mourning clothes removed, staring at the empty living room. The furniture had all been pushed into a pile next to the entrance, and no one had bothered to put it back. A-Kong's photo was atop a cabinet, freshly placed. She'd been crying too long and had forgotten the meaning of grief. All she knew was that there was a hole in her heart that would never be filled.

"Cheng Ai, why are you sitting there?"

She looked up and saw an old man dressed in a sharp-looking suit. His cufflinks were polished and shiny and he was carrying a cane. He looked to be over eighty. A wrinkled face crinkled into a gentle smile. He asked: "Do you still remember me?"

Cheng Ai shook her head. She was never good at remembering family members or, for that matter, elders in general. She used to rely on A-Kong and A-Ma to remind her. But now, A-Kong had passed and A-Ma couldn't remember much. Without them, she was lost. She could not place the old man in front of her at all. However, she knew he was important: her father and uncles cried when he showed up at the public memorial service, calling him "Uncle". Even her A-Ma in her dementia recognized him in the blink of an eye, her eyes filling with tears. Cheng Ai had no choice but to come clean. She said, with some shame: "I'm sorry. I don't remember."

"It's been so many years, of course you've forgotten!" he said with an unbothered smile. "My name is Wu Wen-Kuei. Your A-Kong's tailor shop was across from my tea shop, and you often played there as a child!"

"Really? I'm so sorry I forgot, how could I forget?…" she said over and over, unable to contain her embarrassment.

Wu Wen-Kuei nodded. "It's fine…. It's been so long. It's inevitable that you'd forget." Then, almost as if to himself, he added "I know your father and your uncles must be very upset, so I decided to spend some extra time with them. And I wanted to give my old friend a proper send-off. How about you? Why sit outside? Why don't you go in?"

Cheng Ai gently smoothed the pockmarked rattan chair, lost in thought. "The same reason as you, I guess."

The chair was filled with holes, each a fragile memory; each leading to a distinct memory of her coming back from school and of her A-Kong chatting with the neighbors, waiting for her in that very chair, listening for her tiny footsteps and her cry of "A-Kong!" at which his eyes would invariably crinkle into a benevolent smile.

Now all that remained were holes.

Cheng Ai got up and pulled up a chair for herself, making space for Wu Wen-Kuei to sit. But he just stood there. His reddened eyes glistened with tears. He took a deep breath, pressed out a smile, and patted her lightly on her shoulders. His voice gentle, he said, "I'm so sorry to hear about your A-Kong. If you'd like, next time you come to Dadaocheng, I'll treat you to your

A-Kong's favorite tea, and share some of his old stories with you."

Cheng Ai met his gaze. She had expected to find in his eyes the worldly tranquility of a life long-lived, but instead saw unwavering grief for the passing of a lifelong friend tinged with the same gentleness as she had known in her A-Kong.

She nodded, trying to raise the corners of her mouth. "Sure, I'll visit. Thank you."

Outside, the funeral company had started taking down their tent. A few scooters drove by on the road, which had been blocked all morning, their drivers passing by without a sideways glance. The service had ended, and the days would again return to their usual rhythm.

And yet, some things would never return.

*

"The plum rains are here! Today's stationary front is expected to bring strong rains nationwide. Remember to bring an umbrella with you…"

The local weather report blared from the noodle place on the corner. Cheng Ai checked her bag. Had she brought her umbrella? She looked out at the busy street, then turned her head toward the overcast sky. She should probably head home early to Taoyuan, before the rains trapped her in Dadaocheng.

"Mèi-mèi, how about a bowl of hot noodle soup?"

The owner, a middle-aged lady, beamed at her. She wore an apron over her clothes. Inside the stall, Cheng Ai could see customers blowing on the white mist rising from their thick spoons. She was sorely tempted, but decided to move on, speaking hurriedly: "Sorry, I have to go. Best of luck!"

"Thanks. Are you a tourist? Where are you off to?"

Cheng Ai glanced at her clothes and, with her phone out and on full "navigation mode", she was the very picture of a tourist. The only thing missing was a pamphlet from the visitor information center clutched in her hand. She smiled wryly. "I'm visiting my old home. It's near Chongqing North Road."

"Ahh, okay! Go straight until you hit Minsheng West Road. Turn right and keep walking until you see the road sign," the owner replied enthusiastically. Cheng Ai thanked her, then stepped out from under the shop's awning. She took notice of the aroma of incense pouring out from the Taipei Xia-Hai City God Temple sandwiched in amongst the complex of smells of dry goods and street food. *So this is Dadaocheng*, she thought to herself.

Outside of Yongle Market, she saw a busker playing the erhu. She didn't know the name of the song, but it had a vibe that sent her thoughts drifting into the past. Exquisitely made-up girls sauntered by in Converse shoes and qipao, chattering excitedly to each other, wondering out loud what camera angle might make their legs look longer in photos.

The gaps in the stone brick road seemed to lead back in time. She started to wonder…*Had she been transported back to the Japanese Colonial Era*?

Finally, following the directions on her phone, she wound her way through the bustle of Dihua Street. As the blue dot on her phone showed her drawing closer and closer to her destination, she noticed the review at the top of her map: "Beautiful places like this seem to be found only when one is lost."

Young shop attendants hawked wares along the old streets. She even saw an old man standing next to an electric pole, a cigarette dangling in his mouth, his polo shirt caked in sweat. Did he know his cigarette was unlit?

Her phone clutched tightly in her hand, Cheng Ai's thoughts spread like smoke, trying to recall the warmth of her childhood memories. But no matter how she tried, she couldn't remember a single thing.

She noticed the twisting alleyway ahead. On one side was a small park filled with children, playing and cutting in line for the swings, fighting without end; that is, until their parents, waiting in the wings, finally intervened and told their children to "go home already."

When she was young, did her A-Kong and A-Ma do the same for her? She suddenly felt exposed. Why did she need a phone to find her childhood home? How pitiful was that? She hastened through the maze

of alleys, her feet moving anxiously as if eager to escape her inner shame.

Soon, she made it to the road sign for Chongqing North Road, Section 2. The road was broad and teeming with cars. High-rises lined both sides. She suddenly felt like she'd lost her way but, according to her phone, she wasn't far. She turned left, followed another covered sidewalk past many new buildings. It was then she saw the sign for "Wu Ji Tea Shop" glinting before her eyes.

She stopped and looked. The solemn, ancient-looking brick building stood out from the busy corner, its faded facade and peeling shop signs out of place amongst the fresh new buildings that surrounded it. As Cheng Ai entered, she noticed a phrase in small print on the tea shop's signboard: "In the midst of this vast city, I came across you."

Here she was. Why had she come again? For some reason, she felt it right to trust that old man, stranger though he was. Maybe hearing him say "A-Kong" had softened her heart. She wanted to remember her A-Kong as best she could, even if it was through a cup of tea. Perhaps its sweet scent might coax the return of years gone by.

She peered through the glass door like a lost traveler. It was a typical weekday: midday, no sign of customers. Wu Wen-Kuei sat at the counter, arms wrapped around his chest, taking a nap.

Should she enter? She didn't want to bother him. She wavered and then turned her head toward a metal door by the alleyway, shut tight – her old home. She tried to recall anything, any memory of the place. It was originally a tailor's shop, the domain of master tailor Cheng Chung-Wu, her A-Kong. What did it look like? All she knew was that she'd lived there once, together with her beloved grandparents.

"Mèi-mèi, what are you doing standing there?"

An old man's gravelly voice blared from behind, and Cheng Ai wrenched her head around to meet it. It was Wu Wen-Kuei, now freshly awake from his nap. "Cheng Ai? Why didn't you come in?"

"Sorry! I didn't want to bother you…," she murmured.

"Ai-ioh! I invited you, how could you possibly be a bother?" He extended his hand out, motioning her in.

She walked in and closed the door behind her. There were metal bins of tea crowding the wooden shelves, their names written on red slips of paper, their scents wafting across the air. Cheng Ai didn't understand tea, yet it all felt familiar, and comforting.

"Where are your mom and dad? You came alone?" Wu Wen-Kuei asked suddenly.

"They're working today." She quickly added, "I don't have class."

"Án-ne--oh!"

Wu Wen-Kuei took her into the next room and plugged in an electric kettle. "Look! Boiling water is so convenient nowadays. I just plug in the kettle, and the water boils," he remarked.

Cheng Ai laughed awkwardly. She lowered her head and watched the steam rising from the kettle.

"Do you drink tea often?" he asked her.

She thought to herself, then offered a hesitant smile. "Bubble tea doesn't count, right? Or tea bags?"


BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

NON-FICTION

台味飄撇：食好料的所在

EATING TAIWANESE

photo © Ray Chang

Tēnn Sūn-Tshong
鄭順聰

- **Category:** Food, Lifestyle
- **Publisher:** Yuan-Liou
- **Date:** 7/2023
- **Pages:** 248
- **Length:** 71,000 characters (approx. 46,100 words in English)
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Born and raised in Chiayi, Tēnn Sūn-Tshong is a former publishing editor, radio show host, and Taigi (Taiwanese Hokkien language) consultant for Taiwan Public Television Service (PTS)'s Taigi Channel. His literary career spans published poetry collections, novels, essays, picture books, screenplays, and lyrics. While most of his recent published works are in Taigi, *Eating Taiwanese* is written in Mandarin interspersed with appropriately annotated Taigi words and phrases.

Drawing on extensive field research and linguistic investigation, these essays are much more than an homage to the local ingredients, flavors, and foods that make Taiwanese cuisine "great". They examine how each iconic dish is prepared and explore their ineluctable place in Taiwan's culture, history, and palate.

With two decades of culinary exploration under his belt, author Tēnn Sūn-Tshong weaves linguistic whimsy, in-depth observations, and honest passion into his latest exploration of traditional Taiwan snacks, food and beverage watering holes, interpersonal relationships, and cultural pillars. By transforming the sights and smells of favorite foodie destinations into compelling text, these essays dissect the flavors of spotlight dishes and decipher the unique character and lasting appeal of each.

The book is organized into four easily digestible sections. The first offers a master-class-level dive into the culinary highlights of Chiayi, with special emphasis on the city's widely lauded turkey rice. The second takes readers to some of the author's favorite restaurants and food vendors in four cities – Kaohsiung and Tainan in the south, and Taipei and Keelung in the north. The third delivers in-depth breakdowns of classic Taiwanese eats, including scallion pancakes, cold noodles, and stuffed, leaf-wrapped sticky-rice dumplings. In the fourth and final section, the author offers answers to questions he and countless foodies have about Taiwanese culinary quirks. Why, for example, are Taiwanese so particular about their food having just the right balance of firmness (chew) and crispness (bite)? This gastronomic idiosyncrasy even has its own descriptor, "Q", and featured write-up in the *New York Times*.

Food culture has always been an important facet of Taiwan literature. For Tēnn, Taiwan's culinary landscape is the product of both irreverent inventiveness and warm generosity. While deceptively simple in appearance, iconic dishes stand or fall on the perfect execution of every meticulous step in their recipes. Deftly mixing personal passion, literary aplomb, and a deep knowledge of culinary history and culture, the author has created in *Eating Taiwanese* a page-turning dive into why Taiwanese cuisine is so uniquely and deliciously special.

EATING TAIWANESE

By Tēnn Sūn-Tshong
Translated by Beverly Liu

> Tēnn Sūn-Tshong, from Minxiong Township in Chiayi County, is one of today's most active and innovative authors writing in the Taigi (Taiwanese Hokkien) language. In *Eating Taiwanese*, Tēnn takes readers along on a flavorful investigation of iconic Taiwanese foods that starts with one of his home region's best-known dishes – turkey rice. Much more than a foodie guidebook, this work follows the author as he walks the side streets and chats in the language of street food with favorite snack creators and vendors, piecing together a one-of-a-kind map of authentic Taiwanese eats. Illustrations by comic artist Ruan Guang-Min lift the hood to show how snacks are made, helping bring the narrative to flavorful life.
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller**

Life's Little Pleasures: Turkey Rice

I went to a lunch buffet at a luxury hotel in Yilan. The spread leaned Japanese, with sushi, sashimi, oden, and assorted pickled dishes lining the counters. As I made my way through the usual Japanese-style offerings, I stumbled upon a "DIY turkey rice station" at which each ingredient for this iconic southwest Taiwanese dish was presented separately, allowing diners to assemble for themselves their "ideal" turkey rice dish.

I normally avoid eating turkey rice outside of Chiayi (the city famed for this iconic dish). But this fun DIY station tempted me to assemble my own bowl. I found myself mimicking the motions of the turkey rice shop owners I'd seen – scooping steaming white rice into my bowl, pressing it gently with a spoon, layering slices of turkey on top, and arranging a few slices of pickled yellow daikon along the side. I even reluctantly sprinkled in a few fried shallots despite being not overly fond of them. The final touch was a drizzle of lightly golden rendered chicken fat – the pure essence and heart of this dish.

Eagerly, I brought my bowl back to the table, shoving the plates and cups aside so I could finally taste my creation. Bite after bite, I felt rather proud of my handiwork. It looked the part, and wasn't half bad. But then came that crucial last bite. There it was again – that unmistakable, dreaded whiff of gamey chicken. Sigh…

This hotel's minimalist dining area, reminiscent of a sterile chamber, was sleek, refined, and free of extraneous elements. Given the hotel's highly skilled chefs and the meticulously selected ingredients they had to work with, one would expect nothing less than excellence. And yet, the turkey rice still fell flat.

As my eyes went wide examining the exquisitely designed white porcelain, my mind drifted back to the bowl of turkey rice I had just assembled. The top-grade rice flown in from Japan was off in texture. The skin-on chicken was firm but cut into cubes, which had broken the meat's natural grain. And that final drizzle of rendered chicken fat – if you think using high-

quality chicken is the single key to perfection, you're underestimating the old masters of Chiayi turkey rice.

Without mê-kak, you lose life's little pleasures. How should I put it? Let's start with a word-by-word explanation:

Mê-kak, a Taiwanese Hokkien language (Taigi) term written as 銑角 refers to the tiny but crucial detail that makes all the difference.

The term little pleasures (小確幸) comes from the Japanese word しょうかっこう (shōkakkō), which describes life's small joys – little moments of happiness you can count on.

Once everything is spelled out, it all clicks. Those tiny, seemingly insignificant steps? They're actually the ones that matter most, that shape the quality of your day in every step, every pause, every bite. Miss just one little move, skip one tiny ingredient and, suddenly, it all feels a bit off, like something essential is missing.

The little pleasures of turkey rice lie in its subtle mê-kak. At that Yilan hotel I mentioned earlier, the chefs, wanting to showcase the superb quality of their ingredients, cut the turkey meat into perfectly uniform cubes. In doing so, however, they disrupted the natural grain of the meat and its fatty structure – the very source of its rich, savory aroma. The so-called "turkey rice" concoctions sold in stores typically use shredded chicken instead of actual turkey. While the soft shreds are easy to mix with rice, they don't convey the full-bodied flavor into the bowl the way real turkey does. In contrast to actual turkey rice, these everyday versions come across as sloppy and fall short of the full flavor.

Come to think of it, why do turkey rice stalls in Chiayi always set a whole bird on display out front? Beyond the promise that the stall serves real turkey meat, it's part of the overall culinary performance. For each order, the owner leans over at the perfect angle to slice off just the right cut of meat with practiced precision.

Taigi has several words describing the act of carving meat. One, 拆 (thiah), literally means "dismantle" and describes the tearing off of large chunks of meat. Another, 劉 (liô), is defined in the Ministry of Education's Taiwanese Dictionary as "to use a knife to shave off thin layers or to slice into pieces." For example, when preparing sesame oil kidney stir-fry, the surface of the pork kidneys is first scored in a decorative pattern using a carving technique known as 劉花 (liô-hue). This scoring helps the kidneys cook quickly, absorb flavor more easily, and open up beautifully like a flower in bloom.

When performing the liô-liô (劉劉)[01] carving technique (in Mandarin Chinese or Taigi writing system, repeating a character indicates a continuous or repeated action), both skill and experience are needed to slice meat in a manner that respects the natural curves and grain of the turkey carcass. It's important to keep in mind that the meat covering a turkey is full of curves and contours, and that each part varies in thickness, firmness, and fat content.

Properly executed, liô-liô carving brings out the full aroma of a cut of meat all at once.

Proper use of the liô-liô technique preserves the complete aroma of each piece of meat. Mastering this method requires experience and time. A simple bowl of turkey rice showcases this delicate craftsmanship, offering quiet, steady "little pleasures" in everyday life and the chance to savor each and every bite.

Without the subtle, little touches of mê-kak, life's little pleasures cannot endure; at best, life is just about getting by, not truly flourishing.

Even amid political turmoil, social clamor, and economic uncertainty, good days can still be found in a small eatery, where a humble bowl of rice offers brief, yet certain moments of joy and contentment. And, when the meal is done, the bowl gleams with an oily sheen and the tongue sweeps up any and all remaining grains, savoring them fully.

Finding calm in the midst of chaos, and moments of happiness in a simple meal.

For Taiwanese people, these little pleasures are crafted by skilled cooks' hands and woven into the fabric of daily life, filled with warmth and human connection. There's no sense of distance, no empty words – only a steady, genuine way of living, marked with mê-kak, the subtle sharpness that gives life its edge.

---

01 Translator's note: In Taigi, 劉劉 (liô-liô) refers to the carving action, but it also plays on the word 攏攏 (lóng-lóng), implying "all together" or "completely".

The True Meaning of Turkey Rice

I returned to my alma mater, National Chiayi Senior High School, to give a talk. Strolling around, I could sense the pulse of youthful energy. Glimpsing the courtyard's rain tree, still lush and full, I was transported back to the age of seventeen, when my mind was clouded by melancholy and my body weighed down by tension. Ultimately, I channeled all of this adolescent angst into fiery sprints across our red clay track.

The school is located in Suann-á-tíng (山仔頂), which, as the name suggests, sits on a hillside on the eastern side of Chiayi City, facing Alishan[02]. From there, one can gaze westward for a sweeping view of the city. After my speech, I walked out through the school gates into the gentle warmth of the winter sun. I slowly strolled downhill, heading down a memory lane awash in youth-filled experiences.

In recent years, Chiayi City has seen a flourishing of cultural and creative ventures. Along the alleys where old wooden houses mingle with concrete buildings, cafés have been opening one after another, and I had the sense that somewhere along one of these alleys, a cup of coffee awaited me. Since moving to Taipei for my career and marriage, I've accumulated more time in northern Taiwan than in my hometown of Chiayi. Life in the big city gradually reshaped my habits: coffee quietly replaced the high-mountain tea I drank in my youth and soon became my indispensable afternoon pick-me-up.

To my surprise, in Chiayi City's East District, the hip cafés all closed by four in the afternoon, and the older café establishments serving simple set meals didn't interest me. As the winter evening wind grew sharper, I still couldn't find a cup of coffee that suited me.

Walking along the wide Minzu Road, I passed Democracy (Minzu) Turkey Rice on my left before turning right onto Heping Road, heading toward the East Gate roundabout.

It was then that a massive figure suddenly loomed in my path. I gasped in surprise. It was Ling Ming-Liang, the fourth-generation leader of Chang Yi Ge Hand Puppet Theater. Right behind him, Huang Chin-Chang, the troupe's third-generation leader, emerged from the back of a van parked at the roadside.

This chance encounter on the street was just like the thrilling opening scene of a Taiwanese puppet show. In a twist of perfect timing, I just happened to be standing right at the doorway of Chang Yi Ge Hand Puppet Theater's homebase (khí-ke-tshù in Taigi, the very place where the troupe was founded and that now served as the private residence of its leaders) – truly a perfect twist of fate straight out of a martial arts novel.

Unable to refuse the warm invitation, I accepted their offer to go inside for a chat over tea. Although the second-generation troupe leader had long since passed, the living room wall was still decorated with his plaques, dignified portrait, and awards celebrating the glory of his achievements. I happened to have visited on a Wednesday, the day all the children and grandchildren return home to visit Grandma (wife of the second-generation troupe leader). Rooted in budaixi[03] traditions, the family was close-knit and affectionate. Everyone gathered around and, attentive and caring, fussed over her with gentle concern.

Founded in 1945, Chang Yi Ge Hand Puppet Theater stands as one of Chiayi City's most distinguished performance troupes. From mountain peaks to coastal villages and urban neighborhoods to temple courtyards, the troupe has brought traditional folk theater to countless stages. They have also helped shape the face of modern budaixi by reimagining local history and legends for contemporary audiences. In this uniquely reinvented art form, the past and present intertwine, emotions run deep, and every performance – whether literary or martial – enthralls audiences. The dialogue is delivered in authentic Chiayi-accented Taiwanese and in a natural, conversational style in place of the formal, literary language employed in

02 Translator's note: Alishan, a mountain township in Chiayi County, is home to the world-famous Alishan National Forest Recreational Area, known for its misty seas of clouds, breathtaking sunrises, and ancient cypress forests.

03 Translator's note: Budaixi (布袋戲) is a traditional Taiwanese glove puppet theater, known for its elaborate performances and dramatic storytelling.

traditional texts. Northern-style beiguan percussion[04] provides the meticulously arranged, highly skilled backstage ensemble. With its masterful execution and complete instrumentation, Chang Yi Ge embodies a living tradition, carrying Taiwanese traditional puppetry boldly into the future.

Not wanting to bombard them with earnest questions about the troupe's history, I shifted the subject to Democracy Turkey Rice. The troupe's third-generation leader, Huang, a regular there, told me the menu is quite extensive and the place is always buzzing. The fried shallots in the turkey rice are prepared fresh daily and fried in hot oil until golden and crispy – a simple touch that steals the show.

In Taiwan, there are two distinct approaches to eating rice dishes like turkey rice. Huang is in the bold, unapologetic, "mix-first" camp. He combines the meat, rice, and sauce thoroughly, letting the melding of flavors and aromas awaken all of his senses, before diving in with bold, exuberant bites. I, on the other hand, belong to the slow-savoring, "no-mix" camp – the kind that takes one piece of turkey, one bite of rice, then a sip of soup, savoring each mouthful slowly to uncover the subtle layers of flavor in this dish.

Usually so composed, Huang allowed himself a rare flicker of pride. Gesturing around the living room, he told us we were right beside Chiayi City's East Market – ground zero for turkey rice, where shops cluster thick and the competition keeps everyone at their best. Here, he said, is the true front line of the city's most beloved dish.

Growing up in Chiayi, turkey rice was simply part of daily life and, as such, something I hardly gave much thought to. It wasn't until I moved away for work and found that people around me were curious about this iconic Chiayi dish that I began to ponder the true essence of turkey rice and wonder what made it so unique?

Huang recalled the days when the well-known Liu Village Chief Turkey Rice was still just a street stall near the Chiayi City East Public Retail Market. The old owner's culinary skills were remarkable. You could sit down anytime, order a simple bowl of rice with soup, and get a taste of true local flavor. Just around the corner from Chang Yi Ge Hand Puppet Theater's homebase is another favorite, Dongmen Turkey Rice. Here, Huang shared a tip from his fellow Chiayi native, A-Jie: "Sliced turkey with skin, extra garlic, and a sunny-side-up with runny yolk." Another notable spot is San Huo Turkey Rice, hidden deep in an alley. In the old days, their stall opened at one in the morning, serving as the late-night canteen for the city's nightlife crowd.

Chiayi turkey rice is the humble, comforting flavor that settles the weary, wandering worker – a familiar dish available at no set time or place. Just thinking of famous turkey rice joints like A-Ming, A-Lou, A-Hong, Gu's, Wan Za Rong, Dai Shi, A-Xi, and Park makes my mouth water – I'm tempted to dash out the door and dig into a bowl immediately.

Huang's eldest sister, sitting at the desk, called out, "That's it – 'phang-thâu (芳頭 , aroma)'!"

That's the phrase! That's the phrase! I thought to myself. For years, I had wandered in search of the elusive word that could capture the magic of turkey rice. I had tasted it everywhere, pondered it endlessly and, just when I was at a loss – after failing to find a coffee spot that day, I unexpectedly stumbled upon "phang-thâu."

This can only be expressed precisely in Taigi. The word "phang (芳)" refers to aroma – from the house-specialty sauces, hand-shredded turkey, plump grains of rice, or even the lingering richness of the turkey fat left in the bowl after finishing a meal. "thâu (頭)" is a suffix that conveys the culmination of all these aromas.

The ultimate essence of a bowl of turkey rice lies in its phang-thâu – the mê-kak of turkey rice.

---

04 Translator's note: Beiguan percussion (北管鑼鼓) is a traditional Taiwanese ensemble that is commonly used in folk and puppet theater performances. It features drums, gongs, and other instruments and accompanies the unfolding action and dialogue.

與媽祖同行：
藝術家朱朱的信仰生活實踐記

WALK WITH MAZU

photo © Liao Shao-Wen

Huang Chu-Ping
黃朱平 (朱朱)

- **Category:** Lifestyle
- **Publisher:** Locus
- **Date:** 3/2024
- **Pages:** 272
- **Length:** 93,432 characters (approx. 60,700 words in English)
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Born in Taitung, Huang Chu-Ping is a self-taught artist specializing in religious-themed works, including over two-hundred paintings of Sea Goddess Mazu. She wrote *Walking with Mazu*, one of her several published books, with the aim of helping preserve and promote understanding of Mazu culture.

In religiously cosmopolitan Taiwan, Sea Goddess Mazu enjoys the largest following. This book describes the growth of a young artist as she joins Mazu pilgrimages, paints religious idols, accompanies temple idols on sacred journeys, and shares everyday life with her divine protector.

Following the spiritual and creative blossoming of artist Huang Chu-Ping, *Walking with Mazu* opens a rare window into the Mazu faith as practiced in Taiwan today. The author conveys in thoughtful words and delicately executed illustrations the merits, insights, and stories gleaned from fifteen years of Mazu pilgrimages and visits to over two-hundred Mazu temples. More than a religious testimonial, this introspective work reflects one woman's quest to project goodness into every aspect of the human experience.

This work is divided into four chapters: Seeking, Creating, Settling In, and Traveling. "Seeking" opens on her chance encounter with Mazu worship as a young, rudderless college senior and narrates the whirlwind of experiences and encounters associated with her early Mazu pilgrimages, including a very memorable round-the-island pilgrimage on foot. In "Creating", Huang invests faith into her creative efforts, painting over two-hundred illustrations of Mazu while circling Taiwan on foot that are subsequently exhibited and published to share Mazu culture with a larger audience. "Settling In" plumbs her thoughts and experiences as an artist-in-residence at various places forging connections with local cultural and artistic communities. The final chapter, "Traveling" memorializes her travels with a Mazu idol to temples across Taiwan as well as in Japan and Bhutan, showing how religion not only reflects shared human values but can also promote cross-cultural communication and camaraderie.

Following the author on her journey of self-exploration and discovery, this unembellished, touching narrative offers substantive insights into Taiwanese folk culture and history. The author's empathetic, artistic perspective on the cultural reverberations of Mazu religion and worship shows how religious mores may offer a psychological salve for the confusion and disquiet of modern society.

WALK WITH MAZU

By Huang Chu-Ping
Translated by Jun Liu

> Author Huang Chu-Ping joined her first Mazu pilgrimage in 2008 after becoming a devotee of the Taoist sea goddess during university. Over the decade and a half since, she has experienced numerous pilgrimages as well as circled the island on foot, sketching over this period more than 200 paintings of Mazu. Beyond her artistic pursuits, Huang has accompanied her own Mazu idol throughout Taiwan and on trips overseas. *Walking with Mazu* narrates how Huang's fifteen-year relationship with her chosen religion is neither superstition nor mere idol worship but rather a way of life that captures the unalloyed essence and spirit of being "Taiwanese".
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller**

"Then Let Me Go on Pilgrimage with You." – That's How It All Began.

As schoolchildren, we were all handed the inevitable essay, "My Ambition". Our pens filled page upon page and, when our teacher read out the submissions, there were doctors, scientists, postmen, even future presidents in the mix. But mine was the only one to expound upon dreams of becoming a "painter". I can't have known what it took to become one – was it simply a matter of drawing and drawing? Watching my grandfather, an architect, sweating over blueprints must have fired my imagination.

Only later did I learn there are many kinds of painters, all of them artists. Who could have guessed I would, quite by accident, become an artist who travels with Mazu?

"Do you remember the very first thing you ever said to Mazu?"

Mom says that, when I was little, Grandma presented me to Mazu as a god-daughter, asking for her protection. Years later, I encountered Mazu again one afternoon in my final year at university.

For two consecutive years, I chaired both the Classical Chinese Studies Society (a departmental association) and the College of Liberal Arts Student Council at Fu Jen Catholic University in New Taipei. Most people throw themselves into clubs as freshmen, but I didn't plunge in until my senior year. Everyone grumbled about the departmental association's inefficiency, yet no one wanted to shoulder the job.

"Why must things be this way?"

"Must it be done like this? Aren't there other ways?"

As a child, I brimmed with questions about the world. But the answers seldom came at once; they fermented over years until, step by step, most of them found their answers. Yet still, progress on some questions stalled right at the brink of insight, as though a vital channel in me wouldn't open until I stepped outside my comfort zone.

"If we can't stand the way things are, is carping from the sidelines all we can do? Is doing nothing really acceptable? Why don't I give it a try?"

I still remember voting day. It was a Wednesday just after a mandatory course attended by everyone in the same year as me. Perhaps everyone thought I was a bit mad, but one person, one vote carried me in. Fired by sheer enthusiasm, I took up the chair. I was a blank sheet with no prior club experience learning everything from scratch.

For months afterward, I would linger on campus long after class, planning events and filing for reimbursements. Most of our budget came from first-year departmental fees, and orientation camp had already eaten up the lion's share. With the Department of Chinese Literature's cherished traditions to keep up – poetry recitals, film nights, weekly meetings – I had a queue of expenses looming large over me.

Money was tight. Before each activity, we tramped the neighborhood, asking shopkeepers for donations. A proposal for a creative market earned a small grant from the Xinzhuang City Office (today the Xinzhuang District Office in New Taipei City). One afternoon after the event, I handed in the receipts; once the grant was disbursed, we finally broke even, and I breathed again.

My first brush with art markets was sheer chance. While preparing the Chinese Week series, I fretted that student events all looked the same. As chair, I needed a fresh idea.

Strolling through Ximending – a lively youth quarter in Taipei – I ducked into the Red House, a century-old theater just becoming known for its weekend craft markets. The stalls offering illustrations, metalwork, jewelry, leather, and textiles set my imagination racing. I plucked up the courage to ask if the vendors might consider coming to our campus. To my surprise, the market organizers were all for it.

We themed Chinese Week around the "patrons of learning" across three traditions: Wenchang Dijun, the Taoist God of Literature; Manjushri, the Buddhist Bodhisattva of Wisdom; and St. Thomas Aquinas, the Catholic patron of students. At our help desk, you could write prayer cards and draw lots, each with a different poetic blessing. Local brush shops and vendors of salty kompia – traditional Hokkien buns – joined forces with campus club performances, book and film fairs, and a bustling market. The event spilled out from the Chinese Literature Department's Wenhua Building and stretched all the way to Splendor Square, with close to fifty stalls welcoming well over 1,000 visitors during the week – a campus record. Who would have thought a complete novice could pull that off? This was a world away from those early budgets and proposals that kept being knocked back.

I wasn't trained, and was not yet a maker – just incurably curious. Later, when a creator needed time off, I would mind their stall, selling at places like National Taiwan Normal University and Taipei's Shilin District, and discovering even more kinds of work. Each weekend, vendors would arrive one after another to set up display stands and greet the crowds. When things got so busy that there was no time to eat, we would share snacks in stolen moments. These markets ran on the weather's whim: bustling under clear skies, slipping into a drowsy camaraderie among stallholders when the rain came. The friendships forged then have lasted; we still follow one another's work and remain connected in spirit.

Perhaps it was because of my immersion in the exchange that I began making small things myself. I evolved from participant into practitioner. The conversations around this transition were the rough ground of my creative path. Only after meeting Mazu – when She became the focus of my quest – did my casual making gather direction and aim. It's no exaggeration to say She led me toward creative maturity.

With reimbursements finally off my mind, I strolled across to Xinzhuang Old Street.

Xinzhuang Old Street is home to several centers of faith. I stepped first into Wusheng Temple, dedicated to Guan Yu, to pray for success in study and then proceeded to Ciyou Temple to seek Mazu's blessing. I love the atmosphere of traditional architecture – perhaps an architectural soul runs in my blood. While an undergraduate, I sought out many temples, especially the small, quiet, timeworn ones. I didn't follow any one deity closely back then; I simply "took

incense and bowed" at festivals, continuing my family's way of belief.

In the early days of searching for meaning, as a student at a Catholic university, I also prayed to God. I fretted over rejected proposals and unfunded budgets, muttering petitions as I walked. More than once, between the Truth–Goodness–Beauty–Holiness Square at the gate and the campus within, my phone rang with news that our club's funding had been approved. This subsequently happened another two or three times – uncanny. In the end I didn't enter the arms of Jesus, I think my view of the cosmos leans more toward an Eastern sense of mutual arising and interdependence.

Where the heart inclines, the Divine reveals. I've come to believe that prayers in every tradition carry real power.

Because of its proximity to campus, I often visited Ciyou Temple on Old Street. Mazu sits enthroned there, and the serenity of the place relaxes my body and mind. After lingering awhile, I knelt in front of the offering table and poured my heart out.

"Our generation has material plenty and, it seems, endless opportunity; yet no one has taught us how to choose…" I laid out my troubles – from the departmental association to decisions about graduate school and work – hoping Granny Mazu would part the clouds and show me a way through the fog.

When I finished, even with the fence still partitioning the statue off from the worship area, I felt a slow current of warmth welling from the shrine, gathering heat until it held me close. "So Granny Mazu did hear me!" I've never forgotten that embrace.

"Then let me go on pilgrimage with You." It was a thought that came naturally and unbidden. I'd grown up ignorant of religious pilgrimages. Why that idea surfaced right then I still can't say.

The problems our generation faces are nothing like those of our parents'. Once, hard work led to a clear road; now the world is tangled and noisy. As I weighed my future, I would often wonder: what is study for? I watched classmates study with only a job or diploma in mind, and then bow their backs for a paycheck with little thought for a life aligned with their heart.

What kind of life did I want? One way to find out was to step beyond my frame and follow Mazu on pilgrimage.

Back home I searched "Mazu pilgrimage", and for the first time the sacred names of Dajia Mazu and Baishatun Mazu appeared before me. I skimmed their origins and information. This was an unknown world. "Next year I'm joining the pilgrimage," I thought. I wasn't even planning to ask for anything; curiosity alone said: go and see. Only on the road did I realize that walking forward isn't simply about reaching an end.

In the Taiyuan era of the Jin Dynasty, a fisherman from Wuling followed a stream and entered Peach Blossom Spring…

"When We First Met, You Were Twenty-Five." – The Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage

Each year on the day of the Lantern Festival, which falls on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, the Dajia Mazu temple casts poe – crescent divination blocks – to decide the dates for the nine-day pilgrimage across central Taiwan's western coast. That year the divine answer called for the pilgrimage to commence around the Qingming (Tomb-Sweeping) Festival.

I remember my first year. Days before departure, even though I'd already packed to perfection, fear of facing the unknown alone held my feet fast. On TV, crowds were shown setting out; it was that human tide which somehow emboldened me. "Oh, just go, your bag's packed. See how it goes. If it's really too much, buy a ticket home." My inner theater played out that scene again and again; in the end, stepping out the door still took a little courage.

On April 5, 2008 – the year of Wuzi on the lunar calendar – I boarded a train for Dajia and joined the southbound pilgrimage.

Did it go smoothly? Being a cautious soul, my "longest"

journey so far had been moving from Taitung up to Taipei for university. On weekends I would visit friends at their campuses in other cities, whistle-stop sightseeing at best. Does that even count as travel? My unwritten plan was simply "sleep the night in someone's dorm". In fairness, I did cover a lot of ground – of a sort.

I tried for days to rope in a companion, but to no avail. With no like-minded friend to go with, I still hesitated at the threshold of a new journey.

With each stop at a major station, another tide of people surged inward, packing our carriage like a tin of sardines. With barely room to plant my feet, I swayed like river-weed in the human current.

By the time I reached Dajia Station it was almost time for Mazu's palanquin to set off. I shouldered through the temple with my pack, received my first pilgrimage flag, announced my name and intent to Mazu, tied a safety charm to the flag, circled the incense burner three times clockwise – and then stepped out, heading south on foot.

Online advice urged starting out before the palanquin leaves. While the carriers can rest in shifts; those who follow have only one shift – their own. Set out late and you'll never keep pace. Luckily a steady stream of pilgrims, pushing carts and luggage, showed the way. That advice, I found, was spot on.

Behind us, firecrackers crackled: "Mazu's on the move! She's moving – she's at Shuiwei Bridge now!" Crossing that bridge marks the procession leaving Dajia proper. In those pre-GPS, pre-livestream days, fellow pilgrims served as a rolling newswire for the palanquin's progress, and I drank in the updates.

Along the route believers craned to welcome the palanquin and crawl beneath it for a blessing. To keep to the schedule, Mazu's palanquin pressed on almost around the clock, and those who walked powered on through day and night. After the send-off, although I only rarely caught a glimpse of the palanquin again, the jingle of its bells and the running commentary around me were like a pocket radio. I never felt alone.

Aunties and uncles, seeing me on my own, would slow to chat. When they learned I was a university student traveling solo, they marveled – "So young, and already on pilgrimage!" – and folded me into their groups, swapping life stories as we walked and looking out for me.

But their real curiosity was my footwear: slippers. "Don't you blister?"

"Two advantages," I'd say, sounding like a sales rep for Taiwan's classic blue-and-white flip-flops. "On sunny days I wear socks with them – no sunburn, no chafing, no sweaty feet. When rain drives other pilgrims to stuff their shoes with newspaper, I just take off my socks and am instantly dry and comfy. When the soles wear down, I let them go without a qualm and buy a cheap new pair; walking on thick, soft soles feels positively blessed."

In Taichung's Qingshui Market, I bought my first rolling cart, piled my gear onto it, and felt my steps grow light.

Daytime walking was oppressively hot, so most people made up for lost distance at night. I devised a rule that if I was more than half a day ahead of Mazu's planned route, I could wash up and sleep properly; otherwise, I would just take a short nap and move on. On good days, a household took me in; otherwise, I would find a pilgrims' hostel.

I have slept on bare ground too. On the return leg, in Changhua City, most of us camped at the county government's administrative building. I arrived late; the hall already teemed with pilgrims who had arrived on scooters and bicycles. I managed to find a scrap of cardboard and lay down outside the main gate beneath the portico.

A cold front swept in that night, bringing a fine rain that drifted around our feet. A veteran pilgrim showed me how to wear two raincoats to blunt the knife-edge wind. I shivered on that cardboard, dozing and waking. The chill that cut to the bone became one of my sharpest pilgrimage memories.

山獸與雜魚

BYCATCH AND WILDLIFE

Lin Jing-Feng
林敬峰

- **Category:** Essay
- **Publisher:** Locus
- **Date:** 2/2024
- **Pages:** 296
- **Length:** 54,906 characters (approx. 35,600 words in English)
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Born in mountain-fringed Puli in Nantou County, author Lin Jing-Feng is an ardent conservationist. *Bycatch and Wildlife*, the author's first published work, brings together a collection of essays written by Lin while concurrently studying theatrical costume design at Taipei National University of the Arts and moonlighting at the National Taiwan University Museum of Zoology as a taxidermist. His other writings are occasionally featured in the *News & Market Supplement*.

Wildlife spotting, rummaging through harbor bycatch for fish specimens, fixing meals in his "no flames allowed" dorm room, and preparing specimens in a natural history museum are all part of the extracurricular "everyday" for this set design student. Disparate fields and pastimes intertwine effortlessly in Lin Jing-Feng's essays.

Apart from building models, familiarizing himself with "the theater", reading scripts, and hanging with his dormmates, theatrical costume design student Lin pursues another life – far off the expected script. He regularly takes off into the mountains, trekking lonely trails, walking wild streams, observing ants, and making fish and wild animal specimens with another school's zoology department. He also dallies around fishing harbors, sifting through the bycatch delivered from fixed net fisheries.

The four sections in *Bycatch and Wildlife*, The Beginning, The Great Outdoors, The Sea, and Knives, include over thirty essays interspersed with the author's own scientific illustration-like drawings. "The Beginning" opens on a narrative-framing conversation the author has in an izakaya. "The Great Outdoors" touches on the author's encounters and observations of mountain boar, pangolins, bats, ants and other wildlife. "The Sea" shares his adventures searching for interesting specimens among harbor bycatch and noteworthy experiences cooking meals in his makeshift dorm kitchen. The final section, "Knives", explores how sharp scalpels and animal carcasses can create emotively soul-searching dialogues.

Straddling the realms of the humanities and natural sciences, author Lin Jing-Feng invests his singular knack for science communication into ongoing dialogues with nature and its myriad of creatures. His lively writing style vitalizes his thoughts on a wide range of subjects, turning even the "mundane" into topics worth examining and exploring further.

BYCATCH AND WILDLIFE

By Lin Jing-Feng
Translated by Hongyu Jasmine Zhu

> *Bycatch and Wildlife* is a collection of the author Lin Jing-Feng's own thoughts and musings penned during his time as a distracted undergraduate student of theatrical costume design. His extracurricular explorations of forested mountains and harbor wet markets, his predilection for making taxidermy specimens alongside his stage models, and his out-of-the-box ingenuity (such as building an illicit "kitchen" in his dorm room from scrap items scavenged from a metal recycler) naturally sets him apart from his peers. In this work, Lin welcomes you into his world to help you discover the unexpected in the everyday. *Bycatch and Wildlife* shows how the "happy-go-lucky" college experience can also open the door onto things surprisingly new and unexpected.
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller**

My Side Quests

The automatic doors slid open without a sound, and I stepped into a late-night izakaya. We had just finished taking down the art show, and the after-hours meal was on my boss. I played it safe and, after flipping back and forth through their two-page menu, ordered the two cheapest items: grilled shiitake mushrooms and chilled tofu.

My boss, who had been outside smoking, came in a step behind me and took a seat. She was a capable woman; we had worked together twice before. Though "worked together" is a stretch – at best, I was just the muscle hired to move heavy things around for her. At the izakaya counter, we sat in rank order: the boss, myself, and a colleague I was meeting for the first time.

"Go on, introduce yourself," my boss said. "She doesn't know you yet." During our earlier jobs together, she had already sussed out my various "side quests" and now dangled them as intriguing table talk.

"I'm currently studying at TNUA. Ah, right. No, no, not the one in Banqiao – we're up in Guandu. Taipei National University of the Arts, Department of Theatrical Design & Technology. I'm majoring in costume design."

"Yes, I study theatre. No, I don't perform on stage; I'm not an actor. I just do design work, behind-the-scenes stuff."

After that fluster of explanations, I finally managed to make myself clear. I'd never been used to being the focal point of dinner table talk.

"Tell us about your side quests, then," my boss said, her eyes alight with interest.

*

First, I head into the mountains.

I wander the ridges and the woodlands, following the lay of the land, flowing water, animal tracks, hunters' paths, and tales of the countryside.

I set up an infrared camera to spy on the creatures

that leap and dash through those woods: muntjacs locking horns, crab-eating mongooses shepherding their young, and also the Taiwan whistling thrush that glared down my lens and just pecked and pecked and pecked until my camera tipped over and fell.

I watch ants the way birders watch feathered friends. Up in the mountains, I am always drawn to these orderly insects, and crouch on the ground or perch up in a tree to observe their tidy marching lines.

And, every once in a while, I tag along with the lab on field trips too as their designated "pack mule".

*

Then, I head to the sea…or more precisely, I should say, the fishing harbors.

I listen to the auctioneers in the fish market calling out prices in rapid-fire cadence, onetwentytwentytwentytwentyfifteenfifteenfifteenfifteen. My attempts to pick apart that stream and imitate it invariably sound clumsy and stumbling.

I watch the fishing boats motor in from the set-net fishing grounds and then unload their catch which, all glinting silver, slip and slide across the decks. I shove and scramble through the crowd, picking up a remora, only to have an old uncle snatch it from my hands and toss it back into the sea. "No good to eat," he says.

At the trawl harbor's bycatch section, I wave to the big guy handling the catch, then pull on rubber gloves, and sink my hands into baskets full of dead fish – digging through for scarce odd fish to turn into specimens.

*

And then, I make specimens.

I'm lucky to have interned at the Endemic Species Research Institute in Jiji, Nantou where I learned to prepare mammal study skins and witnessed animals of all shapes and sizes mounted in all sorts of post-mortem conditions.

Later on, I volunteered occasionally at National Taiwan University's Museum of Zoology, where I continued to dissect and skin.

All told, I've personally handled the carcasses of maybe fifty wild animals, give or take. Not exactly a big number, by any measure.

*

Finally, I suppose I can say I write. After all, this book exists.

I simply take the world I see, hear, and encounter; mix in a few of my own odd ideas; and put it into words.

*

"What the heck?" my colleague said, clearly confused.

"See? I really don't get this guy," my boss chimed in. "Why did you go to art school in the first place?"

"I-I-I-I…I don't know," I stammered whenever I got nervous, and being the center of attention at the table was definitely one of the most stressful things ever. "I just…just…just wanted to do stuff. When I get a chance to do something, I…I just do it."

"So how did you even start doing all this?" my boss pressed.

"Uh…because…it's fun?"

"That's not your real answer," she shook her head.

"Because…I feel like I have the right to understand things I want to understand. Sure, books and the internet have tons of info, surely enough to let me 'know' everything. But, I still believe in experiencing things for myself – feeling with my own senses and looking for every new encounter, whether that's with mountain beasts, various and sundry fish, or people from varied walks of life. And writing…writing is just a way to communicate, to share; a way to reinterpret fieldwork in words." I rattled off the whole thing in one breath.

Finally, my boss let me be, and I ducked my head back down and dug into my cold tofu.

The topic wandered away from me, but the chat went on, eventually circling back to work.

"Tomorrow we load in Kaohsiung, then unload in Miaoli. After that, are you heading back to school?" my boss asked.

"Yes, I have class tomorrow."

"Alright, then I'll get you a ticket from Miaoli to Taipei Main Station."

Rain

"Buy yourself a motorbike," my brother said over the dining table. "You're constantly running off into the mountains. With a bike, you won't have to deal with public transport giving you attitude."

"True," I agreed. "But I don't even know what kind of bike I should get." My brother knows bikes. I don't.

"Depends on what your needs are," he said, and then spouted a string of brands, models, and specs that meant nothing to me.

"As long as it runs, I'm good."

"Then just go grab a second-hand."

*

Following my brother's advice, I snagged a second-hand old motorbike from an online group for an unbelievably low price. The engine roared like crazy, but it wasn't fast. Every time I wanted to start it, I had to pull out the kick start lever and give it a few solid kicks before it would, grudgingly, turn over and grumble all the way onto the road.

But rainy days were different. My old bike loved the rain. Whenever it poured, water would seep into the seams of the frame and, when I turned the key and pressed the usually useless starter, the bike would squeal like the sound of a cat caught under its wheels, hack and cough for a moment, then burst into a cheerful roar, charging forward without a second thought.

"This is my motorbike." From then on, I'd always tap the old bike's front while showing it off. "This baby only wakes up properly when it rains. If the rain isn't heavy enough, it refuses to start."

"Piece of junk," my friends would reply.

*

Evening. I drove the old bike into a sheet of rain in the mountains above Taipei City, hunting for a dead pangolin. The pangolin, only a blurry coordinate on the map in my phone, was curled up somewhere in forest shadows enchanted with cicada calls and owl hoots. The old bike gleefully splashed through puddles, letting out its usual strange squawks.

By the roadside, a pack of stray dogs sprawled under a square pavilion. Propped on their front legs and resting their heads, they claimed the small dry patch sheltered beneath the pavilion's roof. At the forefront, one dog stood on alert, ears pricked straight up, fixing its glare on me. Under taut skin, their muscles coiled and ready, their coats flickered with every twitch – some black, some white, some yellow – black as a moonless night, white as bleached bone, yellow like the sandy pits they clawed from the barren earth, scraping away every trace of grass and root.

I pressed on through the growing downpour, spurring the old bike past the pack, and a few startled barks erupted in my wake.

*

The pangolin, curled into a tight ball, lay dead beside the embankment of an industrial road. I slipped on gloves, grabbed its tail, and lifted it up. Slowly, it unfurled in my hands, revealing a soft, white belly and the dark red wounds peppered across its underside like a constellation of stars.

The mountain rain, now warm and feather-light, fell solemnly onto the pangolin's body, draining the blood from its wounds and seeping silently into the soil from which tiny shoots of grass were beginning to sprout.

The rain birthed thousands of maggots that burst from tight clusters of fly eggs, their bodies swelling in the blink of an eye. Linked head to tail and pressing close together, they slithered like water through the pangolin's hard scale seams and traced the contours of its limbs. From the outside in, the maggots nibbled bite after bite, shaping themselves into undulating muscles, throbbing veins, and a brain tangled with thought. The squirming, heaving swarm conjured the uncanny phantom of a living, pulsing body.

I placed the pangolin into a bag, but its five claws hooked stubbornly onto the opening. As I eased its front paws away from the bag, hundreds of maggots poured from between its claws and under the upturned scales,

crawling over my entire palm.

*

The pangolin had been killed by a pack of dogs. I slipped its body into my bag, revved the engine, and thought: I've seen so many who've died by teeth marks like these, and those deep, staring wounds always give the same answer in ragged howls of grievance.

I rode on, my eyes darting – no sign of the dogs. They'd probably moved off, leaving behind a lifeless creature with no explanation. Packs like that one don't hunt for food; they're already full. What they consume is human overabundance, blind sympathy, and obsessive protection. Well-fed, they sprint through the wild on strong legs and whip up spiraling winds, howling as they crush every living thing encountered.

Raindrops were still hammering the visor of my helmet and soaking my clothes. After a while, I shivered; the exposed fingers of my hands had swollen and gone pale. The persistent rain was like a mother fly, laying eggs in my thoughts that hatched into maggots called *if*, which wriggled and burrowed into the shattered phantom of my body.

The *if* maggots crawled into my legs, sending me in search of the howling dogs; the maggots burrowed into my arms and throat, bunched my muscles and rattled my vocal cords, smashing the pack with furious fists and beastly roars; at least the maggots wriggled into my eyes, watching a beautiful silver-scaled creature shamble away. The *if* maggots overflowed into disaster. If only there were an *if*, if only, if only the pangolin had lived long enough for me to get to it, if only I had arrived before the dogs to shield pangolin, if only there had been no dogs–

*

"*Tsss tsss tsss!*" The jet of water rinsed away the fly eggs and maggots still clinging to the pangolin. A mass of larvae writhed as it swirled down the drain of the specimen lab sink. Stripped of its covering of parasites, the pangolin looked naked, its scaled armor now revealing startling glimpses of pink flesh in the gaps. Its formidable hide had proven no match for the repeated gnawing of the dogs and was shattered into jagged edges, breached by canine teeth that had torn through to the bloody, mangled flesh beneath.

I had thought myself sufficiently accustomed to such deaths – that I was able to look upon such mauling with steely composure. But through my gloves, I felt the texture of the pangolin's ruined scales, their uneven edges grating against each other with a *ka-ka-ka* sound, and unexpectedly, a well of tears pooled in the corners of my eyes.

My thoughts returned to the way the pangolin's front claws had caught on the edge of the bag and how, when I released them, a scatter of pale maggots had spilled loose onto my palm.

So let this rain fall without end. Let the raindrops wash clean the puncture wounds stained with unaccounted blood; let the rain soak the yellow sand pits dug out by the pack and quench the spiraling fires they whipped into the air; let the *if* maggots grow in the rain and transform, break free from their pupae, take wing as a skyful of dancing flies, and lay clusters of eggs in more brains; let the rainwater seep into the seams of the old engine and coax the first mournful roar out of its exhaust pipe like a dragon's horn; let raindrops pluck the strings of entangled vines and ring the divine bells of budding blossoms, and I would take the dead pangolin by the hand, start the old motorbike, and drive forward over grasslands and across soil roads of red and black, breaking barrier after barrier and crossing narrow bridges, until we reach a new mountain range where no more silent white bones pile up in the yellow sand.

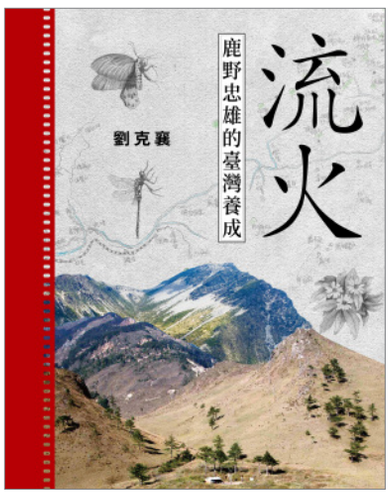
流火：鹿野忠雄的臺灣養成

A BLAZING STAR:
TAIWAN AND THE MAKING OF KANO TADAO

Liu Ka-Shiang
劉克襄

- **Category:** History
- **Publisher:** Taiwan Interminds
- **Date:** 12/2024
- **Pages:** 526
- **Length:** 300,000 characters (approx. 195,000 words in English)
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

From an early age, Liu Ka-Shiang has channeled the spirit of the nineteenth century natural historian in his explorations of the world around him, bringing a poet's eye and a historian's attention to detail to bear on Taiwan's diverse flora, fauna, and people. His over forty books published to date, including poetry, essay compilations, novels, and travelogues, have earned him an impressive list of domestic literary awards.



*** 2025 Taiwan Literature Award**

No one in the 1930s had trekked more of Taiwan's alpine wilderness or conquered more of its peaks than Kano Tadao. This remarkable young Japanese naturalist made the most of his regrettably short career studying firsthand this island's topography, natural environment, and indigenous inhabitants.

Well-respected naturalist author and travel show host Liu Ka-Shiang, looking fully the part of an erudite academic able and eager to set off with a well-packed rucksack on a multi-day wilderness hike at the drop of a hat, credits Kano Tadao as being the source of his passion for the outdoors and professional aspirations. Importantly, Liu's literary pursuits have helped bring him closer in both mind and spirit to his professed mentor. Liu has thoroughly studied Kano's life and works, researched the Japan and Taiwan of Kano's time, and used Kano's detailed notes and maps to retrace his footsteps and compare and contrast Taiwan's interior of today with that of a century ago. Learning from Kano Tadao has greatly deepened Liu's own understanding of Taiwan.

Kano Tadao, born in Tokyo in 1906, is an outdoorsy kid from a very young age. While at high school in Taihoku (Taipei), he spends most of his time in the island's rugged interior collecting insects, developing serious interests in both biogeography and anthropology. Despite his poor classroom attendance, his prolific field observations and writings earn him the headmaster's recommendation to attend Tokyo Imperial University. Between his first experiences in Taiwan in the mid-to-late 1920s and his disappearance on Borneo in 1945, Kano publishes dozens of books on his mountain treks, wildlife research, and indigenous tribe studies as well as over 150 academic papers.

Focused primarily on Kano as a young adult, this book fleshes out Kano's experiences as a student and takes occasional asides to introduce notable influencers on his life. Although the narrative wraps up in 1933 on one of his field surveys on the island, the volume of anthropological and natural science information included in this work far exceeds that provided in most biographies. *A Blazing Star* is the most-detailed examination of the life and importance of Kano Tadao published to date.

A BLAZING STAR: TAIWAN AND THE MAKING OF KANO TADAO

By Liu Ka-Shiang
Translated by Grace Najmulski

> "Anyone even slightly familiar with Taiwan history has likely heard of Kano Tadao, the Japanese naturalist who made early, groundbreaking advances in the fields of biogeography and anthropology on the island. He arrived in Taiwan first as a student and then as a naturalist fresh into his career. An average student in the classroom, Kano found his calling outdoors – amidst Taiwan's forests and mountains. In *A Blazing Star*, naturalist author Liu Ka-Shiang fleshes out young Kano Tadao's early years in Taiwan as a student and young naturalist. He digs deep into the historical record as well as retraces Kano's footsteps across mountain wilds to tell a compelling story that, while epic, is tethered to the actual achievements of a dedicated, pioneering scientist."
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller**

Origins: The Classics at A Glance

At first glance, that book, as big as my palm and wrapped in a stiff slipcase, looked to be a precious, handmade poetry collection long out of print.

How condensed must the text be to fit in this pocket-sized edition and still cram Taiwan's vast and important history in its pages? At our first encounter, it was difficult to suppress my curiosity.

I took it from the shelf for closer examination and noticed that, even though this diminutive work lacked the bulk of most history books, a spectacular richness still flowed from its still closed pages. Looking at it beneath the glow of a gosling-yellow lamp, the cover had clearly been designed and bound with care. The title deserved further praise: *Alongside Mountains, Clouds, and Aboriginals: A Taiwan Mountain Travelogue*. Being a year-round mountaineer myself, I was hooked instantly. Perhaps I might better compare the experience to being an iron nail with a magnet stuck fast to its side.

I opened it slowly. The table of contents caught my eye first. Familiar names of mountain peaks were lined up in uneven rows like lines from the modern poetry I loved. Upon closer inspection, all of the printed mountains, many of which were around "Mount Niitaka" (present day Yushan) showed the surrounding pathways up Taiwan's mountain range. Since I'd studied some simple Japanese and scaled several of Taiwan's mountains by that point, the blueprint, structure, and geography of the book suddenly took shape in my mind. The author's travels were further in.

I was a drone, quietly gliding high in the sky, tracing Taiwan's tallest mountain range – Niitaka – from south to north, visiting mountains as enormous as a whale's back one after another. It was hard to believe that someone had traversed this range multiple times, half a century

before I had launched my own comprehensive dialogue with this imposing landscape.

This book was published in 1941, and I could see most of its chapters were composed in the early 1930s. The author seemed like the kind of person who could travel overseas and wander deep into Taiwan mountain forests that were still unfamiliar to the Japanese, all while Japan imposed its oppressive regime over the original inhabitants. He seemed the kind of person who combed through natural histories and tribal customs during long sojourns overseas, familiarizing himself with each mountain peak. The kind who proceeded to spend tens of days traversing mountain ridges.

Hidden within this single, tiny book were vast and boundless depths that instantly made me feel more isolated and insignificant. Every essay recounting his mountain travels was substantive, a journey of countless trials and tribulations, stacking higher and higher until they became a perilous mountain of words. Moments and places of the past were angled in my direction, and piled tangibly before my very eyes until we were equal in height.

And I still had yet to read it. It never occurred to me this little book would be so dense or that, when I did finally flip through it, it would feel like twenty kilos pressing down on me, making it hard to breathe. It felt as if I were weighed down by a large backpack, about to step into Taiwan's mountains.

I double-checked the author's name: Kano Tadao.

Publisher: Tokyo Chuokoronsha. Printed on August 5th, Showa 16 (1941) and released five days later on the 10th.

From that moment on, it was as if the author's name was tattooed on my cheek, following along on all of my travels through nature up until the day I died. But I was also caught off guard by the publication date: summer 1941, four years into the Sino-Japanese War. How unfortunate that the author published during this less-than-ideal moment in history, and yet how fortunate.

It was a treacherous and tense time for publishing, a time when an enormous, whirling black hole sloshed in the background.

I proceeded with my in-depth inspection. The pocket-sized mountaineering booklet was wrapped in a burlap sack. At the time, there weren't many miniature volumes among the shelves lined with books from the occupation. Not only was the book eye-catching, it appeared that special attention had been paid to its binding. The cover was bright and simple – a Bunun weave pattern subtly printed in red and green across the top and bottom. Splayed across the endpapers was an illustration of Taiwan's cloud-covered mountain peaks; a wood engraving of the Bunun calendar at the bottom, seemingly put there out of concern that someone might forget the when the harvest, hunting, and sacrificial ceremonies were to take place.

The cover and endpapers were a reflection of the book's contents. It was clear that after Kano had finished writing the book, he'd stipulated that the book's layout and binding be inextricably linked to the mountains he'd visited. He even included his personal drawings of each area's hiking paths, clearly and vividly complementing the black-and-white pictures he'd taken.

I later read *Taiwan's Mountains and Aboriginals* (June, 1937), written by Japanese mountaineer Tanaka Kaoru, bound and illustrated by the mountaineer painter Adachi Genichiro. The title stood out on the slipcover, and below the heading stretched the sketch of a mountain, the red and white background adorned with images of indigenous peoples. The book contained information on subjects – like forest succession, climate, rain and snowfall conditions, and landscape – about the various mountains, which included Nanhu, Qilai, Songling, Xue, and Dabajian. The final section introduced Taiwan's indigenous peoples.

Kano's work was published four years after Tanaka's. Although unsure whether he was influenced by his predecessor, *Alongside Mountains, Clouds, and Aboriginals* was notably more diligent and comprehensive. The work cleared the distracting weeds of knowledge and further developed the character of Taiwan's mountains.

As for Kano's publication with Chuokoronsha, his middle school classmate, Fujita Tamao, might have had

something to do with that. Fujita worked at Chuokoron in the early 1940s and was mainly responsible for publishing children's literature, as he himself was also a writer of children's literature. Fujita didn't just help Kano find a publisher, he was also responsible for the book's cover, slipcover, and title page. As for the book's title, that was reportedly chosen by the wife of the newly-wed Kano, Tanna Shizuko.

Four months after this little book was published, Japan mounted a sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, igniting the fire of the Pacific War.

I first came across this book in the fall of 1987 at National Central Library: Taiwan Branch on Bade Road (now National Taiwan Library, located in Zhonghe) while frenetically combing through western travelogues on Taiwan, published in *Ibis* and the Royal Geographical Society's *The Geographical Journal*. All this while compiling reports on the natural scenery of each area.

Back then, all Taiwan-related reference books from Japan and the West were stacked inside the storage room of the library's basketball-court-sized basement, a single walkway separating the Japanese books from the western ones. Interested parties could go in and borrow books by simply presenting their ID. I often spent entire days in there flipping through Western publications and occasionally browsing through Japanese ones when I needed a break.

I was doing exactly that – browsing the bookcases lined with literature published during the Japanese occupation – when I found it. Taking in the volumes one by one, it was fate that amongst a row of books on Japanese local customs and literary histories, this book caught my eye.

I'd just read about Kano in Hachisuka Masauji and Udagawa Tatsuo's "Contributions to the Ornithology of Formosa" (1950 & 1951). Both authors held him in high esteem, particularly in regard to his prolonged ornithological survey of Mount Xue.

The high praise they awarded the young academic left a deep impression on me. However, I was also curious how someone so young and still climbing the ladder of academia could have the opportunity and skills necessary to travel all the way to Taiwan, live in the mountains and become one with the wild, obsessively conduct broad surveys of the wildlife, cirques, and biogeography, and then branch out into anthropology and archeology.

My amazement only grew when I found this book. Clearly, Kano was much wilder than I'd imagined. In that time, not only did he conduct large-scale studies on the tribes and forests by diving deep into Taiwan's remote areas, exploring the mountains to his heart's content despite the risk of being decapitated by the natives.

I'd previously found records of Kano's ornithological and entomological observations while flipping through reference materials, yet was unaware of this book's existence. Why had he come that year, and how? There was something about these mountains that demanded he climb them, something related to their many birds and insects as well as the distinctiveness of each indigenous tribe. These are the curiosities that lurked in the depths of my heart.

In his second year at Tokyo Imperial University, Kano was only twenty-four when he completed the main expeditions described in the book. Most of the Mount Niitaka expedition took place in August 1931. His mountain exploration lasted fifty days, during which he relied on his unmatched passion and lofty goals. Only one of the seven travelogues contained a detailed account of Mount Chao-she, which he had hiked as early as 1928 when he was still in high school. Even before that, Kano had visited many of Taiwan's mountain ranges and natural landscapes, including Mount Niitaka, countless times.

Just before being published, Kano supplied a single comprehensive article about what he'd learned on Mount Niitaka as an addition to his travelogues. Titled the "Niitaka Files", this record detailed the mountain's native Bunun people and their lives. Kano's thirst to live like the Bunun hunters manifested in his passion for hiking mountain forests.

This young explorer traveled all over Taiwan's mountain ranges, a feat very few knew of. Out of all the famous travelogues on the nineteenth-century Age of

Exploration I'd encountered, the observations presented in this were uniquely its author's. Suddenly, all I could think about was how to best treat this work.

It was like thinking yourself to be the first to summit a mountain only to reach the top and find someone had beaten you to it a century before, leaving behind a glimmering array of proof. The book I held before me sang the Niitaka mountain range's praise in beautiful and elegant words. Nearly a century ago, a young man had realized his dreams in Taiwan's wilderness. Alas, along came the war, forcing him south to fight in an impossible war.

He was twenty-seven when he became of the legend of this island. At thirty-eight, he joined eternity.

Kano Tadao, 1906–1945?

When I first learned of Kano in the late 1980s, I didn't have the skillset to fully enter this world. Despite finding it utterly irresistible, I respectfully closed the book and put it back on the shelf with the other historical volumes. At that moment I shelved my heart – his work and legacy.

I originally planned to revisit this book when I was ready, after giving it some time. It never occurred to me that the next time I picked up this early classic and written record of Taiwan's mountains, thirty years would have gone by.

Bug Boy

Don't weep, insects–
Lovers, stars themselves,
Must part.[01]
–Kobayashi Issa

The important Edo-era haiku poet Kobayashi Issa (1763–1827) wrote countless poems about insects throughout his life. An unfathomable number of early Japanese poets mimicked Kobayashi, using insects in their poetry as metaphors for life's joys and sorrows.

Born from a nationwide fervor, this was how a country's poets sang their love of insects, and nurtured a deep-set tradition in their daily lives.

A long time ago, while reading Ms. Lin Wenyue's six-volume translation of *The Tale of Genji,* I distinctly felt the Japanese aesthetic of impermanence, the singular "mono no aware", long described in this thousand-year-old masterpiece. This natural aesthetic had only grown more acute with the West's rising influence. Westerners traveling to Japan imparted their first-hand experience of conducting entomological surveys. Like noodles fermented with yeast, their knowledge was gradually incorporated until it became an essential aspect of Japanese life.

When entomology was first introduced to Japan, it was a hobby mainly amongst the elite. It wasn't until around 1870, near the beginning of the Meiji period, that the government incorporated entomology into the nation's natural science education. Thanks to the influence of modern science, collectors with a scientific inclination began to gradually appear.

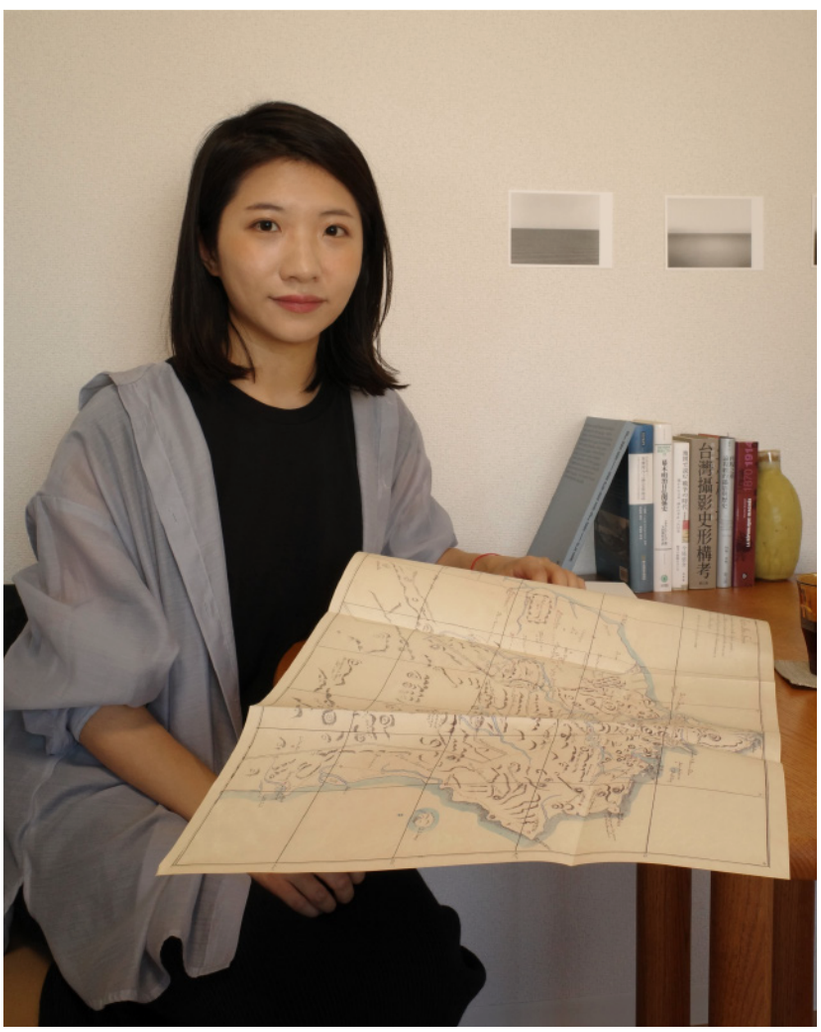
Around the dawn of the twentieth century, this widespread love of insects had already become a fixture of life in Japan's cities as well as an important part of education. Broadly speaking, Japanese children during that period spent their playtime outdoors, many of them obsessed with collecting insects. This was the environment in which Kano, born in 1906, grew up.

Elementary schools featured insect observation classes, which furthered the wave of enthusiasm around collecting and inadvertently created business opportunities. The famous Nawa Museum of Insects opened in 1919, and Jean-Henri Fabre's *Souvenirs Entomologiques* was published in Japanese in 1922. Both were products of their age.

---

01 Translator's note: The English translation of the poetry is a work of Lucien Stryk and Takashi Ikemoto, quoted from *Haiku: The Poetry of Zen* (edited by Manuela Dunn Mascetti; published by Hyperion in 1998).

福爾摩沙的「健行」：
法國軍官薩勒鏡頭下的清法戰爭



Huang Ching-Jen
黃澂任

- **Category:** History
- **Publisher:** Taiwan Interminds
- **Date:** 1/2025
- **Pages:** 160
- **Length:** 55,000 characters (approx. 35,700 words in English)
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Huang Ching-Jen holds a degree from National Taiwan Normal University's Graduate Institute of Taiwan History. In addition to *Carapatteur: The Sino-French War on Formosa through the Lens of André Salles*, which is based on her master's thesis, Huang is the co-translator of *The Witnessed Account of British Resident John Dodd at Tamsui* and other historical non-fiction works focused on nineteenth-century Taiwan.

CARAPATTEUR:
THE SINO-FRENCH WAR ON FORMOSA THROUGH THE LENS OF ANDRÉ SALLES

During his sojourn on Formosa (Taiwan) during the Sino-French War, French naval officer André Salles made a personal record of the island's people and sights in photographs. Different from typical "war photography", these images reflect Salles' impressions of late nineteenth-century Taiwan and his inquisitiveness about exotic lands and cultures.

In 1884, France expanded its war with the Chinese Empire over sovereignty in Indochina to the island of Taiwan, hoping to make it a bargaining chip in eventual peace negotiations. After several failed attempts to capture Tamsui, the French briefly occupied the northern port town of Keelung and the Pescadore (Penghu) Archipelago before abandoning the venture altogether. Today, France's military interlude on Taiwan is an important topic of academic interest and study. *Carapatteur* centers around forty-five photographs taken by French officer André Salles while on Taiwan and the Pescadores in 1884 and 1885, exploring contemporary cultural and natural landscapes as well as Salle's motivations and photographic approach.

Noble-born and educated, it is likely Salles enlisted in the navy out of a dual sense of patriotism and eagerness to see the world. As a French Alpine Club member, he published some of his photographs as engraved prints along with descriptions of the highlands of northern Formosa (Taiwan) in their journal, The Alpine Club Annual.

Included among the forty-five photographs are pictures of French forces firing cannon from a hilltop stronghold, soldiers and civilians posed by a temple gate, and a captive fisherman posed next to a battleship gun. Many of the images seem to have been taken while off-duty and often portray scenes at odds with France's status as a hostile occupation force. Always off-camera, Salles captures the complex face of the French occupation and the fact that, although fighting to extend and secure France's colonial empire, not all soldiers were wholly comfortable with their imperialist mission.

Drawing on rigorous historical research and data as well as insights into the thoughts and thinking of those invested in France's colonial mission, this book packs exceptionally reprinted photographs and insightful, engaging prose. Readers see the limitations imposed on individuals caught in the flow of history, and how victories, defeats, transformative events, and political ideologies spring from a complex, and very human, polity.

CARAPATTEUR

By Huang Ching-Jen
Translated by Genevieve Feest

> "Rather than creating another historiography of the Sino-French War, this unique work turns its narrative lens on the photographs and writings of one French officer serving in Taiwan during that war. *Carapatteur* not only pieces together the natural and cultural landscapes of contemporary Taiwan and the Pescadores (Penghu); it also sheds light on contemporary Western views of the Far East and reveals the textures of everyday life in late nineteenth-century Taiwan. While showing the perspective of photographer André Salles, these photographs also provide insights into his professional technique, talent, and interests as well as hint at the complexities underpinning the Western imperialist outlook, perspectives on the Sino-French War, and ideations on late-Qing Taiwan. Seeing oneself through another's eyes is critical both to better self-understanding and to truly understanding history."
>
> — ***Readmoo*** **/ Translated by Jeff Miller**

Prelude: Finding A New Perspective on Taiwanese History through Travel Photography

"Carapatteur", a French term meaning "a person who loves to walk," once described sailors who, after spending weeks or months at sea, were fond of taking leisurely walks in areas their ships laid anchor. André Salles, a French officer who had taken several hiking journeys in Taiwan and the Penghu Archipelago between November 1884 and August 1885, was one of those who wore with pride the "carapatteur" moniker.

Officer André Salles landed in Taiwan with French forces after the Sino-French War spread to the island in 1884. Guided by subjective awareness and keen sense of observation, Salles took forty-five photographs throughout Taiwan and Penghu. He also penned an essay describing local scenery and landmarks that was published in The French Alpine Club's journal, *The Alpine Club Annual (l'Annuaire du Club Alpin)*. This book takes a closer look at André Salles' forty-five photographs and related journal articles to understand the awareness and perspective Salles invested in these photographs taken on his hikes through Taiwan and examines the historical context behind these images.

The Global Historical Significance Behind Late-Nineteenth-Century Photographs of Taiwan

As a soldier in the Sino-French War, André Salles came to Taiwan not to do business or preach the gospel but to blockade Taiwan's ports. Therefore, his

photographs may be considered more an expression of putting his personal knowledge into practice than of his objectively recording Taiwan's characteristics. Interpreting these photographs as Salles' personal undertaking can complement previous research on Taiwan's photography history, which has largely emphasized the analysis of visual content.

According to Historian Douglas Fix, photographic analysis requires taking into account the life history of the photographer, including their education, exploration experiences, and access to sources of knowledge, among other factors. Moreover, photos must be compared to one another to further elucidate the information contained within. Doing so can help us gain a deeper understanding of the background and significance of the "Taiwan landscape" as perceived through foreign eyes. This book takes a closer look at Salles' photographs and notes to better appreciate his observations and photographic awareness. We re-examine the photographic records of French soldiers from the Sino-French War to shed light on the global historical significance of late-nineteenth-century photographs of Taiwan. Salles' photographs invite the viewer into the contemporary cultural landscapes of Taiwan and Penghu and to appreciate the connections between these landscapes and the French Navy and hiking culture of the period.

The primary historical materials referenced in this book are André Salles' photographs of Taiwan and his articles from *The Alpine Club Annual* and other publications. The author has translated and published Chinese versions of the original French-language articles in the *Bulletin of Taiwan Historical Research, NTNU.* André Salles donated his negatives to the Geographic Society's collection, which are now conserved by the National Library of France, and all of the forty-five photographs referenced may be viewed online on the National Library of France's official website.

Research on Late-Nineteenth-Century Foreign Surveys and Writings on Taiwan

Foreigners in Taiwan on business, military, political, and other missions during the late nineteenth century collectively produced a considerable amount of written material and photographs that reflect their findings and observations as well as their understandings and thoughts of Taiwan. The current discourse in research on these foreign surveys and records centers on two primary aspects: survey results and writings about Taiwan. These two aspects are further explained in the following sections.

1. Research on Foreigners' Surveys and Image Publications

Currently known surveys and writings on Taiwan by foreigners published in the late nineteenth century include those of John Thomson (1871), Charles Le Gendre (1875), and Camille Imbault-Huart (1893). Numerous researchers have since performed route investigations, landscape comparisons, and related studies of their work. For example, the on-site investigation by Yu Yung-fu retraced John Thomson's route through southern Taiwan, doing a comparative analysis of the present-day landscape and referencing Thomson's descriptions of the land, people, architecture, and clothing. In *Voices of Photography* magazine, Hsiao Yung-Seng featured a series of articles on the history of photography and photographic technique in Taiwan that address nineteenth-century printmaking techniques, photographs in *The Diary of George Leslie Mackay*, and photographs in French sinologist Camille Imbault-Huart's *The History and Descriptions of Formosa*.

Two works by Wang Ya-lun, *French Collections of Early Taiwan Photographs (1850-1920)* and *The Dawn of Taiwan's Photographic History,* discuss early photographs of Taiwan from a photographic perspective. The former contains photos taken by John Thomson and Camille Imbault-Huart during the Japanese colonial period, while the latter discusses

early photographs of Taiwan and how they shed light on the influence of nineteenth-century trade and cultural exchange on Taiwan. Focusing on colonial photography of Japan-ruled Taiwan, researcher Chen Wei-chi analyzes the ethnographic photographs of the Aboriginal Affairs Agency and the photography experiences of contemporary anthropologists. Chen's work emphasizes photography as a process of ethnographic archive production, focusing on the construction of anthropologists' field perspectives and their representation of knowledge.

Addressing the use of photographs in relation to text, Douglas L. Fix offers a detailed analysis of Charles Le Gendre's use of photographs in his *Notes of Travel in Formosa*, providing an analysis of Charles Le Gendre's views and purpose in using photos and further demonstrating the importance of conducting comparative analyses of photographers' works. In *Reclaiming Reality: On the Historical Formation of Taiwanese Photography,* Chang Shih-lun conceptualizes issues in Taiwan's photography history, emphasizing the economic and political networks and powers behind nineteenth-century photographs of Taiwan and further highlighting the diversity and difficulties encountered in the history of photography.

The numerous surveys and reports compiled and published during this period have also become important historical research materials. Examples include *From Province to Republic to Colony: The James Wheeler Davidson Collection on the Origins and Early Development of Japanese Rule in Taiwan, 1895-1905; The Island of Formosa Past and Present; The Mission Correspondence of Hugh and Elizabeth Ritchie; The History and Descriptions of Formosa; Journal of a Blockaded Resident in North Formosa: During the Franco-Chinese War 1884-5* (translated by Jackson Tan); Eugène Germain Garnot's *The French Expedition to Formosa; The Diary of George Leslie Mackay; The Cabin Boy of Admiral Courbet;* and René Coppin's *Tonkin Memorial: The Sino-French War and Formosa*. These and other research and historical data publications allow us to understand the survey results of foreigners and their experiences of Taiwan in the late nineteenth century through media other than photography.

However, there remains significant further room for discussion and analysis, with plenty of relevant material that may be combined with and compared to the works already mentioned. For example, the materials of André Salles and Charles de Montigny in the collection of the National Library of France have yet to receive much discussion. Current scholars who have contributed this field of research include Arsène Donada-Vidal, whose work discusses the shaping of collective memory under colonization based on his comparative analysis of the records and writings of multiple veterans of the Sino-French War.

2. Foreign Perceptions of and Writings on Taiwan

The discourse on foreigners residing in Taiwan during the late nineteenth century and their transmission of knowledge and beliefs has been led primarily by two scholars.

Wenpei Lin uses cognitive construction as an entry point for researching Westerners' descriptions and knowledge of Taiwan, using knowledge reconstruction and power relations as a means of analysis. Wenpei Lin compares the knowledge presented in *Notes of Travel in Formosa* by Charles Le Gendre and *The Island of Formosa Past and Present* by James W. Davidson and discusses how transmission of this knowledge may have guided the development and perpetuation of related colonial perspectives. For his part, Chen Tung-sheng uses nineteenth-century Western missionary narratives to analyze the influence of Western views and religious values on their perspectives of Taiwan. Chen Tung-sheng's research focuses on the knowledge systems of Protestant and Catholic missionaries assigned to the island, describing the limitations on their understanding of Taiwan society reflected in these texts and their negative judgments of non-believers and their culture, particularly when evangelistic results fell short of expectation.

Regarding research on contemporary writings,

Lin Hsin-yi has researched the works of Westerners such as Milicent M. McClatchie, who recorded her impressions of the general atmosphere and societal changes in Taiwan over seven months between 1895 and 1896; Marjorie Landsborough, whose narratives introduced Taiwan's uniqueness to the children of her home country; and Lise Boem and Thurlow Fraser, both of whom wrote novels set in Tamsui during the Sino-French War. With regard to McClatchie, Lin Hsin-yi analyzed how her foreigner and female identities influenced her writing, and how the characteristics of travel literature influenced her readers. Marjorie Landsborough's publications demonstrate the process and experience of church missions as well as depict her understanding of Taiwan society. Research on the two novels set during the Sino-French War show how contemporary writings depict daily life for foreigners in Taiwan during the late Qing dynasty and the divide between foreign communities and local residents. Lin Hsin-yi's textually based research pays close attention to outsiders' knowledge about Taiwan and reflects the era in which these novels were set. Moreover, discussions exclude the writings of foreigners with brief stays in Taiwan and those without significant experience of the island beyond the foreign community.

The work of Douglas L. Fix was a great source of inspiration for this book and shed light on the importance of historical photographs and experiences. According to Fix, historical photographs allow us to better grasp the authentic observations and objectives of foreigners in Taiwan. Textual descriptions, maps, photos, and other media that describe the landscape, when brought together in discussion, can illustrate an individual's multiple perspectives, contradictory opinions, and fragmented views on a particular topic. Furthermore, people's knowledge and changing perceptions of a certain place can illustrate the complexity and diversity of spatial discourse and the observer's unique perspective and choices. A similar discussion on this type of research method may be seen in Paul D. Barclay's research. Barclay's comparative analysis of photos of indigenous peoples taken during the Japanese colonial period and mapmaking approaches facilitates his exploration of the changing role of photographs in the service of colonial authorities, the results of which he uses to explain how different ethnic groups were lumped together and how geographical features were constructed. Cross-examining multiple photographs and texts allows researchers to more deeply understand their authors' cognitive differences and, from the viewer's perspective, the influences of powers at work.

However, the current body of research lacks the photographer's perspective, the production process, and the analysis of the photographer's personal history. As a result, most research efforts have yet to grasp the significance of photography and image composition because they fail to consider the photographer's background or the spatial and temporal context of production. Thus, in light of the above and building on previous discourse, this book uses André Salles' photographs to explore foreigners' observations of Taiwan in the late nineteenth century, with a focus on plumbing the history and knowledge (e.g., framing and content) hidden within.

曙光來臨之前：
15 位前輩藝術家的時代散策

Text by Lee Tuo-Tzu
作者／李拓梓

Lee Tuo-Tzu is a former political staffer who worked for the Tsai administration's writing team. Today, Lee is a columnist with a particular interest in Taiwan art history and Japanese history and culture. His publications include *Before the Dawn: Journeys of 15 Taiwanese Artists from Colonialism to Democracy* and *Japan's Epoch-Making Prime Ministers*.

Illustrations by Ruan Guang-Min
繪者／阮光民

Manga artist Ruan Guang-Min, known for his fresh style, humor, and compassion, deftly captures the family, parent-child, and human emotional entanglements coloring everyday life in Taiwan. His award recognitions include multiple Golden Comic Awards, and the 14th Japan International Manga Award Silver Prize. Rights to his work have been sold in Japanese, French, German, Italian, Turkish, and Arabic. Two of Ruan's works, *Dong Hua Chun Barbershop* and *The Corner Store*, have been adapted into television series.

BEFORE THE DAWN:
JOURNEYS OF 15 TAIWANESE ARTISTS FROM COLONIALISM TO DEMOCRACY

- **Category:** History, Art
- **Publisher:** Taiwan Interminds
- **Date:** 3/2025
- **Pages:** 200
- **Length:** 57,000 characters (approx. 37,000 words in English)
- **Rights contact:** bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

This book tackles the stories and backstories of fifteen Taiwanese artists living and creating under colonial and then Martial Law rules and restraints. Working during this "dark age" of domestic creativity and artistic expression, the lonely but vital path they blazed makes them the progenitors of today's prolific creativity.

As Taiwan's reputation for artistic innovation and creativity continues to rise both at home and abroad, authors are wading in to tell the story of the history of modern art on the island. In *Before the Dawn*, Lee Tuo-Tzu invests his authorial skills as a former political speechwriter to frame stories of formative local artists of the early and mid-twentieth century within the context of contemporary political pressures and influences, showing how they and their work stealthily and effectively cut against the current to foster hope in the future.

The book opens on Huang Tu-Shui (1895-1930), a talented sculptor working in the 1920s with dreams his art would secure his indelible reputation in East Asian art circles. However, most of his works vanished in the chaotic postwar years. As a Taiwanese artist working in colonial Japan, Huang's legacy was ignored and underappreciated until *Water of Immortality*, featured at the 1921 Imperial Art Exhibition in Tokyo, resurfaced in 2021. Its return to public awareness marked a watershed moment in the recognition and visibility of Taiwan art.

Many of the other artists covered in this work are contemporaries of Huang, including Li Mei-shu, an oil painter who invested much effort in supervising the restoration of his hometown temple, social activist Chen Chih-chi, and Chen Cheng-po, a victim of summary execution by KMT soldiers during the (1947) 228 Incident. Late-colonial period artists also featured include Chen Chin, Lin Yu-shan, and Kuo Hsueh-hu – three painters known for their works in the "Eastern gouache" genre. The innovations and education they and their contemporaries brought to the island's art scene helped fuel steady, subtle resistance to autocratic rule.

Standalone stories in each chapter are fronted by two-page narrative comic strips drawn by popular comic strip artist Ruan Guang-Min. Centered around a fictional high school art student learning about these prewar artists, these strips open another window into their life and times.

BEFORE THE DAWN

By Lee Tuo-Tzu, Ruan Guang-Min
Translated by Elliott Cheung

> "Severe controls on information and education imposed by the Nationalist government after the Second World War effectively disassociated postwar Taiwan from its fifty-year history as a colony of Japan – a period of both rapid modernization and emerging industrial and artistic accomplishment. This lost era has only recently returned into the public consciousness and is only now being incorporated into public education curricula. Thus, for most Taiwanese, popular literature, easy to read and digest, is essential to bringing us all up to speed on Taiwan's prewar, colonial heritage. *Before the Dawn* takes an engagingly interesting narrative approach to introducing the stories of several prominent local artists working in colonial-era Taiwan. Accompanied by lively illustrations, this important work sheds evocative "new" light on Taiwan's colonial art world."
>
> — ***Readmoo* / Translated by Jeff Miller**

The Pursuit of Permanence in Adversity: Huang Tu-shui (1895–1930)

An Artistic Genius Born in Rags

Huang Tu-shui was the most outstanding Taiwanese artist of the 1920s, and the first Taiwanese to receive a full modern art education. Though he came from meager means, his studies changed the course of his life. He attended Bangka Public School which, back then, bore little resemblance to its modern successor, today's Lao Song Elementary School. Classes were held at Ching Shui Yen Tzu Shih Temple. Later on, because of his father's early death, he moved to Tuatiu-tiann (Dadaocheng) with his mother.

While studying in the normal division of the Governor-General's National Language School (the predecessor of University of Taipei and National Taipei University of Education), Huang's gift for sculpture drew immediate attention. After graduation, Uchida Kakichi, Chief of Civil Affairs, and Kumamoto Shigekichi, the Principal of the National Language School, recommended this gifted student for admission to the Tokyo Fine Arts School (now Tokyo University of the Arts), making him the first Taiwanese student to study at that institution.

By the time Huang began his studies in Tokyo, he was already twenty years old with a strong sense of his calling. He wanted to master the creation of "permanence" in his art. Coming from the colonies, Huang was quite cognizant of his "peripherality". Japan's colonial subjects were a notch below everyone else on the metropole's pecking order. Aside from this further honing his desire to outshine his Japanese competitors, he artfully transformed his "peripheral" weakness into strength, creating works rich with nativist color that awed the art circles of the day.

Chang Shen-chieh, who later became a well-reputed author, was his roommate at the Taiwanese

student dormitory (Takasago Ryo). He recalled how Huang had once expressed his dislike of conversation. He spent each day turning toward the stone, beating and knocking against it. The other Taiwanese denizens of the dorm had little regard for the unassuming "artist" named "Tu-shui" (meaning dirt and water). Even though his peers paid him no mind, by applying hard work to his gifts, Huang stepped into the most sacred halls of the art world.

Taiwan's First Perennial Champion of the Imperial Art Exhibition

Huang had his own reasons for being engrossed in his work. He realized the brevity of life and the inevitable fact that one could leave very little behind. "There is only one way for a man to cheat death, and that is permanence of the spirit." Because of this he went to the greatest lengths to immerse himself in creation, in pursuit of the possibility of permanence. And Huang achieved it. He was the first Taiwanese to have their art featured in the Imperial Art Exhibition – the highest honor for an artist at the time. Not only that, his pieces would go on to be featured in four consecutive years of that prestigious exhibition. For colonial Taiwan, this was a feat none had accomplished before, or would accomplish afterward.

Starting in 1920, his works *The Barbarian Boy*, *Water of Immortality*, *The Posing Woman*, and *Countryside* were respectively selected and displayed at four consecutive Imperial Art Exhibitions. Huang thus became the morning star of Taiwanese art and culture circles. While his involvement in a feud between Kitamura Seibo and Asakura Fumio, two giants of contemporary Japanese sculpture, led to his stepping away from high-profile exhibitions, this did nothing to slow his creative output during this time "in the wilderness".

A Microcosm of the Age of Realistic Sculpture

To make ends meet, Huang, who had made a name for himself in both Taiwan and Japan, rented a studio in Ikebukuro and accepted commercial commissions. He did personal likenesses of the famous and designed mementos for wealthy individuals and companies. For example, *Shakyamuni from the Mountain*, an effigy of the Buddha, was commissioned by Lungshan Temple in Bangka, Taiwan. The head of this Buddha, rather than culminating in the traditional *ushnisha* comprised of many round circles, featured a layperson's head of hair. "Realism" was one of the most important characteristics of Huang's work, and Buddhist effigies were no exception.

The original *Shakyamuni from the Mountain* carved in wood was destroyed in the flames of American wartime bombings. Fortunately, before producing the wooden sculpture, Huang first made a plaster cast, which was later donated to one of the custodians of the Lungshan Temple, Wei Ching-te, by Huang's widow Liao Chiu-kuei. The Wei family home had once been broken into, and the plaster sculpture stolen. However, the thief accidentally dropped it while climbing over a wall and abandoned it where it had fallen. When it was found by the Weis, they enlisted the help of the Council for Cultural Affairs and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM) to have *Shakyamuni* restored and recast in bronze. The plaster original is now retained in the TFAM collection, with the five recast works respectively kept at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts (NTMoFA), National Museum of History (NMH), Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts (KMoFA), Taipei Lungshan Temple, and Kaiyuan Temple in Tainan. The sculpture at Lungshan is the easiest to see and is located on the "tiger" side of the main hall (left from the entrance, but right from the god's perspective).

During this period, Huang also created many animal sculptures as gifts or donations. Each of the monkeys, boars, koi fish, buffalo, rabbits, and goats he crafted leap to life. *Mother and Child*, for example, features water buffalo, with the little calf resting its face on the mother's thigh. In humans and animals alike, children seem to naturally adopt this posture. The artist's keen sense of observation help elicit warmth and empathy from those who see his creations.

During this period, Huang also produced many commissioned human likenesses. A fair share of these were supporters of his artistic career such as mining tycoon Yen Kuo-nien, Lin Hsiung-cheng of the Banqiao Lin family, and Kazuta Terutaro, who

rose to prominence in the salt industry. His subjects also included Japanese who had contributed significantly to Taiwan's development. Among these were Takagi Tomoe, often called the "father of Taiwan medical hygiene", and Yamamoto Teijiro, the founder of Ciaotou Sugar Refinery. These individuals and their accomplishments provide a window into socioeconomic development in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period.

The Light of "Water of Immortality" Reappears

Unfortunately, Huang Tu-shui passed away at the age of thirty-six. By that time in his career, he was already a household name. Li Mei-shu, his underclassman at Tokyo Fine Arts School, produced sketches of his funeral. Huang's extant works at the time totaled around eighty pieces. However, as most were wooden or plaster-cast, a large number of these were later lost or destroyed during the war and subsequent political turmoil. Thankfully, through the hard work of many, more of his works have reappeared gradually over the past few years, with *Water of Immortality* doubtlessly the most legendary of these.

Water of Immortality was one of Huang's works featured in the Imperial Art Exhibition. It was initially kept at the Taiwan Education Association Building (now the National 228 Memorial Museum), which, after the war, temporarily housed the Taiwan Provincial House of Representatives before it and the whole provincial government relocated to Wufeng, Taichung. All of the hall's contents, including Huang's sculpture, were packed up and shipped by train. At Taichung Station, boxes and crates were loaded one by one onto trucks for the final leg of the journey, eventually leaving the sculpture of the naked girl alone on the platform. A group of young Mainlander soldiers passing by touched it lecherously, one even harassingly flecking paint onto the girl's genitals. Chang Hung-biao, a doctor who ran a clinic near the station, saw it all and was deeply frustrated.

Dr. Chang's second brother, the author Chang Shen-chieh, had years ago documented Huang Tu-shui's happenings at Takasago Dormitory. With such pedigree, it was a matter of course that the doctor knew the true value of the work abandoned at the station. Seeing it unclaimed, he brought the nude sculpture home, where it sat in the Chang family living room for many years. When the Chang family's many children returned home from school, they would set their schoolbags next to "Older Sister" before eating dinner and then finish their homework next to her afterward. This is why, although many older Taiwanese don't know what ultimately happened to *Water of Immortality*, they at least know she was last seen at the Chang family clinic.

Later on, as his health declined, Dr. Chang suspected his time was near. He surmised domestic political tensions would continue and that Taiwanese and Mainlanders would continue not respecting each other. Already, few from the generation that knew of Huang Tu-shui's glory remained, and he suspected the presence of *Water of Immortality* in their home might lead to trouble for his family. He enlisted his children to wrap "Older Sister" up for storage, admonishing his family to safeguard her until Taiwanese and Mainlanders finally learned mutual respect. It was then, he said, that *Water of Immortality* must be returned to her country.

2021, the year *Water of Immortality* was rediscovered, just so happened to be the hundred-year anniversary of her completion by Huang Tu-shui. Its exhibition created a great commotion and rekindled public imaginings about the "Artistic Age of Formosa" that Huang Tu-shui had once prayed for. The ardent aspirations of young artists who came before, once stuffed away in wooden boxes to escape the ravages of colonial rule, war, and authoritarianism, are now once again in the light. So long as there is hope, the Artistic Age of Formosa, while perhaps late, shall arrive one day.

Out of Her Chambers, Ahead of Her Time: Chen Chin (1907–1998)

The Extraordinary Path of a Prominent and Talented Scion

Chen Chin came from a powerful family in Hsinchu. Her father was of the gentlemanly class, highly educated and of wealthy stock. Purportedly, when she dined at home, they would stir fry pork floss for her because she disliked vegetables. With meat hard to come by then, eating pork floss was a clear indication of status. Chen Chin advanced all the way to the Taipei Third Girls' High School in her studies. Very few girls attended high school at the time, and the Third Girls' High, a nexus of culture and refinement, was the top choice for daughters of prominent families. Among those studying there around the same time as Chen Chin include the accomplished artist Lin A-chin and noted physician Or Hsieh.

However, the conservative customs of the time held that respectable families send their daughters to high school to develop their talents in cooking, embroidery, and the traditional arts of the zither, Go checkers, calligraphy, and painting. These would be part of the "dowry" presented in their future marriage into an eminent household. Thus, the Third Girls' High was seen as a "bridal school". Even the distinguished Lin A-chin was told by her teacher, Gobara Koto, upon her marriage to Kuo Hsueh-hu to take care of her husband and family so that Kuo could focus on his creative work. This is what led Lin in later years to describe her younger self as "a stallion tied to a stone post".

Chen Chin was also a student of Gobara's. Because of her outstanding talent and comfortable family resources, Gobara advocated strongly to her father upon her graduation to allow her to study in Japan, which was swiftly supported by the Chen family. Chen's father was strict, and she herself had high expectations of herself. Reflecting on her state of mind as she embarked on her studies, she said, "if you're going, you have to do yourself proud. You have to be strong, and not lose. Memorize your art history and Japanese and put effort into it. If your grades are good, others won't look down on you." In deciding to pursue further study in Japan, Chen was bravely striking out on a path very different from her seventeen and eighteen-year-old classmates, many of whom, seeking a life of predictable stability and comfort, were already engaged or otherwise planning to start families soon after graduation.

From Bride-to-Be to the "Three Outstanding Youths"

Chen Chin focused her studies on *tōyōga* (also known as eastern gouache painting, executed in ink and mineral pigments on silk or paper) at a time when very few women were studying Western painting in general. The portraits of beauties, birds and flowers in tōyōga were in Taiwan's male-dominated society easily associated with the feminine "cultivation" of fine manners. Thus, "bridal schools" like Third Girls' High School offered instruction in tōyōga. Aside from this, various women painters had been associated with the tōyōga genre since the Edo Period. For example, her predecessor Uemura Shoen and contemporary Ogura Yuki were both fairly distinguished painters.

Chen Chin studied at the Private Women's School of Fine Arts, predecessor of today's Joshibi University of Art and Design. Although it was established with the lofty goal of cultivating autonomy in women, it was often viewed at the time as a school where distinguished families sent their daughters to learn bridal manners. Not long after entering the school, Chen Chin earned the attention and respect of the art world through being chosen for the Taiwan Art Exhibition. This was the time when the Japanese government began to promote nativist painting over *nanga* with more abstract representation in water and ink. Kuo Hsueh-hu and Lin Yu-shan, who were both chosen the same year as Chen Chin, received the praise of the colonizers for their newer style, irritating many senior artists long active in the scene.

BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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

文化部
MINISTRY OF CULTURE
REPUBLIC OF CHINA (TAIWAN)

TAIWAN CONTENT PLAN
臺流文化黑潮計畫

BOOKS FROM TAIWAN