



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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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.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Dear Readers,

Welcome to Issue 19 of Books from Taiwan!

While working on this issue, I came across a powerful quotation concerning one of our featured titles: "true oppression of women is any image of women... that flattens out our individual differences".⁰¹ The remark was made in reference to *Everything She Fails to Achieve* by Wu Xiaole, but it struck me that this quote is relevant to many of the most powerful books included in this issue. They aren't just wonderful books by women, or about women; they're wonderful books that explore the great variety of ways women can be in the world. The wisdom of this quote, and of these books, is that they display an understanding of the fact that in fighting against one stereotype, it is all too easy to accidentally replace it with another. The truest weapon against a stereotype is specificity – individual lives captured exactly as they are, without resorting to explaining them in generic terms.

This is exactly what Wu Xiaole has done so well with *Everything She Fails to Achieve* (vol. 1). The stunning

precision with which the author details the female protagonist's inquiry into the origins of the societal and familial conditioning under which she labors will be a marvel to any reader. However, female readers, in particular, will find the novel reflect their own experiences back to them as if through a microscope – delivering a visceral blow-by-blow of the precise deployment of every emotional hook in a mother-daughter relationship – as something close to revelatory.

Finely tuned social observations are also powerfully employed in *The Woman and the Elephant in the Room* by Hua Po-Jung (vol. 1). The misdirections and vented frustrations running through the conversations of a divorced couple seethe with a sense of reality, but the novel's tragicomic core emerges after the plot is thickened by a murder, committed by the ex-husband, Ming-jen. While being briefed by police on how the body was found by hikers out looking for fireflies, the ex-wife, our protagonist Cheng-fang, can hardly keep from exclaiming, "How many times did I ask Ming-jen to take me up that same mountain to see those fireflies!" The humor is so effective because it also reveals something about Cheng-fang's character: her prosaic grouching about the husband she thought she had provided a comforting sense of normalcy as the

01 "What's it to You if I Get My Characters Dirty?" In Interview with Wu Xiaole" by Hsieh Ta-wen, Oct 4, 2023, www.openbook.org.

dark truths about the man he truly was threatened to reveal themselves.

For all of their telling details and memorably unique characters, the above novels nonetheless depict somewhat familiar social types: the introvert struggling to assert her autonomy, and the disappointed divorce. However, the first-person narrator of our next book, *My Slight Problem with Infidelity*, is somewhat less typical (vol. 2). She is a writer who keeps doubling down on unhealthy behaviors because she has fallen in love with a married man, and can only find the self-affirmation she craves in his company. In exploring the psychology of a “screw-up”, author Hsu Li-Wei brings humanity, depth, and, most importantly, credibility to the motivations behind romantic indiscretions.

Moving into the most extreme realms of behavior, *A Sketch of a Female Serial Killer* (vol. 1), is a stunning work of reportage that restores the humanity to Lin Yu-ju, Taiwan’s only female death-row inmate, a woman who was characterized by the media as “the daughter-in-law who made the earth tremble”. While Lin Yu-ju readily confessed to the murders of her mother-in-law and husband, author and veteran journalist Hu Mu-Ching wanted to lift the veil of one-dimensional reporting that had obscured the real Lin Yu-ju and replaced her with a simplistic black widow narrative. If we take our initial premise seriously, that is, that “any image of women...that flattens out individual differences” is a form of oppression, then these two books, which restore dimensionality to “bad women” are just as important to our project as books that lend individual depth to more socially accepted types.

Finally, I will briefly introduce a masterpiece that, by itself, could be a case study on granting fully-realized individuality to a complete cast of female characters. Each of the novels in Ping Lu’s *The Taiwan Histories Relived Trilogy* features fictional women confronted by aspects of Taiwan’s complex, and often contested, history (vol. 2). Populated by a writer seeking her missing husband, star-crossed lovers whose passion incurs political sanction, and a spirit medium who is

struggling to revive her fading powers, the trilogy benefits from the celebrated author’s talent for restoring living flesh to the bones of the past. In his review of Ping Lu’s *Love and Revolution*, renowned Sinologist Perry Link praised her “credible portrait” of Soong Ching-ling, the mother of modern China, for searching out “the person buried under all the layers of image-making”.⁰² The resemblance between this aspect of Ping Lu’s writing and the journalistic endeavor undertaken in *A Sketch of a Female Serial Killer* are striking.

We began from the premise that specificity is a tool for deposing stereotypes and confining narratives about women, but it is useful to remember that good writing always entails specificity. A novel can address a generic type, but it succeeds when it achieves a granularity that feels as immersive as life itself, as in the case of *Everything She Fails to Achieve*. Specificity can also be achieved by moving laterally to edges of normalcy, providing unique cases that broaden the range of our understanding of the forms life can take, as in *My Slight Problem with Infidelity*. All of these books win us over as readers for the same reason that they can be said to stand in defiance of oppressive images of women: they provide a detailed topography of life so rich that it defies reduction to a simplistic formula. As readers, we are forced to acknowledge them as works of art that speak uniquely for themselves in a way that no summary can. With that in mind, I encourage you to leave my words behind, dive into the samples we have provided, and let each of these books speak to you in its own unique way.

Specifically yours,

Joshua Dyer

Editor-in-Chief
Books from Taiwan 2.0

⁰² “Chinese Shadows” by Perry Link, *The New York Review*, Nov 16, 2006.

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

MINISTRY OF CULTURE,
REPUBLIC OF CHINA
[TAIWAN]

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

- Applicant Eligibility: Foreign publishing house (legal entity) legally registered or incorporated in accordance with the laws and regulations of their respective countries.
- Conditions:
 - 1.The so-called Taiwanese works must meet the following requirements:
 - A. Use traditional characters;
 - B. Written by a natural person holding an R.O.C. identity card;
 - C. Has been assigned an ISBN in Taiwan.
i.e., the author is a native of Taiwan, and the first 6 digits of the book's ISBN are 978-957-XXX-XXX-X, 978-986-XXX-XXX-X, or 978-626-XXX-XXX-X.
 - 2.Applications must include documents certifying that the copyright holder of the Taiwanese works consents to its translation and foreign publication (no restriction on its format).
 - 3.A translation sample of the Taiwanese work is required (no restriction on its format and length).
 - 4.If applications use the fully translated English version of the book selected into "Books from Taiwan" to be published directly or translated into other languages, or uses its excerpt translated English version to translate the entire text into English or other languages for publication, please state it in applications, and apply for authorization from the Ministry of Culture. It is still necessary to provide documents certifying that the

copyright holder of the Taiwanese work consents to its translation and foreign publication.

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

- Grant Items:

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

- A. Licensing fees (going to the copyright holder of the Taiwanese works);
- B. Translation fees;
- C. Marketing and promotion fees (applicants for this funding must propose a specific marketing promotion plan and complete the implementation before submitting the grant project results; those whose plans include talks or book launching events attended by authors in person will be given priority for grants);
- D. Book production-oriented fees;
- E. Tax (20% of the total award amount);
- F. Remittance-related handling fees.

2. Priority consideration is given to books that have received the Golden Tripod Award, the Golden Comic Award, the Taiwan Literature Award, books on Taiwan's culture and history, or series of books.

3. Grant recipients who use the fully or excerpt translated English version of the book selected into "Books from Taiwan" will be authorized to use it for free. For those who use the fully translated English version 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



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

FICTION

童話世界

FANTASY WORLD



© Mirror Fiction

Freddy
Fu-Jui Tang
唐福睿

-
- **Category:** Crime
 - **Publisher:** Mirror Fiction
 - **Date:** 9/2023
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 - **Full English Manuscript Available**
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Freddy Fu-Jui Tang was a lawyer for five years before he moved overseas to study screenwriting and directing at CalArts. Within his distinctly social realist and humanist writing, the legal system is a device that frames the human dilemmas of his characters. He personally adapted his first novel, *Port of Lies*, into a successful Netflix series, released in 2023.



* Adapted from the movie of the same name

Twenty years after successfully defending a teacher accused of sexual assault, a lawyer finds himself working on behalf of another of the teacher's young victims. Adapted from the film of the same name, Fantasy World questions whether courtroom victories truly deliver justice, or are some transgressions beyond the scope of legal recourse?

Chang Cheng-hsu, a freshman lawyer of undistinguished looks and family background, devotes all his energies to his first big case. In it, he will defend Tang Shih-cheng, a respected cram school teacher accused of sexually assaulting a female high school student. Too late, Chang discovers he has been manipulated by his client, causing irreparable harm to the girl he loves in the process. As it turns out, the object of his affections, Yen Hsin also had an inappropriate relationship with Tang, and is present in the public seating area of the courtroom as Chang accuses the victim of seducing Tang to secure material benefits, thereby securing victory for his client. Just as Tang intended, Cheng's fierce interrogation of the accuser scares Yen Hsin into silence. Soon afterward, Yen Hsin disappears, and Chang's affections slowly wither.

Twenty years later, Tang is once again accused of sexual assault, but this time Chang will represent the young accuser at the request of his social worker wife. For these twenty years, Tang has used his authority and powers of verbal persuasion to seduce one female student after another, convincing them to enter into a fantasy world of his creation, where they are manipulated into indulging his desires. Spurred on by his remorse over Yen Hsin, Chang is determined to finally bring Tang to justice.

However, the young victim never physically resisted the advances of her charismatic teacher. How, then, to prove that this is indeed a case of sexual assault? And will a courtroom victory do anything to heal her psychological wounds? Is the justice Chang seeks for the sake of his client, or is it to expiate his own guilt over defending Tang twenty years earlier?

Adapted from his movie of the same name, author/director Freddy Fu-Jui Tang's latest novel addresses the role of authority in cases of sexual misconduct and assault, taking inspiration from the shattering impact of the global Me Too movement. The author set about adapting the movie after its strong showing at the 2022 Taipei Film Festival, making use of the expertise gleaned from his law career, and the impeccable pacing mastered in the film industry to deliver a searing novel that convincingly portrays the imbalance of power that underpins many cases of sexual assault.

FANTASY WORLD

By Freddy Fu-Jui Tang

Translated by Roddy Flagg

“Social workers are far more than the vague image in the public mind would suggest. They play an important role in society that is often overlooked. Within the novel *Fantasy World*, however, the importance of social work is given flesh and bones. While lawyers worry about winning the case, social workers worry about the possibility of restoration, seeking spiritual compensation for what was lost. The depiction of social workers in Freddy Fu-Jui Tang’s novel are an expression of his commitment to every stage in the process of justice.”

The core motivation of *Fantasy World* is the author’s wish to display the pervasiveness of sexual assault. The collective pain of sexual assault is not a lone tree standing out from the landscape of society – chop it down and be done with it – it is the weeds that we see all around us, almost impossible to uproot. The purpose of art isn’t to lessen this pain, but to display its many facets, and open up more possibilities for dialogue.

— Anniel Hao (Writer) / Translated by Joshua Dyer

Part 1: Ancient Things 2019 (1)

Chang Cheng-hsu tidied his thinning hair from his forehead, noticing as he did so the girl’s perfume lingering on his hand.

White musk and rosewood.

It wasn’t a very good perfume. The base notes were weak to the point of being dull. She’d probably splashed too much on her wrist. But in the gym, amidst odors of sweat and bleach, it performed its duty.

She was a regular, the girl, a frequent visitor over the last six months – or at least she overlapped with his regular sessions. An overlookable face, but one made less bland by a post-exercise glow in her cheeks. A glow which highlighted the two advantages she could claim: her youth and her figure. He remembered her first few weeks and how her arrival had caused certain

users of the gym to put the running machines under more strain than was usual. She had then moved onto the weights section, bringing warmth and curves to the uncompromising steel and muscle.

Her gym wear and accessories were unvarying and on-trend, a testament to too much work on fitting in. Her eyes were evasive but unaffected; her slightly awkward movements betrayed a defensiveness that left her feeling no more secure. He’d overheard her chatting with other gym-goers a few times, the southern accent she couldn’t quite conceal confirming his hypothesis: a girl trying her luck in the capital, confident more in her abilities than her appearance. No doubt employed in some clerical role in some mid-sized firm, where efficiency and attention to detail mattered more than experience.

His conversation with the girl with the glow in her cheeks had arisen from their collusion a week earlier

during an incident.

A new arrival, a young man, had set his sights on her. Despite having some experience in evading persistent suitors, it seemed she'd never quite acquired the knack of delivering a firm and decisive rejection. So, faced with a dauntless pursuer capable of a 10-minute 15-kilometer-an-hour spurt on the running machine, she struggled to respond both physically and mentally. Until, that was, Chang Cheng-hsu arrived, handing her his own clean towel and the cover she needed to escape.

It was by no means a heroic rescue. If anything, the onlookers thought it awkward. He was on the short side, after all, too slight to draw any attention in the gym. Then there was the receding hairline and the thick glasses a career of reading required.

"I'm done. See you at the door in fifteen," he told the girl with the glow, before giving her pursuer a small smile to let him know the competition was over. That it had never begun. Gravitas, acquired through years of being a lawyer, left that crude and over-eager creature crushed.

Chang Cheng-hsu strolled off toward the locker room. The girl with the glow played along, slipping wordlessly from the runner's grasp. A small victory for culture and wisdom in the great and eternal battle against savagery.

That dauntless pursuer, though, showed himself still undaunted. He found Chang Cheng-hsu in the locker room, just as the older man was packing up to leave. "Was that necessary, buddy? Surely your daughter's old enough to get hit on now, right? Ha ha ha ha ha." Chang Cheng-hsu registered the jibe and accepted the challenge. "If she was my daughter, you'd have bigger problems than your running form. You'd need..." Then, because he knew when threats became crimes: "A good lawyer".

Chang Cheng-hsu saw the young runner in the gym a few times after that, but there was no more backchat. Maybe because he was still mulling over what Chang Cheng-hsu had meant? It's a powerful thing, the law.

The gym's motto, "Be a Better You", wasn't why he worked out. He was already better. After forty-four years of an undeniably successful life, all he

needed from the gym was the stamina required to keep up with complex legal cases and the chest and shoulders worthy of expensive bespoke suits. And while he understood that some of his focus on physical appearance was in compensation for emotional setbacks suffered as a young man, he knew his confidence today did not rely on his physique.

He had started his own legal practice fifteen years ago and now had offices in a new building on Songjiang Road. Most of the work was non-contentious cases for corporate clients, with civil or criminal cases for individuals generally declined. Over those fifteen years, his air of success and forceful manner had earned a certain reputation in Taipei's business circles. The practice remained small but that was how he liked it. He employed only two other lawyers and two assistants, all good hands he had mentored personally.

He had named the practice after himself: Chang Cheng-hsu Law. He liked to explain the names to clients, pointing out it included the cheng of cheng-i, justice, and the hsu of yang kuang ho hsu, warm sunshine. Justice as warm as the sun. Immediately, the client would be filled with optimism about their case and those unlucky devils mired in litigation would feel (without any justification) a shred of comfort.

Family, too, was an important part of his success. His wife, Chien Yun, was two years younger than him and a professional social worker, employed at Taipei's Center for Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. Married for twelve years, they had a daughter, Kai-ting, soon to graduate from elementary school. For someone like Chang Cheng-hsu - a man of limited talents and a conservative nature - a stable family life was the foundation on which to build business success. Within that ideal framework, his hard work and practical approach had paid off in spades, winning him the freedom and affluence he now enjoyed.

He hadn't expected the girl with the glow to return the towel. He'd had fantasies in which she did, of course. But that was just a biological inevitability, his male genes working on their own account. Experience and wisdom allowed him, with all sincerity, to rule out those possibilities. After all, his relationship with his wife aside, all Chang Cheng-hsu could say about his love life was that there wasn't much to be said about it.

This was not unconnected with his natural endowments: he offered little to appreciate physically. Eyes as small as whitebait, mouth as wide as a catfish, all set in a narrow jutting face. These were not the worst of flaws, but put them all together and the view was not harmonious. Then there was his hollow chest, his narrow shoulders, his somewhat stubby limbs. As a whole, Chang Cheng-hsu did not stand up to careful viewing. These days, it was true, he carried himself with the confidence of a professional and spent enough time in the gym to ensure his physique was as good as it could be. But that had all come later in life.

Chang Cheng-hsu's biggest shortcoming, though, was not physical. It was his discomfort with anything abstract or intuitive, and the consequent failure to grasp the details of anything uninformed by logic or direct experience – which was not something to blame on his legal career, despite it being a common failing among those in the profession. As a result, his understanding of the world was utterly inflexible. There was no scope for the objective and the subjective to learn from each other. The two could, sometimes, overlap. But never mesh.

He had once said to a girl he liked: "If you want, you can borrow my notes." It was an offer made after a purely logical analysis. So, when the girl replied, "If I do want, I'll let you know," he subjected the response to another logical analysis and found it enticing. Exciting, even.

Fortunately, Chang Cheng-hsu made steady progress both as lawyer and person, his professional skills developing enough to mask his low self-esteem. Then, just as he was struggling with the uncomfortable thought of giving up on hope of love, he met Chien Yun.

He had just turned thirty and quit his job to set up his own practice, renting an office which was old and cheap but close to Banqiao District Court. It would serve as a starting point. To save money he cleaned, painted, and furnished it himself. He even intended to screw the nameplate into the wall outside the door himself. He borrowed a drill and other tools and kept at it for hours – but the nameplate had remained on

the floor. He sat in the silent stairwell, glaring at the nameplate announcing his new business.

"Good luck." He hadn't heard the woman approach. "If it falls off, they'll sue you for sure."

Chang Cheng-hsu looked at her and then at himself: his T-shirt and shorts were stained with paint, his hands were filthy, he was surrounded by tools. He realized she thought he was the handyman called in to hang the nameplate.

"You can't trust lawyers, you know." Chien Yun looked at the unhung nameplate and spoke philosophically, as if declaring an axiom, a truth so obvious it needs no logical argument.

Chang Cheng-hsu nodded, unable to deny it. The woman was clutching a briefcase to her chest. Her suit was unfussy, adorning a figure verging on the plump. Her long black hair fell soft and straight. Her face was round and full, her jaw a little wide. Her features had a gentleness to them – her eyes, in particular. A lake in morning fog, reflecting the hazy light of the rising sun. Quiet, clear.

Later, he learned she was in the building to visit a troubled family living on an upper floor. Every case involving children is sad, she told him, and every lawyer a bastard.

"They all claim to be fighting for justice. But whose money are they taking? Think about that." Chien Yun was sitting on the steps now, her voice flat: "They try to stop the truth coming out then blame it all on the judge. Oh, we're just part of the process. Oh, the judge makes the decisions. Oh, all we do is play our role. Blah blah blah. They just don't want to take responsibility. You'd think they were the biggest heroes of all, and somehow the most unappreciated." Chien Yun's words faded but the set of her brow remained uncompromising. Then she resumed her pointless resistance: "They think the law can solve everything. Yeah, right. I mean, once someone's dead, problem solved."

Chang Cheng-hsu watched as the philosopher inside her gave up and he remembered how someone had once mocked him with similar words. The law can't solve everything. He'd thought at the time it was

just a cynical jest. But later he'd realized there's always some truth in a joke, and cynicism is often borne of hopelessness rather than humor. With no reason to deny anything she said, he just sat there beside her, quietly. The silence seemed to speak to them: if you will ever be understood, it is now.

And so, they fell in love.

He fell in love with her kindness and a moral clarity that needed no logic. It went against all basic legal principles, which he found to be a great relief: if he didn't want to argue, all he had to do was stay quiet. And in some moments of purity, he would even find insights in Chien Yun's views which aligned with the jurisprudence of concepts.

Chien Yun's love for him was a purer and less rational thing. Chang Cheng-hsu would laugh and tell her that what she wanted to avoid would always exist. Chien Yun was always a little stunned by such a cold but truthful interpretation, but not offended. Because that day they met, she saw in his mournful gaze a more intimate reflection of the man. Of a soul which hid behind the law's elevation of argument above conclusion, licking its wounds.

Over twelve years of marriage, Chang Cheng-hsu had proved himself a faithful husband and loving father. Even if he did, occasionally, have the urges of any normal man, he maintained full control of himself and did not stray. He might, perhaps, schedule extra meetings with an attractive female client and do his utmost to keep her rates and billable hours low. The law, after all, was his battlefield. He liked this more mature version of himself. A man of both words and action. A seer of the big picture. Bold but able to give ground. Unemotional yet benevolent.

But his good fortune, he knew, had its limits. A week later, when the girl with the glow found him in the weights section and returned his towel, he did not overstep any bounds of propriety.

The towel was carefully folded and smelt of laundry detergent. Something called Garden Scent or Freshness, perhaps. Where she held it she left that remnant of her perfume.

White musk and rosewood.

Nothing wrong with that.

Chang Cheng-hsu took that perfume with him to the locker room, where he washed it from his hands.

He took his bag from the locker. He saw he had several missed calls and one message from Chien Yun:

"Nangang police station. Now."

*

He called her several times from the car but she didn't pick up. It was past eight in the evening. A police station? At this time? He started to worry about what might have happened. He parked by the Keelung River and weaved his way through the back streets towards the police station, accompanied by the muffled clanging of the metalworking places along the way. By the time he reached the station entrance sweat was pouring down his back.

The female desk officer took him through to the back office. Ten or so desks in rows, each piled high with paperwork. Officers and concerned parties standing or sitting around those desks, as if randomly distributed. There was a thump from a corner as someone's gear hit the desk. From outside, sirens could be heard, some near, some far. The entire room was caught in the cold harsh tones of the fluorescent lights.

He spotted Chien Yun, talking to a police officer about something clearly serious. She saw him and walked over. Before he could complain, she whispered at him: "I need you to take a victim statement."

"A victim?" Chang Cheng-hsu was still on edge from the drive. "Do you want to check your phone? Couldn't you at least text me some details?"

"Oh, come on. It's an emergency. Sexual assault."

那些少女沒有抵達

EVERYTHING SHE FAILS TO



Wu Xiaole

吳曉樂

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- **Publisher:** Mirror Fiction
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- **Full English Manuscript Available**
- **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
- **Rights sold:** Polish (Grupa Wydawnicza Foksal), Simplified Chinese (Shanghai Elegant People), Vietnamese (AZ)

© Mirror Fiction

Wu Xiaole exploded onto the literary scene with her first novel, *On Children*, which was adapted into a TV series in 2018. Her numerous works of fiction include *The Privileged*, which has already sold rights in numerous language markets including English and French. She loves parrots and tends to look closely at things others take for granted.

ACHIEVE



Searching for answers after a student suicide, a lead teacher at an elite girls school delves into the dark shadows cast by a culture of overachievement, reawakening the painful wounds that lie buried in her past.

Wu I-Kuang never thought she'd live past age seventeen, much less become a teacher at a respected high school with one hundred years of tradition behind it. But even more unimaginable to Wu: one day after classes let out, one of her students leaps from the top floor of a campus building. By the time Wu arrives on the scene the body had been removed, but the crowd of parents that have gathered, the pool of blood on the ground, and the distant wail of the ambulance siren are enough to tell her that an invisible but devastating trial by public opinion is already underway.

After the suicide, a pall of anxiety settles over the elite girls' school. The students, normally quick with an answer, struggle to come to terms with the new questions posed by their classmate's death: what had gone wrong? Had her grades been falling? Was she psychologically OK? What had made a seventeen-year-old decide her life was no longer worth living? Students and faculty alike are in desperate need of answers, whether to clear up their personal doubts and confusion, to deal with the media attention, or possibly to absolve themselves of responsibility.

As a lead teacher, Wu is also trying to make sense of the girl's death. She needs a rational, firm, and comforting explanation she can present to her students, their parents, the public, and, also, to herself. Glimmers of an answer appear in the lives of her young students, but again and again, the threads lead her into the darker corners of her own life: a marriage that exists only for appearance's sake, a lifetime of appeasing a controlling mother, and a youth in which she had also considered ending it all.

A master at depicting parent-child relationships, with this novel author Wu Xiaole turns her penetrating gaze to an elite high school, conjuring teacher-student interactions, student social dynamics, and the dilemmas of modern education within an interwoven narrative that spans past and present. Through the eyes of her female protagonist, she painstakingly dissects a suffocating mother-daughter relationship and the costs imposed by society's narrow standards of success. Readers will find much that resonates with their own experiences in this story of one woman's struggle to liberate herself from the shackles of conventional values and assert her right to take charge of her own life.

EVERYTHING SHE FAILS TO ACHIEVE

By Wu Xiaole

Translated by Shanna Tan

“With razor sharp prose, the author dissects the vulnerability and cruelty of human relations. When a society is content to find excuses for poor mothering – even inventing wounds to justify it – perhaps the implication is that we just aren’t ready to see women in their full range of possibilities. The author believes we must bid farewell to this formula if we are to truly understand gender inequality and the subtle influences that inform gender. The author is attempting to contemplate a world that is far from perfect, in which there will always be people we cannot understand, and questions that are difficult to answer. To the author, the true oppression of women is any image of women, or motherhood, that flattens out our individual differences.”

— Openbook / Translated by Joshua Dyer

1

Back when Wu I-kuang was taking classes for the Teacher Education Program, Professor Wang had often reminded the class: between a teacher and their students there will always be a significant gap in age and life experiences, but that’s no excuse for the teacher to wield absolute power. Students may be younger, but their understanding of the world isn’t lesser. A teacher’s role is not only to impart knowledge, but also to create a nurturing environment for students to explore their potential. And as the common saying goes – *it takes a hundred years to mould a person*. What’s important is *time*. Take the Taiwan tree, or what the Rukai indigenous people call “The Tree That Bumps into the Moon”. Its seed is tinier than a fingernail clipping, but a fully grown Taiwan towers at seventy meters tall. To be a good teacher, imagination is essential. As you stand behind the lectern and look

down at the sea of fresh faces, remember that they are the possibilities of the future. Perhaps they’ll go on to achieve the things you couldn’t.

Now a teacher, I-kuang would still sometimes think back to Prof Wang’s words. What was it that her students would achieve, and she couldn’t? Lin, who’d gotten her teaching license one year ahead of I-kuang, found her answer. Over the phone, Lin sounded like she was about to cry tears of happiness as she gave a blow-by-blow account of how she’d kept her eyes glued to the TV screen watching her student, how her eyes had roamed to the beaded sweat on her forehead, how she’d followed the movements of every swing as the girl tried to hit the ball to where her opponent would struggle to hit it back. The girl often had to take time off classes to train. Whenever she handed over the permission form, Lin would stare at her wrist guard and the bulging veins on her forearm. She never quite knew what to say to the girl. Even something as basic

as asking about her recent competition felt like an intrusion of sorts when she barely knew anything about tennis. In the end, she'd just stamp on the form and say, "Jiayou! Do your best!" and the girl would reply, "Thank you, Teacher." She was always respectful even as she did very poorly in her subject – Mandarin. And this time, at the Olympics, she clinched a silver medal. Over the phone, Lin started sobbing. Prof Wang was right, she said. Even in her next life, or her next next life, she'd never be able to make it to the Olympics. But now she could say a student she'd taught won a silver. She was so proud.

I-kuang listened quietly, murmuring in agreement when she was supposed to. A while later, Lin finally remembered that she had a couple more friends to call and hurriedly ended the call. I-kuang got up and headed to the kitchen to wash the dishes. Lunch was spaghetti cooked by Wei-che. Or rather, he simply boiled the pasta, drained it, drizzled in some olive oil, and mixed in the pesto sauce. They'd tried many different brands before settling on this one which they both enjoyed. He'd also boiled some frozen squid sent by her mother. When he noticed that I-kuang was partial to it, he set aside two for himself before pushing the rest to her. I-kuang didn't protest, nor did she say, Aw that's sweet but we should share. They weren't in that kind of relationship. Instead, she simply said thank you and allowed herself to relish every bite.

Later that day, I-kuang followed behind Wei-che to visit her parents. As usual, the dishes her mother had prepared were difficult to stomach. Some years back, her mother switched to a strict low-salt, low-oil diet. The way she cooked vegetables made them taste like dried leaves, and her steamed fish was like chewing plain water. However, Wei-che seemed to be like his usual self, enjoying the meal as though the ingredients were meant to be cooked this way. He was now breezily answering his mother-in-law's incessant questions. I-kuang turned to watch her father. Having just returned from a three-day two-night mountaineering trip, a hobby he'd picked up in recent years, his eyelids were heavy, and he ate slowly. Suddenly, he turned to Wei-che. "What do you think of electric cars? The future of mankind? You reckon it's going to take over the petrol car?" Father liked chatting with Wei-che, especially

on topics that people usually associate with fathers and sons – cars, watches, investments. Watching their interactions, I-kuang wondered if that was because her father had wanted a son. I-kuang was the only child. "Why didn't you give me a sibling?" she'd asked Mother. "Having you is enough." Only years later did I-kuang realize that there were two interpretations. One spoke of satisfaction, the other, tolerance. She'd never asked her mother which one she meant. Both weren't great anyway.

I-kuang's gaze landed on the wall clock. She amused herself by playing "Count to Sixty". Once the second hand hit twelve, she'd look down and start counting in silence – *one, two, three* – all the way to sixty and she'd look up again. Damn, she was two seconds too fast. I-kuang kept going for a few rounds until she heard her name. Mother was looking at her rather sharply. "You're not listening."

I-kuang cleared her throat. "What were you saying?"

Wei-che replied. "Your mother was asking if we've been trying."

Oh. That. I-kuang raised her eyebrows, but her gaze remained fixed on the table. Mother was asking about children. She nodded. "Yes, we are."

Mother wouldn't have accepted any other answer.

Mother continued watching her with a piercing gaze, as though if she looked long enough, she'd be able to read something from her expression. A moment later, she broke the silence. "It's getting late. You should head back soon." Wei-che quickly gulped down the remaining cold soup and thanked her for the delicious meal. I-kuang kept quiet. Mother should feel satisfied enough with the evening. On the way home, I-kuang stared out the window from the front passenger seat. When they'd left her parents' place, it was drizzling, but now it'd escalated to a downpour. She watched the big droplets hitting against the window. Wei-che sighed. "I can barely see what's ahead." Even when he was grumbling, he still sounded so polite, so kind.

Hsieh Wei-che was the man Mother had chosen for her. In marriage, look for a mild-tempered man, she'd told her. So that even when you two are quarreling, he'll give in to you. She was right. Wei-che always gave in to her, but Mother probably didn't imagine that one

day, he'd meet someone whom he didn't have to give in to, and he'd choose that woman, not I-kuang.

I-kuang leant to the side and pressed her cheeks against the cold glass window. Stop thinking about it, she chided herself. Not like anything was going to change. She forced her thoughts to something else, landing on the conversation with Lin a few hours ago.

She must admit that Lin had seeded something in her mind. Would she also see the day where she'd spill hot tears of joy and choke up as she recounted her students' achievements? It was hard to imagine it. She was never good at looking forward to something. Instead, what she'd learned to do best was to extinguish her hopes. That was how it'd always been. Hope was like a cunning wolf. At first, it was small, cute, innocent like a puppy. You couldn't help but cuddle it, feel its warmth, watch its rising and falling chest. You were convinced that both of you would be the best of friends, always. But as time passed, you gave in to the temptation to feed it meat, to satisfy it, and like all wolves, it grew up learning the most obvious fact in life - that those with power, dominate. With each passing night, the wolf grew taller, stronger, its teeth and claws sharpening in its sleep. And one day, while playing together, you ended up bathed in blood. Some people never gave up, believing that hope could be tamed and bent to their command. I-kuang wasn't that type. She simply let go, allowing the wolf to walk away. Even if it didn't have bad intentions, she was sure it'd eventually sniff out her innate weakness and attack.

As for Mother, she was the former. She'd tamed her wolf.

2

It was a Friday afternoon. Sunlight streamed in through the windows, illuminating the tiny dust particles dancing in the air. From the ceiling hung cool white lights. The young author standing on the podium wore a loose-fitting dress, looking even younger than her photos online. As she greeted everyone, she said that it wasn't her first time giving a talk to a room of teachers, but somehow, she was extra nervous today. I-kuang's

gaze landed on the author's thin-rimmed glasses in rose gold, and observed the way she maintained her smile despite her nerves. *She must've known rose gold would look good against her pale skin. For most people, it would only draw out the dark undertones of their complexion.*

I-kuang loved rose gold. Before getting married, she'd discussed with Wei-che about not getting a diamond ring because there was so much sorrow in the precious stone's history. But both their mothers were adamantly against it. "Don't you dare try anything funny," Mother frowned. *Fine.* In the end, I-kuang chose a ring with a tiny diamond that was barely visible. Wei-che's mother, Fang, put her hand over I-kuang's and squeezed. "Such beautiful hands you have. A diamond ring would look lovely on you. You sure you don't want a bigger one?" Her voice was gentle. "This will do," I-kuang said. "I'm a teacher. We can't wear flashy accessories." Mother kept quiet. Instead, she took a step back, crossing her arms as she surveyed the interior of the jewelry shop. Fang had chosen the shop. Mother had her own preferences, but she didn't interfere because according to her, it was important to observe how the groom's side handled the wedding. Her mother-in-law did better than I-kuang had expected. She was very hands-on, making sure everything was done with utmost decorum, and frequently checked in with their family on their opinions. "Everything else about my son is great, but he isn't the most careful person. So it falls on me to make sure everything is taken care of." Outside the shop, Wei-che kept his credit card. He had a terrible poker face, and right now, he looked extremely relieved to cross out another item on the to-do list. Fang was smiling, but her eyes hid a shadow of worry. As for Mother, she was walking ahead of everyone else, so I-kuang couldn't see her expression. She hurried behind her and a few minutes later, they bade Wei-che and his mother goodbye at the carpark.

I-kuang hadn't even fastened her seatbelt when her mother's cold voice rang out next to her. "Rose gold doesn't suit you. We have pale skin with a bluish undertone. That's not going to go well with gold. And

that diamond you picked! It looks so stingy. Not as if that family can't afford it, why help them save money?"

"It's not about money," said I-kuang. "I like that one."

Mother said no more but her knuckles were white as she gripped the steering wheel.

Sometime later, I-kuang returned alone to the shop and asked to see the rose-gold band again. The salesgirl with her hair neatly combed back into a bun was the same one who'd helped them yesterday. At the sight of I-kuang, she smiled. "Ms Wu. I had a hunch you would be back." I-kuang slipped on the ring and both of them peered closer. Mother was right. It was a nice ring, but not suitable for her.

She took it off and told the staff, "I'll take this. Payment by card, please."

On the night of the wedding banquet, I-kuang was all smiles as she held the plate of wedding sweets and sent off the guests with Wei-che by her side. Wei-che's father had had a few drinks too many. He came over, supported by his wife, and thumped his son on the shoulder. "Treat your wife well." He burped. I-kuang could smell his rotting breath. Wei-che's maternal uncle hurried over to prop up his brother-in-law on the other side, telling Wei-che not to worry. He hadn't touched the alcohol, so he would get his parents back home safely. Wei-che bowed in thanks. Meanwhile, I-kuang scanned the room for Mother and found her speaking with a lady who was affectionately patting her hands. While I-kuang couldn't make out what they were saying, Mother was beaming, her eyes arched into crescents. Luckily, Mother hadn't caught sight of that scene just now. Somehow, I-kuang felt the responsibility to protect her husband and his family from her mother's judgement. She had grown up under that piercing gaze. She knew how that felt.

The plate got lighter as people took the sweets, but her calves were getting heavy and achy. Hidden by the poufy skirt, I-kuang shuffled her feet, trying to redistribute the weight on her legs. Mother was walking over with Father. His eyes glistened with tears as he glanced at his daughter, and then at Wei-che.

"The two of you are family from now on. You'll have to support each other, okay?" I-kuang kept quiet, letting the moment pass before nodding her head slightly. Wei-che seemed to have detected the whiff of tension in the air. His smile was slightly strained as he nodded. "We will, Father."

Mother was watching I-kuang. This was one of her talents – to demarcate "territory" by her gaze. No matter how obtuse Wei-che was, he must've picked up the vibes that when it comes to some things, he'd always remain an outsider. A trail of goosebumps popped along her neck. The air-conditioning in the hotel was too cold. She resisted the urge to press them back down into her skin. Until Mother made her next move, it was best to lay low.

Mother smiled, looking somewhat sincere for once. "Go back and rest. Both of you must be tired."

Indeed, they were. An hour later, I-kuang and Wei-che finally stepped into their new home that still smelt of fresh paint. He plonked himself heavily on the sofa, a hand resting against his forehead, while she went into the master bedroom and slowly sat down in front of the mahogany vanity table Mother had gifted them. Looking into the mirror, she removed her fake lashes and her pearl earrings. From her bag, she fished out a velvet case. Inside lay the rose-gold band that didn't get Mother's approval. She pulled open the drawer and pushed the box into the deepest corner, like a small creature hiding their precious treasure, or humans burying something....

Feeling a sharp jab in her ribs, I-kuang stirred from her reverie, returning to the seminar room once more. Shu-fan had elbowed her, signaling with her eyes for I-kuang to look at the podium. The author was looking at her eagerly before realizing that I-kuang hadn't been paying attention. Embarrassed, she scratched her cheek with a finger and said, "Let me explain it again." I-kuang was both grateful and guilty. It was rare for her to allow her private life to intrude in her work. **It was all that woman's fault.** Pai-he. That woman's appearance had turned her life upside down. On the surface, she seemed indifferent, but deep down, she could feel herself crumbling.

第六十七隻穿山甲

PANGOLIN NO. 67



Kevin Chen
陳思宏

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Kevin Chen began his artistic career as an actor, starring in the Taiwanese and German films *Ghosted*, *Kung Bao Huhn*, and *Global Player*. Now based in Germany, he is a staff writer for *Performing Arts Reviews* magazine. His publications include the novels and short story collections *Attitude*, *Flowers from Fingernails*, and *Ghosts by Torchlight*, and the essay collections *Rebellious Berlin* and *Three Ways to Get Rid of Allergies*. His novel *Ghost Town* was published to widespread critical acclaim and has been translated into thirteen languages. The English version was longlisted for the 2023 PEN America Literary Awards.

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Decades ago, two child actors shared a moment of fame. Now, on the threshold of middle age, they are reunited at a film festival in France. As memories mingle with the hard truths of the present, they find solace together, and finally tend to the wounds of childhood and the disappointments of lost love.

Just past the threshold of middle age, “she” is no longer a glamorous starlet. Nor is she a beautiful wife in a perfect family, as others saw her after her marriage to her politician husband. Roughly the same age, “he” was once a leading man, but he slowly retreated from the spotlight and now resides quietly in France. As child stars, the pair had appeared together in a television advertisement. The director was so taken with them that he tailor-wrote a dramatic script for them, and the resulting film became a worldwide art house classic. Now, the film has been restored in 4K, and will be screened at the Nantes Film Festival, giving the stars a chance to reunite after many years of silence. Their pasts will join them for this fateful reunion, as the memories of childhood and past loves resurface.

As her mother’s money tree, she had been pushed into the acting world at a young age, setting her apart from her peers. The men she grew close to – an aspiring medical student, a student activist, and an assistant director of a theatrical group – were all the same: they treated her like a ragdoll, subjecting her to their violent whims.

Like her, he had never felt loved by his parents. His father treated him no differently than the pangolins he raised to sell on the black market. After appearing in some nude scenes, and participating in the gay liberation movement of the 90’s, his father’s indifference turned to scorn. Thus began his self-imposed exile in France, where he entertained a string of lovers, but, sadly, the only one that stole his heart died in a car accident.

Loneliness was their shared fate. Each bearing the burdens of childhood trauma, only the other can reach to the heart of their aloneness. As a homosexual male and a heterosexual female, each turns to the other for sympathy and understanding as they twist in the fetters of patriarchal power and abuse.

Within the novel, the unnamed “he” and “she” represent larger groups – homosexual men and heterosexual women – the objects of patriarchal oppression. Masterfully narrated in the third person, the novel nonetheless reads like a direct account of the inner conflicts of the characters, announcing a new milestone of Taiwan LGBTQ literature from perennial award-winner Kevin Chen.

PANGOLIN NO. 67

By Kevin Chen

Translated by Darryl Sterk

“In the novel, sex nearly always occurs in moments devoid of love, save for a faint glimmer of “redemptive love” seen in a slim minority of cases. The characters are either receptacles of physical desire, or are deprived of sexual autonomy. In either case, all of the cruelty and grief they suffer takes shape in one form: loneliness.

Kevin Chen’s novel allowed me to once again glimpse something in the distance: that each of us in our process of growing up has on some level endured and repressed the desire to scream out loud, and buried it deep beneath the memories of our pain. We think we’ve passed through it and thus, we are healed. We believe the dust has settled over the past and we slowly forget. We think the blood no longer flows from the wound, so we must be fine. Thus, the pain becomes a distant place within ourselves, the spiritual distance towards which we must journey.

— Rob Lo Yuchia (Poet) / Translated by Joshua Dyer

Part 1: A stroll

The first cell phone dialogue

“It’s me! Remember me?”

“Hi.”

“OMG, is it true? I can’t believe I found you. You actually let me. What? I’ll never be able to tear myself away? What the hell, here I come, Paris! I’ll scream it at the top of my lungs when I see ya.”

“OK.”

“Should I really go? You want me to come? Want to see me?”

“?”

“Will you please...You know. Say something. Don’t leave me hanging like this. I’ve been waiting all day. I keep looking at my phone, waiting and waiting and waiting.... And all I get is a question mark. It wouldn’t hurt to write a few more words.”

“Sorry.”

“Don’t mind me. I’m fine. Take your time. You do you. Just let me talk. Please listen. I’m not happy. Anxious. Please, take me somewhere quaint. Where you hang out. Where you work. Take me for a stroll. I want to walk, wander. Walk and walk and walk. Down the block. Where you live. I’m not interested in anywhere touristy. We haven’t seen each other in ages.”

“OK.”

“When I get there, the first thing I’ll do is catch up on sleep.”

Sleep

On the last day of summer, in Paris, they finally slept together again, she and he.

How long had it been? He’d completely forgotten, but she remembered. He was the one who’d left, who

wouldn't change, and she was the one who'd stayed, waiting and waiting, unable to leave, waiting for sleep, pretending to sleep, waiting for insomnia to leave her be. After all this time, she wasn't so sure anymore if she was waiting for him, or for herself to give up. She'd waited too long, so long the seconds stretched to centuries. Her wait grew into a rainforest, with its own microclimate and convoluted ecology: fallen leaves and sticks waiting for fungal decomposition, an insomniac leopard waiting for sleep, a mosquito waiting for death on a spider's web, a tapir waiting for a lost cub to wander back to the nest, a raindrop waiting to fall from the leaf of a tree, a python waiting to shed its skin, an eagle waiting for a breeze, a tree canopy waiting for the sunrise, and a pangolin waiting for ants, or termites. All she could do was keep waiting, for the one who'd disappeared to crawl back into bed and fall fast asleep with her in the rainforest. Even if he finally reappeared, would the wait be over? Perhaps waiting gave her the will to live, waiting a little longer, for the next chance. Waiting is active, not passive; the one who waits is poised, battle ready. She was waiting for a good night's sleep, and for that, she had to wait for him.

Now that they were finally in the same bed again, the stone of her chronic wakefulness started to shift. The rain fell, the stream swelled, the stone relented, dislodging itself from the riverbed. It drifted along with the flood that flushed it far, far away.... Where? No matter, she didn't hurt anymore, the ache was gone. He was the rain, he was the deluge, only he, the water, could move her, the stone, to sleep, from hard and dry to soft and spry. Lying on his narrow Parisian bed, she knew sleep had begun in primordial chaos, in a snore that awakened civilization, a gob of spittle that quickened the earth. She knew that she would wake up to a new future of splashing silver and glittering gold, right outside the window.

But he couldn't sleep.

The window was open, and outside it, Paris, too, was sleepless. The moon was bright, the neighbors noisy, the drunks in the street kept yelling.

The breeze brought in the smell of rain. He knew it was called *pétrichor*. He'd looked it up. "The scent of rain on dry soil." J had taught him. When? While he was

waiting on a park bench for an order to slip in, in the afternoon heat of the summer, when time stagnated, when the earth grew parched, and only rain in cahoots with wind could mend the cracks. He didn't mind that kind of waiting, when everything was late, when Paris paused. He and J were the only ones left on the bench, and if only the sun had been a little bit rowdier, just a little bit, tree branches brushing against one another could have caught fire, burning the park to the ground; and then he would finally disappear, deliberately, for good. He got scared, every time. But this time he wasn't afraid at all, not with J beside him.

He couldn't follow what J was saying. In heavily accented French. No matter, he didn't care. He understood anyway. He had nothing to say, why not listen to J? Regardless of grammar or syntax or pronunciation, he still got it. Even though he never knew what "getting it" meant. If he understood words, phrases, punctuation marks, did that mean he'd gotten it? The truth was like a lobster, hard shell and feelers and pincers and all. Watch out, it'll pinch you. *Ouch!* Boil a pot of water, throw it in, lid it, it'll be a goner. Kill the truth and it doesn't hurt anymore. A freshly cooked lie can be tasty, words can be picante. With J, there was no beating around the bush. J's motto was: when you want something, say so. When you kiss, French! When you're sad, cry your eyes out! When J was frustrated, a 10-episode horror series would get acted out. No ambiguity. J would meet you head on. That lipstick was the most luscious red, and those false eyelashes were octopus tentacles. J could love you wholeheartedly, and then hate your guts. So even though he couldn't understand J's words, he always caught the meaning.

A familiar smell had suddenly drifted into the park. It was sticky in his nostrils, almost musty. J stood up and took a deep breath, whooped, and said *pétrichor* over and over, p, t, k, through red-hot lips. He shook his head. *Say what?* J spelled it out in his hand, *p-é-t-r-i-c-h-o-r*. He typed it into the cell phone, spelling it wrong a few times before finding it. He'd never heard of it, not even in Chinese. Oil secreted by drought-stricken plants that oozes into soil and rock. When the rain hits the dry earth, it mixes with the oil and produces the odor *pétrichor*. That was it. He'd smelled it before of course. It had terrorized him through

childhood. It reminded him of Mother, and parting. It'd wring rain from his eyes. Turned out there was a scientific-sounding word for it. The city was under siege by *pétrichor*, which came rushing in from the streets around the park, where the parched earth had lain open-mouthed, waiting for rain, all summer long. Before skin could intercept the drops, lightning struck the Eiffel Tower, pedestrians scurried for shelter, fluttering floral dresses did a Marilyn Monroe. The rain screamed like a mad ape, gale-force wind tore up the parasols of outdoor cafés, coffee cups, cake plates, wine glasses, and ashtrays crashed on the sidewalks, composing a discordant clink-clank Debussy.... Polychrome store signs broke free of their screws. Who'd pressed the fast forward button, speeding Paris up? A torrential downpour was about to occupy the tiny park. J and he held hands, closed their eyes, and took a deep breath; *pétrichor* poured them full. When the deluge arrived the next second, a fierce tropical rain was already gushing in the palms of their tightly-clasped hands. The warm rain came and drilled holes in his scalp; J's tongue, a groundhog, reached over and burrowed in his face.

This summer in Paris, there had been no rain, and no J. It had been dry and hot, with temperatures hitting forty degrees for days on end. Today she'd come to Paris and lain beside him. It'd been such a long time. They slept in the same bed, on the pillows of estrangement. But where else could she sleep? On the couch? There was no simply no room in the less than eight square meters of this pint-sized Parisian flat. As they lay in bed together, dark clouds moistened the moon, a cool breeze blew, and he could clearly smell the *pétrichor*. That heralded rain. He'd thought the summer in Paris was endless, but it must have been her, she'd ended it, by bringing fall.

Hadn't he promised himself he would leave Paris at the end of summer? Why was she lying beside him now? Why was he still trapped in this tiny cage?

After J was swallowed by the ambulance, he wanted to make himself scarce, again. Living out of a suitcase, he could leave whenever he wanted; no one in the whole of Paris would ask him to stay. The

Seine would not remember him, Le Penseur had not seen him, and the trees in the Boi de Vincennes had forgotten him. The thing was, where could he go? He didn't know. His specialty was disappearing, but his flaw was not knowing in which direction. He was always trying to run, never knowing where. Why had he come to Paris in the first place? He didn't remember, and now he was leaving again. Suddenly an invitation slipped into his mailbox. His long-lost agent had found him. He'd climbed up to the "penthouse" in a sweaty mess, cursing summer. "What a shithole! No elevator, the stairwells are filthy. You're not easy to find! How many times have you moved? Do you know how many people I had to ask to track you down? Those whores downstairs can talk your ear off. Holy moly, your place is a fucking birdcage! It's smaller than the toilet at my place in Taipei."

The birdcage metaphor didn't discomfit him. It was only now, when the agent's gut hit the doorframe, when he spun around and knocked over a glass of water, when he sat down on the floor and grumbled, when he showered sweat, when his navel almost pressed up against the ceiling, that he realized how confining his cage truly was. Hardly a place to entertain guests.

The agent said the girl from Taipei had immediately agreed when he called her. She'd said she was happy to fly to France. "You two have been invited to the release of the 4K restoration. The director's dead, a lot of the actors are nowhere to be found, so we're depending on you. By the way, they're going to show the one you won best male lead actor for, too. It'll be a double feature. A modest personal retrospective."

Was the agent speaking French, Chinese or English? He didn't quite get it. His hearing had been silting up for many years, and now waves were crashing into his ears, against his brain. *Ouch!* The agent's mouth was spewing toothpicks into the mud. "I know our contract expired, I'm just doing you a favor, you know? I see you're in pretty good shape, you're working out, aren't ya? Lemme have a look at ya. Nice arms. How about your abs? Good, good, good. Wanna make a comeback? For old times' sake. I'll arrange an

audition right away, okay? Think about it. The organizer is up for it. And the chairman likes your movies very much. When he talks about you, he gets stars in his eyes."

A million toothpicks filling his head, he imagined stars coming out of a person's eyes. Were they fireflies on a summer night? Or the crystalline sparkles on the screen when the power goes out in the theater, right before it goes black, when the explosions are still playing out in the mind's eye? Or flakes in the first snowfall of a Parisian winter? The freeze had sucked out all the sounds of the city, muffling everything. Little white lights drifted through the gray sky. He looked up and his lashes intercepted the first glittering flakes. Or was it a meteor shower? A big bang deep inside his body, cosmic dust rushing toward his pupils, burning bright arrow trails. He'd seen such a spectacular sight. When his mother bade him goodbye, shooting stars burned in her eyes. See you again. Never again.

Through his agent, he and she, long separated, reconnected. They added each other's social media apps and accounts. He hadn't actually nodded, or said a word, but the agent took his silence as a yes, and couriered over a couple of designer suits for the film festival, battle array. Fuck was the flat ever small. With suits, shirts, accessories, and shoes lying on the floor or hanging on the wall, there was no place to move. He wanted to open the window and jump, not to end his life, but just for one breath of fresh air. The expensive clothes were too fancy, too gorgeous, too greedy. They sucked up all the oxygen in there, stifling and deforming the tiny tables and chairs. He opened the window, stuck his chest out, opened his mouth wide, and inhaled Le Marais, the whole neighborhood. Exhaling vigorously, he returned it. A few centimeters further out, he could also return his body to Paris by relaxing his grip and plummeting. The window downstairs suddenly spit out a pale arm, cigarette between the fingers, head nowhere to be seen. A big puff of smoke floated out. The old lady downstairs had fallen off the wagon again. She finished her ciggy, tossed the butt into the street, and turned up a wrinkled palm, waiting for the next fix to fall from the

sky. A streetwalker looked up and saw him. She smiled and blew a kiss, so hard it pushed him back in. The first night he moved here, he couldn't sleep, so he went out to sit on the sidewalk and people watch, taking in the drunks, the hipsters, the tourists, the pickpockets, and the whores. A redhead came and sat down next to him, tapping a movie still on her cell phone with a glossy fingernail, then pointing at him. He nodded, and she said something he didn't quite get, gave him a peck on both cheeks, and put her index finger to her lips, as if to say: *I won't tell a soul. You can tell them*, he replied, under his breath, *it's okay, not many people recognize me anymore*. Not even J. J didn't recognize him. He had wanted to tell J he used to be an actor. But before he could say it, before they could watch his films together, J disappeared.

He and she squeezed in the narrow bed, and with the magical tacit understanding from their childhood, they rolled, tossed and turned, curled up, without touching at all. It was not uncomfortable, the odor, the snoring, the posture. All familiar. But it wasn't exactly sweet. It'd been ages, after all. So much was left unsaid. Before disappearing, J had slept here almost every night. Squirming and groaning, unable to lie still. J would kick off the quilt and say, "We don't need it, I'll be your quilt." J was a skinny flesh quilt lying on top of him, wriggling like a shrimp fresh out of water. That trembling comforter always needed to cry a little to get to sleep. J would bawl or whimper. Tears were guaranteed. He hugged it tight and got hard. He stayed hard all night. He really wanted to go in and out of J's body, but he couldn't, he had to hold back. J had finally fallen asleep.

Now raindrops came knocking at the window, and the *pétrichor* grew even stronger. The mercury was suddenly low, the sky a silver glow, and the fishing rod of sleep finally swung toward him. Baited by the sound of rain, he closed his mouth on the hook. And took the baton from her in the sleep relay race.

Her last dream before waking was white.

太子與鐵道上的男孩

THE LOTUS PRINCE AND THE LOST



Chang Kuo-Li 張國立

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Chang Kuo-Li, one time editor-in-chief of *China Times Weekly*, has won numerous awards for his writing. A linguist, historian, army expert, sports fan, food critic, as well as poet, playwright and novelist, he is truly a Renaissance man. He has published over 60 books over his career, mostly mystery novels, including the recent *Pawnshop of the Otherworld* and *The Spirit Medium Detective* series. Among all his works, *The Sniper* series has been translated into Dutch, German, French, English, Russian, Turkish, Vietnamese, and Japanese.

© Chang Kuo-Li

RAILWAY BOYS



Missing children are reappearing in unusual locations. Even more bizarrely, the children were all born on the same day of the lunar calendar, and dream the same dreams at night. A child psychologist, a Daoist scholar/priest, and a police detective team up to stop further disappearances, but are stymied by a string of supernatural occurrences.

Ten-year-old Hsiao-chiu disappears on his way home from school. Three days later he is found 200 kilometers away deep in the wilderness of the Alishan mountain range. He appears to be in perfect health, but he has no idea that three days have passed. All he can recall are vague memories of a man leading him from the subway station into the forest, and of a one-legged owl that he followed through the trees. The next thing he remembers is being found by a group of hikers. The only other clue Hsiao-chiu can provide is that every night he dreams of old railroad tracks in the forest, and a boy's voice saying, "Only I am the prince."

Hsiao-chiu's bizarre testimony prompts the police to form a special investigations team. The boy represents the fourth in a series of disappearances involving young boys who are then found in remote forests. The boys all came from different parts of Taiwan, and appear to be completely unrelated. The only clues that link them are their shared birthdate on the lunar calendar, and the voice they all hear in their dreams.

The pattern of disappearances suggests another boy will become a victim within fourteen days. Racing against time, police detective Entotsu invites child psychologist He Jo-fen to assist on the unusual case, and He, in turn, enlists the aid of a Daoist priest and scholar. Han Hsi-yuan. The motley team of detective, Daoist, and child psychologist are soon confronted by further unfathomable events. Everywhere they go they encounter lightning, strong winds, and earthquakes. Soon, reports arrive from across Taiwan that idols of the god Nezha, also known as the Third Lotus Prince, are spontaneously rocking and turning in place.

As the investigators become mired in supernatural mysteries, Entotsu discovers that Han Hsi-yuan has been hiding his true identity. Could the Daoist somehow be connected to the disappearances?

Starting from the case of a missing child, author Chang Kuo-Li builds a gripping tale of suspense blending elements of Daoist legend with the history of Taiwan's railroads. As Daoist cosmology sheds an alternative light on the investigators' understanding of the case – and their own pasts – a unique dialogue is forged between the modern thriller genre and the adventurous tales of Daoist folklore.

THE LOTUS PRINCE AND THE LOST RAILWAY BOYS

By Chang Kuo-Li

Translated by Jim Weldon

“ If we were to divide folklore-based works into two classes, beginner and advanced, this book – a detective novel wrapped in the raiments of folklore – would belong to the advanced class. The author has already explored this terrain with *The Spirit Medium Detective*, but this time he expands the scope, and deepens the integration of local history as a battle heats up between two gods vying for the title of Prince. Relatively speaking, the reading difficulty is also taken up a notch. After conducting extensive field research, author Chang Kuo-Li, a novelist with decades of experience, infused his smooth and direct prose with the literary stylings of myths and legends, making the folkloric content more accessible to readers.

In fact, it wouldn't be impossible to use the novel as a travel guide of sorts. To crack the case, the three investigators travel Taiwan from north to south, traversing many a mountain (though also shortchanging the sea). Train aficionados could also put the book to good use.

— Vogel (Writer) / Translated by Joshua Dyer

Part One: A Missing Person at Hsinkaokou Station

1

“Hsinkaokou Station?”

“Used to be called Hsinkaokou-eki; that was the Japanese name for the station. The ‘station’ bit is the old character for ‘post station’, which is read as ‘eki’ in Japanese.”

“And it still exists?”

“It does, way off up in the mountains.”

“Why build it away up there?”

“Miss, that’s a question you can ask me, but then who I am supposed to ask? If the Japanese wanted to build a station somewhere, it’s not something my old grandpa had any say in, nor my old dad, so it’s not like I do now, is it? And I only just got notice. My bosses sent

me to fetch you; will you come? There’s a helicopter from the aviation division can fly us there direct, though I’m afraid I can’t promise an in-flight meal.” He gave a hollow laugh.

“Can you get airsick on them?”

“Well, I don’t.”

“Will I need my passport for boarding?”

“Just have your Easycard topped up, the more the merrier.”

“Do I need to take anything with me?”

“Come on, it’s only Chiayi. I guarantee I’ll have you back in Taipei in time for dinner. No need for a nightie and a toothbrush.”

So He Jo-fen just grabbed her daypack then was hustled aboard the helicopter. It was a very big backpack, containing the textbooks she used in class, her notebooks, makeup, purse, key wallet and cell

phone. It made Jo-fen look as if she might be heading off to the market to buy all the makings of a meal for a family of five.

She rummaged for her phone. It was down at the bottom of the daypack, sticky with some egg yolk from yesterday's sandwich but otherwise fine, though there was only one bar of battery left. As for the signal strength from Chunghwa Telecom, not even a single bar there, so she had no way of messaging her mother that she probably wouldn't be coming home for dinner that evening. For the daughter of a single parent who had not seen her father since she was five years old, this was a matter second only in seriousness to her entanglement with that married man the year before.

The campus was rotten with shameless men of his stripe; the best thing would be to class the lot of them as a gang of habitual fraudsters, lock them all up and throw away the key. His wife had come straight back from America as soon as she heard about it, and he instantly turned into a contemptible coward. I know I've let you down, Jo-Fen, but I can only choose her, because of the children. I'll make it up to you in the next life.

Was she going to be seeing him again in her next life? Fate would surely not be so cruel. She wanted to say, no need to wait for the next life, you can get down on your knees right here and knock your head to me three times. But she couldn't summon the energy, these loose men who fancy themselves were quick to shed more tears than a dog drops drool.

It wasn't just the in-flight meal that was missing, there were no air stewards either. She was wedged in between two policemen, the smell a mixture of sweat, tobacco, and periodontitis. The pilot up front did not offer a polite invitation to fasten her seatbelt in Mandarin, Taiwanese, English and Hakka; he just shouted out, "Sit tight!"

Shuddering and shaking, the helicopter left the ground. The pilot's tone was more friendly when he next spoke, "Control, this is Zero-One-Sevener lifting off; heading from Songshan to Alishan in Chiayi, over."

Well, at least Jo-fen now knew that their destination was to be Alishan.

That morning, just as she was rushing about getting ready to head into college, her phone rang.

She usually never answered if there was no caller ID, but for some reason today she had pressed receive. It was a man she did not know, "Ms. He, I am downstairs outside your building."

"What are you doing outside my house? I can call the police."

A middle-aged man was standing at her gate, trying to push a cigarette butt into one of the gaps in a drain grating with the tip of his shoe. He showed Jo-fen his warrant card, "I'd like you to come with me."

The man handed her his phone. She heard the gravelly, Hakka-inflected voice of Professor Huang from her time at the research institute, "Ah yes, Jo-fen; you should go with Officer Yen, seems to be quite a serious business. Help them; these men have no idea how to deal with children."

So, this man, who looked more like some street tough, was in fact Officer Yen. He opened the door of a patrol car for her with no word of explanation or clarification. Jo-fen, still not sure what was happening, got into the police car and then into the police helicopter, and she learned just how thoroughly different a police helicopter was to the tourist charter airplane that had taken her to Japan. The cabin had no soundproofing and the clattering of the rotor blades was giving her a headache. It came to her that the vitamin C tablets she had forgotten to eat with her breakfast were still lying on the table; mother was sure to curse her out. Mama He's loving regime demanded Jo-fen consume a mixture of vitamins mornings and evenings to keep her always healthy and pretty, so that they might find a way of securing her a suitable marriage partner before she turned thirty-five.

Mama He would say, there's not much worse in life than being some man's mistress; you just need to hurry up and find someone who looks the part, then we can let that success be atonement for your past misdemeanors. Her grandmother was not so sanguine. She had said, how's that count as making up for anything? Managing to marry before you turn thirty-five, most you could say is better late than never.

Jo-fen was having more contact with men today than at any other point in the past six months. She was the only woman among all of them in the helicopter.

The man beside her pressed two pieces of chewing gum into her hand. Had he washed his hands?

She seemed to hear her mother's voice, "Always have to be the picky one, don't you?"

The Alishan Forest Railway run by the Forestry Bureau set out from the station in Chiayi, winding its way up past Fenqihu until it arrived at Alishan Station. Jo-fen had been before, on a trip after graduating high school. They'd taken a branch line after Alishan, north on the Shenmu line to Shenmu Station. There were two planking trails there through the stands of giant trees, you could stroll along and get the benefit of the phytoncides. Even her mother knew the difference between phytoncides and pesticides. The branch line running east was the Zhaoping Line. North of Zhaoping Station you could connect with the now abandoned Mianyue Line. That turned below Tashan to head south until you came to Zhushan Station. That was where you could put your down jacket on while it was still dark and squeeze your way into the crowd that had come to watch the sunrise. Jo-fen recalled their tour guide kept trying to get her to buy cedar tree oil, supposedly good for mood relaxation, de-stressing, and countering fatigue. She had given in to the patter and bought two bottles. When she got home, she got an earful from her mother, "What have you come back with that for? Where's my High Mountain tea?" Her mother was especially clear about the difference between cedar essential oil and mountain tea.

"Does this mean we're off to watch the sunrise?" Jo-fen asked her question via the helmet mike.

"No such luck." Officer Yen, who the others all called Entotsu, yawned as he replied.

"Where will we be staying tonight, the Alishan Hotel?"

Entotsu made a show of guffawing loudly, laughing so much that the whiff of betelnut nearly conquered the smell of gasoline pervading the cabin. Jo-fen immediately thought of the cedar tree oil again. The men on this helicopter could certainly do with some.

"It's getting on for ten thousand for one night in the Alishan Hotel, you know. You'd be all right staying

at our station, you can see the maple leaves through the bars of the detention block windows, they'll be turning red soon, though you'd have to wait another week or two if you want to get the full autumn show. But you're welcome to stay a bit longer, guest of the department, free of charge."

"Why do they call you Entotsu?"

"It's Japanese, means stovepipe or chimney."

"Why Japanese? Are you Japanese?"

Entotsu laughed at that, and those of the others with headphones on laughed too.

"He gets through two packs of smokes a day, proper chimney and no mistake." The pilot answered on Entotsu's behalf.

"Why do they call it Hsinkaokou-eki?"

"Eki has a touch of class to it, Doctor He; Hsinkaokou-eki. It used to be the way onto the mountain for people climbing Hsinkaoshan."

"What's Hsinkaoshan?"

"Another name for Jade Mountain."

"We're going to Jade Mountain?"

"No, we're off to Mount Fuji."

That brought more laughter. It was not often you heard laughter in the cabin of a police helicopter flying to an emergency. He Jo-fen adjusted her headphones and decided to stick to looking at the scenery outside the window. Where had God gone wrong when he set out to make men?

There was a line her mother said pretty much every day, "Men; beyond saving." The next line was an exhortation to her daughter, "Hurry up and find yourself a man; if you save just the one, that's one more than otherwise."

They disembarked from the helicopter and went to get aboard the little Forestry Bureau train waiting at the station. Glancing along the carriages from the platform, it seemed there was no dining car. It was almost noon.

They passed the sunrise viewing platform at Zhushan, but at twelve noon there was no sunrise to see. They went by the Alishan Gou Hotel; it was not the Alishan Hotel that Entotsu had been unwilling to spend police funds putting Jo-fen up in, but it was a place for

travelers to stay; a little, old place nestled in a mountain col, likely far cheaper than its near-namesake. A group of men in slippers were clustered, shoulders hunched, round the ashtray outside the main doors, smoking. They put Jo-fen in mind of penguins on an ice sheet huddling together against the bitter wind and snow. They certainly hadn't come for the phytoncides.

The little train came to a halt at Zhaoping Station. She had not seen a 7-11 or FamilyMart anywhere en route, which rather dashed Jo-fen's hopes of having a tea egg. There was no car to meet them out front of the station. Jo-fen was both pleased she had worn sneakers but also annoyed not to have put on waterproof approach shoes. Still rather baffled by this whole business, she got off the train behind her three male companions and set out along the narrow, muddy train tracks.

The local Alishan police officers seemed much kindlier than Entotsu and his colleagues from Taipei. One officer, barely twenty by the looks of him, slowed down to wait for her, asking in a tone of worry and concern, "Ms. He, are you used to walking along train tracks?"

Bloody hell. Jo-fen cursed inwardly. Does anyone in Taipei walk to work along the tracks every day? How was she going to be used to it?

"It's about sixteen hundred meters up ahead. This is the Shuishan Line, so you'll see the Sacred Tree of Shuishan in a bit."

"I'm not here to look at sacred trees."

The young officer had no time to reply before Entotsu up front sent over a whiff of tobacco smoke as he said, "Ming, lad, Doctor He is a child psychologist, not a botanist."

That put the young man off speaking all together, but he kept solicitous attendance close to Jo-fen, concerned she might stumble and fall. Jo-fen unceremoniously took her backpack and hung it on his shoulder. The men of the twenty-first century were getting further than ever from gentlemanliness, be a good light year off soon enough.

A few years back, she'd walked down a stretch of abandoned railroad in Badouzi, now called a

sightseeing trail. There was a sleeper at every step, and if you put a foot wrong, like as not you'd twist your ankle, which rather put you out of any mood for sightseeing.

"Sixteen hundred meters is not so far," the young officer carrying her pack was talking to himself, "That's about two thousand steps; one go around the park on patrol is at least twelve thousand."

You could hear the overtones of a contempt for women, like the last thing that married post-doc scholar had said to her: I can't give up on my family; I can't give up on the children. Not a word about the wife he'd been cheating on from the bastard.

The section they'd just come down was at least dry, but the trees grew denser and taller as you got deeper into the woods, so the little path in their shadow never saw sunlight from one end of the year to the next. It was damp and your shoes stuck. Before they reached the Sacred Tree, they could see a railroad push-cart up ahead blocking the track. There was a crowd around it, some in police uniforms, some in the uniform of the Forestry Bureau, wearing hardhats. When they came closer, they could see that all these men were staring at a small, thin boy who was lying on a bench outside a wooden mountain hut. The boy was curled up asleep. One of the men gathered round the boy had his foot up on the bench. Another held a hammer, and somewhat ridiculously, another was brandishing a chainsaw. He Jo-fen at last realized why she'd been brought by helicopter to Alishan and not to see the sunrise.

洗大象的女人

THE WOMAN AND THE ELEPHANT



Hua Po-Jung 花柏容

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After majoring in history at National Taiwan University, Hua Po-Jung began his career in advertising. Now a novelist and screenwriter, his works have won the "Big Three" Taiwan literary awards, namely the Unitas Newcomer Award for fiction, the United Daily News Literature Award, and the Lin Rung-San Literary Award.

IN THE ROOM



Blindsided by divorce, a suspicious housewife hires a private investigator, thereby setting off a chain of events that ends in murder – and the killer is her ex-husband! Even more improbably, her ex-husband then kills himself in jail. What was he hiding? And why was it so important that two lives were sacrificed to keep it secret?

When her husband Ming-jen demands a divorce, he only gives one excuse – “my love for you has died” – but Cheng-fang isn’t buying it. Suspicious by nature, she hires a private investigator to tail him.

Over the course of the divorce proceedings, Ming-jen unexpectedly yields custody of their two children. Gradually, further suspicious details come to light: Ming-jen has secretly changed his name, and now sports a tattoo of a raven on his back; he has shut down his software company, but continues to rent an office; increasingly, he avoids coming home, and frequently spends his nights elsewhere... he might not be having an affair, but he’s definitely up to something!

One evening, Ming-jen comes home bloody and bruised. A month later, he is accused of murder, and the victim is an employee of the private detective hired to keep tabs on him. Cheng-fang visits Ming-jen in jail, and in a desperate whisper he begs her to find one of their son’s games. The next day, Cheng-fang is notified that Ming-jen has killed himself.

Confused and alone, Cheng-fang struggles to connect the dots. What’s hidden in the game that Ming-jen was so concerned about? What business was Ming-jen mixed up in? And why was it so important that someone would stop at nothing – not even the sacrifice of two lives – to keep it secret?

The “elephants” of the book’s title refer to the problems in a marriage that we pretend not to see. With an eye for the absurd comedy of marriage, family, and divorce, author Hua Po-Jung takes the story of an ordinary housewife facing an impending divorce, and spins it into a murder mystery that probes the dark recesses of our closest relationships and reveals our inescapably human needs and desires.

THE WOMAN AND THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

By Hua Po-Jung

Translated by Petula Parris

“The author excels at packaging heartache with humor in this cinematic and fast-paced narrative spanning a broad range of modern dilemmas: divorce, dealing with the in-laws, and the secret to how your personality quirks just might make you kill someone. The cast of characters is a realistic portrayal of contemporary Taiwanese society: the housewife who abandoned her career for her marriage, the intellectually and expressively precocious children, and the primary school cliques that form based on whether kids come from dual or single parent households.”

A menagerie of animal imagery provides rich material for metaphors, while the human characters drift between home, office, storage unit, and other locales, as if searching for some place to finally settle down when even private spaces seem to force one into various relationships with others, and with society. As the protagonist attempts to get to the core of the mystery, layer after layer of obscurations are peeled away, testing her ability to face up to the fact that the man she loved never revealed what he was really thinking, and now, he never will.

— Liang Siou-Yi (Writer) / Translated by Joshua Dyer

So this guy lets people feed off his face? Ouch. Just the thought sends shivers down my spine.

As I wait, I find myself contemplating Anpanman's motto, from the cartoon. My son Hsiao-Yu explained it to me once.

The waiting area for the visiting room at the detention center is packed, with so many people standing they form a ring around the walls. I've rolled my visitation slip into a cigarette shape several times already. The nicotine cravings haven't given up on me yet.

My nose is busy receiving information, periodically assaulted by the jumble of rich aromas from the dishes people have brought in - some are freshly cooked, some smell older, some veritably aged. The sesame oil chicken is hard to miss. I just wonder if its owner chose it because it's November, or because someone is expecting. I also catch a whiff of Buddha Jumps Over the Wall soup,

alongside the smoky tones of roasted chestnuts.

So... he actually tears off chunks of his face to feed the hungry? Maybe it's all the food, but I just can't stop thinking about Anpanman and his life mission. I smell a cruel irony in there, too.

How does he feel, ripping the flesh from his face - his dignity - one piece at a time? And what even drives him to do it? I forgot to ask Hsiao-Yu that part. Is it for justice? Or for love, or peace? Speaking of motivations, I still couldn't tell you why Ming-Jen committed his crime in the first place.

A quick scan around the room tells me I'm probably the only person to have come empty-handed. The mountain of food, ready to be transported in, evokes the kind of scenes you'd expect outside a temple on days for making offerings to the gods. No matter what Taiwanese do, there always has to be food involved - just

like the Hobbits. Though in this case, the dishes are also a manifestation of love: an attempt to offer loved ones a respite from the unpalatable prison food. People stripped of their liberty soon long for those few crumbs of freedom, to provide the mind some solace. I should know. I worked in the rat race. I've been married.

Prior to leaving the house, I agonized over my makeup and what to wear, before settling for my usual ensemble: a sky-blue T-shirt and casual, loose-fitting pants. The T-shirt had a mini rainbow embroidered on the left chest. I kept thinking about how Ming-Jen would have limited access to the actual sky, and that perhaps a splash of blue might raise his spirits. That was my wishful thinking, anyway. Everything starts out with wishful thinking. How it turns out in the end is a matter of luck.

I unroll the visitation slip one more time and, this time, notice the words "Family copy" in small print in one corner. *But you're no longer family, you're his ex-wife.*

Two weeks ago, when I visited with the kids, Ming-Jen told me to stop coming. Last week I came again - this time with the in-laws - bringing three dishes I'd prepared. His face told me he was pissed, and as soon as I picked up the phone, he ordered me to go home. My father-in-law moved quickly. He grabbed the receiver from my hand and tried to stand up for me, explaining how I'd been slaving over a hot stove. Without a flicker of gratitude, Ming-Jen said I could take the food back home with me. That got me riled. I told him to share it around - I'd been reading up, so knew this might gain him some brownie points with the other prisoners. But he persisted, saying he didn't miss outside food one bit, and cared even less about what his fellow inmates thought. Well, suit yourself and starve! I thought. He may have been wasting away, but Ming-Jen was also becoming a lot more stubborn. Who would have guessed then that last night, I would receive a call from him asking me to see him.

"That's not my job, right?" I made a point of clarifying. Before the divorce, he seemed to think I was duty-bound to handle everything relating to him and the kids.

"No, it's not. I'm asking you to come."

That's what makes today's visit different. He *asked* me to come. Such humility coming from my ex-husband is a rare occurrence in itself, so it's hard not to feel a little smug about this minor victory. *Look, you're finally asking for my*

help!

Despite this being my third visit, it still feels surreal. Here I am, once again, in the visitor waiting area of the detention center - a place I never once imagined stepping foot in - waiting to meet the man I now call my ex-husband. In truth, there was never any real love between us. Now, we aren't family anymore; heck, we aren't even friends. The workings of this man's mind remain an absolute mystery to me. And now he's managed to get himself locked up?

I am here, for him. In a place with fluorescent bulbs so obsessively bright they urge you to leave as quickly as you came. I am here, patiently waiting to find out why he finally remembered me.

With that, I suppose I'd best explain what happened this summer....

Volcano

In the name of the kids' summer homework, we took a family trip to see the volcanic crater at Mount Huangzui. My husband, Ming-Jen, waited in the car, while I took Hsiao-Yu and his sister to complete their nature observation assignment. The public had only recently learned, quite out of the blue, that the group of "dormant" volcanoes on the northern edge of the Taipei Basin were, in fact, still active. This discovery gave new undertones to the familiar whiff of sulfur that pursued residents of northern Taipei year-round, portending nameless, new dangers to their lives and property.

It was an August afternoon, still early in the fall. The breeze that whispered through the Visitor Center parking lot felt surprisingly cool. I closed the car door, but turned back resentfully and tapped on the window, which slid down to reveal the iPad positioned firmly in Ming-Jen's lap.

My back was turned for no more than a second! It seemed the iPad was now a permanent extension of his body, an extra organ.

Not expecting him to listen, but knowing the kids would ask me why Daddy wasn't joining, I tried to coax Ming-Jen up to the crater. I suggested he make the most of a break from the heat, but predictably, he refused.

When I ventured a few more questions, he scrutinized

me through his thick high-prescription lenses. It was like being watched by a transparent wall.

"I thought we discussed this before we left? I'm just chauffeur today. I have to do some work in the car."

My husband, a programmer, ran a web design company with a friend. It didn't matter where we went, he never stopped working. It's not like I didn't know this.

The man in front of you is a destination you will never reach, a chasm you will never fill, a black hole from which no light can escape. It's not like you didn't know...

A voice within me tried various approaches, urging me to listen. Was I supposed to keep ignoring it?

"Is there another woman?"

Unable to calm my long-held suspicions, the spring that was my patience snapped without warning. I was taken aback by the words that left my own mouth.

Clearly, the timing could have been better. At this very moment, my kids were racing toward a volcanic crater filled with sulfurous gases, chanting like cavemen around a campfire as they went: "Active volcano! Active volcano!" What kind of mother stands around discussing marital problems while her offspring are let loose on a mountain dotted with scalding-hot springs? I could hear them laughing in the distance as they made jokes about farting smells. When I turned around, I saw Hsiao-Yu teasing his sister by trapping a puff of sulfurous gas in his hands and holding it over her nose and mouth. Mei-Mei responded by running wildly after him, trying to get him back, which only made Hsiao-Yu laugh harder.

"Is now the right time?" Ming-Jen asked, reluctantly shifting his gaze from the iPad to me, an unwelcome intruder in his virtual world. I'd seen that look a million times; it was cold and indifferent. Yet today, it somehow amplified my current predicament as a mother. It also reminded the wife in me that my body ticked all the boxes for middle age - weight gain, double chin, deepening crow's feet, and more. I could almost hear the money I'd secretly invested on those few cosmetic injections, splashing senselessly into the ocean.

It's a pity, really, but Ming-Jen's attitude was nothing new. My abrupt question hardly caused him to blink. Rather, he handled it with the composure of a seasoned

chess player, as if he'd been calmly anticipating this exact move all along. I knew he was paying my question careful thought - otherwise he wouldn't have bothered looking up at all.

"Forget it."

I decided to leave Ming-Jen for now, turning my attention back to the more pressing matter of locating my children. Before long, the sight I'd been dreading materialized before my eyes: Hsiao-Yu and his sister crouched beside a small pool crevassed between some rocks. I was about to yell at them when Mei-Mei turned to face me, eager to show off: "Mom! Come here! We're boiling eggs!"

Where did they get eggs? "What are you doing?! It's not safe! Hsiao-Yu, bring your sister over here!" Before I knew it, I had erupted like a volcano, my eyes brimming with tears as I shot forward to deal with those two rascals. Sure enough, there were three eggs, bobbing up and down in a steaming sulfur spring. I gave them both a good lecture, reminding them that this was no hot spring resort and certainly wasn't meant for cooking eggs. I even managed to throw in a scare about how the police might come and arrest them. As I hurried them away from the scene, I couldn't help but wonder where the eggs came from, but was too incensed to ask. Our nature observation class was over before it had even begun.

*

On the journey back down the mountain, fully aware of the trouble they'd caused, Hsiao-Yu and Mei-Mei behaved themselves perfectly in the back seat. Sensing the frosty climate in front, they knew it was in their best interest to keep quiet and observe.

"When did they get the eggs?"

"Why not ask them yourself?"

Ming-Jen made no attempt to question them. I took this to mean I should have somehow known the kids had sneaked eggs out the house, which only fueled my annoyance. "You know, taking care of the kids isn't solely my job!"

"Well, it's primarily your job, isn't it?"

"My job? Yeah, that's my job! This family only seems

to consist of me and those two in the back! Where the hell are you in all this?" The volcano inside me erupted over and over. For me the whole world was roaring with indignation. But what was the point? My words were simply absorbed into Ming-Jen's impenetrable wall of silence, with just a fraction escaping through the air-con to the rear seats.

"That fart smell is in the car too," I heard my daughter whisper to her brother. Perhaps she was implying my rage stank like sulfur.

"Dad, can you take me and Mei-Mei to Grandpa's house?" Hsiao-Yu had picked up on the unusual chill in the car telling him his parents would be preoccupied for a while. He wanted to get himself and his sister to a safe haven.

"Is that OK, Mom?" Hsiao-Yu made sure to double check with me.

"Yes, fine!" I had no objection. Anyway, I hated the kids seeing us argue.

Ming-Jen drove us to his parents' house, not far from the volcano, and took the kids upstairs. I remained in the car, imagining Grandpa's delight on seeing his grandchildren. I also knew he'd be wondering about his daughter-in-law Cheng-Fang's whereabouts. "Mom's feeling a bit under the weather," Hsiao-Yu would answer on Ming-Jen's behalf – an excuse Grandpa had heard countless times before.

For the entire hour-long drive, Ming-Jen and I sat in silence. His eyes were locked on the road ahead; his hands gripping the steering wheel with the inertness of a humanoid autopilot system. Of course, this robot mode spared him from feeling any awkwardness. Meanwhile, the endless ebb and flow of traffic gradually disoriented my thoughts to the point that my own unease faded away.

We finally arrived back at our mountainside home in Muzha. While the air was less stifling than in the city center, Muzha's humidity remained high throughout the year. The exterior walls of the house were covered in patches of gray-green moss, as if the mist had travelled from the dense forest across the mountain and exhaled directly onto them. When we bought the place six years earlier, I hadn't thought too much about it, but now the downsides

were obvious. Ming-Jen's parents certainly didn't approve. Accustomed to the more refined surroundings of northern Taipei – almost to the point of arrogance – they were forever complaining about the dampness of the southerly mountains. They insisted it was bad for our health. I explained how it was closer to Ming-Jen's office in eastern Taipei, but they thought I chose it on purpose to get further away from them. That, and to make it harder for them to see their precious grandkids...

I got out and watched Ming-Jen back the car into the garage, still irked by the memory of the north-south debate we'd had with my in-laws when we first moved in. Then, for some reason, I started thinking of my own home back in Chiayi. I realized how long it had been since I last visited. Well, it's even farther from my parents! I wanted to tell my in-laws.

I stood outside our front door on the sidewalk, still lost in thought as I stared up at the house. I imagined moss and vines gradually taking over the whole house, like an ominous shadow. In fact, I was so absorbed by the thought that I didn't notice Ming-Jen walk up beside me.

"Is there a squirrel?" Ming-Jen asked, frowning up at the trees. He worried a squirrel might scoot up to the second floor via the camphor tree outside our door. He loathed each and every tiny creature inhabiting these mountains.

太平島 16 小時

16 HOURS ON TAIPING ISLAND



The Twelve Rays 十二芒

- **Category:** Military Thriller
- **Publisher:** Links
- **Date:** 9/2023
- **Pages:** 416
- **Length:** 156,042 characters
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- **Full English Manuscript Available**
- **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
- **Rights sold:** TV series (Yoosonn)

After retiring from active duty in 2015, this former serviceman began writing under the pen name The Twelve Rays, a reference to the twelve rays of sunlight depicted on flag of the Republic of China (Taiwan). One of the few authors in Taiwan writing military fiction, his works include *Loyalty Test*, *16 Hours on Taiping Island*, and *Black Ops: 16 Hours in Taipei*.



The serenity of a remote tropical islet is shattered by the arrival of an invading enemy force. Over the course of the next sixteen hours, all hope for this remote patch of Taiwanese soil depends on the courage of three unlikely heroes: a guileless Marine frogman and two of the Coast Guard's least-disciplined soldiers.

Deep in the South China Sea, Taiping Island, the southernmost outpost of the Republic of China, is left defended by a skeleton crew of twenty Coast Guards as the nation takes its New Year's holiday, though their numbers are somewhat bolstered by the presence of fifteen Marines from the Amphibious Reconnaissance and Patrol Unit who are conducting drills there. At this moment of relative weakness, the island comes under attack by the Philippine Navy, and the outnumbered R.O.C. forces are rapidly overpowered, save for three soldiers who happen to be working off base at the time of the attack.

Now, all hope for the island lies with these three unlikely heroes: a mild-mannered marine frogman, Wang Kai-hsu, who would seem incapable of hurting a fly; and the Coast Guard's shadiest recruits, inveterate shirker Chen Jui-che and his partner-in-crime Hsieh Ping-yu. Possessed with a reinvigorated sense of duty, this ad-hoc band of brothers tempers itself into a force to be reckoned with. Availing themselves of Wang's extensive training, and Chen and Hsieh's intimate knowledge of the island's terrain, they hatch a plan to liberate their captive comrades and defend the sovereignty of their nation.

But there are still questions that remain unanswered. Why would the Philippines, which had previously exhibited no designs on the island, suddenly invade? Could the invasion be a gambit by another power competing to control the South China Seas? When the three soldiers witness the execution of their commanding officers and comrades, their questions take an entirely new turn: stay and fight against overwhelming odds? Or, find some way to flee and save themselves?

Unfolding with the gripping tension and explosive imagery of a blockbuster war film, this high-stakes military crisis is narrated in tightly-paced chapters with precise time markers, keeping readers in minute-by-minute suspense until the final resolution, while true-to-life dialogue and characterizations highlight the personal stakes of every decision made on the battlefield. A rare military novel from Taiwan, *16 Hours on Taiping Island*, is a thrilling addition to the genre, delivering intricate plotting, unexpected twists, and well-turned prose. As entertaining as it is thought-provoking, it is sure to leave readers pining for a film or television adaptation.

16 HOURS ON TAIPING ISLAND

By The Twelve Rays

Translated by Lee Anderson

“Stories about conflict in the South China Sea often involve a face off with China over Taiwan’s Taiping Island, but *16 Hours on Taiping Island* has broken the formula with a coup in the Philippines leading to its entry into a proxy war with Taiwan, a convoluted scenario that highlights the complexity of security concerns in the region. It is also a reminder to policy-makers that they need to think outside of the box when approaching these issues.

Three men – a hero with a background in special forces, a Coast Guard slacker who has been around the block a few too many times, and an ecologist stationed on the island – get tangled up in the deadly struggle against the invading mercenaries. The story delivers plenty of heroic derring-do, and its “live together, die together” ethos hits the mark. The distinctive character of Taiwan’s military culture is also on display, providing humor and a sense of familiarity.

It’s an effortlessly smooth read, and like a movie, you hardly know when to breathe once the action kicks in. There’s a sniper scene that compares favorably to *Enemy at the Gates*, and the dialogue during the naval battles will have readers in mind of *The Hunt for Red October*.

— Lee Tuo-Tzu (Writer) / Translated by Joshua Dyer

1

--- 1530 hours ---

Taiping Island

Northern beach

“What the fuck did I do to deserve this?” fumed Chen Jui-che, clenching the bottle of Coke in his hand and stabbing a finger at the feeble, acne-ridden face of the fellow soldier standing next to him. “Well? You’re fucking useless, why didn’t you get the short straw?”

“Do you think it could be because you went to play golf last time you were supposed to sweep the temple?” Tsai Po-han tried his best to look baffled, but couldn’t stop a satisfied smile from tugging at the corners of his mouth. “Perhaps Buddha is making you

stay here to reflect on the error of your ways.”

“Bullshit! Didn’t you pretend to have heatstroke to get out of your last assignment? Why would Buddha only punish me?” Chen retorted. “Hold on a second, aren’t you Christian? Shouldn’t you be staying here to atone for your sins or something?”

Some of the ten other men sitting in the shade of the coconut trees began to snicker. Chen furiously unscrewed the Coke lid, but the hiss from the half-empty bottle sounded more deflated than refreshing. He’d been in a foul mood ever since the list of people being made to stay behind had been announced earlier that afternoon. Disheartened, he drank what was left of his Coke, but even that felt like it had gone flat.

He was on Taiping Island, Taiwan’s southernmost

territory. With the new year fast approaching, all one hundred and ninety soldiers of the Taiwanese National Coast Guard stationed there were about to take a C-130 back to the main island for two weeks' leave, save for the twenty "lucky" ones who had been chosen to stay behind over the holidays.

"I think you need to look at this rationally," Tsai said after a moment's reflection. Chen scowled at him as he waited for him to finish.

"As one of the longest-serving vets here, you were allowed to draw first – and you still got the short straw. Surely it was meant to be?"

"Meant to be, my ass!" Chen snapped, and he reached out and twisted the younger soldier's ear until he howled for mercy. His rage somewhat vented, Chen let the hapless Tsai go and wiped his face with the condensation that had accumulated on the Coke bottle, then roared in despair. This had to be a bad dream.

"Just look on the bright side, Jui-che..."

The voice belonged to Hsieh Ping-yu, a soldier the same rank as Chen. He was also being forced to stay behind, but he hadn't been given the option to draw straws to decide his fate – at least one communications specialist was indispensable to keeping the island base operational.

"All we've got to do is guard the fort, but they've got to do exercises."

"They" referred to the group of fully-armed soldiers standing at ease further down the beach. The fifteen members of the Amphibious Reconnaissance and Patrol Unit, or ARP, had been ordered to Taiping for two weeks of grueling exercises over the new year, and had landed on the island at 1300 hours. Besides a ton of equipment and live ammunition, the new arrivals had also brought with them a gaggle of reporters and photographers from the Military News Agency.

"And how much do you think they're gonna get paid in overtime? Damn right they'd better do something," Chen sneered.

"Their lieutenant's a good guy, you know," piped up one of the younger soldiers.

"What makes you say that?" Hsieh asked.

"Our platoon leader told me to make a flask of tea for him, so I did, but when I took it to him, he didn't drink any of it... He offered it around to all his men instead."

"It's always easier to admire senior officers when you're not in their unit--"

"Am I the only one who thinks that's disgusting? I don't wanna French kiss a bunch of dudes!" Chen interrupted, his mood not having improved in the slightest.

Near the new arrivals stood a female reporter from the Military News Agency, a professional smile plastered on her face as she enthused about the seemingly fascinating drills the men would be undertaking. The ARP soldiers were also in shot, parroting military catchphrases in voices so monotonous you had to worry about their IQs: "Work hard, train hard", "Fight for honor and glory", and other such inspirational slogans.

"Has it been too long since I've seen a woman, or is that reporter hot?" Chen said, squinting into the distance for a better look.

"Hell yeah she is!" agreed Hsieh. "Check out her tits!"

Excited chatter erupted as the other coast guards began discussing the merits of the reporter's appearance, until even Chen had forgotten he was going to be stuck on this rock over New Year's.

Suddenly, they saw a soldier carrying a T93 sniper rifle step forward and start setting it up on a foam mat which had been laid on the sand. An officer who must have been the lieutenant began gravely explaining to the reporter, who was wearing ear defenders, how to shoot a sniper rifle. When finished, he guided her down onto mat and helped her adopt the correct shooting position.

"Whoa! Is she gonna fire a T93? Man, that's sexy!" Hsieh crowed.

"Nah, it's just for the cameras. No civilian would be able to just come off the street and shoot a T93 like that."

"Wahey, she's getting down!" Chen was about to wolf whistle but Hsieh stopped him just in time.

"Come on man, they're filming. You pull that kind of shit and they'll send us away."

"Shit, you're right! But breaking news: I wouldn't mind examining her technique up close," Chen said, adopting a typical newsreader's voice.

"What technique is that, Jui-che?"

"Why, her firing technique, of course. Ha!"

They watched as another, stockier soldier loaded a 7.62 mm cartridge and attached the sling to the rifle. He then crouched down beside the reporter in a standard combat squat position, and pointed toward the inflatable target out at sea. He was presumably giving her advice on technique and, under his instruction, she cautiously maneuvered herself into position and squeezed the stock tight against her body. There was a loud bang from the gun and a girlish scream from the reporter as she pulled the trigger. A lopsided grin crossed Chen's face. The inflatable target continued to float unscathed, but that wasn't the target the coast guards currently had their eyes fixed on.

The soldier next to the reporter picked up the rifle, switched the safety on, and stood back at ease.

"I'm telling you guys, that mat's mine after you've all gone," laughed Chen.

"It's all yours, man," chuckled one of his squad mates.

Chen continued to ogle the reporter as she stood back up. Then, to his dismay, the stocky soldier stepped forward again and assumed the correct prone position on the mat. From what Chen could see, he was covering roughly ninety-eight percent of the area where the reporter had been lying.

"Ah fuck," he groaned as Hsieh clapped him on the back and dissolved into raucous laughter.

The ARP soldier on the mat expertly loaded and cocked the sniper rifle, then there was a loud bang. The target popped almost instantaneously. The reporter applauded his efforts with a professional smile of admiration, before turning back to the camera and extolling the virtues of his rigorous military training.

The rest of the unit came into frame and, like in every other TV appearance, punched the air and roared out, "For Taiwan!" to crown off the episode.

"Hell, are you guys goofing off again? The platoon leader's looking for you!" another coast guard shouted as he emerged from the trees behind them.

"We were just helping to move that mat into position," Chen said confidently as he pointed farther down the beach.

"Horse shit! It doesn't take ten of you to move one mat!"

"I dunno what to tell you, dude. It was heavy," Chen replied with a nonchalant shrug.

"As if my life couldn't get any worse... Fuck, I bet it's because I hit that bird with my golf club last week. And now I've got to cross the whole island with this thing..."

Chen grumbled to himself as he hoisted the foam mat onto his shoulder, with Hsieh taking the rear end. As the two most senior ranking soldiers involved, they were the ones taking the flack for the squad's laziness. With the airplane scheduled for take-off at 1800 hours, the men who were going home for the holidays were already packing up and the C-130 crew were conducting their pre-flight checks.

"I've got my hands full at the moment," Hsieh sighed, "so forgive me if I don't get the violin out."

The sole runway on Taiping Island was 1,200 meters long and 30 meters wide, and sliced the long, narrow island into northern and southern halves. The pair had been ordered to take the mat from the northern beach to the warehouse in the southeast of the island used to store old equipment. Despite Chen's complaints, "crossing the entire island" wasn't actually that big of a deal but, in the spirit of experienced shirkers, they made sure to move at tortoise-like speed. Just as they were leisurely locking up the warehouse, their platoon leader for the next two weeks came roaring up behind them on a motorcycle.

"Hey, you idiots!"

"What?"

"The ARP guys are gonna need training equipment

for tomorrow, and the duty officer said we might need to take it out to give it time to dry. I want you to move everything out from there and dump it by the assembly point on the eastern side of the runway." The platoon leader pointed to an area of tarmac some two hundred meters away, squinting at the sunlight reflecting from its surface.

"Why can't they do it themselves?" asked Hsieh.

"They're our guests. Not to mention that they need to rest up. Double not to mention that if I tell you to do something, you damn well better do it!"

"Fuck man, that's far!" Chen protested.

The platoon leader looked at the distance they had to cover and made no effort to deny it. Instead, he fired up the motorbike and said, "I'll be back soon to check on your progress. And remember to wipe the mats down; they were all covered in mold last time I looked. Make sure you're done by six. Oh, and lower the flag while you're at it."

And with that, he turned the bike around and sped off, leaving his two subordinates glowering in his wake.

"Fuck..." Even Chen, usually so eloquent when it came to complaining, couldn't think of anything better to say.

As they were desperately thinking of a way to accomplish their task with minimal effort, Hsieh suddenly spotted a hulking figure crouched on the reef rock near the shore, just over one hundred meters away. It was an ARP marine wearing a bulletproof vest, digital tiger stripe camouflage, and tactical boonie hat.

"Hey look, what's that asshole doing? Is he taking a shit?"

"Don't be stupid - wouldn't he have pulled his pants down?" Hsieh blew on his whistle, and the soldier turned round to look at them. Hsieh beckoned him over energetically.

"Oh look, if it isn't our heroic sniper from earlier," he snickered.

"Great... What the hell's that hobbit frogman doing here?" Chen had recognized him too, and still hadn't forgiven him for lying down on the mat after the female reporter. "I know, let's get him to move all the stuff for

us."

"OK, but let me handle this. Your eyes are so close together, you always look shifty," Hsieh whispered back. Chen gave him a swift kick in the ass.

"Fuck you, everyone says I look like Takeshi Kaneshiro!"

By now the marine jogged over to them.

"Petty Officer Wang Kai-hsu of the ARP unit, sir! Is there anything I can do to help here?" His professional, by-the-book conduct was so alien to Chen and Hsieh that he might as well have been an extraterrestrial.

"Er..." Chen stumbled, for once at a loss for words.

"Thank you, petty officer," Hsieh jumped in, "but we're the ones who are here to help you."

"Roger that. Please tell me what it is I should be doing." Wang looked friendly enough, but his formal demeanor and manner of speaking made it hard to know how to talk to him. Hsieh summoned up his warmest, sincerest facial expression.

"Well, our platoon leader told us that someone from your unit had been sent here to get all the training equipment out of storage, and that we should come lend a hand. Because you guys have got exercises tomorrow, right?"

"Yes sir! I haven't received those orders yet, but thank you for the heads-up."

"No worries. Come with us, it's just over here," Hsieh said, turning around to hide the smug smile on his face.

For the next half an hour, they watched as Wang worked like a machine. Tirelessly he went back and forth from the warehouse, carrying out mats, dumbbells, sandbags, weighted ammo crates, and empty aqua bags. At first, Chen and Hsieh pretended to help out by carrying one or two of the lighter items, but they soon revealed their true colors once they saw how strong Wang was.

"What the hell? Is he done already?"

"He's like one of those Roombas!"

第三顆子彈

THE THIRD BULLET



Chang Kuo-Li 張國立

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- **Date:** 3/2024
- **Pages:** 345
- **Length:** 131,975 characters
(approx. 85,800 words in English)
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- **Rights contact:**
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Chang Kuo-Li, one time editor-in-chief of *China Times Weekly*, has won numerous awards for his writing. A linguist, historian, army expert, sports fan, food critic, as well as poet, playwright and novelist, he is truly a Renaissance man. He has published over 60 books over his career, mostly mystery novels, including the recent *Pawnshop of the Otherworld* and *The Spirit Medium Detective* series. Among all his works, *The Sniper* series has been translated into Dutch, German, French, English, Russian, Turkish, Vietnamese, and Japanese.



The pulse-pounding second novel in Chang Kuo-Li's The Sniper thriller series, The Third Bullet is based on the infamous "two bullets" incident – the attempted assassination of President Chen Shui-Bian in 2004. Many believe the attack was staged by Chen himself in order to win reelection. The question is – how did he do it?

Seven days before the election, Taiwan's President Hsu is shot during a parade on a crowded – and closely guarded – street in Taipei. Former senior detective Wu, now working as an insurance investigator, is pulled out of retirement to help investigate the case. He enlists the help of the best sniper he knows, our protagonist Alex, still in hiding after the events of *The Sniper*.

Alex's investigation confirms his suspicion: the shooting was staged. His instinct is to back away, but it's too late – because who makes a better fall guy than a seasoned sniper like himself? Soon, Alex is being hounded by Taiwan special forces. He flees to Japan, hoping to track down an old French Foreign Legion comrade who is now a monk with a drinking problem...

Who is the mysterious sniper that made the non-fatal shot? And who is the puppet master running the show? As secrets are revealed, guns are drawn, and blood is spilled, Alex and Wu face the most dangerous mission of their lives in a battle that will decide the fate of a nation.

Based on the 319 Incident, a 2004 attempt on President Chen Shui-Bian's life, this exciting sequel to *The Sniper* can also be read as a stand-alone thriller. With characteristic humor, brisk pacing, and cinematic action, renowned author Chang Kuo-Li carries readers on a convoluted quest for the truth that is packed with police investigations, political intrigue, and a tense showdown between master snipers.

THE THIRD BULLET

By Chang Kuo-Li

Translated by Roddy Flagg

“**A**uthor of more than sixty books, Chang Kuo-Li has attained mastery over writing technique. So, when he set his sights on the international market with *The Sniper*, he knew how to attract readers outside of the Chinese language sphere: sharp pacing, striking visual imagery, precisely tailored technical knowledge. He built readers’ trust, and put his well-practiced prose to use presenting uniquely Taiwanese story elements, giving readers a strikingly original reading experience without the foreign locale becoming a barrier. His sequel, *The Third Bullet*, continues in this vein, using real events of the 2004 Taiwan presidential election to set the stage: an attempt is made on a candidate’s life, but the gunman’s bullet just grazes the candidate’s belly, leaving only a minor wound, much as the bullet intended for US presidential candidate Donald Trump only nicked his ear. While Trump’s would-be assassin was shot and killed on the scene, the assassination case in Taiwan was never solved, giving the author full-reign to develop his story.

— Wu Chia-Heng (Art critic) / Translated by Joshua Dyer

Part 1: Taking Fire

“In the fourth century B.C., during the Spring and Autumn period, there was a renowned assassin. Now remember, kids, that plenty of assassins became famous. But not so many actually managed to kill their targets. Killing someone’s not as easy as you might think.

“Anyway, this assassin’s name was Zhuan Zhu, and he was known, the history books tell us, for his loyalty and sense of justice. So, the King of Wu had just died. All his kids and grandkids were squabbling over who would succeed him. Prince Guang was the rightful heir, but his cousin, Prince Liao, seized the throne. Guang, furious, ordered Zhuan Zhu to do away with the usurper. Zhuan Zhu made some enquiries and learned Prince Liao liked to eat fish. So he went off to Lake Tai to learn how to cook tender, flavorsome fish.

Think of the fish you might get at a Sichuan restaurant. Simmered in soy sauce and chili bean paste... Or the fish in yellow soybean sauce the canteen did the other day. Can’t you just smell it?

“Zhuan Zhu had a mission. And every mission needs a weapon. Enter Ou Yezi, the legendary swordsmith of the Spring and Autumn period, forger of five famed swords. The first four used up most of his metals, so the final fifth sword was shorter, more of a dagger. But he hammered and hammered at the blade until it took on the scaled shimmer of a fish’s belly. And it was no longer than a fish, so that’s what it was named. Fish Belly.

“Liao, now King of Wu, was informed his cousin Guang had a cook who made the tastiest fish and came visiting to see if this was true. Naturally, he was closely guarded during the meal. Trusted retainers sampled every dish for poison before it passed the

king's lips. Servants were searched for weapons before approaching the table. After many courses, the showpiece arrived: the fish. Zhuan Zhu carried it to the table himself and described the cooking process to the diners. Then, in mid-sentence, he tore open the fish, removed Fish Belly, which had been concealed in its flesh, and with a single stab pierced the usurper king's layers of armor. The king died. When the king's guards realized what had happened, so did Zhuan Zhu."

The instructor jabbed his half-smoked cigar towards the seated students. "Understand the moral of the story?"

"Yes, sir! Stick to sushi and sashimi and stay away from whole fish."

The class burst out laughing.

"It's only half four, Tuan, are you hungry already? Would you like a gate pass so you can go out and get yourself some fucking sushi? Two watches for you tonight, 11 till 1 and 5 till 7, we'll see how that helps your digestion."

The instructor tapped the cigar, sending ash drifting to the floor.

"The story tells us the assassin needs to first identify the target's habits and preferences, then second, understand the environment. And third, and this is crucial for snipers, choose the right weapon. Zhuan Zhu chose Fish Belly because there was no sharper blade, and because it was small enough to conceal in the fish and so evade the searches. If you know your targets are going to be within 400 meters, you don't want the M200. It's 140 centimeters long itself. Add on 50 rounds – each 10 centimeters long – and you weaklings will give yourselves hernias before you're even in position."

More laughter from below.

"Think of Fish Belly. Advanced tech, light, convenient. You're snipers, remember. We are not going to the supermarket and buying the biggest bag of dumplings because that works out cheapest. Although that is no doubt what you gluttons do."

—Colonel Huang Hua-sheng. Army special forces sniper, sniper trainer

1

At 9:17 a.m. the President's right hand went to his abdomen. He bent forwards, shrimp-like, then toppled to the right. His hand came away from his belly to grasp at the handrail in front of him, where it left a scarlet smear. Blood dripped to the floor of the jeep, pooling into the shape of a chili pepper.

*

At 9:11 a.m., President Hsu Huo-sheng, codenamed Phoenix by his protection officers for the literal meaning of his given name, "Fire-born", was in a motorcade pulling into Huayin Street and the final push of the presidential election. Hsu was known to be a workaholic, rising at 6 a.m. even back when he was a mere lawyer. He maintained the habit when he became president, putting in a half an hour on the treadmill before reading his briefing papers over breakfast. And that time was inviolate. Nobody, not even the First Lady herself, dared interrupt.

The President's breakfast menu had featured in the memoirs of a butler recently retired from the official residence. Beef soup, in the Tainan style, to show he remembered where he came from. Two fried eggs, sunny side up, as the Americans like them, with eight mainland-style pork and chive dumplings, to show his openness to all.

The President believed, or so his former butler reported, that breakfast provided fuel for the entire day to come. It was therefore essential to eat until his belly was full. Lunch he could overlook, unless it was a lunch meeting, and was usually a meat-filled glutinous rice dumpling and Four-Treasure Soup. For dinner, he favored steak. Ideally sliced, with a touch of soy sauce, wasabi and crispy fried garlic. Plain rice on the side.

President Hsu's pre-breakfast temper was notorious. A story had once leaked about an occasion when he found the tie laid out for him objectionable: "What am I meant to do?" he had roared. "Employ a tie man?" The anecdote was, naturally, repeatedly denied by a Presidential Office spokesperson. But it remained true that nobody spoke to the President before he had eaten. And he would never smile while

still in the residence, even after breakfast. His smile was a politician's smile – rarely seen by aides or even the premier. Voters, though, were assured of a genuine beam.

Politicians, you see, love votes even more than voters love money.

The schedule published by the campaign headquarters was broken down into half-hour segments. Every day started with a meeting at headquarters at 7:30 a.m., which Hsu attended. General business was concluded by 8 a.m., although Hsu would stay on to discuss matters further with his more trusted advisors. At 8:45 a.m. he would climb into the jeep and hit the campaign trail.

It was a 9:00 a.m. start to avoid the worst of the rush hour. The motorcade drove in the slow lane, Hsu in the back waving to voters looking on from their office windows.

President Hsu loved campaigning. During his first term of office a newspaper editorial had quipped that "Hsu Huo-sheng is possibly the only person in Taiwan who would prefer annual elections."

In the previous election he had started off lagging by 17 percentage points, a handicap he had whittled down to 3 percentage points. Ultimately, he snatched a shock victory by a mere 38,808 votes.

According to the butler's memoirs, Hsu had explored the entire official residence on the day he moved in. The butler had assumed the new president was simply interested to see his new home, until the real reason became clear. Hsu had stopped in the hall used to host foreign guests and pointed at the wall: "Move those paintings to the library. I want a photo of the Central Election Commission results up there." Not just his own votes, the butler clarified. The votes of all the candidates.

Because there's no victory without a defeated foe, and Hsu wanted the guests honored with a visit to the official residence to know they were meeting with a man with a passion for victory. Look, that photo would declare: here are my defeated foes.

Hsu liked to tell reporters that he had suffered from asthma as a child, and when he had an attack

his mother would take him to the town's clinic, where they would put him on a steroid drip and tell him to rest. And as he rested, he felt as if he was floating, weightless. Young Hsu wondered at first if this meant he was dead. Later he decided he was simply flying.

And that's what winning an election feels like, he told them. Like flying. Like you've been on the steroid drip a little too long.

But this campaign was harder fought again. Hsu had been brimming with confidence, until the two opposition parties formed an unexpected and unprecedented alliance, their leaders standing on a joint ticket. An opinion poll the previous weekend had shown Hsu trailing by 11 percentage points.

That deficit would have had any other candidate packing their bags. Not Hsu. He just campaigned harder. Every single one of Taiwan's 23 million residents knew Hsu was not one to admit defeat. Some loved him for it, some cursed him a bullshitter. In a pep talk for his campaign staff that had leaked online, Hsu was seen yelling, his face twisted: "Do not be scared of being behind. Being behind makes us work harder." And so Hsu's schedule for the final week of the election was crammed so full a mosquito would have failed to find a gap to fly through. Hsu made his plan clear: "We're going to boost turn-out in our strongholds, and we're going to take votes in theirs."

And that reminded everyone of what he had said while running for mayor of Taipei: "Switch one voter from their side to ours, and that's as good as two votes. So tell me where their voters are, and that's where I'll go."

Hsu, standing in the rear of the open-backed jeep, heard the shouting of the crowd, amplified through loudspeakers, even before the motorcade turned into Huayin Street. His supporters were there, he knew. Passers-by on the sidewalks watched as he drove by, proud and upright, apparently destined to serve another four-year term.

From the campaign headquarters on Zhongshan North Street the motorcade took Nanjing West Street to Chengde Street, then turned onto Huayin Street in the direction of Taiyuan Road. This was one of the

few remaining traditional communities in central Taipei and had once been a stronghold for Hsu. This time, not so much. His opponents were spending big and portraying him as a political operator sacrificing principles for profit.

But he knew how to respond: "I was born in a place like this. I grew up in a place like this. And I will never forget the mothers and fathers who scrape their children's school fees together cent by cent. They can try to smear my name, but they will not succeed. I swear to you here, hand on heart, that my government will help you pay for your children's education."

The spiel booming from the jeep's loudspeakers was heard well in advance of the motorcade's arrival. Hsu stood behind the cab, one hand clutching the handrail welded there, the other constantly waving, like the paw of one of those Japanese cat figurines. He kept waving, but he could not deny the campaign was physically punishing: he had patches to ease muscle pain on the inside of both his elbows, and round bruises from the cupping therapy on his back. This was an important day for the campaign. There were only seven days before the election, and today marked the start of the final push.

A legislator with Hsu's party sighed and whispered into a reporter's ear: "If you get a chance, film him next time he visits a temple. He lights the incense then closes his eyes and mutters away to himself. It's like he's talking to the gods or something. And when he's done, he's all full of beans. Cheaper than a six-pack of Red Bull, I guess."

The firecrackers started exploding when the sound of the loudspeakers heralded Hsu's arrival on Huayin Street. Hsu was shouting, red from the neck upwards: "Give me four more years, and I promise you Taiwan will be the fastest-growing of the Four Asian Tigers. The stock market will hit 20,000; average income will hit 30,000 US dollars. We can do it if we work together!"

Hsu had never lost an election. Yet.

*

At 9 a.m. sharp, the man – tall and thin, wearing grey

Adidas sneakers with white trim – unlocked the metal gate to the staircase and hurried up to the fifth floor, accompanied by the sound of firecrackers drifting in from the street. On the fifth floor he unlocked the door to Room 502. By the time he was at the window overlooking Huayin Street the President's motorcade was just coming into sight.

Most of his field of view, he realized, was obscured by the shop signs jutting out into the street, but he knew the other rooms would be no better and possibly worse. He pressed a telescopic sight to his eye and adjusted the focus. There was no mistake: there, standing in the back of the jeep, was Hsu Huo-sheng.

The man had been watching Hsu for eleven days now, and had noticed a cluster of laugh lines which appeared at the left corner of the President's mouth when he smiled. At this distance, a 5.56mm round aimed at those wrinkles would blow his head to pieces. Much like a watermelon used for target practice.

He lost sight of the target as the jeep drove behind a large shop sign. It soon reappeared, but a cloud of firecracker smoke now obscured Hsu's face. Someone was setting off the firecrackers directly below the hotel room, sending clouds of sulfurous smoke drifting along the street. The man lit a cigarette and then, with unhurried and practiced movements, assembled a sniper rifle.

He liked the SVD. A classic. Made in 1964, well-maintained even now, and entirely reliable. Not to mention weighing a mere 4.3 kilograms. And thanks to decades of handling and sweaty cheeks the stock was now as soft and smooth as skin.

The man rarely used a bipod, and instead steadied himself against the wall, eased the barrel of the SVD from the window, and centered those laugh lines in his sights. He counted out five rounds by feel, loaded them into a magazine and slid it into place.

七十號，你的鳥歪了

NUMBER 70, YOUR BADGE IS CROOKED



Yen Yu

顏瑜

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



Ho Kuan-yu turns down an elite police university to enroll at an ordinary academy for rank-and-file cops. As a result, he is singled out for harsh treatment. While Ho Kuan-yu's gentle spirit remains unbroken, and even wins him an unexpected friend, he is forced to navigate an internal power struggle that could have life-threatening consequences.

Aspiring police officer Ho Kuan-yu has gained admittance to two police academies: the elite Central Police University that trains police captains, and Taiwan Police College, a vocational school that produces rank-and-file cops. Against his parents' wishes, he enrolls in the latter, only to find that his decision makes him the target of abuse by Hsu Chan-hao, the upperclassman supervising his bootcamp-style freshman training. Despite the challenges, Ho Kuan-yu remains confident in his choice, knowing that the two schools will soon be combined into one academy as part of ongoing reforms to the police force.

Slowly, Ho Kuan-yu's honesty and kindness win over his tormentor, and the two forge an unexpectedly tender bond. At the same time, there is discontent brewing amongst teachers opposed to the integration of the police academies. These anti-reformists are plotting to harm students in order to strengthen their position in the struggle against the newly arrived reformist teachers. Once the safest place imaginable, the campus of the police college is now a veritable minefield.

In the tradition of *SOTUS*, Thailand's pre-eminent work of boy's love fiction, *Number 70, Your Badge Is Crooked* is a tender bromance set against a backdrop of serious social issues. The former addresses the pervasive hazing controversies that tarnished the public image of Thai universities, while the latter exposes a range of related issues within Taiwan's police force and training academies. The seriousness of these issues contrasts with author Yen Yu's endearing rendering of the protagonists' budding friendship. A former police officer and graduate of Taiwan Police College, Yen Yu's personal and professional experience lend credibility to his depictions of campus life, and the internal power struggles within the police force.

NUMBER 70, YOUR BADGE IS CROOKED

By Yen Yu

Translated by Eunice Shek

“It’s impossible not to admire the exhaustive field research that went into this novel, bringing readers into a world they would ordinarily never encounter: a police academy populated with characters and scenes so vivid they practically leap from the page. With this fictional narrative, the author questions the hard and fast rules of seniority that govern student life, the authoritarian style of education, and the faculty power struggles taking place within the academy. While the story is fictional, readers will feel compelled to take it seriously, as if the conflicts described in the novel were taking place in their own lives.

To put it succinctly, *Number 70, Your Badge Is Crooked* is a light read that deals with heavy issues – a book that, for all of its youthful brio, demands serious thought.

— He Wun-Jin (Novelist) / Translated by Joshua Dyer

Prologue

It is said that boys will experience two stages of maturity in their lifetimes.

The first time is in kindergarten, when we learn that we are not the center of the world; every child is the treasure of their family, we are not special. The second time is during one’s mandatory military service.

Upon entering the military, just like entering kindergarten, one is stripped of one’s individuality. Like a girl who has worked hard to grow a beautiful head of long hair, but has her ponytail seized and her head forcibly shaved regardless of her wishes or agreement, serving in the military is like this.

“Diligence! Effort! Health! Vigor! Obedience! Discipline! Unity! Honor!”

Loud shouts resonated throughout the campus. A group of boys wearing tank tops ran out, mouths vigorously reciting these phrases in unison. They

wound around a statue in front of the administration building, heading straight for the training grounds.

It was only six o’clock in the morning. Although it was July, the weather was slightly cool.

Ho Kuan-yu was among their ranks. Like everyone else, his head was shaved, and he was wearing a hat. Like everyone else, he expended all his energy to shout himself hoarse. He deeply feared being caught over a careless mistake and suffering a reprimand from his superiors.

But he wasn’t serving in the military; he was at a police academy.

Chapter One

There are two police academies in Taiwan: one is Central Police University (CPU), the other is Taiwan Police College (TPC). The difference between the two is clear from the names alone. Ho Kuan-yu originally

wanted to study at Central Police University, but due to an unexpected turn of events, he enrolled at Taiwan Police College instead.

TPC's full name is a bit of a mouthful: Taiwan Police College; one only needs to study for two years to become a police officer after graduation. However, compared to other schools, the College is more akin to a military base - there are definitely no university scenes of romance, freedom, or overflowing youthfulness, which is why Ho Kuan-yu felt that he was completing mandatory national military service instead.

"Squad Five, fifth from the end, step out!" a voice roared angrily.

Ho Kuan-yu stood shoulder to shoulder with his classmates on the training grounds, already in formation, but he'd been caught spacing out - "Squad Five, fifth from the end" was him. He hastily hurried out from the ranks.

At six in the morning, the training grounds were so cold that even cheerlessness was difficult to muster. A group of over two hundred boys stood in perfect formation, much like fish on a chopping block, nerves stretched taut, waiting to be gutted.

Before Ho Kuan-yu stood four grim and severe superiors. Although they were called "superiors", they were actually only one year ahead. Though they appeared no older than nineteen or twenty years old, their authoritative air didn't match their age.

"What were you thinking of, lost in thought like that?" the tallest among the four asked impatiently. He glanced at Ho Kuan-yu's student identification number. "Number Seventy, on the ground!"

"Yes, Squad Leader!" Ho Kuan-yu complied immediately, both hands braced against the ground as he assumed a push-up position.

"Two sets, begin!"

One set meant ten push-ups. The unfortunate Ho Kuan-yu immediately began his push-ups. Before this, he'd been feeling a little chilly, but quickly warmed up. His superior's attention quickly shifted to the others.

"The last three in Squad Four, step out!"

"The ones laughing in Squad Thirteen, step out!"

"Everyone in Squad Two, step out!"

Ho Kuan-yu wasn't the only one. Very quickly, the

sounds of push-ups surrounded him; this was the scene of their morning exercise routine. As more units entered the training grounds, the noise increased - at least one hundred others were being punished at the same time.

"Everyone, halt!" At 6:10 a.m., a voice of even higher rank sounded from the front of the grounds.

The superiors immediately had their subordinates get up and quickly return to their ranks.

After the call to halt, the training grounds were densely packed with over three hundred TPC recruits, standing in absolute silence. Not a peep could be heard.

The national flag was raised, the national anthem sung, hats removed and donned again, all in perfect order. Although Ho Kuan-yu's back was soaked with sweat, he still drew out his voice, deeply afraid that if he sang too quietly, he would be reprimanded later.

Who would have thought that he, who had never gone to karaoke nor dared to sing out loud, would end up like this?

With his shaved head and deeply sun-browned skin, he sang off-key without any embarrassment. This transformation had occurred in just two weeks. A fortnight ago, he was still a carefree recent high school graduate; if his bangs were cut just a millimeter too short, he would refuse to go out, preferring to order delivery than let the girl working at the neighboring convenience store see him. In his current plight, he no longer knew who he was.

This was the routine at the College, with its two-year curriculum, over seventy percent of which was comprised of military-style education and military-style management. Students were required to live at the school, comply with disciplinary measures, and live together as a group; they were assigned both dorms and cafeterias. Within the school, you were not allowed to walk around freely; even using the bathroom was regulated. If you broke a rule, even accidentally, woe betide you - the school had a wide range of methods to deal with infractions.

Why bother obeying the rules, you might ask.

It was very simple - if you wanted to be a police officer and receive your certification, you had to comply with school rules. If you couldn't take it, you

could, of course, leave; no one was forcing you to stay, and anyway, there was a long waiting list of students hoping to enroll.

"After dismissal, each group will disperse and operate independently. Dismissed!" An officer broadcast orders from the command podium.

However, they were only dismissed from the flag raising ceremony. The real morning exercises were just beginning.

"Number Seventy, you haven't finished your sets, right?" A voice rang out, laden with bad intentions.

Ho Kuan-yu knew the person speaking to him was behind him to his right, but he didn't dare turn to look - at the college, even turning one's head without permission was violating regulations and could be punished.

"Squad Leader, sir, I have not finished!" he replied loudly, standing rigid and straight, eyes facing forward; he didn't dare to move even his pupils.

"Then why are you acting like you have free time? Number Seventy, step out!"

"Yes, Squad Leader!"

Standing before him was the superior from the group of four. With a height of 1.8 meters, he had eyes like obsidian pools, eyebrows like blades, sharp and well-defined nose and lips, and a bearing that was heroic yet menacing; proud and aloof, yet handsome and dashing; valiant yet elegant and unrestrained... Oh, yes, he was unbelievably cool; it was just a pity he also had a twisted personality.

"Get down!" He berated Ho Kuan-yu loudly.

"Yes, Squad Leader!"

Ho Kuan-yu obeyed his instructions, got into the push-up position, and, in front of everyone, began to exert all his strength to lower and raise his body.

This was a distinct difference in treatment. He was not the only one who hadn't completed his punishment, but he was the only one called out for it; it was very embarrassing. And the person targeting him was none other than his direct superior, his squad leader, Hsu Chan-hao.

"Squad leader" wasn't a terribly extraordinary position. Hsu Chan-hao was merely a grade above

them, only a year older. He had simply entered the school one year before them, but, according to a codified tradition of hierarchy and obedience, he could not be defied.

Police colleges and military academies both followed a system of dividing the student body between upper- and lowerclassmen. This system was neither good nor bad; the point was to learn obedience. When Ho Kuan-yu had first arrived, he was suspicious of this approach; but after his two-week-long rude awakening, he was already numb to it. Those that couldn't adapt to it had all dropped out.

"Number Seventy, fall in!" Hsu Chan-hao said.

"Yes, Squad Leader!"

Their unit began their morning exercises, running on the early morning training grounds. Every so often, they would encounter another unit and briefly run alongside them before splitting off again. After several encounters, their unit leader got tired of this, so he directed them to the mountain behind the school and ordered them to run up the sloping mountain path.

Running on the rising and falling mountain path was the worst. TPC's campus was not flat; there were mountains and hills, as well as simulated shopping malls and traffic intersections, interspersed with barracks and other facilities. Those students who were a bit heavier, or at least not fit, quickly ran out of steam and fell behind the group one by one, only to be rounded up by the squad leaders, who commanded them to do push-ups, giving their legs a rest even as they engaged in a more unbearable exercise.

The unit leader began singing, "*The light of the police is brilliant and glorious!* One! Two! One! Two! Ready, sing!"

Damn it, this isn't over yet? Now, we have to sing as we run.

"*The light of the police... is brilliant and glorious...*"

The recruit next to Ho Kuan-yu tried to sing but was out of breath; he was nearly done for.

He slept beneath Ho Kuan-yu on the lower bunk. His name was Chou Wei-hao. He wore glasses that lent him a well-educated and well-bred appearance, and was a little plump. He'd just barely passed TPC's

physical selection threshold; if he'd been a little heavier, he likely would have been rejected.

When Ho Kuan-yu first saw him, he guessed Chou Wei-hao wouldn't last three days. He didn't expect that that it would be their neighbors, Numbers Seventy-Two and Seventy-Three, who both dropped out, and that Number Seventy-One - Chou Wei-hao - would still be there, sleeping under him on the lower bunk.

If you want to become a police officer, it turns out willpower is the most decisive factor.

"We must carry forward the glorious history of the police force!" Ho Kuan-yu sang loudly to replace Chou Wei-hao, hoping to conceal Chou Wei-hao's faltering voice.

Hsu Chan-hao was running right beside them, glaring at them menacingly.

Each squad consisted of fifteen people. Hsu Chan-hao was their squad leader, responsible for Numbers Sixty-One through Seventy-Five. His top priority - every squad leader's top priority - was to push these fifteen people to their utmost. On behalf of the school and the national selection policies, he was to separate the wheat from the chaff and select the best TPC recruits from his squad.

This was why their training was so strict. When he first arrived, Ho Kuan-yu didn't yet understand why the school wanted to abuse people like this. Only later did he understand that the military and the police both had the same mission: if obedience was a matter of free will, soldiers would never enter the battlefield.

Ho Kuan-yu understood this, so he was still here; those who didn't understand had already run off. The current Seventy-Two and Seventy-Three were already much better than the ones who had dropped out, at least in terms of physical stamina.

"Number Seventy, what's distracting you?" Hsu Chan-hao's impatient voice rang out again. He was like a tick, stuck to Ho Kuan-yu, as if he wouldn't be satisfied until he'd eliminated him.

"Nothing, Squad Leader!" Ho Kuan-yu panted in response.

"Number Seventy, step out! Get down!"

Ho Kuan-yu was forced to separate from the group

and submit to Hsu Chan-hao on the mountainside.

The Vampire, they called him. Hsu Chan-hao looked the part with his pale face, spiteful nose, and ruddy lips, it seemed as if he would only give up after sucking them dry.

Ho Kuan-yu might be under the jurisdiction of Squad Five, and entirely under Hsu Chan-hao's thumb, but it wouldn't have mattered which squad he was in. No one likes their squad leader.

"I heard you tested into CPU. You think you're all that?" Hsu Chan-hao said suddenly, close to Ho Kuan-yu's ear. Ho Kuan-yu could almost feel the puff of air as he spoke.

Ho Kuan-yu was dumbfounded. Forgetting the rules for an instant, he lifted his head without permission.

Hsu Chan-hao was squatting before him. He narrowed his eyes, sizing him up. "So? You think your grades are hot shit?"

Central Police University and Taiwan Police College were two different schools. CPU required four years of study; after graduation, one directly became a commissioned officer, so enrollment required very good grades. On the other hand, TPC graduates could only become ordinary police officers.

Ho Kuan-yu was accepted into TPC, but had also been simultaneously accepted into CPU. He unexpectedly gave up his chance at CPU and chose TPC instead. Ho Kuan-yu thought this was a secret - he'd only told his neighbor, Chou Wei-hao. He realized now that Chou Wei-hao and his big mouth had blabbed, bragging until even the squad leader found out.

No wonder that ever since the first week, Hsu Chan-hao had fixated on Ho Kuan-yu; there had been a reason all along.

死神先生的自殺契約書

MR. DEATH'S SUICIDE PACT



L.C

-
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-

With *Mr. Death's Suicide Pact*, one of the most promising book debuts of recent years, author L.C won the KadoKado Novel Award, and was selected to represent Taiwan at the 2023 Busan Story Market, a content development marketplace held alongside the Busan International Film Festival.



Only those who are determined to kill themselves will ever see Death and his suicide pact. If they die by suicide within seven days of signing the pact, their souls belong to Death, and they will never again suffer rebirth. In three stories, Mr. Death's Suicide Pact unveils a dark and tender panorama of the human condition, posing the question: can suicide truly liberate us from suffering?

The three stories that comprise *Mr. Death's Suicide Pact* are set in a fictional world where those who are determined to kill themselves receive a visit from Death, and an offer. If they sign a pact with Death, they will surely die within seven days, by one means or another. Three people accept Death's offer, underpinning three stories in which harsh realities are edged with the warmth of love, family, and friendship.

In the first story, a young woman, Celeste, decides to end her own life after a car accident leaves her a burden to her family. Touched by her selflessness, Ivan, aka Mr. Death, begins to develop unaccustomed affections.

In second story, Death, now in the guise of a top student, appears to Huang Wei-jen, who plans to kill himself to escape the bullying of classmates. After signing the Death's pact, however, Huang Wei-jen has a realization that changes his life, and he begins to regret signing the pact.

In the final story, suicide deprives model mother Amamiya Yuzuki of the daughter she raised with all her devotion. In the depths of her despair, a young boy appears. Claiming to be Death, he tells her he knows the real reason her daughter killed herself.

Spanning various nations, life stages, and family relations, these three stories grant a range of perspectives on one of life's big questions: is suicide the end of suffering, or, is it merely the end of living? Both entertaining and thought provoking, each story is propelled to its conclusion by the fundamental mystery of death. An additional epilogue invites further contemplation that will linger long after the stories end.

MR. DEATH'S SUICIDE PACT

By L.C

Translated by Jacqueline Leung

“Taking on the extreme subject of life and death, the novel explores the contradictions of human nature and the multitude of forms that life can take. When given seven days to live, the characters don't run around ticking items off their bucket lists as we see in the familiar “terminal diagnosis” novel; instead, they are given seven days to go and truly experience the warmth that life has to offer.

Mr. Death's Suicide Pact is a pure distillation of life in all its kindness and cruelty. Each story will leave readers with bittersweet, even tearful, resonances to savor.

— Cheau Chi-An (Crime Writers of Taiwan) / Translated by Joshua Dyer

ACT ONE

01 I'll be in your care, Mr. Death

Old alley, dismal, desolate.

Girl, young, pale-skinned, lying on ice-cold cobblestones littered with heaps of trash.

Her face was elegant and youthful and etched with wounds. Her eyes, large as show windows, displayed glass-blue irises so exquisite they could pass for art. And like art, she was deathly still.

Wind howled and perforated the streets on this cold winter day, scouring everything of color until the surroundings were faded and mottled. Warmth seeped from the girl's body, starting from her fingertips, and gradually her whole body.

Her long lashes trembled, and her sleek brows twitched in a shiver. She could no longer feel the tip of her nose. Subconsciously, she curled into herself – she could still feel a bit of the cold, at least.

She fixed her gaze, still slightly out of focus, on an overturned wheelchair a close distance away.

One of the wheels was upended towards the sky, still spinning and skidded with mud. Her forehead throbbed with pain until it felt numb. She could hardly remember how she fell.

She'd wheeled herself to this deserted town and hadn't eaten for days. She couldn't feel her hands, and any strength she might have to prop up her body had left her. She could only lie here, waiting quietly for her life to slip away.

She once heard that the tramps here ate human flesh like vultures, which was perfect.

*Like this, I'll silently disappear from the world.
Like I'd never been born.*

“Little lady, you sure know how to pick a place.”

A flippant voice sounded above her, and she felt herself enshrouded by the person's shadow, but didn't have the strength to lift her head to see who it was. All she could see was a pair of wrinkled black leather shoes, which looked like they'd been worn for a number of years, and they were man-sized.

He squatted, and the girl finally managed to catch a glimpse of the owner of the shoes.

He was tall and pale, oil-sleek hair touching his shoulders. A few curly strands stuck to his chin, mixed with his stubble. She spotted the crescent scar carving his skin from his left cheek to his chin, and her heart pounded in fear.

The man was dressed in a somber black suit, but the knot of his tie, sitting beneath his Adam's apple, was crooked, and the top button of his pants was also undone. For some reason, his uncouthness was surprisingly fitting with the unruly smile hanging on his lips.

Before the girl could ask why the man was here, he'd already scooped her up bridal style.

She felt his hot breath closing in. Her unfocused eyes widened in disbelief as she sighted his thickbrows, and then she registered the unmistakable heat and taste of alcohol on her lips.

"Hngh..." The girl grasped the fabric of the man's suit instinctively and swallowed.

"Much warmer now, aren't you?"

They parted, but the scent of alcohol still lingered between their mouths, making her feel dizzy. But like the man had said, the alcohol was flowing into every cell of her body until she slowly warmed, and her fogged mind finally began to rouse.

She gathered her strength and asked, "Who... are you?"

"Oh, I'm Death."

He said it so lightheartedly, the girl couldn't even react.

"Hey, why does no one believe me when I introduce myself?" The man gave a big sigh and scratched his head in confusion. "Anyway, since you're dying to be on your way, I suppose you'll let me take your soul after seven days?"

He poked the girl's forehead with a fat fingertip, as if that was where her soul resided. The girl rubbed her forehead in a daze and listened to Death complain about the previous person, how they'd also not believed him in the slightest, and then she smiled.

"I'll be in your care, Mr. Death."

At that, the man was stunned for a moment.

Since taking on this role, he'd never once gotten this response. Surely even people who want to kill themselves still feel intimidated, skeptical, terrified as they confront a grim reaper?

But the girl before him smiled so kindly and spoke in such a soft voice, she seemed to be far removed from the trivialities of this mortal world. Looking at her reaction, the man put away his cynical smile, and his face hardened slightly.

"Call me Ivan," he said. "Mr. Death is a mouthful."

"Of course, Mr. Ivan."

He was going to tell her that she could drop "mister" too, but...he could only care so much.

Ivan unscrewed the cap of his bottle of alcohol and clamped down on the neck with his teeth as he drank gulp after gulp, all the while carrying the girl and settling her back into her wheelchair.

"Right, let me see – I've collected the person, next I'll..." It'd been a long time since he'd taken on a mission, so he flipped through the thick pages of the *Grim Reaper Guidelines*, mumbling to himself, but soon he let out a low, irritated groan. "Dammit, why are there so many words in this?"

He slapped the book shut, released the empty bottle from his mouth, and looked at the girl, who was still staring at him in a stupor.

He should just wing it. After all, he'd worked this job for several hundred years, and things had always been fine.

He peered down at the girl with confusion written all over her face, and said, "Why don't you start by telling me your name so I can verify you. It'd be awkward if I got the wrong person."

02 A Place to Live

"Right. My name is Celeste. I'm a third-year student at Fulham University, and I live in Pead. I have parents and a younger brother. I don't have any special interests, and on weekends, I also—"

"Stop, stop," Ivan raised his hands to cut Celeste off, "Little lady, I only need your name, not your life story. I only need your life, I'm not here to marry you."

Celeste froze, then smiled apologetically. "Ah,

apologies."

Ivan frowned. The girl was docile as a doll. He leaned closer, his hands reaching behind her to clutch the handles of her wheelchair.

"Little lady."

As soon as Ivan spoke, Celeste smelled the thick smell of alcohol from his mouth. She kept smiling stiffly and stared at the forbidding man.

"Is it really OK to trust me so much? Maybe I'm not a grim reaper, but some over-the-top handsome boss of a trafficking gang, selling you to a rich, perverted businessman as a plaything."

Ivan licked his upper lip, then continued his jest. "You don't know how those old geezers have fun. First, they'll cut off your legs so you can't escape. After that..."

"That's all right," Celeste cut him off and gave a sorrowful laugh. "Look at me. Am I not already in the same state?"

While Ivan was unable to react, she curled her lips again and added, "I have no other option but to believe you, Mr. Ivan."

From the moment they met, this girl kept overturning his expectations.

The job of a grim reaper was simple: harvest the lives and souls of people. That was all there was to it. Unless he met someone who refused to accept their destiny, and needed to be taken away by force, this was a job with nothing much to do. And Ivan loved his job to death.

But he looked at Celeste, who was clearly cooperative, and couldn't put his finger on what was odd about her. He sighed in defeat.

"Little lady...I have a feeling we won't get along."

"Huh? Why? What did I do wrong?"

Ivan didn't respond to Celeste's frantic question. Instead, he went behind her and gripped the handles, then he pushed her along the dark and uneven alleyway.

In contrast to his wild appearance, Ivan pushed the wheelchair with care, so Celeste felt little discomfort from the bumpy surface.

"Mr. Ivan, where are we going?"

Celeste turned and looked up at him with her big eyes, and he felt like he was being gazed at by a peaceful sky.

"We need to find a place to live," Ivan responded. "It'll get colder in the night. If you died from hypothermia, that wouldn't count as a suicide."

At the mention of the word "suicide", Celeste's heart lurched in fear. She had indeed considered ending her life, but that was just a thought she'd kept to herself. How had this man she was meeting for the first time read her mind? Also...

Celeste voiced her confusion and said, "Mr. Ivan, aren't you here to kill me?"

"Kill?"

This time, it was Ivan who didn't know what to say, his alcohol-drenched voice pausing as he opened his mouth helplessly and sighed. "Really, that's... I said, don't associate grim reapers with killing. Let me tell you, I'm very gentlemanly, and have never done such a thing."

Celeste looked at the man's scar, crawling from his left cheek to his chin, and blinked.

"What's with that look of doubt?" Ivan said, displeased.

"Ah, no, I'm not doubting you, Mr. Ivan." Celeste waved her hands in a panic. "I was just thinking this is quite different from my first impression of you, Mr. Ivan."

"You really don't hold back, do you..."

The two of them talked until they arrived at a building and stopped in front of it. In the dark, the building was illuminated with several swaying lamps lit with fire.

Ivan carefully tightened the brake level of the wheelchair before walking around the perimeter of the house to observe it. He grinned in satisfaction and said, "Good, good. This house has only one floor, and it's pretty big. There's even a backyard. We'll use this one!"

"Isn't someone living in it?" Celeste questioned, pointing at the lights inside.

Ivan didn't even look where she was pointing. He turned his neck several times and pulled out a

packet of cigarettes from his suit jacket. He put one in his mouth and lit it, exhaling deeply.

"We can just chase them out."

Next, he retrieved a huge, black sickle out of thin air, which he held in one hand as he went up the stairs and pressed the doorbell.

An elderly woman answered the door. When she pulled the door open, Ivan transformed his human form into a terrific skeleton, his abyssal eye sockets gazing into her, and she stumbled to the ground in shock.

"I've come for your life, granny."

"Ah—save me!"

Once her screams subsided, Ivan shapeshifted back into his humanoid form and brushed back his fringe. He knelt and tapped the unconscious woman's forehead, and a bright, small orb fell out and rolled onto the floor.

Ivan picked up the pearl-like orb, blew the dust from it, and put it in his pocket.

"Let me keep your soul for a while, I'll return it in seven days."

Finished with his flamboyant robbery, Ivan turned back smugly to Celeste, who was frozen in shock.

"See, I told you I don't kill."

03 Contract

The next morning, the view outside the windows was still white with fog, and the sky looked like it was covered in a gray layer of dust.

Celeste had just woken up and was staring out at the snowy landscape, but she didn't feel a shiver of cold.

She was wearing a soft, pale sweater, though she couldn't remember when she'd put it on. It didn't belong to her and smelled of unfamiliar, fragrant laundry detergent.

Her wheelchair was parked next to the bed. With both hands on the soft mattress, Celeste maneuvered her body and got into the wheelchair with much difficulty. By the time she was settled, her

long, wavy white hair was disheveled.

She slowly wheeled her way to the vanity table, made herself presentable, and flattened the red ribbon bow on her neckline. She stared at her reflection in a daze, touched her cheek, and slapped herself twice, rousing her pale face, as if she was trying to rouse a sleeping soul. Then she turned toward the door.

Her room was closest to the living room whereas Ivan slept in the granny's room at the very end. He'd carried the unconscious woman to the room last night, and said, "Relax, I'm picky when it comes to women."

Once she was in the kitchen, Celeste opened the fridge, found some ingredients she could use, and made a pot of porridge for breakfast.

"Morning, little lady, you're up early."

Soon after Celeste finished eating, a lazy, raspy voice came from the other side of the house. She was reading by the window, and turned to see Ivan shirtless, wearing only his black suit pants. He yawned and scratched his back, which was fully tattooed.

"Morning, Mr. Ivan." Celeste closed the book and smiled gently. "Aren't you going to put something on? It's snowing outside again."

"No need." Ivan gave a shrug.

He sat on the couch and was going to smoke a cigarette, but then he spotted the pot on the dining table, which he guessed had something fragrant and delicious inside.

"Oh, I made some porridge. Would you like to have some, Mr. Ivan?" Celeste pushed her wheelchair to the dining table, confirming his suspicions.

He thought for a moment, and then said, "Sure, I'll have some."

He lit his cigarette by waving his hand in the air, and as he breathed out smoke, Celeste brought over a bowl of the porridge she had made.

Ivan held the bowl in his hands and took a large slurp directly from the rim, surprising Celeste, who was holding a spoon in her hand.

夏日的檸檬草

LEMONGRASS IN SUMMER



Macchiato

瑪琪朵

-
- **Category:** Romance
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-

Macchiato is a bestselling romance author whose novels have already sold more than 140,000 copies in Taiwan. A number of her works have sold print, film, and television rights in foreign markets. The film adaptation of *Lemongrass in Summer* was released in 2024, and foreign language editions of the novel have already appeared in Korea, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Her web series *My Little Princess*, which first appeared in 2016, was published as a novel in Thailand in 2019.



* Film adaptation *I am the Secret in Your Heart* released in 2024

An outgoing and optimistic middle school girl falls for an aloof schoolmate, only to have the boy disappear after she accidentally reveals her feelings. Years later she finally learns that she wasn't alone in her affections....

The outgoing and optimistic Hsiao-hsia, the perfect but aloof Cheng Yi, and the loyal, principled Yu-tzu – three school friends who are thick as thieves, but lack the courage to reveal their true feelings. Together, they leave behind a story of youth that is filled to the brim with each other, yet laced with regret.

Polite, good-looking, and a talented pianist to boot, Cheng Yi is the coveted Prince Charming of his middle school campus. Hoping to stand out from the crowd of Cheng Yi's fawning admirers, Hsiao-hsia gives him a hard time instead – and it seems to work! Could the normally aloof Cheng Yi be hinting that he has feelings for her, or is Hsiao-hsia just imagining things?

After their graduation ceremony, Hsiao-hsia accidentally reveals her true feelings. Before giving any kind of response, Cheng Yi moves overseas, leaving her heart filled with disappointment and unresolved questions. Having observed these ships pass in the night, Cheng Yi's close friend Yu-tzu gives up his first choice school so he can attend the same high school as Hsiao-hsia. He even joins the same school clubs so they can be together as her heart slowly heals. The two grow closer, but just as they seem on the verge of becoming an item, Cheng Yi returns from overseas.

At the heart of *Lemongrass in Summer* are the unspoken affections of youth: those deep, intense loves that only lack for the honesty to reveal themselves – first loves which are not easily forgotten because we've already lost the courage to love so deeply, so heedless of the consequences. Noteworthy for its absence of emotional fireworks, *Lemongrass in Summer* builds its affecting narrative with simplicity and restraint, charging the everyday interactions of school life with an innocent longing that will resonate with all but the most jaded readers. The addition of an epilogue from the perspective of Yu-tzu adds a wistful touch to the novel's conclusion.

LEMONGRASS IN SUMMER

By Macchiato

Translated by Sarah-Jayne Carver

“Spanning many years, the foundational narrative of innocent love and unspoken affections in *Lemongrass in Summer* is fleshed out with convincing characters. Each stands apart as a complete existence. Even as they progress through various stages of life, their unique characters remain distinct.

The stage is constructed from elements of secondary school life in Taiwan: daily squabbles, student clubs, advancement exams, and anxieties over the future. The authenticity of the rhythms of student life – the ups and downs, the tightly wound bonds of friendship – all draw the reader’s admiring attention. The depictions of those beautiful moments of youth, so highly anticipated even if we believed they’d never come, capture an exquisite abandon that most adults no longer possess.

The author has inlaid this shimmering portrait of adolescence with the dilemmas of real life, setting up the misunderstandings, deceptions, and wasted words that always mar human relations, and bringing the story back down to earth, eliciting a call and response between youthful dreams and the possibilities afforded by reality.

— Liang Siou-Yi (Writer) / Translated by Joshua Dyer

Chapter One: I Still Secretly Like You

I think it’s fair to say that if every boy dreams of a beautiful girl-next-door like Shen Chia-yi from *You Are the Apple of My Eye*, then deep down every girl dreams of a handsome prince who happens to be class president. Since I was a kid, I always had the impression that class presidents were these brilliant, dazzling creatures. My brother, Feng, was two years older than me and president of his class. He won so many awards and trophies that he had to put them in storage and organize them by category! The only real flaw in his perfect life was me, his deadbeat sister.

My teachers often resorted to quotes from old philosophers and poets like: “if we look up to others and follow in their stead, we can all achieve great things”, or “we all have talents, it’s up to us to use

them.” I think these were supposed to be encouraging.

One day, I asked Feng: “How do you become class president? Is there some kind of path to success I can follow?”

“I don’t really have to study that hard,” he said, frowning as though he’d never thought about it before. “I just read something once and then I remember it.”

No wonder I’d never been class president. I often suspected that I may have been adopted or that I had some kind of genetic mutation. Maybe my parents had brought the wrong baby home from the hospital. How else could we have the same parents but such different brains?

We went on a family trip once where I got carsick and threw up on Feng.

“Hsia, what the hell!!” he yelled, pointing at me. “It’s like you’re missing a cerebellum or something! Maybe

your parents never gave you one. It's flat ground out there and you still somehow manage to get motion sickness."

Wait, what? Don't we have the same parents? This question bounced around in my mind for a long time, then my imagination ran wild with it until I eventually came to the irrefutable conclusion that my mom and dad probably weren't my biological parents.

One day just after I started elementary school, I was trying to do my homework after lunch, but I was struggling to write with my clumsy, feeble hands.

"Your words look like earthworms!" shouted Feng, grabbing an eraser and rubbing the whole page out in three quick swipes, the dust flying everywhere until my Mandarin assignment was just a blank page.

"Did you forget to bring your brain home from school? You don't remember anything the teacher said! Look, this one's wrong, and so's that one, they're all wrong!" He rubbed the eraser across my math exercises three times and shook off the dust, so now they were all blank too.

"Feng, you suck! Why do you even care about my homework?" I was so angry that I jumped on the chair and grabbed my pencils, workbooks and textbooks off the table and started throwing them all at him.

"You're so stupid, no one would believe you're my sister!" he shot back, dodging my throws.

"Who would even want to be your sister? Just leave me alone!" I yelled.

"You don't want to be my sister? Fine by me!" Feng made a karate-chop gesture with his hand then slammed the door.

Fine, I'm not your sister!

My tears pitter pattered as they fell on the blank pages of my workbook.

When no one was looking, I hastily stuffed some bread and snacks in a small bag and decided to run away from home. I walked out of my house, which sat at the end of an alley, and followed the path beside the train tracks towards the city center. I forgot how long I walked for or how far I went, but after a while I got tired and saw a small park with a lone swing. I sat down and swung back and forth staring up at the sky.

A black dog sat watching me from a distance. I threw a half-eaten doughnut at it. The dog sniffed it

and ate it in two or three bites, then slowly walked a little closer to me. I threw a pineapple bun, and he wolfed it down before coming even closer. By the time he was less than three steps away from me, he was staring up at me with his huge, innocent eyes. They were darting around but I had already thrown him all the food that I'd had in my bag.

"Hey buddy, are you looking for your mom?" I asked, tears streaming down my cheeks like an open faucet. As my eyes blurred with tears, I thought about the showdown between Mazinger Z and Baron Ashura on TV tonight and wondered what would happen. Then I started thinking about all the marbles I'd hoarded in the powdered milk can under my bed - it took years of battles to collect those! And my mom's pigs' feet stew with potatoes cooking in the kitchen, it had smelt so good as I left, but now I wouldn't be able to have any...

I crouched down to pet the dog which rolled over, exposing its round black belly.

A shadow appeared on the ground in front of me, and when I looked up and saw a boy about my age standing there. He was resting one foot on a ball and looked intrigued by the small dog.

"What's his name?" he asked.

"Blanc," I replied.

"Blanc? But he's black." He looked confused.

"He's got a white bit here." I scooped up the puppy and pointed to the heart-shaped patch of white fur on his upper belly.

"Oh, I get it," he replied, squatting down and reaching out his hand. "Hey Blanc, come here..."

The dog licked his hand.

"I haven't seen you before, did you just move here?"

"No, I live really far from here."

"Really far? Like, did you take a plane?"

I couldn't speak for a moment, so I just shook my head.

"Is Blanc your dog?"

"No, he's just lost. He can't find his mom."

"So, you're from out of town and you're here with a lost dog..."

He flashed me a smile.

"Do you want to play some ball?"

We spent that afternoon chasing the soccer ball

all over the park. The boy seemed like he didn't have a care in the world, his peals of laughter rang through the space like a silver bell as he ran and ran. It wasn't a big park, so we ran round and round in circles, our faces reddening from the sun. We joked around while we played, deliberately tripping each other over and laughing so hard we couldn't breathe. The dog ran alongside us, barking and jumping. The sun hung in the distant sky like a glistening yellow egg yolk and my stomach began to rumble.

"Oh, I should head home," I sighed.

The boy stopped smiling.

"Can Blanc stay with you for a bit?" I begged.

He looked silently at the dog then back to me again,

"If I take him home, will you come back tomorrow?"

"Definitely! I'll come find you."

"My house is right there, turn right at the third streetlight, my place is the one with the green metal gate," he replied, pointing behind him. He gestured towards a bunch of Japanese-style villas that all looked nearly identical from the outside.

"My granddad planted a bunch of this grass, you'll know it's my house from the smell," he said, pulling a leaf out of his pocket and rubbing it between his fingertips before holding it up to my nose.

An unfamiliar scent filled my nostrils, it smelled faintly of lemon.

"What kind of grass is this?"

"Lemongrass."

Seeing my confusion, he smiled and said, "If not, I'll just wait for you in the park tomorrow."

"Okay! Pinky promise, whoever breaks it is a mangy mutt!" I linked pinkies with him and carefully stamped his thumb to seal the deal.

I ran back home along the same road, and after a while I saw my brother standing on the curb waiting for me with tears in his eyes. He wiped his face when he saw me come closer, then he picked me up and carried me home.

My first ever "adventure" running away from home was already over and it wasn't even 6pm. I was back in

time to watch the opening theme song for *Mazinger Z*. My mom even gave me the biggest portion of pigs' feet stew to comfort me.

The next day, I walked back along the path beside train tracks, but I couldn't find the park again. Was the boy waiting there for me? Would he be mad that I hadn't turned up? Would he think I was a total backstabber? And would he take care of Blanc? Would he be able to help Blanc find his mom?

Over the years, the boy and the little black dog gradually faded from my mind, and eventually so much time passed that I could no longer recall any trace of them.

*

On my little adventure, I learned one very real but brutal lesson: if you want to be a hero, you need to know how to feed yourself. That day made me realize that it didn't really matter if you were stupid, it was way more important to make sure you had a full stomach. Even if I'd been the best student in the whole grade, or even the whole school, or heck, even the whole country, it wouldn't have guaranteed anything. It's not like having a certificate that said "Ultimate First Place" or "The Best in the World" automatically got you the biggest portion of pigs' feet stew. And in that case, coming first was really more of a loss.

Cheng Yi was the kind of class president who was always the best at everything. I first met him when I was in fourth grade. That day, Yu-tsu and I were both on duty and clapping erasers in the corridor outside, which meant we were mostly just messing around and blowing chalk dust at each other. There was a sudden gust of wind, so I grabbed two erasers and smacked them together with a loud bang. The dust got swept up in the breeze, creating a dense white mist in front of me.

At that exact moment, Cheng Yi came through the mist, and everything happened in slow motion like we were in a movie. The white dust caught in the sunlight,

and it looked like he was surrounded by all these clear, glittering crystals. He had fair skin and shimmering dark eyes beneath double eyelids and lashes that were so long they made the girls jealous. Between that and his perfectly straight nose, he looked almost a bit too delicate, but thankfully the contrast with his thick eyebrows gave him an imperious air. With his rosy lips and perfectly curved chin, he looked like one of those boyishly charming anime characters, so good-looking he could get away with murder.

Unfortunately, he didn't exactly have a glowing first impression of me.

He frowned and cupped his hands over his mouth, coughing slightly.

"I'm so sorry!" I apologized, feeling flustered. I wanted to give him a Kleenex but after digging around in my skirt pocket for a while, all I could find was a crumpled piece of toilet paper.

His frown deepened.

My hand, still clutching the toilet paper, hung awkwardly in the space between us.

"Excuse me," he said eventually.

I hastily pulled back my hand and it hung awkwardly in the space between us.

He strode past me, and I saw the name embroidered on his chest: Cheng Yi.

It wasn't a glamorous introduction by any means, just a sky filled with chalk dust on an ordinary summer afternoon, but it was as though I'd somehow been struck by lightning. I really liked him.

When girls have a crush, they tend to start doing stupid things. Well, at least I did! Why else would I have written his name in tiny letters all over the margins of my textbooks and exercise books? I could set myself off in an unstoppable fit of giggles just by thinking about how handsome he was. I even hung around outside his classroom when the bell rang and secretly wrote down his schedule, including all his extracurricular activities, that way I could run into him on campus and pretend like I hadn't realized he'd be there.

I went so far as to follow him home one day which was how I discovered that he had a vicious black dog. The dog found me and came flying towards me, but

Cheng Yi had zero intention of stepping in and playing the hero. Instead, he casually clasped his hands behind his back and wore a half-smile on his face as he watched the drooling dog approach me. I was so scared that I ran away crying for my parents and didn't dare go near his house again.

Cheng Yi was the pianist for the school choir, so I bravely auditioned to join despite the fact that I was tone-deaf and had no idea how to read music, but this way I had a genuine excuse to see him every day. The choir had a rigorous training schedule with practice every morning Monday to Friday before class, and we even had rehearsals on holidays if there was a competition the next day.

Cheng Yi usually got there extra early to practice the piano. Well, he might have said it was to practice, but he often played non-choir pieces which I was surprised to find were mostly western pop songs. Each morning before the teacher and our classmates arrived, he would play the piano and I'd sit in the corner stealing glances at him while I flipped through a book or ate breakfast. It felt like the best kind of happiness. I was bewitched by his piano playing like a rat following the Pied Piper. I would be their rain or shine, even when I had a cold or a fever. I would be lying in bed groaning one minute, but in a flash my feet would be dragging me to choir practice all by themselves.

One drizzly morning, I got to the classroom and found Cheng Yi was already there playing a song. It was a slightly sad tune, but his face wore a tender, tranquil smile.

"It's called 'The Rose'." He hummed along softly, wrapped up in his own thoughts.

Wow! This was the first time Cheng Yi had ever spoken to me directly, and he was even singing to me. I could talk a mile a minute and was almost never at a loss for words, but just then I found myself totally tongue-tied.

"Uh-huh," I gulped, forcing down some saliva. My face burned and my throat ached.



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

NON-FICTION

我是人生整理師：死亡清掃 × 遺物

REMNANTS OF LIFE: THE TENDER BUSINESS OF



A graduate of Nanhua University's Department of Life-and-Death Studies, Lu La La is Taiwan's foremost trauma cleaner. A former funeral director, he has worked in the funerary services industry for nearly two decades.



Lu La La
盧拉拉

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整理 × 囤積歸納

HANDLING ALL THINGS DEATH

With nearly twenty years of experience, Lu La La, Taiwan's foremost trauma cleaner, has a unique familiarity with death. Writing with clarity and compassion, he records his observations and reflections on living, dying, and carrying on, helping readers to understand his profession and his personal calling to help settle the affairs of the deceased.

A few years back, South Korea had a hit TV series with *Move to Heaven*, a fictional portrayal of the life of a trauma cleaner, which raised public awareness the professionals who clean and organize the homes of the deceased. Taiwan has a similar profession, and the top man in the field is author Lu La La. He removes blood stains, deodorizes living spaces, and packs corpses into body bags in addition to tending to the cleaning, organization, and disposal of a lifetime of possessions.

Lu La La has worked in the funeral industry for nearly twenty years, during which he has literally seen it all. As a trauma cleaner, he travels from one death site to the next, restoring the homes of the deceased to a more presentable condition while also helping to clear away the pain of those who survive them. With this book, he shares his experiences on the job, his personal reflections, and the stories of those who have passed on.

In the first of its four parts, *Remnants of Life* introduces the work of trauma cleaning in objective terms, lifting the taboo of death that shrouds the industry. As in any industry, there are high and low seasons due to the increase in heart disease related deaths in winter and an uptick in suicide deaths around major holidays.

In the second part, the author continues by discussing how he first began working as a trauma

cleaner. He shares his desire to contribute to society, and to give opportunities to disadvantaged members of society, whom he often employs in his work: the homeless, rehabilitated inmates, and those with disabilities. Part three delves into the human side of death, relating the full spectrum of emotions that the author has observed in his work, and the impact of social issues on life quality as death nears. Herein, readers witness how, after death, money often becomes the primary focus of the surviving family members. More poignantly, readers learn the background factors that too many deaths share in common: poverty, estrangement from family, loneliness, and cramped and unsanitary living quarters.

In the fourth part of the book, Lu La La expresses his complete vision of what it means to tend to the affairs of the deceased: as much as his work focuses on sorting through the possessions of the departed, he also hopes to accompany the surviving family members as they sort through the complex emotions that are stirred by the loss of a loved one. Only when each emotion, and possession, is finally settled in its proper place, can the soul of the departed finally rest in peace.

Though constructed around a chilling subject, *Remnants of Life* passes through the darkness to emerge with a message of sincerity and warmth. At its heart, Lu La La's account is an exploration of our humanity and what is most essential in life, and also sheds light on social issues that are often obscured by the fears and taboos surrounding death.

REMNANTS OF LIFE: THE TENDER BUSINESS OF HANDLING ALL THINGS DEATH

By Lu La La

Translated by Ana Padilla Fornieles

“The “tender business” of the title addresses an unseen need of society: professionals who can see the deceased beyond that final mile on the road of life. The stories in this book are strung together out of grisly images of corpses, the laments of the author as he handles post-mortem cleaning, and his speculations about the lives of the deceased as he sorts through their material possessions.

The author has transmuted his criticisms and concerns for society into practical action. Through observations taken from his unique perspective working on behalf of those who die impoverished and lonely deaths, readers can feel the proximity of the bodies entrusted to the author’s care, and partake of his professional insights into the tribulations of those who pass their final years penniless and alone. The book is like a prism, reflecting a “connectionless” contemporary society in which we are gradually losing contact with family, the land, and community. At the same, light is shone on the areas of society to which the social safety net has not yet been extended.

In strikingly vivid prose, the author makes a strong case that the end of an individual existence, and the conditions under which it takes place, should be a concern for all of society.

— Wei Shu-Er (Associate professor, Department of Life-and-Death Studies, Nanhua University) /
Translated by Joshua Dyer

Chapter 1: Between Life and Death

I: On the Privations of Life and the Seasonality and Aftermath of Death

Take it from my past experience in the death care industry: the grim reaper has no operating schedule. That being said, we do have peak seasons – something that people are always curious about. For starters, the change of seasons comes with abrupt temperature swings. People with pre-existing comorbidities are particularly vulnerable at these times. Winter

cold fronts typically cause a surge in the rates for cardiovascular disease and sudden cardiac deaths. In these circumstances, you just don’t get a break. It’s a constant string of customers.

In fact, my one piece of advice is that we should all look after our bodies a great deal more. In daily life, you want to avoid excessive strain that could compromise your wellbeing and eventually put you at risk of collapsing.

Back to winter – our utmost peak in activity came in the weeks leading up to Lunar New Year. Because this is meant to be a joyous festival, traditional customs

warn that funeral rites must be completed before the holiday. As a bereaved family contemplates the minutiae of funeral rites, in the lead-up to the Lunar New Year they scramble to secure three things – an available day, a ceremony hall, and a cremation oven. As mortuary staff, I worked long hours from four or five in the morning to late night, with only a brief break at noon. The first half of the day went to funeral preparations, while the second half I devoted to all sorts of managerial duties, including decoration, overseeing of rituals, negotiating with service providers, receiving bodies, and more. Go home, sleep, rinse and repeat.

Needless to say, this took a toll on our physical and mental health. In my time in the industry, I never got to enjoy the family reunions and merriment that are characteristics of Lunar New Year. It was a time to catch up on precious sleep, recharge and rest from serious burnout, if not downright illness.

Later, as a death scene cleaner, my job duties included biohazard cleanup – the inauspicious term for the thorough sanitization of the site where a violent crime, suicide, or otherwise traumatic death has occurred. Previously I mentioned the risks of the winter season; summer is not without challenges either. The sudden death of a lonely individual will often go unnoticed for a good while until an apprehensive relative or friend attempts contact. In the absence thereof, a landlord will eventually show up to collect their rent arrears. By then, the putrid stench of death will trigger the alarm bells.

Summer dispatches required us to cope however possible, except our working environment was inherently challenging. Ideally, we would close all windows, turn on the air conditioner and keep cold beverages at hand to regulate our body temperature. The reality is that more often than not there was no AC unit at the death site, or else it would be entirely out of order. Windowless spaces weren't entirely out of the realm of possibility, either; in those occasions we could only hope that the dusty ceiling fan would still work. I guess the one saving grace is that bodies are usually discovered way earlier in the summer. It only takes a couple of sweltering days for a rapidly decaying

corpse to smell accordingly.

Our body bags carried plenty of shirtless or even naked bodies. This could have been due to the personal preferences of the deceased, though you couldn't rule out mental health issues or even simply poverty at play. One would be wise not to pass unwarranted judgement nor jump to conclusions.

For Starters, Dignity Is a Privilege Out of Reach for Many

Dignity: a composed or serious manner or style; a sense of pride in oneself; self-respect. A lofty concept, if also one that relies on your essential needs being sufficiently met. Those who die in solitude – loners, elderly people, financially disadvantaged individuals, or a combination of all of these – often fail to secure the necessities of life.

American psychologist Abraham Harold Maslow (1908 – 1970) determined that human needs can be categorized into two types: deficiency needs and growth needs. The former are lower order needs, while the latter arise from the desire to grow as an individual. Both are arranged in a five tier model known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: physiological needs, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. As in any hierarchy, there's no reaching the top without first climbing from the bottom.

Dating back to the Spring and Autumn period (771 – 476 BC), Chapter Herdsman, *Guanzi* (《管子·牧民》) warned readers: "...when there are adequate stores, people will know what are decorums; when the people have enough of food and clothing, they will know what is honor." Honor, self-respect, and shame are all secondary concerns when your survival is at stake. We cannot possibly expect anyone in dire straits to spare energy for noble ideals when their next meal, the roof above their head, their clothing, and the means to move freely are not guaranteed. Instead, we should acknowledge our privilege that we lead stable lives conducive to the pursuit of our own, unique life values and goals. There is certainly a direct correlation between these two.

Frugality

Frugality is an unfortunate, involuntary badge of pride and honor for people in strained circumstances. I have met my fair share of vulnerable folks – whether elderly or otherwise disadvantaged – that continued relying on low income or meager subsidies even after they'd eventually managed to step out of the streets and secure some form of rental housing. More often than not, they were forced to go without in their daily lives. They'd open the door to any summer visitors with sweat beading their foreheads, and insist that they did not need to turn on the air conditioner, if they even had any. They were much too frugal for such frivolities.

The truth is that it was far too costly for them to afford the electricity bill, or else the repair cost of their broken AC units. They would also never dare to approach their landlords to cover the costs, out of fear that the rent may go up or their lease be terminated. The best case scenario, for them, would be for the landlord to ignore their demands. The air conditioner became a pointless item of wall décor, and the tenants settled down for their umpteenth cold shower of the day, or else cracked open a window in the vain hope that a breeze would trickle into the house. The electric fan certainly wasn't there for comfort, not with those rotating blades threatening to send out gusts of hot air to compound an already sultry and miserable predicament.

Daytime does offer some respite to resourceful minds. Many seek refuge in public spaces that won't be too crowded and will be fitted with air conditioning. Libraries are nothing short of havens: spacious and comfortable, cool indoors, and never short of books and newspapers to entertain oneself. At the end of the day, though, you still have to go back home, where the steaming heat will punch you with an invisible yet inescapable force. This is a phenomenon known as nocturnal urban heat island effect, where densely populated urban areas suffer from higher nighttime temperatures as a result of the released heat accumulated during daytime by concrete buildings and asphalt roads.

Bedtime marks the end of another wretched

day, except there's no rest in sight when your back is drenched with sweat again. But taking yet another cold shower before immediately jumping into bed could prove fatal for those with hypertension and heart issues. The sudden exposure to chilled water leads to the rapid contraction of the blood vessels in the body, followed by a significant blood volume flowing back to the heart. The result is an equally sudden spike in blood pressure that could increasingly compromise the patient's already fragile health.

Poverty, Death and Sweltering Heat: A Rotten Trifecta

In any case, the beneficial effects of a cold shower can only go so far. Soon enough, the body is back to sticky unpleasantness. Our lonely dweller is alone at home, so why wouldn't they take off their clothes? They get naked hoping that the more they expose their skin, the more comfortable they'll be. Then fate strikes – and, in death as in life, the deceased are stripped of their remaining dignity when their remains are found weeks later amidst the pitiful mess where they took their last breath, the ultimate grotesque sight.

I still remember one of these wretched stories. That summer, we'd been called to a "sardine tin" – residential units subdivided into an array of smaller rental units typically aimed at low-income families or individuals. The iron roof meant that, in the summer months, the property turned into a furnace divided into a total of eight narrow chambers.

One of them was now our death site, a room barely measuring one and a half square meters. Most of this surface had been seized by a single bed frame covered with straw mats and a thin quilt pushed to a corner. What remained only allowed the space reserved for the door to open, a simple storage cabinet with some personal items and – miracles of modern technology – an LCD TV propped up on piles of magazines at the end of the bed. But the ill-fated tenant of this room was no longer in need of any worldly entertainment nor material possessions, which in any case only amounted to a backpack and some clothes hung behind the door since they could not possibly fit in the rickety wardrobe.

The tenant had clearly had some hoarding tendencies, because there was a collection of ashtrays, beer cans, off-brand cigarette packs, and mobile phone carcasses spread through the scattering of everyday refuse.

It was a wretched space for a wretched body. Naked, lifeless, decomposed flesh that had been decaying at a steady rhythm for who knows how long. At night, the remains stewed further into putrefaction under the dim light of a night lamp plugged in a socket. But if the fluorescent tube light fixture had given up long ago, the slightly dazzling electric fan had persisted, its relentless blades – click, click, click – circulating the putrid stench of the blackened body crawling with maggots. There wasn't even space to turn around. We had to drag the remains directly into the body bag spread on the ground.

Nowadays, there is plenty of evidence pointing out to an epidemic of loneliness among the elderly, many of whom spend their final days in squalor. Our modern society deems them useless, and so they shrivel away, dispossessed and deprived of any human contact. By the time we make our entrance, we're only there with one purpose: biohazard clean-up.

II: Seasonal Joy, Inauspicious Fate: On the Complexities of Festive Days

To be sure, there was more to our job than just weather conditions. The calendar of festivities can also be very triggering for people in vulnerable circumstances. After all, humans are social animals. It truly takes a village, one ruled by complex bonds – mothers and infants, family, citizenship. Loneliness effectively implies exclusion from these communities, ultimately compromising the ability of an individual to survive. Alienation can exacerbate the feeling of loneliness, thus leading to worsening mental and physical health issues. At the end of every tether, some people end up faced with a single and tragic way out.

Early onset conditions and lifestyle factors are the root of more serious health issues down the road. Such is the finding of a growing body of research, including the WHO 2011 Study on Global Ageing and Adult Health (SAGE), which warned about the impact of

sustained loneliness in the elderly. As a demographic, they are exponentially more exposed to chronic issues such as neglect, strain, isolation and lack of support or a stable family environment. This has to be paired with the fact that older adults typically experience a greater range of significant life transitions – retirement, widowhood, empty nest syndrome, age-related health issues – that will equally impact, or even sever, their social connections. Solitude is indeed a silent killer, perhaps more so than other better-known factors.

Our services were at full steam around the three major modern festivals – Lunar New Year, Christmas and Valentine's Day. The latter two may not be acknowledged in the traditional lunar calendar, but their present importance cannot be underestimated. They're pushed onto our agendas by corporations and companies in our gradually westernizing modern society. They also share the same mandatory pattern of obligatory gift exchanges, travel, and indulgence in lavish meals, all in the course of a single day.

Nowadays, some people equate heartfelt expressions of love and affection with an almost ritualistic display of material gestures. If the expensive bouquets, meals, and gifts (the modern day equivalents of ritual offerings) do not appear in a timely manner, the relationship may turn rocky. Emotions consequently run high for quarrelling lovers and lonely singles alike, triggering potential self-harm and suicidal episodes that sometimes lead to fatal consequences.

現在的青少年很難教吧？ ——以理解尊重支持取代嘮叨控制， WHY ARE TEENS SO DIFFICULT: FIELD- WITH CHALLENGING TEENS FROM A



Counseling psychologist Lin Wei-Hsin has worked as a guidance counselor for kids and teens over 11 years, and is the author of the flipped classroom column of *CommonWealth Education*. A certified supervisor for the Taiwan Guidance and Counseling Association, he has extensive experience in the fields of guidance and parenting counseling, and holds a certification from the National Guild of Hypnotists.



Lin Wei-Hsin
林維信

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資深校園心理師給父母、老師的實戰書

TESTED STRATEGIES FOR DEALING VETERAN GUIDANCE COUNSELOR

This parenting and education guidebook speaks up on behalf of teens and the adults who care about them. Developed from real situations encountered in the author's work as a guidance counselor, it pinpoints the key issues of teen psychology, and addresses common areas of conflict with concrete advice and proven methods.

The teen years are an important stage for the development of "self identity" which is facilitated by the attention and accompaniment of adults. However, teens can also be confused and irritable, making them frustrating to be around. This book helps parents and teachers understand the issues behind the confusing behavior of teens, and puts them on the path to better relationships with teens built on understanding, respect, and support.

The book's 22 chapters are divided into four parts. The first part addresses the key factors in getting along with teens: trust and respect. Only when you respect a teen and demonstrate that you are trustworthy will they open up and communicate with you. This gives you space to discuss the differing obligations and responsibilities of teens and adults, and why some behaviors aren't appropriate for teens.

What about challenging teen behaviors like unstable emotions, obsession with appearance, and the tendency to engage in put downs? The second part of the book addresses these issues one at a time, providing solutions to each. All of these behaviors reflect the hidden need to be seen and understood. Rather than assume that nothing can be done and therefore ignore these behaviors, adults need to engage teens in appropriate

ways. The unstable psychology of teens can make them swing between seeking closeness and keeping their distance, making it difficult to maintain relationships. The third part of the book advises on what to pay attention to when building relationships with teens, and what minefields to avoid, emphasizing that a "sense of safety" is critical for developing healthy interactions. The book's fourth part focuses on how to work with teens as they discover their own values (hints: don't force them, don't negate them, and be patient), analyzing a variety of scenarios to point out underlying concerns, and guiding readers to practical solutions.

Beyond just summarizing field-tested strategies for working with teens, author Lin Wei-Hsin shares his knowledge of the sticking points we all encounter when relating to teenagers, providing solutions and model dialogues for a variety of common situations. This practical guidebook is essential reading for any parent or teacher who wants to understand teens and interact with them in ways that provide positive support for their growth and development.

WHY ARE TEENS SO DIFFICULT: FIELD-TESTED STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH CHALLENGING TEENS FROM A VETERAN GUIDANCE COUNSELOR

By Lin Wei-Hsin

Translated by Grace Najmulski

“With his abundant experience in education and his well-honed powers of observation and personal reflection, the author paints a portrait of the mental state of Taiwan’s teens, and gives new teachers and parents an easy-to-understand strategy manual for dealing with adolescents. When you don’t understand the logic behind teens’ reactions, this book’s ample supply of case studies will help you quickly find examples and solutions that can be applied to your situation.

— Chung Sing-Yiing (Adjunct lecturer, Center for Teacher Education, National Tsing Hua University) /
Translated by Joshua Dyer

How should we offer guidance to teens who engage in inflammatory online behavior?

– Understand the six psychological causes behind teen bullying; use dialogue to help teens consider the circumstances of others.

Hao-Ching likes leaving nasty comments online.

Apart from calling people with differing opinions morons, Hao-Ching also engages in flame wars. He’s incited so much anger that people got together to have him banned. In the end it took the Student Affairs Office stepping in and providing protection before it was finally resolved.

A classmate predisposed to depression recently posted on his individual page, stating he was miserable and wanted to die.

Shockingly, Hao-Ching told him to “Do it, kill yourself!” As a result, the student slit his wrists. This had

the entire class in an uproar.

When adults asked Hao-Ching about it later, his reply was apathetic, “He’s the one that wanted to die, I didn’t do anything wrong. These attention seekers are the ones asking for it!”

The victim’s father was so enraged by Hao-Ching’s attitude that he posted a campus bullying survey and threatened to sue.

To everyone’s surprise, Hao-Ching still refused to admit he was in the wrong, “Do it then. Hope you win, you useless scum.”

*

While adults are horrified when teens engage in unprovoked online bullying, the bullies remain indifferent.

Attempts to teach empathy are met with resistance, leaving parents discouraged, sad, and questioning whether there’s something wrong with their parenting.

It’s true that teens often put up a rebellious front

when it comes to these matters. If you want them to be less defensive, then you must understand where they're coming from, which is no easy task.

They don't consider themselves as being in the wrong and instead think that the other party is too sensitive. They think "why shouldn't we tell them to wise up and take care of themselves? And then I have to show sympathy? What's the point?!"

Before we try to change them, we must first understand teen psychology.

1. Teens feel a sense of accomplishment when they accurately predict what someone else is thinking, believing they've unmasked the other party

It's true, sharing one's struggles online may be partially motivated by a desire for others' sympathy.

To a certain extent, this teenage perspective isn't "completely wrong," and is one of the reasons they can't accept being rebuked.

They aren't sure why "most people" can't see it and would even go as far to console the other party.

"It's so stupid, and fake. Just watch, I'll expose them so everyone knows what they're up to."

Because of their contempt for "fakes," teens believe their actions - revealing a person's true colors - shouldn't be labeled as bad.

In reality, most people know that there is probably an underlying desire for sympathy behind these posts, it's just that we don't choose to provoke them. Someone mature might figure that it's not their duty to help them get better, but they wouldn't do anything to harm the person. That's because mature people do unto others as they would have others do unto them.

The paradox for teens is that while they can't stand others' needling when facing setbacks, they think they'll never encounter a low point. *And only once they've been upset and experienced lows many times will they understand the other party and become more tolerant towards both others and themselves.*

2. Making a show of being stronger and smarter; teens relieve pressure and dissatisfaction through online attacks

In actuality it's not just teens, but perhaps even adults who have especially aggressive online personas.

People who can't compete in real life turn to the internet to show off, mercilessly mocking perceived "weaklings". They attack others as a defense mechanism because they are scared of becoming a weakling themselves. Only through this attack can they increase the distance between themselves and the weaklings, proving themselves entirely separate.

They weren't treated well, so they don't want to treat others well; their own feelings weren't seen as important, so they won't care about the feelings of others.

However, teens who are quick to reply aren't necessarily in the same category. It's just that some unhappy teens find it easy to make others also feel unhappy online.

3. Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE)

Psychology's Fundamental Attribution Error points out that when discussing human behavior, there's a tendency to overemphasize individual factors and underestimate situational ones. In other words, some teens believe that when others run into a problem it's a matter of their personality or them being stupid, when it's really a matter of the other party's unfavorable environment.

Take depression, for example. It's actually a condition related to the quality of neurotransmitters in the brain, but teens think that it's a matter of a weak personality. Similarly, teens may believe students in special education - whose biologically uncontrollable impulses produce distressing behavior - are faking it to garner attention.

It's easier for teens to make FAEs, mainly because their cognitive processes have yet to mature, and they lack social experience, leaving them with no way to understand human behavior from more distant perspectives. With insufficient information and a lack of in-depth familiarity about the situation, it's simplest to conclude that "it's their own fault."

4. Wanting to reduce guilt and absolve responsibility without knowing the gravity of the consequences

There's a humor to netspeak and internet memes, as well as a sense of belonging that comes from being part of a subculture. Take the netizen phrase, "Be confident, drop the XX." But when someone posts "I want to die," commenting "drop the 'want to'" may bring about grave results.

Teens mistakenly believe that the phrase "I'm just joking" reduces the harm they inflicted. They don't understand that provoking and bullying others online can result in serious physical and emotional harm, and possibly even suicide. Teens don't necessarily know the weight of their words.

This isn't just a moral issue, but a legal one as well. Public humiliation, slander, blackmail, intimidation, and inciting suicide are civil offenses that harm another's reputation. This all happens in an instant with a single careless comment and may very well carry legal implications.

5. Even if they understand the consequences, teens' defense mechanisms render adult advice ineffective

"It's not that big a deal. Anyways, they're just words."

"If someone looking for attention ends up dead, it serves them right."

When you openly warn a teen about the gravity of an outcome, you'll likely receive this kind of flippant response. This is due to their unwillingness to face criticism and their heightened defensiveness; they won't register what you say, maybe even coming up with more facile defenses for the sake of argument.

The more you show your anxiety, the more teens will minimize the damage caused by their actions. Otherwise, they would have to face what they've done and understand that they are in the wrong. Adults might hope to see teens repent, but they will do whatever it takes to avoid losing face.

Adults know that taking responsibility is a serious task. It's not something you can avoid with an "It's got nothing to do with me," and start with a clean slate. The toll of avoiding responsibility will follow you the rest of your life, unless you face the truth.

Mature people have a strong sense of boundaries and avoid stirring up trouble for no reason. They won't insert themselves in matters that are none of their business, or needlessly offend others.

6. Empathy deficiency

Immediately assuming that teens lack empathy just leads to further discouragement. Instead, I recommend rethinking the issue of empathy in light of the previously discussed possibilities.

Empathy isn't something you have or don't have; it exists on a spectrum.

It's true, an exceptionally empathetic person would never make the kind of comments mentioned above, but parents need not put too much pressure on themselves or worry that they didn't raise their child well just because a teen stirs up trouble.

At the very least, children can understand that they should treat others how they want to be treated. Whether or not they can exhibit true generosity is another matter.

If there is a true lack of empathy, caused by excessive egocentricity, a teen will still understand the principle of maximizing benefits. Analyzing the costs and benefits of their behavior can help them understand more quickly the advantages that come with being empathetic.

As for how to nurture true empathy, it's a long process with many stages.

From the above we can conclude that if we want teens to take our advice, we must utilize the following principle: *while working to reduce their defensiveness, help them consider the consequences of their actions, and find better options to satisfy their underlying needs.*

One: first, see what they see

Seeing your teen's point of view is not supporting or affirming their poor behavior. There's no need to praise behaviors we don't approve of.

All we are doing is *refraining from making a split-second judgment, using reflection and a curious attitude to show that we can see the logic behind their thinking.*

Just seeing what they see, that's all. This allows at least some portion of their underlying needs to be met. How do we go about this? First, start by earnestly asking your teen why they're so certain the other party is seeking attention.

Teen: "You can tell just by looking that she wants attention!"

Adult: "I see her expressing her sadness, that she wants to die, but I don't see her saying 'pay attention to me!' How do you know she wants others to comfort her?"

Teen: "If she really wanted to die then she wouldn't post it there out in the open (in a public space) for everyone to see."

Adult: "That's true, everyone can see it. But there have been cases where people have made public posts before killing themselves. How do you know for sure that she won't do the same?"

Teen: "Those people are usually just whining; I never saw her actually try to kill herself."

Adult: "So you're saying that since you didn't see her attempt suicide, the chances of her dying are low?"

Teen: "Exactly!"

Adult: "So you have your way of seeing things." (We aren't confirming his assessment, we are only conveying that we understand what has been said. There is a purpose to this.)

"Do you know her? If not, how do you know she's never tried?"

Teen: "I don't, but these kinds of people are all like this."

Adult: "Okay, have you ever known someone who actually tried to kill themselves?"

Teen: "No."

Adult: "So, you don't know whether she's attempted suicide, but you don't think she's the sort of person who would do it. But you aren't sure, either. Do I have it right?"

Teen: "Yeah."

Adult: "What if she's part of the small group that makes a post and then actually kills themselves, then what?"

Teen: "Then she kills herself. What's that got to do with me? She said she wants to die so that's all on her."

Two: Use dialogue to help them understand what the other person may be going through

Adult: "Not necessarily. Didn't you say that she's probably just looking for attention? Maybe she didn't really want to die at first, but then after reading your comment she became so sad that she actually killed herself."

Teen: "If she dies because of a comment, then she's weak. So what if someone that weak kills themselves?"

Adult: "Are you saying that if you're going to live, then you need to toughen up?" (Don't let your teen's harsh words get to you. Rather, attempt to see the good intentions that may be hidden beneath.)

Teen: "Yeah."

Adult: "So if she can toughen up a little, then she can live a better life where she won't want to die, am I right?"

Teen: "Yes."

Adult: "Then can you help her toughen up?"

Teen: "Why should I? That's not my problem!"

Adult: "Mm, it isn't, so it'd be fine if you just ignored her, wouldn't it? So why push and make someone who is already vulnerable feel even worse?"

我的黑手父親：港都拖車師傅的

MY GREASE MONKEY FATHER: THE LIFE AND WORK OF A



text by
Hsieh Chia-Hsin
謝嘉心

Author Hsieh Chia-Hsin holds a master's degree in sociology from National Tsing Hua University. Her thesis on the lives, work, and social mobility of tractor trailer mechanics, received the Taiwanese Sociological Association's Award of Excellence and Master's Thesis Fieldwork Prize, as well as the Taiwan Science Technology and Society Association's Outstanding Master's Thesis Prize. She currently works in the education sector.

photo by
Wu Chih-Hsuan
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Founder of YO FU, a hybrid food and beverage/cultural space in Kaohsiung, Wu Chih-Hsuan is now deeply involved in local community renewal efforts. A writer and photographer, his photographic works were selected for exhibition in Thailand for three years running, 2019-2021.



工作與生命

KAOHSIUNG TRUCK MECHANIC



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A sociologist's tribute to her blue-collar father; this is a moving portrait of a generation of working-class men in the boom times of Taiwan's largest industrial port, as well as a personal reflection on the comfort, security, and success the author enjoyed as a result of her father's sacrifices.

In Taiwan, mechanics who repair and maintain heavy machinery and vehicles are known as "black hands", since their hands are always covered in grease. Author Hsieh Chia-Hsin's father entered the trade of tractor trailer manufacturing and repair when he was still a teen. For five decades he has plied his trade, using his two blackened hands to support a family of four, raising both the author and her younger brother. Yet, her parents always encouraged them to study hard so they could escape from the bonds of physical labor that shackled their father.

Taking these words to heart, the author hit the books and tested into top schools, but all the while, she wondered why her parents seemed to look down on their own professions. This question was still with her when she entered graduate school to study sociology, and the lives, work, and social mobility of the black hands of her hometown, Kaohsiung, became the subject of her master's thesis.

Adapted from her thesis, *My Grease Monkey Father* starts from the industrial landscape of Siaogang District, Kaohsiung, an important manufacturing and shipping hub for southern Taiwan, describing a social milieu born of Taiwan's miraculous 20th century transformation from an agrarian economy to one dominated by manufacturing. Having established this social and economic setting, the author turns her attention to the life stories of working men like her father, who, through an apprenticeship system that provided young men from the countryside a second family as much as it did vocational training, learned to become skilled laborers who could hold their own in a newly industrialized economy. Going further, the author delves into the philosophy and values of these blue-collar tradesmen, the limiting labels applied to them by society, and the resulting self-image they maintained.

Combining field research and ethnographic records, *My Grease Monkey Father* challenges the narrow lens through which Taiwanese society evaluates "a good career". The author's flowing, readable prose lends dignity to her subjects, and provides an integrated socio-economic analysis of the tractor trailer repair industry's boom times during Taiwan's economic miracle.

MY GREASE MONKEY FATHER: THE LIFE AND WORK OF A KAOHSIUNG TRUCK MECHANIC

By Hsieh Chia-Hsin

Translated by Chris Findler

“**A** daughter’s tribute to her working-class father, a consummate tractor-trailer mechanic whose sincerest hope was that his children could study hard and escape the fate of a blue collar laborer. After earning a master’s degree in sociology from a university in northern Taiwan, the author turned her attention back to her father, analyzing his acquisition of technical skills and the influence of class structures on his parenting values.”

One axis of the book views the development of the Taiwan tractor-trailer industry through the lens of the sociology of technology, exploring how the author’s father acquired the skills he needed to work as a fabrication and maintenance mechanic, his interactions with his coworkers and bosses, and how he defined his notion of a “good job”.

Another axis involves the inter-generational relationships and class divisions within the author’s family. How did the author’s father have such confidence in the value of his own labor and technical skill set, yet at the same time constantly praise the superior value of his daughter’s degrees? The result is an elaboration of an important site within the evolution of modern capitalist labor, which also touches on inequality in education, the culture of class structure, and other larger issues.

— Lan Pei-Chia (Distinguished professor of sociology, National Taiwan University) /
Translated by Joshua Dyer

Chapter 1: The Red Blood Cells of Taiwan’s Economy

01 My home in Kaohsiung’s Siaogang District

The high school I tested into was 40 to 50 minutes from my house, so my father usually took me there by motorbike to minimize my commute time.

Morning self-study started at 7:30 a.m., so we generally had to leave the house by 6:45 a.m.. My father always took Jhongshan Road, which took us along Siaogang Airport, and then turned on to Kaisyuan Road which brought us to my school. After dropping me off, he would double back to either the Qianzhen District or the Siaogang District where he would work all day.

An important artery, Jhongshan Road cuts straight through old Kaohsiung City from the periphery to its heart. Our home was located just outside of the Siaogang District, south of old Kaohsiung City. Going north on Jhongshan Road, we would ride up Jhongshan 4th Road and 3rd Road. Jhongshan Road goes through Kaohsiung’s two major industrial areas: the Qianzhen and Siaogang Districts. We would turn on to Kaisyuan Road just before the Sanduo Shopping District begins on Jhongshan 2nd Road.

My father took me to school every day, rain or shine. Occasionally, if he was held up at work for some reason, my mother would take me. Our daily shuttle continued like this for three years, during which time we experienced our share of accidents, major and minor.

Sitting behind my father on those long trips, I usually had nothing to do. It was during this time that I developed the habits of whiling away the time by watching people or just spacing out.

As I recall, the motorway was always packed with motorbikes. In all seasons and types of weather, I saw riders of all kinds zip by, from those decked out in sleeveless white undershirts, shorts, and flip flops to those completely covered up in long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and gloves to shield themselves from the sun, and everything in between. There was something individualistic and spirited about motorbike riders in Kaohsiung as they dashed along Jhongshan Road with its expansive 14 lanes.

Between 6 and 7 o'clock in the morning, most motorcyclists careening down Jhongshan Road were clad in blue denim shirts, dark jean pants, and thick-soled, heavy leather work boots. In the heat of summer and the cold of winter, their outfits, just like the black grease stains that graced them, never changed.

Their gear was typical of Kaohsiung's Qianzhen and Siaogang Districts, hubs for plants in a variety of industries and points of convergence for massive numbers of blue-collar workers, who, like my father, rode their motorbikes to work each morning.

Where Blue-Collar Workers Assemble

The Qianzhen and Siaogang Districts were characterized by meticulously laid out streets and austere, sprawling buildings. In addition to Siaogang Airport, on the other side of the lengthy walls we rode past were factories set up when industrial development was just getting underway.

If you traveled from the opposite direction on the route we took, that is, along Jhongshan 1st Road from the high-rises in downtown Kaohsiung toward Siaogang, you'd see more and more of those large perimeter walls on the sides of the road. They served to demarcate Kaohsiung Linhai Industrial Park's 1,560 hectares. In that park alone, there were some 40,000 people employed in over 490 factories.

The park was home to many large factories that were key to Taiwan's economic development, including Taiwan Sugar, China Steel, Tang Eng Iron Works, China

Ship Building, and China Petroleum. It was also home to Kaohsiung Ammonium Sulfate, which had a huge impact on industry, but which has since gone out of business, and numerous chemical plants that thrived here for decades. Also located here, the Qianzhen Processing Export Zone, which helped spearhead Taiwan's economic miracle. A center for light industry, it drew many female workers.

Under government guidance, Kaohsiung became Taiwan's center for heavy industry, an undertaking which required an excellent transportation network. Siaogang was a major hub for land, sea, and air transport; home to Taiwan's second largest international airport; and had several docks utilized exclusively by China Ship Building, China Steel, and China Petroleum. Not far from the airport was a vast container yard, known locally as the "Taiwan Sugar Parking Lot". The various modes of transport, tailored to facilitate import and export, provided the ideal environment for industry to connect locally and with the world.

A transportation system set up for industry, however, can never really suit the needs of local residents, no matter how well it's designed. I don't know if it was because the population here was composed primarily of secondary industry workers – nuts and bolts individuals accustomed to deciding for themselves when they wanted to leave for work and how long they wanted to spend on their commute – or because local conditions weren't conducive to the development of a better mass transit system. Siaogang had only one metro station to service the district's swelling population. It was ten minutes by motorbike from our house in Dapingding. As for buses, those were pitifully few and far between, both in terms of routes and frequency. In any case, public transportation was not the best option for local commuters.

Industrial development always comes at a price. Due to the concentration of light, heavy, and chemical industries, the air quality in the Siaogang District was persistently poor. Because I was born and raised there, however, I never particularly noticed until I went away to college and later working in a city even further north. Whenever I returned to Kaohsiung on holiday and exited the Siaogang station, I would find myself sneezing as my body tried to adjust.

The buildings around here were nothing special to look at. Other than a few clusters of small-scale apartment complexes and the occasional high-rise, most residences were single-family units. The locals preferred living in unattached buildings. New homes, especially in recently developed residential areas, like Dapingding, were marketed with ads touting “Sunny villas near green mountains and blue water”. Apartments just didn’t sell around here. In addition to the nearby garbage incinerators and industrial zones, the area itself was pocked with pineapple fields and tombs. It was not uncommon to get a whiff of some strange chemical as you walked down the street. Yes, there were mountains, but you could barely make them out. Yes, there was water, but you probably wouldn’t want to swim in it. And the air quality, well, it was pretty bad. Despite this, they kept building “villas” as the population grew.

From Gaosong to Dapingding

During the 18 years that I lived in Kaohsiung, we moved once. When I was born, my family lived in Gaosong, close to the border between the Siaogang and Fengshan Districts. This area, built when my grandmother was younger, had many cookie-cutter, three-story, unattached houses. When my grandmother had squirreled away enough money to buy a place of her own, she read about this new residential area in a newspaper ad.

Houses were cheaper here. That was probably why she and my mother bicycled south along Jhongshan, the road I would later take to high school, checking out homes all the way, from their rental in Shihjia in the Qianzhen District to Siaogang where they eventually bought one. After my mother married, she used the money she had saved up while working as the down payment on a house near my grandmother’s, so they could be close to each other.

We lived under the airport’s flight path, so frequently heard the roar of airplanes passing overhead. The noise never bothered me, however, probably because I grew up with it.

We moved into the house in Dapingding during my

final year of high school, just as I was preparing to head off to college. The Metro hadn’t opened yet, so I couldn’t figure out why my father had decided to buy a place there. I couldn’t understand why he would relocate us to the mountains where everything was so far away, to an area that was worse than what we were leaving. And then there were all those tombs there. I’ve had a thing about tombs since I was a kid. To this day, I can’t shake off the dreariness that characterized Dapingding.

But once my father made up his mind, there was no changing it. Maybe it was because he sensed I was upset about the move, but when we were divvying up living spaces, he assigned me the entire third floor. It was a spacious area of 16 pings, or about 50-square meters, including a bedroom, a study, a bathroom, and a storage room, and I had it all to myself. Sure, I had to climb a few more stairs, but I was won over instantly by this special treatment.

Thinking back, my father probably relocated us to a remote area like that for the same reason that my grandmother moved where she did years earlier. New residential areas tend to offer favorable conditions and prices to entice people to purchase homes they would otherwise not consider because of their location. Both my father and grandmother had limited resources at their disposal, so affordability was top priority for them when buying a home. This also explains why my parents decided to take my little brother and me to and from high school. They were trying to make up for the inconvenience of the long commutes.

I think this embodies my father’s work ethic and that of others of his generation. Exchanging physical labor for money is what they did and what they couldn’t pay for with money, they would pay for in sweat.

Most people here were like this, so if they came across a weird smell or suspicious black smoke when passing through an industrial area, they would simply hold their breath, hit the gas, and try to get out of there as quickly as possible. I’d never seen anybody lodge a complaint or stage a protest.

Locals coexisted with those factories for decades, because Siaogang was their bread and butter. When Taiwan’s economy took off in the ’60s and ’70s, the

driving forces behind it were this sprawling, non-descript district and the simple, honest people that resided here.

Siaogang - The Gears Grind Faster

Siaogang developed slowly. Compared with Zhubei, Taichung, and Taipei, cities that change with each visit, new construction projects in Siaogang increased at a plodding, “friendly” pace and the trendy artsy stores that dot the landscapes of other metropolitan areas were a rarity here.

For locals, a swanky bistro with eye-catching dishes was not nearly as enticing as a bento shop offering large chunks of braised pork. Roadside stands that served up indistinct offerings thrived and became an enduring feature of the landscape.

I used to think that the gears of time high above Siaogang would forever grind slowly, unhurriedly, but they have steadily accelerated over the past decade. Since Kaohsiung County and City merged to form a single special municipality, the Siaogang District is no longer off the beaten track and the new residential area of Dapingding is becoming increasingly well known. Buildings with elevators and administrators have begun to crop up around Siaogang Hospital and nearby shops with their ever-changing storefronts reflect the change.

I have a friend I have been close to since grade school. Our families both live in Dapingding. He went to college in Taichung and, later, went to work for Taiwan Sugar in Pingtung. When we return to our hometown for long weekends, we like to meet up, but we now find ourselves agonizing over which shop to go to.

In terms of décor and quality of food, the restaurants that we grew accustomed to after leaving home to pursue studies and work differed in every way from the shops in our old stomping grounds. That said, over the past two or three years, an increasing number of coffee shop chains have been making inroads into our old neighborhood and the inflow of brunch restaurants is challenging the dietary conviction of farmers and factory workers that “breakfast is breakfast and lunch is lunch”.

Not only are the shops changing, even the

landscape that we were once used to is gradually disappearing. When my little brother and I got sick as kids, we would go to a pediatric clinic in Guilin. On our way there or to our cram school, we would take a road near the airport with farmland on both sides. The edges of the fields went right up to the airport’s perimeter fence and the runway where planes took off and landed was just inside. If our timing was right, we could watch an airplane fly by overhead. The roar of its engines would leave our ears ringing.

I always liked the rice paddies in that area: the emerald seedlings in the planting season, the golden heads just before harvest, the breezes gently sweeping through. The road was narrow and vehicles rare, so the ride was quite pleasant. There was one drawback, though: a constant stench emanating from the hog lot and two or three small junkyards at the end of the road.

Those rice paddies had a special significance for me as a small child just learning about the world. It was the closest thing to a rural life near us. On our rides there, I heard story after story from my parents about planting rice, raising pigs, and what it was like for them growing up in the countryside.

Probably because of its proximity to the airport’s flight path, the area developed slowly. Aviation safety regulations placed restrictions on the construction of tall structures and land use. So from the time I was a kid until I was in high school, the area remained pretty much the same.

Things changed, however, after I left home. The “two or three small junkyards” were replaced with a large convenience store and the pig farm – which I credit for my ability to hold my breath so well – and the fields have vanished.

一位女性殺人犯的素描：她如何 A SKETCH OF A FEMALE SERIAL KILLER: ROW PRISONER AND THE MURDERS



Hu Mu-Ching
胡慕情

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Born in 1983, Hu Mu-Ching has worked as a reporter for a number of news agencies, focusing on the environment, human rights, and social issues. She has been awarded the Vivian Wu Journalism Award, the Foundation for Excellent Journalism Award, and the Society for News Design Creativity Award. Her work has received the Golden Tripod Non-fiction Publication Award. Currently director of interviews for Mirror Fiction's Cultural Division, she also occasionally writes book and film criticism.

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謀弒母親、婆婆與丈夫

TAIWAN'S ONLY FEMALE DEATH THAT SHOCKED A NATION

* 2025 Taipei Book Fair Award

* 2024 Openbook Award

Convicted of killing three family members and sentenced to death, Taiwan's only female death-row inmate speaks through interviews, courtroom records, and her personal autobiography. Journalist and author Hu Mu-Ching frames these documents with her extensive research, dissecting the patriarchal assumptions about women and crime that informed the public image of "the daughter-in-law who made the earth tremble".

Twenty years ago, Lin Yu-Ju, currently Taiwan's only female death-row prisoner, committed three murders that shook the entire nation. She began by murdering her own mother. The resulting NTD 5 million life insurance payout served to whet her appetite, and within the span of a few months she killed her mother-in-law and husband, both by administering toxic injections. Her story created a media frenzy in which she was portrayed as a cash-crazed murderess who would stop at nothing to acquire more wealth. Soon she was soon known as "the daughter-in-law who made the earth tremble" – but was the story true? Was she truly a cold-blooded killer who felt nothing for her own kin, and brought disaster to the doorstep of her unwitting and innocent family?

Veteran journalist Hu Mu-Ching spent two-and-a-half years in communication with Lin Yu-Ju – via written correspondence and numerous in-person interviews – to finally break through her defenses and gather the information needed to write this book. All the while, she questioned her own motivations, paying close attention to questions of journalistic ethics and potential conflicts of

interest. Astoundingly, the author received permission to use Lin Yu-Ju's autobiography, now available exclusively in this book. Therein, Lin Yu-Ju recounts a difficult childhood at home alone while her parents worked, and a rebellious adolescence. Most importantly, she describes her relationship with her husband, the heir apparent of a wealthy family, and a gambler who often beat her. However, there are numerous discrepancies between Lin Yu-Ju's autobiography and the accounts given in previous media interviews. Her telling mixes fact and fiction, and it is difficult to discern one from the other.

In addition to Lin Yu-Ju's letters, interviews, and autobiography, this work of meticulous reporting includes extensive original research sourced from interviews with Lin Yu-Ju's family and friends, the insurance case manager who handled the payouts, the police who investigated the murders, and the psychiatrists and lawyers who worked with Lin Yu-Ju after her arrest. The author also documents the entire process of the interactions with prison administrators who allowed her access to Lin Yu-Ju.

Throughout this daunting endeavor, the author questioned her own motivations: what exactly was she hoping to uncover? She writes that she never hoped to overturn the case, but felt compelled to understand how the public image of the "daughter-in-law who made the earth tremble" was in some degree a product of patriarchal social structures and narratives that influenced the courtroom account of her crimes. More than just a rare book-length dissection of a true-crime case from Taiwan, *A Sketch of a Female Serial Killer* is an outstanding work of reportage whose meticulous research, fluid prose, and fine-grained analysis clarifies the role of gender-bias in our understanding of criminal behavior, giving curious readers much food for thought.

A SKETCH OF A FEMALE SERIAL KILLER: TAIWAN'S ONLY FEMALE DEATH ROW PRISONER AND THE MURDERS THAT SHOCKED A NATION

By Hu Mu-Ching

Translated by Laura Buice

“The killer is revealed from the first page, but the author nevertheless keeps readers in constant suspense. The murders may be an established fact, but what was the motive? What kind of person is the killer? Is it even possible to have a glimpse into the inner workings of her mind? It's a sumptuous read, packed with literary style that will have readers in mind of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. ”

The author maintains clarity by distancing herself from the established narrative of the murders. As a work of non-fiction, it possesses two outstanding qualities. First is the author's tenacious pursuit of the facts through exhaustive interviews with a broad range of subjects, including many individuals who were deemed “unimportant” by the media and court proceedings at the time. Second, the book addresses contested details, seeking out contradictory views and evidence. The diligently conducted interviews did not always yield the best results, but the author does fantastic work weaving the smallest gleanings into the bigger picture. In this sense, she is thorough beyond reproach, raising the ceiling for non-fiction writing in Taiwan.

— Chang Chuan-Fen (Writer and director of the Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty) /
Translated by Joshua Dyer

The Beginning: Her, An Earth-Shattering Daughter-in-Law

Murdered

A silent murder still needs to be covered up. But she hadn't bought a shovel, nor prepared any burlap bags. Calmly, she looked around at the apartment. She tried to recall happy memories with her husband, Liu Yu-hang, but she could not. Instead, the phrase, “You get what you asked for” was bouncing around nonstop

in her head. She opened the drawer, looking for the Seroxat her psychiatrist had prescribed. She ground a large number of pills into fine powder and brought it over to the kitchen, which was oppressively hot year-round. There she dug out the dehydrated sodium acetate that she used for preserving food and then went out back to grab the insecticides her mother-in-law Cheng Hui-sheng used when gardening, which contained Methomyl. Finally, she entered their only child's room and grabbed the methanol she used to remove stains and a bottle of cough syrup.

She twisted the cap off the cough syrup, turned

it upside down over the kitchen sink, and watched it slowly empty down the drain, and into sewers already filled with stomach-churning scents of rot and decay. The sweet, fragrant pink syrup was used to cover the bitter taste of medicine, but that wasn't necessary now. She filled the sticky transparent plastic bottle with the pain medicine, sodium acetate, insecticide, and all her hopes. She left the house and went to the pharmacy where she bought a syringe before driving to see Liu Yu-hang at Puli Christian Hospital.

Expressionless, she walked into Liu Yu-hang's room, room 1505. Liu Yu-hang asked for his medicine in a hoarse voice. She obediently pulled the sleeping pills from her backpack and handed them to him. He swallowed three pills. Within three minutes he was asleep and snoring. Keeping an eye on her husband reclining on the hospital bed, she pulled the syringe out of her bag. She filled it with the concoction she had mixed at home and pushed it into Liu Yu-hang's IV line. Robotically, she repeated these actions again and again.

When she came back to herself, the bottle was completely empty. She did not know what time it was. She left the room in tears, discarded the syringe, drove home, and cleaned up. She sat in the living room and stared at the clock. She knew the hospital would call to notify her. She knew she would inevitably pay for killing her husband with her life. But first, before her trial, she, Lin Yu-ju, made up her mind to hold a grand funeral for her husband.

Suspected and Arrested

To this day, if you mention Liu Yu-hang's death to the people of Puli, they remember it vividly. For Puli, it was an unusual death; there has not been a comparable murder in the fourteen years since. At first locals thought Liu Yu-hang's death was a tragedy: in three short months, the Liu family had lost both Liu Yu-hang and his mother, one right after the other. It was not until the funeral that rumors started flying.

Puli is located in Nantou County in the central part of Taiwan. Landlocked, it sits in the Central Mountain Range, hemmed in by the Paiku branch of Hehuan

Mountain and the Tahengping branch of the Xueshan Range. The city is not well-served by transportation, which has greatly slowed its development. Shielded by the mountains, Puli sits in a star-shaped basin with valleys radiating out from the city. Winter is not too cold, summer is not too hot, clouds and rain are abundant, and strong winds are scarce. The charming climate has given Puli a reputation for having "green hills and clear waters".

During the first half of the twentieth century, Puli, like all of Taiwan, was under Japanese rule. Industry developed in accord with the needs of the Japanese motherland, prioritizing the extraction of forestry and agricultural resources. Camphor was harvested from the mountain forests; sugar cane and rice were planted on the hills and plains. Towns developed small factories to complement the farming industry. In the fourteenth year of the Showa Era, towards the end of Japanese occupation, Puli's streets were packed with fifty-three factories. Almost half were rice mills, which were very common in Taiwan at the time. There were also paper mills, tile-making factories, lumber mills, flour factories, sugar factories, tea factories, tofu factories, etc., no more than three each. After the occupation ended and the Chunghsiung highway was constructed, tourism industries started to develop in Hehuan Mountain and nearby regions. Furthermore, as industrialization slowly progressed, Puli became the transport hub for the central mountains, and the streets gradually filled with various food stalls.

Liu Ching-hsun, Liu Yu-hang's grandfather, learned to make tofu during the Japanese occupation. At first, he only made tofu and dried tofu. Later, after observing the vegetarians in Puli's numerous Buddhist temples, he researched and developed an herbal brine for producing stinky tofu, and began selling his tofu products wholesale. Luckily, he was the first, and since Puli's remote location made it difficult for competitors to bring their products to market, Ching-hsun immediately had a monopoly. Anyone buying tofu in the area had to buy from him, and there is evidence that his tofu was selling as far away as Caotun, a town forty kilometers away.

Liu Ching-hsun was able to get married and settle down because of his tofu business. He had one son and two daughters. He had a conservative personality and, in the tradition of "the son inherits, not the daughter", he passed his secret recipe for stinky tofu down to his son, Liu Yen-liang. The younger Liu continued to operate the business until, in keeping with Liu Ching-hsun's wishes, he passed it down to his only son, Liu Yu-hang. The Liu family stinky tofu business survived through three generations, but collapsed in an instant the day Liu Yu-hang died.

Hsu Chia-jung was surprised when he received the news that Liu Yu-hang was dead. After Cheng Hui-sheng's death one or two months prior, Hsu Chia-jung's company, Baoyuan Life LLC, had handled her funerary arrangements. On May 28, 2009, Hsu Chia-jung received a call from Lin Yu-ju, asking for his help because Cheng Hui-sheng had succumbed to illness at Puli Christian Hospital. They wanted her body to be brought home for the wake but nothing had been prepared in advance. The Liu family lived approximately three kilometers away from his business, so Hsu Chia-jung agreed. He quickly arranged for employees to decorate the Liu Family's mourning hall. While they were working, members of the Liu family kept coming and going. After about thirty minutes, the simple hall decorations were completed. Hsu Chia-jung washed his hands and maintained a calm state of mind so he could receive Cheng Hui-sheng outside the door. As he arranged her remains, he called out, "We are here." When he finished, he prepared to wash Cheng Hui-sheng and change her clothes, but he heard people yelling.

Cheng Hui-sheng's older brother and father Cheng Tu had rushed to the hall after receiving the news about Cheng Hui-sheng. They couldn't understand how she had been fine a few days ago when they last saw her, but now, she was suddenly dead.

Lin Yu-ju explained that after midnight on May 27th, Cheng Hui-sheng said her head hurt and she felt like throwing up. At the time, Lin Yu-ju and her husband took her to the ER at Puli Christian Hospital.

Around two a.m., they were given three days' worth of medicine and returned home. But later that day, Cheng Hui-sheng started to lose consciousness and could no longer move on her own. They returned to the ER with the live-in caretaker soon afterward. The doctor wanted Cheng Hui-sheng to remain overnight for observation to determine if her psychiatric medication or weight loss pills had triggered acute gastroenteritis.

Cheng Hui-sheng stayed at the hospital that day. When the nurse went to start a new IV bag the next day at five a.m., Cheng Hui-sheng looked normal. "In the end, around six a.m., I discovered Mom was very pale." Lin hit the call button and called for a nurse. The nurse realized Cheng Hui-sheng did not have a pulse; she quickly called a code, but they were not able to revive Cheng Hui-sheng. "Two hours after they worked the code, the doctor called her time of death. She had passed away."

According to the death certificate, Cheng Hui-sheng died of myocardial infarction secondary to hyperlipidemia. After Cheng Tu heard this, he had an even harder time understanding, "What on earth does a heart attack have to do with gastroenteritis? They owe me an explanation!" At the time, he wanted his son to take him to the hospital and request an autopsy. Liu Yu-hang stopped him, "The hospital already asked us if we had any concerns about her death. and I said no. That way, they wouldn't order a forensic autopsy. Mom has already passed away; an autopsy would be a violation of her body."

Liu Yu-hang used the traditional argument that the bodies of the deceased should remain intact to persuade Cheng Tu to accept the fact of Cheng Hui-sheng's death. After they argued back and forth, Hsu Chia-jung was finally authorized to continue handling Cheng Hui-sheng's funerary arrangements. But he did not expect that two months later there would be another argument in the family of the deceased on what should have been a solemn and sad occasion. On the day Liu Yu-hang's body was supposed to be returned home for the wake, his aunt, Liu It-sen, and his grandfather, Liu Ching-hsun, rushed to the house and began yelling at Lin Yu-ju. They questioned how

twenty-seven-year-old badminton athlete Liu Yu-hang could have died suddenly from a minor illness. "You must have killed him!"

Lin Yu-ju did not refute the accusation. Liu Ching-hsun had never liked her, not before the wedding, and not after. She had once worked in a "hostess bar", and by marrying his son, she had caused Liu Ching-hsun to lose face in the community. She let Liu Ching-hsun yell at her and did not flinch when he raised his cane to hit her. But a friend of Liu Yu-hang stepped in: "Grandfather, what you're saying doesn't make sense. Even if she is your grandson's wife you can't just hit her. If you suspect her for something, you should go to the police." Liu Ching-hsun lost his temper when he heard this and immediately went to file a police report. Afterwards, Lin Yu-ju was asked to give a statement at Nantou County Police Bureau.

Time: July 20, 2009, 5:10 p.m.

Place: Puli Precinct, Nantou County Police Department

"Why are you here today to file a report?"

"Because my husband Liu Yu-hang died."

"What's his date of birth?"

"He was born May 18, 1983."

"How long were the two of you married?"

"Seven years."

"Are his parents still alive?"

"They've both passed away."

"What work did he do?"

"He was a stinky tofu wholesaler."

"Who did he live with?"

"With me, our son, and his younger sister."

"How did he die? Please describe what happened."

"Early morning July 17, 2009, he suddenly had a stomachache. He broke out into a cold sweat, felt dizzy, and couldn't walk in a straight line. I asked if he wanted to go to the doctor. He said no, he would be fine after some rest. Afterward, he sat on the toilet resting. I waited around twenty minutes and then asked if he felt any better. He said he felt dizzier and dizzier, so I took him to the ER at Puli Christian Hospital. After seeing the doctors there, at twelve-thirty a.m. on the 20th, they

notified me my husband was terminally ill and needed to be transferred to the ICU. They sent me to his room and I waited for the doctors to treat him. When they were done, they told me he had passed away."

"When you entered the ER with your husband did you go straight to the ICU?"

"No, first he was placed in a regular room. They moved him after the hospital notified me."

"When you and your husband entered the ER, did they advise you of his condition?"

"At the time, they didn't say a lot. They just said they had to run a few tests because the doctor said my husband had fatty liver disease."

"When they transferred him to the ICU, did they advise you as to why?"

"They told me the nurses were not able to get his blood pressure and they discovered his pupils were enlarged, so they needed to stabilize him."

"What room was your husband in at the time?"

"Room 1505"

"At what time did you finally leave your husband's room?"

"I left at eleven p.m. on July 19th, 2009."

"Did your husband express any discomfort before you left?"

"He did not."

"Did your husband ever state he was in pain during his stay at the hospital?"

"At six p.m. the day before, he told me his stomach was bloated and uncomfortable."

"How was your husband's mood in the hospital?"

"He slept a lot."

"Did your husband go to the hospital often prior to this occasion? How many times? And what dates?"

"He went twice before. Both were within these two months; I can't remember the exact dates."

"Was it the same situation both times?"

"It was almost exactly the same."

"Did your husband drink excessively?"

時代如何轉了彎：蔡英文與臺灣

HOW THE TIMES CHANGED: TSAI ING-WEN AND TAIWAN'S



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Lotus Chang

張惠菁

Holding a BA in history from National Taiwan University and a PhD in history from the University of Edinburgh, author Lotus Chang is Executive Editor of Development at Mirror Fiction. Her previous works include the essay collections *For Pluto* and *A Place Deeper than the Mists*.



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Wu Chin-Hsun

吳錦勳

With over a decade of experience as a journalist, Wu Chin-Hsun has authored more than a dozen books and received numerous awards, including the Society of Publishers in Asia's award for Excellence in Feature Writing, the Vivian Wu Journalism Award for in-depth reporting, and the Golden Tripod Award.



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轉型八年

8-YEAR TRANSFORMATION



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Over the course of Tsai Ing-wen's presidency, Taiwan underwent seismic changes that will have an impact far beyond her 8 years in office. Yet, these accomplishments are not the work of a single politician. This is the story of Tsai's core team and the epochal shifts they helped bring about, compiled from over thirty interviews with administration officials, political staffers, and leading figures in various fields.

The pandemic brought worldwide attention to Taiwan. It wasn't just that Taiwan enjoyed success keeping COVID-19 at bay, but that Taiwan managed it while still marking up points on the economic scorecard. As the rest of the world suffered under the myriad blows of the virus, Taiwan's outstanding performance attracted notice, and raised the question: how was this island nation thriving against the odds? Turning the spotlight on then-president Tsai Ing-wen and her inner circle, this book documents the remarkable success and transformation of Taiwan under the Tsai administration.

Holding office from 2016 to 2024, Tsai emerged victorious through two election cycles. A cool-headed rationalist, Tsai resisted the temptation to hoard political glory, instead attributed her successes to her policy team, a tendency which got her labeled an "atypical politician". Under this unique brand of leadership, she was unrelenting in pushing forward a broad range of significant reforms: pension reform, energy restructuring, marriage equality, the Forward-looking Infrastructure Development Program, the domestic submarine program... Taiwanese society was visibly transformed in ways that will likely influence its future path for decades to come.

Targeting ten signature policies of the Tsai administration, the three authors of this book conducted over thirty interviews with political staffers, government officials, and influential figures of Taiwanese society to complete their research. Organized into ten chapters, the book coherently analyzes Tsai's policies from a variety of perspectives - national defense, diplomacy, the economy, etc. - giving readers valuable insight this critical period in Taiwanese politics, while also serving as a case study of effective leadership in divisive and challenging times. The foreword, afterword, and a valuable timeline of key events further aid in situating readers within Taiwan's unique political landscape.

In contrast to political retrospectives that focus on a single leader, *How the Times Changed* highlights the work of Tsai's entire policy team, giving credit to the important contributions of administration officials and political staffers. Though it addresses Taiwan's recent political history, the book adopts a distanced perspective, providing a complete record of a political era and demonstrating how the stage has been set for Taiwan's future.

HOW THE TIMES CHANGED: TSAI ING-WEN AND TAIWAN'S 8-YEAR TRANSFORMATION

By Lotus Chang, Wu Chin-Hsun, T.H. Lee

Translated by Paul Cooper

“ Just eight years ago, Taiwan was a different place. In the past, the international community viewed Taiwan exclusively through the framework of cross-straits issues. But now, Taiwan has made a new name for itself as a critical player in pandemic defense and global supply chains, and a bastion of democracy, human rights, and social reform. A new era has dawned, and the shift couldn't be more obvious. ”

How did Taiwan manage this change? What did the recent administration do over the past eight years to shift the state of affairs? What preparations had Tsai Ing-wen and her staff made beforehand, and what kinds of competing pressures did they have to face once in office? Assembled from in-depth interviews with the staff and officials of the Tsai administration, *How the Times Changed* is a political memorandum, establishing a record of how this soft-spoken yet firm-willed president and her core team led the nation safely through the treacherous waters of international politics. Under pressure from constant saber-rattling and hostile military exercises, they held to the middle-course, pushing forward one reform after another. During this time of great changes in the international order, they steered Taiwan in a new direction, and steadily urged the nation forward.

— Lee Tuo-Tzu (Writer) / Translated by Joshua Dyer

Stirrings of Love and Human Rights: The Story of Marriage Equality in Taiwan

One day in late 2012, Tsai Ing-wen was having a conversation in her car with her personal secretary, Lo Jung. Tsai had lost the presidential election early that year, and had resigned as Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) chairman, and so at this point in time she did not have any official position. Her campaign office had been disbanded, and the retinue that had surrounded her prior to that election – party officials, campaign staffers and grass roots volunteers – had been reduced in an instant from several hundred to a staff of only 5 or 6. This handful of staffers were now responsible for all

the tasks for Tsai, arranging her schedule and dealing with the media. During this time, Lo Jung was one of this small group.

Many people expected Tsai to stand in the next presidential election in four years' time, but for now, the year following her electoral defeat, she could take something of a gap year. During this time, she travelled overseas on an itinerary arranged for her by Antonio Chiang, visiting Indonesia, India and Israel, as well as Silicon Valley in the US.

Not having any official position certainly came with its conveniences. Traveling around India by train, she got to meet local scholars, journalists and intellectuals; in Indonesia she met with Taiwanese businesspeople there; in Israel she inspected the creative industries

and held meetings with national security personnel, and she was also able to go to the West Bank. In the US, she visited Silicon Valley tech startups and go to know Taiwanese businesses in the creative sector there. None of these visits were part of any official itinerary; they were more a series of personal trips. For example, in India, Antonio Chiang, who was accompanying her, said that their group of five stayed in a very ordinary hotel, that the streets outside were hardly pristine, and that they ate very ordinary food. This was the first time that Tsai had been to India, and she was curious about everything, and ended up falling in love with the country. She had some very fruitful discussions with local intellectuals, and even said that she could see herself living in India. Chiang observed her interactions with the baggage handlers and workers and concluded that she was very empathetic, and didn't see herself as above them." Watching her on the road, he discovered that there was a strength and resilience to her.

At the end of 2012, Tsai Ing-wen, still without an official position, was on the move around Taiwan. First, she embarked on a tour of the island to thank those who had voted for her in the presidential election and visit local politicians around the country. She went to Taitung, Orchid Island and the Hengchun Peninsula, as well as the Takanua indigenous village in Kaohsiung's Namasia District, also visiting many social welfare organizations. She saw with her own eyes how the country was changing. At the end of that year, the Taiwan Alliance to Promote Civil Partnership Rights launched a petition in support of diverse forms of marriage, signed by pop-singers A-mei, Jolin Tsai, Suming and Anpu, as well as Taiwanese writer Chen Xue. The support for same-sex marriage was strong, especially among the younger generation.

That day, Lo Jung mentioned the petition to Tsai Ing-wen in the car on the way to visiting a local politician. At the time there was also a conservative local DPP politician in the car, who jumped into the conversation, saying "That won't work! There is too much opposition to this idea in Taiwan." After this politician left the car, Lo continued to discuss the issue with Tsai, and after asking several questions, Tsai nodded and said, "OK, let's do it." Tsai signed the petition and made a post on Facebook, inviting

everyone to get involved.

This, then, was an opinion that Tsai spontaneously endorsed while on her "gap year", when she held no public office and was without a job, expressing her support for same-sex marriage.

For these reasons, she was probably unaware of how much resistance her post would generate.

"Her greatest strength is the fact that she is different from everyone else."

Tsai Ing-wen is not your typical DPP politician.

Antonio Chiang has said, "Her greatest strength is the fact that she is different from everyone else." She is without political ambition and has no agenda. In the very beginning she did not even understand the history of the Dangwai ("outside the KMT") movement, or the DPP, and was often unclear as to who was who in party circles. Chiang, who had been involved from the 1960s and 1970s, had an insider perspective of the movement, and who had been there during the process of Taiwan's democratization, would from time to time give Tsai a few pointers.

However, this absence was actually an advantage to her. At the time (in 2008, when Frank Hsieh and Su Tseng-chang, running as president and vice president, were unsuccessful in their bid for election after the conclusion of Chen Shui-bian's second term), "everyone was ready to move on from the DPP's loud and constant appeals about democracy." Tsai Ing-wen was an entirely different political animal altogether. From his observations of Tsai, Chiang said, "Her strength was her rational approach, her willingness to discuss the issues with people, her fondness for asking questions instead of offering her own opinion. This made her very different from the other politicians, because all politicians love to hear the sound of their own voice. Tsai would ask questions because she would also be holding an internal debate with herself on these ideas. Also, she knew more about finance, negotiation, and international economics and trade than many of the DPP politicians of the time, she didn't have the bad habit of political scrapping that the DPP politicians had taken on."

It was precisely because Tsai Ing-wen's character were different from those of her DPP colleagues that many in 2008, when the party was at its lowest ebb, thought that it needed a new kind of leadership, and placed their hopes for its future in her. Tsai would later indicate, in a book, that Yao Jen-to had suggested that she stand for the party chairpersonship. In fact, it was not only Yao; many figures visited Tsai at her home to impress upon her their hopes that she would stand for the party leadership.

Tsai took the reins of a DPP in crisis and gradually led it out of its doldrums. That is not to say that she was universally accepted by the party; there were elements among its earliest members that did not get on so well with Tsai. Chiang's observation that Tsai's difference from others was her greatest strength was true, but this aspect of her character would subsequently lead her into choppy waters.

When she became the party chairperson, Tsai applied her characteristic approach of rational debate. In 2009 she began a debate on the party's 10-year policy platform. In 2011 the new platform was announced, followed by a succession of white papers elaborating its various aspects. During her "gap year" Tsai kept herself busy: in addition to her travels overseas and within Taiwan, she continued policy debate within her Thinking Taiwan Foundation. She gained a reputation among her staffers as something of a "policy wonk."

At times, between discussions on a range of issues, Tsai Ing-wen let the people around her in on her thoughts. Her staff often heard her use the phrase "second is best." According to Lo Jung, "she often said she thought that 'second is best.' During the process of reform, it is often the second-best option that is the one that actually gets implemented. She says that the best option is often met with more opposition, as people find it 'too idealistic' or 'unrealistic'... in the end, it is often the second-best option that can be coordinated and compromised upon, and that everyone is able to move forward with. That is not to say that we should not raise the optimal solution; it is just that we must bear in mind that in the end the one that we will proceed with

is often the second-best choice."

The new 10-year policy platform included the phrase "respect for the human rights of people of different sexual orientations." In fact, Hsiao Bi-khim, then a legislator, had proposed legalization of same-sex marriage in 2006. Though Tsai was not elected president in the 2012 election, DPP legislators-at-large such as Hsiao, Yu Mei-nu, and Cheng Li-chiun became strong advocates of same-sex marriage during that legislative session, and civic groups were also energized on the issue, so there was support for legislating for marriage equality both within the legislature and among the public.

The louder these voices became, the stronger the opposition. With the proliferation of petitions in support of marriage equality, forces opposed to the idea were starting to gather. In September of 2013, the Alliance of Religious Groups for the Love of Families Taiwan was formed, which launched its own petition and organized a rally on Ketagalan Boulevard. This alliance was to become the most influential representative of the anti-same-sex marriage movement for the next few years.

With the same-sex marriage issue came all kinds of discriminatory and barbed rhetoric. The writer Chu Hsin-yi recalls how one day, when she was working in the media, she saw her colleague Huang Li-chun, also a writer, arrive at the office so angry that he was physically shaking. Apparently, Huang had taken a cab over, and the driver had spent the entire journey talking about how he was opposed to same-sex marriage. Seeing Huang's obvious anger gave Chu a sense of relief. She says that during that period homosexuals would hear all kinds of accusations, from the farcical to the frightening, but because the prejudice was so blatant, "we also began to see our heterosexual friends around us unable to accept their homosexual friends being talked about in that way."

Yu Mei-nu first proposed relatively straightforward amendments to the Family Act of the Civil Code in 2012, and in the following year, Cheng Li-chiun championed a Taiwan Alliance to Promote Civil Partnership Rights version of the amendment.

Unfortunately, neither of these were able to make it over the legislative threshold, and were ultimately unsuccessful.

Light at the end of the tunnel?

On Oct. 16, 2015, Tsai Ing-wen's presidential election campaign team launched a rainbow-colored EasyCard design, with the 18,000 print run selling out within 15 minutes.

On Oct. 31 of that same year, on the morning of the Taiwan LGBT Pride parade in Taipei, Tsai released a video in which she said that, "Everyone is equal before love. I am Tsai Ing-wen, and I support marriage equality and allowing each individual to have the freedom to love and to pursue happiness." She was the first presidential candidate to publicly announce support for same-sex marriage. The colors of the rainbow were projected on the outside of her campaign headquarters in LED lights, responding to the calls of those marching in the parade.

The projection of the colors of the rainbow and the messages of love and happiness brought an element of color rarely seen in ordinarily uninspiring presidential campaigns. However, behind the scenes, Tsai Ing-wen started to receive telephone calls expressing serious concerns from voices within the pan-green camp opposed to same-sex marriage. Church groups in particular began revealing their dissatisfaction. Tsai was being put under considerable pressure outside the public eye.

In January of the following year, Tsai won the presidential election by a large margin, and the DPP also gained an absolute majority in the legislature.

Lee Tuo-tzu, who had led the presidential campaign speech-writing team, recalls how a young man named Fan Kang-hao excitedly asked him now that Tsai Ing-wen has been elected, would same-sex marriage become a reality? Lee replied that he did not imagine anything would happen very quickly, that it might take 10 years. In response, Fan "looked at me as if I were just a stubborn old man." Lee's belief that the change might take 10 years was based on his

understanding that the issue of same-sex marriage would require a consensus within the DPP, and that there was still a way to go before this could be achieved.

Yu Mei-nu began preparation on legislative amendments and visited LGBT groups to seek their views. The LGBT groups also put together the Marriage Equality Coalition Taiwan platform to allow them to control the political agenda. One of the organizers of this platform, Jennifer Lu, had a bit more political experience, having stood for a legislative seat representing the Social Democratic Party. She believed that it was inappropriate to place all of the hopes and stress on the shoulders of one or two legislators. "Right from the outset, we established a very clear objective, which was that we did not want this to become a partisan issue between the green and blue camps. If it did become a partisan issue, it would be impossible to bring over large sections of the electorate to the cause. The team therefore spent a lot of energy talking to legislators from the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the New Power Party, establishing lines of communication with the parties and their legislative caucuses."

Young political aides and advisors to DPP figures were also keen to promote same-sex marriage. Jason Liu, who at the time was Presidential Office deputy secretary-general, recalls, "It was maybe around October, 2016 (perhaps it was the day before the LGBT pride parade), during the regular weekly advisors' lunchtime meeting, everyone's attention was on an opinion survey on same-sex marriage. As I remember, the survey showed that support for same-sex marriage was at about 40%, higher than the 30% opposing it, with the remainder not expressing an opinion. This statistic made the young aides feel like there was a possibility that this could actually happen."



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