



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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

Published by Ministry of Culture (MOC)

Minister | Yuan Li

Deputy Minister | Ching-Hwi Lee

Director | Ting-Chen Yang

Deputy Director | Yu-Ying Chu

Organizers | Wen-Ting Chen, Yu-Lin Chen, Shi-Ze Weng, Lun-Hui Lin

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

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

Telephone | +886-2-8512-6000

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

Editorial Team of Books from Taiwan

Managing Director | Gray Tan, Jade Fu

Editor-in-Chief | Joshua Dyer

Editor | Jeff Miller

Production Manager | Itzel Hsu

Copyeditor | April Ma, Bernie Yang, Maja Liao, Rita Wang

Editorial Consultants | Gi Liu, Itzel Hsu, Kim Pai, Sandy Lin, San Lin, Ting-Chen Yang, Yu-Ying Chu

Cover Design | FLICCA Studio

Design and Layout | Wei-Jie Hong

Issue | Issue 19 Vol.2, Spring 2025

Publication Date | March 5, 2025

ISSN | 2410-0781

© Books from Taiwan, Spring 2025

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

CONTENTS

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

Fiction

JOYLAND ABOVE	14
by Lâu Tsí-Ū · translated by Jacqueline Leung · published by Crown	
THE MEMORY KEEPERS IN ASHES	20
by Chan Wai · translated by Fion Tse · published by Ecus	
MY SLIGHT PROBLEM WITH INFIDELITY.....	26
by Hsu Li-Wei · translated by Shanna Tan · published by Yuan-Liou	
WHEN THE SUN PLUMMETED INTO MT. HAINSARAN	32
by Chu He-Chih · translated by Tony Hao · published by Ink	
THE TAIWAN HISTORIES RELIVED TRILOGY.....	38
by Ping Lu · translated by Qing Zhao · published by Ecus	
LAND OF SERENITY	44
by Pan Yutang · translated by Mike Fu · published by Gaea	
THE CHENG-PO CODE	50
by Ke Tsung-Ming · translated by Michael Day · published by Yuan-Liou	
SPIRITSPEAKER STUDIO, BOOK 1.....	56
by Teensy · translated by Cheng-Yi Tsai · published by Gaea	

THE BLOODY OLD PLUM, VOL. 1.....	62
by Flo • translated by Sahana Narayan • published by Showwe Information	
ISLAND OF A THOUSAND DEITIES	68
by Kuang Feng • translated by Catherine Xinxin Yu • published by Gaea	
SEVEN	74
by Coco Shen, Chen Liwen, Ye Jiayi, Chang Yi-Hsum, He Wenjun, Cui Shunhua, Huang Simi • translated by May Huang • published by Homeward	

Non-Fiction


ESCAPING AFFECT EXHAUSTION.....	82
by Su Shun-Hui • translated by Emily Lu • published by Commonwealth Education	
OVEREXPOSED	88
by Chen Pin-Hao • translated by Petula Parris • published by Commonwealth Education	
VENDORWORLD	94
by Cheng Kai-Hsiang • translated by Beverly Liu • published by Yuan-Liou	
TAIWANESE SCHOOL GHOST STORIES AND WHERE THEY COME FROM	100
by Hsieh Yi-An • translated by Beverly Liu • published by Gaea	

ABOUT MINISTRY OF CULTURE

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

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

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



ABOUT BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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

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

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* (see 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 (see 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-Qing 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

樂土在上

JOYLAND ABOVE



© Ya-Chun Huang

Lâu Tsí-Ô

劉芷妤

-
- **Category :** Dystopian
 - **Publisher:** Crown
 - **Date:** 5/2024
 - **Pages:** 528
 - **Length:** 261,689 characters
(approx. 170,000 words in English)
 - **Full English Manuscript Available**
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Lâu Tsí-Ô's first popularly acclaimed work, *Goddess Buffet*, is a collection of realistic stories spotlighting misogyny and other difficult issues facing women in society that has inspired wider social discussion and debate. *Joyland Above* is Lâu's first work of dystopian fiction.



After uniting the world, Motherland begins transforming a nearby island into a new world “Joyland”. However, decades on, some there still cannot tolerate the straightjacket of rules and regulations binding this so-called paradise so tightly together. They are determined to leave this “beautiful new world” behind...at any cost.

In the wake of a debilitating global pandemic, the Motherland takes advantage of a distracted world to conquer and assimilate its smaller neighbor, Whale Island, and then rallies its allies to launch a global war that ends in a Motherland-imposed world government. To end the still-deadly pandemic, the Leader orders all infected citizens into exile on Whale Island and works to bring island residents to heel under the ominously named “Joyland Plan”.

Linguistic savant Amber, a cog in Joyland Plan’s machinery, sees how Motherland’s promised “land of joy” is being realized through manipulated language, thought, and laws, creating in the process a population of water-averse, compliant followers. Her delusion is further shattered when, as her assigned task nears its end, she is barred from leaving...condemned to remain on Whale Island forever.

Several decades on, Joylanders are enmeshed in a web of mobile tech and virtual reality. Society is now stratified by Joy Value (JV) rating, with only those at the rarified top able to ride airships, live in comfortable homes, and dine on “authentic” food, while those in lower strata live lives awash in restrictions and checkpoints. Thus, almost everyone dedicates their every waking hour to activities that add to their JV score...to get a leg up on their peers.

However, an “erased” gay, a man who had seen his sweetheart dragged away by the robot brigade, a couple with dreams of raising children of their own dashed, and a teenager fallen to social rejection and scorn find themselves no longer able to even feign belief in the lies they’ve been told. Taking the decision to flee no matter the cost, these outcasts fortuitously cross paths with a now much older Amber.

This book, one in a planned short story and novella collection, brings together five interconnected stories set in the same world and timeline. These stories, while lacking the action-packed twists and turns typical of today’s popular dystopian tales, will nevertheless leave you hoping such a future remains firmly in the realm of fiction.

JOYLAND ABOVE

By By Lâu Tsí-Ū

Translated by Jacqueline Leung

“Reading *Joyland Above* is not unlike indulging in a hot pepper. Each bite, while inflicting fiery discomfort, invariably entices you back for more.”

This rainy, earthquake-prone island, where even the location of a new garbage dump triggers a heated debate, is nevertheless deeply beloved by many, with those who leave often making excuses to return. What is it with this island? *Joyland Above* frankly shares with readers the many apocalyptic bogeymen that have visited this island...from epidemics and natural disasters to the devastation of war; from the death of a nation to self-obliteration. What on its face seems a bloody tragedy, is portrayed by the author as subtly ironic. The fairy-tale airs of this work craftily rework warnings of a doomed nation into a bedside story.

Considering our present-day reality, should *Joyland Above* be read as a prophetic warning of apocalyptic doom or a fairy tale in which, true to form, a happy ending awaits? Who can say?

— Anniel Hao (Writer) / Translated by Jeff Miller

Amber wasn't the type of person to ask questions like, *If the world was coming to an end, what would you want to do the most?*

She'd always found this kind of conjecture utterly meaningless. After all, no one knew how the world would end and if people had the chance to act on their last wishes. This question was meant for lovers, with the sole purpose of soliciting the answer, *All I need is to be with you*, followed by, *Ah, why'd you have to say it like that? We're so in love, ah, so sweet*, and some rolling around in bed, and that was that.

Oh, and some might even interject and say, *Am I the only one who thinks ___?* to make a great show of their profound thinking and distinguish themselves from the rest of the bunch.

It goes without saying that this was the tritest problem in the world. If the world was really coming to an end, Amber was convinced it must be perpetrated

by these people.

She knew she was a bit out there with her opinions, but she didn't think it was an issue at all. As a linguistic genius, she was busy fortifying her gift by learning more languages, and learning them deeply, to flaunt her fluency to other people. It was typical for someone like her to have more extreme views, and it wasn't like she had any time in her life to reflect on them anyway. Until the day the world was truly coming to an end.

The apocalypse had arrived and, while people were still mulling that over, another apocalypse announced its arrival. How many had there been now? Are we mid-apocalypse or post-apocalypse? Will there be apocalypse after apocalypse, apocalypses breaking the record of previous apocalypses until the next true apocalypse comes?

As a survivor, at least for the time being, Amber felt responsible to start documenting all these

apocalypses. But no matter how she retraced the past, she could never ascertain the point when the world had truly started coming to an end.

"Obviously, it's the year the pandemic happened."

On the six-screen video conference interface, most of the participants had pale skin like Amber's. They were all wearing similarly drab-looking home clothes and spoke in multiple different languages. Some even code-switched from time to time. It was as if they were all trying to one-up everyone else by speaking in the world's least-known language – a long-standing, tacit endeavor among their group. The purpose of these gatherings was to practice and exchange languages, and also, of course, to compete.

For no reason other than pride, they never used any kind of software or machine translation, believing their language capabilities to exceed any translation tool. But come to think of it, there really isn't any translation tool that can deal with a gathering of this kind.

A woman with curly hair, the only one who was dark-skinned, was speaking in a historical language that exuded religious undertones. In a blunt accusation, she said, "All of this happened because of that cursed virus!"

"Do you mean the pneumonia? What age do you think we're in, to have one contagious disease end our world like that?" Amber shook her head. This may have been the opinion of most people, but she could never bring herself to agree. It underestimated humans too much.

"The pneumonia isn't the apocalypse in itself, but it's the *start* of an apocalypse that set a series of consequences in motion which, together, certainly make for an apocalypse. If the International Health Organization hadn't released that damn research report claiming nothing was suspicious while fully knowing where the virus originated from, other countries wouldn't have let their guard down. Or, if those foolish leaders hadn't befriended the Motherland and adopted their quarantine policy, which was in effect a mass grave..."

A vampiric-looking man, with jet-black hair and pallid skin, seethed until he was practically gritting his teeth. He spoke in the dialect of a faraway, landlocked

country with extreme weather. When the pandemic started spreading, his government had rashly adopted the Motherland's quarantine policy when the situation was still unclear, and his family had suffered many deaths as a result. He only survived because he was doing research in a remote village at the time. By the time he returned home, his family had already died helplessly from those ill-advised pandemic measures, and had been mass cremated with other unidentified bodies. Amber could only imagine the agony of not being able to see your loved ones for the last time, and to not know where their remains were buried.

"If it was just pneumonia, that would've been the end of it. A virus leaked from a Motherland bioweapon lab and created this whole disaster, but it was not something we couldn't have handled," said a red-haired woman, using a language from a mid-sized rainforest tribe. It was a language Amber was less familiar with, so she had to pay extra attention and surmise using contextual clues to understand everything the woman was saying.

"You're right, the economic and diplomatic sanctions enacted by all the other countries, coupled with widespread civic discontent had forced the Motherland's hand. There was nothing else the Motherland could do but disseminate all of their bioweapons that were still under research and not yet stabilized, so what was supposed to be just a pneumonia outbreak became uncontrollable," interjected a brown-haired man in standard Motherese. The participants on the surrounding screens visibly bristled at this claim.

"Hold on, so you're saying this dire situation we're in is the fault of all of those countries who suffered heavily from this virus and decided to sanction the Motherland? And that if they hadn't done so, things would've been fine? Is this what you mean?" The man who looked like a vampire said in disbelief.

"I'm using our one official global language. If you can't comprehend what I'm saying, that is hardly my problem." The brown-haired man's voice dripped with mockery.

"You don't need to worry about how good I am with languages. *I'm* worried about your memory. Have you forgotten the reason we're like this now? The

Motherland unleashed their unstable bioweapon just to retaliate against the sanctions and suppress internal unrest. *They* caused the virus to interact, creating an uncontrollable number of variants until the world fell into utter disarray. They even instigated war while the other countries were too weak to defend themselves!"

The man who looked like a vampire slammed his hand on the table and leaned forward until his face filled the entirety of his screen, the point of the meeting long forgotten. They were supposed to speak in the most obscure languages to outmatch other linguists, but he'd subconsciously switched to the common language for international exchange before the war.

"Are you slow or evil? Or has age just deteriorated your brain? Just because the Motherland won the war doesn't mean you can say what they did was right!"

On the screen, the video conference descended into tumultuous arguing. As the participants became more incensed, they all reverted to their mother tongues, no longer remembering that they were supposed to practice hearing and speaking in different languages because they couldn't meet in person.

Before the war, they had all been members of the same language exchange association. With the pandemic now engulfing the world, the participants of this video conference were the only ones still around to continue these meetings.

The virus had mutated at a speed far greater than either new vaccines or medications, and Amber had seen the number of screens in their online sessions dwindling at an alarming rate. There was a long time during the war when they halted the calls, and by the time the war ended and they were finally able to resume, the members in this meeting today were the only ones left.

And now, it looked like even polyglots had lost their ability to communicate with each other.

The virus had interacted and mutated so quickly that no one could remember the numeric titles of its variants and strains. Even their transmission methods, symptoms, and targeted organs became untraceable. People simply came to call it the "castastrophavirus",

effectively turning this unprecedented man-made tragedy into an inevitable natural disaster.

Catastrophavirus had taken countless lives, but that wasn't all that the world lost. For each of the participants on the screen, whatever they may have accomplished with their hard work and talent no longer mattered.

Was it possible for a world so wrecked by war and disease to rebuild itself?

Amber shook her head. This was a problem for someone else to solve. "I have to pee," she told the group in an indigenous language of some tropical island. She unplugged her earphones, got up, and left her desk.

Everyone had a different perspective on just when the world had started coming to an end. To the man who looked like a vampire, the apocalypse probably dropped when almost all of his family members died; for the brown-haired man, he may still think the world was simply undergoing some major changes, and that the true apocalypse still lay far ahead.

However, even though they were radically split on certain beliefs, there was plenty they could still agree on, like the necessity of eating and drinking...and peeing and pooping.

She headed to the bathroom, pulled down her zipper, and sat on the toilet.

For example, the vast majority of people who had survived the pandemic and the war would agree that the linchpin leading to the collapse of the formerly chaotic but more or less equilibrated world order was Whale Island.

It was global knowledge that the Motherland, vast as it was, had been coveting Whale Island, its eastern neighbor across the strait, for at least a century. Every single leader of the Motherland had used all strategies known to man, tactics soft and hard, to annex the territory in the name of unification. Although Whale Island was a small country, it was surprisingly resilient, and was markedly different from the Motherland in terms of its political system, socioeconomic structures, and culture. It, too, used tactics soft and hard to retaliate against the Motherland's advances.

When Whale Island, like the rest of the world, was thrown into a state of crisis by that atrocious pneumonia, the Motherland grasped the opportunity to take the country using its lethal bioweapon and dominating military strength. They very nearly achieved their long-stated goal of "seizing the island, purging the people".

For Whalepeople, that must have been their apocalypse.

In hindsight, that may not have been an apocalypse for just Whalepeople, but the entire world.

Amber wasn't aware of the situation then. She didn't live in Whale Island, in fact she'd never even traveled there. She was from a different continent far away from the Motherland and Whale Island, and cared little about the long-standing strife between the two countries. And so, like most other people, she had no idea at the time why the end of Whale Island might mean the end of the entire world.

In order to take over Whale Island in one go, the Motherland had spared no effort in using the multiple bioweapons at their disposal, so the viral strands and mutations on the island were more diverse and much stronger. As Whalepeople escaped as refugees, they brought with them several more contagious strands, triggering a whole new wave of the pandemic when the world was already struggling to contain the pneumonia. This was the start of the catastrophavirus that has yet to be subdued to this day.

After instigating war to "recapture" Whale Island, the Motherland made an alliance with several countries ruled by authoritarian autocrats who had been developing weapons of mass destruction in secret for years. Together, they invaded the rest of the world, already inundated by catastrophavirus, and emerged victorious in just three years. They established the Federation of Earth, and all the countries had no choice but to fall under their jurisdiction. Although the new order was touted as a federal system, each territory was under the de facto rule of the Motherland.

The world was fundamentally changed, and many people died – but not everyone, so maybe it doesn't count as an apocalypse after all?

Having emptied her bladder, Amber wondered how high the death toll needed to be in order to declare an actual apocalypse. As she zipped her pants back up, she suddenly heard a loud impact outside the bathroom – the noise was intrusive, forceful, urgent.

Her first thought was that the arguing in the video conference had gone too far, but then she remembered that she'd taken off her earphones and couldn't have heard any of the audio.

Amber rushed out of the bathroom at the very moment several armed troopers broke down her door and breached the passageway, shattering her fish tank and potted plants all over the ground.

One of them called out her name and personal details loudly, and asked her to verify if that was indeed her.

Amber tore her gaze away from the goldfish flailing on the wooden flooring and slowly nodded her head. From the corner of her eyes, she glimpsed the monitor on her desk. A gun was visible on almost every participant screen, pointing at one of the world's few remaining linguists.

"Greetings. We have orders to escort you to your assigned work location. Please remain calm."

That can't be right. If you want people to remain calm, surely breaking in with guns blazing isn't the way to go about it?

"M-May I know where I'm g-going, for what work? Who will I work for?" The trooper spoke in Motherese, so Amber responded in Motherese, too.

"I had heard you're a genius linguist..." The trooper glanced at her suspiciously. "With the way you're stuttering, you don't sound fluent in Motherese at all."

What an insult! You're a braindead soldier with a toy gun who probably doesn't even know old Motherese. Don't think I haven't noticed you dropping the honorific – and you say I'm not good with languages?

Amber raged inwardly.

"I was panic-stricken. Respectfully, you're pointing a gun to my head. I'm so good at Motherese, I'm probably better at it than your teacher."

拾香紀・焚香紀

THE MEMORY KEEPERS IN ASHES



Chan Wai

陳慧

-
- **Category:** Literary Fiction
 - **Publisher:** Ecus
 - **Date:** 12/2023
 - **Pages:** 448
 - **Length:** 145,211 characters
(approx. 94,400 words in English)
 - **Full English Manuscript Available**
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
 - **Rights sold:** Korean (Minumsa)
-

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



This finely crafted epic novel centering on a large well-to-do family in Hong Kong works both as a gripping tale of generational fortunes and as a microcosm of Hong Kong's fate from the mid-twentieth century through the 2010s.

The Memory Keepers in Ashes is the second published work by Hong Kong-born author Chan Wai since her move to Taiwan. Volume I was first published in 1998, with Volume II first released as an online serial publication under the name *Tale of an Outsider* from 2015 to 2017. Taken together, these two volumes work as one novel spanning seven decades of time.

Volume I opens on the story of Lin Ten Fragrances' parents journeying out of China to build a new life and business in Hong Kong. Ten Fragrances, a young woman in her twenties and the first-person narrator, reveals from the start her status as the youngest of ten children and that she knows she has not long to live. However, despite her sharing the least amount of time with the Lin family, she confides she is privy to more inside gossip than most. Ten Fragrances wants nothing more than to spend her final time on earth detailing memories of her other siblings and sharing how major events such as the leftist riots of 1967, the 1973 death of Bruce Lee, the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989, and the deadly Garley Building fire of 1996 touched her family. More than just a part of Hong Kong, the Lin family is woven deeply into this city's modern DNA.

The narrative in Volume II adopts a magical realism approach, switching to and fro amongst various protagonist perspectives. Despite her death, Ten Fragrances very much lives on the memories of her loved ones, while the story picks up nearly a decade and a half later, after the SARS epidemic in 2003 and through the Umbrella Revolution of 2014. The emotions and conditions facing the characters in this volume empathically capture the turmoil felt by most in Hong Kong through the first decades of the twenty-first century.

Chan's keen sense of observation and refined writing skill capture brilliantly the vagaries of life experienced by Ten Fragrances and her loved ones, laying down for posterity an emotive picture of a Hong Kong now lost to the mists of time and the love and relationships that held an entire era together.

THE MEMORY KEEPERS IN ASHES

By Chan Wai

Translated by Fion Tse

“
Chan Wai, perhaps contemporary Hong Kong’s most talented storyteller and scriptwriter, first came into the public eye working on TV and film production teams during the colony’s “glory days” of film and television. She was a member of the writing team behind the fondly remembered Hong Kong film *Comrades: Almost a Love Story* and other projects as well as a firsthand witness to the “golden years” of Hong Kong cinema.

If Han Banqing’s *The Sing-Song Girls of Shanghai* and Jin Yucheng’s *Blossoms* can be said to capture the essence of Shanghai, then *The Memory Keepers in Ashes* surely encapsulates Hong Kong’s late-twentieth-century verve. The best years of Hong Kong are beautifully told through the lens of the lives of fortune led by Lin Shing, Song Wan, and their ten children. However, these halcyon days of spectacular growth and prosperity face an inevitable end, with a clock already winding down to zero.

— Chiang Ya-Ni (Writer) / Translated by Jeff Miller

Volume One: 1974~1996

I,
Lin Ten Fragrances,
was born on June 5, 1974,
and died on November 25, 1996.

Events

My father Lin Shing and my mother Song Wan had ten children. In order, they were Big Harvest, Chance Encounters, Three Manifold, Four Seas, Five Elegances, Six Unities, Seven Up, Eight Treasures, Nine Excellences (later renamed “Nine Health”), and me, Ten Fragrances.

Out of ten siblings, I was the tenth.

Beginning with Four Seas, our names became intertwined with Lin Shing’s various business ventures: Four Seas International Market, Five Elegances Fashion, Six Unities Department Store, Seven Up Store, Eight

Treasures Garment Manufacturing Company, Nine Excellences Logistics – and Ten Fragrances was a restaurant.

It all began with olives.

In the winter of 1947, Lin Shing and Song Wan exchanged vows in Guangzhou. Lin Shing was twenty-two and Song Wan twenty-four. She was his older cousin and the most educated in the family; he was the only person in the family who had studied in Hong Kong. They moved back to Hong Kong together in January 1948 for Lin Shing to finish his secondary schooling at Queen’s College, where he had studied all the way up to Form Six before the Japanese occupation. If he finished school, he could attend the University of Hong Kong. Before they left, Lin Shing had agreed to help deliver tens of thousands of olives, but after they arrived, he couldn’t locate the owner of the olives. So he employed four workers, and together they labored day and night to ferment the olives. Lin Shing announced

to the workers his product would be named "Atomic Olives", and in just three days, he and the four workers had sold every last Atomic Olive. The four workers were Gwai, Hou, Shun Fat, and Sheung. All of them, except for Hou, stayed with us from then on. Eventually Gwai and Shun Fat got married, after which they continued to live with us. Lin Shing never did attend Queen's College. Instead, he went into business. Whatever could be sold – whether edible, useful, or purely aesthetic – he bought. Whatever he bought he resold, and the money began to roll in. The next year, when the People's Liberation Army took Guangzhou, Song Wan realized they would never go back there. She bought a houseful of the finest furniture, and also became pregnant with my eldest brother, Big.

Big was born on October 5th, 1950. At the time Song Wan had labor complications, and an anxious, fretting Lin Shing made such a fuss that the midwife at the maternity hospital kicked him out onto the streets. As he wandered past a newspaper stand, he found what turned out to be the first edition of the *New Evening Post* and bought a copy. Squatting by the road, he perused every page, character by character. Finally, having read through even the ads, he returned to the hospital. Big Harvest had been born, and mother and son were safe and well. From then on, Lin Shing made a point of reading the *New Evening Post* every night.

There were security checkpoints at the borders by then. People from the mainland couldn't enter freely, and those who had already entered wouldn't leave without good reason, either. So Lin Shing and Song Wan named their son, born January 1st, 1952, Chance Encounters.

When Lin Shing and Song Wan moved back to Hong Kong in 1948, they first lived in Kennedy Town, close to the temporary campus of Queen's College, in what used to be teachers' quarters. Afterwards, when they learned a new campus would be built at Queen's Playground in Causeway Bay, Lin Shing rented a small unit on Causeway Road. Except, he never returned to his classes at Queen's College, and the unit wasn't quite big enough to house their goods and workers, so the family moved to a large apartment on the Causeway Bay waterfront that had a view of the sea. According to Lin Shing, that bit of ocean later became Victoria Park,

but that was after they had already moved. That move was because Chance, then a month old, had developed asthma, and no doctor, Chinese or Western, was able to cure it. Desperately worried, Song Wan visited the temples of Kwun Yum, Lü Dongbin, Manjusri, and Erlang Shen. On a friend's recommendation, she prayed to the deity Wong Tai Sin and received the answer that Chance would only recover if he lived in Kowloon. It so happened that Lin Shing had just spent a hundred Hong Kong dollars to get Shun Fat a driver's license. Shun Fat drove all of them – Lin Shing, Song Wan, Big Harvest, Chance Encounters, Gwai, Hou, Sheung, and two assistants – in a loaf-shaped Volkswagen van, crossing the sea on a ro-ro ship to land at the Jordan Road Ferry Pier. Chance's asthma never returned. The family settled near the intersection of Jordan Road and Nathan Road, where Three Manifold and Five Elegances were both born.

Three Manifold was born on June 3rd, 1953. Queen Elizabeth II's coronation had taken place the day before, and there were celebratory parades on Nathan Road all day on the third. People swarmed the streets and traffic ground to a halt. Lin Shing couldn't get Song Wan to a maternity hospital, so Song Wan had no choice but to give birth at home on her bed, making Three her most painful birth. Nothing as awkward or difficult ever happened again. When Three reached her first month, there was a water shortage that, combined with the scorching weather, meant her skin was never the same. Five had the same problem, because the water shortage of 1954 was even worse. They even shut off the water supply. Initially, Lin Shing felt conflicted: he had previously bought a large number of zinc sheets, and when the water shortage hit, practically every family was using the metal buckets he produced. But he eventually figured that he would invest his efforts into turning a profit, so he could buy Three and Five the best beauty products money could buy.

Three was born in 1953, and Five was born in 1954. But Four Seas, who numbered between them, was born around 1951 or 1952.

Big and Chance both had jade pendants, prepared and delivered to Lin Shing and Song Wan by their family in Guangzhou. But when it came to Three, Lin Shing and Song Wan felt something was different. Their family,

saying something about a “Three Antis and Five Antis” campaign, barely gave Three the time of day. At night, even with the newborn Three between them, Song Wan knew Lin Shing wasn’t sleeping well. He would wake in the morning, dizzy and dazed, thinking he had spent the night on a floating piece of plywood. Song Wan was at a loss. All she could do was boil turmeric for him every day. After a while someone came from Guangzhou and told Lin Shing his parents had died, both of them, in a struggle session. The news rattled Lin Shing. He spent the next few days sleepless and in shock, though his dizziness had vanished. Then he went to negotiate with the landlord to buy the apartment they lived in. Song Wan pawned all her gold jewelry to scrape together two thousand dollars, and they bought the entirety of the fifth floor plus the rooftop.

Every night without fail, Lin Shing would go onto the rooftop to gaze at the moon: rain or storm, summer through winter. On December 24th, Lin Shing noticed something a little different in the view from his roof. Realizing there was a fire in Sham Shui Po, he sent Shun Fat out to ask around and see what was going on. Shun Fat walked as he asked around, and eventually he walked all the way to Shek Kip Mei. He was out all night, just looking at the flames. Sometime in the middle of the night, Lin Shing returned to the rooftop, worried that the fire, if it kept going, would burn down all of Kowloon. When daylight finally arrived, Lin Shing went looking for Shun Fat. At home, no one spoke a word all morning. Afternoon came, and with it came three people: Shun Fat, dirty and ragged and complaining about his empty stomach; and Lin Shing, smiling bright and wide and carrying a boy who looked to be about two years old. The boy was dressed simply from the waist up and naked from the waist down – this was Four.

At the time, Big had just turned three and hadn’t learned to speak yet. Song Wan cradled him every day and taught him word by word: Ba, Ma, Hou, Gwai, Sheung, Harvest...Four sat and listened next to them and, when the day came, he was the first of all the children to call Song Wan “Ma”.

On March 3rd, 1954, Four Seas International Market opened for business on Johnston Road.

It was through this market that Lin Shing and Song Wan met a few Americans preparing to join the war in Asia. They were passing through Hong Kong and were keeping themselves entertained in Wan Chai. They were young, well-educated, and preferred doing business over fighting, and agreed to help Song Wan out by sourcing and supplying trendy women’s goods from the US. Fortunately, they all survived the war in Korea and quickly returned to the US. On September 30th of that same year, Five was born. On Christmas Day, “Five Elegances Fashion” – with goods supplied by the Americans – staged its grand opening. They even managed to invite the famous actress Tsi Law-lin to cut the ribbon. A group photo of everyone blowing out the candles on a huge shortcake, with Tsi holding Four in her arms, was a permanent fixture on the walls of Five Elegances Fashion afterward. From then on, the day Four Seas was brought into the family was celebrated as his official birthday.

Between the winter of 1954 and the summer of 1963, Song Wan bore no children.

It was also during this period that Song Wan kicked Hou out.

After she kicked Hou out, Song Wan moved into a youth organization hostel on Waterloo Road Hill with nothing but a small leather suitcase. After three days, Lin Shing still hadn’t come for her. Gwai and Sheung visited her often, though, bringing a different child with them each time. And each time, the child – be it Big, Chance, Three, Four, or Five – would inevitably kick up a fuss and refuse to leave. Song Wan was left with little choice. By chance, a new apartment building had just been constructed on Chatham Road in Tsim Sha Tsui. It was a little different from previous apartment buildings; the ceilings were only nine feet high, but Song Wan figured that way, it’d be easier to change the lightbulbs even without the help of a man.

So she bought an apartment and moved in with all five children. Sheung was their primary caretaker, so she moved in too. As for Gwai, well, she had always been Song Wan’s assistant because she was literate, and that meant she had learned a bit of English and later even typing and accounting. So of course she went with Song

Wan, too.

Song Wan had bought the apartment using part of the profits from the Four Seas International Market and Five Elegances Fashion. The rest went into stocks and shares. As it turns out, the stock market was incredibly active at the time, and the dollar volumes were often record-breaking, reaching over four million dollars in a day. During this time, Song Wan was making even more than Lin Shing.

One day, Lin Shing collapsed, drunk, outside Song Wan's apartment door. Finally, Lin Shing, along with Shun Fat, moved into the apartment.

Only later did it come out that this was Shun Fat's idea. The reason he had been so anxious was because he was secretly in love with Gwai. But no one knew a thing; that was, until Song Wan decided to play matchmaker and marry Gwai off as a second wife to some rich man. Shun Fat screamed and cried and accused Song Wan of human trafficking, and only then did Gwai realize Shun Fat liked her. Lin Shing and Song Wan immediately set about arranging their marriage, though Song Wan still refused to speak to Lin Shing, choosing instead to pass notes or verbal messages through Gwai and Sheung. And like that Shun Fat and Gwai were married, with the tight-lipped Lin Shing and Song Wan as their witnesses.

Since Song Wan refused to speak to Lin Shing, he could only resort to nitpicking about the apartment, complaining that the ceilings were too low. The next day, Song Wan found an apartment on Granville Road with twelve-foot ceilings. Lin Shing said the unit was too small, especially with Gwai already pregnant. Wordlessly, Song Wan bought two neighboring units and told no one until the move-in date was settled. From then on, Song Wan and Lin Shing lived in two separate apartments, with Song Wan, Big, Chance, Three, Five, and Sheung in unit A and Lin Shing, Shun Fat, Gwai, and Four in unit B. Unit B also housed a newly employed helper. At first Lin Shing had hired a hardworking young woman, but he ended up sticking with Yuet, who was a recently widowed and reticent older woman. Yuet was an early riser, so Unit B became responsible for breakfast. But everyone squeezed into Unit A for dinner,

as Sheung's cooking was better.

December 31st, 1957: Governor Grantham had completed his term and was leaving Hong Kong. Lin Shing went out to see what all the fuss was about, but when he returned to unit B, he heard Song Wan screaming and crying in unit A, drunk out of her mind. Only then did he remember – it was their tenth wedding anniversary that day.

Song Wan had always loved flowers. So, with Shun Fat in tow, Lin Shing wandered around the watercress and flower fields of Tsuen Wan. At long last, he bought a flower field somewhere called Chuen Lung and hired someone who lived nearby to tend to it. From that day on, the living room in unit A was never without the fresh fragrance of ginger lilies.

But, at the end of the month, Song Wan transferred a small amount to Lin Shing from her own savings as payment for the flowers.

After that, Lin Shing moved into the attic of the Four Seas International Market and stayed there for four years.

January 30th, 1958: It was the eve of Chinese New Year, and Song Wan was busy making the rounds when Shun Fat and Gwai's daughter was born. Unfortunately, the girl only survived five years.

One by one, Big, Chance, Three, Four, and Five started school, and Song Wan did everything in her power to enroll them in historic church schools. But by the time Three was in Primary Three, Chance still hadn't entered Primary Two. Song Wan brought him along to ask for advice from the deity Wong Tai Sin, who said, Chance has the best life ahead of him, no need to worry about anything else. Song Wan never beat Chance with the duster over matters like homework again.

The first day of school on September 1st, 1962, was cancelled due to a typhoon. The five children were bouncing excitedly on Song Wan's spring mattress when, all of a sudden, the window shattered into shards of glass that would leave a permanent scar on Four's face. The typhoon was so severe that they couldn't even stand up in the apartment.

The radio said people had died. A lot of people.

我有一個關於不倫的，小問題

MY SLIGHT PROBLEM WITH



Hsu Li-Wei
許俐葳

-
- **Category:** Literary Fiction
 - **Publisher:** Yuan-Liou
 - **Date:** 5/2023
 - **Pages:** 240
 - **Length:** 62,600 characters
(approx. 40,700 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Born in 1984, Hsu Li-Wei holds an MFA degree in Creative Writing from National Dong Hwa University. She has accumulated numerous domestic novel and essay awards, reflecting a distinguished career as a writer of novels, essays, and film scripts. *My Slight Problem with Infidelity* is Hsu's latest major work. Hsu currently works for the literary magazine *Unitas* and is a Golden Tripod Editor's Award winner (magazine category).

INFIDELITY



Why is their true love condemned to lurk in the shadows? Told from the female protagonist's first-person perspective, this story immerses readers in the emotional journey of a couple entangled in an adulterous affair.

This is a story of little rooms and a furtive romance between a writer and her lover – a film director and ostensible family man. As they pursue their passion in nondescript room after nondescript room, their affair grows from raw, mutual lust into a sweet and stimulating romance before devolving into a consuming jealousy that ultimately ropes the writer's good friend into the fray.

The writer, finding herself crushed under a maelstrom of conflicting emotions about their still-hidden affair, falls back on what she knows best – writing – to bring their love into the light. But, will this bring the respect she craves to their relationship or will it send both of their lives into an irretrievable tailspin? Does the writer, now battered and bruised, have any real hope of redeeming her love, her relationships, or her life?

Despite the prominence given to “problem” in the title, this story orbits around issues such as love, intimacy, power, deceit, jealous enmity, despair, and self-doubt that invariably arise with infidelity, with the narrative pertly plumbing the nature of love, relationships, and family, and fleshing out the state of women in society today. The first-person perspective enhances the immersiveness of this work, while key passages cut to the chase, exposing its underlying essence and plunging the reader headfirst into the emotional dilemmas faced by the protagonist. These insights may even turn the mirror around on the reader's own innermost thoughts and experiences, enhancing self-awareness and providing the wherewithal to continue facing life's myriad challenges.

MY SLIGHT PROBLEM WITH INFIDELITY

By Hsu Li-Wei

Translated by Shanna Tan

“This unconventional book is sure to add a dash of restless anxiety into more than a few marriages.”

Responding to the female protagonist's question, "Do you hug your wife this way too?" her lover, a married man, says, "We're family. Family doesn't do this stuff." *Family doesn't do what stuff?* I'm thinking *I want to know precisely what you're talking about!* Reading this made me suddenly eager to contact the author and ask her myself.

A once common aphorism states that, "Love is indispensable in sex before marriage, as is sex in love after marriage." While some say it as a joke, others know it to be true. Honestly, for both family and lovers, the relationship hangs on much more than the relevance of either sex or love. This terrifying ingredient in this work is its asking of one simple question: *How far along is it in a marriage when couples start expecting something different of their spouse?*

— Anniel Hao (Writer) / Translated by Jeff Miller

"There are places in the heart that do not yet exist; suffering has to enter in for them to come to be."

— Léon Bloy

1.

"The human body is scary."

Hsiao Chuan's voice had trembled when she told me that, fear seeping into each syllable. In other words: *The body is honest.*

The first time Charlie told me to touch him, we were on my couch in the middle of the living room. It was a L-shaped fabric couch, firm yet comfortable, big enough to fit five. It'd come with the rental, a typical family apartment with three bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, and common bathroom. Elections were on for the next day and my flatmates had all gone back to

their hometown to vote. So, for once, I had the entire place to myself.

Charlie had called, saying he wanted to come over.

We'd been wanting to get more undisturbed time together, but only once did the suggestion of a motel come up...and not for an overnight trip, if you get what I mean. We tried searching online for a suitable place and later he told me he'd even phoned the motels one by one to ask if they might have rooms available for "a rest". I took that as evidence he was also new to this. In any case, considering his age - mine too, in fact - to be asking such a question was a real "throwback-to-our-teens" moment.

His place also came up as a possibility. But back then, our status was unclear. We were holding hands, caressing cheeks...our conversations deeper than normal among friends. But, what next?

Are you ready? He had asked. I wasn't. I was actually okay either way, but I couldn't deny that I was very curious about his home. And when humans get horny, nothing seems impossible. It makes us feel powerful, sexy, and delusionally confident.

But in the end, it was Charlie who chickened out. He was very careful to make sure I wouldn't see something I shouldn't, be it a picture frame, or traces of his private life. This included the possibility of being recognized by the guard. He even had a ready script in case there were questions. I was to be a photographer, or a journalist. To be allowed into his home, I had to don a disposable identity. "I'm just worried that you'll get hurt if you see something," he said. I had my doubts. Were those his rules, or just an excuse? After all, home was the last line of defense when it came to privacy. Was he telling me not to overstep the boundaries?

The answer revealed itself before I had the chance to ask. The day I was supposed to go over, there was a water outage in his apartment complex.

—I can't even brush my teeth or wash my face.

The text was followed by a proof shot of the emergency notice.

I replied.

—I guess it's fate.

Charlie sent a link.

—There's a motel close by, wanna come over?

—You're asking me to go all the way for a motel?

That's different from going to your place you know, right?

Charlie didn't reply. And the conversation ended there. The next time we met, no matter how I tried to wheedle or pacify him, he refused to open his mouth, although he still ate his dinner just fine. We worked our knives and forks in silence. Still, he chose my favorite restaurant. Only when dessert was served did I quietly say, "Let's take it slow."

Back then, Charlie was so desperate about taking things forward that it felt as though we were in different time zones. Whenever I found myself swept up by his momentum, I would remind myself, *Of course, he can't wait to screw me*. But there were times I wondered if his anxiety stemmed from not knowing how to get our

relationship going, like the reflex to tighten our grip just to make sure that what we were holding was real, and not merely a figment of our imagination.

We sat on the couch. Finally, he leaned over, dropping a trail of light kisses on my ears and neck before his lips sought mine. It took him so long I was starting to wonder if he'd really come over for a cup of tea, but of course, who were we kidding? A song lyric came to mind – *I've got no time to waste*. We had done plenty of platonic tea chats, the kind where even our fingertips remained a polite distance away. Sitting opposite from him, I was unflustered. Sure, if he wanted a chat, I was fine. But to act like we were in a relationship? Impossible. Why should I? Back when we had first started hanging out, Charlie would always ask to meet at an old-school café near his office. The shop only sold a single NT\$380 set (about US\$12), that included egg sandwiches and a pot of Ceylon tea. Back then, my enthusiasm had not yet worn thin, and I was still happy to dance to his tunes. I sat there sipping my tea, while he would watch me. Not quite a date, but never once did he ask me to pay my share.

When we bumped into his colleagues – girls much younger than me – Charlie would greet them. After a couple more times, I started to grow uncomfortable.

"Should we find another place?" I asked.

"No matter," he replied. "They don't take much notice of me anyway."

"But it's so expensive here. Shall we go MOS Burger next time?"

"MOS? Do I look like a high school kid to you?"

"But their iced tea is nice."

"I'm not your friend. And I'm forty-five. I don't go on dates at fast food chains."

Hmm. So this is a date? But nothing's happening. I didn't want to get into a debate on what constitutes a date, so I kept my mouth shut and continued munching on my sandwich.

Several times, Charlie would call for a "breakfast meeting" to chat about story ideas for his next movie. I knew he was trying to find a topic to talk about, but our conversation never got anywhere. I didn't have anything constructive to say; his true intentions lay elsewhere too. Sunlight streamed into the café through

the large windows. Outside was a busy street with pedestrians walking past constantly. Charlie sat there, clearly upset we weren't getting a private moment. He struggled to get a conversation going, which frustrated him. "A teenage puppy in love" was how he would later describe himself back then.

"How about we hold hands, or our pinkies?" Seeing how woebegone he looked, I tried to coax him, wiggling my finger like E.T.

"How about legs?" He asked, suddenly sticking out his foot.

That was unsexy as hell. Quite stupid in fact. But feeling generous, I reciprocated, my sandals tapping a gentle rhythm on Charlie's sneakers. *Tap. Tap, tap.* The curious weight below my foot made it feel like I was stepping on a gold bar. My heartbeat was getting louder. *Thump thump.* The fact that we couldn't touch only fueled my craving for some skin on skin.

Was that our start?

The start...But now that we'd come so far, to reflect on the beginning at that point felt a little like trying to shirk responsibility. And honestly, I had no idea what could be considered our beginning.

My yardstick for measuring relationships was something I dubbed "The Elevator Theory". I borrowed the idea from the common onscreen trope of two acquaintances stuck in an elevator, both either trying to find a way out or chatting as they waited for help. Not that it really had to be an elevator. The point was the spending of time together in darkness. Take Hsiao Chuan and I as an example. We were vastly different in terms of age, family background, career...Heck, even our ideal types were different. We didn't hang out that often - only if we crossed each other's mind. But, when we did, it always filled me with a sense of security, and that feeling, I know, was mutual. As to how we'd gotten closer, it was an ordinary story, nothing to shout about. We'd happened to sit next to each other at a film festival and she turned to ask me something about scriptwriting. It happened to be the exact same thing I'd been mulling over for the longest time. At first, we were chatting to while away time before the film started, but we became so engrossed in the conversation that,

in the end, neither of us remembered much from the movie. It might seem like trivial complaints or anxieties, but no...not to me. We had been in the same elevator, the one named "discussing the craft of writing". She knew her subject matter. I trusted her completely; she knew it too. Every time we met, I'd be reminded - *We were together in that elevator. We've shared the same darkness.*

Then what about Charlie? Had we ever taken the same elevator? Not that it was completely necessary in order to get close to someone, but without that kind of shared experience, I found it hard to trust completely. It was just regular socializing. Our relationship wasn't built on anything concrete. I could miss a step and fall at any time. When we first got together, Charlie kept asking why I'd agreed to be in a relationship with him. It was as if the mood between us had shifted in an instant, the euphoria of festive celebrations evaporating in the next moment into the dull hum of the daily grind. Even the change in seasons gives at least a hint - a gust of wind, a change in temperature. Perhaps Charlie was asking an elevator-type question. He'd asked the question, but I think I was more desperate about the answer. If only I knew where the switch between us was, I'd have pounced on it the way I would a leaky faucet and turn it off. And never...never ever to turn it back on again.

Before Charlie came over, he texted.

-Your housemates aren't going to come home today, right?

Less than two seconds later, he unsent it.

I scoffed. *Getting cold feet? He's overthinking it.*

-No, don't worry.

-Oh, you saw that. Sorry.

"What do you want me to do?" Charlie asked. "Your house, your territory. Your wish is my command." He was courteous, behaving like a polite guest. But I knew what he really meant - *Do you want me?* My face flushed pink. Very rarely did my date want me to initiate intimacy. We sat, hugged, and before I knew it, I'd arched into him, my limbs molded against his. I'd seen this position on a movie poster and had been

wanting to try it. The top of my head graced his chin, and I could hear the thrumming of a heartbeat. His or mine – I could no longer tell.

On the table were the drinks he'd bought, condensation droplets still clinging to the paper box. The opened flaps on both sides looked like two kite birds perched on the left and right.

"Sorry, we ran out of drinks at home," I said.

"Small matter. But helping you buy stuff makes me feel as if I'm really your friend," said Charlie.

I didn't take off my clothes. Neither did Charlie. His hand roamed under my blouse, touching every inch of skin. I wore a bra, although I'd mulled over whether I should before he came. It was noon. Sunlight was streaming into the living room. I'd taken a liking to this apartment because there were windows on all four sides. But now it felt too bright for what we were doing. To be safe, we should go into my room. But I didn't want to. The main reason was because my bedsheets were ugly. The big gaudy floral print looked cheap. My mum had brought them over from home, and I absolutely didn't want Charlie to see them. Even though I was sure they wouldn't be his main focus of attention.

When Charlie stepped inside the apartment, he stood in the living room for a while, taking time to compliment the big dining table, which, like the sofa, belonged to the landlord. "I was dirt poor when I'd started my first job," said Charlie. "My rented place then was nowhere as nice." That sounded like an uncle speaking to a niece. I suppressed my laughter. Sometimes Charlie gave me the impression that if he wasn't complimenting me about something, he would have no idea what to say.

His hands started to knead my flesh as he kissed me slowly. Everything was progressing the way I'd expected, but his body felt alien. The warmth of his tongue, the brush of his fingers – everything was new. Even with my eyes closed, I could tell that Charlie was experienced. *He's an old hand*, I thought. But there was a layer of carefulness, as if he'd rehearsed the moves in his head dozens of times. His touch oozed technique. It felt as though we could kiss forever. I didn't need to

feel my feelings to know that I was aroused. Charlie, too. The mood intensified; a spark was ignited. I moaned loudly, the sounds vibrating in the air. The curious unfamiliarity of it all made the apartment feel different. It made me different too. The question on the tip of my tongue melted away; it no longer mattered. His touch felt good. It was like an invitation. It was impossible for someone with experience to pretend otherwise. And when a man was working hard to lick you, to touch you, to make you happy, he was also hoping you might return the favor. Even if you couldn't match up, you could at least reciprocate a one-third of what you were being given.

Charlie was wearing a knitted sweater. I loved this look. It made his figure look slim, his chest look broad and flat. He looked good. He lifted his sweater, revealing the undershirt beneath. *Ah, so he likes this color*. The act of taking off clothes usually made people a little clumsier than usual, a little more honest. Charlie had an average body, not the drool-worthy kind. Just average, like mine. Flabby skin and spots. I thumbed his nipple and felt his body tremble.

"Can you touch me here? Kiss that spot?" Charlie pleaded. His hands roamed from my body to his and he grabbed my hand to trail down his body. "Can you lick me from here to there?" I started to panic. Usually, I was the one being touched. Not that I was against initiating. But right now, should I pretend to be shy, or do my best to please him? He was already trying so hard. I stuck out my tongue. I must've looked so clumsy, but I didn't stop. My hands reached for his zipper.

Charlie's hand slipped under my skirt. I heard the slosh of wetness beneath.

當太陽墜毀在哈因沙山

WHEN THE SUN PLUMMETED INTO

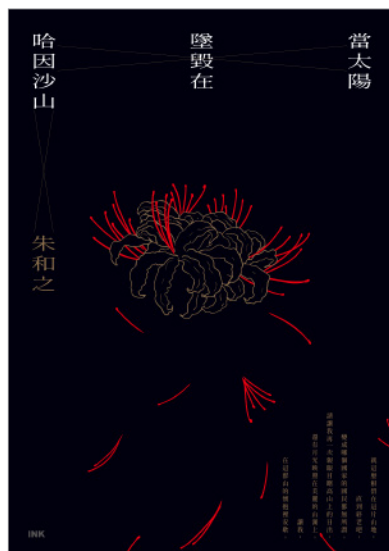


Chu He-Chih 朱和之

- **Category:** Literary Fiction, Historical Fiction
 - **Publisher:** Ink
 - **Date:** 1/2024
 - **Pages:** 368
 - **Length:** 159,597 characters (approx. 103,800 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Chu He-Chih has won multiple local literary awards for his works of Taiwan-centered historical fiction spanning the seventeenth through twentieth centuries. *Last Stand in Paradise*, *Taiwan 1661*, *Aura of the South*, and *When the Sun Plummeted into Mt. Hainsaran* rank among Chu's most critically acclaimed works. Chu is a 2022 alumnus of the International Writing Program (IWP), an Iowa-based writing residency.

MT. HAINSARAN



* 2025 Taipei Book Fair Award

Award-winning historical fiction author Chu He-Chih's latest effort interweaves the perspectives of different social and ethnic groups about the crash of a plane in the mountains above their town. The subsequent search and rescue effort spotlights the internecine fractures gripping Taiwan at the close of the Second World War.

After a US bomber carrying liberated POWs crashes in southeast Taiwan's Sancha (Hainsaran) Mountains eight days after the formal end of wartime hostilities in 1945, a search-and-rescue party organized by the Japanese police chief in a nearby village discovers all twenty-five aboard had perished. Informed the Americans want the bodies recovered and returned home, he assembles a motley team of seventy villagers to trek up again to the crash site. However, a typhoon arrives before they reach their objective, forcing them to turn back and killing twenty-six in the process. The task was finally completed in a second attempt by a new team several weeks later.

Chu He-Chih, building on the foundation of this historical event, creates a trio of protagonists of different social and ethnic backgrounds to explore what may have motivated these villagers to undertake such a daring and dangerous mission.

Officer Kido Yasohachi, one of the leaders on the search team, has lived in Taiwan over half of his life. Although long taken to deriding his adopted home as a "wild and savage waste", since his country's surrender, he finds himself unable to accept the idea of leaving. Another in the trio, local Chinese businessman Pan Ming-Kun, can't get over that Kido, a long-time business acquaintance, has invited him on such an important mission. Haisul, an indigenous Bunun tribesman Kido had helped as a boy, serves as the team's guide. Having heard stories of the mountains from his grandfather all his life, he is now eager to experience the realm of his ancestors for himself.

This story of the travails endured by a team of Japanese, Chinese, and indigenous Taiwanese transforms a largely forgotten footnote in history into a window on Taiwan society in upheaval at the end of the Second World War. The author encapsulates this epochal time in history through the eyes of each ethnic group and, through literature, breathes life again into souls now long lost to the sands of time, giving voice to their internal struggles and everyday joys and sorrows.

WHEN THE SUN PLUMMETED INTO MT. HAINSARAN

By Chu He-Chih

Translated by Tony Hao

“The author uses the backdrop of a historical incident, the fiery, fatal crash of a B-24 Liberator during a flight between Okinawa and the Philippines in the mountains above a Taiwanese village, to take readers through the everyday lives of story characters into a period of time far removed from “normal”. Here, long-practiced habits and emotions hint at the deep, inner wounds pushed to the fore by the recently ended Pacific War. Here, the normal and abnormal grind against one another, creating a cauldron of feelings difficult to put into words yet brought to a head by the plane crash. Author Chu He-Chih’s circuitous narrative turns this creative story into a puzzle that, once finished, lets readers mingle with long-departed friends in that brief span of historical time. Relationships, folk ways, contemporary mores, and fate intertwine in the brief window after the war in Taiwan when neither Japan nor the Allies were in charge.

— *Openbook* / Translated by Jeff Miller

Prologue

When the aroma began silently wafting into Kanzan Village, at first, no one seemed to take notice.

The scent could not have had its origins in the mundane world. Sublime, elegant, and too faint to be detected, it must be the light fragrance of deities from heaven, except that it was conspicuously laced with the smell of fire.

Everyone was now busily engaged in their various trades. The village had swiftly recovered from the slump near the end of the war, and every household had more work than they could manage. Villagers flooded into the Chamber of Commerce across the street from the train station like a bloated colony of ants rushing toward a broken bag of sugar – a controlled good during wartime. They eagerly fought for freshly arrived products, trying to wrestle away boxes even before the lashings were untied.

They were exhausted, yet uncontrollably feverish – two opposite forces clashing inside their bodies. They wanted to have a long sleep yet were unable to stop tossing and turning all night; they craved a big meal yet had not the patience to digest; they longed to sing and yet their larynxes had forgotten how to produce a pleasant melody.

Finally, they sensed something was strange. They turned and gazed like suspicious cats who nonetheless couldn’t find anything wrong. However, once they returned to their work, they unmistakably perceived the peculiar atmosphere that had engulfed them all. The air had thickened, perhaps a harbinger of something that would soon befall them all.

They noticed they were sniffing – striving to gather information from the aromas wafting in the air. The smell slowly intensified until it became overwhelmingly sweet, carrying with it a suffocating, disquieting smoke. When they raised their heads again, people had

already flooded into the streets.

Was it an air raid? The villagers had guessed the same. Under the blaring sun, they looked at each other in confusion, before shaking their heads – the war had ended days ago. No enemy aircraft had reappeared, and nobody had heard the air raid siren or the urgent bell summoning young members of the Seinendan to fight a fire. But who knew? After all, war was such a ludicrous concept, and some Japanese generals had allegedly refused to accept defeat, claiming that because their two hundred thousand Taiwanese troops were still in perfect shape, they would fight to the bitter end. So, could it be that the war had resumed?

The wind fiddled listlessly with the fallen leaves, making a sparse, dry scraping sound. Those who gave any attention to those restless leaves would be reminded that autumn had already arrived. The weather was still hot, but one glance at a calendar would inform that summer had ended. In fact, the next day was Ghost Festival, one of the village's busiest days of the year. A sudden gust of wind rattled the leaves on the ground. Roadside trees responded, waving their branches cheerfully. The smell in the air sharpened, but its complexity only further confused the villagers.

Hinoki! Someone shouted in Japanese.

Everyone pointed their nose skyward, sniffing the air arduously. It was indeed the smell of cypress wood, but how had it blanketed the entire village?

"It must be Matsu-Po!" An old granny cried ecstatically, putting her palms together, "Today is the day when She returns to our village in Her golden body. It must be that the Goddess's holy spirit has just arrived!"

But no, it smelt as if someone's house was on fire. A few young people emerged from the crowd and ran in the direction of the aroma. It didn't take them long to reach the end of the village, where they saw steam rising from Lilong Shrine by the mountain. They worked their way up a mild slope – at the end of the road, the shrine's honden was indeed ablaze, its wooden structure crackling in the fire, the fragrance of cypress wood billowing in every direction.

In front of the honden, a crowd of formally dressed Japanese people had amassed, led by the chief priest, followed by the county governor, the village head,

three police chiefs, and every person of importance in the area. They were accompanied by dozens of Japanese women attired in ornate kimonos, standing solemnly and sorrowfully as if attending a funeral. It was a remarkable sight: since the first American air raid, all of the governors and officers, fearing being targeted from the sky, had eschewed traditional formalwear, which had always been of great importance to the Japanese, for plain, casual clothes. It had been a long time since the village last saw such a grand occasion.

The Han villagers watched the gathering from far away and discussed enthusiastically, unconcerned about being overheard by the Japanese. After the Japs lost, one of them said, they were afraid their gods might be destroyed by us Taiwanese out of revenge or profaned by the Chinese who would soon arrive, so they figured it'd be best to take the shrine down themselves. They've just sent their gods back to heaven, and now they're burning down their honden.

"Fuck them!" Another one said, "We Taiwanese would never be so presumptuous. How dare they set their own gods on fire!"

The crowd was reminded of what had happened only a few years ago, when over two hundred deity statues sacred to Taiwanese had been confiscated and thrown into the flames in Hai-Shan Temple in Taitung Township. The Japanese cops said they wanted to send Matsu, Shangti-kung, and Yuanshuai-yeh all back to the heavens. They doused the pile of statues with kerosene and reduced it to ashes. But now they're allowed to send their gods off in a dignified ceremony – how can they simply get away with everything they've done?

Some villagers watched the rising smoke with vindictiveness. "Karma!" cried another villager, elation welling up in his eyes. Others lamented the funereal mood of the ceremony, even though they had always hated the Japanese. Someone let out an unrestrained sneer and said, "When they sent their gods off, the chief priest cried in such a high pitch, 'O–' I really thought it was the air raid siren!"

O– O–

He parodied the cry in a deliberately loud voice.

The fire intensified and the cypress wood aroma and dark smoke became increasingly dense, the billowing waves of heat contorting the mountains

in the distance. Along with the rising fumes, the Japanese Shinto gods of Ōkunitama, Ōnamuchi, and Sukunabikona – the so-called Three Pioneer Kami that nobody fully understood – ascended into the clouds, taking leave of the island forever. Even though the figures of those hastily departing deities could not be seen, the villagers all felt a huge weight lifted off their shoulders and carried away in the hot air.

The shrine was completely consumed by flames, its contours no longer discernable. Unable to bear the sight, the county governor took a deep bow and turned away, followed by the rest of the crowd attending the ceremony.

Suddenly, a rapid series of loud bangs like machine gun fire broke out. Everyone was startled and crouched down out of habit. But they realized immediately that those bangs could not have been gunshots – the sound was too hollow and too blithe. What they had heard was the bursting of firecrackers, which had been banned by the Japanese Government-General and thus had not been heard in the village for ages.

Along the narrow lane next to the shrine, a shrill melody of the suona pierced the air, the tune from the brass trumpet so brazenly sonorous. The synchronized beat of drums and gongs followed – tīn-thâu performers were parading in high spirits, leading the way for the Holy Empress Matsu, Her golden statue sat in the majestic palanquin. Although the Japanese police had ordered the statue “straightened out” and destroyed, the villagers had secretly stowed it until today, when Her almighty made Her glorious return behind the statues of Chi Yeh and Ba Yeh, two deities who had dauntlessly cleared the way for Her.

The Japanese crowd watched the procession in stunned shock, completely oblivious of plans the Han villagers had made in secret, incredulous as to how a full set of tīn-thâu props could have been assembled in such little time.

She is back! The Han villagers dispersed before the shrine and flocked into the procession. Roll after roll of firecrackers were set off along the parade route, exorcising evil spirits with sparks, fume, the noise of

explosions, and the stink of sulfur, bringing peace and luck to every corner of Kanzan Village.

The villagers brought out their altar tables, lit incense sticks and joss paper, and offered up all the food stored in their houses for worship – large chunks of pork, stacks of bagged rice, poultry and fish, bottles of alcohol, piles of fruits.... Even half a liang of pork would have been a luxury during the war, and the village had seen a shortage of rice for years. But now, the streets were flooded with the people’s best food.

Meanwhile, the Japanese returning from their ceremony were dumbfounded, as if they had stumbled onto what they called Shina Machi, “China Street”. How did they manage to hide everything and evade the daily, highly thorough police searches? Forget about the small items – where did they keep pigs and sheep? They are so big, and they needed to be fed!

But what astonished them most was how the villagers “glowed”. They had discarded the drab kokumin-fuku that always seemed dusty and donned their brightly-colored Taiwanese clothes. They prayed to the golden statue devoutly, before turning to each other and laughing exuberantly. The code of conduct for Japanized Taiwanese Kōmin – the so-called doctrines of Kinshin-Hōkō and Kennin-Jikyū, “unwavering devotion to His Almighty with resoluteness and veneration” – had vanished without a trace. The laziness and docility that seemed to have been engrained in villagers’ souls were now nowhere to be seen.

The dense smoke of gunpowder violently stung the nerves of the Japanese. The odor of firecrackers, which they had always deemed filthy and barbaric and had thus strictly banned, had nevertheless found its way into every pore of their skin, solemnly declaring that they, the Japanese, were the true monsters here and must be expelled.

Kanzan Temple, previously integrated into the Hongan-ji sect of Buddhism, was promptly restored as a Matsu temple. The place had shed its stately and aloof airs, and life had already returned, with people coming and going as they pleased. A glove puppetry stage had been set up on the plaza in front of the

temple. Musicians in the Beiguan ensemble beat their drums and gongs with full force and showed off their finest skills with their pipes and cords. The crowd watched the play with mouths wide open, cheering and clapping as the action on the stage intensified.

The burnt smell in the air had disappeared – such was what people remembered. The entire village was intoxicated by the crisp aroma of cypress wood as Matsu slowly traversed the streets and returned to Her sacred throng, riding an auspicious aura, restoring Her glory back to the village.

Night had fallen. Household after household lit stack after stack of golden joss paper in the fire buckets before their houses and hung beneath their eaves lanterns painted with the blessing “May the light guide your way through the darkness”. New worship offerings had been placed on their altar tables, waiting to be feasted upon by forlorn ghosts and spirits that had been neglected for ages. The streets were adorned with belts of flames. Orange apparitions danced and wriggled, welcoming the village out of its long night under wartime blackout.

Had everything hitherto documented truly happened? Over the next three or four years, people discussed those days endlessly, boasting about and debating every detail of their recollections. One claimed Matsu had returned not on a palanquin but a freshly built bamboo sedan; another argued he had personally carried Her golden statue back to the village. Some questioned whether the giant figures of Chi Yeh and Ba Yeh had been part of the parade, and others added that the Japanese must have set their shrine on fire on a completely different day.... Nevertheless, the village’s collective memory of that day resembled a dreamland in which everyone had fallen together. Everyone cleaved to the remains of their own remembrance, which nobody else could verify or dispute.

Chapter One: Pan Ming-Kun

Under the curtain of night, Pan Ming-Kun snuck into the air raid shelter in the backyard of the Lilong Chamber

of Commerce, the place he had chosen to bury his family’s ancestral tablets.

He did not realize this during the day, but under the black of night, the air raid shelter resembled a tomb. The Japanese had done tests, finding arched shelter roofs to offer the best protection against explosions. Hidden beneath dirt and grass, the arched roof donned the appearance of a burial site, with the concrete blast wall before the shelter gate acting like the gravestone.

When the Pacific War broke out, the need for new air raid shelters skyrocketed, allowing excavation specialists to demand astronomical prices. Even so, it was quite common that none were available. Lilong Chamber of Commerce head Lin Chin-Tang needed to use his connections to secure a specialist to build this standard 4.5-meter-deep shelter. The layer of dirt above its roof was particularly thick and sturdy. Nobody expected this shelter to one day be where Ming-Kun hid his family’s ancestral tablets.

Holding a candle, Ming-Kun descended the stairs, slowing his steps as if entering the underworld. He was startled by a sudden noise outside the shelter and blew out his candle nervously, plunging the shelter into darkness. He did not know where he should take his next step: the dark cave was filled with suspicious air currents that moved like specters, the cold echoes of their hiss giving him goosebumps; but it was not safe outside either – he could be apprehended by the Japanese police and have the tablets confiscated and burnt, a responsibility beyond his comprehension.

Hearing his own heavy breaths, he confirmed that no one was outside the cave and relit his candle with a new match. *Whoosh*. The striking sound was crisp, and the sulfurous smell was strong enough to wake the entire village. But ghosts hated the odor of sulfur – remembering this, Ming-Kun immediately felt the threat of darkness evaporate.

臺灣三部曲

THE TAIWAN HISTORIES RELIVED



© Luke Huang

Ping Lu 平路

- **Category:** Literary Fiction
- **Publisher:** Ecus
- **Date:** 1/2024
- **Pages:** 304 (Vol. 1), 264 (Vol. 2), 304 (Vol. 3)
- **Length:**
 - Vol. 1: 87,531 characters (approx. 56,900 words in English)
 - Vol. 2: 65,456 characters (approx. 42,500 words in English)
 - Vol. 3: 80,007 characters (approx. 52,000 words in English)
- **Full English Manuscript for Volume 1 (Translated by Jeremy Tiang) and Longer English Sample for Each Volume (Translated by Qing Zhao) Available**
- **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Ping Lu is a Taiwan-based fiction author and syndicated columnist as well as a prominent voice of social criticism. Her critical assessments of well-known historical characters, including those in *The Taiwan Histories Relived Trilogy*, have helped a generation of readers reinterpret their roles in history from new and more-nuanced perspectives. Ping is a recipient of the National Award for Arts and the Wu San-Lien Award for Literature. Her long-form novels *Love and Revolution*, *The Story of Teresa*, and *The River Darkens* and a collection of her short stories have been published in translation in English, French, Japanese, Russian, Czech, and other languages.

TRILOGY



* 2024 Taiwan Literature Award (Annual Golden Grand Laurel)

Multi-award-winning novelist Ping Lu in this, her most celebrated work, explores the unfolding fate of modern-day Taiwan by revisiting formative characters from Taiwan's past, including Ming Dynasty pirate-turned-Admiral Zheng Zhilong, VOC Governor of Formosa Frederick Coyett, and ROC President Chiang Ching-Kuo.

After publishing *To the East of the East* in 2011 and *Ilha Formosa* in 2012, Ping Lu finished her highly acclaimed series this year with the release of Taiwan Literature Awards for Books' 2024 Annual Golden Grand Laurel Award winner *Passing*. While each book in this trilogy stands on its own, a shared motif and style tie them all closely together, with readers finding new appreciation for Taiwan's present through getting to know some of those who shaped its past.

To the East of the East: In search of her missing husband, a writer travels from Taiwan to Beijing only to find the Public Security Bureau with nothing new to share. In her continued writings she finds herself responding to her husband's final letters in her imagined discussions between the Qing Emperor and Admiral Zheng. Then, a chance meeting with a self-professed fugitive from the Chinese authorities ends with him begging her to take him in...

Ilha Formosa: In love with a woman working for Taiwan's national intelligence service, a US foreign service officer naively divulges politically sensitive insights that land him in prison. He likens his plight to that of Frederick Coyett, the imprisoned and banished Dutch East India Company governor of Taiwan. They both had been ostracized for a love no country indifferent to all but utilitarian concerns could understand.

Passing: A once-gifted medium, at wits' end after losing contact with the Taoist deity Nezha, meets a clairvoyant not yet aware of his powers. The massage therapy he takes at her suggestion is the key that opens her link with a princely deity who gradually enlightens her to the deity's close-knit relationship with her own intergenerational trauma.

Ping Lu employs historical elements to explore modern-day social issues from both a personal and an island-nation lens. What makes these three books so interesting is discovering where and how these perspectives overlap and why they sometimes don't.

THE TAIWAN HISTORIES RELIVED TRILOGY

By Ping Lu

Translated by Qing Zhao

“Written over the past several decades, Ping Lu’s *The Taiwan Histories Relived Trilogy* has launched an iconic new “Taiwan” novel style distinct from the classic roman-fleuve-inspired works of the last century. Apart from their disconnected time flows, neither the characters nor stories in these three novels are presented in anything resembling a sequential manner. However, their narratives similarly center on difficult situations and how characters interpret them and muddle through. Also, each of the narratives regularly cycles between “past” and “present”, using the present to better understand the past to quench conflicts that have festered and grown over time.

It may be said thusly: Ping Lu has fostered in her *The Taiwan Histories Relived Trilogy* not a common perspective on history but rather a common humanity shaped and guided by a shared heritage of suffering. Put another way, the history in *The Taiwan Histories Relived Trilogy* is told not for its own merit but for the deep and meaningful importance it has for us today.

— Hsiao I-Ling (Department of Chinese Literature, National Chung Cheng University) /
Translated by Jeff Miller

To the East of the East

Tell me, how can I be free?

Chapter 1: Prologue (One)

The spokesperson pointing at the projection screen with a digital pen said, “The Taiwan Affairs Office and public security departments have always prioritized the safety of Taiwanese businesspeople who have invested in the mainland for more than ten years. Incidents have occurred in only a few cities and, in every instance, swift action has been taken to resolve the case, apprehend the perpetrators, and ensure the law is upheld. Only a very tiny percentage of cases remain unsolved.

“On this particular case, the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) was

assisting with the search. The Taiwan Affairs Office and the Public Security Bureau immediately set up an investigation team, which queried hospital inpatient and emergency departments, all traffic accident records involving Taiwanese residents, hotel logs and so on...”

“Is there no exit record?”

A voice from the far corner of the long table answered quietly, “No.”

“When did he last contact his family?”

The question hung in the air.

“Any phone calls?”

Nothing.

“Emails?”

“No.”

“When was his last paycheck issued? Did the company mail it to his home?”

Min-Hui shook her head.

"You know nothing," said the chief seated at the center of the table. He leaned back, rolling his eyes. "As his family, you've been careless."

*

A few tea leaves floated lazily in the tall glass she held. Min-Hui recalled the early days after Chien-I had moved to the mainland. She used to call him often. When the call finally connected, it was always the same empty exchange. "What are you doing?" she would ask in that trailing, nasal voice, drawing out the words, as though lengthening the question could somehow fill the silence between them, masking the unease that always bubbled to the surface.

For over a year now, each time she dialed his number, she was met with the same disembodied, clear female voice: "The number you have called is not connected" or sometimes, "The number you have dialed is out of service". Each time, the same questions circled in her mind: Why is the phone off? Is there another woman? Nights would drag on, heavy with tension and sleeplessness. He hadn't even called back on her birthday a few months ago.

The chief's voice jolted her back to the present. "According to the communication records, Mr. Chang, the Taiwanese businessperson, lost contact with his family about a month ago, not the week the report was filed."

A month? Her grip tightened around the glass. Could they have already...executed him? Since her plane landed, she had met with officials from the Taiwan Affairs Office and asked the same question over and over. The response was always cautious: *We cannot completely rule out that possibility*. Was her husband being held hostage? Kidnapped?

A shiver ran through her, just as the spokesperson's voice droned on, issuing hollow reassurances: "Incidents involving Taiwanese businesspeople on the mainland are isolated and rare. The safety of Taiwanese investors is fundamentally guaranteed. The environment for investment and living is favorable."

"The Beijing Taiwan Affairs Office provides assistance," the spokesperson continued, "to family

members of Taiwanese businesspeople who arrive in Beijing." The final slide appeared on the screen, and the spokesperson concluded with a firm nod. "Beijing authorities have committed to intensifying their efforts to combat all forms of criminal activities, maintain a positive social environment, and foster a more favorable investment environment for Taiwanese enterprises. Local governments will also strengthen public security measures to give Taiwanese investors greater peace of mind in their business activities."

*

Min-Hui's afternoon on the day her plane landed was a blur of back-to-back briefings. That evening, officials from the Taiwan Affairs Office drove her to the apartment Chien-I had rented. Stepping out of the elevator, her guide turned the key in the dimly lit hallway. When the door creaked open, the living room lights flickered on. It felt surreal - her first time entering the space her husband had lived in, yet she was guided by a stranger. His absence filled the room like a fog, dense and palpable.

Later on, that moment would replay itself in her mind, again and again - the dim light by the entrance casting long shadows across the small living room, the two doors leading off to separate rooms. She had been told to expect it, this strange impersonality, but everything about the scene seemed staged, as though his disappearance had been orchestrated with care. Or perhaps someone had already come before her, tidied away those telltale traces she might have otherwise found.

She wandered through the rooms. The décor was sparse, generic; the kind of impersonal arrangement one might expect of someone passing through - of a man stationed in a city that wasn't his home. Two potted plants sat in the kitchen, their IKEA barcodes still attached to the pots. So, Beijing had IKEA too. The plants drooped, their leaves crumbling, as if they'd been neglected since they were brought in. The apartment had the feel of a bachelor's temporary refuge, cheap furniture and sterile surfaces. As she paced through the space, disbelief gnawed at her. Here she was, standing where her husband had lived,

surrounded by the objects that made up his life. She examined everything, searching for any clue that might explain his disappearance.

On the flight to Beijing, one question had circled in her mind, persistent and unrelenting: *Did she really know Chien-I?*

The kitchen was separated from the living room by a bar and two high stools. She glanced up at the wooden cabinets, and above them, liquor bottles stood in a neat row, lining the space between the cabinets and the ceiling – empty bottles of varying heights and brands. She scanned the labels: “Johnnie Walker”, and a few square bottles of foreign whiskey. But Chien-I had always been intolerant to alcohol; a few sips, and his skin would break out in a rash, flushed pink. He never kept alcohol at home. So, who had been drinking? Who had entertained guests here with foreign liquor? The husband she thought she knew would never host anyone at home.

She opened the wardrobe. A few polo shirts hung inside, well-worn and faded, from a brand she didn’t recognize. She ran her fingers over the fabric – not cotton, not linen. Cheap nylon, the kind of synthetic material Chien-I would never have chosen for himself. She pushed them aside, and then found a handful of familiar items – shirts she had carefully picked out for him, ironed and smoothed by her hands before placing them in his suitcase. They appeared untouched, as though they hadn’t been worn since the day they were unpacked. So, what had Chien-I been wearing all this time? Her heart sank as she held the clothes. How much of her husband had remained hidden from her all along?

It wasn’t until later that she realized she hadn’t eaten dinner. Earlier, she had politely turned down the Taiwan Affairs Office’s offer of food, claiming illness. Now, hunger was a distant, irrelevant thought. She sat on the edge of the bed, her mind racing, conjuring images she couldn’t shake – Chien-I taken, his skin bruised, his thin wrists bound tight with thick hemp rope, his ears cruelly stopped with wax. It reminded her of those first days after hearing the news. Those days had been consumed by the rush of paperwork,

trying to clear the bureaucratic haze of exit papers, while the nights stretched endlessly, too exhausted to stay awake, but too afraid to sleep. Whenever her body gave in to the exhaustion, horrific visions would yank her back awake.

It was now well past midnight, and she was still lying in Chien-I’s bed, tossing and turning. The quilt remained neatly folded beside her. She stared at it, unsure whether she should unfold it. What would she find beneath that quilt? An emptiness, an unknown void she hadn’t yet prepared herself to confront? Her husband, once so real, had been swallowed by that void, dragged into its depths.

All night, she lay there, paralyzed by indecision. In her mind, she could see herself pulling back the quilt, bringing it to her face to inhale his scent – perhaps mixed with the smell of another woman. Could she lie in this bed, pretend to rest, knowing that someone else might have been here with him?

The apartment had poor soundproofing. As dawn began to creep in, she heard the distant rumble of traffic from the highway.

The noise filtered in, muffled and far away, reminding her of the quiet alleyways of Taipei. She could almost picture it – students on their way to school; newspaper delivery workers making their rounds, slipping papers into mailboxes; breakfast stall steamers starting to fire up. Had Chien-I ever lain in this bed, she wondered, thinking of her back in Taipei?

It wasn’t until the pale light of morning seeped into the room that her body finally relented, and she slipped into a fragile sleep. It felt as though everything had returned to the way it once was – as though her husband had returned to their home in Taipei, as though this entire ordeal had been nothing but a fleeting nightmare. It was a temporary affair, and soon he would wake. When he did, he would return to her, and life would go on as before.

But, she reminded herself, it was she who was the problem. Even if her husband woke, there was nowhere left for him to return.

She had taken that from him, left him without a place to belong. It was that, in the end, that had

brought them here.

★

The next day, she uncovered a few pieces of evidence.

Sitting on the floor, she pulled open a large drawer hidden beneath the bed. It was stuffed full, overflowing really, with lingerie – orange, mint green, floral, mesh. Thickly padded bras, the kind she would never wear. Without thinking, she slammed the drawer shut, her hand recoiling as if she'd touched something alive.

She couldn't explain why it unsettled her so much, but it did. It reminded her, absurdly, of cockroaches. The way they mated, their ugly wings twitching, folded awkwardly against their backs. A grotesque and obscene act. Then came the eggs, followed by the hatching of tiny, squirming bodies, all of them with those same folded wings. At home, she was obsessive about scrubbing the dank kitchen corners, convinced that under the sink, behind the wire mesh, they were nesting, waiting for nightfall to rise from the sewers and creep into her world.

Her obsession with cleanliness had always been there – a constant. Perhaps it related in some way to her unusually sharp sense of smell.

In Chien-I's kitchen, she found a woman's barrette among the soap-soaked items in the soap dish. She needed to separate her husband's belongings from those of the other woman, to keep them distinct and apart. Scrupulously apart.

Exhausted from tidying up, she leaned against the high stool. Her mind was playing tricks on her. Was she even sure the lingerie belonged to another woman? Could she have wronged her husband? Perhaps, despite being considerably older, Chien-I was a bit helpless, dependent. Perhaps he had never even opened that drawer. Maybe the bras were left behind by a previous tenant, his landlord's forgotten mess. And those empty liquor bottles in the living room too – those could have been left behind, relics of another life that had nothing to do with him.

What kind of life had her husband really been leading in Beijing?

She closed her eyes, a familiar light-headedness sweeping over her. Her mind began drifting when she most needed to stay focused. Lately – perhaps it had to do with a sense of foreboding, something about Beijing – she had been distracted at odd moments. Once, while crossing the street near her home in Taipei, a motorcycle sped by, almost hitting her. Only afterward, standing on the curb, did she realize how close it had been, and how far her mind had wandered.

If this were a story she was writing, how would it unfold?

Min-Hui berated herself for the thought, for her mind's sudden retreat into detachment, as though her husband's disappearance could be deconstructed and mapped out like fiction, analyzed for its plot, its arc.

But this was not fiction; it was her reality. Chien-I was missing – her husband had vanished. She scrambled to open her eyes and force herself back into the present. She took out the cell phone she'd been lent and pressed a number she had scribbled in her notepad.

"Alright, alright. Hold on a second," the voice on the other end muttered.

As she waited for the car, she stood in the kitchen of Chien-I's apartment and looked down at the lower balcony. The iron lampshade hung there, dusted in cobwebs, cast a dull, yellowish light even though it was already broad daylight. Below it was a pile of briquettes, a broken plastic bucket, and an old mop bundled up with rags. Briquettes? She frowned. Surely no one still burned charcoal. Her gaze drifted back to the kitchen counter, smooth and spotless yet somehow also hollow – as though the shine itself were a thin film hiding something messier underneath.

Twenty minutes later, a black sedan pulled up downstairs.

安雅之地

LAND OF SERENITY



Pan Yutang 班與唐

- **Category:** Literary Fiction
- **Publisher:** Gaea
- **Date:** 8/2023
- **Pages:** 352
- **Length:** 118,250 characters
(approx. 77,000 words in English)
- **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Born in 1993, Pan Yutang is a recipient of a 2019 TSMC Literature Award merit award for her novella *Carnivore Hill*. *Land of Serenity*, Pan's second novel, reflects her talent and passion for historical research, which she also regularly pursues through her history-themed Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube channels (@benanddon).

© WenhSun Magazine



A young reporter hides his identity and talks his way onto a fishing boat to escape his postwar island's military-led bloodbath. However, the remote island in the Ryukyus where he lands continues to present dilemmas that leave his fate in the hands of others.

In the spring of 1947, with Lee Tsan-Yun's fellow reporters mostly either imprisoned or dead, he sees escape to the "Land of Serenity" with Chen's cryptic instructions and a hand-drawn map as his last best hope. Trekking from Taipei to the Yilan coast, he catches a fishing scow bound for the Yaeyama Islands with just the map, a gold chain, a picture of his crush, and his memories.

Lee sees himself fated to a life of mediocrity and just "getting by". Before becoming a reporter, he enrolls in Tokyo's Waseda University on a benefactor's endowment, but when the funds dry up, keeps up the pretense of being a student while making ends meet writing homework for former classmates. Finally professing love to his university crush at the end of the war, he is devastated to learn she is already married. Returning despondently to his hometown, he takes a job as a cub reporter; but, unlike his ambitious colleagues, is there only for the steady paycheck. However... when the nightmare finally comes, it is to him that a respected pillar of the community turns, out of desperation, for help.

So what about this so-called "Land of Serenity"? Would he be able to complete the mission entrusted to him? With nothing to go on, he clings to the kindness of strangers...even though some, he finds, expect something in return.

Land of Serenity is the first Taiwan-authored novel inspired by the real-life stories of Taiwanese émigrés to the Yaeyama Islands in Japan's Okinawa Prefecture. For the people of Yaeyama, contact with Taiwan has long been heavily colored by smuggling, illicit immigration, and conflict, with their experience largely elided over by chroniclers and historians alike. Pan Yutang's emotive style of writing lends palpable authenticity to Lee Tsan-Yun's sense of insecurity and bewilderment, showing powerlessness as a state of mind common to all fated to live through history's epochal turning points.

LAND OF SERENITY

By Pan Yutang

Translated by Mike Fu

“This vibrant historical novel is set in early postwar Taiwan during a time when the island’s new Nationalist Chinese rulers are engaged in violently suppressing and cowing its recently “liberated” residents. While brilliantly capturing the anxious mood in Taiwan at that time, this work also weaves the nearby southern islands of the Okinawa Archipelago into its compelling narrative landscape.

The author treads lightly through historical minutiae to focus on breathing enticing life into the plot and literary imagery. Protagonist Lee Tsan-Yun, a man who analogizes his life to a map, fears being unable to extricate himself from its intractable lines. Unexpectedly, he too finds himself fading from the world and, as he makes his escape from his well-mapped life’s course, adopts a new perspective on the underlying meaning of the “map”. *Land of Serenity* amalgamizes personal and social anxieties, reminding readers of the true price paid by those who were sacrificed. Seeing future possibilities through the umbra of this age, the author describes a narrative landscape that, albeit sorrowful, is also radiantly bright.

— Chien Chen (Writer) / Translated by Jeff Miller

To you whom I can’t see:

*In this moment, I’m far away from the turbulent seas.
Rest assured that no one will get hurt anymore.*

Don’t be afraid. At least it’s this way for the time being. Memories have been forcibly seared into the lot of us. It’s not easy for us to casually use spoken language or written words to pour out our hearts. But please don’t worry, because we have faith.

Please have faith that time will dissipate this bog reeking of blood. In no time at all, we’ll be able to meet again in a place of light.

We’ll be awaiting you in a land of serenity.

Late spring, 1947

Nanfang’ao, en route to the Ryukyu seas

Vicious winds

The merciless crash of waves against the boat feels worlds away from the tranquility that springtime is supposed to bring.

The boat suddenly lists, and a heap of burlap sacks falls on top of me. When I come to, the acrid stench of vomit on my body assails my nostrils and stomach once more.

A huge wave lifts this fishing boat of more than twenty tons, tossing us into the air and then swiftly slamming us back down onto the surface of the sea. There’s a shattering sound as though the boat has crashed onto a rock. The fishermen on the front deck are making small talk as usual, but I’m close to being unable to keep my gastric juices from reaching into my

throat.

The crest of another wave comes.

I can't take it anymore. Vomit bursts out of the corners of my mouth again and onto the clothes that were given to me by the widow in Chiaohsi. The sour-reeking liquid seeps into the fabric and clings to my skin. If the man who once owned these clothes has already crossed over into the other realm, it occurs to me that my time to die may not be far off either.

"Hey, you can't puke on other people's cargo."

"Kid, is this your first time on a boat, *da*?"

I want to look up to see who's talking to me, but my head is much too heavy. I lay my head on a burlap sack and gaze at them at an angle. It's the two men who came aboard with me at Nanfang'ao. They banter occasionally with a crew member in Ryukyuan, which I can't understand at all. When not fully occupied with trying to suppress my nausea, I've been thinking about how to get to know these two countrymen of mine.

"Looks like you two fellows are much more solidly built than me. Got any tips for avoiding seasickness?"

They laugh coldly and look away. It seems my signal of friendship was not successfully received.

"That's right," says the gaunt one whose clothes are so threadbare they only cover the bones under his skin. "You're nothing like us folks who'll never wear glasses."

"Young man, boating life is really tough," the other one chimes in, a short man with a sturdy physique that shows through beneath his light garments. "You'd best think it through before getting onboard, *da*." He has high cheekbones and sharp canine teeth that reveal themselves when he smiles, adding that "*da*" sound to the end of his sentences.

The gaunt man walks before me and squats down. He produces a black pill of something that looks like medicine from his pocket, shoving it under my nose while I'm still lying atop the burlap sack. A urine-like stink wafts towards me.

"Boatmen have a pretty wretched existence. You'll save yourself some trouble if you can stomach this."

I peer at the black pill in the man's hand, trying to

make out what lies beneath the shiny surface.

"He's afraid you're gonna poison him, *da*," says the short, sturdy man. "Young man, not just anyone can come aboard the boat, *da*. Have you prepared something valuable to give to the island chief, *da*?"

The waves rise again, and the black pill falls from the man's hand. My stomach turns. I can't see where the pill has rolled. The voices of the people around me are muffled as though they're coming from behind a layer of fabric.

Young man, what's your name? What are you doing here?

Their cold laughter and the reek of vomit blend into the confused mess of my head.

No, no, I can't tell them. Mister Chen taught me that I have no name.

A huge wave again lifts the boat skyward, shaking it so hard that everyone is thrown to the deck. The burlap sacks slam against the cabin walls, splitting them open and spilling sugar and rice. The fragrance of cane sugar clings to my seawater-soaked nostrils.

The Ryukyuan fishermen rush out from the cabin and bellow at everyone to tie up their wares, mixing in some words I've never heard before. The only thing I understand is that I have to quickly find a rope and secure myself to the boat.

The fishermen swiftly find a place to sit, expertly fastening themselves with ropes and waiting to ride out this storm. They look at me coldly as a Ryukyuan, muttering under his breath, unties my rope and then reties it properly. There's still a long road ahead before they'll accept me as their companion.

Waves crash ceaselessly against the boat, the froth of seawater soaking my entire body. I desperately try to contort myself to protect the wallet inside my pocket, which has Miss Lee's photo, the gold chain, and the map Mister Chen gave me.

I squeeze both eyes shut, the only way I can temporarily escape from this moment. As soon as I enter that darkness, it becomes impossible to tell whether my eyes are open or closed. I can only feel the curved ridges of my eye sockets. I look again and again

as I travel across the mountains for countless days and nights, committing to memory the thick black ink marks that guide me along a hidden path, taking me past Pinglin, along the river to Lanyang, and continuing by the seaside to Nanfang'ao. A string of numbers are written at the very bottom of the map. I don't know who these numbers will connect me to, only that I must make that connection on behalf of Mister Chen.

In the end, there's no escape. Mister Chen long ago forced me into this situation in which I must choose to either live or die. I open my eyes wide to see how the boat is tolerating the ruthlessness of the waves.

The sky above seems to have changed from murky black to indigo. I can't tell what time of day it is. I wonder if Father and Sister are walking along the banks of the Keelung River, carting another monstrous stack of bamboo baskets. I wonder if they're heading towards the roundabout, or if they're already returning to Siā-á.

Fuck, why didn't Mister Chen flee himself? Why did he have to entrust the map to me? And why did he have to say what he said to me?

Lee Tsan-Yun, do you know what the price of freedom is?

I had no idea the price of freedom was becoming a wanted man, hiding in mountain forests perpetually shrouded in fog, like wading through water without end so my body was forever damp. The only thing that kept me breathing was that soft map within my pocket.

Gold chain, wallet, map, I repeated to myself. Gold chain, wallet, map...

These things reminded me that I still knew who I was, even if I didn't have a name.

But why didn't Mister Chen flee himself if the map was ready? I couldn't understand how he mustered the courage to wager his own life, handing over to me the plan that he'd painstakingly worked on, asking me to board a boat to this island in the east. All so I could

send a specific radio frequency to an unknown person far away, using a code woven into memory to retell what we had witnessed.

From this moment on, Lee Tsan-Yun no longer exists. You're a person without a name.

I didn't have a chance to ask Mister Chen who would trust the stories of a nameless person.

Only after entering the mountains does one become aware that humans are much too reliant on streets for their visceral experience of the world. Lead a person away from the familiarity of streets, and he'll lose the capacity to find his destination. He'll sink into an endless confusion until he regains his orientation.

Mister Chen's map showed triangulation stations, elevation contours, and the locations of villages from Shihting and Pinglin all the way to Chiaohsi. I had a rough sense of where I was on the map, thanks to my year of naval training. But how would I know if I was on the right path? What if I couldn't find it, or if I misjudged? My cold, wet body trembled; I couldn't imagine that my salvation was even possible.

There were many quiet moments in my escape when all that remained was a dialogue with my own thoughts, when I couldn't discern whether what I was hearing came from my surroundings or my imagination. The gold chain in my pocket - I'd never have a chance to use it to free my sister from our father's control.

I have no memory of my mother. There wasn't a single photograph or painting of her in the household. Father never brought up anything about her. Sister only mentioned her sometimes while brushing her hair, talking about how she used to love getting her hair brushed and braided by our mother. Sister never looked directly at herself in the mirror, paying attention instead to the height of her updo, making sure everything was firmly in place after she'd bundled it all up. She never stopped to examine her own face. Then, when her hair was secured, she'd move briskly through the house to prepare Father's breakfast and going-out clothes with her thickly callused hands that had matured all too soon.

When I was little, I used to ask Sister why our neighbor always said we should be thankful we hadn't lost two lives, thanks to the midwife's ample experience. My sister, who was one head taller than me, would turn to me and ruffle the short, spiky hair freshly grown on my scalp.

"Yun," she'd change the subject, "what happened to all the rice you've been sneaking at night? Are you working hard enough on growing taller?"

I did get taller and taller later on, while my sister conversely shrunk into perpetual girlhood. She was always on the ground scrubbing the vomit left over from Father's drunken antics.

"Yun, make me proud when you grow up."

My father knew that my sister's precocious and industrious nature was for the sake of appearances only. Our family would forever remain sunken in the mud of Siā-á, with nothing on the dinner table but rotten leaves, sweet potatoes, and salty pickled melon. No matter how much Father twisted his knees to hoist burlap sacks, stuffed with tea and larger than a person, and hustle down the streets of Tataocheng, we knew we'd never have a chance at inheriting the Lee family's ancestral fortune.

It was a massacre, Father would yowl, throat seared with liquor, describing the day the Japanese came to town and robbed him of his true destiny. The real him should still be sitting inside the old Lee family estate, a young master collecting farm plot rent from hard-working farmers.

Father had been born in the wrong era. Now, his happiest times were spent squatting by the door, drinking to the last drop the liquor he'd spent all of his wages on and then vomiting up the pitiful dregs of what remained in his stomach. If I wasn't worried that one of our neighbors might walk by and see Father passed out on the street, I wouldn't have bothered to bring him inside. I wouldn't have tolerated him acting like an animal with its limbs cut off, curled up on the ground, writhing and slamming his head against the floorboard in anguish.

No matter how badly Father scraped his head,

nothing would change the fact that this rotten home raised from the putrid mud summed up his whole life. It didn't matter whether he was living in the right era or not. Rather, the wavelet rippling down the river of time didn't care that he was an outsider who'd gotten his feet stuck in the mud, and now had to absorb all that had accumulated over generations.

Yun, are you leaving to go home?

By the time I returned to my senses, I'd already reached a dilapidated village where banyan roots were wrapped around crumbling red-brick walls. I could still see the general layout of the village. There was a small Earth God temple covered in moss near the slope. I spread open the map, but couldn't find any village marked where I was. Perhaps it had ceased to be even before the Japanese colonial period, or maybe the ink on the map had faded. Every time I opened the map, I worried too that the greetings at the very bottom would also be faded beyond recognition, and that no one in the world would be able to confirm the existence of those words to me anymore:

May you swiftly reach a land of serenity.

I selected a brick house with a partial roof and sat down for a break, leaning against the wall. I felt the irrepressible beating of my heart in my chest. When I shut my eyes, I couldn't tell whether I was hearing my heartbeat or the footsteps of someone in the distance. I didn't keep my eyes closed for too long. It was dangerous for me to be outside of the forest.

Nightfall would soon disperse the sunlight. I decided to hide out in the abandoned house. It would be better to sleep beneath an actual roof than in a tree hollow. The village looked like it had been abandoned for some time. Nobody would be coming back here. What had happened here? I could only imagine. Maybe the land had been barren, or maybe disease had swept through the area. Maybe there was a war. Had they experienced the same thing as my ancestors? I spread the map on the crumbling brick as daylight gradually dimmed and the entire mountain entered the dark of night.

陳澄波密碼

THE CHENG-PO CODE



Ke Tsung-Ming 柯宗明

- **Category:** Mystery, Art History
- **Publisher:** Yuan-Liou
- **Date:** 11/2018
- **Pages:** 336
- **Length:** 137,202 characters
(approx. 90,000 words in English)
- **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
- **Rights sold:** Japanese (Iwanami)

Ke Tsun-Ming has a well-established career as a writer and director of television and stage productions, most of which revolve around Taiwanese historical and cultural issues and themes. *The Cheng-Po Code*, Ke's first novel, took first place in the 3rd New Taiwan Peace Foundation's Taiwan Historical Novel Awards in 2018.



Why is this painting unsigned? A curious painting brought in for restoration suggests the existence of a tantalizing secret concealed in the paintings of Taiwanese artist Chen Cheng-Po, drawing the reader into a highly satisfying adventure filled with suspense, sleuthy investigations, actual historical happenings, and plenty of heart.

The curtain on this story rises in the year 1984 during the waning years of the nearly four-decade-long Martial Law era – a time when freedom of speech, assembly, and association was still curtailed by Taiwan’s single-party autocratic government. Cheng, a non-conformist painter working in disheartening obscurity, is approached one day by an odd individual who implores him to restore an unsigned oil painting. Curious, he and his reporter girlfriend Fang Yen engage in some sleuthing and gradually assemble a picture of the life of the man behind the unsigned work – the early twentieth-century modernist painter Chen Cheng-Po. In talking with Chen’s friends and acquaintances, among whom are more than a few nationally renowned artists, the couple finds it curious that, while all are more than happy to share stories of Chen’s studies in Japan, teaching career in Shanghai, and lectures at Zhongshan Hall in Taipei, each is mysteriously tight-lipped about the artist’s death.

Included in this novel are images of a number of Chen’s paintings, including the story’s inspirations – “Linglang Mountain Hall” (1935) and “Self Portrait No. 1” (1928). Only when the couple’s investigation leads them to the Chen family in Chiayi County do they finally learn why the original restoration request was so furtively made, why Chen’s death is so taboo, why some artists hold things so close to their chest, and...why pursuing the truth can be hazardous to one’s health.

Chen Cheng-Po, a member of Taiwan’s first generation of Western-style painters, was born during the inaugural year of Japanese rule (1895) and died just a half century later in 1947, soon after Taiwan’s absorption into Nationalist China. The author deftly weaves Taiwanese art and political histories into a suspense-filled story about Chen’s life of struggle that, in many ways, captures the complex emotions and concerns felt by modern Taiwanese in their search for cultural and national consciousness.

THE CHENG-PO CODE

By Ke Tsung-Ming

Translated by Michael Day

“This creative effort, spanning the wide swathe of Taiwan’s modern art history with a story that resonates with plausibility and practiced literary flair, should not be underestimated. Beyond unraveling the “Cheng-Po” code, this story may indeed hold the key to understanding Taiwan itself. Interspersed with Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese elements, the narrative lays breadcrumbs while dangling answers just beyond reach. Once the code is cracked and the air has cleared, it is now us who should unlock our own closed doors.

Weaving a detective tale into historical fiction adds extra layers of difficulty to an inherently challenging literary genre. Its brilliant execution in *The Cheng-Po Code* gives staccato pacing and rich literary texture to the unfolding story. Resolving this novel’s final mystery sheds new light not only on Taiwan’s art history but also into a dark corner of Taiwanese history.

— *Openbook* / Translated by Jeff Miller

Having said goodbye to Chiayi, Fang Yen sat aboard a northbound train, nose in a book about painting by Chen Cheng-Po. While Fang Yen read, Cheng stared out the window, chin in hand like Rodan’s “The Thinker”.

Suddenly, a scrap of yellowed paper fluttered down from the book onto the floor. Fang Yen bent to pick it up, crying excitedly, “Look at this!” It was a letter. Fang Yen leaned close to Cheng and slowly unfolded the letter, and together, the two began to read.

Chieh:

I have two years of graduate school left, and even though I don’t have the employment part figured out yet, my heart is set on fulfilling my duties as a husband. I’m not sure I can make a living off my art, but nothing would make me happier than painting full time. Making art fills me with joy, firstly because I enjoy what I’m

doing, and secondly because I’m excited to share my work with the world. I still remember, when I was young, my grandma told me...

1.

History is like a medicine cabinet in a Chinese pharmacy, the kind with countless drawers filled with all types of herbs. Open the drawers of the medicine cabinet of history, and you’ll see a kaleidoscope of scenes from the past.

For instance, open the drawer labeled Minguo 49, 1960, and this is what you’ll see: the opening of the Cross-Island Highway, President Eisenhower’s visit to Taiwan, Yang Chuan-kwang’s silver medal in the Olympics, Lei Chen’s arrest. In the drawer labeled Minguo 53, 1964: the Great Baihe Earthquake, the crash of a plane filled with movie stars from Hong Kong and Taiwan. In the drawer for Minguo 59, 1970: the premiere of the televised puppet program *The*

Great Swordsman of Yunzhou, Chiang Ching-kuo's attempted assassination in New York, the movement to impeach Taipei Mayor Henry Kao in the Control Yuan. In the drawer for Minguo 51, 1962: Fang Yu crowned Miss Republic of China, the first Golden Horse Award for Best Narrative Feature given to *Sun, Moon and Star*, the first broadcast on Taiwan Television. Minguo 57, 1968: the Hongye Junior Baseball Team triumphs over Japan. Minguo 63, 1974: the smashing success of the TV show *Justice Pao*. Minguo 42, 1953: the first car crosses Xiluo Bridge. Minguo 60, 1971: protests over the Diaoyutai territorial dispute at National Taiwan University, Taiwan's ouster from the United Nations. Minguo 68, 1979: the publication of the first issue of *Formosa Magazine*, the successful separation of conjoined twins Chung-jen and Chung-i. One year or another: the dismissal of army commander Sun Li-jen. Some other year or another: the implementation of mandatory nine-year education for all...

More and more drawers fly open with increasing speed...Liu Tzu-jan acquitted of murder charges, a mob at the American embassy, the great August 7th flood in central and southern Taiwan, the declaration of martial law throughout Taiwan, the 37.5% Arable Rent Reduction Act, the death of Hu Shih, the publication of Chiung Yao's *Outside the Window*, masses of people welcoming Ivy Ling Po to Taiwan, the arrest of Peng Ming-min, the death of Chiang Kai-shek, the defection of Fan Yuen-yen, the Taiwan Nativist Literary Debate, the Zhongli Incident, the expressway opening, the severing of Taiwan-US relations, the murder of Chen Wen-chen, one hundred and ten killed in Far Eastern Air crash, the Land Bank of Taiwan heist, Lee Fu-an shatters decathlon records, Solzhenitsyn visits Taiwan, United World Chinese Commercial Bank truck robbed, fourteen million Taiwan dollars lost...

The drawers of memory open one after another, and the fragrance of history wafts in the air, like the subtle, mingled aroma of so many time-seasoned herbs.

The scene of Cheng and Fang Yen reading the letter is found in the drawer labeled Minguo 73 - 1984.

This was an eventful year for Taiwan. The president of the Executive Yuan, Sun Yun-suan, was hospitalized with a cerebral hemorrhage, Chiang Ching-kuo was

reelected President, northern Taiwan was struck by a flood on June 3rd, students at Yingqiao Elementary School were doused with acid by a crazed assailant, cave-ins at the Haishan and Ruifang mines killed hundreds, Chinese-American writer Henry Liu was stabbed to death, and Operation Clean Sweep - a crackdown on organized crime - was launched.

It was also the year Taiwan's first McDonald's opened.

November 1984.

In a cramped living room stood a wood-framed 18-inch Synco TV. The news was playing: Taipei residents were streaming into Taiwan's first McDonald's. The camera lens captured vivid images of patrons' bright, smiling faces, and the cathode ray tube beamed them onto Cheng's retinas.

Cheng sat in the living room of the little apartment, eating minced pork rice and watching the news. The more he watched, the greater his irritation. He spat, "Thought we'd left ketchup-drenched hamburgers behind. Now those burger-scarfing Americans have launched an economic invasion on innocent little Taiwan. Shit!"

"Give me a break!" said Fang Yen, who was sitting with Cheng eating dinner. "Taiwan isn't so innocent. This is no agricultural society like you seem to think. Not anymore. Taiwan's foreign exchange reserves are growing, and skyscrapers are sprouting up all over the Eastern District of Taipei. The problem is you're behind the times. At least try and keep up with trends."

"Why you..."

"Be quiet!" Cheng was readying a retort, but Fang Yen cut him off. "Just eat your food. You're going to choke." Fang Yen finished with a harrumph, wagging a finger.

Cheng had returned a few years earlier from studying fine arts in the United States. At the time, wave after wave of new trends in postwar avant-garde art were sweeping through New York, from Jackson Pollock's abstract drip technique to Andy Warhol's pop art to new, multi-dimensional photorealist approaches. The sheer scope and range of these methods and techniques made Cheng's head spin. He had no interest in any particular trend, and cared only for natural

landscapes, like those Monet and van Gogh had painted in the nineteenth century. Like them, Cheng strived to capture the spirit of natural landscapes by transferring them onto the canvas as they were.

As a stubborn adherent of impressionist ideas and techniques in the 1980s, Cheng may as well have been a visitor from the Middle Ages. Needless to say, he was a fish out of water in the US, but he didn't feel any more at home back in Taiwan. A month earlier, he had held his first one-man exhibition since returning from America in a gallery in Taipei's Eastern District, where he sold a grand total of just one painting. Aficionados of impressionism were few and far between, and Cheng was extremely sensitive to phrases like "behind the times" and "up with trends". He hadn't been happy when the outspoken Fang Yen had blurted, "The problem is you're behind the times. At least try and keep up with trends." This rubbed Cheng the wrong way. Like a hedgehog flaring its quills, he puffed with annoyance. But Fang Yen had no time to deal with Cheng's feelings, which was probably for the best. She had slipped away from the newspaper office on dinner break to eat with Cheng, and she had to hurry back to turn in an article.

"I'm outta here. You should get to bed early. And stop smoking like a chimney already." Fang Yen put on her gold-framed glasses, pulled on her overcoat, picked up her backpack, and made for the door, leaving Cheng still chewing on a mouthful of minced pork rice that tasted like nothing.

Of course, Cheng understood that Fang Yen hadn't meant to press his buttons. When he had returned from America a sad and deflated man, Fang Yen had been the only one who listened to his woes, encouraging him to look on the bright side. It was just that, considering the predicament the market for paintings was in, he couldn't hold back his knee-jerk emotional responses.

Just then, an episode of *A Sprig of Plum Blossoms* came on the TV. A gentle male voice sang the show's theme: "Our love is expansive like the grassland, and though nothing can stop the rain and wind, the clouds soon will part and limitless sunlight will pour down

upon you and me..."

Cheng stood and, in one swift, irritated motion, switched off the TV.

The next day Cheng boarded the bus holding a canvas entitled "Impression of Zhuoshui River" that he had just finished painting. He was headed for Tung Hua Gallery in the Eastern District of Taipei, planning to discuss putting it on consignment. The bus was packed with people, and Cheng gingerly cradled the size-30 canvas, watching from the corner of his eye as Section Four of Zhongxiao East Road passed by, noting it was looking more and more like Fifth Avenue these days. It was packed with countless new skyscrapers and art galleries too, projecting the image of a cultured, flourishing city. There must be buyers for oil paintings out there, Cheng thought with a growing sense of hope.

When Cheng carefully handed over "Impression of Zhuoshui River", the gallery owner, Mr. Li, made a show of thoroughly inspecting it.

"So this is another piece you'd like to consign."

"Yes," Cheng replied.

Mr. Li put the painting down, wearing a tortured grimace. "Ming-cheng, I'm going to be frank with you. Impressionist works are tough to sell these days, and they don't bring high prices. Even when some rich consortium does get a mind to buy an impressionist work, they look to the classics: Li Shih-chiao, Li Mei-shu, Yang San-lang..."

"Mr. Li, I know all that, but..."

"Listen to me," Mr. Li interrupted. "My point is, times have changed, and the new generation of artists has to bring fresh ideas to the table. To sell, art has to get people talking. You could learn something from Wu Hsuan-san. Look at the portraits he did in Africa... look at his cubist works. That's how you keep up with trends."

As soon as the words "That's how you keep up with trends" left Mr. Li's lips, Cheng stopped listening, and Mr. Li apparently had nothing else to say.

Cheng silently picked up "Impressions of Zhuoshui River", got on the bus, and went home.

That evening, Fang Yen and Cheng had dinner at the night market in Chien-Cheng Circle. Cheng took the opportunity to lick his wounds, telling Fang Yen, "That's how you keep up with trends' my ass. In his infinite kindness, Mr. Li let it be known that the Taiwanese art world is coming to be dominated by agents, and he wants me to get one to help shape my style. He says that's the only way I'll ever crack the market. He says it will do no good to push back against the tide, clinging stubbornly to old styles."

"He has a point," said Fang Yen, her chopsticks pausing in midair. "Agents will be good for the Taiwanese art world. You've been overseas yourself, so it's not like you don't understand Western culture. And what do you want people to tell you, if not the truth?" With this, Fang Yen's chopsticks shoved some more rice noodles into her mouth.

"I..." Cheng sighed, trying to swallow a mouthful of food, but it wouldn't go down.

"Hey, why don't I be your agent?" Fang Yen suddenly lit up with excitement. "I'm an arts journalist. I can find out about the latest trends in the art world. I can give you up-to-the-minute advice."

"Up-to-the-minute advice?" Cheng looked dismayed.

"Yeah. Hire someone who loves you as your agent, that's the way to get honest advice, like van Gogh and his little brother."

"No way!" Cheng shook his head. "Van Gogh's brother was an insider in the arts world, true; but he never interfered in van Gogh's work."

"That's probably why van Gogh only sold two paintings in his life."

"Correction, one painting."

"Didn't you already sell one painting at that last show?" Fang Yen's excitement was unabated. "Par for the course. You're still young. You're not going to end up a sad sack like van Gogh. Let me help you!"

Fang Yen and Cheng had met in New York. Cheng had been setting up an exhibition with his teacher when Fang Yen visited the gallery as a journalist intern. The fact they were both from Taiwan and had crossed

paths so far from home was probably part of what made them such fast friends. Later, as they continued exchanging letters and phone calls, they realized they shared similar interests and gradually became the kind of friends who told each other everything. It was after both had graduated and returned to Taiwan that Cheng finally made a move on Fang Yen, whom he admired for her sparkling eyes, generous spirit and boundless energy.

"I wasn't expecting you to ever confess your crush. I thought you had a stick up your ass," said Fang Yen with a grin, pushing her gold-framed glasses back onto her nose, then twirling a finger in her chicly shaggy, Meg Ryan-ish hair.

"It's just that..." Scratching his head, Cheng explained sheepishly, "I'm afraid that since we're back in Taiwan now, someone else will snatch you up."

"They probably will. Actually, my mom is already trying to set me up," Fang Yen teased with a grin. At that moment, the lanky, swarthy, handsome Cheng looked like a lost little boy.

These days, with Cheng in a creative dry spell, the two lovebirds were quarrelling more and more frequently. A few days earlier, Fang Yen had shown up at Cheng's place at the exact moment the movers were bringing Cheng's paintings back from the gallery. Fang Yen thought it strange and asked what was going on. Cheng said he was taking back all of the paintings he'd had on consignment at Tung Hua. Fang Yen asked, "What? They won't let you keep them there, or you wanted them back?" Cheng said, sounding miserable, "Let's just say both. It wasn't the right place for them." Cheng squatted on his haunches and gently caressed the paintings laid out on the floor, as if tending to his injured children.

Watching this, Fang Yen was more determined than ever not to give up on him.

通靈事務社 1：開張大吉

SPIRITSPEAKER STUDIO, BOOK 1:



Teensy 星子

- **Category:** Urban Fantasy
- **Publisher:** Gaea
- **Date:** 6/2023 (Vol. 1), 9/2023 (Vol. 2), 1/2024 (Vol. 3)
- **Pages:** 272 (Vol. 1), 288 (Vol. 2), 272 (Vol. 3)
- **Length:**
Vol. 1: 71,070 characters
(approx. 46,200 words in English)
Vol. 2: 73,398 characters
(approx. 48,000 words in English)
Vol. 3: 72,349 characters
(approx. 47,000 words in English)
- **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

A powerful storyteller in the fantasy genre, Teensy is well-known for integrating nativist mythology and occult legend into stories of the modern, urban world. Originally a writer of online serial novels, he is today a prolific author of well-known print works such as *In the Underworld* and *The Immortal Gene*. Rights to his best-known series *The Divine Flesh* have already been sold for adaptation into a graphic novel, Netflix series, video game, and theatrical production.

THE GRAND OPENING



Looking to make the most of his spirit medium partner's talents, a “ghost-phobic” private eye turns his small detective agency into a center for mortal contact with the nether realm focused on handling a myriad of supernatural cases.

Private eye Adam Hsieh, harassed by the spirit of his former tenant, a woman who had hung herself in her rented room, turns to gifted spirit-medium Wen Hsiao-Ching to help negotiate a way for both to coexist in peace. Ching's rounding success in that endeavor leads to their mutual business partnership in Spiritspeaker Studio, with Ching its Chief Investigator and Adam her assistant. The studio takes on all comers, providing various and sundry services including but not limited to finding long-lost pets.

The three-volume *Spiritspeaker Studio* series leads readers through the litany of oddball cases taken on by Ching and Adam. In the first volume, the duo investigate a malicious spirit haunting a mansion, a cryptic closet that bewitches its owners, a female ghost who roams the internet, a child spirit trapped in a cloth doll, and more. More than becalmed, these once-restless spirits are unshackled, after which they continue helping the investigators break important new cases and scare the pants off mortal miscreants. Seemingly inexplicable, however, is their continuous failure to locate a missing dog. “Where is that dog?...” is thus an intriguing enigma that “dogs” the pair throughout the series.

In this series, author Teensy weaves contemporary social issues into enduring urban legends and nativist myths. The bright, lively writing style, soulful protagonists, and array of uniquely talented ghosts and ghoulies combine to give readers a warmly satisfying sense of justice and closure.

SPIRITSPEAKER STUDIO, BOOK 1: THE GRAND OPENING

By Teensy

Translated by Cheng-Yi Tsai

“The concept of “ghost” in Taiwan goes beyond scary story characters and earthbound souls to embrace the idea of life persisting in another form. Thus, the ghostly characters in this archetypal work of Taiwanese paranormal fiction seek assistance rather than salvation from the mortal realm to end their earthly encumbrance. This is the solid foundation that underpins the ghost-mortal relationship in *Spiritspeaker Studio*. ”

Across the ages, ghost stories have offered a platform for raising and discussing difficult social and human issues, shining hope into life’s darker corners, and speaking out for justice. In *Spiritspeaker Studio*, spirit-permeated smartphones add an interesting new twist on the human-ghost relationship in an expansive story revolving around the trials and tribulations of dysfunctional families and the issue of sexual predation, the latter of which leads readers smoothly into Book 2.

— Lu Djin (Writer) / Translated by Jeff Miller

Case #01: The Million-Dollar Villa

This was our first case. It may in fact be one of our most important.

Mr. Adam Hsieh, the CEO of our studio – that is to say, I myself – will be recording it in its entirety.

This case has us traveling to a villa to exorcize a spirit that has been haunting it for decades...to send it along its way...to send it to where it belongs—

The sky, dripping a faint flow of rain, was gray and overcast.

Umbrella in hand, Hsieh Chu-Kung stood at the end of the street in a little neighborhood halfway up the hill. Muttering into the recorder pen in his hand, he set his eyes upon the gloomy villa he’d been called to.

“Chief Negotiator Hsiao-Ching and I are now just outside the villa. It’s not much of a looker, just

an ordinary single-family residence really, but it’s on very valuable land in Yangmingshan and has its own yard and basement. Probably worth more than three million...more than the house Dad left me, that’s for sure.”

To the side, clutching her umbrella, Wen Hsiao-Ching took out a bunch of keys on a key ring from her pocket. A few bold steps and a push took her past the gate hanging ajar and into the yard.

“Wait! I’m not done yet!” Chu-Kung hurried after her. A sudden sense of cold dread engulfed him as soon as he stepped into the front yard, eliciting an involuntary shiver.

“My goodness...this must be what Chi meant when he said this place makes him quiver!” Scared, Chu-Kung rushed after Hsiao-Ching and followed her as she walked to the main door beneath the eaves. Closing his umbrella, he continued to speak into his recorder.

"Chi is an old friend of mine. We met during high school, and he's now working as a real estate agent. He's the one who referred this case to me.

"The client is a distant relative of his...much older. Six months ago, the client's father passed away and bequeathed his house to the client, so he asked Chi to sell it for him. Chi came here to the villa three times. The first time, he got really ill afterwards. The second time, he broke his arm. The third time, he saw the dead grandfather of that cousin of his, ran away screaming, and crashed his car on the way home..."

"How come all of the keys here look the same?" Hsiao-Ching complained impatiently as she tried and failed to find the right key to the door among the many on the key ring. "You said your friend has been here many times. How come he didn't label the keys?"

"Here, let me help." As if anticipating her complaint, Chu-Kung left his umbrella by the door and took the jingling keys from Hsiao-Ching. He continued to speak into his recorder pen. "Every time Chi visited the house, he would prepare label stickers beforehand, but they would always blacken and peel off as if they'd been burned after he left."

Pausing for a moment, he let go of the recorder and took out a sheet of label stickers with door names like "wall gate" and "main door" written on them. He picked out keys and tried them in the keyhole one by one, resuming his recording in the meantime.

"Chi's distant cousin's grandfather..."

Chu-Kung paused and turned to Hsiao-Ching. "A distant cousin's father and grandfather...What should I call them?"

"It's *his* distant cousin, what does it matter what *you* call him?" Hsiao-Ching rolled her eyes at him and added, "Call him 'old man' if you like him or 'old coot' if you don't, I don't really care."

"Show some respect for the dead!"

Chu-Kung gave her a nervous glare and resumed recording.

"At any rate, Chi's cousin's grandfather...the 'old man'...He was a successful businessman in his youth and made quite a fortune. But then his wife died in an accident, and he was never the same afterwards. He got involved in esotericism, sold a lot of his properties, and fell out with his son—"

The old man's son offered to take over his business and he agreed. However, his son lacked his talent, and the company was on the verge of collapse after only a few years. The old man's son had to ask him for bailouts repeatedly. After selling some of his properties for that purpose, he soon stopped as bailouts simply led to more bailouts. As a consequence, the two of them fell out.

At that point the old man stopped bothering with shaving and taking care of his appearance. His neighbors and friends started calling him "The Ascetic" because of his appearance and lifestyle. But his old business rivals settled on just calling him crazy.

The Ascetic stopped bailing out his son and refused to save the company he had built with his own hands. Instead, he spent the remainder of his fortune on mysterious artifacts and curios, believing that his collection possessed powers beyond the mortal ken. He would tell everyone he was immortal and could return his dead wife to life.

Many years later, The Ascetic was found dead on his own bed. By the time he was discovered, nothing was left of his body but bones. They were not even sure exactly when he had passed away. The one who had discovered his body was an experienced burglar. Exactly what he saw during that burglary would forever remain a mystery, but he gave himself up to the police holding a piece of femur in his hands and staring ahead blankly in a daze. It was said he had remained so for a long time afterwards...even well into serving his sentence.

Clack. The door was now unlocked. Withdrawing the key, Chu-Kung politely gestured to Hsiao-Ching to enter the building.

She left her umbrella outside and pushed her way silently past the door. The furniture in the living room on the first floor, antique in appearance, was visibly buried under thick layers of dust. Following closely behind, Chu-Kung continued his recording in a low voice.

"After the funeral, the old man's son wanted to get rid of the house, but it just wouldn't sell no matter how hard he tried....For a decade, the situation continued

like that without any change. Before dying of cancer, his son told Chi's cousin, his own son, that the old man's ghost still haunted that house. He shouldn't try sell it, or else he'd suffer misfortune and illness as well. Chi's cousin, thinking his father to be simply not in his right mind in his last moments, put the house on the market immediately after his father's death. However, accidents happened each time realtors brought customers to the house. Sometimes, prospective buyers would suffer headaches and start vomiting. Other times, they would encounter an 'accident' on the stairway. Realtors never managed to close a deal on the property. In the end, Chi's cousin asked Chi to handle the case, which is where we come in..."

Chu-Kung paused and took a deep breath before continuing.

"In any case, Chi's cousin, that is to say our client, offered us a very good deal. He doesn't care how we do it, but, on top of our consultation fee, he'll pay us a commission equal to five percent of the selling price if we can sell his house. Damn! Five percent of three million dollars! That's way more money than what I made investigating adultery cases!"

"You're really loud and distracting," remarked Hsiao-Ching as she glared at Chu-Kung with a frown. "Who even records their cases this way anyway? Do you think this is your diary or something?"

"This is just how I like to do it..." Chu-Kung reluctantly put away the recorder pen after marking down the time and date. "Alright, you can start now."

Standing at the center of the living room, Hsiao-Ching's head swiveled around until, at last, her gaze settled on the ceiling.

"Is the old man upstairs?" Chu-Kung crept up behind her and raised his head to follow her eyes.

"You're too close," said Hsiao-Ching with a frown. She scooted away from him and pointed to the front yard door. "If you're so afraid, why don't you just wait outside?"

"What do you mean, afraid? What makes you think I'm afraid?" Grunting in annoyance, Chu-Kung pointed to the stairs leading to the second floor. "Are you going up right now?"

"I sure am," Hsiao-Ching said as she strode towards the stairs. Chu-Kung hesitated and did not follow her. As the distance between them grew, the air began to feel colder and more oppressive. Fear struck him, and he ran to where she was.

"Hsiao-Ching, something isn't right..."

"What isn't right?"

"Your Field, it seems to have shrunk in this building..." Chu-Kung stammered. "Does that mean the old man is rougher than Fen?"

"The old man upstairs *is* pretty rough. Fen isn't rough at all, though," Hsiao-Ching remarked nonchalantly. "Anyway, it's all the same to me."

The two of them reached the second floor. Chu-Kung gasped: The silhouette of something tall and dark could just barely be seen through the door to the main bedroom, hanging ajar. The black shadow looked like a giant bowing down to peer outside. In its head were two faint stars of shining red light, looking like a pair of eyes.

Intimidated by the palpable aura of dread exuded by the massive dark shadow, Chu-Kung shuddered and could only meekly follow along as Hsiao-Ching walked towards it, seemingly without a care.

She pushed the door open. A gust of chill wind carrying an eerie scent of putrescence rushed forth from the room. Scared beyond his limits, Chu-Kung grabbed Hsiao-Ching's arm and stammered, "Give... give me two minutes, I'm not ready for this yet..."

"..." Hsiao-Ching glanced down at his trembling legs and told him, "I'll go in by myself, then. You wait outside."

"Huh?" Chu-Kung, eyes squinting and head lowered as if to avoid the crimson gaze of the giant shadow in the room, asked frightfully, "By yourself... will you be okay?"

"I'll be fine." Hsiao-Ching shrugged. "I'm more worried about you getting scared to death."

"If I stay just outside the door..." Chu-Kung thought visibly. "Will I still be within your Field?"

"Probably." Hsiao-Ching paused and said, "Close the door after I enter the room. I'll stay as close as I can to the door, and we'll be close enough if you keep your

back to the door. Does that make you feel better?"

"Yeah..." Chu-Kung nervously nodded. He was about to say more, but Hsiao-Ching had already gone into the room and closed the door behind her.

He quickly turned around and pressed his back against the door. Hugging himself but still shivering, Chu-Kung muttered ashamedly, "Come on, Adam Hsieh, be a man! Did you practice judo for ten years just to let a girl negotiate with a ghost all by herself while you hang around outside? Isn't James Bond your idol? Would James Bond let his girl go deal with ghosts while he cowers behind her?"

Having engaged in some self-recrimination, Chu-Kung began to look for excuses for his actions. "Still, you can't exactly fight ghosts with judo. James Bond never had to fight ghosts either. I'm not like Hsiao-Ching...She has nothing to fear from ghosts thanks to her natural talents. She's really a one-of-a-kind negotiator with the supernatural..."

As he muttered, he could faintly see smoldering ashes dancing in the corridor ahead. The air had become distorted, as if in a mirage. At the same time, a semicircular bubble a couple of meters wide shimmered into being around him. Inside this bubble everything was normal...with neither ashes in the wind nor mirages in the air.

This bubble was Hsiao-Ching's Field. Chu-Kung knew he would be absolutely safe as long as he stayed inside.

Taking a deep breath, he took out his recorder pen, swallowed, and began to speak. "Now, our chief negotiator has entered the room and begun official negotiations with the old man. I wonder what they're talking about right now? We'll have to ask Hsiao-Ching after she comes out...Oh, what am I even talking about? Am I even recording the case anymore? I can't record anything while outside that room! Calm down, calm down! I'm Adam Hsieh, CEO of this studio! Right...I should talk about how our studio came into being. That whole thing with Fen sort of counts as a case too, so I should put that on the record as well."

Chu-Kung cleared his throat and continued to speak. "Three months ago, we weren't called

Spiritspeaker Studio yet. We were known as Adam Investigation Services."

Hsieh Chu-Kung, CEO of Adam Investigation Services, didn't like his birth name, so he usually went by his English name, Adam. One year ago, Chu-Kung quit his job at an investigation agency and moved into the house his deceased father left him. He had name cards printed, ordered a billboard, bought online advertising, and established Adam Investigation Services, with himself as its senior investigator and CEO.

He had worked on only four cases during those first six months...two adulteries, one missing person, and one missing puppy. Three out of the four were resolved. They still haven't found that puppy.

To earn some extra money, he leased out the main bedroom he was using as his office. The tenant was Fen, a young, pretty college student. Soft-spoken and always smiling, Fen would often cook an extra portion for Chu-Kung when she made meals on weekends. He secretly imagined something romantic might happen between them.

Two months later, she committed suicide...hanging herself on a beam by the door to her room.

Preliminary investigations by the police eliminated Chu-Kung as a suspect. In addition to his multi-day trips out of town in search of that puppy...the suicide note, Fen's diary, plus the messages between her and her family painted a clear picture of the circumstances behind her suicide.

老梅謠卷一：血色童謠

THE BLOODY OLD PLUM, VOL. 1



Flo

芙蘿

-
- **Category:** Horror
 - **Publisher:** Showwe Information
 - **Date:** 2/2024 (Vol. 1), 7/2024 (Vol. 2), 1/2025 (Vol. 3), TBC (Vol. 4)
 - **Pages:** 314 (Vol. 1), 240 (Vol. 2), 286 (Vol. 3), TBC (Vol.4)
 - **Length:**
Vol. 1: 122,687 characters
(approx. 80,000 words in English)
Vol. 2: 84,227 characters
(approx. 55,000 words in English)
Vol. 3: 100,854 characters
(approx. 66,000 words in English)
Vol. 4: TBC
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Mystery Writers of Taiwan member Flo is a popular internet author with a passion for major criminal cases, the forensic sciences, and forensic medicine. She is adept at weaving her extensive knowledge and technical acumen into her creative works that currently span paranormal thriller, mystery and suspense, and fantasy adventure genres. The four-volume *The Bloody Old Plum* ranks as one of Flo's most critically acclaimed works to date.



A magician and part-time cold-case investigator joins up with a spirit medium to investigate the origins of a creepy nursery rhyme and ghastly legend told by the residents of a picturesque coastal village. What they find is more appalling and dangerous than either could have imagined.

The sleepy north coast village of Old Plum, famed for its windswept, wave-worn sandstone topography, is internet author Flo's inspirational muse behind this wide-ranging four-volume fantasy horror story in *The Bloody Old Plum*. The book opens with a tale of a deceptively innocent nursery rhyme with a sinister backstory.

Wu Chang, a magician by trade, has a passion for investigating unsolved murder mysteries in his off-hours. After discovering a deeper, curiously dark meaning in the lyrics of an obscure lullaby, Wu teams up with local tour guide and medium Wang I-Chieh to visit Old Plum Village, the source of the children's song. There, however, they quickly find the veil of mystery to be thicker even than the fog that regularly blankets the village. Threatened by mysterious shadows stalking them in the fog, they beat a hasty, albeit temporary, retreat.

Far from discouraged, their odd encounters in Old Plum only pique Wu's curiosity further. He invests in state-of-the-art special equipment and brushes up on local historical knowledge to prepare for a second visit. Comparing his findings with clues woven into the nursery rhyme, Wu learns that the long-abandoned mansion standing where the fog was always thickest is the former home of the local Chen clan – and the site of their brutal massacre.

While preparing their return to Old Plum, a local policeman implores them to end their investigation, saying a survivor had told that on the night the fog appeared, all it touched had perished. Moreover, he tells them the unnatural fog that blankets the property even by day is an otherworldly warning to the curious...and that those foolish enough to enter the decrepit mansion are never seen again.

Flo injects distinctively Eastern fantasy elements into a horror story rooted in the pain of unrequited injustice. The staccato tempo of the narrative and the story's sudden twists and turns underpin this work's novel treatment of Taiwan's infamous White Terror Era.

THE BLOODY OLD PLUM, VOL. 1

By Flo

Translated by Sahana Narayan

“A recent murder brings to light a forgotten, decades-old injustice. Weaving together past and present with folktales and ghost stories, the author stokes the overall air of mystery while painting a true-to-life picture of life in Taiwan under autocratic rule during the White Terror period.

The meticulous treatment of the story's milieu wraps readers in authentic local and historical texture. The narrative, following the decline and destruction of an once wealthy and influential family, artfully tracks Taiwan's changing fortunes between the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. The rigorous and imaginative treatment given to the two “worlds” of the Yin and Yang and the Taoist magic of the protagonist further fuel reader anticipation about the adventures ahead on the path to solving this long-dead, ostensibly unsolvable case.

— Lu Djin (Writer) / Translated by Jeff Miller

Chapter One: The Macabre Chant

*Old plum, old plum, how many sprouts? No branches,
no leaves, nine flowers about. When mama moon
hides, don't go out; bolt the windows shut.*

*Green leaf, green leaf, how long green? Turns
to spring with cool jade sheen. When storms come,
don't swim about; tides rise on green reef and life
goes out.*

*Waterwheel, waterwheel, when will you stop?
Bamboo can't lead when water runs out. As dawn
brings fire, stone turns gold; cries without shadows in
the night.*

*Gold mountain, gold mountain how much gold?
Only the Chen clan really knows. On New Year's Eve,
don't come near; the faceless ghost of the house will
kill you mercilessly.*

Old Plum Village was located on Chi Ching Island, along the coast north of Hsün Hsiang City.

Originally a sleepy town, it'd gained popularity in recent years for a gorgeous formation of sea-eroded rock known as “Old Plum Reef”. Photographers and tourists now flock to the spot, posting their pictures on social media.

But for Wang I-Chieh, a local guide, Old Plum was more than just a beautiful place. The creepy chant and its accompanying legend shrouded the peaceful village in a veil of mystery.

The long-term residents of the village know the chant. They teach it to their kids, as a warning. The kids say it when they're bored. When they play hide-and-seek, the seeker recites it before setting out.

I-Chieh wondered if the song was really appropriate for kids. Sure, it served to keep them in line, but the lyrics were dark, hinting at a horrible tale. Wouldn't they have nightmares? She, along with the other local guides, called it “the legend of Old Plum” – but the locals called it “the faceless ghost”.

According to the legend, one stormy night,

someone was murdered, their face disfigured. The murderer was never caught. Ever since, on rainy nights a faceless ghost appears, roaming the village, murdering people and destroying their faces. The legend has evolved over the years to include another dreadful twist: A murderer who disfigures their victim's body and abandons it at the reef shall never be brought to account for their crime.

And so, "the faceless ghost" has become a daily sign of terror for the locals. The elders often warn naughty children: "If you keep up like this, the faceless ghost will come for you!"

There was only one man who didn't believe the legend. His name was Wu Chang.

Tall and refined, born to French and Taiwanese parents, Wu Chang was an internationally renowned magician who solved crime in his spare time. On his many world tours, he'd established strong connections with police departments in different countries and had fostered especially tight bonds with the police chiefs on Chi Ching Island. His past was a mystery to everyone, except for Captain Yang Chih-Kang of the Ninth Criminal Investigative Unit.

Sitting across from I-Chieh, Wu Chang flipped a coin between his long, dexterous fingers. He said, "Dead men tell no tales, but songs betray volumes - *as long as you listen for the music beyond the strings.*"

The two, along with Chih-Kang, had become involved recently in a case at the Golden Sands Resort. A client on one of I-Chieh's tours had died under mysterious circumstances. They pieced the case together, unveiling the truth and gradually becoming familiar with one another in the process.

During the case, Wu Chang learned of the creepy chant, and heard the music beyond the strings. It was the killer himself, after they'd caught and bound him, who had told Wu Chang the legend of the faceless ghost. Seeing a connection between the rhyme and the legend, he decided to come to Old Plum and investigate the secrets possibly hidden there.

I-Chieh was delicate and petite, with clear skin and big, round eyes. She scrutinized the slip of paper, looking over its lyrics for the millionth time. "I

really don't understand what you're looking at. You really think there's something hidden here?"

She tilted her head, her bangs and high ponytail falling to one side, thinking for a second. "Are you and Chih-Kang messing with me? This feels like some sort of weird prank."

"Of course there's something hidden," said Wu Chang. "At the very least, there was a murder. I'm sure of it."

"That's ridiculous! But wait...another murder? Even if there was a murder, ages must have passed since. What's the point of investigating when we're not gonna find anything?"

"If we don't try, how will we know? Besides, we have you."

"Honestly, I feel dumb as hell around you guys. Your abilities make me question my self worth," she complained.

"But you can see spirits; I can't."

"Who am I, the legendary Judge Pao?" she shot back. "I'm terrified of ghosts, how am I supposed to help...let alone become some sort of paranormal investigator?"

"If I'm not mistaken, this is an unsolved crime. You have the power to set things right. Don't you want justice for the victims?"

"Ugh, don't guilt trip me! Besides, now that the Golden Sands case is wrapped up, the restrictions on tours will be lifted. I'll go back to being a tour guide and won't have time for you."

"No matter." Wu Chang's eyes were a deep indigo. His body radiated a sense of dangerous mystery. And yet, he seemed calm, at ease. His nimble fingers continued to play with the coin. "After all, in this world, there are so many whose deaths remain unspoken for."

There was a splutter as I-Chieh spat her half-drunk hot tea onto Wu Chang's face.

He froze in place. The coin dropped from his hands, clinking against the marble tile floor and rolling under a coffee table.

"Oh my god, I'm SO sorry!" I-Chieh grabbed a wad of tissue and started to wipe at his face.

"Master Wu, are you alright?" Liao, the butler, popped in from the kitchen, holding a fruit knife.

Wu Chiang brushed the tea off his face. "I'm okay. Get back to work." He got up in a huff and headed off to the bathroom, pointedly ignoring I-Chieh.

I-Chieh stared awkwardly at Wu Chang's receding figure, contritely wiping the sofa.

"What should I do? This couch is such a light suede; I'll never be able to get the stains out." She looked helplessly at the butler.

"Just buy a new one." Wu Chang said as he left, slamming the door behind him.

"I-I-I'm...so sorry!" I-Chieh said as she bowed to the butler.

"It's no problem, I'll sort it out. Please sit. Have some fruit." he answered.

I-Chieh picked the coin up from under the coffee table. She started to play with it, mimicking Wu Chang's movements, emotions swirling about her.

The last couple days had been one problem after another. First, someone in her tour group had died, then she'd encountered a ghost, and then there were the police requests...accompanying them to the crime scene, identifying the body. It was all so much! She didn't want anything more to do with it, especially with there being corpses and spirits involved.

Yet at the same time, if it weren't for the guidance of the spirits, would the case have been cracked so quickly? Would the murderer have given himself up so easily?

What if Wu Chang was right? If only there were a safe and easy way to help out.

Just as Wu Chang emerged from the bathroom, a solution popped into I-Chieh's head.

"Wu Chang! I know what to do!"

She paused and looked. Wu Chang was wearing a white bathrobe. I-Chieh was a little disappointed; she was hoping he'd be wearing a towel, exposing his rippling abs.

"Yes?" He dried his short, black hair with a towel.

"Let's figure out if there really was a murder first. If so, *then* we can launch an investigation."

"As I said, there was a murder. I'm sure of it."

"That might not be true. Let's at least think about where to start looking, okay?"

"There's no need; the lyrics make it very clear," he said, impatient. He looked at her with supreme disappointment, the way her father looked at their family dog as it failed to do a trick for the umpteenth time.

"Okay, sure...whatever...You're the super-special once-in-a-lifetime genius blah blah blah..." she grumbled. "So what's so special about these lines? It doesn't always rhyme, but sometimes nursery rhymes are just like that. You sing it anyhow. The lyrics make no sense though."

"No, it's not the rhyme; it's the structure."

"The whole thing?" I-Chieh scrutinized the lyrics again.

Wu Chang went on. "Have you noticed? This chant has four sections. In three, the first sentence of the second line ends in three words: a negative particle followed by a phrasal verb. Only one section ignores this rule: *stone turns gold*."

"So? It might just be an exception. So, what about those 'three ending words'? *As dawn brings fire, stone turns gold*. Doesn't that just mean sunlight makes the stones look golden?"

"You can also read it as, when police arrive at the crime scene with their lanterns, the murderer has already hidden their metal weapon in a place once used for storing stones or perhaps under a rock."

"Isn't that kind of dark for a children's rhyme?" I-Chieh had a bad feeling about this.

"It's pretty dark to start with."

"But, if you're right, the person who came up with both the rhyme and the legend would have known about the murderer and the murder weapon. Why didn't they tell the cops? Why was the murderer never caught? Why is there no trail to follow?"

Wu Chang shrugged and said, "They were probably afraid they'd be silenced." With that said, he turned his attention to the piping hot cup of coffee his butler had just brought him.

"So you're saying that if we stumble upon the truth, we might be...?!" Goosebumps broke out over

her skin. For some reason, her sense of foreboding was growing stronger and stronger...

Chapter Two: The Time Realm

Worldly writings do the scriptures contain, passed by witnesses through generations. Ink collects and becomes treasure, the mountain's secrets passed down forever.

In the final years of the Eastern Chin, a poor man named Liang succumbs to sickness. His wife mourns long; she seeks to die with him. His coffin stays in the hall for several days.

On night number seven, Liang's wife is at his side. Her tears, unceasing, take her close to death. Hearing a noise within she stops and runs; she gathers neighbors close to check inside.

As the coffin's lid is lifted, Liang sits up, breathing deeply. His wife weeps tears of joy as they embrace. The neighbors doubt, and Liang begins to sketch, his words a blur and pictures more than vague.

He regains life but can speak no longer, otherwise the same as before. The villagers declare a miracle, they often come to watch and give support.

Days after, Chang, a Taoist priest, pays a call. He says Liang's sketches aren't of this world. They map the boundaries of the chaos realm! To mortal's hands they will bring nought but harm.

Chang takes Liang's scrolls away for safekeeping, but his temple drowns in blood soon after, all inhabitants dead within a night, the scriptures taken, lost with nary a trace.

Upon this news, Liang, fearing without end, falls to the ground, unable to rise. Ever since, the path of resurrection has been lost.

The air hung with a thin mist that carried a hint of chill. I-Chieh could see a dimly lit street ahead. Streetlights in front of old apartment buildings flickered to life, as if to welcome her arrival, and yet even their light seemed hazy and cold. Shreds of newspaper on the ground fluttered and drifted in the occasional gusts of wind.

I-Chieh had no idea how she'd ended up here.

As she came to, she realized she was walking with a group of people. She had seen them before – but where? She saw confusion and terror on their faces. She, too, was gripped by fear...a fear stronger than theirs.

What exactly was she afraid of? She couldn't tell. Maybe it was the incense in her hand. Everyone had one. Where did they come from? What were they for? There was a blue light at its burning tip, and fluorescent green filled its center. It emitted a white smoke that was strangely cool. Even as it burned, it did not drop ashes. And its length stayed the same, as if time had come to a standstill. Perhaps the incense wasn't lit by flames.

She and the group were alone. No one knew where to go; no one dared leave each other. In wordless panic, everyone followed closely on each other's heels, searching for a sense of safety, ambling aimlessly down the quiet street.

Suddenly, a gust of wind. A voice rose from inside the group: "M-m-my incense is burning! So fast!"

Everyone turned to look at each other's incense. Some were burning very fast indeed. Some were still long, others dangerously short.

眾神之島

ISLAND OF A THOUSAND DEITIES



Kuang Feng 光風

- **Category:** Short Stories, Heart-Warming
 - **Publisher:** Gaea
 - **Date:** 1/2024 (Vol.1), 1/2025 (Vol.2)
 - **Pages:** 256 (Vol.1), 240 (Vol.2)
 - **Length:**
Vol. 1: 75,927 characters
(approx. 50,000 words in English)
Vol. 2: 66,655 characters
(approx. 43,000 words in English)
 - **Full English Manuscript for Volume 1 Available**
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Born in 1989, full-time creative Kuang Feng enjoys drawing, travel, and petting cats. Her novel *The Suncake Pastry Shop* has been translated into Thai, Polish, Italian, Spanish and French editions. Her picture book, *Purple in Flight*, centers on conservation efforts targeted at protecting the dwarf crow butterfly (*Euploea tulliolus*) in Taiwan. Kuang Feng is the recipient of numerous local literary awards, and *Island of a Thousand Deities* is her latest creative effort.



This collection of six short stories delightfully sifts through the dreams and miracles that, still, discretely persist in modern Taiwan's "everyday".

Despite the myriad of temples still dominating both rural and urban landscapes, many in Taiwan's younger generations today feel disconnected from traditional beliefs. Drawing on her love of temple culture, author Kuang Feng brings to her readers this warmly personal collection of fantasy fiction short stories rooted in the reputed characteristics, powers and personalities of the gods that inhabit Taiwan's folk religious pantheon.

The two stories written from a deity's perspective present celestials with personalities not dissimilar to modern-day professionals in search of acknowledgement and respect. As a home guardian deity, Tē-ki-tsú wants nothing more than for a mortal supplicant to set a chicken leg lunchbox on the altar, while a movie-crazed deity enamored with *Shawshank Redemption* flies into a jealous rage over Marvel Studio's *Thor*.

Another two of the stories insert deities into family drama. In one, a single father perplexed by his daughter's refusal to return to school turns to the Divine Farmer for heavenly advice, while in the other, a reclusive family of four find themselves the unwitting host of the itinerant Nine-Village Mazu. Although these celestials don't directly resolve these mortals' everyday problems, the changes induced have undeniably soothing effects.

For the skeptic in all of us, the remaining two stories center on the offbeat journeys of two timeworn individuals. The first embarks on an adventure to repay a debt of gratitude, while the second centers on the experiences of a temple abbot who has never once witnessed what he could call a "miracle". Straightforward without being "preachy", these stories are honest and poignant.

Taiwan's plethora of deities reflect the manifold hopes and dreams of its people. In this collection, Taiwan's folk religious heritage is shown to be far more than a means to an end. Indeed, compassionate heavenly oversight is to be welcomed as long as human kindness and empathy persist. Kuang Feng looks forward to further developing *Island of a Thousand Deities* into a multivolume series.

ISLAND OF A THOUSAND DEITIES

By Kuang Feng

Translated by Catherine Xinxin Yu

“Despite the ubiquity of temples in Taiwan and the palpable influence of “religion” in everyday life, most Taiwanese have only a surface-level understanding of the manifold gods that inhabit the heavenlies: Pray to Earth God for good fortune, to Baosheng Dadi for good health, to Yuelao for a good life partner... and so on. *Island of a Thousand Deities* is a modern guide to Taiwan’s gods, folk religions, and local culture that offers a path forward for gods and humans to find common ground and coexistence in the twenty-first century.

Taking both immortal and mortal perspectives, *Island of a Thousand Deities* relays down-to-earth stories that clarify the intricate web binding local tradition, history, culture, and society together. What is most touching is how this book conveys the hopes and dreams across centuries of political and social upheaval of those who call Taiwan home. Here, Taiwan’s gods, neither aloof nor all-powerful, are remarkably “human” – anxious about being forgotten, eager for plumes of incense smoke, and longing for heartfelt sentiment.

— Chen Mo-An (Writer) / Translated by Jeff Miller

The Taste of Chicken Legs

In a time and space unknown to mortals, Empty 20 Ping hurries to attend Wealthy 85 Ping’s party. Deir face glows like never before thanks to a piece of good news that dei can’t wait to share.

“Someone is moving in! SOMEONE IS MOVING IN!” Empty 20 Ping keeps repeating, both inwardly and aloud, fearing dei might get nervous on the spot and fail to proclaim the news with due fanfare. When it comes to the Wealthy Pings, you will get snubbed if you speak dully. Their favorite topics are their residents’ gossip and quirks, secrets to becoming and staying rich, and which takeaway place serves up the most delicious chicken legs. I hope they don’t talk about chicken legs today, Empty 20 Ping thinks to demself, annoyedly.

The party is being held just one block away from Empty 20 Ping’s house. The building, designed by a famous architect, is an outlandish skyscraper with luxury apartments that sell for sky-high prices. It’s in a prime location right next to the major arteries, but there’s a pedestrian pathway along its perimeter, which helps reduce the oppressive noise of passing traffic. What’s more, inside the areas concealed behind groves and fences are private gardens and eco-ponds where birds and frogs take turns performing by day and by night. But the most eye-catching things about this luxury condominium are its exterior covered in hundreds of blue glass panes and its impressive seventeen-floor height. It seems to have been designed to ensure sunshine hits it from every possible angle, making it brightly visible within a three-kilometer radius. Due to its colossal size, older apartments and

small houses nearby are regularly engulfed in its shadow for some period of time each day. It wouldn't be an overstatement to call it the landmark monster of the district.

Before entering the Monster, Empty 20 Ping straightens deir black gauze hat (the rounded flaps on both sides as tiny as a hummingbird wing), beats a light coat of dust off deir pale green uniform (a green that seems to have devolved in recent years into more of a nonreflective gray hue), shakes bits and bobs out of deir shoes (last time, dei left behind sand and gravel wherever dei set foot, which flabbergasted the Wealthy Pings), and, finally, tries to smooth out the impossible wrinkles in deir hem.

Dei take a deep breath and push the door open.

Every visit feels like the first time. It may indeed be impossible to ever *not* be bowled over by the glamor inside. Wealthy 85 Ping's home is located in the penthouse of the luxury condominium. Inside the 85-ping space, every inch of decorable surface is gilded, and every point of entry for natural light has been transformed into floor-to-ceiling windows. Sparkles created by natural light glancing off the interior gilding flit across the peonies on blue-and-white ware, dance on the faces of ladies in contemporary masterpieces, fall on the auspicious dragons' tails fashioned of colored glass, and shine in the rainbows refracted by the crystal chandeliers. Sparkles beget even more sparkles, turning the space into a lake of rippling gold.

Wealthy 85 Ping sits on a sofa in the middle of this golden lake surrounded by an inner circle of the other Wealthy Pings, then a circle of Mid Pings and Pro Pings, and finally an outer halo of Empty Pings.

Tē-ki-tsú, or household deities, are generally small in stature, slightly over a meter tall. If mortals could see them, they would likely mistake them for a gathering of primary school pupils bedecked for some reason in ancient Chinese costumes. With their little bodies and stubby limbs, they sit snuggled together on the sofa like sparrows. Behind them, the whole city is framed within one of the floor-to-ceiling windows.

Here's a little-known fact. These deities are true to their names. They're named after the properties they watch over, which are divided into four categories depending on the wealth of the household: Wealthy,

Middle Class, Professionals, and Low Income. This is then followed by the property size measured in ping – each ping is about 3.3 square meters or 35.6 square feet. The smaller the property and the poorer the household, the lower the deity's status. But the most pitiable of the tē-ki-tsú are not those looking after poor residents or tiny homes, but rather those assigned to empty properties.

As far as Empty 20 Ping can remember, dei have always guarded an empty home. There's nothing wrong with the house, and it's not like nobody's interested in it, but the eccentric owner never moved in or rented it out after furnishing the place. It's been vacant for almost a decade. As a result, Empty 20 Ping began to look as shabby and lifeless as the deserted home under deir charge.

Mid 20 Ping, who has already found a seat, sees Empty 20 Ping and waves to dem to show that dei have reserved a square stool for dem.

As soon as Empty 20 Ping sits down, Wealthy 85 Ping begins deir speech in a slow voice, "Blessed be the chicken legs!"

The other tē-ki-tsú immediately repeat after dem. This is their favorite opening statement.

"Speaking of chicken legs, I will never forget what Snooty offered up on the day he moved in." Wealthy 85 Ping closes deir eyes and chews the air, as if dei are savoring the chicken leg quarter in deir memory.

Snooty is the nickname Wealthy 85 Ping gave deir resident. Although his extraordinarily large schnoz made him the butt of jokes as a child, it later proved to be an excellent physiognomic feature...an augur of wealth. Indeed, the speculative real estate investments he made at forty landed him more money than he could ever spend. So, he bought this luxury penthouse and became an instant neighbor of distinguished politicians and tycoons.

Empty 20 Ping can almost recite verbatim what Wealthy 85 Ping is about to say. "Snooty bought chicken legs from the oldest and most famous shop on Linsen Road! They marinate them for three whole days, so the meat soaks up the soy sauce, turning it a beautiful autumnal caramel color. It's packed with flavor and umami and it's tender and juicy. I can eat a hundred of those in one sitting, no problem!"

Those tē-ki-tsú fortunate enough to have tasted chicken legs from the same shop nod in unison, but they also complain about the long wait for orders...at least an hour. So, their residents have been switching to other shops. Are chicken legs from other shops not tasty? Not exactly. Each shop has its signature touch, with some adding rock sugar and herbal ingredients to the marinade, while others use select extra-large chicken legs. But none of them is on a par with the one on Linsen Road, which is considered hands down the best of the best.

"It all comes back to devotion. They should wait in line no matter how long it takes, given they only make offerings a few times a year, isn't that so?" Wealthy 85 Ping can barely hide deir smugness when dei say this.

The number of offerings made each year differs from family to family. Some observe all important festivals and make offerings to tē-ki-tsú on Lunar New Year's Eve, Lantern Festival, Tomb Sweeping Day, Dragon Boat Festival, Ghost Festival, Mid-Autumn Day, Double Ninth Festival, and Winter Solstice, while others cut it down to New Year's Eve and Ghost Festival only. Then there are a rare few exceptionally devout families who duly perform the ritual on the first and fifteenth, or the second and sixteenth, of every lunar month. In addition to regular offerings, residents also have to inform the tē-ki-tsú when they move into and out of a property.

All the tē-ki-tsú know perfectly that even though Snooty makes offerings only a few times a year, he certainly doesn't line up to buy the chicken legs himself. All he needs to do is pull out some bills, and plenty of people are suddenly available to handle the matter for him. Hiring people to wait in line probably costs several times the price of the chicken legs.

Once Wealthy 85 Ping has finished saying what dei wanted to say, dei courteously let the other Wealthy Pings speak and share remembrances of deir first bite of chicken leg. In the past, Empty 20 Ping would listen most reverently to deir discussions, in which dei couldn't participate. But today, dei can barely contain deir excitement and has to fight the urge to butt in a few times.

Finally, the Wealthy Pings finish giving their chicken leg sermons. Wealthy 85 Ping proceeds to ask, without hiding deir boredom, "Alright then, I suppose nobody else has anything to announce?"

Empty 20 Ping's hand shoots up like bubbles bursting from a shaken coke bottle, attracting the gaze of all the tē-ki-tsú present. As such, Wealthy 85 Ping can't ignore dem.

"Speak then."

"Someone is moving in!" Dei announce in a voice several times bigger than deir stature. Those six short syllables echo in the luxury apartment, and the booming soundwaves even seem to have shifted the fishtank a little.

Wealthy 85 Ping picks deir ear and says in deir usual apathetic voice, "Well, congratulations, Empty Ping. I suppose that means you won't have sand in your shoes anymore."

"That's right! And I can enjoy chicken legs!" Oblivious to Wealthy 85 Ping's sarcasm, Empty 20 Ping basks in the other Empty Ping's envious gaze and wallows in the joyful thought of finally being able to taste a chicken leg soon.

"Excellent. Well, I'll let you speak about your chicken leg next time." Wealthy 85 Ping yawns and waves deir hand to signal the end of the gathering. The tē-ki-tsú may now return to their homes.

Empty 20 Ping hums cheerfully on deir way home, but Mid 20 Ping intercepts dem somewhat apprehensively.

"I don't want you to be disappointed, so I have to warn you they might not offer chicken legs. They might get you a pork rib bento instead, or something vegetarian, or they might not even make an offering. Take Hua for example, she doesn't even believe we exist at all."

Mid 20 Ping and Empty 20 Ping are best friends. They took up their posts on the same day, live close by each other, and have the same property size. Mid 20 Ping often invites Empty 20 Ping to deir place, so Empty 20 Ping fully knows that Mid 20 Ping has watched over three batches of residents. The previous ones used to make offerings to the tē-ki-tsú, but the

current resident, Hua, is a young artist and devout Christian who says her morning and evening amens every day. She only believes in one omniscient God. Even so, Mid 20 Ping still guards her home dutifully, without the slightest negligence or resentment.

"I know." Empty 20 Ping's steps suddenly become heavier. "But it's hard to say! Who knows if the new resident won't be someone who buys chicken legs from Linsen Road?"

"Don't get your hopes too high just yet." Mid 20 Ping quickly replies, sounding even more worried.

Has Empty 20 Ping no right to be excited? Dei remember the solitary days at home alone, when dei would use dusty windows and desktops as paper, and deir fingertips as a writing brush to draw lonely noughts and crosses, game after game. Dei were always the winner and always the loser. Dei would also look out the window to gaze at other families' lamplight and shadows, listen to their muffled chatter, and hear dogs barking out excited welcomes to their returning humans. All this would make dem laugh and make dem cry. Those lonesome days taught dem to look forward to the future, which must be better. Deir home will have people and dogs and cats, and chicken legs will be offered up with prayers, so that dei too can speak proudly at tē-ki-tsú gatherings. Surely...surely such a future will come.

Dei are firm in deir faith, but dei are also afraid. What if things are not like how dei imagined, then what? What if, like Mid 20 Ping said, the new residents don't make offerings? Is such a future worth looking forward to?

No, no, dei have waited for ten years already. It is time for deir stroke of luck to come!

Like a defense mechanism, years of accumulated loneliness and fear surge up and mutate into another kind of energy. Dei shiver with anger. "You! You're just jealous of me because Hua doesn't buy you chicken legs! Just you wait! I'll definitely be having chicken legs this time...from Linsen Road too! Everyone will be jealous of me!"

Without waiting for Mid 20 Ping to reply, Empty 20 Ping shakes deir arms forcefully and throws open the

door with the air current from deir wide sleeves. Dei jump in without looking back and slide inside, stirring up puffs of dust that fill the air. Dei sit vacantly in that deserted space for a long time, waiting for the swirling dust to slowly settle.

*

Soon, the home takes on a new look. Two cleaners hired by the new residents open up all the windows, allowing the wind to sweep away the stagnant air. Dust erupts from every corner. Using dust mops and vacuum cleaners, the cleaning ladies carefully dust the floor, walls, and every nook and cranny. It looked like they were shoveling out of a deep snowfall. Next, they divide up the tasks – one wipes all the furniture and applies a coat of protective oil if needed while the other removes the window screens and rinses off the black dirt accumulated over the years. They vacuum the floor once again to make sure every speck of dust has been accounted for and removed and then spread a thin layer of water across the floor with mops. In an instant, like parched skin soaking up toner, the house begins to breathe again and comes back to life.

Meanwhile, Empty 20 Ping is experiencing a transformation as well. Deir official robe returns to its original fresh green color, deir dark gauze hat is once again shiny black, and deir shoes are no longer a magnet for grit and gravel! Dei wave deir wide sleeves blissfully and spin around in the clean, quiet house, feeling incredibly fresh and light.

But dei are even more excited about the residents who will soon move in. When will they come? What kind of people are they? Dei wonder incessantly. If dei could, dei would even lay out a red carpet and prepare party poppers to give them the warmest welcome possible.

SEVEN

SEVEN



Coco Shen 沈意卿

Born in Taipei, raised in Canada, and now living in Hong Kong, Shen is a wordsmith with a wide-ranging career spanning advertising, journalism, animation scriptwriting, and translation (including Tao Lin's first novel *Eeeee Eee Eeee*). Her short story collection *They Ain't Fatal, Those That Kill You* is one of her best-known works.



Chen Liwen 陳莉文

Born in 1999, Chen holds a degree in Chinese Language and Literature from National Chi Nan University and has been honored with numerous domestic awards for her short stories. A collection of her most recent works has been published under the title *Rainforest*.



© YJ Chen

Ye Jiayi 葉佳怡

Born in Taipei City, Ye left her position as chief editor of a literary magazine to focus on literary translation. Notable works she has translated include Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, Arlene Heyman's *Scary Old Sex*, and Julia Phillips' *Disappearing Earth*. She has published collections of her own works under the titles *Overflow* and *Dyed*.



© OKAPI, Chen Pei Yun

Chang Yi-Hsum 張亦絢

Born in Taipei, Chang Yi-Hsum earned her Master's degree in Film and Visual Studies from Paris University No.3. Now a well-known advocate of queer writing, she has also written *Risks Along the Riverbank*, *Ephemeral Love: Notes from Nantes and Paris*, and *A Goodbye Letter: In the Era After I'm Gone*.



He Wenjun 何玟琿

Born in 1998 in Taichung and now living in Tainan, He holds dual bachelor degrees in Taiwan Literature and History from National Cheng Kung University. She has been honored with numerous domestic awards for literature and is the author of the short story collection *That Day We Searched for a Path Behind a Chicken's Butt*.



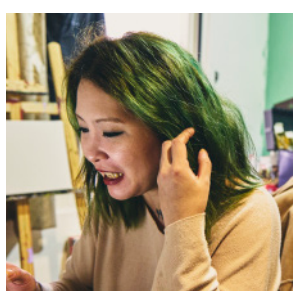
- **Category:** Short Stories
- **Publisher:** Homeward
- **Date:** 5/2024
- **Pages:** 256
- **Length:** 57,000 characters (approx. 37,000 words in English)
- **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Taking its cue from the so-called “seven deadly sins”, this short story collection brings together seven distinctively different female authors to create an innovatively new work sure to provoke and engage its readers.

Each short story in this collection centers on one of the so-called “seven deadly sins”, namely gluttony, indolence, greed, pride, wrath, lust, and envy, with each author crafting their own unique take on the subject at hand. Taken as a whole, this book sheds light on the universally complicated yet individually unique lived experiences, constraints, desires, and social expectations of women at different stages of life.

The main protagonists in each story range from lesbian partners and young students to mothers and wives, and narratives take readers on journeys that, while at times warmly intimate, more often than not end in surprising plot twists foreshadowed by the myriad biting undercurrents, pressures, patriarchal expectations, and generational conflicts facing women as they grow and mature into their own. The unique writing style and perspective of each author help tie a brilliantly perfect bow on this encapsulation of life for women in modern society.

The seven established and up-and-coming female authors from Taiwan who contributed to this collection bring experiences spanning writing, translation, creative art, and design. Moreover, the bold photographs and illustrations accompanying these stories add visual punch to the narratives’ underlying ideas and finely honed insights. Finally, the unusual editing framework employed in *SEVEN*, beyond breaching the protective façade of superficiality to let readers experience the complex realities of femininity today, sows the seeds of introspective thought and provocative, continuing conversations.



© Literature Festival Taipei 2022

Cui Shunhua 崔舜華

Born in 1985, Cui has earned a number of domestic literary awards. Her poetry collection *Boléro* and essay collection *God Abides* ably reflect a creative career focused primarily on poetry and essays. Cui’s first short story effort is featured in *SEVEN*.



Huang Simi 黃思蜜

Huang graduated from the University of Taipei’s Department of Visual Arts and currently wears several hats at Rusuban Studio, including General Manager, Chief Editor, and Designer. Her works include *The Man with the Raised Pinky*.

SEVEN

By Coco Shen, Chen Liwen, Ye Jiayi, Chang Yi-Hsum, He Wenjun, Cui Shunhua, Huang Simi
Translated by May Huang

“Streams of tender warmth and hard-boiled violence course through each of *SEVEN*'s short stories in equal measure, delivering the “one-two punch” of unfettered anguish and liberating relief necessary to kick the process of healing untold years’ worth of heartbreak and pain into motion. The seven female authors chosen to narrate the plight of women in our modern day vie for reader attention through their honed techniques, practiced prose, and charismatic moxie. Beautifully presented and bound, *SEVEN* is a welcome gift – be it for yourself...or someone else!

— *Openbook* / Translated by Jeff Miller

When Mary Met Sally

By Coco Shen

Sally didn't say, "I want to eat spicy hot pot." Instead, she said, "David wants to eat spicy hot pot."

Sally was like a cat. She'd awakened at 3 a.m. and whispered in Mary's ear, "Mary, I'm craving spicy hot pot."

"Sounds good...You want spicy hot pot," Mary mumbled, half-asleep.

"It's not me that wants it, it's David."

"Alright, *David* wants spicy hot pot."

Sally was relentless. "Don't you want to know what David wants to eat?"

"David wants spicy hot pot."

"Yeah, but what does he want in the hot pot?"

"..."

"Come on, ask me."

"What does David want in the hot pot?"

"Duck's blood, hundred-layer tofu, intestines, taro balls."

"Taro balls?...Sorry, you want to put taro balls in your spicy hot pot?"

"It's David who wants the spicy hot pot."

"...and duck's blood, hundred-layer tofu, intestines, and taro balls."

Pleased with herself, Sally flipped back over like a walrus, and fell asleep soon after.

But Mary was now wide awake.

Perhaps it really was David who was craving spicy hot pot, Mary thought to herself. The Sally that Mary first got to know eschewed spicy hot pots and the like. Back then, Sally dined on avocados, blueberries, nuts, grass-fed beef, wild salmon, virgin olive oil, and 85% dark chocolate. She wouldn't even eat chicken. Factory farming was unethical, so chicken breast meat was out of the question as well as chicken drumsticks, which were injected with all kinds of unnatural hormones and drugs.

"The needle always goes into the leg," Sally would tell Mary grimly as she picked up the latter's fried drumstick order.

The two had met in the so-called culinary scene.

Although both identified as “foodies”, they couldn’t have been more different.

Mary loved eating fried chicken, especially the crispy skin and the translucent chicken fat that oozed from it. Sally started her day with a mushy, colorful blend of five veggies and fruits, sprinkled with matcha powder and turmeric, which to Mary looked like the gooey remains of an alien, suited only for use as fertilizer. Mary liked to drink beer on an empty stomach the moment she woke up, claiming it was the best hangover cure and helped switch on her brain. At noon she’d pop a bottle of champagne, and, after her afternoon nap, it was time for happy hour, which she justified by saying that negroni and old fashioned captured perfectly the colors of sunset. Evenings invariably belonged to vodka, whiskey, and brandy.

In the summer, Mary liked to travel in the southern hemisphere to feast on the plump, tasty oysters raised in the cold waters there. In the winter, she’d feast on organ meats braised in spicy miso stew, throwing in a scoop of ice cream when she fancied. Mary believed the only ethical question one needed to ask when it came to food was whether it had been cooked to perfection.

Hoping to satisfy both Sally’s request for low-calorie, low-carb foods and her own voracious appetite, Mary chose a Japanese restaurant for their first dinner together. However, this did not stop Sally from asking those same probing questions about Mary’s culinary preferences.

“I can’t see why anyone would choose to eat horse meat,” Sally crossed her arms, as if Mary was eating her childhood friend.

“Horses are proud and beautiful creatures,” Mary replied. “They don’t lie down, even when they’re sleeping. Their meat tastes lean and refreshing. Unlike cows, they don’t fart methane into the air. In fact, you’re doing the atmosphere a favor by eating horses.”

“So you’re saying, the reason horses sleep standing up, is for your eating pleasure?” Sally glowered as she watched Mary pick up her chopsticks.

“I meant that we should be grateful that such a beautiful creature sacrificed its life. My cravings are paired with affection.”

The thin slices of meat with almost no fat, dipped

in ginger, a splash of yuzu vinegar, and light soy sauce, lay soft and tender on Mary’s tongue. She tasted notes of mint. She delighted in savoring the sashimi before her, and didn’t think twice about Sally’s feelings.

The tsukemono was served. Then sashimi, sushi, and stewed dishes. Empty plates were cleared away, then came dessert: shaved ice made from fermented fruit pulp. Mary could feel Sally’s eyes on her at all times. To avoid her intense stare, Mary busied herself refilling their glasses, downing shot after shot of hot sake.

Mary was beginning to feel tipsy. Although the woman sitting before her was beautiful and charming despite her temper, Mary couldn’t shake the feeling that she was making a mistake. She was preparing to down her last drink, when Sally grabbed hold of her hand on the cup, and met her eyes with a solemn and unyielding stare.

“If I died, would you eat me?”

The two women first met at a European-themed food and tourism event. Sally was a guest speaker who had been invited to talk about clean eating and sustainable wines, while Mary was simply there to eat and drink. It was another uneventful Sunday afternoon, the most depressing time of the week. In the poorly ventilated conference hall of a five-star hotel, a group of strangers looked at posters together, hoping soon-to-be-expired drinks and dry goods could transport their souls somewhere far away, somewhere that had different air, weather, gravity, and water pressure.

The only sport Mary was good at was chasing the bottle. As the atmosphere in the room grew rowdier and the air quality worsened, the host began to invite distinguished guests onstage. As was typical of these occasions, middle-aged men and young women gathered in a line. The host’s face resembled a slab of pig liver. Boring social pleasantries spewed from his mouth, and the crowd howled with laughter.

Mary, holding an olive in her mouth, was about to sneak away with a half-finished bottle of Vinho Verde when she spotted Sally standing at the end of the line. Mary watched Sally’s smile falter as the host described

her as “yesterday’s top model, today’s trophy wife”, but no one else seemed to notice. Then the crowd scattered like a flock of pigeons pecking at each other.

Though it lasted only a split second, Mary was the only person in the crowded room to catch Sally’s deflated expression. That was all it took for Mary to decide to approach her.

There were a million reasons why Mary was against Sally’s pregnancy. But she couldn’t name one out loud. After all, Sally had the right to make her own life decisions. It was *her body, her choice* – a slogan advocating for a woman’s right to choose abortion. Who would’ve guessed that a woman’s pregnancy could have nothing to do with her.

Mary knew why she didn’t want kids and knew why Sally did. Sally believed in blood ties the same way she believed in coincidence and fate. Mary believed in taking what she could get; if the shoe fits, wear it. Sally believed the world had been created for a divine purpose.

Once, in the early days of their love affair, as the oxytocin rushed in at the climax of their lovemaking, Sally looked at Mary with dreamy eyes and said, “I want to have a baby with you only. One that belongs to us alone. With today’s technology, they’ll be able to take our DNA, and intertwine us like this.”

Mary turned her head to look at Sally: her silhouette resting on the pillow, her beautiful bosom, and her fingers that were at this moment raised towards the ceiling, intertwined, such that it looked like she had more than ten fingers, beyond the bounds of reality, just like her imagination. Words like mitochondria, stem cells, nucleus transplantation, and even genetic engineering flashed across Mary’s mind, but in the end she decided it would be best to keep her mouth shut.

These were but the words of a lovesick fool at the peak of fertility, no different from promises to love each other “till the end of time”. Mary knew she shouldn’t take them seriously. Back then, she and Sally were

in the honeymoon phase of their relationship. They could smell each other’s scent from afar, an aroma as sweet as freshly baked bread. They felt destined to be together, as inevitable as the domestication of humans by wheat, thousands of years ago.

Sally always visited Mary after dropping her kid off at school, a time when Mary was usually still lounging in bed. In an effort to get Mary to quit her morning drinking habits, Sally traded her own gooey, alien-like smoothies for greasy croissants, eggs, sausages, and bacon that could absorb the remaining alcohol left in Mary’s system. Sometimes, instead, she’d bring rice balls, shaobing, soy milk, and steamed buns with scallion egg that were sold outside her son’s school. The scent of breakfast and lovemaking blended together, while the health drinks Sally brought from home were used to water the various potted plants Mary never could seem to keep alive.

Those plants miraculously began to flourish, alongside a new, croissant-eating Sally. Her waist began to expand with her diet, and her flushed face took on an almost drug-induced glow. Sally no longer spent ages in the bathroom, sighing at the number on the scale. She began to admire her appearance in the mirror again, and would laugh heartily while eating fruit after dinner. At night, while her husband snored in bed, she’d sometimes hide herself in the only room in the house that could be locked, and stand for ages in front of the mirror, reviewing every word Mary had said to her with an attentiveness on par with examining each brushstroke on an oil painting.

The stray hairs that escaped the razor’s sharp edge, the chickenpox scar that made a tiny dent under her right eyebrow, the freckles on the left side of her face caused by driving in the sun, her split earlobes... Sally pressed her hot palms against the porcelain basin as she carefully traced her own outline in her mind’s eye, from one earlobe to another, just like Mary had done with her icy fingertips.

Mary loved all her imperfections. All those subtle and abstract details that a man stops noticing over time, yet women become increasingly meticulous about. The slightest tightness or looseness in her

flesh, variations in her skin tone, the discomfort and insecurity that only a woman could feel, the stringent rules she arbitrarily imposed on herself...all lost their former importance. For Mary saw those parts of her and found them charming, and that was enough to make her like them too.

Sometimes Mary would accompany Sally to her kid's school and watch from the next street over as Sally, her back turned away, made small talk with the other mothers. Sally would feel the warmth of her child running into her arms and sense that her true self wasn't standing there, but rather somewhere behind her, throwing herself into Mary's arms as if no one was watching.

There was nothing wrong with Sally's husband; he had good looks, was well-educated, and had a good family background. He didn't speed while driving, drank in moderation, told their son bedtime stories, and even washed his own dishes after dinner.

The couple had experienced their fair share of romance. Early romance, flirtation, declarations of love, fits of passion, quarrels, breakups, tears, reconciliation...they'd checked all of the boxes. They'd navigated all the doubts and certainties people should have before marriage. The culmination of their four-year courtship was a pragmatically planned wedding, where the balance between family finances and cultural tradition was carefully disguised in the form of fresh flowers, champagne, and banquet food. After both families had sealed the deal, any pretense the couple had of continuing to live in their two-person world was extinguished. There was no grand romantic gesture like the one at the end of *The Graduate*, but after bidding farewell to their wedding guests and being left with only a man by her side, Sally felt just as confused as the woman in the movie.

They say that a woman looks most beautiful on her wedding day. Doesn't that mean she has no choice but to get uglier after that, for the remainder of her life?

When Sally's feelings of doubt began to spiral out

of control, the only explanation people, including Sally herself, could think of was that it was about time for her to have a baby.

I want to have something that belongs to me. I want a connection that feels absolute.

Others can do it, so I can too, she told herself.

Sally thought she was prepared, but she still struggled as she watched her own body transform, stretched open by the creature inside her belly that could eat and move. She had finally gotten used to living with it inside her when it suddenly couldn't wait to leave her womb, breaking through flesh to enter the world.

Then came the unending days that felt like one interminable hangover. Everything seemed to happen reactively - if he cried, she needed to feed him; if he made a fuss, she had to soothe him; if he smiled, she'd smile back at him; and if he screamed, she would want to scream, too. When the child grew old enough to not need constant supervision, husband and wife finally had time for each other again. But Sally realized she could no longer clearly perceive his appearance, and believed he felt the same. She began to understand why Picasso painted women the way he did in his later years.

He was the father of her child the same way kitchen utensils they'd used for years, while no longer sharp, still fit in her hand and were easy to grip. Sally was the mother of their child, and she was like the furniture in their home: you couldn't tell what color anything was, but still knew where to sit down in the dark.



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

NON-FICTION

擺脫情緒消耗：不再被負能量控制，找回

ESCAPING AFFECT EXHAUSTION: FREE REDISCOVER PEACE OF MIND



Su Shun-Hui

蘇絢慧

-
- **Category:** Self-Help
 - **Publisher:** Commonwealth Education
 - **Date:** 1/2024
 - **Pages:** 272+40
 - **Length:** 105,000 characters (approx. 68,200 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

Su Shun-Hui holds a master's degree from the Institute of Psychology and Counseling at the National Taipei University of Education, and has over twenty-five years of experience in psychological counseling. She has worked as a social worker and counselor at various medical centers and hospices, and is a specialist in childhood trauma. She is the founder of and currently works at the Puchen-Hsinyu Space Mental Health Counseling Center. Her books have received Golden Tripod Awards in the Social Science and Literature categories. As of 2024, Su has written and published nearly thirty books, including most recently *Escaping Affect Exhaustion* and *Learn to be More Secure*.

找回身心安在力量

FREE YOURSELF FROM NEGATIVITY,



In this work, professional psychologist and bestselling author Su Shun-Hui cracks the code on how to manage body and mind energies effectively, helping readers reclaim true happiness and contentment in their lives.

Nationally renowned psychologist Su Shun-Hui has already drawn on her over twenty-five years of psychological counseling experience to author multiple bestselling books on motivational psychology and personal growth. Now, her insights, gleaned through her work across community, university and hospital settings, into the powerful psychological and physiological effects of emotional negativity are platformed in this important work on the issue and real-life impacts of “affect exhaustion”.

This work in three parts begins by defining affect exhaustion before moving on to help readers wrestle with this topic and then achieve deeper understandings of both their own emotional issues and effective strategies for self-healing. Su works solid theoretical knowledge into highly relatable, everyday issues such as family pressures, workplace competition, and media-based incitement, social-media controversies, and the dichotomous relationship many women have with modern and traditional values. Readers learn that affect exhaustion, beyond tying affected individuals in knots, can impact interpersonal relationships and even pull at the fabric of social stability and trust. Little wonder why effectively managing your body and mind energies is so important!

This book gently but clearly reminds readers to prioritize their personal needs and goals. After all, only by fully knowing yourself and your emotions can you actively avoid becoming mired in affect exhaustion of your own making, gain better control over your body and mind, positively influence others in your orbit, and, ultimately, learn to recognize others with affect exhaustion and safely navigate your relationships with them. This book has something of value to give all who value and seek to better their emotional health.

ESCAPING AFFECT EXHAUSTION: FREE YOURSELF FROM NEGATIVITY, REDISCOVER PEACE OF MIND

By Su Shun-Hui

Translated by Emily Lu

“The “affect exhaustion” epidemic rampaging through society today is rooted in poor gatekeeping between our internal (emotional) and external worlds, which is essential to ameliorating the impact of negative emotions, ideas, and relationships on our psyche. The author attempts in this book to help readers become better “gatekeepers” via a rational, step-by-step process starting from awareness and causal understanding and ending with practices tailored to dispel mental internal friction. The author, who has a distinctly Eastern take on the factors contributing to this friction, promotes the importance of “balance, temperance, and self-control”.

Today’s social media environment drives participants to engage in ever greater levels of both self-exposure and interference in others’ affairs. Thus, setting boundaries goes beyond reestablishing the ability to protect oneself to using one’s personal space to express noncompliance with the present social system. Although not delving into the deep social structures associated with affect exhaustion, the author affixes an appropriate name to an ever-present threat facing our physical and mental health as well as maps out a self-help approach to easing today’s emotional self-torture epidemic. This book effectively shows the way forward to readers lost in emotional turmoil and provides the wherewithal to regain peace of mind.

— Harris Chon-Hou Sou (Counseling Psychologist) / Translated by Jeff Miller

Preface: Affect Exhaustion Is When Everything Falls Apart

Living in modern times regularly forces us to the brink. From the day we are born, we accumulate each disappointment and unresolved hurt. Feelings of futility and learned helplessness become our constant companions, and the reverberations of early childhood trauma pervade our interpersonal relations as adults. News on the internet and real-world encounters can leave us momentarily stunned. Mired in affective phenomena almost daily, with the trigger pressed against our chest, *bam-bam*, we erupt in our

pain. Overwhelmed by disquiet and anxiety, we run.

In high stress and unsafe environments, we must implement coping mechanisms – denial, repression, aggression, dissociation – to survive. And although we survive, we are invariably plunged back into affect, unable to break free.

At the heart of affective spillover, like the eye of a typhoon, are the unresolved emotions of painful past experiences. Those past lessons have primed us to react reflexively. Impulsively we head into affective storms where everything falls apart. Again and again, our physical and mental health lie in the wreckage.

Emotional boundaries are integral to constructing

safe personal spaces. When at the whim of emotion, we are constantly overrun by situational anxiety. Feelings of unease and fear stampede over us, and emotion is sovereign. Its intensity kidnaps and redirects our logic into reaction, and we bear its onslaught and consequences.

Build Myself a Safe House

Boundaries are like the windows and walls of a house. I want my windows and walls to be able to protect me from the storm outside. A whisper from the streets shouldn't easily penetrate these walls and disturb my repose. If so afflicted, it can only mean these walls were either damaged or never constructed at all. I am forced to respond at every moment to external elements, without the benefit of time or assistance. I need to build a safe house to be my own master.

If I want to practice becoming the master of my life, the next time I am in crisis, I should allow myself a moment to look at the situation and ask myself:

"What has happened?"

"What am I feeling?"

"Has a situation I previously encountered made me feel this way?"

"Looking at the situation again, how are things different this time?"

Examining the reality of a situation is quite different from running on auto-pilot. Each has its own logic, process, and mode of arrival. Pause. I carve out a small space to settle in my feelings. As long as I don't wallow in these feelings, the most intense emotions last only about ninety seconds. During this interval, I let myself breathe. I practice not going down those automatic trajectories. I practice not seeing things in absolutes. As my heart rate slows, I try again to proceed in a way that encompasses myself, a way that accepts and slowly begins to process my negative affect.

When everything falls apart, that's affect exhaustion. Emotional triggers are like the landmines of the body. When set off repeatedly, they take a toll on our mental and physical health. Not reacting reflexively requires practice. If I can repair my inner sense of safety, then I may be able to face the world more pragmatically. I prepare; I trust in my ability; I

adapt as needed.

In writing this book, I hope to offer some expertise as well as practices related to our mental health journeys. I have been in the helping professions for over twenty-five years, first, as a hospital social worker and psychologist, then during the last decade, as a community psychologist. Often encountering the emotional pain and turmoil of others, this line of work is affect work. I mobilize my affect effectively to support others.

I'm at the whim of my affective surroundings, and my mental health reserves are drained by the end of each workday. Stuck in the milieu and thus depleted I became interested in the topic of affect exhaustion. For those in helping professions, those working as caregivers, service staff, and other emotional laborers, I believe it to be a topic of quotidian relevance.

Don't Look Away from the Reality of Affect Exhaustion

The brutal onslaught of affect exhaustion makes me numb and detached from daily life. Life would be untenable otherwise. However, in that relentless cycle, things can only get worse. Not only is my mood worsened by exhaustion, I am more prone to somatic symptoms, physical illnesses, and other functional impairments.

The drain never ends. After all, the wider world is hard to change. It requires collective awareness as well as collective action to prioritize people's wellbeing. Only then may we begin to restore our depleted health and wellness.

But before then, when I'm affect exhausted, how to strategically empower myself to protect health and add to my toolbox? To continue, I cannot wallow in loss. Like struggling against a riptide, I can only be pulled further into the sea of self-defeat. Instead, I work to improve my psychological awareness, choose people and environments that value me, and when I'm at the limit of my energy, I choose not to carry everything on my shoulders. I don't have to say yes to every ask.

Do I want to mobilize my affect effectively? When will I stop feeling exhausted? When will I break free from people and settings that only drain me? Who will take up the task of valuing my health? Am I

willing to be my own guardian? I hope this book can accompany others for the journey ahead. Life cannot not just be exhaustion. There is still time to experience abundance.

Section 1: What Is Affect Exhaustion?

01 Why Am I So Fucking Tired?

Exhaustion refers to a state of depletion, being broken down and worn, as well as the consequence of that process.

Being exhausted implies that affect has been depleted. When drained to null, it is difficult to recharge and even harder to recover. There are two causes of my exhaustion. The first is when inner turmoil depletes me, making me squander my energy carelessly. The second is when I'm affected by the people and environment surrounding me, leading to an external drain on my health. In the latter, the external world can be vampiric. Until a stop measure or border is put in place, I am unable to stanch the drain.

A common scenario is when I'm assaulted left and right by the intensity of people's words or affects when, for example, they're venting, hurling insults, screeching, making statements or behaving in a manner to elicit maximum drama. When faced with the onslaught of those affects, in order to shoulder the heaviness of those feelings, I must use my affect in response to counter them. Thus, my energy depletes quickly. Like a battery encountering a mega device, my entire charge may be drained in an instant, negating my ability to function. There's nothing left to work with. I'm left void, befuddled, and at a standstill.

There will always be those who leverage emotional intensity to sap energy from relations with others, consuming other people's feelings entirely along their own. People in this category can use their affect as a weapon or tool to threaten and manipulate. Another category of people has no emotional control at all, yet still depletes themselves. Their inner emotional world is akin to a floodwater beast that rears its head at the

first opportunity, drowning itself, attacking others, and destroying everything in its path on impulse.

The following are eight additional personality traits that I also observe on a regular basis:

1. Impulsive, thoughts and behaviors escalate rapidly
2. Overly defensive, never at ease, and constantly in search of external validation
3. Egotistic, narcissistic, and superficial in interpersonal relations to take advantage of others
4. Having coping mechanisms maladapted to deal with reality, leading to denial, projection, avoidance, paranoia, lashing out, aggression, hostility and other reactions
5. Lacking a sense of personal agency, blames only their circumstances or others
6. Lacking respect for other people's boundaries
7. Mistake themselves for the center of the universe and everything as constantly threatening, for example, if someone didn't smile, they must be upset at me, or if someone declined my request, they must not respect me
8. Lacking appreciation for other perspectives and points of view, unable to see things as they are, which skews judgment

People who exhibit more of the above characteristics are more dominated by emotions in their day-to-day. They have not adequately trained their rational mind.

Affect originates from feeling, with those dominated by affect prone to oversensitivity and overreaction. Although having a sensitive and reactive predisposition is not necessarily bad, when the balance between rationale and affect is ignored, emotions dominate, and logical processes are swept aside.

Affect is difficult to steer, as is feeling. Instead, they are forced by feeling to dance its dance, to mire in its chaos, and thus be exhausted as inevitability.

Affect exhaustion doesn't seem to be the best approach at home, in the workplace, or in the community. For example, people are drawn to click-bait headlines that incite strong emotion, and easily

get caught up in arguing these topics in the online echo chambers that define today's social media. Like a perpetual engine that never shuts off, these cycles burn through to collective affect exhaustion.

Affect has long been used to incite the masses politically, not only leading to collective affect exhaustion but also to the wearing down of the heart and mind. Massive amounts of emotional reserves and mental health are depleted with no hope of replenishment.

I've noticed various media, marketing, advertising, and political strategies employing affect in this way. Surely Taiwan's reputation as an "overwork island" isn't solely due to long working hours and a general lack of awareness regarding the need for rest. The environment and surroundings are also constantly wearing away at people's emotions. This contributes to general unwellness and the rise in prevalence of disease pathologies among the population.

With more instances of affect exhaustion overlapping at home, at work, with in relationships with friends, and on the internet, the world is primed for eruption. How can I live safely while anticipating that at any moment, my body might collapse in the aftermath? How can I build my skills and confidence when my life is constantly on the brink?

To counter both the external and internal processes of affect exhaustion, I must nurture self-awareness and personal agency. To take responsibility for my own self-care, I must achieve a certain affective skillset. The sooner I realize a situation has turned sour, that point when even equanimity and experience have been overwhelmed, the earlier I can implement self-preservation measures. These measures reduce the impact of intense affect flares in my environment. Allowing them to run their usual course would steamroll my physical and mental health and leave me left with nothing.

Disciplines I feel to be of utmost importance to maintaining good mental health include practicing everyday routines of grounding techniques, maintaining boundaries, employing outlets for stress, exercising regularly, and eating a nutritious diet. I

want to find respite and safety within myself and to build up my personal space. The goal is to practice a mode of self-preservation that will reduce the risk of affect collapse. I want the ability to examine my own life. In those large and small details, it is up to me to determine how much of myself to invest in order to not overextend and not expend my affect reserves to the point of depletion.

Affect Exhaustion Reflects the Inability to Set Boundaries

Affect-exhausted individuals are prone to stressing themselves out. These people cause themselves to suffer and burn through their own emotional energies. When the external environment is hostile and there's confrontation in the air, those prone to stressing out are quick to blame themselves. Without considering the details or thinking ahead, they jump straight into devaluing themselves, doubting their abilities, and fermenting guilt and shame. They plunge headfirst into the canyon of negative affect. Eventually, they drain their mental health, and ego. Their confidence takes a huge hit.

The root cause of this phenomenon is during development. Their early relationships and formative experiences may have made them feel that the world is fundamentally unsafe. Along their trajectory, these individuals don't develop an internal fuse box. They don't have a protective feature to disrupt the emotional circuit when overloaded above their limit. Instead, the circuit continues to expand exponentially out of control.

Early family dynamics matter. Main caregivers, most often the parents, provide the model for how adults react to stress. When adults employ threats and fear to teach their children important lessons, these kids from a young age are unable to build a stable system to manage their feelings and traverse life's emotional maelstroms. After a while, these individuals become unmoored like a house washed out to sea, shifting, trembling, teetering.

過曝世代：青少年為什麼更不快樂、

OVEREXPOSED: WHY YOUTH TODAY ARE MORE INSECURE AND LESS SELF-ASSURED



Chen Pin-Hao 陳品皓

-
- **Category:** Parenting
 - **Publisher:** Commonwealth Education
 - **Date:** 4/2024
 - **Pages:** 288
 - **Length:** 80,000 characters (approx. 52,000 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

© Chien-Pin Huang

Chen Pin-Hao is a longtime clinical psychologist with many years of experience in adolescent psychotherapy, specializing in the treatment of adolescent-related emotional, relationship, learning, and behavioral issues as well as parental education and psychological health. Recent child-parent education-related works in addition to *Overexposed* include *Building Psychological Resilience* and *Put the Emotional Tempest on Take an Emotional Time-Out*.

更缺乏安全感、自我評價更低落？

ARE LESS HAPPY, LESS SECURED



A Taiwan-based adolescent therapist investigates the psychological effects of modern social media on today's youth and provides practical advice and strategies about how Asian parents and educators can help their children rebuild their identity and sense of security.

The ubiquitous internet, while transforming the way we communicate and learn, has with the advent of today's ever-present smartphones, tablets, and social media brought an exponential and continuing rise in the number of adolescents with physician-diagnosed psychological issues. It is this phenomenon that spurred the author to call the internet-suffused adolescents of today the "overexposed" generation.

Chen Pin-Hao, a long-practicing psychotherapist with extensive experience counseling adolescent patients, recognizes children as particularly susceptible to the opinions of others and peer pressure and sees social media as designed to train user attention on the latest status of peers and other influencers. This unhealthy relationship is a Petri dish for self-contempt, jealousy, and anxiety, robbing teens of a natural sense of security in their interpersonal relationships and, if pressures go unchecked, leading to serious repercussions.

The author continues first by highlighting key psychological issues faced by adolescents across a spectrum of typical parent-child conflicts. Then, he provides parents and educators easy-to-implement strategies and solutions to assist children to cut unhealthy ties with social media, enhance their resilience against others' criticism, and rebuild their authentic self-identity.

Chen's rational approach to this subject eschews criticism and instead treats everyone's unique situation with empathy and understanding. His use of everyday examples and situations, in addition to making analyses and explanations easier to understand and digest, allows parents and teachers to think more deeply about how to promote healthier perspectives on internet use and selfhood.

OVEREXPOSED: WHY YOUTH TODAY ARE LESS HAPPY, MORE INSECURE AND LESS SELF-ASSURED

By Chen Pin-Hao

Translated by Petula Parris

“How is online social media negatively influencing our young people? In discussing this question, many point to “internet addiction” as the wellspring of related troubles and thus advocate gatekeeping the amount of time allowed online. But this author takes a different tack, arguing this issue must be reexamined from the psychological needs perspective of adolescents if we are to resolve not only the symptoms but also the root causes of this problem.”

While written for a general audience, this work is well grounded in relevant theory and practice. Sifting through the varied modes of interaction used by today’s youth, the author points out that, besieged by peer pressure from both online and real-world communities, young people today are bereft of a “mental staging ground” where they can catch their breath and think. Of particular note, the author includes Asian cultural ideas about “shame” and “guilt” in the discussion. Ultimately, this book offers many practical counseling and self-help solutions.

— Chung Sing-Yiing (Lecturer, Center for Teacher Education, National Tsing Hua University) /
Translated by Jeff Miller

Foreword: Do Virtual Communities Make Our Children Less Happy?

A decade ago, the concept of student counseling was still in its nascent stages. As a professional in this field, I was asked by several schools in New Taipei City to work alongside students, teachers, and parents to help children learn better adaptive skills. Since then, I have worked in almost sixty schools across New Taipei City, with my original role as an independent school psychologist evolving into my current position as supervisor for guidance counselors in Taiwan’s Ministry of Education. During this time, my colleagues and I have, through a collaborative approach, worked to continuously improve and innovate the realm of student counseling. We also witnessed the implementation of the *Student Guidance and*

Counseling Act – Taiwan’s first law specific to student counseling – which established a clear legal footing for school counseling in Taiwan.

During the earlier years of my career, it is notable that the majority of students referred to me (by the various schools’ counseling departments) were those struggling with outwardly discernible behavioral problems such as ADHD, impulse control, talking disrespectfully to teachers, oppositional defiance, and emotional outbursts that would cause them to storm out of the classroom. These are, of course, the types of behavioral issues that are easy to spot in a classroom environment.

Over time, the focus of my work has shifted from school campuses to Miruku Mental Health Counseling Center that I now run with several partners. It is in more recent years, therefore, within this setting that I have noticed a shift in the nature of school referrals. Our

counseling center now serves an increasing number of children who present problems such as social withdrawal, social anxiety, self-harm, internet addiction, school refusal, and declines in academic performance.

This shift in children's emotional difficulties over the past ten years has intrigued me, and as such I often mull over possible explanations. The longer I work alongside the team at Miruku and the more children I serve in the counseling center, the more insight I am afforded into this problem. Armed with this insight and having consolidated the views and experiences of my fellow psychologists, I began to discern the broader outline and characteristics of an entire generation of children.

The Rise in Negative Emotions Among Adolescents as a Global Phenomenon

Research increasingly suggests that children today are facing a wide range of emotional challenges. According to Taiwan's Ministry of Education, in 2019, the number one reason elementary and junior high students sought help from school guidance offices was for "emotional distress". For senior high school students, it was the second most common reason after "career guidance". Meanwhile, a 2018 survey conducted by the John Tung Foundation found that one in seven high school students showed signs of depression. In a 2014 survey by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, 20% of junior and senior high school students revealed they had "seriously considered suicide". This finding (reported in an in-depth feature titled "2021 Survey on the Psychological Sense of Security in Children and Adolescents with 10,000 Participants" in *CommonWealth Parenting* magazine) highlights the pervasiveness of emotional distress among children and adolescents today.

This latter survey also revealed that, from third grade through junior high, a sense of inferiority, fear of failure, and reluctance to try new things were all more prevalent in children who regularly spent time online. As well, nearly half of the children surveyed viewed the love received from their parents as being "conditional". Likewise, in the realm of interpersonal relationships, almost half were "very concerned" about what others

thought of them – particularly in terms of negative feedback (even more so for girls than boys).

Professional bodies around the world have witnessed a troubling rise in mental health problems among adolescents in recent years. In 2019, the US-based *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* reported that, between 2009 to 2017, mental health disorders among adolescents had increased by approximately 50%, concluding that "electronic communication and digital media" may have played a significant role in this. Similarly, the *Youth Risk Behavior Survey Report* released by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2021 also showed that mental health issues among adolescents had risen during the preceding decade.

These trends, which match closely with my own clinical observations and those of the rest of the team at Miruku, portray a subtle yet powerful paradox: *Despite the fact they are possibly growing up in the safest era in history, our current generation of children are haunted by a profound sense of insecurity.*

Although these children reliably present vibrant personas on social media, have the latest information at their fingertips, enjoy a wide range of fashion choices, and interact enthusiastically with their peers online, they nonetheless frequently struggle with feelings of insecurity. They worry they aren't good enough, that their relationships aren't strong enough (that love is conditional), and that they aren't liked (fear of negative feedback).

A Generation Raised on Social Media

So what exactly is behind the mental health crisis among adolescents today?

In 2023, the US Office of the Surgeon General (a body responsible for providing healthcare guidance to Americans) published a twenty-five-page-long report titled "Social Media and Youth Mental Health". The report noted that substantial evidence already points to modern social media as a source of potentially serious harm to the mental health and wellbeing of children and adolescents.

Similarly, Common Sense Media, a non-profit organization focusing on media and content safety

issues, recently published a report titled “The State of Kids and Families in America 2024”, which showed that more than half (53%) of children and adolescents considered mental health their “biggest problem” at school.

In its 2023 “Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence”, the highly regarded American Psychological Association (APA) recommended – for the first time ever – that parents should monitor and manage their children’s use of social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram.

In conclusion, all the aforementioned reports indicate a strong connection between mental health and social media use in youth.

I privately refer to these children – heavily reliant on the internet since birth and raised on a diet of social media – as the “overexposed generation”. Of course, the term “overexposure” comes from the field of photography, describing what happens when too much light reaches a camera sensor and results in images that are too bright. By “overexposed generation”, I refer to a generation of children that has been “overexposed” to the digital world throughout childhood. While my generation needed only the basic elements of oxygen and carbon dioxide to survive, the “overexposed generation” requires a third element: WiFi. Indeed, WiFi has become so integral to their daily lives that its absence can trigger a range of troubling physical and psychological symptoms.

A Generation-Wide Delay in Psychological Maturity

What presents outwardly as mental fragility reveals the deeper issue of children who are susceptible to emotional distress and struggle to concentrate. They tend toward simplistic, fragmented thinking, finding it difficult to engage in deeper, abstract thought. At the same time, for their age, they show exaggerated concern for what other people think of them, which leads to a lack of purpose and low motivation. In light of these combined traits, we see a generational phenomenon of delayed psychological maturity.

Hidden behind these tendencies, I see a theme central to the mental development of these children, specifically: “Digital natives; disordered boundaries; compromised time resources.” These three components, in my opinion, form the psychological axis for the maladaptive behaviors of this entire generation. They are also the basis of the preliminary framework I have developed by consolidating my learnings from numerous research reports, my extensive clinical experience, and collective, comprehensive feedback from my colleagues.

In this book, I delve into various aspects of the “overexposed generation”. These include the key characteristics and challenges faced by these children; the impact and underlying causes of these challenges; and, finally, potential solutions. I begin by examining the role of the internet – a critical starting point in this journey.

Many readers will recall in the years leading up to the millennium the internet becoming more pervasive and the ways in which we used it proliferating. The dot-com boom saw the rapid growth of internet companies with record-breaking market valuations and, along with it, an influx of readily available capital. Although the stock markets crashed soon after, the internet – by then a prominent fixture – was here to stay. Its applications expanded significantly and, in 2007, we witnessed the release of the first truly game-changing smartphone. The internet, now bonded to our cellphones, began rapidly and dramatically transforming our lives. We transitioned from fixed internet access to a mobile-centric lifestyle in which the internet could be accessed anytime, anywhere. This significantly altered our attention processes – even if we were not fully aware of it at the time.

Today, the jury is still out as to exactly how – and to what extent – the smartphone affects us, especially when it comes to the physical and mental development of our children. Indeed, we are still very much in the process of “adapting” to the internet, navigating both its benefits and shortcomings. It is evident to me that our efforts in this area have, so far, met with limited success – meaning that we still struggle to define

our relationship with the internet. Every year without fail, parenting workshops held by Taiwanese schools address the “hot topic” of how parents should deal with their children’s internet addiction and, every year without fail, I am invited to discuss this subject. Yet perhaps rather than viewing it as a “hot topic”, it would be better to acknowledge that this topic’s prominence is fueled by the ongoing struggle to understand and manage our children’s internet usage. Lacking universally accepted perspectives and guidelines, we find it difficult to know what to do, and therefore turn to experts and scholars for advice.

While we continue to unravel the meaning of the internet’s omnipresence, our children are birthed into and grow up in this digital landscape. Our relationship with them as parents – and also their physical and mental development – all take place against the backdrop of the internet. It is, as such, in light of the numerous uncertainties, contradictions, and concerns I have mentioned above, that the premise for this book came about.

I begin in Chapter One by looking at how the internet affects the physical and psychological development of adolescents – paying particular attention to their emotional wellbeing and interpersonal relationships. To offer readers a better understanding of this topic, I must first introduce some of the basic psychological traits of adolescent children before bringing in the added factor of “the internet”. I aim to present a holistic and practical overview of the role of the internet in the lives of adolescents today, while taking into account that some readers may be relatively unfamiliar with the fundamentals of children’s psychology.

Chapter One: Understanding the Overexposed Generation

The Adolescent’s Contradictory Nature: A Tug-of-War Between Feeling “Awesome” and “Awful”

I will begin this chapter by outlining, in the most straightforward fashion, the general psychology of adolescents. Doing so will lay a foundation for exploring the psychology of the “overexposed generation” that will be continually referenced throughout the entire book.

The central cause for “conflict” in adolescents, namely: a constant tug-of-war between “self-expectations” and “feelings of inadequacy”. This is a highly unstable, dynamic, and constantly changing process, with neither force fully able to gain the upper hand. These dual standpoints exist in tireless opposition and, even if one manages to dominate for a while, they are destined to be superseded by the other at any given moment, resulting in an ongoing, dynamic phenomenon.

It is therefore important to understand that this internal struggle can manifest in your child at any time.

Although the terms “self-expectations” and “feelings of inadequacy” are relatively self-explanatory, I would still like to break them down a little further.

Self-Expectations: What I Expect of Myself

The concept underlying self-expectations refers to the outcomes a person imagines for themselves: how they hope to perform, what goals they hope to achieve, and what kind of person they hope to become. This necessarily embodies a person’s overall perception of their own worth. Self-expectations may be described as an inner psychological “force” that drives a person to proactively embark upon a series of actions. Almost always, this continuous, natural drive from within – derived from a desire to fulfil one’s own expectations – is far more powerful than external rewards and punishments.

百攤台灣：100 個攤販，100 種台

VENDORWORLD: 100 VENDORS, IN TODAY'S TAIWAN



Cheng
Kai-Hsiang
鄭開翔

-
- **Category:** Culture, Art
 - **Publisher:** Yuan-Liou
 - **Date:** 7/2023
 - **Pages:** 192
 - **Length:** 48,000 characters
(approx. 31,200 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
 - **Rights sold:** Japanese (Hara Shobo)
-

Cheng Kai-Hsiang, known as a painter of the urban moment, is the first professional artist to depict Taiwanese townhome and shophouse culture in his works. He has painted the urban architecture of Taiwan and several other East Asian cities, using brushes and vibrant colors to create snapshots of local culture and communities. His first illustrated book has been translated into French, Japanese, and Spanish.

味生活的方式！

100 UNIQUE TAKES ON LIFE



This richly illustrated, brightly written work leads readers on a lively, enlightening journey through the emotive landscape and compelling stories that define Taiwan's modern street vendor scene.

In *Vendorworld*, celebrated author and artist Cheng Kai-Hsiang constructs an almost ethnographic record of contemporary Taiwan street vendor culture. His keen eye and sharp wit treat each subgenre of vendor culture – from traffic intersection hawkers of white champak “air fresheners” and roadside sellers of barbecue-smoked rolled squid to street market vendors of every stripe – with just the right blend of inquisitiveness and empathy, inviting readers into the experience.

The book is divided into four main sections. “Mobile Underworld” highlights Taiwan’s multitudinous array of mobile vendors, including pushcart sellers of wheel cakes, ladies selling Yakult drinks from bicycle coolers, and much more. “Open for Business” examines vendors that set up shop at fixed locations such as fresh produce sellers at wet markets, sellers of marinated snacks, cold beverage stands, and so on. “Capturing the Essence of Time” looks at game and festival-related vendors offering aquarium-fish catching, water balloon target practice, and other fun activities. The final section, “Metropolis of Collective Vendors” takes on the country’s iconic night markets, traditional markets, and second-hand bazaars. From the smallest of details to big-picture descriptions, this book is your multifaceted window into the mechanics, embellishments, and creative, lively soul that, together, define Taiwan’s modern vendor culture.

More than exploring the aesthetics and witty innovations used by vendors to draw interest and entice passersby to part with their hard-earned money, this book is a loving tribute, in words and illustrations, to this time-honored reflection of authentic, local Taiwan culture. *Vendorworld* captures in its pages the enticing glow and magic of this world for everyone to enjoy.

VENDORWORLD: 100 VENDORS, 100 UNIQUE TAKES ON LIFE IN TODAY'S TAIWAN

By Cheng Kai-Hsiang

Translated by Beverly Liu

“ compare reading *Vendorworld* to a stimulating, nostalgia-laced virtual journey through Taiwan’s markets and side streets – from crowded crossroads to shops and stalls with dozens-deep lines of hungry customers outside. ”

The author’s illuminating focus on these vendors, each a small but important part of their surrounding milieu, paints a fun-to-read, satisfyingly complete picture of Taiwan’s lively street vending scene. Moreover, the myriad stories and insights into vendor owners, clientele, and history add delightful dimension to this work. Taiwanese readers in particular are sure to find fond and familiar memories of their own within its pages.

With Taiwan’s distinctive street vendor culture now in slow but steady decline, *Vendorworld* is an important new addition to Taiwan’s collective cultural memory bank.

— Chen Mo-An (Writer) / Translated by Jeff Miller



Introduction: A Gaze into the World of Taiwan Street Vendor

Is there a familiar scent or sound that brings back childhood memories for you?

Point 1: Street Vendors Through My Artistic Vision

The term “street vendor” usually refers to small businesses set up outdoors, on street sides, in plazas or markets, and other public places. The typical street vendor establishment is a mobile stall offering products such as food, cultural/creative items, household goods, and so on. Most of their owners are self-employed entrepreneurs, operating at a small scale with simple equipment and tools, which makes it easy for them to quickly and flexibly adapt to market changes.

Different from street vendors, “stores” typically refer to physical indoor retail locations. These establishments have a fixed location, more comprehensive operations, higher capital requirements, more complex equipment, and a relatively rigid business model. Furthermore, they must operate in compliance with stringent legal and health standards.

Classifying the diverse types of street vendors and the industries they operate in is a complex task. In the early stages of my research for this book, the task of defining, selecting, and classifying street vendors proved to be daunting. However, I have taken a unique approach by adopting the perspective that “street vendors are the smallest unit of labor cost”, which has allowed me to classify street vendors by the complexity of their infrastructure – from bare-bones modest to impressively outfitted. I’ve also focused on selectively chosen vendors to represent the most unique street vendor industries.

In Part I, “Mobile Underworld”, I approached the subject of street vendors from the perspective of mobility – starting with the most simple form – a hawker selling goods on the street, and moving up to those who use pushcarts and tricycles and then on to larger vehicles such as scooters and trucks. I carefully examine the diverse range of transportation methods used by street vendors to actively run their business

operations.

In Part II, “Open for Business”, I focus on how street vendors typically gather in specific locations and easily set up shop by laying a piece of canvas tarp on a table. Adding display racks or signage can help establish the business further. Street vendors may also expand their operations by adding tables, chairs, and other equipment as needed.

In Part III, “Capturing the Essence of Time”, I specifically include a section on “game stands” that delves into my childhood memories and expresses my deep personal connection and love for these amusement-themed carts. I also discuss themed street stands that are usually found only during specific times of the year or around certain holidays.

For Part IV, “Metropolis Made up of Collective Vendors”, watercolor sketches of five select markets are curated. The compositions of the market scenes captured in these sketches invite you to step into the shoes of a market patron, seeing both the left and right sides of the different vendors. I hope this uniform perspective helps you feel like you are physically “walking” into the frame. As you observe the differences in overall ambiance, aesthetics, and consumers among these scenes, take a moment to interpret the details I’ve incorporated into the street vendors. Consider the purpose of the market. Your interpretation will provide more profound insights into how people here live.

I’ve set out to document the different types and appearances of street vendors in this book, hoping to provide a great introduction to the diverse types of street vendors in Taiwan. Taiwan’s culture, with its rich and diverse charms, is so captivating that this book can only offer a small glimpse. I urge all readers to embark on their own adventures and explore more of Taiwan’s fascinating places and people.

Point 2: A Closer Look

Street vending is not just a business model but a ubiquitous presence in our everyday lives. They are like colorful paint, sprinkled onto the blank canvases of buildings and roads, adorning every corner of every city. What was once a sterile cityscape is now a

vibrant, living canvas thanks to the pervasiveness of street vendors. They have become an essential part of Taiwan's unique way of life and their influence is felt in every street and alley.

One might ask, "What's so interesting about these street vendors?" I will tackle this question from three different perspectives: "quirky designs", "sales content", and "emotional resonance".

Quirky Designs

Street vendors may be divided into different business operating systems – cart stalls, street stalls, and table stalls, with a myriad of potential combinations. Based on their approach to their business, business type, and personal aesthetics, the final look of street vendors can be drastically different, even among those that adopt the same kind of business operation. Each street vendor is a unique and independent entity, richly colored and full of creative originality.

Cart vendors are essentially miniature storefronts but with limited capacity and mobility.⁰¹ They must operate with total efficiency and mobility while also appealing to potential patrons. Street vendors must be prepared to move quickly, set up and close efficiently, and be able to adapt to any situation. Experienced vendors have standard operating procedures for just about any situation. Every aspect of the stall is carefully planned to ensure maximum efficiency for every task. I love observing these meticulously planned details as they show the owners' effort and dedication to planning and executing their operations.

Many vendors use clever homophonic wordplays in their business names to show their sense of humor. They often post notices⁰² on their stalls – some friendly and some conveying a stricter tone. Without needing to speak to the stall owners, these notices help

customers understand the owner's mood and follow the "rules of the stall" to avoid causing undue trouble.

It's common for business equipment to show signs of wear and tear over time, leading to age stains. These marks on the stall's facade represent its endurance over time and reassure customers of the high-quality food being made there. In Taiwan, people often joke that the more "worn out" a vendor stall looks, the better the food must taste.

Sales Content

There was a line from an old advertisement that read, "We sell everything; nothing is too strange for us to sell." This couldn't be more fitting as a descriptor of what street vendors sell.

From street snacks and clothing to household hardware, street vendors sell things from all walks of life and cater to everything a potential customer might need. Take a closer look into the extensive sales offering of street vendors and you will begin to see the correlation between the evolution of the Taiwanese lifestyle and their habits. For example, in the early mornings on streets in coastal areas, you'll regularly find women selling seafood freshly caught the night before. In rural areas, where shops are not prevalent, you can still find trucks driving down each street hawking household hardware and bringing services directly to consumers. Depending on the time of the year, you will also find seasonally fresh, locally grown and processed farm goods sold on street corners alongside freeway entrances. This is why I love taking friends to visit local traditional markets around Taiwan. These traditional markets are authentic microcosms of local life.

Over the course of my research, I identified a category of street vendors that specializes in selling their skills and crafts. Whether a dough figurine artist, handyman skilled in replacing window screens or zippers, portrait artist, masseuse, or facial threading beautician, each self-employed entrepreneur with unique expertise has their own approach to attracting loyal customers. However, it's a challenge for these skilled craft workers to find the apprentices necessary

01 Translator's note: Some street vendors must push carts back and forth from their homes to the operating location, so while these carts are designed with maximum storage to carry everything the vendors need to operate, the cart's weight must be considered so it will not affect its mobility.

02 Translator's note: For example, a notice might say, "We apologize for not smiling during busy hours" or "Please be patient and wait for us to take your order".

to preserve and continue their craft. It's a shame that many of these skills may be lost to future generations. Every time I think about the potential loss of these special skills, it makes me truly treasure those vendors still in business.

Emotional Resonance

Street vendors in Taiwan play a crucial role in local culture and society. The budget-friendly pricing and wide variety of foods make it convenient for people to dine out, creating an indisputable connection between seller and buyer. Over time, some customers develop deep and friendly bonds with vendors.

Sometimes you will see street vendor carts converted from small trucks on the road. Their loudspeakers broadcasting music or lively advertisements are part of a familiar scene that never fails to spark my nostalgia for the disappearing street vendor culture. However, with the rise of large-scale supermarkets and chain stores, the once vital functions of these street vendor trucks have significantly diminished. The familiar street cries and lyrical calls of merchants, once a staple of open roads, are now fading from our collective memory.

Life and entertainment were simpler in decades past. Children didn't have easy access to snacks or toys, so having dessert was a special joy that created lasting childhood memories. Certain tastes and smells, like those of a bowl of noodles from a corner store or a simple molasses candy, can bring back memories of a fondly remembered time and place. These simple pleasures from childhood memories can't be replicated by fancy restaurants. When you return home, there are nostalgic spots that you simply have to visit, and you may even take your own children to share your memories with the next generation. The same food stall may evoke different emotions in each person's heart, creating a unique and personal connection to the past.

Point 3: Elements Shared by Taiwanese Street Vendors

While creating drawings and sketches of Taiwanese street vendors, I discovered several unique and common elements. These include the main body of the cart, signage, and components tailored to the needs of stall operators such as sunshade props and lighting systems. These oft-overlooked but significant elements play a vital role in the design of street vendors as they embody the quintessential "Taiwanese" characteristics and have become classic, easily recognized symbols of roadside stalls in Taiwan.

The Vendor Cart

The standard vendor cart features a tabletop on which business is usually conducted. Goods to be sold are generally stored inside the cart, and the wheels are along the bottom and steering handles are located on the side.

The cart design may be customized for business type and scale. For example, some are equipped with custom-installed frying stations, while others have sun-cover canopies installed on top. Most street vendor carts are constructed of stainless steel for durability and functionality. However, there is a growing trend of carts being made from wood, reflecting a prioritization of aesthetic appeal over durability, as wooden carts typically don't move around well over long distances and show wear and tear relatively quickly. The variety in cart materials reflects the diverse needs of different street vendors.

Stand Signage

Signage is usually the first thing a customer sees and so is generally vibrant in color with strong brand recognition. You can immediately tell what a vendor sells by looking at their signage. One great example of this is given by ice cream stands. The striking ice cream-shaped LED signage is designed to quickly catch the attention of children from afar, tempting them to drag their parents over to buy ice cream for them.

必修！臺灣校園鬼故事考

TAIWANESE SCHOOL GHOST STORIES A



Hsieh Yi-An

謝宜安

-
- **Category:** Humanities
 - **Publisher:** Gaea
 - **Date:** 3/2024
 - **Pages:** 384
 - **Length:** 170,407 characters
(approx. 110,800 words in English)
 - **Rights contact:**
bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw
-

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

AND WHERE THEY COME FROM



A sealed dormitory room, a bathroom none dare use, a building riddled with maze-like, seemingly ever-shifting corridors... This book plunges readers face-first into one hundred iconic ghost stories set in high schools and universities across Taiwan, analyzing their possible origins and evolution over time.

After spending four years collecting, researching and analyzing widely shared ghost stories set on Taiwan's high school and university campuses, Hsieh Yi-An discovered that, in both sociological and literary terms, such tales share something important in common with popular urban legends – while many have heard them, few can speak to their veracity.

Dormitory hauntings comprise the largest category of ghost stories in this book, with spine-tingling tales of sealed dorm rooms, architectural oddities, and worrisome roomies drenched in the angst of children not long separated from home. The second category, campus building hauntings, center on bathrooms and classrooms and are sometimes tied to features unique to one school or another. The third category, outdoor hauntings, take place in and around campus ponds, sports fields, and shuttle buses and are almost always tied up with something unique to that school. The 2020 film adaptation of *The Bridge Curse* is a prime example of this story type.

Each of the ten chapters and forty subchapters that form the three story categories begins with a traditional retelling of an iconic ghost story. Afterward, subsequent variants are introduced, the potential real-world origins and reasons for adaptation over time are explored, the plausible threads in the narrative considered, and tales are analyzed from a socio-psychological perspective to answer the question: Which real-world insecurities, fears and prejudices may have inspired such frightful tales of campus life?

Hsieh Yi-An's approach to the narrative gives readers the tools to rationally reexamine these and other chilling stories of the preternatural. While they will always give us goosebumps, this book sheds light on the truth hidden just beneath the surface of our favorite scary stories.

TAIWANESE SCHOOL GHOST STORIES AND WHERE THEY COME FROM

By Hsieh Yi-An

Translated by Beverly Liu

“In *Taiwanese School Ghost Stories and Where They Come from*, the author sleuths out Taiwan’s most iconic school-related ghost stories and their variants. The fact that most readers likely already have a passing familiarity with at least a few of the underlying plotlines ensures this book a place in Taiwan’s collective cultural memory bank. Their placement in familiar school settings, from bathrooms and dormitory rooms to shadowy school-campus corners, imbues these stories with plausible realism. The author accompanies her readers on this journey, allowing both to discover together what makes these stories “scary” and why we sometimes simply need to be scared.

— Liang Siou-Yi (Writer) / Translated by Jeff Miller

Dormitory Ghost Stories

The dormitory is perhaps the most iconic setting for Taiwanese school ghost stories.

Whether or not you’ve lived in a dormitory, you’ve likely heard a ghost story about school dormitories at some point in your life. Many variations of these tales exist – be it a haunted dorm room, a tragic death in a dorm, or the dormitory being built on an old graveyard. “There are a lot of school dormitory ghost stories.” This statement resonates with most Taiwanese; it feels entirely logical and unremarkable. However, when compared to ghost stories in Japan, you’ll find that “dormitory ghost stories” are unique to Taiwan. Just as Japan considers “toilets” to be representative spaces for school ghost stories, the dormitory deserves recognition as a key setting for ghost stories set in Taiwanese schools.

Bathrooms are the most common setting for Japanese school ghost stories, with some of the best-known supernatural tales including “Hanako-san”, “Akai Kami (Red Paper), Aoi Kami (Blue Paper)”, “The Hand

that Reaches Out from the Toilet”, and “The Peering Face”, among others. The wide variety of bathroom-related urban legends is enough to demonstrate that the bathroom is considered a unique space in Japanese ghost story culture. Why are there so many bathroom ghost stories in Japan? Tsunametsu Toru, a scholar specializing in Japanese school ghost stories, extensively analyzes these tales in his book *School Ghost Stories: A Study of Oral Literature I*. Generally speaking, the bathroom represents the darker, hidden side of school campuses. It is a space where individuals expose their physical vulnerabilities, easily creating a sense of unease.

Taiwan has many bathroom ghost stories as well, but they are usually shorter, more simplified, and far less detailed compared to dormitory ghost stories. Taiwanese dormitory ghost stories often have complete plots that follow straightforward narrative patterns. When comparing the quantity and completeness of these two types of ghost stories, it is clear that dormitory ghost stories resonate more deeply with Taiwanese students. (For a more detailed comparison between Taiwanese

and Japanese bathroom ghost stories, please see Chapter 5, “The Empty Bathroom”) It’s common among Taiwanese students to pass around rumors about haunted stories set in dormitories. In high school, I remember hearing ghost stories like “the dormitory used to be an execution ground” or “a certain activity room is especially eerie”. Back then, I viewed dormitories as places awash in ghost stories. Even now, just mentioning dormitory ghost stories is enough to resonate with fellow Taiwanese. Is there any other location in a school that can compare to the dormitory in terms of ghost story settings? No! The dormitory is unique, and there is no other place quite like it.

Why are there so many dormitory ghost stories?

How can we explain this distinctly Taiwanese phenomenon?

Ghost stories are a reflection of the human spirit. Interpreting school ghost stories essentially involves understanding the impact that “school” has on the psychological world of students. Dormitories evoke “certain feelings” in us, which explains the abundance of ghost stories related to them. What are these feelings... and why are they so consistently an inspiration for ghost stories? To uncover the answers to these questions, we must delve deeper and analyze thoroughly the dormitory ghost story genre.

In this work, I distinguish dormitory ghost stories into four narrative patterns and discuss each individually in the following chapters: “Locked Dorm Rooms”, “Grid-Like Rooms”, “Someone is Watching You”, and “The Eerie Roommate”. The stories within each are often interconnected and may be read in relation to one another.

1. Locked Dorm Rooms

This is a story I heard from a boarding student at Taichung First Senior High School during their school anniversary celebration.

It is said that there is a sealed locked room at the end of the hallway in one of the dormitories. No one knows why the room was sealed. However, a student once heard loud noises coming from that empty room and thought maybe someone had snuck in for a private party. But, upon investigation, the room’s

seal remained intact, and there was no sign that it had ever been opened. Perhaps it wasn’t a fellow student or a person making the noises inside the room, but rather a spirit.

The story of the locked dorm room at Taichung First Senior High School is simple yet shrouded in secrecy. No explanation has been provided for why that room was sealed, adding an additional layer of mystery and taboo. The reason behind the sealing and locking of the room remains a closely guarded secret – so forbidden, in fact, that no one is allowed to speculate. It is simply taken for granted that the room is unfit for use ever again.

The “locked dorm room” is a prevalent theme in dormitory ghost stories. Every school with dormitory facilities tends to have at least one such room, often said to harbor a dark past involving a tragic incident such as a student’s death or paranormal activity. Over time, after the students familiar with the incident have graduated, schools typically reopen these sealed rooms to accommodate student housing needs. Although new students certainly hear rumors about these once-forbidden rooms, they are unaware of these rooms’ precise locations. This narrative format can easily be adapted to other dormitory ghost stories such as urban legends surrounding the “purge fluid college dorm room”, the repurposed “special dorm room” tale, and the popular “fur ball” story still circulating at National Cheng Kung University.

Purge Fluid College Dorm Room

Urban legends surrounding the “purge fluid college dorm room” generally center on an overseas Chinese student⁰¹ studying at a particular university whose chronic illness causes him to cough frequently. During a long school break, to save money, this student chose to stay in the dormitory instead of flying back home to Southeast Asia. One day, his chronic illness worsened, but there was no one in the dorm to help him. He passed away in his dorm bed. But it wasn’t until the end of the break when everyone returned that students noticed the foul stench wafting in the air of their dormitory. The students traced the smell to the overseas

⁰¹ Translator’s note: The term “overseas Chinese students” refers to students of Chinese heritage from other countries who are studying in Taiwan.

Chinese student's room. By that time, his body had decomposed significantly and bodily fluids had seeped into the mattress and bed frame, making it impossible to separate his remains from the bed. Ultimately, they had to tear the bed frame apart to remove his body from the space. Since then, people have reported hearing mysterious coughing sounds or crinkling noises, as if someone were rummaging about, looking for their medicine in the middle of the night.

The “purge fluid college dorm room” is one of the most famous urban legends in the college dormitory ghost story universe. I first heard the story from a younger classmate while studying at National Chengchi University (NCCU). He recounted it as if it were a true story. However, in the version he told me, no paranormal activities followed the overseas Chinese student's death. I long assumed the incident to be true, and it wasn't until many years later, while researching and collecting information on urban legends, that I realized the “purge fluid college dorm room” story to be a widely shared urban legend that almost certainly never happened.”

While NCCU is the best-known setting for the “purge fluid college dorm room” story, it's not the only one. National Chung Hsing University, Chinese Culture University, Tunghai University, National Taiwan University, Chung Yuan Christian University, Fu Jen Catholic University, and National Taipei University all have their own versions of a story about an overseas Chinese student dying alone in the dorms during a long break. Of course, it's simply impossible for this scenario to have happened in all of these schools. Although the “purge fluid college dorm room” story is clearly not based on a real person or event, it has been widely circulated, leaving a lasting impression on many people. I've heard from at least four or five classmates from NCCU who have all mentioned hearing about and being affected by this urban legend. A cousin of mine who attended National Chung Hsing University also shared with me their school's version of the same tale. The “purge fluid dormitory” legend has become so widespread that if someone were to remember only one school dormitory ghost story, it

would most likely be this one.

How did this urban legend spread to the point where so many people know about it today?

• TIT Version: Same Story, Different Main Character

The earliest version of the “purge fluid college dorm room” story has been traced back to a 1995 post made to the BBS⁰² chat room “Ghost Stories of Taipei Institute of Technology (TIT), Part I”. Taipei Institute of Technology is the former name of the National Taipei University of Technology. The original post was made by someone using the name “A Laughing Friend⁰³ at TIT.” The original poster claimed the story to be a real account of something that had happened in the old TIT dormitory.

Ghost Stories of Taipei Institute of Technology (TIT), Part I

The old dormitory across from campus, now no longer used as student housing, is still occasionally used for club meetups. However, no one spends the night there unless absolutely necessary. There's a good reason for this. While still a dormitory, rooms in the building regularly housed six students each. One year, five roommates who had already finished their exams left early for their break, leaving their remaining roommate A-yao, with one last exam remaining on Saturday, as the room's sole occupant. However, A-yao did not show for his test that Saturday. Before locking the dormitory down for the summer break, the dorm manager did a final inspection. He noticed books and other items still on A-yao's desk and assumed the owner had simply forgotten to take their belongings home. The manager didn't think much of it, locked everything up, and left.

Summer vacation at TIT extends over three months

02 Translator's note: A BBS is a computer server that runs software enabling users to connect to the system using a terminal program. Once logged in, users can perform various functions, including uploading and downloading software and data, reading news and bulletins, and exchanging messages with other users through public message boards and sometimes via direct chatting. (Source: Wikipedia)

03 Translator's note: In Chinese, “laughing friend” is a homophone of “alumnus”.

during the hottest and most humid time of the year. Over the summer, A-yao's parents filed a missing person report with the police, but no sign of A-yao could be found anywhere. After the end of summer vacation, the dormitory reopened to prepare for the start of the new school season. The first student to walk into the dorm nearly fainted from the foul stench. He rushed to find the dorm manager for assistance. All assumed it was likely a stray cat that had gotten itself caught inside the dormitory over the summer and died. But when they opened the room identified as the source of the rotting odor, a horrifying and nauseating sight met their eyes: a decaying corpse covered in maggots was literally melting onto the wall in one of the upper bunk beds inside the room. Blood and putrefied decomposing bodily fluids had saturated the mattress and dripped down, covering the lower bunk as well.

The school quickly contacted A-yao's parents to identify the body. It was later determined A-yao had fallen asleep in the upper bunk facing the wall the night before his exam. When the temperature dropped suddenly that night, he succumbed to sudden heart failure. Because the dorm manager hadn't discovered the body, it remained to rot away in the closed dormitory over several hot summer months. Afterward, many strange, unexplained occurrences began happening in that dormitory building. (Source: BBS, 1995)

The story was posted in 1995. But the fact that the original poster had jokingly referred to himself as an "alumnus" and said "he heard this story from his upper classmates" implies the story was already in circulation for quite some time before he had heard it. The story ends with, "Afterward, many strange, unexplained occurrences began happening in that dormitory building...To be continued next time!" This unclear ending is an essential characteristic of "purge fluid college dorm room" stories, leaving readers wondering if there's more to the tale. However, when searching online, only the story of "Ghost Stories of

Taipei Institute of Technology (TIT), Part I" can be found – there seems to be no trace of a Part II. If there were ever a follow-up to this story, we may learn more about these "strange occurrences" and whether they align with the paranormal phenomena associated with later iterations of this urban legend.

"Ghost Stories of TIT, Part I" is an early version of the "purge fluid college dorm room" story. This story has two crucial features: First, the main character is a Taiwanese student who upon going missing is actively sought by their parents. Second, the student was said to have died during the hot summer break, ideal for setting up the climax of a "corpse decomposed beyond recognition in the sweltering summer heat". As the story evolved over time, the two elements of parents searching for their missing child and a body decomposed by intense summer heat are replaced by other plot devices.

• NCCU Version: The Most Popular Version

The best-known version of this story is set at National Chengchi University (NCCU) and dates back to 1997. It first appeared on the Maokong Student Housing Bulletin Board System (BBS), posted by a student named "donson". He mentioned having heard this ghost story, set in one of NCCU's male dormitories, from a senior classmate, suggesting this version had been circulating at NCCU long beforehand.



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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



BOOKS FROM TAIWAN