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**THREE ASPECTS OF WANG TUOH-
A CONTEMPORARY TAIWANESE
INTELLECTUAL**

A thesis

**submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree**

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by

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Abstract

This thesis presents English translations of three pieces of work by the Taiwanese intellectual Wang Tuoh. Wang Tuoh's works range from short stories and novels to literary criticism, moral essays and newspaper opinion pieces. The exact form of his writings varied according to the political conditions in Taiwan at the time he wrote them.

The first piece is Wang's novella Auntie Jinshui, considered the centrepiece of Wang's Badouzi series of stories. Wang's writing was associated with the Nativist school of writers, which was to form part of the first organised cultural opposition to the rule of the authoritarian KMT in Taiwan. The second piece is Wang's essay "It's 'Literature of the Present Reality', not 'Nativist' Literature", which was written in response to criticism of Nativist writers by KMT supporters. In this essay Wang supplies an important definition of the Nativist school, and broadens the scope of Nativism from being merely of the countryside, to including all of Taiwan's 'Present Reality'. The third piece is Wang's moral essay "Finding the Basis of Success out of the Experience of Failure" which sums up much of Wang's personal philosophy.

In the essay part of the thesis, a description is given of the historical background that led to the complex society of 1970s Taiwan when Wang began writing. Taiwan's history as a geographic crossroads between the interests of China, Japan and the West means that Taiwan society, and its intellectuals, can call upon a socio-cultural heritage that draws upon Chinese, Japanese and Western influences in addition to the local Taiwanese culture.

Wang's works are analysed within a conceptual framework that shows how these multiple influences interact within Taiwan's social, cultural and intellectual worlds. Wang's roles as writer, literary critic, and moral essayist are all simply aspects of his larger role as an intellectual in Taiwan. In exploring Wang's biography and relating it to larger historical events, it can be shown that Wang's writings and his role as an intellectual changed in response to the changing degree of political freedom in Taiwan.

The thesis concludes that Wang has consistently regarded his primary role as being an intellectual commentator, and that he has consistently called upon his countrymen to reflect upon the importance of social justice and democracy in Taiwan.

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A Note on Romanisation

As the international standard used in the study of Modern Standard Chinese around the world, for most purposes in this thesis Hanyu Pinyin has been used for the romanisation of Chinese characters. The exceptions are for Wang Tuoh's name, the spelling being taken from that used by the Taiwan Legislative Yuan on its website; and those Taiwan localities and personalities that have well-known spellings in English, such as Taipei, Keelung, Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo.

[1]Three Aspects of Wang Tuoh
- A Contemporary Taiwanese Intellectual

1.1 Wang Tuoh's Place in Taiwan

1.1.1 Introduction

Wang Tuoh once commented, "Literature is society's best weapon against unjust and inequitable wickedness. I believe that any highly-rated writer has to first have a big heart and a sense of justice".¹

Wang Tuoh (Wang Hongjiu) was born in 1944 in Badouzi, a fishing village in northern Taiwan. Taiwan has seen enormous changes since 1944, but in his chosen role as an intellectual commentator on Taiwan society and culture, whether as a Nativist writer, literary critic, political activist or later as a member of Taiwan's Legislature, Wang Tuoh has adhered to the theme of social justice. In his novella *Auntie Jinshui* (*Jinshui Shen*) he examines the life of the eponymous Auntie Jinshui as she struggles to deal with having been cheated, and falling into debt. In his essay "It's 'Literature of the Present Reality', not 'Nativist' Literature"² ("*Shi 'xianshi zhuyi' wenxue, bu shi 'xiangtu' wenxue*"), in which he gives a definition of Nativist Literature, he attaches great importance to showing the world as it really is, as a way to call for social justice. In his political writings too, he reiterates the need for social justice, and rails against government corruption and what he sees as the Taiwanese people's lack of public consciousness.³ Even in 2003 as a legislator for the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), he still maintains his role as a critic of the government.

1

Wang Tuoh ji p 10

² Translation provided by Chang p 159

³ Most recently in a Taipei Times essay:

www.taipeitimes.com/news/edit/archives/2003/05/13/205799

As a reflection of various facets of Wang Tuoh’s intellectual commentary, I have chosen to translate the novella *Auntie Jinshui* as an illustration of his writing of literature to comment upon Taiwan; the essay “It’s ‘Literature of the Present Reality’, not ‘Nativist’ Literature”⁴ as an example of his use of his academic credentials and his position as a literary critic; and his essay “Finding the Basis of Success out of the Experience of Failure”⁵ (“*Cong shibai jingyan xunzhao chenggong de jiyin*”) as an example of his moral essays.

1.1.2 A Timeline

An outline of Wang Tuoh’s life and times in the table below shows the relation between his works and the events in society surrounding him.

Table 1-1 Wang Tuoh's Life and Times

1970s	1980s	1990s
In his mid 20s to mid 30s	In his mid 30s to mid 40s	In his late 40s
Authoritarian society	Transitional society	Open society
Writer, Critic, Activist	Imprisoned Activist	Politician/Commentator
Describing politics	Engaging politics	In politics
<i>Auntie Jinshui</i> , the Badouzi stories, literary	<i>Jie xiang gu sheng</i> collection of essays, two	“Finding the Basis of Success”, newspaper

⁴ From Wang Tuoh’s collection of essays *Jie xiang gu sheng* (*The Sound of Drums in the Streets*).

⁵ From a collection of essays called *Xunzhao jiushi niandai de rensheng jiazhi* (*Searching for the Value of Life in the 90s*).

writing.	novels written in prison.	opinion pieces
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To better understand Wang Tuoh's writings, his role as an intellectual commentator, and the 1970s Taiwan in which he first wrote, it is necessary to look at the earlier history of Taiwan and Taiwanese literature.

1.1.3 The Geo-political Position of Taiwan

In cultural and geo-political terms, Taiwan is a unique case as a tiny Chinese-populated island located off China's southeastern coast. It has at various times come under the influence, or rule of, China, Japan, various European colonial powers, and the USA, and has never had true (or '*de jure*') independence at any time. Gary Klintworth ⁶ describes Taiwan in geo-political terms as being in the center of a triangle with China, Japan and the US being the sides, all influencing Taiwan toward themselves or away from the others, and it is only this confluence of interests that allows Taiwan the *de facto* independence it now enjoys. Naturally, these three powers also exert socio-cultural influences upon Taiwan, with the three outside influences intermingling with each other and the local Taiwanese culture to form modern Taiwan.

1.2 A Historical Background

1.2.1 Chinese Rule and the Establishment of Taiwan Province

⁶ Klintworth p 3

Taiwan initially drew outside attention in 1598, with the first of repeated attempts by Japan's Tokugawa Shogunate to conquer the island.⁷ Then sparsely populated, with an Austronesian Aboriginal population and some Chinese emigrants from Fujian province, formal political control was established by the Dutch from a trading base in Tainan in 1624. They ruled until 1662 when the Ming Dynasty loyalist Cheng Ch'eng Kung (Koxinga) fled to the island from the Manchu Qing Dynasty. Koxinga brought formal government, and steadily modernized Taiwan whilst bringing it into the Chinese sphere of influence. With his defeat in 1682, Taiwan became a county of Fujian province, but it remained an isolated, neglected frontier and refuge, with immigration from the mainland banned.

In the late 1880s increasing interest from the Imperial powers, such as the US, Germany and France, and a Japanese attempt at annexation in 1884,⁸ lead to the establishment of Taiwan province in 1885, and serious attention from the Qing authorities. Taipei in particular, was transformed from a frontier town into a city integrated into both the Qing and international political economies.⁹ Taipei's trade with the world became dominated by Westerners with an arrogant disregard for the people of Taiwan.

1.2.2 Japanese Rule and Taiwanese Resistance

A turning point in Taiwan's history came in 1895 when it was ceded to Japan after the Treaty of Shimonoseki ended the Sino-Japanese war. Although the Qing wished to retain Taiwan, they also realized their inability to defend it, especially at

⁷ Klintworth p 5

⁸ Klintworth p 7

⁹ Corcuff p xii

the expense of the mainland itself.¹⁰ Under the terms of the treaty, all who remained on Taiwan after a two-year period would become subjects of Imperial Japan. An attempt by Qing loyalists and the northern Taiwan gentry to establish an independent Taiwan Republic¹¹ failed due to the mostly Yue troops from the mainland being unwilling to defend the island, and to Western refusals to take notice of the Republic's requests for assistance. The cession to Japan was felt as a betrayal by many Taiwanese, and led to a sense of abandonment and to some ambivalence as to whether Taiwan was truly a part of China.¹² For the next fifty years the island was largely cut off from mainstream Chinese culture and thought, whilst under increasingly harsh Japanese colonial rule.¹³ Major rebellions continued until as late as 1930.

The relative liberality of Japan's Taisho era (1912 to 1926) exposed Taiwanese studying in the imperial metropole of Tokyo to a range of outside influences, such as notions of Wilsonian self-determination and nationalism, debates on colonialism, and the influence of modern Chinese and Western literature and intellectual debate. In the 1920s and early 1930s a local debate and a form of literature evolved as a means to express local identity and to resist Japanese cultural dominance. Many of these writers of *xiangtu* (Nativist) literature (as it became known) wrote in Japanese, but those who wished to express their links with China wrote in Mandarin, whilst others attempted to modernize the writing system of the local Hoklo language in order to express a local identity. Since these writers held little hope of reinstating relations

¹⁰ *ibid* p xiii

¹¹ *Taiwan Minzhuguo*, Asia's first republic. Historian Hsi Chi-tun suggests that at this time the notion of Taiwanese first appeared. Quoted in Corcuff p xiii

¹² *ibid* p xii. Wu Zhouliu's novel 'Asia's Orphan' also deals with this.

¹³ It is worth noting that during all of this time Japan was nominally a constitutional monarchy.

with China, they thus argued for “local cultural distinctiveness”.¹⁴ It was necessary to have “independent Taiwanese culture in order to adjust ourselves to the reality in Taiwan”.¹⁵

Most forms of Taiwanese debate were effectively ended in 1937 with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War that led into World War Two. The oppression was further increased with the ‘*Kominka undo*’ policy of the Japanese requiring Taiwanese to become loyal imperial subjects, by forcing them to speak only Japanese in public and to take Japanese names.

At the same time as it ruled Taiwan through the coercive power of its police¹⁶ and its use of the traditional Chinese *baojia*¹⁷ system, Japan was determined to hold up Taiwan as a model colony, to show that Japan too could be a successful colonial power. The Japanese built infrastructure such as roads, railways, and electricity; developed industry and agriculture; and tied Taiwan completely into the metropolitan monetary economy of Japan. In 1934 the Japanese had also instituted prefectural councils, which were half-elected, half-appointed.

1.2.3 Chinese Nationalist Rule and the 2-28 Incident

By the time Taiwan came under the rule of Chiang Kai-Shek’s Nationalists (The KMT), and the Republic of China (the ROC) in 1945, the island was more highly developed, more highly educated and wealthier than any other province of China. The stage was set for Taiwan to be reintegrated with China and the wider world.

¹⁴ Hsiao p 29

¹⁵ Kuo Ch’iu Sheng quoted In Hsiao p 42

¹⁶ Approx 1 in 300 of the population

¹⁷ Where a group of about 100 households had an appointed leader, and were held collectively responsible for any crimes committed by any member of the group.

The KMT however, was too busy fighting the civil war against the Communists on the mainland to spare much attention to Taiwan. It ruled Taiwan as a subject province under martial law and “systematically plundered”¹⁸ the local economy. Severe economic difficulties and food shortages ensued, exacerbated by the departure of thousands of skilled, uncorrupt Japanese administrators; the laying off of thousands of Taiwanese civil servants, and their replacement with a small, incompetent and corrupt bureaucracy, lead by the autocratic governor Chen Yi. The new KMT government compared very unfavourably with the departed Japanese. Added to this was KMT suspicion regarding the loyalties of the Taiwanese, and the influence Japan may have had on them. The smaller civil service, too, used only Mandarin, further alienating the majority of Taiwanese who didn’t speak the language. Matters came to a head on February 28 1947, with an open revolt against the KMT governor. The Taiwanese leaders of the revolt, generally educated, influential and often wealthy, were executed in the resulting crackdown, along with some 10-20,000 others. The 2-28 Incident destroyed the local leadership, and poisoned relations between the locals and their government. The 2-28 Incident remained a totally taboo subject until the 1990s. This was the most important event in causing a differentiation between the Taiwanese and those from the mainland, and led to the view of the KMT as merely a new occupying force.

¹⁸ Klintworth p 12

1.2.4 The KMT Retreats to Taiwan

In 1949, the KMT government of the Republic of China and some one million¹⁹ refugees, including around 200,000 trained, educated professionals,²⁰ retreated to Taiwan. Along with them they brought the contents of the national treasury and the National Palace Museum. The new enlarged population of Taiwan also included some 500,000 soldiers from provinces all over the mainland, mostly poorly educated conscripts who didn't speak Hoklo at all. To add insult to injury for the Taiwanese, Chiang Kai-shek gave the order that the new 1949 constitution was not to apply to Taiwan. Taiwan's increasingly dire situation was only retrieved with the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, and the consequent decision by the US government to support KMT rule on the island. An influx of American aid, advisors, businessmen and military followed. To consolidate its rule the KMT declared martial law, and banned the formation of any civil organization, newspaper, magazine, radio station, or political party without government permission. It established party branches that were involved in every aspect of organized life in the country. Local and provincial level elections continued, but were mostly used by the KMT as a means to co-opt local leaders and factions into the party. The national government, installed in mainland China before 1949, remained frozen in place, and largely above the lives of the population it ruled.

The KMT and its Western educated administrators and American advisors took close control of the Taiwanese economy, and also redistributed land to farmers in a

¹⁹ Corcuff p 154

²⁰ Klintworth p 13

very successful 'Land to the Tiller' program.²¹ The traditional landowners used their new money and shares in government enterprises confiscated from the Japanese to invest in industry. The process of industrialization was boosted by policies such as high import tariffs, and American aid money amounting to 6.4% of GNP, or 34% of gross investment.²² After the cessation of American aid in 1965, export-processing zones were set up with low wage labour, which allowed access to the US market and encouraged huge US private investment. In the event of labour disputes, the government stepped in as mediator.²³ American influence also extended to market economic practices and management techniques, technology transfer, and the English language.²⁴

The social and cultural influence of the US was also visible in the university humanities departments, now cutoff from the mainland again and coming under the heavy influence of US and Japanese intellectual debates and fads. National Taiwan University's *Modern Literature* magazine, for example, was sponsored by the US Information Service.²⁵ These departments struggled to maintain their position under a government suspicious of their roles in intellectual debate, and quite aware of the role of students in the revolutionary ferment on the mainland prior to 1949. The newly expanded tertiary education sector was heavily focused on engineering and science, while the more controversial humanities were underfunded and much less influential.

²¹ Which, ironically, the KMT had refused to do on the mainland

²² Klintworth p 37

²³ Kung p 39. Also, see Wang Tuoh's *Awaiting Your Return* for his take on this "mediation".

²⁴ Klintworth p 37

²⁵ Harrell p 32

1.2.5 The KMT's Cultural Policy and Chinese Nationalism

In the cultural sphere, the KMT saw its own role as guardian of traditional Chinese culture²⁶ and nationalism, upon a basis of staunch anti-communism. This KMT state ideology, accompanied with its promotion of Mandarin as the only language of state and thus of the broadcasting, publishing and education systems, marginalized the few Taiwanese intellectuals left, and effectively cut discussion of Taiwan history, tradition and conditions from intellectual and popular debate. Implicit in this KMT ideology was the idea of a “Great China”, with 5000 years of history, of which Taiwan was just a small and very recent part. The KMT was not above insisting upon intellectuals hewing to its ‘accepted’ interpretations,²⁷ with many writers producing “rigidly prescriptive cliché”.²⁸ With Chinese culture as promoted by the KMT seen as stale and stagnant, “the classics became museum pieces”²⁹ and Confucianism an “empty shell”;³⁰ Western and Japanese modern market and consumer culture began to gain ascendancy. Even the ‘Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement’, promoted by the KMT in response to the mainland’s ‘Cultural Revolution’³¹, couldn’t increase the appeal of traditional Chinese culture.

1.2.6 The 1970s and the Rise of Opposition to the KMT

By the 1970s, a vast jump in general prosperity, a large literate population, and a rising middle class, were set against a background of Third World labour conditions, an increasingly impoverished rural sector and an export oriented economy dominated

²⁶ Hung p 285

²⁷ ibid

²⁸ “It’s ‘Literature of the Present Reality’...” p 69

²⁹ CT Hsia page 515

³⁰ “It’s ‘Literature of the Present Reality’...” p 69

³¹ Hsiao p 67

by US and Japanese business. The KMT government was committed to the rhetoric of ‘taking back the mainland’ and ‘propagating Sun Yat-sen’s democratic ideology’³² as part of asserting its legitimacy. A big weakness in the KMT’s arguments for its legitimacy was the fact that the security of Taiwan was clearly dependent upon the US.³³ By 1971 the recovery of the mainland seemed implausible,³⁴ whilst the twin blows of Japan’s claim to the Diaoyutai Islands, and the loss of the ROC’s UN place to the People’s Republic of China (PRC), had both damaged the government’s standing.

The Japanese claim to the Diaoyutai Islands sparked huge protests against Japan by residents of both China and Taiwan and in Chinese communities abroad. *The Intellectual* magazine, of which Wang Tuoh was an editor, played a “central role in arousing reformist fervency” .³⁵ Wang Tuoh attributes his political awakening to these events and even wrote the novel *Taipei, Taipei!*, based upon them. This national ‘rise of social consciousness’ gave new impetus to the democratic opposition movement known as the *Dangwai*.³⁶ The KMT Government’s prestige, and the standing of Japan were further eroded by the loss of official diplomatic relations with Japan in 1972. These events combined to open a crack in government power, which intellectual and political dissidents, Wang Tuoh among them, were quick to exploit.

Initially the *Dangwai* were merely lone dissatisfied KMT members and independents who stood in (and sometimes won) local and provincial elections. As the political environment liberalised in the 1970s, the candidates started working

³² Rigger 1996 p 16

³³ Hughes p 30

³⁴ Rigger 1996 p 16

³⁵ Hsiao p 68

³⁶ *Dangwai* literally means ‘outside the party’, i.e.: outside the KMT .See “It’s ‘Literature of the Present Reality’...” chapter one.

together, first in elections to the Taipei City Council in 1974, and then in provincial elections in 1977. A *Dangwai* magazine, *Formosa (Meilidao)*, set up a nationwide network of offices that served to assist the ‘unofficial’ opposition. In 1986 the *Dangwai* movement declared the establishment of the DPP.

To KMT leader³⁷ Chiang Ching-kuo, the events of the early 1970s “strengthened arguments for a gradual, controlled broadening of political participation”.³⁸ He decided upon a policy of bringing into the party and nurturing local-born politicians: known as the ‘Taiwanisation’ of the KMT. He also called supplementary elections for the legislature, and increased internal party reform. All these reforms had the paradoxical effect of both legitimizing the opposition and of making the suppression of dissent more difficult, as calls for reform now started coming from within the governing KMT.³⁹

1.3 A Conceptual Framework

1.3.1 Introduction

By the 1970s, Taiwan’s unique heritage of Chinese, Japanese, and Western influences, combined with local culture and tradition, was becoming apparent to all, as were the contradictions and strains inherent in their intermingling. I would suggest that a three-way interaction between the Chinese, the Taiwanese, and the Western⁴⁰ traditions becomes a focal point for us to understand the conceptual background of Wang Tuoh’s work.

³⁷ His father Chiang Kai-shek was still alive, but most power was in Chiang Ching-kuo’s hands by this time.

³⁸ Chiang Ching-Kuo quoted in Taylor p 290

³⁹ Rigger 1996 p 113

⁴⁰ I put the US and Japan together here as examples of modern industrial societies.

Table 1-2 A Conceptual Framework

Western influences	Chinese influences	Taiwanese influences
Foreign	Chinese	Taiwanese
Universality	Conformity	Particularism
Modernity	5000 years of history	Native soil
Global Industrialism/capitalism	State Authoritarianism	Local communities
Change	Inheritance	Local conditions
Global	City	Country
Post-colonialism	Mother Country	Taiwan as a colony
Global trade	China as a continental economy	Taiwan as island trader
Modernism/Writer as artist	Traditional view of writer as scholar/commentator	Writer as product of his upbringing

The dividing lines between these categories are quite fluid and are not necessarily mutually exclusive or in opposition to each other. Indeed, in terms of social and cultural debate, most Taiwanese would be familiar with all three influences. If these three influences were drawn as a triangle, then Wang Tuoh and many other Taiwanese are quite capable of shifting position from one side to the other, and using the arguments of one 'side' to critique the others. The real challenge for Wang Tuoh and other intellectuals is to identify their own position among such a wealth of influences.

1.3.2 Chinese Nationalism and ‘Great Han’ Ideology

First of all, obviously, Western traditions arise from sources foreign to Taiwan. Much of the application of these traditions was brought to Taiwan by an elite largely educated in the US and Japan. Less obviously, some of the Chinese influences on Taiwan are also foreign in that they are the values imposed by the former Imperial metropole, and then by the largely mainland-orientated KMT. The KMT after 1945 had been determined to “re-Sinocize”⁴¹ what it saw as an excessively Japanese-acculturated Taiwan. After the retreat in 1949, Chinese nationalism became the dominant ideology of the KMT. This Chinese nationalism was often expressed in the form of ‘Great Han’ ideology, which stressed the culture of the Han majority and suppressed or ignored local particularities in favour of a state imposed uniformity.

The KMT’s nationalism was expressed by such things as renaming streets after mainland locales, and maintaining the fiction that educational and cultural institutions were the “successors”⁴² of mainland bodies. The Taiwanese view of these Chinese traditions was affected by this government imposition and the language barrier between the Mainlanders and the Taiwanese, as well as by the KMT’s intellectual sterility and stifling of debate over China, its championing of high culture, and the lack of contact with the mainland since 1895.⁴³ In addition, to denigrate the Japanese colonial period was to “‘stigmatize’ the Taiwanese”⁴⁴ and their culture. Dissident Peng Mingmin in 1964 critiqued this Chinese nationalism by describing Taiwanese

⁴¹ Hsiao p 53

⁴² Hughes p 29

⁴³ With the exception of the brief period 1945 to 1949

⁴⁴ Hsiao p 63

history in terms of people trying to escape the yoke of the mainland.⁴⁵ To many Taiwanese, the Chinese mainland was represented by two equally unpalatable ideologies: The KMT's Chinese nationalism and 'Great Han' chauvinism, or the CCP's communism.

1.3.3 The Impact of Western Values and the Chinese Response

Western values, as they stand now, claim to have universality,⁴⁶ as for example in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and in the multilateralism expressed by international organizations such as the UN. Used to support this claim is the victory of the West in World War Two, and the conspicuousness of its technological superiority and enormous wealth. That this claim to the universality of western values came along with appalling mistreatment of Taiwanese labour by US and Japanese companies did not go unnoticed.⁴⁷ China's traditional Confucian culture stressed stability and social harmony and had come under severe external pressure and internal criticism during the early 20th century because of Western influence. The KMT used one strand of conservative Confucianism in order to justify its authoritarianism, whilst the Communist Party had rejected Confucianism altogether. Taiwan however, had largely been outside this debate. As a long time neglected frontier colony, which had changed rulers several times, it held to its local traditions as a shield against the imposition of outside culture.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Hughes p 36

⁴⁶ Wang Tuoh attacks this in terms of Western dichotomies in "It's 'Literature of the Present Reality'..." p 69

⁴⁷ "It's 'Literature of the Present Reality'..." p 67

⁴⁸ E.g.: in resistance to the Japanese colonial *Kominka* movement; the Nativist writers response to Modernism; and Wang Tuoh's call for renewal in "It's 'Literature of the Present Reality'..." p 76

1.3.4 The Impact of Modernity

The West however, also exemplifies modernity- a wealthy, comfortable lifestyle which the rest of the world also aims to enjoy. This modernity interacts with the idea of 5000 years of Chinese history, which Taiwan is told is its inheritance, and with traditions and culture born of the native soil of Taiwan itself. Modernity manifests itself largely in the form of industrialisation and is wrapped in an ideological package of capitalism. This requires a society with freedom of movement of labour, and capital. This movement comes into conflict with the requirements of the central government run along the lines of a strong top-down authoritarian⁴⁹ administration, with influence in every sphere of society. Both capital and government then come into conflict with the traditional 'sea and soil' economy and its attendant social structure. In addition the cost of this modern industrial society, in terms of social disruption, cultural dislocation and environmental damage is very high.

Western culture holds a high degree of regard for progress, which manifests as change. Naturally any adoption of Western traditions by Taiwan would mean changes, which always cause social problems. Both the particular local culture and traditions, along with those inherited from the mainland, became very important to intellectuals and popular debate, because they needed to be defined and understood in order to retain what was valued through a time of rapid change.

⁴⁹ A recurring theme in Nativist Literature is the need for ordinary people to avoid the authorities.

1.3.5 Taiwan as a Cultural Crossroads

All the above can be loosely summed up as the interactions between Taiwan as a global economic player, a rapidly developing urban society, and the rural fishing, mining, and agricultural roots the people are still closely linked with. For the majority of Taiwanese these roots can be traced back to the village in the mainland their ancestors came from. The ban on travel to the mainland⁵⁰ meant these roots were cut off. The cession of Taiwan to Japan by the Qing in 1895 was the origin of the Taiwanese feeling that they have been orphaned. By helping link Taiwan with their own domestic markets and the wider world economy and its geopolitics, Japan and the US ensured that Taiwan would never again be an isolated island frontier. Strategically, Taiwan became an important part of the world trading system, and Japan and the US had a vested interest in ensuring that Taiwan remained separate from Communist China. A common description of Taiwan in the early 1970s⁵¹ is that Taiwan was entering an era of post-colonialism, freeing itself from the shackles of, first, Japanese formal colonialism, and then Japanese and US economic imperialism.⁵² Certainly Wang Tuoh's writings show full awareness of Taiwan's colonial position. Even Chiang Ching-kuo said he wanted "as close a relationship with the US as the US wants."⁵³ A more difficult conundrum was how to place Taiwan identity within that of the larger Chinese cultural sphere originating in the ancestral mother country.

⁵⁰ This wasn't lifted until 1988.

⁵¹ NB post-colonialism as a theory post-dates this era. The people of Taiwan at the time would not have defined their position in this manner.

⁵² Some commentators go as far as defining the KMT as a colonial regime, from which Taiwan has yet to fully free itself.

⁵³ Taylor, p 332

1.3.6 Intellectual Debate in the 1960s

Intellectual responses to 1960s problems included Modernism, which was adapted as a progressive western theory by universities cut off from the mainland and its intellectual mainstream. Modernism was attacked for emphasizing style over form. The traditional Chinese idea of intellectuals with a larger role and responsibility as commentators upon society made a comeback. Wang Tuoh fits firmly in this tradition. Nativist writing was a response to the perception that Modernism had little to say about Taiwan, and that the Modernists had “defaulted on their social responsibilities as members of the intelligentsia”.⁵⁴ It was characterised by the “use of Taiwanese language, small-town or country folk in economic difficulty, and resistance to imperialist pressure.”⁵⁵ It traces its roots back to the Japanese occupation period.

1.4 Wang Tuoh’s Life and Post-1945 Taiwan

Wang Tuoh was born in 1944 in Badouzi, a small fishing village near Keelung City in northern Taiwan. He was the youngest of six children born to a fifth generation fishing family.⁵⁶ The majority of residents of Badouzi were “half-year workers,”⁵⁷: involved in the seasonal fishing industry. He was less than a year old in September 1945 when Taiwan came under the control of the Republic of China and its KMT government. When he was 12, his father died, and from a young age during the economic hardship of the mid-1940s to 1950s, Wang Tuoh picked up scrap, sold

⁵⁴ Chang, p 151

⁵⁵ op cit p 149

⁵⁶ *Wang Tuoh ji* p 253

⁵⁷ *Jie xiang gu sheng* p 197

ice blocks and fried sweet potato, and searched for coal scraps, to assist his shopkeeper mother. In the early 1960s he worked for the Taiwan Power Company or on the Keelung wharves during high school holidays. The Taipower workers at this time were envied, for their company supplied accommodation and steady well-paid jobs.⁵⁸

Wang Tuoh ascribes his mother's ambition as part of his success in entering high school and then National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU). Compulsory state education at this time was only six years,⁵⁹ extended to nine years only in 1968, and even then fees were too high for some families. A strict examination system allocated places in the secondary and tertiary sectors. Wang Tuoh describes the faculty at NTNU in the 1960s as very rigid and conservative; and as a result, as a student and then later as a high school teacher, he "rejected the idea of controlling student thought".⁶⁰ After gaining his MA through part-time study, Wang Tuoh became a teacher at National Chengchi University (NCCU) which had been established in Taipei in 1954. At NCCU he was an editor of *The Intellectual (Daxue)* magazine, to which he contributed essays, fiction and reportage. In the 1970s he contributed essays to *Political Review (Taiwan Zhenglun)* magazine and *Formosa (Meilidao)* magazine.

1.5 Wang Tuoh as a Nativist Writer

1.5.1 The Nativist and Modernist Schools

⁵⁸ Martin p 224

⁵⁹ Only 51% of primary school graduates went on to Junior High in 1961. (Rubinstein page 333)

⁶⁰ Wang Tuoh quoted in Martin p 226

Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang identifies two major strands of Taiwanese writing in the early 1970s, when Wang Tuoh began writing. One strand was Modernism, which was influenced by Western high culture and used “the ideas of liberalism, individualism and nationalism as correctives to oppressive social relations derived from the traditional system of values.”⁶¹The Modernists were “politically disengaged”, ⁶² and, as they “endeavored to explore new spheres of human experience”, their efforts were mostly within the bounds of ‘realism’ (*xieshi*). Their major innovation was wrought in the greater and increasingly skillful use of the ‘objective’ voice to present “an impartial view of reality”.⁶³

The second strand was Nativism. Nativist writers, too, had been influenced by the Modernists innovative use of the “objective” voice, but they followed in the steps of the May Fourth writers in echoing the traditional view of literature as being a vehicle for social change. It is also part of the wider Chinese tradition of literature as high culture and as an expression of intellectual debate. Joseph S M Lau said that the impact of traditional literature on Taiwan literature was “invisible, yet thicker than blood, a born Chinese can never shake off this traditional heritage from his consciousness”.⁶⁴

1.5.2 The 1950s and 1960s Mainstream

The mainstream in the 1950s and 1960s saw a large amount of so-called ‘airport’ literature written by mainlanders who regarded their lives in Taiwan as a temporary

⁶¹ Chang p 407

⁶² op cit p 405

⁶³ op cit p 410

⁶⁴ quoted in Faurot p 9

stage before the mainland was retaken and they could return. It was largely nostalgic literature set in the mainland, a trend which was exacerbated by the fact that this literature, due to political considerations, had to avoid mention of the current political situation of China and Taiwan. Writers of this strand of literature were often identified with the university they had received their training at, and were often teachers there⁶⁵ which meant they were part of the establishment, and thus careful not to upset the KMT.

1.5.3 The Nativist Critique of the ‘Failings’ of Modernism

At the end of the ‘New Poetry’ debate in 1972, the consensus of some writers and academic critics was that the modernist influenced New Poetry suffered from “semantic obscurity, excessive use of foreign imagery, Europeanized syntax, and evasion of contemporary social reality”.⁶⁶ Nativist writer Chen Yingzhen said modernism was “erecting an empty structure of formalism”.⁶⁷

Reaction against these perceived failings had already begun with the ‘*huigui xiangtu*’ (return to the native) trend around 1970. Progressive writers such as Wang Tuoh urged Taiwanese to respect their own cultural heritage and to “show greater concern for domestic social issues.”⁶⁸ These writers, based around *Literary Quarterly* magazine, publicly renounced the modernist works as being overly foreign influenced.

⁶⁵ C T Hsia quoted in Lau 1976 p x

⁶⁶ Chang p 148

⁶⁷ quoted in Faurot p 20

⁶⁸ Chang p 148

Because intellectuals had been cut out of a role in the KMT's Taiwan, they had to find themselves a new social role, as spokesmen for the new middle class.⁶⁹ Nativist literature catered for this class's romantic and nostalgic yearnings for their former rural life and kept them from 'getting lost'.⁷⁰ This Nativist critique, in such a time of intellectual crisis and momentous political events, was effectively the beginnings of a formal cultural opposition movement against the KMT.⁷¹ The Nativists believed that the capitalist-style economic modernization of the 1950s and 1960s was flawed. They advocated socialism and fiercely attacked the government's economic dependence on the US, with its 'decadent' and 'degenerate' capitalist culture. They drew public attention to the plight of farmers, miners and workers who were paying the price of urban and industrial expansion. Nativist emphasis on Taiwan also touched upon sensitive issues such as the balance of power between the native Taiwanese and those born on the mainland, and the 'provincial identity problem' (*shengti wenti*).

1.5.4 The KMT Attack and the Nativist Response

In 1977 critics associated with the KMT publicly attacked Nativist Literature. The Nativists defended themselves in various articles and the 'Debate on Nativist Literature' began. Wang Tuoh's essay "It's 'Literature of the Present Reality', not 'Nativist' Literature" "represents an important step in the Nativists' self-definition".⁷² The increasing politicisation of critical discourse saw the literary climate become

⁶⁹ Chang Hsi-kuo writing in Faurot p34

⁷⁰ ibid

⁷¹ The *Dangwai*

⁷² Chang p 159

“truly unpleasant...Taiwanese writers were deeply split into opposing groups”.⁷³ Debate only came to an end in 1978 as a result of threatened government intervention. This was because Nativism was seen by the KMT as being too similar to the ‘workers, soldiers, peasants’ literature⁷⁴ espoused by Mao Zedong in 1942, and closely related to the kind of writing that the KMT had “lost against ideologically on the mainland”.⁷⁵

Wang Tuoh pointed out that he had no knowledge of pre-1940s Chinese literature,⁷⁶ but that (like Republican-era China) “Society now has conditions that need improving,”⁷⁷ and ‘Literature of the Present Reality’ reflects these. As Sungsheng Yvonne Chang commented, “it is undeniable that literary nativism was used by a special group of people at a particular historical moment to challenge the existing social order.”⁷⁸

1.6 ‘Concrete’ ‘Present Reality’: A Look at Auntie Jinshui.

1.6.1 Introduction

A consistent theme that arises from the reading of various pieces of Wang Tuoh’s fiction writing including *Auntie Jinshui*, is that of what can be called ‘concreteness’: the background of the story must be so strongly and accurately described that every detail rings true and the reader takes it entirely for granted. Wang Tuoh once said that “Literature not only reflects the writer’s life and environment, but at the same time

⁷³ op cit p 152

⁷⁴ ‘gong, nong, bing wenxue’

⁷⁵ Hsiao p 70

⁷⁶ “Most important May 4 works were unavailable” C T Hsia p 509

⁷⁷ Wei p 303

⁷⁸ op cit 151

reflects all of history and the present social environment.”⁷⁹ This is the order of ‘reality’ he seeks to create in his fiction.

1.6.2 Biographical Detail and Personal Experience

Auntie Jinshui is the major novella within Wang’s series of Badouzi stories. The series draws heavily on his own experiences in a small, insular village where everyone is part of a larger family that has been there for five generations. Wang Tuoh is meticulous in using his own biographical details and his intimate knowledge of this way of life in order to draw as real and solid a picture as possible. Details include a family of six brothers, with a father ‘who never understood affection’⁸⁰ and who beats their mother; the brother who is a sea captain; and the extended family network that allows pooling of resources in order to survive a meager existence dependent upon the sea.⁸¹ Even Wang’s physical description of the buckets set to catch the water leaking in from the ceiling during winter and the permanently damp bedding are from his own memories.⁸²

That *Auntie Jinshui* is by no means unique in this kind of biographical detail and links with Wang’s personal experiences, can be seen in comparing it with some of his earlier short stories. The short piece *Explosion (Zha)* tells of a Badouzi resident who is desperate to raise the money for his son’s school tuition fees. He severely injures himself while illegally fishing with dynamite. Even if he survived his injuries, he would still be imprisoned, and his family’s fortune would dramatically decline. This

⁷⁹ *Jie xiang gu sheng* p 198

⁸⁰ “*Finding the Basis of Success...*” p 28

⁸¹ *Wang Tuoh ji* p 70

⁸² *Jie xiang gu sheng* p 199

story is based on events that happened to Wang's relatives.⁸³ It describes a borderline existence of constant debt and dependence upon a tiny vegetable garden to bolster the family's food resources. *A Young Country Doctor (Yi ge nianqing de xiangxia yisheng)*⁸⁴ tells of the disillusion and resignation of a young country doctor as he deals with his decision to return from the city to assist his home village and face the harsher rural reality he finds there. *Chimes in the Graveyard (Fen de zhongsheng)* has an illiterate fisherman facing off against a teacher who had administered corporal punishment to his son for not paying supplementary school fees. The divide between the urban and educated teacher and the rural and uneducated fisherman is starkly seen, as is the importance attached to education. *Awaiting Your Return*⁸⁵ (*Wang jun zaogui*) also has a character called Auntie Jinshui and tells of her and her daughter-in-law anxiously awaiting news of their son and husband, missing presumed drowned, as his fishing boat is lost in a typhoon. The most important character in this story however is the young Fishermen's Association activist who fights against his own association's bosses and the government for compensation for the bereaved. Further veracity and 'concreteness' are added to these Badouzi stories by the knowledge of the biographical details shared by Wang Tuoh's mother (a real person) and the fictional character Auntie Jinshui.

All of these stories end inconclusively, increasing their sense of 'present reality' by implying that they imitate life and therefore do not have a tidy literary ending. The themes of rural-urban divide, increasing poverty of the villages, the generation gap between the newly educated young and their parents, the importance of education as a

⁸³ op cit p 198

⁸⁴ Title translation provided by Rosemary Haddon.

⁸⁵ ibid

means of upward mobility, and what Wang Tuoh regards as the increasing dominance of money in social relations⁸⁶ are seen in all of these stories, including *Auntie Jinshui*.

1.6.3 Auntie Jinshui and Rural Life

The opening page⁸⁷ of *Auntie Jinshui* sets the scene of a seasonal existence, as it describes the fishing boats pulled up on the beach. The traditional role of the patron goddess of fishermen, Mazu, is brought in, as she and Auntie Jinshui are the most well known personages in Badouzi village.⁸⁸ In the next scene the author lists the educational and career achievements of Auntie Jinshui's six sons, and underlines the importance of education in escaping rural poverty, as Wang Tuoh did himself. The other villagers all admire Auntie Jinshui for her role in her sons' success.⁸⁹ The importance of peddling is highlighted as one of the few occupations open to women who often used this income to support themselves when there was no male breadwinner or when the male breadwinner was unemployed.⁹⁰ The precariousness of depending upon the sea for survival is mentioned by Auntie Jinshui's fellow villagers and customers⁹¹ who also talk of the sons' traditional role of supporting their elderly parents. Auntie Jinshui contrasts this with her sons and their "going through money like water."⁹² Auntie Jinshui tells a customer, "I have bought this Marie brand for you," and one can see some hint of foreign exoticism in the name of the brand.⁹³ The mention of a brand hints at the arrival of capitalism and modern marketing in a previously isolated village. Auntie Jinshui of course, in her role of capitalist mediator

⁸⁶ *Jie xiang gu sheng* p 205

⁸⁷ All page references are to *Wang Tuoh ji*. Page 67 is the first page of *Auntie Jinshui*.

⁸⁸ op cit p 68

⁸⁹ op cit p 69

⁹⁰ Kung p 17

⁹¹ *Auntie Jinshui* p 71

⁹² op cit p 72

⁹³ op cit p 74

between city and village, is not afraid to use this perceived sophistication to sell her goods: witness the Paris brand perfume and the skimpy underwear she attempts to sell. Also interesting in this scene is Auntie Jinshui's illiteracy and insistence upon the strength of her memory in a dispute over payment.⁹⁴

In the second chapter of the novella, winter arrives, and Wang Tuoh carefully describes the deprivation and poor living conditions this brings, as the rainwater drips onto Auntie Jinshui's bedding. This adds to her distress as she laments having been talked by a priest into giving money to his non-existent business, which has left her unable to repay money owed to her *hui*.⁹⁵ *Hui* were an extremely important method of generating money and credit in rural communities without access to formal banking facilities. Women usually dominated them. The breakdown of Auntie Jinshui's relations with others of her women's network over the payment of the *hui* money is the most significant part of the story. The women's networks were much less visible to the authorities, relied less on patrilineal kinship and had much stronger local roots.⁹⁶ For Auntie Jinshui to be in conflict with a group that previously held her in high esteem distresses her greatly. Auntie Jinshui can't repay the *hui* money because her whole family has lost a great deal of money in a bad business investment and because her sons have taken on large hire purchase and mortgage debts. The mutual dependence on pooling family income has become a liability and her sons and daughters-in-law prove reluctant to assist her. This lessening of previously strong filial ties due to the influence of money is seen as a tragedy in Taiwan of the 1970s.

⁹⁴ op cit p 77

⁹⁵ *Hui* are informal credit networks in which villagers pool their money and take turns in spending the collected sum.

⁹⁶ Weller p xii

1.6.4 When the Family Fails

In chapter three, when Auntie Jinshui goes to Keelung City to ask her sons for assistance, she is shown as a fish out of water and an embarrassment to her urbanized sons and their young wives. Even her most filial son, Ah He, seems to have deserted her.⁹⁷ Even before his death, her husband, Jinshui, is of no use to her, because he is an easily satisfied type who never concerns himself with what he sees as the women's worry: the household finances. His ready resort to violence and his ignorance have already ruptured relations between himself and his sons. His funeral only adds to the debt load, but because their family is regarded as a success story and an example for the whole village, a grander funeral than the family members can afford is unavoidable.

In the end Auntie Jinshui is driven out of Badouzi by her need to repay the *hui* debt, and by the contempt of her peers. She goes to Taipei City and joins its ever-expanding menial workforce as a maid. In the epilogue the author hints that eventually she will repay all her debt and return to Badouzi. Whether she will be able to readjust upon her return is a question hinted at by the views of her sons and grandchildren, when they return for Jinshui's funeral. Perhaps she will have been permanently altered by becoming a city resident, and by the gulf of experience between her and the other Badouzi residents.

Wang Tuoh's stories (like many Chinese works) have a degree of sentimentality and melancholy in their view of a changing society. Wang Tuoh is, however, careful

⁹⁷ Auntie Jinshui p 99

to avoid any implication of nostalgia in his works.⁹⁸ Despite the hopeful ending of Auntie Jinshui, there is still the sense the ordinary fisher folk can't leave their village.⁹⁹ Those few who do leave and return seem to bring trouble upon those who remain,¹⁰⁰ while the majority feel that they can't return.¹⁰¹ Those who can't return evince a certain nostalgia for their rural roots.

1.6.5 Literature and Real Life

All these themes are wrapped around Wang Tuoh's biographical facts and memories, to form a mode of narration that "depends exclusively upon the action".¹⁰² Nativist writers maintain that there is no artifice in their work and that the backdrop is self-consciously not a literary construction, that it is real life, the 'present reality'. Nevertheless it has been meticulously constructed to be as real as possible in order to focus the reader's attention upon its action and the message of social justice. By making this 'present reality' as 'concrete' as he can, the writer seeks to add weight and strength to a story of someone historically inconsequential and insists that their story is an equally valid part of Taiwan's whole story. Indeed Wang Tuoh says, "In history there is no great literature that didn't arise from the soil and present reality."¹⁰³

⁹⁸ see "It's Literature of the Present Reality'..." p 77

⁹⁹ especially in *Explosion*

¹⁰⁰ see *Auntie Jinshui*, and *A Young Country Doctor*

¹⁰¹ .For many reasons, economic, greater city cultural life etc...

¹⁰² Haddon page xvii

¹⁰³ *Jie xiang gu sheng* p 220.

1.7 The Implicit Becomes Explicit: A Look at “It’s ‘Literature of the Present Reality’ not ‘Nativist’ Literature.”

1.7.1 The Response to KMT Criticism

By 1977, when this essay was written, the implicit political criticism in Wang Tuoh’s fiction had become explicit political criticism in his literary essays. This is because Wang felt compelled to reply to KMT criticism in the ‘Debate on Nativist Literature’ mentioned previously. As in *Auntie Jinshui*, Wang is drawing a concrete picture of the ‘present reality’. He uses a skillful assemblage of biographical detail, factual information, historical events and reports, and careful quotation of others’ works to build this picture. He mentions his own awakening during the Diaoyutai protests;¹⁰⁴ and notes his own and others’ ‘reportage’ for *The Intellectual* magazine.¹⁰⁵ He adds in newspaper reports of working conditions for farmers and miners,¹⁰⁶ together with the facts of the historical events from 1970 to 1972.¹⁰⁷

Wang’s extensive quotations of others’ works are carefully chosen to add emotional background to his facts. For instance, Wang Xingqing’s “Condemnations and Appeals”¹⁰⁸ exemplifies the enthusiasm and awakening of political and social consciousness of youth. It also talks of a national crisis and the need for social and political change. Wang Tuoh doesn’t edit out the call in this essay also for “the government to...thoroughly and totally reform politics.”¹⁰⁹ His quoting of “*The*

¹⁰⁴ “It’s ‘Literature of the Present Reality’...” p 64

¹⁰⁵ op cit p 65

¹⁰⁶ op cit p 67

¹⁰⁷ op cit p 60

¹⁰⁸ op cit p 63

¹⁰⁹ ibid

Complete Story of the Taida Volunteer Service Corps”¹¹⁰ also exemplifies the views of youth, and by telling of the youth investigating rural conditions, also hints at the need for change. More explicitly Wang Tuoh also leaves in this quote that “school didn’t talk about anything meaningful”¹¹¹ as an attack on the KMT controlled education system. The quotes from Wei Tianzhong¹¹² represent the fears and confusion of Taiwanese caught in a period of great social and cultural dislocation. A quote from Wei on how “our current modern literature and Taiwan’s real life have become separate”¹¹³ is used to bolster the Nativist view that literature and society cannot be separate.

The historical events of 1970 to 1972 would still have been in the memory of Wang’s readers in 1977 and indeed would have been reinforced by subsequent international setbacks for Taiwan. Referring to these events still fresh in the collective memory, is the only way Wang can appeal to a Taiwanese historical consciousness, because formal and open study and discussion of Taiwanese history was impossible at this time.¹¹⁴ The implications of these international events resonate with the unrecorded folk memory of the Taiwanese.

1.7.2 The Problem of Imperialism

Having used these various means to build his picture of Taiwan’s ‘present reality’, Wang then attributes many of the economic problems in this present reality to Japanese and American imperialism. His readers don’t need to think too hard for

¹¹⁰ op cit p 65

¹¹¹ ibid

¹¹² op cit pp 71 and 74

¹¹³ op cit p74

¹¹⁴ this weak historical consciousness is discussed in Yang p 137

examples of the impact of Japan and the US and their capitalist system and economic exploitation on their own lives, and on their country, so the link Wang makes is easy to understand. Wang then very cleverly uses a Western historian to attack the West when he quotes Arnold J Toynbee's attack on capitalism for causing class war and social division.¹¹⁵ This is exactly the problem that Wang sees arising in Taiwan, with its increasingly uneven distribution of wealth.¹¹⁶

Examples are given of Western literature that Wang sees as representing "an elegy for Western culture"¹¹⁷ and as "evidence of systemic collapse."¹¹⁸ These examples are all modernist in style, and by mentioning these works Wang also obliquely attacks Taiwan's Modernist school of writers, the main literary rivals to Nativist writing. He says that many Western-influenced Taiwanese writers produce only "hazy, pallid, coy imitations"¹¹⁹ of Western literature. He goes on to condemn using Western standards of literary criticism to assess Taiwanese works.

Wang's answer to these literary problems he writes of is that "Literature is required to take a position rooted in the reality of life and to stand in the same position as the masses".¹²⁰ At its base is Wang's argument that "If I don't reflect the Taiwan I was born and raised in, what do I reflect?"¹²¹ To reflect reality Wang Tuoh "can't leave Taiwan".¹²² Here is Wang Tuoh's answer to the KMT government's concern about his fiction's subject matter. He is merely reflecting 'present reality' and the KMT should face that reality too.

¹¹⁵ *Jie xiang gu sheng* p 70

¹¹⁶ op cit p 66 and 68

¹¹⁷ op cit p 72

¹¹⁸ ibid

¹¹⁹ op cit p 73

¹²⁰ op cit p 75

¹²¹ Wei p302

¹²² op cit p 352

1.7.3 Redefining ‘Nativist’ Literature

Because the ‘Debate on Nativist literature’ featured attacks on a small part of the Nativists output (stories about rural life or the working class), in the final section of his essay Wang redefines Nativist literature. He says that Nativist literature “was produced from a perspective of, and sense of, opposition to foreign culture and to society’s injustices,”¹²³ and is therefore the opposite of those “blind copies of western literature”.¹²⁴ It is not localist, which he calls “narrow, divisive, and emotional”, nor is it nostalgic.¹²⁵ Wang Tuoh avoids nostalgia, because if one “overlooks the objective reality of historical and social progress, it is even easier for people to fall into a kind of nostalgic and sentimental depression”.¹²⁶ Wang says that Nativist literature isn’t simply concerned with rural regions and people (*bu shi xiang tu*), rather it is concerned with the ‘here and now’ (*xianshi*) of Taiwan society as a whole range of social environments. ‘Nativism’ should therefore be defined as literature rooted in Taiwan and reflective of it. An additional important point is that Wang Tuoh uses the word *xianshi* (present reality) rather than the word *xieshi* (realism): this served to widen the scope of Nativist literature to include *all* levels of society and also removed the confusion inherent in the use of the Western literary term ‘realism’ (*xieshi*) which was associated with the Western-influenced Modernists.¹²⁷

¹²³ *Jie xiang gu sheng* p 77

¹²⁴ *ibid*

¹²⁵ *op cit* p 78

¹²⁶ *ibid*

¹²⁷ *ibid*

1.8 Giving Meaning to Life: A Look at “Finding the Basis of Success from the Experience of Failure”.

1.8.1 Engaging in Politics

After the ‘Debate on Nativist Literature’ Wang Tuoh came to the conclusion that if “you don’t engage yourself in politics, politics will sooner or later engage you”, thus he joined the *Formosa* magazine faction of the *Dangwai*. In December 1979 he was arrested after “The Formosa Incident” (*Meilidao Shijian*), in which a *Formosa* magazine-organized rally to celebrate International Human Rights Day was broken up by police. He was imprisoned for almost five years. After his release he resumed his involvement in politics and writing, and in 1991 he was elected to the Legislative Yuan as the DPP member for Keelung.

1.8.2 Seeking Value from the Experience of Imprisonment

The essay “Finding the Basis of Success out of the Experience of Failure” was written as part of a collection of essays called *Seeking the Value of Life in the 90s* (*Xunzhao jiushi niandai de rensheng jiazhi*), and Wang Tuoh uses this essay to explain what value he got out his experience of imprisonment.

Although written seventeen years after “It’s ‘Literature of the Present Reality’ ...”, “Finding the Basis of Success...” nevertheless shows the same careful combination of elements. There are biographical details, quotes from a wide variety of literature, factual information, and observation of the world around him. By 1994 Taiwan had been free of martial law for seven years and Wang was able to read and quote freely from literature ranging from the historical to the modern, from Taiwan, China and

Japan to Russia, Europe and the US. As an intellectual commentator in Taiwan, Wang was able to fully utilize Taiwan's unique position as both a geographical and cultural crossroads and to assume that his audience too would have some familiarity with the works he quotes and with this wide-ranging kind of style. Wang shows a highly personal, practical approach in formulating his philosophy of life. He starts from the basis of his own experiences and failures,¹²⁸ and then uses well-known stories and legends to show that his experiences are not unique but are part and parcel of life's experiences. As such, all experience is valuable in adding to one's life. This is well-expressed in his quoting of Dostoevsky: "What I most fear is suffering and hardship that I don't learn anything from".¹²⁹ It accords too, with his view on writing: "A person who has suffered a lot, a very depressed person, can free himself and gain much comfort through literature".¹³⁰ Perhaps this essay finally freed him from his prison experiences.

1.8.3 Linking Man and his Environment

From this personal, practical beginning, he goes on to tell the reader of the German Jewish psychologist Frankl's *'Logotherapy'*¹³¹ which was formulated while in a Nazi concentration camp. Frankl's observations were that those inmates who still had people outside the camps who loved them, and those who tried to find joy in their environment, were those who had meaning in their life and were thus able to survive such a dreadful place. Frankl says, "Because in their hearts there was a resonance and

¹²⁸ "Finding the Basis of Success..." p 4

¹²⁹ op cit 26

¹³⁰ quoted in Martin p 228

¹³¹ described in Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*

sympathy with the natural world, they could endure months of suffering.”¹³² This matches very closely with Wang’s description of his feelings and actions whilst in prison.¹³³ The close link between man and his environment that Frankl finds crucial to survival is also a consistent theme in Wang’s fiction, particularly the Badouzi stories. The same awareness of the details of one’s reality is what allows Wang to write his fiction. Wang eschews great flights of fancy, and in “It’s Literature of the Present Reality...” he says that even the most mundane part of Taiwan’s reality is worthy of record. The value he places on *all* experience in his 1977 essay has practical value in the 1980s in enabling him to take some lessons and value from his imprisonment. He says being imprisoned “allowed him to understand the truth of human nature”;¹³⁴ made him “more open-minded”¹³⁵; allowed him to “read many books I enjoyed”;¹³⁶ gave him lessons in how to face failure;¹³⁷ and made him far more humble.¹³⁸ All of these would be very valuable lessons for a man who describes his roles as intellectual commentator and politician.

1.8.4 Lessons in Facing Failure

Wang says that his first lesson in facing failure was that “The heart has to retain a sense of aesthetics”,¹³⁹ and then describes sitting in his cell enjoying the setting sun. Wang’s detailed descriptions of the wind and waves on the sea in *Auntie Jinshui* show his sense of aesthetics. Lesson two was that “The heart has to be full of

¹³² Quoted in “*Finding the Basis of Success...*” p 22

¹³³ op cit p 21

¹³⁴ op cit p 15

¹³⁵ op cit p 17

¹³⁶ op cit p 15

¹³⁷ op cit p 17

¹³⁸ op cit p 20

¹³⁹ ibid

love”.¹⁴⁰ In his fiction he shows a great affection for his family and the residents of his hometown. In his political activism he showed his love for his country. In prison he comes to value love on its most personal and intimate level as he talks of his family and to not take love for granted. Lesson three was that “The heart has to contain dreams”.¹⁴¹ Given Wang Tuoh’s childhood dreams of education and his adult dreams of democracy in Taiwan, then it seems that he subconsciously knows this lesson already. Wang admits that he used his time in prison to “do a deep self-examination”,¹⁴² so the lessons he learnt would certainly be rooted in this newly gained knowledge of himself and the motivation that he gained from this unfortunate imprisonment.

In prison then, Wang Tuoh came to an acceptance of his situation. Acceptance of, and taking pleasure in one’s ‘present reality’ doesn’t however absolve one of not actively participating in it. The message of this essay and all the examples contained in it are best summed up in Wang’s admonition to his daughter:

“Daughter! The meaning of life isn’t in thinking, it is in doing....We should use life to interrogate ourselves: i.e, “Wang Tuoh, I am your “life”, what meaning are you going to give me?”¹⁴³

1.9 Wang Tuoh as Commentator.

Wang’s belief in ‘doing’ is easy to see. In recent years, in addition to his role as a legislator, Wang has written many articles and newspaper opinion pieces.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ op cit p 22

¹⁴¹ op cit p23

¹⁴² op cit p 19

¹⁴³ op cit p 25

Although he is now part of the ruling party, the views expressed in these writings are consistent with the views he expressed as a dissident in his earlier writings.

He explains that “intellectuals must keep the government on its toes...even though it may sound harsh to the ears of those in power”, and that “criticism by intellectuals has always been a pillar of stable national and social development”.¹⁴⁵ He said this in 2002 when his own party, the DPP, was the ruling party. Wang clearly puts his role as a commentator above his role as a politician. In other articles he notes that he knows he is “not good at following orders,”¹⁴⁶ and criticizes those intellectuals who “have become willing captives of politics.”¹⁴⁷ Wang continually calls for reform of the political system and for more open and less self-interested politics.¹⁴⁸ He laments that there are “no role models for fulfilling civic duties,” and calls for a “deepening of public consciousness.”¹⁴⁹ He criticizes the fact that “only in elections is justice occasionally mentioned.”¹⁵⁰ His concern for the state of Taiwan’s democracy is evident when he says that the DPP “should try to do all it can to maintain its clean image”; as the ruling party it should ensure that the excuse of ‘national security’ is not used to allow the government to become an “authoritarian monster”.¹⁵¹

In his articles on international affairs Wang also shows a great awareness of Taiwan’s international position: “trying to exist between two big nations, China and the US, Taiwan’s international undertakings are both frustrating and tragic.” Wang

¹⁴⁴ According to the Legislative Yuan Library records, very few other legislators do this.
¹⁴⁵ all from www.taipeitimes.com/edit/news/archives/2002/06/26/141886

¹⁴⁶ op cit 2002/02/24/125177

¹⁴⁷ op cit 2002/06/26/141886

¹⁴⁸ op cit 2002/12/30/189153

¹⁴⁹ op cit 2003/05/13/205799

¹⁵⁰ op cit 2002/06/26/141886

¹⁵¹ op cit 2002/03/24/129004

has written several articles analyzing Chinese, US and Japanese views and their influence upon Taiwan. Wang has no illusions that these other nations do not have their own interests at heart in their dealings with Taiwan, when he criticises US hegemony¹⁵² and attacks a pro-China faction in the Japanese government.¹⁵³

1.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be seen that the three aspects of Wang Tuoh expressed in the three pieces of writing translated in this thesis are not in fact separable and distinct, but are all part of Wang's self proclaimed role as intellectual commentator. Each piece, if taken in the context of its times, is a carefully written response to the problems he saw in the society around him. In the early 1970s he saw no professors or politicians speaking for the poor,¹⁵⁴ so he did it himself through his stories. When his early Badouzi stories, including *Auntie Jinshui*, were written in the early 1970s, his critique of the KMT government, even when obliquely expressed through literature, courted danger. Nevertheless, through the device of 'Literature of the Present Reality', Wang carefully and solidly describes the reality of those who have missed out on the growing prosperity of 1970s Taiwan, and allows the readers to draw their own conclusions. As he says, "from the point of view of poverty is how I recognize everything."¹⁵⁵ One is much more acutely aware of the reality of the social hierarchy when one is at the bottom.

¹⁵² op cit 2003/02/11/194169

¹⁵³ op cit 2002/08/22/165150

¹⁵⁴ *Wang Tuoh ji* p 204

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*

In 1977, with “It’s ‘Literature of the Present Reality’...” Wang answers criticism of Nativist writing by KMT supporters. Although in the essay no direct reference is made to the KMT at all, it is quite obviously an attack on the KMT’s refusal to face the reality of society’s problems and its contribution to them. Wang uses selective quotes to remind the reader of what is common, but unspoken, knowledge, and to evoke their shared understanding of recent history in order to support this attack; in an essay that on the face of it, is a purely literary argument of definition.

Whilst he was in jail, Wang wrote his novel *Taipei, Taipei!* which was explicitly based on the controversial Diaoyutai Protests. One of the lead characters in this novel is known by the nickname ‘sweet potato,’ which is a metaphor for both poverty and for the geographic shape of Taiwan. First used in Wu Zhouliu’s *Asia’s Orphan*, in *Taipei, Taipei!* this metaphor is apt as a description of the sense of international abandonment felt by Taiwan at this time. It was widely felt at the time that a good part of this international abandonment was due to the authoritarian rule of the KMT, and it is obvious that Wang felt he had nothing left to lose in being openly critical of the KMT.

By 1994, seven years after the lifting of martial law, and of most censorship, Wang was free to write “Finding the Basis of Success...”, incorporating a wide range of international sources and utilizing Taiwan’s unique cultural inheritance. Although “Finding the Basis of Success...” is a personal essay on the lessons Wang learned whilst imprisoned, it can also be taken as a metaphor for the lessons Taiwan as a whole could learn from its experience of martial law, emphasizing the need to find meaning from those experiences and to build a better and more just society.

Wang's post-prison experiences and politics show him consistently reminding the people of Taiwan to take heed of the lessons of their oppressive past and to constantly strive to build a better democracy. Regardless of which party is in power, democracy requires a politically active population with a public consciousness.

It is in his role as an intellectual commentator, highly aware of his society, its history, and its 'present reality,' that Wang Tuoh's writings serve as a mirror for the Taiwanese to reflect upon themselves.

[2] Auntie Jinshui

(Originally published in August 1975 in issue number 260 of *'Young Lions of Literature'* magazine. Reprinted in the *'Wang Tuoh ji'* collection of short stories 1987).

2.1 Chapter One¹⁵⁶

Once afternoon arrived, the sun seemed extraordinarily scorching hot and blazing white, nothing at all like any mid-autumn weather previously experienced.

The fishing season was over, and the sea deserted. The fishing boats were all pulled up higgledy-piggledy on the shore in preparation for overhauling.

The streets were still and quiet with only some stray dogs running about chasing each other. Suddenly, a woman's shrill piercing voice was heard coming from a curve in the road.

“Goods for sale, goods for sale.”

At that moment Shui Wang, who was on the beach painting his boat, looked up. He could see Auntie Jinshui's bent back, her head lowered, carrying her goods on her shoulder pole. She swayed with light hurried steps as she came down the road toward the beach. When she was still some distance from the beach, he called out to her.

“Auntie Jinshui, working hard, I see!”

Auntie Jinshui took her goods on their pole down from her shoulders, and holding it in her hands, stood in the centre of the road, also shouting loudly.

“Shui Wang, the height of day is almost red-hot. How can you not wear a top? Do you want to buy a vest?”

“It's so hot I'm totally covered in sweat. What good is a top? It's too much hassle!”

“Is Mrs Wang at home? Two days ago she asked me about buying some perfumed soap.”

“I don’t know. Go to our house and see for yourself!”

“OK, I’ll do the rounds of the streets near here, then later I’ll go to your house.”

Auntie Jinshui continued, “Do you want to buy anything? Towels, clothes, toothpaste, a toothbrush?”

“No, no, we have all of those things,” Shui Wang said.

Continuing his painting he grizzled to himself, “What does she want perfumed soap for? God! What a waste of money! If it washes, it washes, all soap is the same!”

Auntie Jinshui didn’t linger, she picked up her pole and walked along the road, calling loudly.

“Goods for sale, goods for sale!”

In this remote fishing village of Badouzi there were two names that everyone immediately recognized. One was that of Du Tian Temple’s guardian goddess Mazu, and the other was that of Auntie Jinshui the peddler.

She was well known in Badouzi for two reasons. Firstly, because all year round she carried her pole and her goods around every household in the village, hawking make-up and household goods as well as candy and biscuits for the children.

In addition, due to the nature of her job, she naturally knew of all of Badouzi village’s business, whether big or small. For example, if Uncle Tu Sheng’s wife had had twins, Auntie Ah Mu’s family’s sow had dropped a litter, or if Mrs Long and her mother-in-law had had an argument, she knew all of this very well. Her position in the village although not at all a formal one, was nevertheless very important.

Secondly, not only because did she not look her age, despite having borne and raised six children; but also, because her children had done well for themselves, each of them going to university; she had become an object of envy and admiration for the majority of parents in Badouzi.

Her eldest son, Ah Sheng, was already a bank manager. Her second son, Ah Tong was an assistant director of a tax bureau office. Ah Yi, the third son, was captain of a deep-sea fishing boat, while her fourth son worked on a merchant ship, and it was said that he would soon take the test for a master's licence. The fifth and sixth sons were still students. One was a second year university student, and the other would graduate high school this year.

The four eldest sons had already established homes in Keelung City; the youngest two lived in their school's hostels.

Although Auntie Jinshui's household finances were extremely tight (her husband was irresponsible, lazy and good-for-nothing) she had still put all her children through school. Accordingly, at the mention of Auntie Jinshui, Badouzi's residents couldn't help but give a thumbs-up in her praise.

She was slight, slender woman who certainly didn't look as if she given birth to and raised six children. This year she was in her fifties with deep layers of wrinkles in her forehead, her drooping cheeks appearing dry and aged. Her hair was usually pulled back into a shiny neat bun, revealing a high forehead. Her nose was high, resembling the beak of a hawk; her thin shoulders were grooved from the poles she carried her goods on while from the waist down she was round and solid.

She habitually wore a grey, coarse cloth blouse and skirt, and cloth shoes which had long since had any colour washed out of them.

Today, like every day, she had spent the morning completing her household chores, eaten lunch, and had then picked up her goods and begun her rounds hawking them.

Only after she walked along the road, then turned off to the left would she see the enormous banyan tree outside the house of Shui Wang's family.

She hadn't reached the head of the lane when she heard a child's voice call out.

"Auntie Jinshui! Auntie Jinshui!"

"I'm coming, I'm coming!" She swayed from side to side as she increased her pace. Just as she turned she saw Mrs Wang's seven or eight-year-old son racing down the lane toward her.

"Auntie Jinshui! Faster, faster!" he grabbed Auntie Jinshui's shoulder pole and started pulling her towards his house. "My mother has been waiting for you for ages!"

"You don't have to pull me like that boy. You might pull me over."

"Well, hurry up then."

"Okay, Okay. Why so anxious? Do you want to buy some candy do you?"

The boy laughed, but continued pulling Auntie Jinshui ever more unsteadily along.

"I told you to stop pulling me, darn it! Don't you listen?" Auntie Jinshui couldn't contain herself any longer, and burst out laughing.

In the distance she could see Mrs Wang, and yelled out, “Mrs Wang, look at your boy in such a hurry to buy candy.”

“Ai yah, Auntie Jinshui, how come you are so slow? I hear your voice all day, but you only come now!”

Auntie Jinshui made it to the tree, and with a deep sigh, put down her pole.

“It’s like this,” she explained, as she greeted the other women. “I’ve just been at Chun Mei’s house, then Mrs Long’s. She spent ages picking and choosing and gossiping, then finally bought some buttons, needles, and thread. So, you’re all here just chatting?”

“Sit down Auntie Jinshui! Carrying such a heavy pole! You must be tired! Why not take a break?”

Auntie Jinshui pulled up a chair, and sat down. Kneading her legs she said, “Of course I’m tired, walking all day, my feet are killing me!”

“Your life has been so fortunate, yet you still like working hard.”

“Darn it, what’s so fortunate? I’ve spent my whole life working like a dog, working myself to death.” Auntie Jinshui pulled out a towel and wiped her face.

“How are you unlucky? You have six sons; they’re managers and captains, not like us fisher folk dependent on the sea to survive. How can you say you’re not lucky?”

“Auntie Jinshui, if I was you, I would sit waiting at home for my boys to bring money and pay their respects, everything would be so easy, who’d need to work hard?”

“That’s right, although you laboured so hard in your youth, now you’ve finally come through it all.”

“What? What riches? That’s just hearsay.” Auntie Jinshui heard everyone’s praises, and although she was still speaking politely and carefully, she couldn’t help her thin sharp features crinkling in a huge laugh.

“Auntie Jinshui, tell us the truth. Are you saying that your children don’t bring some money home to you each month?”

“Huh. Where from? Those young people don’t understand thrift. They like comfortable living and eating and dressing well. If they see something to their liking, the more expensive it is, the more likely they’ll buy it. They go through money like it was water, and if they have none left at the end of the month, they cry poor! What money do they have for me?”

Still laughing, she continued on, “At the moment Ah Sheng and Ah He are in a business partnership along with some others. Even their initial capital was from me going and borrowing, and using my *hui*¹⁵⁷ money.”

“These days doing business is best. Are you still worried about having no money?”

The women talked on and on, seeming like they’d never stop. Mrs Wang’s boy had been waiting impatiently and was sticking closely to his mother trying to get her attention.

“Eh, Ma, you said you wanted to buy some sesame cookies, hurry up!”

“What are you fussing about? We adults are talking. Why are you muttering and grunting? Such bad manners! What a loss of face! Anyone would think I hadn’t fed you for three hundred years!”

¹⁵⁷ *Hui* are informal credit circles, where each member puts in an equal amount of money each month, and they take turns to borrow the collected sum.

“You said! You said you would buy some! You were just tricking me! Come on Ma!”

“What are you on about? Do you want some sesame cookies?” Auntie Jinshui turned and said to the boy with a smile, “I knew you wanted some sesame cookies. You’re so big yet still acting like a baby. Mrs Wang, is he still breastfeeding? Why else would he be burying his head in your chest?”

“That’s right. He’s not acting his age at all.”

Mrs Wang raised her hand and swatted the boy on the bottom.

“You’re so big and yet still not afraid of others laughing at you for being childish. How embarrassing!”

“You said! You said you would buy some!” The boy stood with a hurt look on his face, his voice rising as he began to cry.

“Ai yah! What are you crying for? A big boy like you crying? Everyone will laugh at you! Here, come here, don’t cry, don’t cry!”

Auntie Jinshui took a metal box out of her shoulder bag, chose a couple of sesame cookies from it, and put them in the boy’s hand. “Take them, take them, don’t cry!”

At this, the boy suddenly became very timid, and he wouldn’t accept the cookies. Instead, he looked at his mother.

“Take them, take them. Why so polite? I’m giving them to you, don’t be afraid, take them and eat them.” Auntie Jinshui reached out and closed the boy’s fingers over the cookies.

The boy looked at the cookies in his hand, and again looked timidly at his mother, all the while still snuffling.

“Mrs Wang, look at your boy acting so strange. I want to give them to him, but he won’t take them.” To the boy she said, “Take them! Don’t be nervous, your mother won’t tell you off.”

Mrs Wang glanced at the boy impatiently. Angry, she scolded him loudly. “Why haven’t you taken them yet? Why are you just standing there snuffling? I’ve never seen a kid like you before, what an embarrassment! You look like I never feed you!”

The boy heard his mother say this and immediately closed his hand tightly. Still looking hurt and offended, he bowed his head and walked off.

Auntie Jinshui watched the boy’s disappearing back, and laughed at Mrs Wang.

“Well, he’s so young, don’t take any notice of him. Would any of you like to buy something? Soap, towels, toothpaste, toothbrushes, or perfume, lipstick, powder and such-like?”

“Yes, I do. I asked you last time if you had any perfumed soap,” Mrs Wang answered her.

“Of course I have some. I bought this Marie brand especially for you.” Auntie Jinshui held up a cake of perfumed soap to show her. “Here, smell it, it’s good!”

“Auntie Jinshui, I’d like some perfume if you have any.”

“I always have perfume. This Paris brand is the most well known. It has a beautiful fragrance.”

Auntie Jinshui bought a small bottle of perfume, brought it up to her nose, and took a deep sniff.

“Fifteen dollars okay? I guarantee you won’t find it in Keelung for under twenty dollars. For fifteen dollars I’m being very reasonable.”

“Do you have any facecloths?”

“Facecloths? Certainly! This one with the three flowers on it is very good. It’s really thick and washes well.”

Everyone picked over the goods, while Auntie Jinshui pulled out this and that trying to deal with everybody simultaneously.

“Auntie Jinshui, I gave you ten dollars, you haven’t given me back my change yet.”

“Hang on, I’ll get it right now.” She scabbled for a while in her waistbag, before finally pulling out some shabby looking notes.

“From ten dollars, you get three dollars change; and for you from six dollars, here’s fifty cents. Ah Gui, how much do I owe you? A dollar fifty? Right. Mrs Wang do you want to buy a vest for Mr Wang? He’s out in the hot sun without any shirt on.”

“That’s his choice. He has three vests at home.” Mrs Wang took the perfumed soap and held it to her nose. “Auntie Jinshui does this soap last well?”

“Why would it not? It’s very firm. One cake will last one, maybe two months.”

“I’ll buy one then. You said five dollars fifty didn’t you?” Mrs Wang held the soap in one hand while with the other she energetically searched in her handbag for sometime. “Oh, where did I put my purse? Darn it! Auntie Jinshui can I give you the five dollars fifty next time? With the toothbrush and toothpaste from last time, that’s twenty dollars altogether, right?”

“Alright, you can take it now. Don’t worry about it,” Auntie Jinshui replied. “Didn’t you also get two dollars worth of cookies and candy last time?”

“I gave you two dollars for them in cash last time, don’t you remember?”

“You gave it to me already? Okay, two dollars doesn’t matter.” Auntie Jinshui pulled out a transparent bag and spoke to one of the young women.

“Yue Li, would you like to buy a pair of these briefs? They’re very fashionable these days.”

“How much are they?” Yue Li took the bag and examined it carefully for a few moments. “Fifteen dollars? Why so expensive? They’re so thin and flimsy they wouldn’t last three washes. That’s no good!”

“They’re very beautiful, they suit pretty young women like you really well. Lots of women are wearing them.” Auntie Jinshui took the underwear from their bag, shook them out and handed them to Yue Li. “Look how beautiful, soft, and comfortable they are.”

“Ai yah! You’re too much! Auntie Jinshui you should be more virtuous! They’re so flimsy, how could anyone wear them?” Mrs Wang peered at the offending briefs, and taking them in her hand held them up, and laughed uproariously.

“They’re so thin they don’t hide anything at all. How are you supposed to wear these?”

“Too thin you say? All the city girls are wearing them. They’re easy to wash, dry quickly, and the colours are lovely.” Auntie Jinshui grabbed the briefs from Mrs Wang, and looked at Yue Li again.

“These were specially brought out for twenty-somethings to wear. Why don’t you buy a pair and try them. They’re beautiful and comfortable!”

“I’ve worn them before, and they really are very comfortable,” Yue Li said to Mrs Wang as she took the briefs from Auntie Jinshui and stroked them with her fingers.

“They weren’t so expensive before though. What do you say to two dollars off? How does that sound?”

“Thirteen dollars? I won’t make anything.” Auntie Jinshui thought for a moment, as if she was making an important decision.

“Ai yah! Okay. Since this is the first time I’ve sold this kind, I guess you can have them for thirteen dollars.”

“I only have five dollars on me,” Yue Li said. “I’ll give you the rest next time, is that okay?”

“That’s fine, no problem. Don’t you forget, though.”

“I see you haven’t written a note in case you forget.”

“No need to. I’ll remember it. I’ve been selling in this business for over ten years, and I’ve never forgotten a bill. I’m very good at remembering who owes me money, and when they’ve paid me.” Auntie Jinshui continued, “For example, I even remember that last time you bought some lipstick and a box of powder, so altogether you owe thirty eight dollars, right?”

“What? That’s not right. I gave you the money for the lipstick and powder last time. Auntie Jinshui, don’t quibble unreasonably with me like this alright?”

“Quibble? Unreasonably? You definitely said last time that you would pay me this time.”

“Ai yai yai! Why are you doing this?” Yue Li said sharply. “Don’t you remember? You were sitting in my living room, and I went into the bedroom especially to get the money. I gave you thirty dollars and you gave me five dollars change. How could you forget?”

“What? You definitely didn’t give it to me. At my age, why would I lie to you about twenty five dollars?” Auntie Jinshui creased her brow, and looked at Yue Li with an expression of suspicion on her thin sharp features.

“If you’re going to be like this, I’m not going to buy anything from you.” Yue Li tossed the briefs at Auntie Jinshui and said indignantly “I clearly remember you giving me five dollars change from thirty dollars, but you say you didn’t. Why would I trick you out of twenty five dollars? If I did that the God of Lightning would strike me down for not showing proper respect to my elders!”

“Perhaps it is me who remembers incorrectly? I’ve been selling goods for so long, but I’ve never had this kind of dispute with anyone before.”

Auntie Jinshui handed the briefs back to Yue Li. “Don’t get upset, I’ll work it all out again at home.” She creased her brow in an expression of puzzlement, “Could I really have made a mistake?”

“I wouldn’t trick you. I’m sure I’d be made to suffer if I was to cheat you out of twenty five dollars. Don’t you think I’m scared of being punished by the God of Lightning? A young person like me cheating one of my elders?”

“Let me go and work it out again. Maybe I’m getting old and losing my memory.” Auntie Jinshui asked the others, “Do you want to buy anything else?”

“Auntie Jinshui, you already have all of our money!”

“Right, right. Well, I won’t stand around and quibble over nothing. All this time doing business, I’ve never had a disagreement with you before. In doing business everyone has to be happy and willing to trade, and it has to be fair. Trying to cheat you out of a few dollars! Honestly, my conscience wouldn’t let me rest!” Auntie Jinshui began packing all her boxes and bags carefully and tidily back into her shoulder baskets as she spoke. “If there’s nothing more to you want to buy, then I’ll be going.”

The sun was sinking into the west; the shadow of the banyan tree in the yard was long and thin, and almost looked as if it was stuck to the roof of the house. Auntie Jinshui lifted her pole, and hunching her back slightly, strode off with light hurried steps. Her hoarse sales call got fainter and fainter as she got further away.

“Goods for sale, goods.....”

The ladies returned to their gossiping. “Ai! She’s had such a hard life. It’s high time she took a break from all this hard work. Six children, managers, ship captains, they’re all so successful! She can’t still be afraid of being poor in her old age? ‘When the Gods smile upon good people, good people get rewarded.’”

2.2 Chapter Two

As they entered winter, Badouzi's weather changed. It became dark and gloomy. In the harbour, the wind and water churned together to create waves like a range of small hills, which broke with a crashing 'ha ya, ha ya' sound. The wind was fierce and chilling, and howled off the sea, laden with salt and smelling of fish, mercilessly pouring through every crack and crevice, engulfing the town. Rain fell continuously, both day and night. It was like living in the middle of a damp, putrid pile of shabby clothes; cold, wet and miserable.

For many days nobody had seen Auntie Jinshui hawking her goods. The children hid in their houses and looked forward to eating the sesame cookies and candy bars in Auntie Jinshui's packs. If they heard the slightest hint of something like "Goods for sale, goods for sale" they would brave the freezing wind, open the door and loudly call out "Auntie Jinshui, I want to buy from you! Over here Auntie Jinshui!"

But the only reply they received was the wind ruffling the tops of the trees 'sha, sha'.

"How come Auntie Jinshui hasn't come for so long?"

Even Mrs Wang was becoming increasingly anxious. If she heard the sound of footsteps outside, she would move to the door and peer through the cracks.

"Only ghosts would dare go out in a howling gale like this!" Shui Wang said to his wife.

"Even this kind of weather never stopped her in the past. It's been more than ten days since we've seen her!"

“What are you so worried about? Even Auntie Jinshui isn’t crazy enough to brave this wind and rain!”

“You don’t know the half of it! She’s in two of our *hui*; her *hui* money payment is already two days late,” Mrs Wang replied. “I’ll go to her house and find out what’s going on.”

“Mummy, I want to come too!”

“What? I’m only going to get the *hui* money. There’s no reason for you to go out in that howling gale!” She found a bamboo hat, and pulled back the bolt on the door, allowing a cold wind to come pouring into the room.

“My God, it’s cold!” Shivering in the cold, she opened the door, and quick as a flash, closed it behind her, before her son had time to follow her out.

“Shui Wang, come and bolt the door behind me,” she shouted. She moved close to the door to comfort her son, who was crying noisily. “Boy, don’t cry. I’ll bring some candy back for you.” She put on the bamboo hat, dipped her head, and hurried through the biting cold wind and pouring rain towards Auntie Jinshui’s house.

There, in order to save even the cost of burning a small lamp, the house was in darkness save for a thin glimmer of light which came through a small skylight and fell on a round chamber pot at the end of the bed. A faint sour smell of mildew and stale urine wafted out of the room.

Auntie Jinshui sat, leaning against the end of the bed, huddled in a blanket with her legs curled up.

In the middle of a quilt spread out on the floor was a wash basin which was being used to catch the water dripping from the ceiling with a faint but clear ‘drip, drip’ sound.

Jinshui was lying on the bed, and it seemed as though the two of them were asleep. The room was silent except for the sound of the dripping water and of deep breathing.

Auntie Jinshui was totally away with the fairies. Then, suddenly, almost as if she had received an electric shock, she stuck out her arm and grabbed the wash basin.

She let out a long breath. “Wah! I almost knocked it over!” she murmured.

“What time is it?”

“I don’t know,” Auntie Jinshui replied. She was quiet for a few moments and then spoke again.

“Ai! Every time it rains, the roof leaks and drips water on us. When the weather clears up again, you’ll have to get up and fix it.”

“My heart is sorely troubled, yet you still bring up that problem?” Jinshui replied impatiently.

“So what good is it doing us sitting here by ourselves worrying?”

“What other choices do we have, you stupid woman? You’re talking rubbish!”

“Ai! How was I to know everything would change like this?” Auntie Jinshui said. “It’s all that cursed priest’s fault. He calls himself a holy man, but no one will mourn for him when he dies.”

“Alright, alright, have you quite finished? I have a pounding headache, and you’re still chattering away endlessly.”

Auntie Jinshui sighed deeply. In the quiet and stillness their anxieties were painfully gnawing at their every thought. From outside they could just make out the faint sound of the wind jumbled together with the sound of the waves hitting the sand.

The stillness was broken by a rapid knocking on the door.

“Auntie Jinshui, open the door! Auntie Jinshui!”

“Who is that?” Jinshui said irritably. ““What are you sitting there for? Go and see who it is!”

“It won’t be anyone who can help us. What are you getting so worked up about?”

Auntie Jinshui climbed across the bed, first tipping the half-full bowl of water into the chamber pot, then returning it to its original place, before leaving the room.

“Who’s there?”

“It’s me. Let me in Auntie Jinshui.”

Auntie Jinshui pulled back the bolt on the door, and Mrs Wang crashed inside, along with the freezing wind.

“Mrs Wang, why did you come here in this kind of weather?” Auntie Jinshui suddenly realised she was being impolite, and fell silent.

Mrs Wang took off her bamboo hat and tossed it on the floor. Raising her head, she looked at Auntie Jinshui in surprise.

“Ai yah! Auntie Jinshui, are you ill?”

“No!”

“We haven’t seen you for days, and you’re looking dreadfully thin!” Mrs Wang continued. “I thought you were probably sick. Why else would a hard-working person like you be sitting at home? Have you been to the doctor?”

~~Auntie Jinshui Section Three~~

“No, I haven’t. I’m not sick.”

“Auntie Jinshui, don’t lie to me! Your eyes are sunken, all your veins are popping out, and the skin on your cheeks barely covers your bones. How can you say you’re not ill?”

“It’s just that I haven’t slept well these last few days,” Auntie Jinshui said, rubbing her cheek.

“Then you should really see a doctor.”

“Mrs Wang... the *hui* money.”

“I came here to get it. ~~I~~’ve been expecting you to come and bring it to me at home for the last few days. But since you didn’t come, and what with all ~~you didn’t~~ ~~in~~ this wind and rain, I thought I’d best come here myself.”

“The *hui* money... can you give me a couple more days?” Auntie Jinshui asked hesitantly. “~~Lately~~-I’ve been a little short of money ~~lately~~.”

Mrs Wang’s eyes ~~went~~-widened, as if she hadn’t expected to hear this. Looking embarrassed, she replied, “According to our agreement the *hui* money has to paid back within three days of the agreed date. When it was your turn, I gave you the *hui* money within two or three days. You’re already two days late. Mrs Ah Mu’s family

want to pay for their son's wedding, and need the money urgently. What can I say to her?"

"In two days, I'll personally bring the money to your house, but I'm just a little short of money at the moment."

"You're not waiting for your sons to give you back the *hui* money are you?"

"The weather's been so bad over the last few days; I've been waiting for a fine day to go into Keelung."

"Is there any other way you can find the money ~~You can't find the money some other way can you?~~ Three or five hundred dollars will do."

"If there was ~~some way to do that~~ another way, I would already have given it to you. I've been a member of the *hui* for decades, so you know that I ~~would not~~ ~~f~~wouldn't ask for an extension unless there was no alternative."

Mrs Wang looked undecidedly at Auntie Jinshui. Then with some embarrassment, she said, "Okay. I'll tell Mrs Ah Mu that you will give her the money ~~to her~~ in two days' time. But you have to give it to her then. All my time in the *hui*, I've never seen anything like this before."

"It'll be done, don't you worry! You know I'm good for it," Auntie Jinshui ~~said in~~ responded.

Mrs Wang left, and Auntie Jinshui ~~f~~sighed wearily. She lay on the bed, and after a long time could be heard to say, "Oh! Where am I going to find the money in only two days? If it were only three or five hundred that would be fine, but there's Ah Shu's ten thousand, and the fifteen thousand for Nanshan. The interest on that was due three or four days ago. Damn it! Killing me and selling my skin still wouldn't raise enough!"

Auntie Jinshui ~~laysat~~ silently at the end of the bed ~~[hmmm interesting, She was lying on the bed at the start of the last para, but lie/sit whatever]~~. ~~She was~~ thinking about the morning she'd gone to see her eldest son to collect the money she'd given him as capital for his business. She'd run breathlessly to the train; never guessing that he'd lost all of the money she'd given him. Her heart couldn't take much more, she felt a deep pain and grief, and was unable to stop the tears rolling down her face.

"I told them then, they should think about what was proper, and investigate it carefully, but they had already thrown their hearts into it, and wouldn't listen to me. They told me it was absolutely fine. How could a priest responsible for giving sermons to others have cheated us?"

~~Also, w~~When we gave him the first thirty thousand, most of that money came back within a month, so how were we to know it wasn't right?"

"Shit. We were so stupid, tricked like little children!" ~~As Jinshui thought over this matter, his heart was even sadder that that of his wife~~ [Jinshui contemplated these events with an even sadder/heavier heart than his wife]. He was an easily satisfied person, with no ambitions. He'd never earned much money, and as a result, he had a very prudent and cautious attitude when it came to ~~towards money/towards~~ his finances, ~~in all his life he had never earned much money, so therefore, he was very prudent and cautious toward money~~. When there was money for food and necessities, he ruled the household, when there was no money, he didn't ~~care about anything~~ worry about it. Throughout his life, the times when he had no money far outnumbered the times when he had money. He had never thought of going into business and making big money. ~~I, if~~ he could eat, he was happy. ~~In this way,~~ This meant that he was quite satisfied with life, because there were no responsibilities for

him to bear. The household and the children were left to his wife to worry about. ~~In this way~~ He could still be picky about small things though: “How are you running this household?” “How are you teaching the children? Damn it!” If he felt out of sorts he would vent his anger by hitting his wife or children. None of their problems were his responsibility.

This time, because his children were so certain “We’ll make money!”, “We’ll make money!”, and he had met the priest and thought that he seemed ~~seen that person,~~ so genuine, so polite; it hadn’t entered his head that ~~this man/such a person~~ ~~that the priest~~ might be a crook.

Also, ~~he~~ he was old now, and his sons were married and had families, and they could stand up to anyone. He now found that he was a little afraid of his sons and didn’t act as he had in the past, when he would be physically violent and abusive. He would ~~only listen~~ only politely listen to their suggestions, and if they were around, he didn’t dare speak coarsely or rudely to his wife.

He didn’t dare go to their offices, he was afraid of a world he hadn’t seen, afraid of making a fool of himself. His sons gave him fifty or a hundred dollars every month, so if he had to go to one of their homes he was always especially polite to his daughters-in-law, ~~since every month they would give fifty or a hundred dollars to spend.~~

It seemed as if his sons had gained greater status than he. As a result, on this occasion, when his sons were so convinced that they could make money, he didn’t hesitate to give them the ten thousand dollars he had accumulated from the fifty dollars here, one hundred dollars there, that they had given him. He had added to this amount by borrowing money to invest. He had no idea that he would be so

completely taken in. Since then, he had found himself under more pressure than he had ever experienced before. He worried so much he could hardly sleep.

“I don’t how you couldn’t see through that man! We’ve been taken in so completely, it’~~is~~ as if you had eaten the priest’s *fushui*.¹⁵⁸~~we’ve been taken in so completely~~ Now we have to give the skin off our backs!”

“Ai yai yai! What use is that kind of talk now? How were we to know ~~that he was~~ he ~~+~~would turn out to be that kind of person? He was a friend of Ah Sheng. Ah Sheng was totally convinced, he said it was fine, it was fine. So who knew what kind of man that priest really was? If you had some magical foresight, you’d be so rich! Not poor like now!”

“Anyway, how are we going to get this money? Even the skin off our backs wouldn’t be enough!”

Auntie Jinshui wiped her nose on her sleeve, and reluctantly said, “I’ve thought it over and over, we can only jump into the ocean, what else is there to do? Everyone will laugh at us, and scold us!”

“Alright, alright!~~Oh, enough of this/~~ that’s enough! You women are all the same! Something happens you can’t handle and you start crying and talking about suicide. Hell! You think you can run away from ~~it-all~~everything by dying?”

Outside, the wind’s howling had lessened slightly, but the “ha wah, ha wah”~~sound~~ of the waves on the beach could still be heard. Inside the house all was silent apart from the “drip, drip” of the water leaking in, and the occasional sigh.

In the early afternoon, the two of them were still lying in bed, unable to think of a way out of their problem. After a long time, Jinshui spoke up, “We can go and ask Sulan for some money. She’s my sister and I’ve looked out for her before.”

“That won’t work, Sulan’s household is also going through hard times right now, her husband died only a short time ago and ~~her family is~~ she has such a large family to look after. Besides, we haven’t repaid any of the money we borrowed from her; you couldn’t possibly go and talk to her!” Auntie Jinshui carried on, hesitantly, “Seeing Yuan Yang would be better, they’ve earned a lot of money in the hardware business lately.”

“Don’t be so stupid! You don’t know Yuan Yang like I do. In the past, when Shintian was there, I’d ask them, after all Shintian’s and my brotherly relations are strong, but that wife of his: God! She’ll haggle over anything. Even when I ate at her house, she was adding it all up. Shintian has beaten her three or four times already because of this! I’d rather go begging than ask her for money!”

“Well”, Auntie Jinshui thought for a while, “We’ll just have to go and ask the children.”

Jinshui was silent for some time, and then suddenly burst out with “If we can’t go to them, who can we go to? The old saying goes ‘If the parents are in debt, the children should help pay’. Shit, we can talk around and around this all we like, but if not for the children, we wouldn’t have gotten to know that priest.”

“The only thing is, they usually always say how poor they are! Now, ai yah, the last few days we’ve already been to them hands out, and to ask for more ...”

“If you think that of them, you go pay all of the debt back by yourself! Dammit, this money was given to them as capital for their business, not for us to throw into a

void! If they can't repay it, who else can we ask to repay it? We've brought them up, educated them, even they must understand this kind of obligation."

"But you said that they weren't at all happy to see you the last couple of times you visited them."

Jinshui heard these words, and immediately felt ashamed. He was quiet for a while, then said, "Ah, six sons, that sounds so good, but really we are poorer than people with no children." He shook his head, appearing disheartened. "This is a new era, society has totally changed. Ah! Bringing up sons? All for nothing!"

The last few times he had visited his son, he had found that his daughter-in-law was not nearly as polite to him as before. She had hidden in another room and not come out for ages, leaving him to sit in the living room alone, gradually feeling more and more unwelcome. He ~~didn't~~ hadn't dared show his feeling of total indignation to her face, ~~but~~ so had endured it until his son came in, but even his son looked at him less than respectfully. Watching his son's wife in the room, he didn't know what to say. After he'd waited for ages, his son came in and handed him some small bills.

"Pa, here's some spending money for you. We're rather short of money right now, so I can't give you any more."

At this Jinshui couldn't restrain his indignation any longer. He leapt up from the sofa angrily, and pointing his finger at his son, upbraided him, "Screw you! Do you think I'm a beggar, here to beg some food from you? All our efforts bringing you up, if I can't get the money back from you, then who can I get it from? That money wasn't just for you to throw away! How dare you treat me like this! You have no filial piety at all! We bring you up, and now you turn into young masters, no longer

your parents' sons. Screw you and all your ancestors! If I can help conceive you, and raise you, then I can kill you too! Today I'm going to come and beat you to death!"

"Don't be like this Pa! Don't act like this!"

"How could you beat someone? How could you act like this?" said his daughter-in-law.

His son grabbed his hand at the same time as his daughter-in-law grabbed his arm. His clothes tore.

Although he was older than his son, his son was already stronger and better built than him. His conscience was pricked.

"Alright, alright! You've both dared to lay hands on me. Such disrespect! No respect for your elders! Right! From now on, I'm not your father. I've seen through you! Screw you! Screw you both! May the God of Lightning eat you as a snack!" he shouted as he

~~And like that, he~~ left his son's door, walking towards home in a cloud of raging indignation.

From that day onward all his sons were the same.

All of this brought the misery and grief of ageing home to him. He would feel like a beggar if he was to go to them now asking for money. He felt he had totally lost face, and felt weighed down. Such disrespect from his children!

He abruptly lost his temper.

"Right, since they don't have any respect at all for their parents, then I don't have to express any fatherly feelings!" He leapt up from the bed, as though his sons were standing right there in front of him. He roared violently, "I'll cut you up like sliced vegetables, you lowlives! I'm your father, I raised you all, I can kill you all!"

“God! Do you want to die or what? You’re insane! What the hell are you doing?!”

Auntie Jinshui hurriedly pulled herself onto her knees and pulled Jinshui’s arm with all her strength, accidentally knocking over the washbowl and spilling water all over the bedding in the process.

Jinshui continued ranting. “I blame you! It’s all your example, you bought them up! You got them educated! Educated in what?”

“Okay, okay. It’s not like you were any kind of example, you’re like the Lightning God, even ghosts would be afraid. When children are young, you have to talk to them nicely. Being violent and abusive for no reason, that’s no way to carry on! I’ve spent my whole life suffering and putting up with your bullying. Our sons, our daughters-in-law, they’re educated. Why should they put up with you?”

“This is your example! If you cherish them so much, you go ask them for money! Damn you woman! Why did I have to go talk to them and put my hand out? You gave birth to them, you raised them and brought them up, why don’t you go and ask them to pay back the *hui* money for you! Why are you sitting here just shaking your head and sighing all the time? Damn you woman!”

“It’s not that they don’t care for us. Ah Sheng and Ah He’s money was also taken by that man. Ah Yi hardly ever has any money, Ah Tong has asthma and all his money goes on pills and injections. You know all this full well. They all owe so much money, even if they wanted to give us money, it is difficult to do so.”

“How can you understand their thoughts so well, when they can’t understand yours? They’ve gone out and joined the world; they have more places to borrow from. Aside from Badouzi, where can we borrow? With this bill, who would loan to us again? They’re in their twenties and thirties, if they think of their parents, how

could they not think of that? Fraudsters! How can you be so close to them and cherish them so? When the *hui* come to get their money and their interest in two days' time are you going to give them a pound of flesh or two?" Jinshui hung his head as his tears dripped down. His shriveled skinny face looked like a dark statue in the grey and gloomy room.

There was a long pause.

"Alright then," Auntie Jinshui said ~~after quite some time~~. She sighed deeply, and said wearily "I'll go tomorrow. All these years scrimping and saving, toiling so hard to raise them, I don't believe they'll just abandon us old folks without a care."

The room was silent as a grave. All that could be heard was Jinshui's laboured breathing, and the steady 'pu tu, pu tu' of the rain leaking in, soaking the bedding.

2.3 Chapter Three

In the early morning, the weather in Badouzi was still windy and rainy. The waves rose and fell in a solid muddy sheet of freezing grey, crashing and booming. An icy cold wind scraped everyone's faces and penetrated their bones.

In the streets of Keeling though, the sun showed its radiant face, beating down on the dull grey buildings and lanes. Fine black dust and soot swirled in the air ~~fine black dust and soot~~, giving people the feeling of confusion and weariness felt after a major illness.

Auntie Jinshui was wearing as ~~much clothing~~ many layers as she could, and was covered by a worn old black coat with woolly cuffs and collar that she'd picked out years ago from a pile of old goods. She was ungainly and round, like a huge black

ball of cotton. Her thin sharp face peeked out, looking like a long discarded orange, completely covered in wrinkles.

She walked the wide streets of Keelung with the same light hurried half walking, half running steps that she took when she carried her shoulder pole of goods. In her left hand she carried a rolled up grey fabric bag, while in her right she carried a black umbrella.

The sun shone down on her slightly hunchbacked body as she walked on, gradually getting hotter and hotter.

She used the fabric bag under her arm to wipe her face, and unbuttoned her coat. As she did she revealed a little of the tattered and mismatched clothing underneath. She thought for a moment, and then did the buttons up again.

She slowed her pace slightly, but before long she slipped back into her usual half walking, half running pace. Cars flew past from both directions, 'hwa, hwa'.

She crossed a bridge, turned a corner, and walked to the end of a long straight road, then turned into a smaller lane and walked up to the third floor of an apartment building. Puffing and panting, she came to a landing and knocked on a door, calling out,

“Ah Xiu! Ah Xiu!”

No one replied. She tried the door handle, but it was locked.

“She’s probably gone to buy vegetables,” Auntie Jinshui said to herself. She took off her coat, and seeing the mismatched and ill-fitting clothes, furiously tried to push them into some semblance of order. After fiddling for ages, there were still several layers bunched around her waist. She pulled them all out again in annoyance.

Feeling tired, she leaned next to the door, and then sat down on the floor with her bag over her knees. Outside, the rays of the sun were stirring the soot and dust in the air, but inside was dark, cool and still. The sound of people and the tooting cars seemed to come from some other world.

She bent her head over her knees, and without conscious thought, she nodded off.

Who knows how much time had passed when she thought she heard a voice.

“Ma! Ma!”

Auntie Jinshui was startled out of her daydreaming. She sleepily raised her head, and saw her fourth daughter-in-law standing in front of her, holding a basket of vegetables.

“Oh! Ah Xiu, you’re back!”

“Ma, the ground is terribly cold. What are you doing sitting there sleeping?”

“These last few nights I haven’t slept very well. Sitting down here, I just nodded off.” Auntie Jinshui energetically tried to stand, but her clothes were so cumbersome she sank back down again.

“Ma, how can you wear so much in this hot weather?”

Ah Xiu pulled Auntie Jinshui up, and as she opened the door said, “You go lie down on the sofa, I’ll go and wash some rice and then we can talk.”

“Don’t worry about me. I don’t need to sleep now.” Auntie Jinshui followed Ah Xiu inside, and opened her bag on the kitchen table. She pulled out a paper bag.

“This dried fish I dried myself last summer.”

“Ma, why are you always so troublesome when you visit? Bringing this, bringing that? That kind of fish is easy to find in the markets here, what do you need to bring things for? If we want some, we can buy some ourselves.”

“I don’t come here very often, and never have anything to give you. I dried this fish myself, it’s my own work, and it’s better than the stuff you can buy.” She opened the bag, took a small fish, and popped it into her mouth. “It’s dried really well. Fry it in a little bit of oil and it will come up crispy and tasty.”

“Ma, sit down on the sofa. Take your shoes off and leave them by the door.”

Auntie Jinshui picked up her bag and went into the living room. Suddenly, she slipped, and with a loud cry, and a resounding thump, she collided with the TV set. She landed with one arm gripping the TV and one leg kneeling on the floor.

“Ai yah! What on earth! Why is the floor so slippery?”

Ah Xiu stuck her head into the living room and called out.

“Ma, you should be careful, the vase on top of the TV set is from Japan. I wouldn’t want it broken!”

Auntie Jinshui slowly and cautiously made her way to the sofa, giving a long sigh as she sat down.

After a short time, Ah Xiu came into the living room and put a pot of boiled water down in front of Auntie Jinshui.

“Ma, why aren’t you wearing slippers? I had the floor waxed yesterday, so it’s really slippery. If you wear only socks you could easily fall.”

“No wonder. It didn’t feel so slippery the last couple of times I came. I almost fell this time!”

Ah Xiu sat holding her teacup with both hands silently regarding Auntie Jinshui with a small smile.

Auntie Jinshui also sat for a while, as if she was unable to find anything to talk about with her daughter-in-law. She blew on the cup of water in front of her, took a

couple of mouthfuls and sat looking at her daughter-in-law, finally saying, “Ah, this is hot!” as if she was deliberately looking for a subject to talk about with her daughter-in-law.

But it was as if Ah Xiu hadn’t heard. She continued to sit silently, smiling and politely regarding Auntie Jinshui.

The only sound in the room was the tick-tock of the clock on the wall. Occasionally the sound of passing cars in the street, or their horns could be heard. The room had an eerily silent feel.

The sun came through the window behind Ah Xiu highlighting her long hair. Auntie Jinshui raised her head, looking at Ah Xiu, but the sun at her back obscured her face and expression. Auntie Jinshui began to feel less and less comfortable. She racked her brain for something to say, wanting to have an intimate conversation with her, to speak her heart, but at the same time resenting her own clumsiness.

This silence continued for a long time until Ah Xiu eventually said, speaking very politely, “Ma, please stay for lunch.”

Auntie Jinshui put her teacup down on the tea tray.

“Oh! Lunch! Ah, okay!”

“Ah He will be home for lunch.”

“Oh? Ah He’s ship is in port?”

“It came in yesterday.”

“Really? Yesterday? Well, well, well. Why didn’t you tell me earlier? Auntie Jinshui relaxed immediately felt much better. She looked at her daughter-in-law with a huge smile on her face.

“Ma, you stay there, I’ll go cook lunch.”

“I’ll help you cook,” said Auntie Jinshui happily, quickly standing up. Her knee inadvertently struck the teatable, the sound startling them as the cup fell over, spilling the water onto the table and the floor.

After they had eaten, Ah Xiu tidied up in the kitchen, while on the TV in the background a slender woman could be heard coyly singing. Auntie Jinshui sat on the sofa, the sun warming her all over. Her fourth son, Ah He, sat opposite her dressed in a white shirt, red tie and carefully pressed trousers. Ah He looked neat and clean from head to toe. Auntie Jinshui felt full of satisfaction and happiness.

“Ah He, did you have enough to eat? You only ate a small helping.”

“I’m fine, I’ve had enough, thanks,” Ah He responded, without taking his eyes off the TV show.

Auntie Jinshui looked toward the kitchen, and, lowering her voice, spoke to her son. “Ah He, this month’s *hui* money and interest....”

He suddenly stood up and turned off the TV. The room fell silent. He returned to his seat and looked at her solemnly. Auntie Jinshui suddenly felt very uneasy.

“It’s all because of that damned priest, swindling us, taking our money. Fifty, sixty thousand! Isn’t he afraid of being killed for his greed? Isn’t he afraid of being struck by the Lightning God?”

Ah He replied, “So we were swindled. Cursing won’t do any good. We were stupid, and now we’ve paid for an expensive lesson.”

“A lesson? Who’d buy that kind of lesson? Right now the *hui* money and the interest payments are overdue. Everyone’s urgently demanding money like there’re demons driving them!”

Auntie Jinshui looked at her son, who sat silently, turning the teacup this way and that on the tea tray. Auntie Jinshui felt dismayed, her previous gratitude and joy deserted her, sinking as if into a pit of icy water. Finally she heard her son speak.

“That’s a lot of money, and our finances are really tight now!” He stood up and left the room.

Auntie Jinshui was unable to hold back her tears as she watched [saw](#) her son’s retreating back with a growing sense of distress. The sun beamed through the windows into the room, showing the dust and dirt dancing in the air. The room felt like a dreary and desolate tomb, even the ticking of the clock seemed to add to the unsettling air of melancholy.

After a short while, Ah He and Ah Xiu entered the living room together. Ah He, with his head still bowed, sat down opposite his mother, while Ah Xiu handed her a cup of hot water then sat down beside her, looking deeply concerned.

“Ma,” Ah Xiu began, “Talking of this, we should really blame that damned black hearted priest. Even the eighty thousand Ah He borrowed from his friends has been stolen. These days we can’t even keep up the payments on what we owe. Eighty thousand! What can we do? However...” She looked over at her still silent husband then back at her mother-in-law, “You are our parents, we can’t ignore your problems.” She put a bunch of ten-dollar notes on the table, saying, “This two hundred dollars is all we can afford.”

“You should scrape some money together, and at least pay the next couple of days’ *hui* money and the interest payments, then we’ll all try to think what we can do. You have six sons; your first son and second son have both bought houses. You should speak to them first. It is not reasonable for the eldest sons to not help and still expect us younger sons to be responsible.” Ah Xiu spoke quite quickly, without pausing, and Auntie thought that she spoke very reasonably. But what good was only two hundred dollars? She looked at her son. He still sat with his head bowed, looking very ashamed. Finally, he spoke.

“Ma, you know of our recent troubles, First Brother and Second Brother have more money than us. The eldest have more responsibility too, you should go and ask them.”

Auntie Jinshui sighed in disappointment, unwilling to take the two hundred dollars. But, on thinking further, she thought that if she saw her other sons, she might be able to scrape together enough money.

“Alright. Since you say this, I’ll also...” Auntie Jinshui suddenly felt rather heartsick; she couldn’t finish her sentence as her tears were already falling. She picked up her bag, and using her umbrella as a walking stick, began the halting walk back down the stairs.

Her son and daughter-in-law called out solicitously behind her, “Ma, don’t fall now!”

“When you’re free, come and visit, you’re welcome anytime!”

She didn’t turn around to look at them, she simply replied “Okay. Okay”, as her tears wet her face.

Numbly, she stepped out into the drowsy sunlight, and the swirling dusty air of the streets of Keelung. From out of nowhere it seemed she heard a beggar's voice intoning the tale of its owner's bleak life, "Ai yah! Kind-hearted Auntie and Uncle, no-one to depend on, woe is me!"

She thought long and hard, back and forth, but the more she thought, the more hurt she felt. No matter how hard her life had been, she still couldn't believe her son would treat her like that. Especially Ah He, who as a child had been such a lovely obedient boy.

"Ma," he'd say, "Don't cry. When I grow up I'll earn lots of money and give it to you, and you won't have to cry again."

Many times she had thought of killing herself, or of leaving her family. But, every time she received an unprovoked beatings from her husband, this son had consoled her, and even in her darkest moments she had had boundless hope for the future of this son. -Only last year, after Ah He had finished his military service and the two of them were talking after dinner, discussing his upcoming wedding he had told her,

"Ma, I've got a good job now, when I'm married I want you to come and live with us. You've worked hard all your life, you ought to have some good fortune, and live comfortably and well. I already have a good salary; you won't have to work so hard with us. Carrying around your goods on their pole every day, and having so many children who can look after you: everyone will be laughing at you."

This kind of talk had moved her to tears. She thought that all she had struggled for in her life, all her effort, had not been in vain.

But as she thought all of this over now, she couldn't make any sense of it. How could such a well-behaved obedient child suddenly act this? If it wasn't someone whispering in his ear, what could it be?

She remembered the small silent smile on Ah Xiu's face, and her mind was filled with doubt and uncertainty. That woman usually didn't say much, which only gave greater weight to her words when she did speak. Ah He was young and easily persuaded: if she truly had his ear, could he stand up to her wiles?

-Auntie Jinshui walked along the riverbank, and with each halting step she thought on the subject and finally decided against seeing her eldest son at home.

The sun had already disappeared behind a bank of impressive black clouds which were sinking lower and lower, pushing down darkly and gloomily on the rooftops. People were scurrying to and fro; some were even running. A rainstorm threatened.

Auntie Jinshui walked up and down the building lobby two or three times, nervously trying to work out which in the line of office doors was which. She had never been to the bank before except on the occasions when she was walking past with her youngest son, who had told her that Ah Sheng worked there. She remembered the location but not the details. Any one of the doors looked equally possible, especially since she couldn't recognise the characters, or read the signs on the doors.

"Excuse me sir, could you tell me which door is the Credit Co-operative?"

"That one."

Auntie Jinshui quickly followed behind the man, and pointing at a door asked, "This one? This is the one?"

"That's right."

Auntie Jinshui looked into the bank, shifted her bag to her shoulder, gripped her umbrella, and entered. Directly in front of her was a half circle shaped counter with the teller's nameplates sitting on it. She could only recognise the numbers above them. A few people were standing in front of the counter.

She walked over to the counter, behind which were rows of people sitting at desks. She looked for ages, but couldn't see her eldest son.

"Excuse me."

People glanced at her briefly, taking no notice, busily engaged in their own business. She poked her head over the counter and spoke to the nearest worker.

"Excuse me sir, I'd like some service here."

It was as if he hadn't heard her. He continued shuffling his papers, without even lifting his head.

Auntie Jinshui looked at all the people, and began to feel somewhat unsure. She hesitated, then finally plucked up her courage, raised her voice and said, "Excuse me, I'd like some service here."

"How can I help?" The man was still engrossed.

"I'm looking for someone."

"If you want to find someone, go to the police station, I haven't got time, I'm busy." He lowered his head and continued working.

Auntie Jinshui looked at him timidly, not knowing what to do next. She saw that a young man standing at the counter was looking at her curiously. Summoning up her courage again, she asked him, "Excuse me. Does a Wang Cai Sheng work here?"

“Who? I don’t know.” The young man pointed to a man behind the counter. “Ask him, he’ll know.” He asked loudly “Does a Wang Cai Sheng work here? This lady wants to see him.”

The employee who had previously spoken looked up, regarding Auntie Jinshui. “Are you looking for the manager?”

“Yes, I am.”

“What’s your connection with him?”

“Ah Sheng is my eldest son.”

“Oh, you’re his mother! My sincere apologies.” He stood and earnestly greeted her. “Yes, the manager is in.” He opened the gate in the counter and came out to her. “If you’ll follow me. I’ll take you to him.”

“Thank you, thank you very much,” Auntie Jinshui said from behind him. “You’re really too kind. Thank you for your trouble.”

The young man knocked on an office door, then entered. Auntie Jinshui immediately followed. She saw her eldest son sitting with his head down behind an enormous desk, writing.

“Manager Wang, this lady is here to see you,” the employee said respectfully.

Auntie Jinshui’s eyes almost disappeared as her face crinkled up with a truly happy laugh. Peering at her eldest son, her previous nervousness disappeared entirely.

“Ah Sheng,” she called excitedly.

He raised his head. Upon seeing his mother his face immediately went blank. He turned to the employee saying, “Thank you. You can go now.”

The employee bowed slightly, and left. Auntie Jinshui called to him, “Thank you very much, you’re too kind. Thank you.”

She dipped her head as she opened her bag, saying to Ah Sheng, “Ah Sheng, the people here are very nice.”

“Who asked you to come here?”

“This dried fish I personally dried last summer.”

“Who told you to come here and find me? I’m so busy I don’t even have time for lunch. What are doing coming here bringing me dried fish? Why can’t you bring them to me at home?”

His mother just then realised that his expression was full of impatience and anger. Her heart sank. In a panic-stricken blank, she gripped the dried fish with both hands. Where was she? Had she made a mistake? She had gone white in surprise and panic.

“You should have dressed up much more. Looking so scruffy and dishevelled, if people see you, I’ll lose a lot of face.” He seemed to be tightly holding back his rage as he told her off in a low, rapid voice.

Auntie Jinshui stood in front of him, unable to speak, looking at him in a mixture of confusion and fear.

“What is your extremely important business that can’t wait? That you have to see me here? And not at home? I finish at five o’clock, can’t you have waited at home for me?”

“The *hui* money, and the interest payments. Everyone is coming round demanding their money, and getting upset. Otherwise I wouldn’t have come here to the bank to see you.” She spoke calmly, as if in a dream.

“That business? Is it different if you tell me about it at home? I’m really busy here, when do I have the time to talk with you?” He hastily gathered up her bag and

her umbrella, pressing them to her. “You have to go. After I get off at five, I’ll talk to you when I get home.”

He opened a door, and pushed her toward a smaller door. “Go out this back door. Go straight down the lane, and you’ll come to the main street. Next time you want to talk to me, go to our apartment and talk to Ah Zhen, or else wait for me to return. Definitely don’t come here again, I’m busy, I don’t have time to see you. You go. I have to return to work.”

Auntie Jinshui stood outside the back door, looking down the narrow lane, feeling totally panic-stricken and at a loss.

This experience was totally unlike anything she had expected. Her thoughts were unable to adapt. Her mind was confused and uncertain. She didn’t understand why her son had behaved like that. She simply didn’t believe it was real; it seemed like a dream.

The dark lane extended into the distance, with towering buildings on both sides. The only thing in the lane was the falling rain. The sound of the traffic, car horns, and people, were muffled by the buildings, and it seemed as if they came from another world.

2.4 Chapter Four

When Auntie Jinshui returned to Badouzi it was almost seven o’clock. The rain still fell ceaselessly. As she got closer to her house she saw a light shining out of her front door, and immediately knew that something out of the ordinary was happening.

Pushing open the door, she saw that the room was full of people sitting and standing. There were her husband's Third Great Uncle, Ah Chuan, Ah Biao and their wives; a few nieces and nephews; Uncle Tu Sheng the neighbourhood head;¹⁵⁹ her neighbour Wang Tsai's wife, and others. Her nieces and nephews saw her and immediately called out, "Second Auntie is back!"

Auntie Jinshui looked in surprise at the roomful of people, her heart thumping as she felt an unwelcome sense of foreboding. Third Great Uncle stood up and walked over to her. He spoke slowly in a low voice.

"This afternoon, Jinshui had an argument with his blood brothers Nan Shan and Ah Shu. He was like thunder. He was so angry he got a huge headache and was rolling on the ground."

"Ai yah! What the hell was he doing? A grandfather fighting with his blood brothers? Not worried about what anyone might think?" Auntie Jinshui strode immediately into the bedroom. "What's going on? Goddammit Jinshui!"

"Auntie Jinshui you shouldn't go in right now. Mr Liu has given him an injection, he's sleeping." Uncle Tu Sheng stopped her.

"He loves this kind of arguing with people. But he hasn't been well lately, he's been constantly complaining about his headaches. How can he be fighting like that?"

Third Uncle Great Uncle handed her a paper bag saying, "Mr Liu gave us this medicine for him. Give him some when he wakes up, then three times a day after meals."

"What did the doctor say?"

¹⁵⁹ The Neighbourhood Head or *lizhang* is an elected government official responsible for either 100 related households, or in the cities a neighbourhood of families.

“Nothing to worry about,” said Third Great Uncle. “With the injection and the medicine, he’ll be fine.” He stood up. “If there’s nothing else, we ought to go.”

“Sit down Tu Sheng. Even though you have no other business here, you are welcome to stay.”

Third Great Uncle cut the speaker off. “It’s already seven o’clock. It’s time to go home for dinner.”

The others all stood and left one by one. Auntie Jinshui thanked them all repeatedly as they left, and escorted them to the door. “Thank you all very much. Take care getting home.”

Third Great Uncle and Ah Chuan were still sitting in the living room, along with Ah Biao, their wives, and some close relatives.

“Goddammit! What the hell was he arguing about to make so much trouble over?” Auntie Jinshui asked of them.

“We don’t know either. With this bad weather everyone has been keeping their doors tightly closed. We only heard Jinshui cursing and swearing saying “I’m Jinshui. I’m not some lost cause, to borrow money and not pay it back. Ai yah! It’s impossible for me to imitate it all!” Ah Chuan’s wife replied. “When Ah Chuan and I went to see what was happening, he was already rolling on the ground in distress.”

“How much exactly did Jinshui owe them? How could such close friends for decades become so angry with each other?”

“It was almost ten thousand dollars!”

“That’s not much. Why didn’t he ask your sons to give that much to him? It isn’t worth ruining a lifetime’s reputation by giving people this kind of thing to talk about,” Third Great Uncle opined.

“Ai! Everybody’s exaggerating the difficulties.”

“Isn’t the *hui* money usually repaid on time? Why shouldn’t we think there is some difficulty?”

“In the past business was good, but now the money has been ripped off by someone else,” Auntie Jinshui replied quietly and sadly.

“What the hell? Second Auntie, what didn’t you tell me sooner? How could you do this?” Ah Biao’s wife shouted suddenly. “If that’s the case, what has happened to the two thousand I loaned you? I’d like it back, you know!”

“Yes, it will be paid back. I’ll work very hard to earn the money to repay you.” Auntie Jinshui was unable to hold back her tears any longer.

The gloomy lamplight fell upon her aged and weary features, with her grey hair messily falling over her wrinkled brow and her slightly hunched back. Everyone realised to their surprise that Auntie Jinshui seemed to have aged ten years in just the last few days.

Third Great Uncle spoke up, “We don’t have to press her about it now. She’s been walking all day and we should let her rest. Let’s all go home; it’s time for dinner anyway.”

“Second Auntie you’re welcome to come over to our place for something to eat,” Ah Chuan’s wife offered. “It’s too late and too much trouble to cook for one now.”

“Don’t worry about it. I couldn’t eat anything anyway.” Auntie Jinshui watched them stand, and followed them to the door.

Third Great Uncle turned around. “Don’t worry, we’ve faced hardships in the past. The boys are grown now; you just relax and take care of Jinshui. He’s got a bad

temper, but he's a very straight up kind of person. You've been together so many years." He thus encouraged her.

"That's right Second Auntie. You just take it easy. If there's any problem or change, just call us."

They all left. But, just as Auntie Jinshui was about to close the door, Ah Biao's wife came urgently running back.

"Second Auntie, you were telling the truth right? You'll pay back my two thousand? I really need the money right now."

"Of course! Don't worry. You'll get your money back."

"If you're sure. I gave it to you out of the goodness of my heart; please repay it as soon as you can." She turned and left, muttering in a low voice as she did so. "Damn it! How could they have just given the money to someone else to lose?"

The house was still and silent, the wind and rain stilling whistling and roaring outside. Auntie Jinshui put out the living room light and went into the bedroom. It was already pitch-black aside from a slight glimmer of light through the skylight. She sat at the head of the bed and called out "Jinshui... Jinshui."

He appeared to be fast asleep, and there wasn't the slightest sound or movement. She rubbed his forehead, but there was no fever.

"You're really unbelievable. You owe people money, and yet you still dare to fight with someone." She moved down to the end of the bed, where the basin of water still went 'ka tong, ka tong' as the water fell into it. She threw the water down the toilet, and fell straight into bed.

She curled up in the in the damp bed, bringing her knees up to her chin, but her eyes stayed wide open, her mind a blank. All this business seemed like a bad dream, which she just couldn't believe.

But, as she touched Jinshui's icy feet, it suddenly dawned upon her: it wasn't a dream. It was real. The tears started flowing again. All that could be heard was the drip drip, drip of the water into the basin at the foot of the bed, gradually seeming louder and louder. She let her tears dry on her face.

The silence immediately felt strange, but on more careful listening, she felt it more normal, although there was still the 'ka tong, ka tong' of the dripping water. With only this sound, she was slightly uneasy. She couldn't hear Jinshui's usual deep breathing.

"Jinshui," she called softly.

There was no reply.

She kicked him lightly. "Jinshui, Jinshui."

Fear overtook her. "Jinshui! Wake up!" In a panic she climbed to the head of the bed and pushed him. She put a hand near his nose, and an ear to his chest.

She relaxed as she felt light breathing, and a faint heartbeat.

"He's utterly dead to the world," she said to herself. She straightened up his blankets, and curled up near him at the top of the bed, one of his freezing cold hands tightly clasped within her own.

For more than thirty years they had been married. This was her fate, to be together with him always. From her youth to her old age, nothing had changed; he never gave her a moment's ease. If he wasn't beating her, he was cursing her. But this was how she had passed thirty years with him. At that moment, he was very real, lying there

beside her. She hadn't realised before that she was so attached to him. Her thirty years of toil and hardship, being a good wife and mother, raising their sons to university graduations, adulthood, marriage, and families of their own, all seemed to have been an empty dream.

Her sons weren't hers. Only Jinshui, for all his failings, and her thirty years of tears, in the end, he was hers, and, in fact, she was his. Her tears slowly rolled down her cheeks.

Eventually, she felt tired enough for her body to drift off into a trance-like sleep. She didn't know how much later it was when she felt the icy cold hand in hers move slightly, and heard Jinshui moaning softly to himself.

“What? Jinshui, how do you feel? Do you feel a little better?”

He kept rolling his head to and fro, moaning in pain.

“Jinshui, are you okay? Where does it hurt?”

“My head, my head! Ai yah!”

“Shall I rub in some mint balm? I'll rub some in for you, okay?” All in a fluster she grabbed her coat with one hand, while with the other hand searching inside it for the balm. “Where on earth did I put it? I can never find it when I want it. Jinshui, just a moment. Where did I put it? Shit!” She searched for ages before finally pulling out a stick of mint balm from a pocket in her third layer of clothing.

“How's that? Is that better?”

Jinshui's head was rolling about even more rapidly, and in the darkness of the room she had great difficulty rubbing the mint onto his forehead.

“Jinshui, quiet down will you, stop shaking your head so much!”

“Oh, oh! My head! Ow, ow! It hurts so much! Ow, ow!”

“Jinshui, Jinshui!” The mint she was holding was knocked to the floor as his head hit her hand. She used both hands to feel for the mint, all the while hearing his increasingly loud cries of pain. She was in a total panic. Rubbing his forehead, she suddenly hugged him to her, unable to stop crying.

“Jinshui, what’s wrong? Jinshui! Jinshui!”

Jinshui was still shaking even in her embrace, and was moaning and groaning. Suddenly he pushed her violently away and rolled over, crying out, “Ow ow! I’m going to die! I’m going to die!”

Auntie Jinshui woke fully, startled by his sudden push. She hurriedly leapt off the bed, and braving the wind and rain, pounded on the neighbour’s door.

“Third Uncle, Ah Zhuan! Jinshui’s gotten worse, come quickly!”

Shortly after, Third Great Uncle, Ah Zhuan, Ah Biao and their wives were all crowded around in a fluster in the bedroom. The light of a torch revealed Jinshui’s struggles and shaking.

“Ah Biao, go and get Mr Liu. Jinshui, you must restrain yourself.” Third Great Uncle turned to Auntie Jinshui, “Did you give him the medicine?”

“No, I didn’t. He was fast asleep up until just now when he woke up moaning and shaking like that!”

“Don’t worry, it’s only a headache, there’s no fever. No need to worry.”

The watchers aimlessly and helplessly crowded around the bed, while Auntie Jinshui was sobbing. After a while Jinshui quietened down, and all that could be heard was a monotonous ‘ai yah, ai yah’ in a low voice, and then at last, there was no sound at all. He seemed to be asleep again.

“It’s not too bad. This kind of headache comes and goes.”

“Let’s not argue, let him sleep quietly.”

Ah Chuan, who had been first to get to the house, and had gone off to get the doctor, returned. “Mr Liu isn’t home. It’s so late, but even his wife doesn’t know where he is,” Ah Chuan said breathlessly.

“It doesn’t matter, Jinshui is sleeping again. It’s probably okay.”

“It’s three in the morning,” Third Great Uncle said. “Those who want to sleep had best go home. I’ll stay here. Jinshui’s condition will probably change, and Auntie Jinshui’s here by herself. If something happens what could she do? Six sons, and not a one here to help!”

Auntie Jinshui sat at the head of the bed, and with great care pulled up Jinshui’s blankets. She studied his face attentively in the faint torchlight, and it seemed that he was much steadier than before.

However, after sometime, just as Auntie Jinshui desperately wanted to sleep, she unexpectedly heard him faintly calling, “Ah Lan.”¹⁶⁰

She sat up as if electrified, and was wideawake again. In all their years together he had never called her that. She hurriedly turned on the torch and looked at him. He looked as if he was still asleep; his eyes were closed peacefully, while his forehead and nose were covered in beads of sweat. She used her hand to wipe his face, which felt cold and sticky.

“Jinshui.”

He opened his eyes suddenly, as if he was awake and replying to her. “Ah Lan!”

¹⁶⁰ Ah Lan is Auntie Jinshui’s given name

A short time later, he called out again, and looked at her in panic, as though he had something he wanted to say to her, but nothing came out. She could only see his lips moving repeatedly, until finally with great difficulty, he said two words:

“The money.”

Then his eyes closed, and it seemed as if he was asleep again.

“Jinshui.”

Auntie Jinshui’s heart pounded with fear, as she immediately touched his chest, then put an ear close to listen. She listened for a while, then cried out, “Waah!

Third Great Uncle rushed into the room. The torch was still on, but had been tossed onto the bed, so he couldn’t see clearly what was happening. All he could see was Auntie Jinshui kneeling next to her husband and crying.

“Jinshui! How can you abandon me all alone like this? Jinshui?”

Third Great Uncle placed his hand on Jinshui’s nose, and shaking his head, he said, “He’s gone.”

Ah Zhuan and Ah Biao’s wives and other relatives arrived soon after, and the room was quickly full of people, both inside and out.

Third Great Uncle first quietly called the younger generation into the living room, and finding two boards, he laid them on the ground. Next, he covered the living room altar with the tablecloth. Finally he gave orders to Ah Zhuan and Ah Biao to carry Jinshui’s body into the living room. Their wives each took Auntie Jinshui by an arm because she was so distressed she was unable to walk.

First Ah Zhuan and Ah Biao, then all the nephews and nieces one by one lit incense sticks and burned sghost money. Then, in accordance with the custom in

Badouzi, the women squatted on the floor and started crying loudly, and screaming in mourning. Auntie Jinshui cried and shouted until she was hoarse.

“Jinshui! You’ve gone and left me! What am I supposed to do now? Jinshui! Come and take me with you!”

After crying for some time, the women stood up one by one, wiped their tears, and lit more incense, as though they had exhausted their most heartfelt grief. Only Auntie Jinshui continued crying in sorrow and distress, her voice getting hoarser and hoarser.

“Second Auntie, don’t cry! Don’t cry like this!”

“Right, Second Sister-in-law, crying is okay, but take care of yourself, we still have a lot to deal with.”

The watching relatives all consoled her, and after a long time, she stopped crying and stood up.

“Third Uncle, everything depends on you to help me handle it, I’m totally at a loss right now!”

“Alright. You go and lie down. A whole day with no rest is not good for you. I’ll take care of this.”

“How can I sleep? Jinshui suddenly leaving? Abandoning me?” Auntie Jinshui couldn’t help but cry out.

Third Great Uncle replied, “You shouldn’t cry anymore. Everyone else has stopped crying, and you’re about to start again! If he’s gone, he’s gone. Crying is no use. It’s almost dawn. Ah Zhuan and Ah Biao, you two stay here and keep the

*shouling*¹⁶¹ for Jinshui since you are his fraternal cousins. Everyone else can go. Anything else can wait until tomorrow.”

According to Badouzi custom, a wife can't keep the *shouling* for her husband. Therefore, when everyone else had left, Auntie Jinshui burned some ghost money for Jinshui, and then sorrowfully went back inside.

She curled up under the blankets near the head of the bed looking for all the world like a dead prawn. The part of the blanket near her knees was soaked by her non-stop flow of tears. She was like this for a long time, her tears gradually drying up. Her eyes wide, she looked around the dark room.

The room was in absolute darkness, but since she had lived there for decades, all four corners and their contents were intimately familiar to her. Everything was as it was. Nothing had changed. She suddenly felt very strange and disconnected, as if the entire event just passed had not been at all real. It had been a dream. Just a dream.

Tomorrow she would wake up after a good night's sleep and find that Jinshui had gambled away more money and had come back banging and crashing, cursing and swearing, “Damn it all! A woman shouldn't sleep so late! Resting your lazy arse 'til midday! And not cooking breakfast either! Damn you woman!”

From the distance she heard a rooster crowing, its crow sounding coarse and not as musical as normal.

In the strong bone-piercing wind of daybreak, the crowing was long and drawn out, and quivered up and down, giving a rather chilling feeling.

¹⁶¹ *Shouling*: Chinese believe that the spirit of the departed stays near the body, and thus needs to be accompanied for a couple of days after death.

The next day, Badouzi's weather turned fine, the sun showing its pale face again; but the atmosphere still felt damp and musty. There was a weary, tired feeling in the air.

In the afternoon, Auntie Jinshui's sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren arrived.

The door of the house was left ajar, and on it was hung a sheet of white paper. Inside, the gloom of the house was only slightly softened by the glow of several oil lamps, flickering dimly. Compared with bright daylight outside, it seemed inside to be a lair for ghosts and demons.

Auntie Jinshui was kneeling on the floor burning ghost money, and her crying grew stronger and louder as her sons entered the house.

"Jinshui! Our sons have all come to see you!" she cried out.

When her youngest son entered she cried out, "Waah!" and the atmosphere in the room felt a thousand times more miserable and depressing. Auntie Jinshui hugged him tightly.

"You poor thing! To have lost your father so young! Who will look after you now? Make you a man? Your poor youngest son, Jinshui!" She was unable to stop her loud sobs. The faces of her other sons showed clearly their innermost feelings, whilst their eyes were rimmed with red.

The sons lit incense and burned ghost money, as they followed the custom of the closest relatives taking care of the last appearance of the deceased.

Third Great Uncle lifted the sheet covering Jinshui, allowing his sons to see him for the last time.

Jinshui's eyes were still open, and were big and round, as though he was still angry about something.

“Jinshui, your sons have all returned, they will handle all your unfinished business for you. You can close your eyes and rest now.” Third Great Uncle caressed Jinshui's face, and it seemed that Jinshui had heard his message, since he closed his eyes, and appeared to be merely sleeping. His sons couldn't hold back their grief, and were sobbing and crying out loudly. Their wives too, in accordance with Badouzi custom, all knelt on the ground and started howling and sobbing as if showing the deceased their deepest grief. After sometime, everyone finally stopped crying, and closed their eyes. Only Auntie Jinshui and her youngest were embraced in one big tearful hug.

“Ah Xiong, don't cry. If you keep crying like this, I'm afraid Ma will finally lose her voice from crying together with you.” Ah Sheng spoke to his youngest brother in the tone of an elder brother well used to advising his juniors. His heart was full of love and affection as he patted his mother on the back, consoling her.

“Ma, you should let him go. You need to take care of yourself now.”

His crying mother seemed not to have heard him, and continued sobbing. Then there was one long sorrowful cry of “Pa, Pa, Pa!” from the youngest son. Auntie Jinshui sobbed and wailed as though giving the deceased Jinshui a detailed account of her experiences of misery, bitterness and hardship. After she cried so long that her voice became a hoarse unrecognisable murmur, she stopped, wiped away her tears, and choking with sobs, consoled her youngest.

“Third Great Uncle, what were our father's last words?”

“Ask your mother, she knows.”

“What last words? He passed away so quickly, he only said two.” Auntie Jinshui thought of Jinshui’s last dying moments, and burst into tears again.

While Jinshui was alive, he had always done his duty, and although he was poor, he hardly ever asked anything of others. On this recent occasion, he had personally borrowed from all quarters, not at all expecting his current fate. He had known then on his deathbed that he couldn’t repay the money, and he had given up all hope in his sons. Naturally, there was only Auntie Jinshui to take up the burden he had created. In his heart he was uneasy, and felt sorry for her, even with his last breaths he was still talking of the money. Thirty years of marriage, and he still left her in this pitiful plight and poor circumstances. Thinking all this over, Auntie Jinshui wailed loudly.

“You mustn’t cry like this Ah Lan. All the crying in the world won’t bring Jinshui back again.” This was Third Great Uncle. He quietly and simply related the circumstances of Jinshui’s illness and death to the six sons.

“I think you six are all quite aware of Jinshui’s state of mind when he passed away.”

“Yes, Great Uncle. After the funeral we brothers will discuss how to resolve that business. Don’t worry.”

At that moment, they could see Ah Biao’s wife along with Mrs Wang, standing outside the living room, pointing and peeping inside.

“Her sons have all returned. You should take advantage of this time to talk with them Mrs Wang. Otherwise I’m afraid you’ll never get the money back,” said Ah Biao’s wife.

“There’s so many people Auntie Biao, you go in first!”

Accordingly, Ah Biao's wife entered first. She stood by the door watching Auntie Jinshui's sons. "So you're all back" she said.

"Of course, Fourth Auntie."

"Ai! Second Brother was really unfortunate. His sons are all grown up and have good positions in the world. Just as his fortunes improve, he dies! Really!"

Mrs Wang, who was standing by her side, smiled slightly, and bowed her head in greeting to Auntie Jinshui's sons. Immediately, however, she felt her smile was inappropriate in this particular situation. Therefore, her face assumed an expression of grief and mourning as she said, "Who would've thought it? A man so full of life, would pass suddenly like that. Ai! It's really unfortunate."

Everyone in the room looked at her, but made no reply. The atmosphere in the room went chilly, and she felt somewhat uncomfortable.

Finally, Third Great Uncle spoke up, addressing the six sons, "We should go now. We'll go over to Uncle Ah Zhuan's place. We have a lot to discuss, buying a coffin, finding people to help decorate for the funeral¹⁶², arranging a date, inviting the Taoist monks etc. As he spoke, he was already walking into the living room. Auntie Jinshui's sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren all followed, and they left the house.

Only Auntie Jinshui remained, squatting on the floor, burning note after of ghost money. After throwing one note into the tin, and watching it burn, she would immediately throw in another. Her face would be briefly lit up by the flame, and just as quickly go dim again. The alternating brightness, dimness, brightness, dimness, produced an indefinably weird and gloomy ambience.

¹⁶² Traditionally funerals were held at the home of the deceased.

Mrs Wang and Ah Biao's wife moved slowly to Auntie Jinshui's side, seemingly undecided, before finally calling softly, "Auntie Jinshui."

Auntie Jinshui stared fixedly at the flames as if she hadn't heard. She continued throwing ghost money onto the fire. The money would immediately catch alight, the light of the flames turning her face completely red.

"Auntie Jinshui."

Auntie Jinshui sluggishly turned her head in response to Mrs Wang's call. The flames dimmed, and all that could be seen was her wooden unmoving face, appearing totally lost and without hope.

Mrs Wang," she said in a hoarse whisper, then lowered her head again, and threw more notes into the fire. "Jinshui, Mrs Wang has come to see you," she said, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Mrs Wang suddenly felt rather guilty, as if she had been caught doing something she shouldn't have been. She moved her lips soundlessly, before perfunctorily saying, "Auntie Jinshui you shouldn't be so sorrowful like this!" Her eyes reddened.

2.5 Chapter Five

Early on the morning of the day after Jinshui's funeral, Third Great Uncle gave the sons a detailed list of accounts.

"Every expense is listed here, it's sixty four thousand dollars altogether, so there's six thousand left over. There's also your father's unpaid debts and the *hui* money, which I've listed in the back of the account book. You all discuss what you want to do, I have some business to finish, I'll be back later."

The sons leafed through and pored over the accounts. They were sincerely grateful to Third Great Uncle, agreeing that without his help, they would never have had such a remarkable funeral for only sixty four thousand dollars. But on the subject of Jinshui's debts, and the *hui* money, they immediately started arguing.

"How on earth could one person owe a hundred and twenty thousand dollars? It's unbelievable!" Ah Teng's wife said in surprise, grabbing the account book. "The *hui* money alone is seventy, eighty thousand, what did they spend it on?"

"It's all clearly detailed here what it was used for," Ah Tong said, pointing at the book. "This was for Ah He's wedding; as was this; this is for Ah Yi's wedding; while this is for Ah Sheng and Ah He's business. It's all written out very clearly."

"But at our wedding the gift cakes¹⁶³ were only a simple token. We didn't spend much money at all," Ah He queried.

"Our wedding was even simpler, we didn't even have any cakes," Ah Yi chimed in.

"How could you not have spent any money? It's clearly written here."

"How can you say all this when your business investment is seventy, eighty thousand? We didn't spend much more than ten thousand," said Ah Yi.

"How can you say it was all spent by our business? Pa also invested money. He also split the profits. So how is it all our business spending?"

"Well, there's no point arguing over the figures, we need to discuss how we are going to resolve this. Let's get to it now, and discuss a solution."

"That's right. The debt isn't going to just disappear. I think how much we put in should depend on how much we have. They're our parents after all. Those who have

¹⁶³ Traditionally each wedding guest is given a small cake to take away.

more money should put in more money,” Ah Sheng’s wife said. “We only have one breadwinner and six mouths to feed: you all have fewer to support so it’s up to your consciences to decide how much to put in.”

“That’s only fair, those who have more should put more in.”

“But, who actually has money or not? You all have property. We still have to pay rent every month,” said Ah He’s wife.

“Ai yah! We all know you have lots of money that you loan to other people for interest,” Ah Sheng’s wife replied. “We borrowed money to buy our house; we haven’t paid back all our debt yet.”

“You want to talk of fairness, then we ought to look at who spent most of the money. Those who used the most should pay the most. That would be fair.”

“What? Are you so smart? Our parents aren’t yours? Father’s debts have nothing to do with you?”

“If we didn’t get any use from it, then of course it has nothing to do with us. You can’t ask us to repay money spent on you!”

“Who it’s relevant to is also no use. We’ve just bought a house. The colour TV, washing machine, stereo, water heater, are all on hire purchase. Every month we pay thousands of dollars. Our sofa cost more than twenty thousand dollars, and it’s not paid for yet. How can we afford to help pay this for you?” Ah Tong spoke out in support of his wife.

“Well. Talking of that, we also acquired a new sofa, and a colour TV which aren’t paid off yet. We don’t have any money either.”

“So why don’t you economize? You’re all talking about enjoyment and fancy living, even if you are well-off, you have nothing left over!” Ah He spoke up.

“You’re telling us we should economize? What about you? If you economized, then a hundred and twenty thousand would be easy for you to bear. Also, you used most of the money anyway.”

Auntie Jinshui sat down beside Jinshui’s altar, silently folding the ghost money into the shape of *yuanbiao*,¹⁶⁴ overhearing the argument between her sons, not saying a word, tears streaming down her face.

The next day, Auntie Jinshui’s sons and daughters-in-law all indicated that they wanted to return to their own homes. Auntie Jinshui listened, giving no hint of her feelings, as Third Great Uncle and their cousins urged them to stay.

“There’s only your mother alone in the house now. Even New Year and holidays you hardly ever come back, you should stay with her longer.”

“With us being away for this week, there’s business we left unattended that we have to return to deal with.”

“How come your business in the city needs to be done now in particular? The two weeks’ funeral leave isn’t over yet,” said Third Great Uncle.

“We feel rather embarrassed. We’ve already been here a week, the whole lot of us staying in Third and Fourth Uncles’ homes, disturbing their routine and having them look after us. We can’t impose on you anymore, we should go home.”

“Ai yah! Don’t make me laugh! We are family, how can you say you’re imposing upon us?” Ah Zhuan’s wife replied. “I’m afraid you’ve all gotten used to city living. You’ve become citified, eating well, living comfortably, getting used to pleasure. You just feel it is very inconvenient living here in our country houses.”

¹⁶⁴ *Yuanbiao* are an ancient type of gold currency.

“That’s right, if you don’t mind the discomfort, you’re welcome to stay longer,” said Ah Zhuan.

“That’s not it at all. We’re not comfortable imposing upon you like this. The children haven’t washed in days, and we are not sleeping well,” Ah Sheng’s wife replied.

“To be honest, we really aren’t used to this kind of living anymore. With only one toilet for so many people, and it’s only a hole with two wooden boards at that.”

“Well, you women can take the children home, but Ah Sheng was brought up here, he is used to it, he can accompany your mother for a few days more,” Third Great Uncle replied to his nephew’s wife. “Also, the problem of your father’s *hui* money and other debts still has to be resolved yet.”

“That’s right, why do you have to leave in such a hurry? Stay a while longer; when all the business is resolved it will be time to go.”

In the end, Auntie Jinshui’s sons stayed another day, then all returned to their own homes in a great hurry: even Third Great Uncle urging them to stay wasn’t enough. Before they left, they all agreed with Third Great Uncle on a resolution for the debt problem. The one hundred and twenty thousand in debt would be divided between the four sons who were already married, and they promised that within a week they would post the money.

However, a week, then two weeks went by, without any news at all. After this time, Third Great Uncle sought them out himself. But each of them each had their own reasons as to why their equal quarter of the debt was unfair, and why they were

opposed to paying it. An angry Third Great Uncle scolded them to their faces, and declared that from then on, he would have nothing to do with their family's business.

Every evening Auntie Jinshui would sit alone in her living room. There was an oil lamp on Jinshui's altar, shimmering and twinkling, alternately light then dark, light then dark.

She felt that the house was too big, too empty, and too quiet. It had the feel of an abandoned hillside mine, lonely and desolate. It was all clear to her now. She wasn't in a dream, it was all horribly real.

Jinshui's funeral portrait hung on the wall, looking at her. This proved to her that he truly had died. This awareness only served to set her crying. Even though when he was alive, he had never bought her any good fortune to speak of, when there had been the two of them in the house, she felt as if there was always something she could rely on. No matter that whatever happened, he had had only words to offer: everything felt real and enduring. But now, there was only her, by herself, in a big house. Her tears flowed down her face again.

"Jinshui. If you have life after death, if you believe, then tonight please come and take me with you."

She went into the bedroom, and curled up in bed under the blankets, closed her eyes and thought of falling asleep. But the sound of her own breathing overcame the dark, overcame the silence, overcame the emptiness: she could hear it clearly in every detail. Also, the wind blowing outside whistled through the treetops, sounding like low mournful crying.

Every day, creditors would come. Because Auntie Jinshui had been known in the village for her trustworthiness, and was looked up to, and because her many sons were held up as examples of success, everyone believed she could pay back the money owed to them, so they were all very polite and courteous to her.

However as time passed and everybody could see her delaying and delaying, they began to feel concerned, and gradually even somewhat fed up. Their talk got harsher and sharper; they discarded any politeness, and had little regard for her feelings.

Winter in Badouzi was occasionally clear, but usually had periods of days on end of howling wind and rain, making everything damp and miserable. The strong winds brought the salty fishy smell of the sea. Like a knife the wind cut into one's face, boring through into the bones. The weather was cold enough for everyone to see their own breath. But, Mrs Wang, the rest of the *hui* committee, Nan Shan and Ah Shu and their cousins didn't let the freezing cold put them off. Early one particular morning, without invitation, they congregated in Auntie Jinshui's house.

Auntie Jinshui was dressed roundly like a ball, in many layers of clothing, her greying hair falling in disorder over her forehead, her bun untied and falling untidily behind her, her eyes dark and sunken, her face wan and sallow.

"I will repay the money."

"What use is all your talking? You may be able to borrow other people's money for a year and a half, but not the *hui* money. You've been the head of the *hui* before," said Mrs Wang.

“You’ve said it all before, wait just a few days, just a few days, but in the end you’ve deceived us. It’s not a very large amount,” Ah Biao’s wife said. “We’re all relatives, what good does it do create such bad feeling?”

“I don’t have any money now. It’s not that I don’t want to repay you!”

“You say you have no money? When you spent so much on the funeral? Such a small amount you owe us, even demons wouldn’t believe you can’t pay it!”

“My sons haven’t brought the money yet.”

“I don’t care if they’ve brought you money or not. I just want you to give me my fifteen thousand dollars,” Nan Shan answered. “I gave you the money in good faith, how can you say you can’t pay it back? Robbing someone, or eating someone isn’t like that! You haven’t paid any of the interest! Have you wasted the entire principal too? Even bandits don’t have your effrontery!”

“I’m not that kind of person. I’m just waiting for my sons to bring the money...”

Ah Shu interrupted loudly, “I think you’re just telling stories. Ai! If your sons don’t bring the money are we supposed to let you owe us? Let you just take our money? Fuck! You’re just embroidering your lies now!”

“Every time you’ve said wait for your sons, wait for your sons. We’ve already waited for more than two months. Second Sister-in-law, how long exactly do you expect me to wait? She also sympathises with me,” Ah Biao’s wife said. “My whole body is aching, but I don’t have the money to see a doctor.”

“Auntie Jinshui, it’s because we have been good neighbours for decades that we’ve been so considerate of you. You put us off, eight, ten times, even children don’t fall for that!” Mrs Wang continued, “You spent sixty or seventy thousand on the funeral. The *hui* money is only three, five hundred, but you’ve been putting us

off. Nine, ten times now. You must think we're soft, that you can take advantage of us!"

They surrounded Auntie Jinshui, shouting and pointing their fingers, all back and forth speaking and criticising her. She looked at them blankly, simply crying.

"I'll pay it back. We've been neighbours for decades..."

"Neighbours? Neighbours have to act reasonably. They don't spend sixty seventy thousand on a funeral, and make their neighbours wait two months for their *hui* money. You're just taking advantage of us, having money and not repaying it!" Mrs Wang suddenly grabbed Auntie Jinshui's arm and shouted, "Let's go! Whoever you want to make your case to, we'll go along with you! Let's go!"

By this time neighbours from all over had run over and were crowded round the door peering in. Outside it was still drizzling.

"Can you please listen and decide who is right? Auntie Ah Zhuan, you're her relative, come and adjudicate for us! Have you ever met one like this before? Delaying and delaying so the *hui* money is three months late. Whatever case she wants to make, we'll all listen! Taking advantage of us like this!" Mrs Wang was pulling Auntie Jinshui by the arm as she spoke.

Third Great Uncle stepped out of the crowd, calling out loudly, "Why are you like this? Why are you like this? It's only three, five hundred dollars, do you have to pressure her like this?"

"Huh! You can say that because it's not your money. If it's only five hundred, how come she can't pay it? She's made us wait eight, ten times? Don't you feel embarrassed? The previous times you spoke for her. Everyone has great respect for your age, we gave her an extension for five or six days. Now more than two months

have passed, and where is the money? How can you say we are pressuring her? How can you say, only three, five hundred? You keep talking like this, singing the same old song! Very smooth and slippery! All deception!”

“How can you show such a lack of respect? Such a normally dutiful young person, talking to one of her elders in such a way? Aren’t you afraid of cutting yourself with your own sharp tongue?” replied Third Great Uncle. “It’s not that she won’t pay you back, it really is that her sons haven’t brought her the money. You’ve been neighbours for so long, is it so difficult to give her an extension for a few more days? Normally you are all very close, why are you being so pushy and pressuring her over three, five hundred dollars? Life is a very long road and to travel it you need friends to help you, especially when money is tight. Is it necessary to be so pushy over this?”

“Extension? Even extensions have limits! You ask around, I’ll bet you never hear of anyone not repaying *hui* money for three or four months.” Mrs Wang wasn’t taking Third Great Uncle’s speech lying down. “You feel so sorry for her, then you can repay it for her! Only three, five hundred dollars? You sing such a sweet song, do re mi! But you’re really just making sweet sounds aren’t you?”

Auntie Jinshui was standing beside him, still crying. “Please, please, you don’t need to pressure me to death...”

“What did you say? That would be good for you! Pressuring you to death! If you owe money you won’t have to repay it! You say we’re pressuring you to death?” Mrs Wang was speaking in an unusual tone and shouting, “You think that if you die that’ll finish it? If you don’t repay the *hui* money to me today, I’m quite willing to chase you to the King of Hell’s court to discuss this!”

“Mrs Wang,” Auntie Jinshui pleadingly pulled Mrs Wang’s clothing. “It’s not that I don’t want to repay it to you!”

“Don’t pull at me! If you don’t pay back the *hui* money today, I’m not going to just let it go! Such an old long time neighbour, I don’t want you to claim kinship with me now! You are obviously simply cheating us because you think we are soft touches. Is this how you’ll get rich? With our *hui* money?”

“No, no, no! I’m not that kind of person!”

“If you’re going to give it to me, then you can give it to me now. You don’t have the money? You spend seventy, eighty thousand on a funeral, and then you don’t have three, five hundred for the *hui* money? You obviously think I’m just a sucker for a sad story.” Mrs Wang replied, pulling at Auntie Jinshui’s clothes, and pushing her. “Go to Mazu’s temple and let her hear your plea! You think others are really so stupid?”

“Mrs Wang, don’t be like this! I’ll kowtow to you for forgiveness.”

“Kowtow? If you don’t have the *hui* money, then kowtowing is no use!”

“Don’t push me like this, I’m pleading with you! I’m begging you! I’ll kowtow to you...” Auntie Jinshui was pulling Mrs Wang’s arm, resisting her and struggling, all the while crying non-stop.

Then, all of a sudden, she kneeled down as she had said she would. The neighbours and fellow villagers just stared in surprise.

“Ai! Ah Lan, do you need to do this? It’s only three, five hundred dollars. Are you really that badly off?” Third Great Uncle spoke softly, shaking his head.

“Ai yah! What the hell! Auntie Jinshui, what...what are you doing?” Mrs Wang stood by her, waving her hands in confusion, not knowing what to do.

Outside, the drizzle continued, the sky was gloomy and dark, whilst the wind from the sea ‘she oh, she oh’ whistled through the town. The weather was still cold enough that people could see their own breath. Badouzi had entered the deepest, most extreme cold and hardship of the winter season. For rainy day upon rainy day, no one saw Auntie Jinshui. The *hui* committee and her creditors anxiously sought her out.

“Auntie Zhuan, where has Auntie Jinshui gone? Her door has been locked for several days.”

“It’s really very strange,” said Mrs Wang. It’s been more than four days now. Even if she has gone to visit her sons, she’s usually back in less than four days.”

“Third Uncle, do you know where Second Auntie went?” Ah Biao’s wife asked. “I hope she didn’t take all we said too much to heart, and go and kill herself. Shall I get some people together to look for her?”

“You’re asking me? Why ask me?” Third Great Uncle replied. “You’re the ones who were giving her such pressure. Ai!”

“I think it’s unlikely she killed herself,” Ah Zhuan said.

“Nevertheless,” Mrs Wang thought for a while, and muttered “God! Do you think she has run away?”

“Run away? She’s run away? Is she avoiding running into us on the street? That woman!” Ah Shu piped up, “Should I go visit her sons? ‘If the parents owe, the children repay’. Should I be afraid she’s run away?”

“What good would going to see her sons do? There’s no need. You’ll just waste your bus fare!” Third Great Uncle answered him. “This modern age, everything has

changed. Raising children now is like the sound of throwing money into a deep pond. Raising children? Huh! You'd have to be prepared to get no return!"

Days passed, and as suspected, Auntie Jinshui never returned. It was said that Mrs Wang and the *hui* committee had gone to see Auntie Jinshui's sons, but they weren't at home. Not even their shadows could be seen. They only saw the daughters-in-law. The daughters-in-law seemed very polite, but they avoided the question of the debt entirely, saying that they knew nothing at all about it. They didn't even know Auntie Jinshui's whereabouts. The eldest told them to talk to the second eldest, the second eldest told them to see the third eldest or fourth eldest. Such was the way they all passed the buck.

At the merest mention of the *hui* money, the daughter-in-law would querulously ask with a totally straight face, "What makes you ask me about the *hui* money? Are we members of the *hui*?"

Due to this, Mrs Wang and Fourth Daughter-in-law argued furiously. Fourth Daughter-in-law even threatened to call the police on them. Mrs Wang wasn't a very knowledgeable woman, and was very afraid of the police. She was soon stern-faced and angrily cursing and swearing, back on the road to Badouzi. There, to everyone she met she cursed Auntie Jinshui's family back eight generations, and damned her descendants.

The weather in Badouzi was still overcast and gloomy, day and night the rain-laden winds blew. They blew, salty and fishy and damp, into every crack and crevice.

It was so cold the residents spent days sheltering under their blankets, not even daring to open their doors.

For a long period of time, the wind and rain showed no sign of stopping or clearing

2.6 Epilogue

Spring finally returned to Badouzi, like a generous mother bringing life, renewing the earth, with boundless vitality and vividness, giving birth to countless new lives, cheering and leaping in the sun and the breeze.

The villagers adopted a happy, busy rhythm of work on the beach, preparing to welcome the upcoming fishing season. The business of Auntie Jinshui gradually slipped out of conversation.

However, on the celebration of Mazu's birthday on the twenty-third day of the third month of the lunar calendar, Mrs Wang received by post the *hui* money owed by Auntie Jinshui.

Not long after, the story around Badouzi was that someone had bumped into Auntie Jinshui at Xian Gong Temple in Taipei's Mucha district. That day she was praying for good luck for her sons. This New Year was the year of the tiger, but her sons were a snake, a dog, a pig, a rooster, and a rabbit, all of which were antipathetic to the tiger. So, she was worried that her sons might have bad luck.

Auntie Jinshui

She asked the person to pass on word to Badouzi: saying that she was working as a servant in Taipei: washing clothes; looking after children: and to assure everyone that all the money she owed would be paid back.

She said that when that was done, she would return to Badouzi, with a completely clean slate, and would go to Mazu's temple and burn incense and give thanks.

The person who saw Auntie Jinshui said that she seemed very happy. She was just like the outgoing, laughing Auntie Jinshui, full of hope for the future; who had once carried a shoulder pole of miscellaneous goods for sale around the streets of Badouzi.

**[3] ‘It’s ‘Literature of the Present Reality’, not
‘Nativist’ Literature’**

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3.0 Introduction

It’s not known for sure when it started, but in the last few years the phrase ‘Nativist Literature’ has gradually appeared in many magazines and newspapers, and upon the lips of literature aficionados everywhere. This phrase has come to describe the main trend in today’s literary works.

As to whether this phrase is appropriate to describe this trend, I do know that there are many differing views among writers and readers alike, and no matter whether they oppose or support this trend, I’m afraid that they’ve mixed theoretical and non-literary reasons together.

At the same time, when talking about ‘Nativist Literature’, what exactly is ‘Nativist Literature’? What does ‘Nativist Literature’ really mean? It seems to be very vague and general, with no one having publicly offered an explicit and clear meaning.

I think, before discussing this problem, I will review the major changes in Taiwan’s government, economy, and society from 1970 to 1972. This will assist our understanding of this issue. I’ve consistently advocated that literature should be investigated within the context of its objective historical and social conditions. Then we will be able to see its appearance clearly.

In recent years, in particular from 1970 to 1972, Taiwan has experienced a series of major events. In their influence on the worlds of thought, culture, and youth, they have left obvious marks that can still be found.

3.1 Taiwan Society 1970 to 1972

During this period, we in Taiwan experienced some enormous, extremely shattering, and strongly impacting events. In their proper chronological order, they are:

1. In November 1970, the Diaoyutais Incident begun.
2. On the 25th of October 1971, The Republic of China (The ROC) was expelled from the United Nations (the UN).
3. On the 21st of February 1972, US President Nixon visited Beiping.¹⁶⁵
4. In November 1972, Japan broke off formal diplomatic relations.

The Diaoyutai¹⁶⁶ Islands are a small group of Taiwanese-owned islands approximately 100 nautical miles to the northeast. Although they’re uninhabited, Taiwan fishermen often fish offshore from them. Because it is thought that there may be offshore oil reserves, they’ve attracted world attention, and Japanese espionage efforts. Japan unilaterally declared the Diaoyutais to be part of their own Ryukyu Islands.¹⁶⁷

At that time the Ryukyu’s had been administered by the US since World War II. The US declared that in 1972 the Ryukyus would be returned to Japanese control. At the same time, the Americans, without informing Taiwan, said that they considered the Diaoyutais to be part of the Ryukyus and that they would be returned along with them to Japan. Although the ROC government had delivered a stern declaration that

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Beiping (or Northern Peace) was the Nationalists (KMT) name for Beijing (Northern Capital), since the KMT capital was Nanjing (Southern Capital).

¹⁶⁶ Known as the Senkaku Islands in Japanese.

¹⁶⁷ The Ryukyus’ main island is Okinawa.

sovereignty over the Diaoyutais belonged to China; Chinese compatriots and students living overseas could clearly recognize the authentic face of imperialism.

Feeling deeply the grief of a weak country with few diplomatic relations, they united together and launched fierce protest actions and demonstrations against the US and Japan. They vowed to back their government, and to defend to the death the country’s soil. So, like a raging fire, the ‘Protect the Diaoyutais’ movement spread.

They quoted the slogans of the May Fourth era, speaking with resounding calls: “Resist Outside Authorities!” “Eliminate Domestic Traitors!”

To those compatriots who had long lived with the beautiful appearance of economic co-operation with the US and Japan, which in fact covered their economic invasion of Taiwan, this was a provocative and educational event. It opened their eyes to the true ugly face of Japanese and American collaboration in invading China. We, whose national consciousness had long been dormant under these two countries intrusions, suddenly awoke.

Hence, university students who had for decades seldom shown any interest in national affairs, on campus after campus held national affairs forums, took part in demonstrations, and publicly used slogans of the May Fourth movement:

“Chinese soil can be conquered, but never forfeited!”

“You can kill Chinese people, but never their will!”

At the same time could also be heard slogans from the Anti-Japanese War¹⁶⁸ such as “A foot of soil, a foot of blood, ten thousand youth, ten thousand chariots,” indicating their vows of determination to defend their country, and resist invaders! This awoke the entire population’s self-awareness!

Myself, and many of my friends who all learned a lot from this movement, and today’s rise in national consciousness, were all stimulated by the ‘Protect the Diaoyutais’ movement.

Following the shock of the Diaoyutais movement was the even greater shock of the expulsion of Taiwan from the UN.

Of the evenings after these two events, still fresh in my memory is the situation of we friends in this sad, broken-hearted time; we couldn’t help uttering our lamentations. This sad, but splendid and heated patriotism still moves me when I think of it even today.

But, at the same time, these events exposed those vacillating opportunists, with their money invested abroad, and their airplane tickets bought, who in a time of crisis would abandon Taiwan and their sixteen million compatriots without any consideration, as they left for far away places. These people usually rely on the effort and support of their 16 million compatriots, and are high-earning capitalists, and don’t represent or resemble any minorities or government officials.

But to the majority of people, to whom only a tragedy is likely to provoke any effort, these events happened to shake them awake, and educated those who normally lived colourless goal-less lives. The aftermath of this painful experience caused the mass of society to better recognise that “If their own destiny is in their own control, they will prosper. If it is in other’s control, they will perish”.

Accordingly, many young friends in *The Intellectual (Daxue)*¹⁶⁹ magazine, which was able to be representative of public opinion at that time, composed numerous

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Magazine.

Wang Tuoh was an editor of *The Intellectual*

articles expressing their vow to back the government to the hilt, and their determination to share in life or death their patriotic enthusiasm with their sixteen million compatriots.

The most moving, and deeply unforgettable example was when Wang Xingqing turned down a scholarship to America’s Mississippi University. When he turned down the prize, he wrote a letter to the American people saying:

“My country is faced with an enormous transformation, in its government, defences, and economy. At this time of imminent national danger I feel I can in no way cast off my responsibility to my family, my country, and my people.

By tradition Chinese scholars are people who conduct themselves in an upstanding manner with a clear conscience and no regrets. Even though my power in this time of great change may be extremely small, I am willing to accept this tradition and its sacrifices!”

Following this, in January 1971 he wrote an article for *The Intellectual* magazine which is representative of the literary revolution of that time, “**Condemnations and Appeals**” in which he said:

“I condemn those overseas students who in this time of great peril abandon Taiwan’s sixteen million people, and bow to communist policies in the hope of receiving support!

I condemn those who use the country’s difficulties to rig the financial markets, and abscond illegally with valuable funds!

I also condemn parasites on society who avoid responsibility, live aimlessly, and who are too happy-go-lucky and try to corrupt the public morale!

I further condemn those who hide their selfishness conceal real-life shortcomings, who can only call upon others but never themselves, and who in this escalating crisis spread poison and feelings of false optimism!

Right now, we have to bravely admit our own plight; we can only spare no effort to build a foundation for the future that will last thousands of generations, without the support or interference of outside forces.

I appeal to the government and youth to work together, to use the fierce enthusiasm and clear wisdom of youth to light the first flames of national recovery!

I appeal to the government to use incomparable willpower, pool the collective wisdom of the masses, and thoroughly and totally reform politics! Only this way can we rally popular feeling, and live more strongly. There is no alternative!

I further appeal to all nationals to relinquish their own selfish interests. Whatever tightly held privileges they hold will inevitably hinder progress, and will certainly delay the harvest of success, which we now cannot continue to wait for and see suffer delay!”

Wang Xingqing’s expression of this kind of opinion, and his patriotic actions in that year, in the eyes of youth was very representative of their own views, and had an educational significance.

Seeing our country’s difficult situation at this critical time couldn’t help but cause the majority of people to open their eyes in concern. They then discovered clearly those selfish, self-interested opportunists who are society’s and the people’s public enemies; and reflect deeply that we can, should, and must, in an earnest and down-to-earth manner set down roots in this place. Naturally, the government has to seize the initiative with determination, to thoroughly and totally reform politics.

From this, we can clearly discover that the ‘Protect the Diaoyutais’ Movement in 1970 gave us, the mass of society, a valuable lesson in politics, which awakened and broadened our public consciousness. The business of our expulsion from the UN not only gave us a strong lesson in nationalism, but at the same time made us recognise clearly that to oppose imperialism, and fight for our right to exist internationally, we first have to thoroughly reform our domestic society and politics! Thus, the spearhead of young people’s criticisms points to the enemies of society and the people!

The above mentioned events of Nixon visiting Beijing, and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Tokyo and Beijing, along with the breaking of formal relations with Taiwan, these two big events, gave our society an education in nationalism and politics: two lessons which left deep impressions.

They also made our youthful intellectuals, not only in the fields of public opinion and of writing begin heavily criticising imperialism and the enemies of the people, but in demonstrations call upon increased societal and political participation.

At the political rallies at this time, there could be seen many forums on the future of the country which called for freedom of speech and democracy, the central discussion being the need for popularly elected representatives.

These spectacular patriotic movements and fervour are amply recorded in *The Intellectual* magazine and other student publications. They show that during this popular movement, many schools established “Volunteer Service Corps”¹⁷⁰ which genuinely went everywhere to serve, and went to many farming villages, fishing villages, and mines, to understand and do on the spot investigations of their problems.

They unmasked many occupational dangers and health hazards in the factories, helped in mining disasters, and protected the interests of workers.¹⁷¹

“**The Complete Story of the Taida¹⁷² Volunteer Service Corps**” has abundant explanations:

“After the ‘Protect the Daiyutais’ movement, Taiwan’s youth stood up! The majority were not willing to bury their heads in the sand like ostriches; they began to pay close attention to national and world affairs. Each tertiary institution’s politics forums were the main focus of student activity. School publications as well as public newspapers and magazine articles began to give lots of space to discussing our country’s difficult situation, and what future way out there might be.

Since we were expelled from the UN, this trend has become even more obvious. The problems of various sectors of society inspired efforts to maintain the stability of society and the nation, and to seek a new direction for future progress.

The youth and students had experienced two baptisms of fire. Many youth who realised that their school did not talk about anything meaningful, all discovered in this time of mutual exchanges of opinions, and all sorrowfully pointed out, that youth, aside from being the “most sensitive barometer of society” also needed to become the vanguard in “cleansing society and embracing the people”¹⁷³

Formerly they were passive and weak, now they were active and assertive. This change in fundamental status underwent a long period of preliminary preparation before finally triggering the basic actions of the Volunteer Service Corps.”

(See *The Intellectual Magazine*, Volume 49, page 62)

¹⁷¹ Wang Tuoh’s 1984 novel **Taipei, Taipei!** is on this subject.

¹⁷² *Guoli Taiwan Daxue*, National Taiwan University

¹⁷³ *Xidi shehui, yungbao renmin*.

After these events, the educated youth of this time both engendered and made the “Embrace the people vanguard”¹⁷⁴ realisation. Aside from being strongly influenced by the above-mentioned international political problems, another important reason for this was the phenomenon of Taiwan’s growth as a flourishing mature industrial economy bringing an uneven distribution of wealth. Prior to this, under the government’s enormous long-term encouragement and assistance, Taiwan’s industrial economy had clearly progressed and prospered.

In 1971, after Taiwan’s expulsion from the UN, the government immediately adopted more flexible policies, actively enacted policies separating the government and economy, and also used favoured treatment and incentives to actively attract foreign investors’ money and the building of factories.

Due to the success of this policy, although Taiwan suffered huge setbacks in its diplomacy, the economy saw a surprisingly high level of success. But with this kind of success, one cannot avoid talking about the fact that under these policies of encouraging the expansion of the industrial sector, the rural economy was in crisis, with the price of rice and agricultural goods, and the wages of workers continuing to fall! These sectors were sacrificed! This phenomenon naturally caused those patriotic members of the public and educated youth who wished to set down roots in, and fervently wished to reform, society, to feel very dissatisfied.

Accordingly, when the educated youth were striving to focus on enemies of society and the people, when they fought for the ideology of “cleanse society,

¹⁷⁴ *Yungbao renmin de xianfengdui.*

embrace the people”, they received a wide-ranging warm and sympathetic response, and enthusiastic support.

Therefore, when the educated youth went into the real world and engaged in investigating the problems of the farming, fishing, and mining villages, they mercilessly exposed the previously concealed tragic injustices in the lives of their labouring compatriots.

I have on hand three representative and strongly typical examples clipped from newspapers:

1/ October 1972. The American-owned Feige Electronics factory in Tamshui in a one-year period saw seven young women suffer strange work-related illnesses. Three of the seven died, and an additional ten young women who had gotten the disease and returned home to the south for treatment, died of unexplained causes. The United Daily News closely followed the story, and discovered even more sufferers, and so caused strong protests against this common ill treatment of, lack of concern for the lives of, and lack of responsibility towards our compatriots by American companies.

2/ April 1973. At a Japanese-invested company in Taichung’s Tsanzi Industrial Zone, Funai Electronics, the regulations require that when the Japanese Chairman of the Board of Directors gives his weekly instructional address to his subordinates the whole workforce have to stand at their workstations and listen. Because the Director uses Japanese in his talks, and the talks have no ceremony, and the listeners can’t see him, fifty part-time students there as interns stood for two minutes, then sat down. The Japanese manager, Yasumura Motoaki saw this and was very unhappy. He called a student named Wang out for instruction. But Wang’s attitude was very fierce; he said that the weekly meeting ought to have the national flag, and a portrait of Sun

Yat-sen to indicate respect for the nation. He said that since the company didn’t follow the correct ceremony, the students naturally wouldn’t express respect for the Director.

Wang was fired, which aroused the righteous indignation of the other fifty students, who collectively resigned. This business was first reported in the Taiwan Times, and then the United Daily News picked up on it. This is an actual example of Japanese businessmen maltreating Chinese workers.

3/ May 1973. An article about a Japanese-owned mining company in Sanjing Jin in Jinshan Riding in Taipei County. Because the company’s wastewater was entering the farmers’ rice paddies, there were severe effects from pollution. The company resisted admitting its error, but under the pressure of public debate and government attention, it finally admitted its mistake. However it only agreed to a small sum in compensation, which attracted strong protests from the local farmers.

It is clear from this example that Japanese businessmen with their arbitrary attitudes, wantonly exploit our country’s farmers.

The exposure of, and protests against, these events indicate the mass of society’s opposition to the power of imperialism in international politics, and in addition, they also indicate society’s opposition to the poor position of our farming and labouring compatriots under the colonialist economic invasion; all of which shows a high degree of public consciousness!

From the above writings, we can come to a simple conclusion as to current stage of Taiwanese society. In this period of time, under the provocation of serious international events and uneven distribution of wealth, which are engendering strong protests against imperialism and against the colonial economy and its compradors:

our national and social consciousness ought to express love for our country, love for our people and concern for the problems of the mass of society. These are the times and background that produced ‘Nativist Literature’.

3.2 A Review of Literature in Taiwan Since 1949

In whatever era, literary progress is determined by the objective political, economic and social conditions of that time. If, in terms of kinds of literature, that era’s objective historical conditions don’t have a certain level of maturity, there is no way to claim that its literature can surmount its era and become essential reading.

To put it another way, in the world of pre-1970s Taiwan literature there were writers who stood for Taiwan’s rural life and wrote of it in ‘Nativist Literature’, but that in that era’s society, and objective conditions, there was no foundation that provided a mature environment for this kind of ‘Nativist Literature’, so that even though there were its advocates, even their hardest and most careful work still couldn’t get them into the world of that era’s literary mainstream.

In order to give a clearer picture of this problem, let us here do a concise review of post-1949 Taiwan literary history: it will certainly be of interest.

1949 was the year the government retreated to Taiwan. In the period immediately following, because of the multitude of huge changes and the instability in politics and society, intellectual thought in Taiwan was stuck in a state of affairs close to a vacuum.

In literature, those writers who followed the government to Taiwan had experienced a long period of unstable life and politics in the cauldron of civil war.

Those who didn’t enter academia and become out of touch with reality, wrote stiff rigidly prescriptive cliché, with almost no contribution to literature to speak of.

In addition, those writers born and raised in Taiwan, for example, Yang Kui, Wu Zhouliu, Zhong Lihe, Zhong Zhaozheng and so forth, because they had been educated under Japanese colonialism, their ability to use Chinese had to await complete retempering. At the same time, because of certain objective situational grounds, at this time they had to maintain a deep, almost complete silence.

After the Korean War exploded,¹⁷⁵ huge amounts of American aid and materiel begun to flow into Taiwan and stable politics gradually bought forth economic vitality. A new array of businessmen arose in society, and with this American economic aid and materiel, became Taiwan’s middle class.

Gradually, the Japanese who had previously worn military uniform and carried weapons to invade China, changed their clothing, wore Western-style suits and, carrying 007 style briefcases entered Taiwan anew, beginning another aspect of Taiwan’s progress: economic invasion.

Taiwan was thus bought under American and Japanese economic colonialism, and turned bargain wages and low prices of agricultural goods into a measure of economic growth and prosperity.

In Taiwan’s worlds of ideology and intellect at this stage, traditional Chinese Confucianism was being advocated and upheld by government officials, who by doing so, were grudgingly maintaining the surface of an empty shell. In reality this was unable to keep out Western capitalist economics and humanist ideology with their ‘freedom of the individual’ value system.

¹⁷⁵ June 1950

Under America’s advocacy and leadership in global Cold War policy, life for Taiwan’s intellectuals began an enormous absorption of Western ideologies:

individualism vs. collectivism; freedom vs. rights; democracy vs. despotism, these kinds of ideological dichotomies.

With China’s nationalistic tradition of opposition to imperialist invasion, they too made a complete break! Total neglect!

Those writers living in Taiwan who on one plane broke with their nationalistic tradition, and on another plane blindly opened up to and whole-heartedly absorbed Western capitalistic ideology and sense of values: in this situation begun blindly modelling and copying Western literature.

But, what is the reality of Western capitalist society?

The essence of capitalism is making money and obtaining possessions, expressed through the behaviour of fierce person vs. person or country vs. country “fair competition”. In reality this is dog eat dog, survival of the fittest! The results of this situation are:

On the one hand, as a result of disparities between the rich and poor, and market contention, they cannot help but mobilise as if for war, but on the other hand as a result of the contradictions inherent in ever-increasing profit, they cannot help but be on the brink of total collapse.

Therefore, historian Arnold J Toynbee said:

“Owing to the huge success of technological discoveries, the Western middle class aggravates the sicknesses of class war and systems of class control, and makes them both chronic and incurable! Systems of class control even now are irredeemably dividing society, and the war could destroy humankind.

Because of recent technological discoveries, there is already a small minority who enjoy privileges and a majority who don’t, in a situation and time of uneven distribution of property. What in the past was an unavoidable evil, has now changed into an unendurable unfairness.”

Looking at these factors, the middle class is undoubtedly facing a great crisis, and the average person under the corrosion of this kind of business culture, where person to person connections are used for advantage and can mutually exclude outsiders, forms a different kind of suffering... in this kind of setback to people’s respect, people lack mutual aid and understanding, and appear solitary, lonely and socially distant etc: you can find these symptoms everywhere.

“As a result, modern people struggling in this unfavourable situation generally come to a crux point...in one part, their bearing appears terribly arrogant, in another part, their will appears to be feeble and impetuous; therefore this loss of will makes them especially sensitive, and makes them frequently fearful and want to withdraw from the world. Ethical concepts and the difference between good and evil become obscured: in order to get rid of these afflictions they cannot help but seek artificial stimulation for their pleasure; therefore, aside from smoking and drinking, sexual desire becomes the main way to assuage the loneliness, and so this unceasing excessive stimulation has results including mentally-induced loss of sexual function. As a result not only do incidences of homosexuality and incest increase, but musicality and sense of colour are all trapped in misplacement and chaos: after this, along with this increase in stimulation, life and the pattern of sensory life emerges in

an endless stream, leading up to one’s total collapse. (See Wei Tianzhong **The Road Ahead Is Not Built By One Person Alone**¹⁷⁶ pages 43 to 45, Lianjing Publishers).

It is in this kind of capitalist society that Western writers reflect their own Western society it is natural that it is not people, democracy or freedom that is reflected: rather it is individual loss, the dangers of freedom, the ossification of society, and the death of the spirit.

“Their subjects are two of the essence of Florida¹⁷⁷: killing (or suicide) and sex. The art itself has degenerated into stimulating the desires of the murderer, becoming merely a means of entertainment or diversion.” (Wei Tianzhong page 46)

“Along with the mid-century collapse in artistic value, it very quickly began expanding its innate morbid characteristics, gradually becoming a less creative, and more and more sick, regressive, negative and improper art. It sank into society’s filth. Replacing kings, its heroes and role models are young wastrels, criminals, prostitutes, the mentally afflicted, and other abandoned people. It sets love among jails and car parks; the bedrooms of women landlords, loose women, madams and seductresses; bars and saloons; the offices of petty schemers; or in cities full of murderers and other evils.” (Wei Tianzhong pages 66-67)

What this kind of literature and art reveals is that since the Renaissance there has been a continuing collapse and destruction of Westerners’ value systems. Eliot’s **The Wasteland**, Auden’s **The Age of Anxiety**, Kafka’s bizarre dream world, Camus’ absurd world, Hemingway’s doomed world: they are representative of a lost era, an

¹⁷⁶ *Lu bu shi yi ge ren zuo de chu lai de*

¹⁷⁷ The writer, not the US state

angry era, an era of systemic collapse. They are modern Western writers singing together an elegy for modern Western culture.

Taiwanese writers, under the American or Japanese colonial economic system, and an American-style education system, not only uncritically studied Westerners’ feelings and thoughts, along with their apocalyptic decadence and world view; they imitated their apathetic, absurd and morbid poses, continuously using newspapers and magazines to widely disseminate Eliot, Kafka, Sartre, Camus, D. H. Lawrence etc, and using Western literary criticism and theory to comment on **The Wasteland, The Castle, The Outsider** and other great works. They even turned to using the standards of this Western literary criticism and its theories and methods to appraise Taiwan’s native-grown works.

This phenomenon caused the Taiwanese literary world’s works of literature that commonly lacked vividness, liveliness and joie de vivre. They spread everywhere a hazy, pallid, losing kind of imagined illness, coyly producing imitations of Western literature. They wrote self-proclaimed works for the upper classes, ‘great works’ uncomprehending of the average person, and they held a kind of arrogant self-important attitude.

However, in a Taiwan society with this kind of literary and social atmosphere, there were still some writers staunchly and persistently standing fast in the native soil they were bought up in. With their native lives as a background, they genuinely reflected the society and real life they knew intimately, even attempting to use the background of native soil as a foil against modern people’s bumpy road of life. Examples are Wu Zhouliu’s **Asia’s Orphan** and Zhong Zhaozheng’s trilogy **Sinking**: all comprehensively elaborate the progress of history at great length, and highlight the

people’s drifting and sense of pessimism. Zhong genuinely reflects the difficulties and fortunes of real life, his works brimming with realism and the power to move people.

This kind of writing, using the people’s history and individuals’ lives as subject matter, and using the active life on native soil as background, is a creative direction which possesses a spirit of realism. In that time’s Taiwan literary world, mainly modelled on Western spirit and technique which reflected the degenerate, decadent, apathetic and regressive lives of the middle class, this writing didn’t receive much attention or comprehension.

Yet we can’t ignore the fact that with a stealthy and direct power this literature quietly replaced and superseded the prevailing ossified false literary custom, in a time when society’s objective conditions were changing. It became literature’s mainstream, helping us to more rapidly set off along a healthier and more proper road.

Taiwan’s post-1970 society set the conditions that nurtured the necessary maturation of a prevailing custom of literature that reflected current reality.

The above related changes in Taiwan society from 1970 to 1972, and their reflection in literature, first had to severely critique the literary atmosphere of the past twenty years:

“In actuality, our factories, salt mines and farming villages have many problems. Our education system, in this time when a new society replaces the old, has many places worthy of inquiry. Yet our writers are certainly not addressing this predicament, on the contrary they take Western problems, and problems that haven’t happened here, and in their clamouring to receive them, others problems become our

problems, so that when others catch cold, we start sneezing. So Taiwan’s current modern literature and Taiwan’s real life have become separate, and not only will it not face its own ills, but many novels and new poetry wittingly or unwittingly leave real life even further distant. In this situation we really need a kind of healthy portrayal of reality in art and literature. Regrettably, however, the only works we have in our hands are merely the works of intellectuals who can’t see the forest for the trees. These writers of works of self-indulgence are not only unwilling to admit the facts of reality: on the contrary, they are using modern literature and art theory “to beautify their own ugliness”. (Wei Tianzhong page 53)

“We think: modern literature has no bigger task than to penetrate through the people’s sufferings and struggles, towards a new society conforming to rationalism... To reach this point writers and artists cannot avoid an understanding of their subsistence environment...Only rooted in life, and with all one’s heart embracing the world’s tribulations and joys, can our art match the destiny of the Chinese nation, and after going through endless tragedies and struggles, become a sound that comforts the audience’s lives.” (as above page 149)

Rather than follow these literary trends of severe criticism of over-Westernisation and of excessively blind imitation of western literature’s decadence, degeneracy and avoidance of reality; literature is required to take a position rooted in the reality of life, and to stand in the same position as the masses, and to care for and embrace society’s tribulations and joys. The ideological awakening of post-1970 Taiwan bought about by these international incidents has caused a higher level of awakening to the national awareness of anti-imperialism. This great improvement of social awareness is to care for the real life of the masses. All of these have adapted the same

pace, and have become integrated with the healthy and active realism which was demonstrated in the works of these authors who have been working quietly for over twenty years, and they honestly describe the stories of individuals’ and the nations’ up and downs of life, using the countryside as background.

3.3 It’s ‘Literature of the Present Reality’, not ‘Nativist Literature’.

The above is a concise review of Taiwan’s post-war literature and Taiwan society from 1970 to 1972. I think at this time there really was a flourishing expansion of what is called ‘Nativist Literature’, and it has gradually become the literary mainstream trend of writing, with a modern background and objective environment.

Now I will attempt to discuss a few problems regarding ‘Nativist Literature’. Most people, in talking of ‘Nativist Literature’, give the impression that so-called ‘Nativist Literature’ has the countryside as background and describing the lives of rural people as its objective.

Moreover, its language uses a lot of dialect words. These kinds of works can be understood by today’s educated youth who appreciate art and literature, and by the mass of society who also enjoy them.

Because 1970s Taiwan society, according to our previous analysis, suffered a series of huge international shocks; domestic politics, economics and the social environment have changed enormously with the awakening and rise of a national consciousness opposed to imperialism, and a social consciousness opposed to the unequal distribution of wealth.

To oppose imperialism in the realm of culture naturally requires a renewal of one’s own culture; a new awareness, new values, and new determination, to build a new foundation.

To oppose that minority of oligarchic capitalists with their monopoly on wealth, naturally requires criticising and attacking the present economic system’s unreasonable aspects, and naturally also requires more sympathy and support for those on lower incomes.

Because of the hypocrisy of the imperialists in co-operating under the ugly name of progress to invade Taiwan, the opponents of imperialism and opponents of the oligarchs have connections with each other, and often are one and the same.

In this situation, these kinds of works with the background of rural life and describing the lives of rural people can satisfy these two different emotional needs of its audience at the same time. That’s because in Taiwan society under the stimulation of foreign capital and foreign culture, the level of Westernisation in the cities is already little different from that of large American or European cities. This can be seen not only in respect of their outward construction, but also in the people’s ideology, sense of values and attitudes to life.

Although the villages have also been saturated in the industrial economy, and have seen huge changes, compared with the cities they still continue to retain more of the features of traditional culture and the appearance of a simple life. At the same time, in this huge transformation of society, and amid policies actively promoting the expansion of the industrial economy, the rural dwellers are sacrifices, ignored, low-paid, with gruelling labour, and a lower standard of living.

Because of this, people can easily, from the novels subject matter of rural life and rural society, satisfy their nationalism and sense of social consciousness.

But, should these works be called ‘Nativist Literature’?

Or, aside from ‘Nativist Literature’, don’t these works have any more suitable description? I believe this is a question worth discussing.

As far as I know, most people think that what they call ‘Nativist Literature’ and understand to be ‘Nativist Literature’, has a subject matter of rural villages and rural society, and it features liberal use of the Minnan Language.¹⁷⁸

But, according to our previous analysis, this literature, which has attracted widespread attention and appreciation, and is widely read, was produced from a point of view of, and feelings of, opposition to foreign culture and to society’s injustices. Therefore, so-called ‘Nativist Literature’ is in reality the opposite of those blind imitations and copies of Western literature which avoid the reality of Taiwan society and which would measure literary standards by their level of Westernisation.

In this sense, equating ‘Nativist Literature’ with ‘Rural Literature’, although not without some reason (which has been explained in this essay already), causes an obscuration of views and a sense of misunderstanding and misdirection.

Firstly, because it makes us regard the city and the country as opposites, and makes people mistakenly think that only literature with the subject of rural life and rural dwellers is ‘Nativist Literature’, and because it excludes the cities and their residents as subjects of literature. If ‘Nativist Literature’ really has this meaning, then this kind of ‘Nativist Literature’ is excessively narrow, excessively limited and closed.

¹⁷⁸ *Minnan hua* also known as Taiyu (Taiwanese).

Secondly, because rural people still regard the Taiwanese language as most important, at this time those who regard ‘Nativist Literature’s’ representative works as important do so in part because these writers use the Taiwanese language with skill and verisimilitude. Of course this is a great contribution and assistance in making the Mandarin vocabulary richer and more vivid, but if emphasised too much it can easily make people fall into the trap of a narrow, divisive and emotional sense of localism.

Thirdly, under the influence of technology and the pervasiveness of the industrial economy, certain unique characteristics of rural society will decline or vanish. For example, ox carts are replaced by cars or trains; the animal drawn plough by the mechanical plough; oil lanterns by electric lights; superstition and witchdoctors by modern medicine etc. Following along with the material advances come the changes of different kinds of thinking and feelings, all of which according to the objective rules of historical and social progress cannot but change people’s subjective aspirations. If one over-emotionally embraces rural society and rural dwellers, such that one overlooks the objective reality of historical and social progress, it is even easier for people to fall in a kind of nostalgic and sentimental depression, and produce a kind of ‘Rural Anxiety Literature’.¹⁷⁹

The average person frequently mentions more representative ‘Nativist’ writers, such as earlier writers Wu Zhouliu, Yang Kui, Zhong Lihe, Zhong Zhaozheng, or later writers such as Wang Zhenhe, or Huang Chunming etc. Their representative works, although they seek the villages for the rural atmosphere, and use the rural people’s lives as their main subjects and reveal skill and proficiency in their use of dialect, what they express is not limited to simply local flavour and customs. What is

valuable about their works, doesn’t lie in these surface characteristics, but lies in the works reflection of people’s real life emotions and responses, their pessimism, their joys, their struggles and their heart’s aspirations. Their works allow us to thoroughly increase our understanding and concern for people and society. To call these kinds of works ‘Nativist Literature’ or ‘Rural Literature’, as they commonly are, is I think, totally inappropriate.

Mr Zhong Zhaozheng, reckoned to be the number one writer representative of post-retrocession Taiwan ‘Nativist Literature’ previously said this:

“I think the definition ‘Nativist Literature’ strictly speaking, is not useful because there is no such thing as ‘Nativist Literature’. To take a wider view of this, all literature is ‘Nativist’; no literature can escape its native soil. The large amount of literature I’ve read, Chinese or foreign, 99% of it has the flavour of its native soil, because for each writer to write, they must have a place to stand: this place to stand is in their native soil.

Or, to put it better, it has a kind of ‘flavour of the soil.’¹⁸⁰

The term ‘Native Soil’ (*xiangtu*) fixes everybody’s eyes on the ‘Native’ (*xiang*), and says this is the countryside, very earthy. I do not approve of this way of saying things.

What of ‘flavour of the soil’ then?

In the city one can also have the ‘flavour of the soil’, no matter what way of the world the writer says it is, it still can’t leave the ‘flavour of the soil.’ (see self-published **Jia** magazine page 64).

What Zhong Zhaozheng speaks of here as ‘flavour of the soil’, if I understand it correctly; has to indicate that it is the greater social environment of Taiwan, and the present lives of the people in that environment. This includes the rural villages, and at the same time doesn’t exclude the cities. Using this meaning of ‘Native Soil’, in discussing the growth of ‘Nativist Literature’ shows it is a literature rooted in the earth of the present reality of Taiwan society, which reflects this present reality, and the people’s lives and heartfelt aspirations.

It not only a rural literature using the country as a background to describe rural life, it is also a city literature using the city as a background to describe the lives of city people. This kind of literature not only reflects and draws a picture of rural farmers and workers; it also describes and draws a picture of entrepreneurs, small business people, the self-employed, public officials, academics, and all the other kinds of people who live and struggle in the industrial economy.

That is to say, everyone born in this society, every thing, every phenomenon, should all be reflected in and described in this kind of literature, that this literature is concerned with, and understanding of, it all.

This kind of literature, I believe, should be called ‘Present Reality’¹⁸¹ literature and not ‘Nativist Literature,’ in order to avoid causing a confusion of viewpoints, and misleading and mistaken emotions. What is presently called ‘Nativist Literature’ should be renamed ‘Present Reality’ literature.

These kinds of literary works can resonate with and be appreciated by today’s readers – for example, Huang Chunming’s **Sayonara, Goodbye** describes Japanese businessmen coming to Taiwan to take advantage of Taiwanese prostitutes; Yang

¹⁸¹

xianshi zhuyi

Qingzhen’s series of novels about workers are both commonly regarded as important, and have been evaluated highly – this proves the analysis in this essay: that Taiwanese society from 1970 had a widespread awakening of national consciousness due to the objective reality and lessons of this time, and with its newly raised social consciousness, needs and expects this kind of literature.

This kind of ‘Literature of the Present Reality’ is rooted in the soil we were all born and raised in, it describes the here-and-now’s real life triumphs and struggles, reflecting the trials and tribulations and aspirations of the people in our society. It brings progress to our understanding of history and people and thus contributes to strengthening the mental and intellectual power of our people.

**[4] ‘Finding the Basis of Success out of the
Experience of Failure’**

(First published in *Xunzhao jiushi niandai de rensheng jiazhi* 1994).

4.1 Facing Failure

In a person's life there are countless times when they will encounter failure and frustration; this is unavoidable. In the midst of the experience of failure, to search for the basis of future success is the most positive direction to take.

People have failures, and the world of nature has similar phenomena. In the world of nature, there are the spring, summer, autumn and winter seasons, although there are the freezing depths of winter, there are also crazy violent days of rain; there is no such thing as an “endless spring”. As the moon too, waxes and wanes, so, in one's life one will experience both happiness and sadness. If there is life, both success and failure are certain to follow. So, as far as failure, frustration and suffering are concerned, they are simply natural phenomena!

Of course, there are those who ask, “If life has these failures, frustrations and suffering, why would one want to live?”

Existential philosophers say: “One cannot choose one's parents, and one has no right to decide whether one wishes to be born or not.” Only if there is life, does one have the right to choose: in Jie Chuan Long's novel **River Child**, this is said.

River Child is similar to a human but is not a human creature. Before this creature was to be born, his mother asked him “The outside world is like this... are you willing to be born, or not?” If he wasn't willing, his mother would take him back into her womb, and let him be naturally digested and dissolved. If his answer was that he was willing to be born, then he would be born. No other living creature has this kind of right to choose.

Some people are always whinging and moaning: “Why do others’ parents have such success? Why are other people’s families so well off? My own family is so poor, I suffer so many difficulties!” Since people have no right to choose their own parents, or choose whether or not they wish to be born, then of course life will have its accompanying suffering, frustrations and failures.

For myself, I’m very afraid of relationship heartbreaks, but I have experienced this kind of loss many times; I was also afraid of not passing the university entrance exams, but the first time I sat them, I failed; I was even more afraid of being imprisoned, and contrary to my life’s expectations, was imprisoned, and spent almost five years in jail. ¹⁸²

In this life, what I most loved doing, was being a university professor, and a scholar, or a writer. Unfortunately, the school principal thought my ideology was suspect, so I couldn’t continue to teach. Not long ago, after taking part in The Premier’s Monthly Meeting at the Presidential Palace, I bumped into Li Yuan Cu my old school principal. I said to him “Principal Li, you may have forgotten me. When you were principal at National Chengchi University, you had me dismissed, and when later you were the Minister of Justice, you had me imprisoned. Our lives’ two paths are deeply intertwined.”

Nine times out of ten, life doesn’t go as one wishes. My mother and I were extremely close and I loved her very much. My fondest wish was that she would live to a healthy ripe old age. But contrary to this wish, she passed away whilst I was in prison. Life has many other similar happenings. I wished to avoid much suffering,

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and frustration, and there were events too that I wished to avoid. What was the result? One bad thing after another. Since this was so, in the midst of these sufferings, frustrations, and losses, I have to learn to be self-reliant and to overcome my difficulties.

I remember was when I was at university I lost my first love. I sought out my philosophy professor, Father Zhao Ya Bo. He told me: “Young people, this time they are going through, is really benevolent.” When I heard that, I thought it was utter nonsense! The taste of this heartbreak didn’t feel at all benevolent! Afterward, after experiencing a horrible year, I finally discovered that time really was benevolent! I’d actually unknowingly, forgotten all my experience of loss and suffering.

All the same, however, time was very cruel because the innumerable wonderful happenings I had experienced, had, with the passing of the years, all gradually faded from memory. But that is not to say that one should simply let the passing years wipe out any suffering. If that is really the case, it is far too passive. In facing our suffering we ought to actively seek to learn how to not only reduce the level of suffering, but also in its very midst we should seek to stand anew.

When I was small, whenever I fell my grandmother would say, “Falling makes a strong man”. Being only small, I didn’t understand what she meant. In fact, it is to console and encourage children: “If you fall, never mind, if you stand up again by yourself, everything’s fine”. She also had another saying “When you fall, never mind, grab some sand.” It means you don’t want to fall for nothing, you should grab something, even a handful of sand has value.

This is ancient folk wisdom, passed down to today, and still endlessly useful.

4.2 When Facing Loss, How Does One Regard Oneself?

So, how should we regard these unavoidable losses, frustrations and suffering in life? Mencius said “Before the Gods give a person great responsibility, first they must necessarily test and temper their heart and their resolution, and steel their body and its strength, try them with hunger and suffering, and overturn their everyday life and routine. All this will be of limitless value to their future task.”

When I was young and read this, I didn’t fully understand it, but as I grew older and read a lot of history, I felt that Mencius had genuinely seen clearly many of life’s real situations. In the pages of history, we can discover many people who accomplished great successes, and there is not a one who didn’t stand tall in the midst of their experience of failure.

According to the historical records, China’s first Emperor of common stock, Liu Bang, had at one point in his life, also never achieved anything, and liked to gamble and chase women. As a result, his father was disgusted with him, and gave Liu Bang an especially small share of his estate as an inheritance. In war, he had a hundred battles and a hundred losses, and was pushed into a hopeless situation by Shang Yu. He put together wisely the sum of his learning from these losses, and learned how to manage people.

Although he himself was not a good general, he could use those who were. He had under him a very capable officer named Han Xin, who had frequently competed with his ministers. After Liu Bang became Emperor he asked Han Xin, “How many men do you feel I can lead?” Han Xin replied, “You can lead one hundred thousand men”. Liu Bang then asked, “And Shang Yu?” Han Xin replied, “Shang Yu can lead

a million men”. When Liu Bang heard this he not at all convinced, and he deliberately asked Han Xin, “How many men do think you can lead?” Han Xin replied, “I can lead as many men as I can”. Liu Bang was naturally very angry and said to Han Xin “In that case, why is it that today I am the Emperor and you are one of my ministers? Han Xin quickly replied in a flattering manner “Because you have God given brilliance, and have ability at everything.”

When Han Xin was young, he was also impoverished. He usually carried a sheathed sword (which couldn't be used to kill) and spent his time strolling up and down the streets of Chang'an. He eventually attracted the unhappy attention of the street people who the more they saw him the more displeased they became, and they thought him a far too haughty fellow. They sought him out, and their leader asked “That sword of yours, what kind of magic does it have! If you are really that powerful, do you dare to kill me? If you dare, then do it! If you don't dare, then kneel at my feet.”

Enduring such a humiliation, Han Xin knelt at his feet.

He was also so poor that he never had a square meal, and often had nothing to eat at all. In ancient times there was no piped water, and he had to go to the river to wash his rice. At the riverside he saw people washing rice, and he felt extremely hungry. One woman saw his thin pasty flesh, and feeling sorry for him, gave him a handful of rice. Han Xin received the rice and said to her “When I am rich and comfortable, I will return and repay you”. The woman angrily lectured him “Today you have nothing to eat and you dare to think one day you will be rich and comfortable! For such a lowly man you are rather too proud!”

As the example of Han Xin shows, he too encountered numerous frustrations when he was young. Working under many people, including Shang Yu, he never achieved his ambition. He came to Liu Bang’s attention by way of a recommendation from Xiao He: “If you want to become King or Emperor, then you have to use this person.” Liu Bang thought Han Xin wasn’t as good as that, and so only made him a very minor official.

Han Xin felt that this position had no prospects and no future to speak of, so, seeing his choices clearly, he quit the position and went into exile. Xiao He, however, knew that Han Xin was a genius, and thus occurred the well-known story of “**Xiao He Chases Han Xin in the Moonlight**”.

Liu Bang heard the report that Xiao He had disappeared, and was very disappointed, and having lost his right hand man, didn’t know how to handle the situation. Later he heard that Xiao He had returned, and was immediately wildly happy. As soon as he saw Xiao He he told him off: “Where on earth did you get to?” Xiao He replied, “I was chasing Han Xin”.

Liu Bang was very puzzled “That’s strange! We have many underlings, why did you chase Han Xin?”

Xiao He said “I’ve already said to you that Han Xin is far better than the average person.” He again asked Liu Bang to make good use of Han Xin. Liu Bang could only see Xiao He’s expression, and appoint Han Xin as a general.

Xiao He still objected, “A General is not enough, he will most likely still run away, he won’t be able to stay here, you’ll have to appoint him head of the army.” Liu Bang reluctantly agreed.

Xiao He continued, “This is not good either, Your Majesty. You have a flaw in that you treat people too arrogantly, and do not understand how to respect genius but always seek to command it. He won’t take orders from you in this manner. You should refrain from bathing, and treat him as God-given gift.”

From this story we can see that although Han Xin was such an outstanding military genius, he didn’t meet with success immediately in life. He was poor and frustrated, but his willpower was not at all weak. In every person’s life there will be bitter experiences such as those suffered by Han Xin. If you are still unsuccessful today, think of Han Xin’s experience and you can take comfort from it.

Chinese history aside, these kinds of famous person’s sufferings and frustrations can be found everywhere. For example, what the Japanese Tokugawa Ieyasu met with in his life, we can say was far more than any ordinary person could bear. He was ordered by Oda Nobunaga to kill his wife and son. Although this was the most horrific moment of his life, he still gritted his teeth and bore it. He ordered his son to commit hari-kari, and then killed his own wife. This was far more than any ordinary person could be expected to bear. If we think of all the happenings we have experienced in our lives, what does heartbreak matter? What does divorce matter? Or business losses? In the past divorce was regarded as a cause of great suffering.

Those persons in history who met with almost unendurable suffering, not only endured, but, in the face of their losses sought out the basis for success. Tokugawa was very clear about why he had received that order. Because he only had an ordinary man’s strength, he relied upon Oda Nobunaga, and found a way to go on living in a turbulent and warring period of Japan’s history. If there were no today, there would never be a tomorrow. This deepened his sorrowful realisation that he

definitely needed to strengthen his own fortitude. Therefore he took this example and warned his family factor to have a high level of vigilance: if they didn't fight hard for order, then possibly not only his wife and son, but the lives of his entire clan might be in danger.

So when we face life's losses and frustrations, we ought to take them as a lesson in life: those who have not experienced loss cannot be called truly successful. It is worth celebrating that if there is life there certainly will be frustration, loss and suffering, and thus that everyone has the opportunity to experience the flavour of success, and to appreciate the happiness of genuine achievement.

We can also observe many similar phenomena in the natural world. In the words of a popular song “The colder it is, the more the plum tree blooms.” The cherry blossom too blooms in the cold of winter. There are two well-known lines of poetry: “The valuable sword comes from grinding, the plum fragrance comes from winter.” (These lines should be on one's wall as a motto to live by). Just as the sword is sharper after grinding, so the plum flower is more fragrant after a hard winter.

Supposing life didn't have these experiences of loss, frustration and suffering: it would not be possible to have a fully rounded life.

Just like people, if there were only life, and no death, would life be truly fulfilled? The answer is no.

One time, I returned to my old school, Badouzi Elementary and told the teachers there the story of the childhood of an American Jew named Singer. This was the story that I gave extracts from to my daughter while I was in prison. At that time she was in elementary school, and her mother wrote a letter to me saying: “Your daughter is

liking beautiful things more and more, she frequently wears my jewellery.” I was inspired to write to her the following story.

There was once a girl who loved beautiful things, but she didn’t get along with any of her neighbours. Because she was very selfish, she was not considerate of her husband or mother-in-law, and spent all her time wishing she were beautiful, even going to the temple to pray that she be made beautiful.

The assembled gods together realised that to make this kind of woman beautiful would be equivalent to saying “The Gods are blind”. They all discussed ways in which they could punish her.

One god suggested “Give her a nasty disease that immediately kills her”

Another objected, “No way. Killing her that way is too simple.”

“Make her a cripple.”

“We can’t do that; she’ll still go on living.”

Finally, one god thought of a way to punish her, saying, “The most straightforward thing to do is answer her prayer and make her beautiful forever...but... forever young and unable to die.” Is this a gift? Or a punishment? The assembled gods understood what he meant. “Ai yah! That is an exquisite plan. That is a fine punishment.”

In the end her husband passed away, but she was still a beautiful young woman; her son grew old and passed away, she was still a beautiful young woman; even her grandchildren and great-grandchildren passed away; but she was still as beautiful as she was in the past. But her mind had stopped in a time past, she became a strange kind of creature, and none of neighbours dared to talk with her. Eventually, after a long period of loneliness and a nervous breakdown, she finally went crazy.

So “death” is the full-stop at the end of a life. If there was no death, life would have no way to come to a rounded end. That is to say, life must certainly be accompanied by losses, frustrations and sufferings, and although each person hopes to avoid them, if they did not experience these sufferings, their life could not be considered fulfilled.

Once there was an old gentleman who fathered a child. At the child’s first birthday celebration there was a monk who bought as a gift a basket on which was written “Birth, Aging, Death”. The gentleman saw this and angrily asked “My son has just reached one year old, he is bonny and healthy. You bring this kind of gift; mentioning aging, that doesn’t matter, but you have the impudence to mention death, that is too ill-omened.”

The monk told him “Ai yah! Old man, don’t you know? From the moment one is born, one is on course toward death. This course includes illness, and aging. Today I celebrate your son; he has only experienced life, no old age or death. This is a person’s greatest good fortune. My congratulations are the greatest possible on this earth”. Can a person really never suffer illness? This is definitely not possible, if it were possible it would be the greatest blessing a person could have in this world.

4.3 How Can One See the Pros and Cons in a Losing Situation?

In addition, we ought to look at the positive viewpoints of the sufferings, frustrations and losses one meets in life. This kind of positive viewpoint is the most abundant of the wisdom of the Chinese philosophers. Everyone is very familiar with

the story of **Sai Wang Loses his Horse**. Sai Wang raised a horse, and one day the horse was nowhere to be seen.

His neighbours consoled him: “How sad! Your horse grew up so handsome; to have him suddenly run away!”

Sai Wang laughed and said, “Today the horse ran away, who knows if it is not a blessing?”

The neighbours heard this and felt rather baffled. A month passed, and the horse unexpectedly returned leading a herd of wild horses. Many people came to congratulate him: “Old Grandfather, your horse is very smart, it bought you great fortune! Congratulations! Congratulations!”

Sai Wang laughed again. “Although today bought so many horses, who knows if it is not a misfortune?” As expected, Sai Wang’s son was one day riding one of the wild horses, and carelessly fell off, breaking his leg.

Everyone came to console him: “Your son grew up so well, but now he is a cripple, this very unfortunate, but you shouldn’t be too sad!”

Sai Wang said, “My son broke his leg and is a cripple, who knows if it is not a blessing?”

Not long after, there was a war, and others died on the battlefield. Because his son was a cripple he didn’t have to go to war. He was able to help his father, and their family was very happy.

From ancient times, who knows how many people have been consoled by this story!

“Fortune and misfortune are interdependent”, this is the essence of Zhuangzi’s philosophy, and I could list many similar stories. If you frequently recall these stories,

come the times you have to face frustrations; you can be calm and have more courage to endure.

I recently saw in the newspaper a very clear-cut example. Taipei mayor Huang Ta Chou failed the university entrance exam. He said “Never mind, if I had passed it the first time, I wouldn’t be Mayor of Taipei today.” Why? Because he failed the first time, he sat the exam again. Because of this, he had the opportunity to become a student of President Lee Teng-hui and become close friends with him. This is how he could become Mayor of Taipei. You can imagine that the first time he failed he was certainly heartbroken and his parents were very disappointed. But today on the contrary he is thankful he failed the first time. This shows a positive vision in regarding one’s own failures.

In short, failing the first time is no big matter. We frequently say “One can’t judge a life until it is over”. Many of life’s losses are in fact not genuine losses at all. Often, an experience of a loss can be seen to be part of a process that set the conditions for future success. This definitely worth consoling oneself with.

In the time before I was imprisoned, I was considered to have the traditional Chinese scholar’s bad disposition: that is, the common failing of ‘strict with others, lenient with oneself’. But after I was released from prison many people said to me “Wang Tuoh! Since you have been imprisoned, you’ve turned into another person; even your appearance has changed!” Even my friends joked with me “You look kind and benevolent”. To tell the truth, during my imprisonment, I constantly questioned my self, “What pluses and minuses did this experience have?” I believe there were more pluses than minuses. All I lost was four years nine months of physical freedom,

but they couldn't bind my freedom of spirit. In addition I found three things that being imprisoned gave me:

1: It allowed me to understand the truth of human nature.

Before I was imprisoned, I felt that I was very brave and was full of lofty sentiments. In that era of the White Terror each person involved in the Dangwai democracy movement had a rather fatalistic view of being jailed. Some of my relatives who worked in the security agencies advised with me with the best of intentions: “Don't be like this. If you won't think of yourself, then think of your mama, she is already so old....”

How did I answer this? “My mother has six children, I am the eldest. If I suffer a misfortune, she has my brothers to take of her”.

“If you won't think of your mama, then think of your wife, she is still young and beautiful.”

I said, “She should remarry as soon as possible.”

They then said, “Then you should think of your children! One is in kindergarten, one is in elementary school.”

I replied, “The fortune of one's children is the fortune of one's children. When my father died I was twelve years old.”

If your life doesn't fall into certain kinds of emotional states, you can't discover life's true situation, and you also will be unable to understand exactly what kind of person you are.

The time I was being interrogated by the secret police was my life's biggest suffering. For seven straight days, I was closely interrogated. I was not permitted to sleep, or even blink or close my eyes. After total lack of sleep and rest, what

happened? I shook when I walked; this was only a small matter. At that time what I missed most was my mother. I had just realised: to give up family ties is not so easy.

The first time I was allowed to sleep in the basement cells, I had constant nightmares, and I was shouting out. When the guard came to open the door and shook me awake, my whole body was spasming. After I got over this pain, I looked out the window at the dusk. Outside the prison was a bamboo grove, and rain had just started drizzling. This is how I passed New Year, listening to the sound of the rain on the leaves, it was incomparably dreary. Suddenly I heard a rooster crow, breaking through the empty night. At that moment, I remembered something I had heard when I was small: that dying is unavoidable.

Afterward, while I was washing my face, I discovered that my hair was falling out, and my skin was sagging. I turned my head to look, ai yah! This was already the netherworld! At that moment, I really thought that everything had ended. I first thought of my mother, and the tears rolled down. I told myself very plainly, “Wang Tuoh! You are not so brave, your heart is still made of flesh, you can’t give up your family ties.”

Previously, I had never believed even in my worst nightmares that a person like myself could be imprisoned, but I unexpectedly ended up in prison. While I was in prison I renewed my reading of history and came to several realisations.

So what are genuine human characteristics? People aren’t really all that brave. The heroes of history have frequently been moulded by their enemies. Someone kills them, and they become heroes. Have you read George’s Orwell’s **1984**? It describes out-of-control technology which torments a man so thoroughly that even his personality changes. It’s very frightening.

2: It made me more open-minded.

Before I was imprisoned, I was very harsh in my expectations of other people. I would hear the friends of political prisoners talking: “So and so went to jail and sold-out all his friends, curse him.” Each time I heard this talk I was indignant, and felt that that if I met this kind of person I would have to kill them. Luckily however, I was imprisoned myself, which made me find out the limits of one’s body. A person has their major weaknesses, but at the same time one has a large other side. When under pressure from an odious external environment, one can yield, but if this pressure weakens slightly the positive aspects of one’s personality will again come to the fore. It is this understanding I use nowadays in dealing with others. In considering another, I will put myself in their shoes, which has real results. In addition, there was another good point. I read a lot of history. **The Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government**¹⁸³ (*Zizhi Tongjian*) is very dense and full of meaning. Of the masses of people, those who are sufficiently recorded in history are actually very few. If placed in a historical context most people amount to next-to-nothing. That is, an individual’s fortunes and misfortunes are nothing to fuss over.

3: It allowed me to read many books I enjoyed.

I have a good friend – Tang Dajia – who asked me “Have you read **The Brothers Karamazov, Crime and Punishment** or **Anna Karenina**?”

I replied “I’m ashamed to admit that although I’m a writer, I haven’t read those books”.

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He said “You are very courageous, calling yourself a writer when you haven’t read those books.”

So, when I was in prison I promised myself that I would read those novels. The result? I read each them from cover to cover three or four times, especially **The Comprehensive Mirror**.

I remember when I was a third year university student I visited my teacher Xu Fuguan and asked of him: “I want to be a scholar, what suggestions do you have for me?”

He told me “You have to resolve to read the great books to lay the foundations of your scholarship.” I asked him “Which books are the most useful?”

He said “You should read **The Comprehensive Mirror**.

At that time I was earning \$400 a month, of which \$200 I would send to my mother. The complete set of **The Comprehensive Mirror** was \$600. I would go to the World Bookstore and browse the books there. Handling the books was a kind of addiction. Finally the store-owner generously said to me “Young man, do you like this set of books? It’s okay for you to take them, and pay me whatever you can manage in instalments each month.” I am still very thankful to him.

Continuously reading it from my third year of study until I was imprisoned, I still hadn’t finished the second volume. In the end though, whilst in prison I read it completely through three times. I told my wife “If I had read **The Comprehensive Mirror** earlier, I would never have been in prison.” That’s because I discovered that many many examples of political cases had already occurred in history. I came to the conclusion that “There is nothing new under the sun”.

Aside from this reading, I could also come to face up to myself; namely, what kind of person I was, and to know completely my own heart.

I used my time in prison to do a deep self-examination and self-criticism of my life's path thus far, and then renewed my self-expression. To my mind, imprisonment was a cause of great suffering to me, especially my sadness in missing my family. However, looking back now, I am thankful for the experience.

A similar occurrence occurs in Leo Tolstoy's novel **Resurrection**. The story's main character is a pure and honest young woman named Cachusaz who is abducted by her landlord's son and becomes pregnant. The son however was only holidaying in the countryside, and, forgetting this affair, he returns to Moscow. But in Russia's feudal society at that time, she has no way to hide her shame. She is reduced to prostitution.

One day, a client is unfortunately murdered and his possessions are stolen. At that time the weight of the evidence all points towards her, and as a result she is exiled to Siberia. In fact, she was unjustly treated, and she felt that since she had never mistreated anyone in her life, why was fate being so unkind to her?

In the years following she came to know many of the intellectuals who were struggling for social democracy in Russia. In her life together with these people, she began to study Russian history and to understand the patterns of Russian society.

Finally, when she reached Siberia she wrote in her diary: “Because of my exile I have had suffering and misfortune, but now I have to thank God because I now understand many things I may otherwise never have learnt in my life.

So being exiled unexpectedly allowed great achievements in her life.

4.4 Facing the Experience of Failure

Because we all experience loss, frustration and suffering in life, let us examine how we can face them, and how we can become self-reliant. It may well be that at a time that we feel we are suffering immensely it is quite likely that in the midst of our torment, there can be found a basis for future success if we can see a means of taking hold of it. That is to say, when a person is facing loss, frustration or suffering, what is one to do?

Here are some lessons gained from the experiences of myself, my friends and some extracts from books:

1: The heart has to retain a sense of aesthetics.

One evening a friend came to visit me, and just after he came in he said to me “I’ve just returned through a dangerous doorway.”

I asked, “So what exactly happened?”

He solemnly replied, “Today I went to Badouzi to commit suicide by drowning myself.”

I asked him, “So why did you not do it in the end?”

He said, “When I was sitting on the beach, I saw the distant lights of the fishing boats, the stars in the sky, and the full moon, and felt very strange. Why had I not noticed before that the world was this beautiful? Previously I had never paid attention; I didn’t know the sky in Taiwan was so beautiful! Because of this discovery, I couldn’t bring myself to die!” He definitely wasn’t joking.

I remember during my imprisonment that after the evening meal, I enjoyed squatting by the window watching the twilight and the setting sun, and the lengthening shadows of the coconut palms before the sun finally disappeared behind the grey walls opposite. Amidst the blue sky and white clouds there were flock after flock of birds calling ceaselessly, flying here and there. Ah! That feeling was perfect! All my troubles temporarily seemed unimaginably far away, and that was the best time for writing letters to my family.

I once read a book by a German psychologist called Frankl. He was the father of Logotherapy, and was imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp for more than three years. His time in the concentration camp is a thousand or even ten thousand times more terrible than my suffering in Taipei prison: death could come at any time, if the guards called his name, or pointed him out, he would go to the gas chambers. Would he be alive tomorrow? No one knew. Even in the cold and snow of winter there was never enough food and they still had back-breaking labour.

In his book **Man’s Search for Meaning** he describes these men -who could at anytime be sent to the gas chamber- one evening hearing someone call out, “Everyone come quickly and see! It’s so beautiful!”

Everyone forgot their exhaustion and starvation and sat down on the ground watching the red setting sun gradually sink below the horizon.

He says: “Because in their hearts there was always a resonance and sympathy with the natural world, they could endure their months of suffering.”

So, in facing an evil environment, and when meeting life’s frustrations, maintaining our soul’s sense of aesthetics can lessen many sufferings and endureances.

You can feel that wherever your life may be there are still times worth cherishing and yearning for. These kinds of experiences have left a deep impression on me.

2: The heart has to be full of love.

The French government once did a nationwide survey in which 70% of those surveyed said that what gave their lives meaning was those they deeply loved, or a thing they loved to do, and that this is what gave them the courage to continue living.

Frankl and myself both had this kind of experience. Because his wife was separated from him and sent to another concentration camp, he had no way to know if she was alive or not. Whenever he thought of her, his heart was full of boundless warmth. Later, in the deepest part of his heart he began an energetic conversation with her and it felt to him as though she was by his side. In his book he wrote: “Due to this ongoing conversation, I discovered that love transcended life or death”, and as result despite his terrible environment he was able to endure many difficulties.

In addition he observed his fellow inmates, and asked why did some of them survive and others not? It was because those who didn't survive had lost love. When these people thought of their parents, wives and children, and that perhaps they had already gone to the gas chamber, they thought that life really had no meaning!

When this thought begins to invade one's soul, it is impossible for one's life to continue under these kinds of conditions. Frankl regarded this as his conclusion from his professional observation. He rejoiced that he was able to better understand the importance of this, and as a result, he continued to use his abstract on-going conversation to stimulate his will to live.

Immediately after I was taken to Taipei prison, I went through my most depressing period of time. At that time, the weather was freezing cold, and I was given no books, paper or pens. I didn't know what to do with myself, every day I just paced in circles in my cell. At the peak of my misery, I most missed my son and my daughter. I began writing a children's story in my head. Although in fact I only spoke it aloud to myself, it was as though my son and daughter were by my side. It was this that helped me pass those dark and gloomy days. Therefore, the French government's statistical survey is well worth giving to psychoanalysts to consult.

3: The heart has to contain dreams.

Frankl was not beaten by his horrific environment, and the most important factor was that he wished to one day tell everyone about his theories of Logotherapy.

When he was incarcerated in the concentration camp his rough drafts of his theories of Logotherapy were all destroyed by fire. He regretted this very much. He began to think of a way in which to preserve his theories. In the concentration camp he had nothing at all, so he used stones, and fabric, in a crude method of writing down the key points of his theories. From these points he was able to link their general meanings together and combine them. In addition, he researched the histories of his fellow camp inmates and recorded them. This arduous effort imperceptibly assisted him in getting through the most miserable months in the camp.

In the same manner, when we face heartbreak, family break-ups, or business losses our heart can be like Frankl's, and contain a dream: I will come back, and on that day I will feel proud and elated! This will keep us going.

I most appreciate Mao Zedong's saying "A strong mind can withstand anything." This shows a boldness of spirit. Everyone is the same: whatever difficulties they

encounter, whatever sufferings and frustrations, they have to tell themselves: “I will be strong and I will withstand them”, and they will withstand them. Sustaining us in that time will be our sense of aesthetics, our love, and our dreams.

4.5 The Meaning and Value of Loss

Our lives never lack for loss. But do these losses really have no meaning?

The great novelist Dostoevsky said this: “What I most fear, that I would suffer the most over, is that I couldn’t continue to write.”

If everyone in the midst of their losses, frustrations and sufferings was like Dostoevsky then “We’re finished”. We have to understand how to discover the value of suffering. After a loss, do you go down willingly? Give up on yourself? Or are you willing to take your suffering and loss and stand up again? This is entirely your choice.

One year whilst I was taking up an invitation by the United States Defence Department to visit America, I received a letter from my daughter asking, “Father, why did you have me? What is the meaning of life? I feel life has no meaning. I’m not happy. Can you answer me?”

She was only a first year in junior high! This gave me an enormous headache. I replied to her in a short letter, “Daughter! The meaning of life isn’t in thinking, it is in doing. It is what you give it. We are not qualified to call it to account and ask “Life, what is your meaning?”

We should use “life” to interrogate ourselves, i.e.: “Wang Tuoh, I am your “life”, what meaning are you going to give to me?”

Some people say, “People are the product of their environment.” Dostoevsky said “People are not evil, they are only unfortunate.” This is the greatest saying of the humanists.

Why do some people become thieves? Why do others take drugs? ... This isn't their evil; this is their misfortune, because they have been influenced by their environment.

However, can it be also said that they have no self-determination? That they have no ability to stand own their own two feet? Are all of us today the kind of people we are because of our environment? If this really was true, then our lives really would have no meaning.

What people regard as human, what people value and respect, is that under the influence of our environment, we have enough ability to change it, and that we can even decide what kind of person we wish to be.

Therefore, Frankl's book hugely inspired me. Even in a concentration camp, where death could happen at any time; where in order to continue living some collaborated with their enemies and become their pawns and gained a more comfortable life; there were others in the same environment who secretly shared their food with those who needed it more. From these two kinds of people in this most evil, most oppressive environment, can we see proof of what people will become? That it is for each person to decide for themselves?

Supposing a certain person's life went very smoothly, that due to the legacy of their forefathers, their successes were always looked upon as a matter of course. That to this self-made man, even after a loss there was no downside, he just needed to

gather his strength, and begin again; we would feel that he was some kind of legendary hero.

Buddhist scholars all know a similar story. There was once a man who left home to study Buddhism. In order to avoid any temptations he chose to live on a mountaintop and practice his devotion. His soul was untroubled. Others chose to steel themselves in the hustle and bustle of the world, in spite of the rough and tumble of money, socialising and women; they were still unaffected. This is the genuine worldly environment. This kind of life, more dignified, is actually more worthy of respect.

In short, the meaning of suffering is that it takes us into a deeper part of life, and allows us to learn through experience to comprehend life's deeper meaning. People who have never suffered, cannot comprehend what the genuine meaning of life is. Therefore when we encounter loss and suffering we can loudly say to ourselves, “The suffering and loss I'm experiencing has value!” Because this loss happens to assist us in all our works.

Of course, in the midst of frustration and suffering, people will frequently yield to some degree, and experience some degree of dejection. However, we believe that people's will to survive is extremely tenacious. My mother is a great example. Her life was full of frustrations, and although she had asthma when she was young, she still worked every day from dawn to dusk. She had several children, and although she was in her third day of the traditional confinement after pregnancy, she still had to chop firewood, wash clothes, and cook the meals.

My father never understood affection, and would frequently beat her. She also had this phrase on her lips: “Having you children, I can't escape, but I want to die; I

can't die so I want to escape.” But she never did escape, or die; she raised us children well, and despite her arduous life, she lived to be eighty years old. So you see that the will to live is very tenacious. If a person wants to die, it is not easy to do so.

Some people shout: “I want to jump into the sea!”, and I always say to them, “When you jump. Let me watch.”

When I was imprisoned, I read a poem by Zhu Yuanzheng called “**Snow on the Bamboo**”:

The snow weighs down the bamboo,
But the canes don't reach the ground,
The bright morning sun rises,
And, as of old, the clouds clear.

Using this poem to describe the vitality of life, cannot be surpassed. So, when I read this poem, I was wild with joy, and felt it of great encouragement to the heart. When we meet with loss, frustration or suffering, or have pressure from outside forces, we will be disheartened, and we will have to yield to some degree. However, just like the snow melts, the pressure will disappear, and our life will send forth new sprouts, renewing its usual vigour and tenacity.

People are really like this... I feel that life is in fact a very subtle thing.

Although there is suffering, loss and frustration, they are very difficult to avoid, and they should be regarded as a source of benevolence from the gods. I believe that our every day is greater than our last, and that our tomorrow will be better than our today.

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