

## Walis Nokan

### Mini Album of Microfictions

#### On the Recollection of Two Dreams

There are times in a person's life when things don't turn out as expected and as for Irish novelist Lord Dunsany, he too was no exception.

In thinking back on the scene in the trenches of the first world war, Lord Dunsany recalled: "At six feet four inches (about 193 centimeters), my height was rather precarious. You see, in 1917, war trenches were dug to a depth of six feet (about 183 centimeters); so, I was in a spot of bother, going about my days with my bonce bobbing above the trench line." It's a good thing bullets don't have eyes, otherwise one would surely have lodged itself in that head of his sticking out like a giraffe's.

In 1983 (66 years after Lord Dunsany's head exposure during WWI trench warfare), I had my own run-in with things not turning out as expected. While cruising down Taiwan's eastern seaboard I was involved in a life-threatening accident, but the hand-of-God shed a tear of compassion and I too slipped free of the reaper's grasp.

Thinking back on these two run-ins with fate, similar in the dream-like circumstance of their plots, I shed tears of empathy, though I stand in the face of them like hard cold marble.

#### Stung

I looked up and invited a bee to fly down and join me. He was a cultured worker-bee who sported a tightly knotted bowtie. After a cautious landing he sat down on the cover of a collection of Kafka short stories, perhaps even in an upright posture with his legs crossed, but that's not the point. Let me get on with the telling of his visit!

I turned on my computer, got online, logged into Facebook, and browsed through postings from friends, some familiar and others not so. My fingers tapped out messages on the keyboard as I chatted up a few of them. Noticing how my bee-friend's eyes grew large, I explained to him how the internet had shrunk the world, making communication across distances fast and easy. Not but a few minutes later he yawned, fluttered his wings, and politely took his leave, saying: "Thank you, but if I'm not mistaken you have no way of hugging, do you?" This comment, following on the heels of his all too sudden boredom, had stung me to the quick, and just like that without further ado he flew back up into that corner of the rafters where a great hive was just about done being constructed.

#### Legends Amongst Us

When the legendary swordsman Blades-of-Heaven Wang Wu came to Yangzhou, he stopped under a white shop banner in an alley that made a remarkable claim: Best Bladesman Under Heaven.

The celebrated Wang Wu came up to the counter but didn't order anything. His glance fell upon a stone basin with a bowl of clear water and chunks of tofu, like tender squares of white jade bearing the fresh markings of a slender knife, 99 cuts upwards and 99 cross-wise. The handle of that knife gave way to an adept old hand and above that an old face, one that still had the exuberance of a 17 year-old, full of glory and romance. The left hand set lightly down its cache of white jade, an

extraordinary bowl of intertwined hair-thin strands that jiggled ever so slightly.

After that, Blades-of-Heaven Wang wasn't seen again. Seven years later, the circulation of certain fabulous tales and unsubstantiated rumors brought me back to that white banner. I called out "Wang Wu." The tofu handler paid me no heed, but a waiter soon came dashing over with a bowl of Yangzhou's finely made "legendary tofu", piping hot strands of tangled tales.

### Elevator

The oldster stepped into the elevator. Of the five inside, only one was a building resident that he knew. His knowing any of them or not, however, didn't seem to make much difference since each flickered like a luminous shadow.

The elevator stood still for a moment, as if time's cogs had caught on some fateful bone, before it started back up in a smooth ascent. It was like standing inside a rocket until it came to an abrupt end. His old eyes couldn't make out the numbers on the display, but he did hear the familiar voice of that familiar resident softly whisper in an ear: "Here we are; your slice of paradise."

The doors slowly opened, but the oldster couldn't muster the courage to take a step out . . .

### A Stand-up Crocodile

For 67 yuan a day I put on a crocodile suit to prowl the floors of the arcade. The boss reminds me not to scare the children, cause if no shoppers venture in the store then he'll just have to sell my hide to make bags for the Burmese junta. The problem is how could a green crocodile writhing around that grindstone floor not scare passersby? Thinking hard for a moment, I came up with a ploy.

Whenever a lady would come along with a child in hand, I'd quickly stand up and make as if to crawl along the wall like a timid croc.

In the end the boss still fired me. As I skulked out the glass doors the last words I heard that boss say were, "We're a Lacoste store, not some damn seller of made-in-Taiwan lizard brands!"

### Paper-eater

My father once told me a story a few years back about a half-face in the tribe; and, what's more, how this half-face, his face half-black half-red, resisted Japan's military police. With deep feeling father had mentioned how *belief* gives spirit to a story, how it can give it wings, so that it might fly back to comfort a beleaguered soul on a harsh bleak night. Having this in mind, I can now tell you about the story of an unschooled tribal brother.

One day while out tending the national park, he found some paper covered in strange squiggly drawings in the shade of a camphor tree. Whatever language it might have been made no impression upon him, and being hungry he ate a piece of it. It had a juicy crisp feel as though it could be tasty and nutritious. On the way back down the mountain he ate every bit of cryptic script he came across, filling his stomach with a mountain of paper. Later whenever someone asked him something he'd shit a piece of paper in reply, but the stink of these written missives was such that no one ever bothered to read them. And no one ever came to know that they amounted to an encyclopedia of treatments for all manner of incurable disease. Prior to death he gave instructions that he should be cremated. I attended his funeral service and as soon as the flames caught, little words flew up on wings that turned to smoke and ash. But no one ever saw the fluttering of those wordy wings because they had all bought tickets to view the left-over remnants of our ancestors' beautiful scenery now kept in a national park.

## Submarine

It was a rather viscous sea, covered half in the light of day and half in the dark of night, as if made that way by a tired creator. A submarine had for some time been concealed in its depths. Then with a great effort one day it rose up and pierced the surface with a periscope that projected up and out like a tombstone. At the scope's end its small lens immediately took in a massive face full of surprise, the bottom half of which opened into a great sky that emitted a piercing shriek: "Oh my! Have a look Daddy! Our Little Sea has sprouted her first tooth!"

## In-love with a Murderer

I was once in-love with a man who, to be quite honest, was a murderer.

One morning the man woke me with a start and I was overcome by the intensity of his terror. The look of horror didn't diminish in the slightest as he told me what he had seen in his dream. There was a man who appeared to be a noble warrior of days gone by, but who was, in fact, stalking a modern day president (clothed in suit and tie), a president well known by all for his incompetence, greed, violence, and dictatorial rule (forgive me my shame for thinking that person's name). That noble warrior took out the "Tyrant-slayer" dagger of yore and plunged it deep into this president's heart. Black as night the blood spurted out into the dreamy air, seemingly extinguishing all stars. I thought that it must have been the spectacle of this blood that had so terrified the man, but when he went into the bathroom, as if to wash the splatter from his face, I could see plain as day that in his right hand, without any rational explanation for it, he held a dagger.

The terror gripped me too as the realization of this impossible dream dawned on me. Getting out of bed, I turned on the television and saw the banner on the breakfast news light up with the words: *President dead from heart attack at 3 a.m.*

**Two-Line Collection: nuclear deliberations**

Walis Nokan

*Little Boy* and *Fat Man* seem to indicate something benign & good-natured, but, in fact, are the names given to the first and second atomic bombs that fell to the earth. I have as yet never conducted an interview in Hiroshima or Nagasaki, but I have seen the countless films and images depicting the devastating blasts. How about you Prof. Einstein, with your sideburns that rise up like white clouds, was your life still benign and good-natured after having witnessed that?

In the world of the aboriginal, our spatial contact with this land has been the cause of many events. The objects survive but we are not there anymore. The more we apprehend about this land on which we depend for our existence, the taller we can stand as we go out to defend this blue planet of ours; otherwise, we may come upon a day when we call out to ask: "Is there anybody here?"

**Little Boy**

At 8 hours 15 minutes & 43 seconds on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month in the year 1945  
We bombed Hiroshima in the name of love for the world's people.

**The Second Atomic Bomb**

A mushroom cloud called *Fat Boy*  
Devoured 150,000 in Nagasaki.

**Einstein**

The atomic formula  
Equates to seven cardinal sins.

**Atomic Energy**

Moulted beverage  
Thirst quenched.

**Nuclear waste**

My dear people, I'm not waste  
I'm the raw material for atomic bombs.

**Atomic Test Explosions**

The irradiated in the footprint of an atomic test blast  
Are but numbers and lab rats to science.

### **Some Say of Democracy**

It is only to make the night black  
That I turn on my flashlight.

### **War Poet**

Dug out of bone  
One after another, after . . .

### **Big Sound**

No one heard; the earth within the cosmos  
Crackling and gurgling with a mounting pulse.

### **Voiceless**

All sounds that we might hear  
Come about through the desire of an ear.

### **Space Shuttle**

My dear planet  
Is there anybody there?

## Seven-Days Reading

### Day 1

In one of Tainan's sellers-of-old-books I came across a rarely seen bargain, a 1977 translation of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* priced for NT\$120. The cover had a portrait of Chief Crazy-horse, his rugged old face looking as if carved from rock, and below it an arc of red letters that proclaimed: On the Centennial of Crazy Horse's Death.

Holding onto this book with its tombstone like cover, I boarded a limited express northbound. The a/c on the night-train gave the feeling of a winter day and the passengers were all curled up in their seats. Until slowing for Chiayi, the express streaked through the black prairie night at an epic gallop. This northbound traveler had already been forewarned by Dee Brown's preface to this 1970 edition, where he advised that this is not a cheerful book. The first chapter, "Their Manners are Decorous and Praiseworthy," would seem to be laudatory, as it begins with a passage from Columbus' missive to the King of Spain reporting on his 1492-arrival to San Salvador Island: "So tractable, so peaceful, are these people that I swear to your majesties there is not in the world a better nation. They love their neighbors as themselves, and their discourse is ever sweet and gentle, and accompanied with a smile; and though it is true that they are naked, yet their manners are decorous and praiseworthy."

In no more than ten years, however, these "decorous and praiseworthy" San Salvadorans, numbering more than 100,000, met extinction: their villages annihilated and people exterminated unceremoniously.

### Day 2

In the black of night while everyone slept, father's old pick-up was already pattering up the road toward the orchard. That plot of land with the fruit trees had been a money-loser from the start, but father wasn't willing to admit it. As for me going up the mountain was always a joy, like that first drop of dew for an early morning leaf.

My first knowledge of our ancestral lands came from childhood hunts with my father in the Xiatan forest. Concealed under the canopy of that mid elevation subtropical forest was a paradise of myth and lore. Long the land of our people, it was later besieged and then changed hands under the order of a national government. Now it's administered under the auspices of the Forestry Bureau and Council of Agriculture as the experimental Mid-Elevation Endemic Species Research Institute. I once tried to visit our ancestral lands, but because I didn't have an official pass I was refused entry outside a wrought iron gate.

Dee Brown wrote *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* in order to gum up the white man's voice of irony. The great number of military officers and US government officials cited in treaty conferences and recorded in officially convened meetings served as a vast resource for the government record in Dee's work. All these recorded instances of *he said this or he did that*, regardless of whether they be just the long forgotten minutiae of the day, are what Alberto Manguel<sup>1</sup> points out for us as being what makes up the fruit of a distant future.

Although we (Taiwan's indigenous people) lack a record of our dialogue with the nation, we are blessed to have a pen yet able to spit out our words. I hope that my words may speak out with the power of an alternative authoritative voice for these people subjugated under hundreds of years of history.

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<sup>1</sup> Born in Buenos Aires, Manguel in his youth had read aloud for the renown Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges after he had gone blind. Two of his books published in Taiwan are *Les Livres d'Image* and *Reading Pictures* (The Commercial Press, Taipei).

## Day 3

You have all drunk your fill of the white man's ghost water and are like the dogs of summer, running wild and chasing after your own shadows.

The American book, *A History of Minnesota*, records Chief Little Crow's rebuke of Sioux youth spoken in 1862. As I read these words more than nearly 150 years later, they still have the power to evoke the sense of great despair inherent in their plaint. That year the treaty between the American government and Sioux people was torn up. Tribesman poisoned by habitual drinking of ghost water had gradually lost their Sioux lands, the government never honored their promises, and the tribe succumbed to a manmade famine. In the words of a trader named Merrick, one of the many encroaching on the west, "If they are hungry, let them eat grass, or their own feces."

American indigenes who drink ghost water chase wildly after their shadows. In our tribe we call this "the ones taken by the *public monopoly bureau*." What's been taken you might ask? Their souls of course.

Through the window I see mother come trembling out of the dark night and sit herself down on the chair in the dual-purpose dining room parlor. Mother says the assembly hall has been burnt down. She means the assembly hall that was built as a temporary shelter after the 1999 Chi-Chi earthquake. Its benevolent landlord is a Presbyterian pastor whose son has an angelic sounding name and is known throughout the tribe as "one of those taken by the public monopoly." Some say he had gone that afternoon to ask the pastor for drinking money, saying he'd better get it or "otherwise the assembly hall just might get itself burned down." Not more than an hour after this outrageous threat from the off-spring of a father-pastor, flames were burning up the pathway of heavenly dreams. Fortunately, a neighbor dragged out the groggy pastor who had been roused from his dream-state. The owner of an eatery 50 meters from the fire, Old Zhuang, aptly described the scene of the disaster (as did the group of bystanders composed of half the tribe), "I could have done up a wicked barbeque from the heat of that fire."

"Little Crow's Sioux Uprising" was put down in 1863, and the US military carried out retaliatory hangings in the month of antler shedding (December). Thirty-eight Santee Sioux bodies swayed in the wind, prompting one of the white executioners present to call it "the United States' largest mass hanging."

## Day 4

The American novelist William Faulkner wrote every day of his life, as if determined to use what comparatively little time he had to fight against the grand narratives of history. He once said, that "the past is never dead, it's not even the past." The past is just so many rising suns and setting moons, each day weaving a part of history's web and leaving the traces of its footprints. Days made of sweat and spit reflect the trajectory of time; and, the tracks of history never vanish. In the same vein, Peter Carey, who after 27 years in New York returned to his native Australia and wrote *30 Days in Sydney*, strived to present a new view and a re-working of the history of the Australian aboriginal people. Through his companion Vicki of Australian aboriginal blood, he was finally able to truly awaken to the four natural elements – soil, fire, wind and water – that constitute Sydney and the long recognized spirit of outdoor ruggedness that is Australia: a nation built by stomping on the chests of the indigenous aboriginal. "Our prime minister was able to embrace and forgive the killers of our benevolent fathers and precious children (this is in reference to Gallipoli). It was reasonable that he should do that, and yet he is unable or unwilling to make an apology to our aboriginal people in acknowledgement of two hundred years of massacre and abuse." Peter Carey's historical re-examination has not been the first of its kind. In 1867 after Custer led his cavalry division (under the command of General Winfield Scott Hancock) in the massacre of the southern Cheyenne, the conscientious John Sanborn, nicknamed Black Whiskers, sent a telegraph to the US Department of the Interior to protest the cruel conduct under General Hancock: ". . . For a mighty nation like us to be carrying on a war with a few straggling nomads, under such circumstances, is a spectacle most

humiliating, an injustice unparalleled, a national crime most revolting, that must, sooner or later, bring down upon us or our posterity the judgment of Heaven.”

Outside the window the late-arriving plum rains have already transformed themselves into the lashing winds and heavy downpour of a typhoon. Violent rivers have overflowed their banks and mudslides have taken out the roads, turning the south-central region of Taiwan into a land of water and marsh. The news screen just flashed notice that the Dajia river bridge has been washed out, and the tribe has an electrical black out for the night. All I can do is light a candle and embrace the dark stormy night by reading a barrage of historical anecdotes one after the other as I await the morning’s metaphor of *bright skies after a stormy night* to bring an end to the waves of pain washing over my bosom.

#### Day 5

The rain hasn’t let up for two weeks and by now the deluge has turned the island into a disaster scene. Father’s persimmons had just begun to bud, but now their trees have been bent half over by violent gusts and rain. Mother’s rainwear emerges from the sideways downpour, framed by a background of deep blue mountains releasing torrents of yellow mud into an overflowing river seething in a thorny patchwork of whitecaps that has been rearranging the once beautiful scenery. When humanity has its desires hanging on the precipice of calamity, when has nature ever shown compassion? I’m reminded of a phrase of the now deceased Simone de Beauvoir which especially tuned me in to the derisive tone history takes with the human race: “I have found fame to be evanescent, giving rise to derision.”

Perhaps because of this we seek warmth from the pages of a book in the darkest of times. Poetry lifts up the quality of our lives, especially our level of happiness in comparison to all the misery around us. In 1877 the Nez Perce took flight through the Rocky Mountains harassed all the way by pursuing soldiers close on their heels. After Chief Joseph was sent off to live on the barren terrain of a reservation, he spoke out in verse upon verse of poetic oratory, composing a mournful ballad of the suffering of his people. *Let me be a free man—free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to think and talk and act for myself.*

Chief Joseph held on until 1904 when he died on a US government “protected” reservation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs physician assigned to the reservation determined his cause of death to be a broken heart. What this illustrates is the extreme extent of a long drawn-out death with respect to the concept of “give me freedom, or give me death.”

#### Day 6

When electricity was restored, television screens that usually broadcast the political-scandalmongering, government-business-corruption-exposing, ethnic-tension-exploiting news programs became inundated with reports on storm damage and flooding. The two roads connecting the tribe to the outside were blocked by mudslides. Father, chomping on mother’s wild mountain-forest-foraged vegetables, stared intently at the news images as if at any moment these scenes of island tumult would burst out from the screen. I thought of Chateaubriand in the midst of the chaotic French Revolution and the sentiment of the Brittany poet, who had beseeched him to bring him to Versailles, upon seeing the grounds: “The empire is in a state of utter chaos and yet people still stroll the gardens and view the fountains.” The last voice in *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* is that of Black Elk and in fact resonates with the tone of the book itself: “A people’s dream died there. It was a beautiful dream . . . the nation’s hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.”

I have already said that this is not a cheerful book. The incisive candor of Argentina’s great literary master, Borges, rebuts our concept of the beautiful life in the world: *As long as even one*



*sinner remains in the world, there can be no happiness in heaven.*

Day 7

God seeks rest owing to the calamities weaved by the multitude of lesser gods.

## “White Terror” Chronicles

### I. White

White, ‘hwīt, color. Clean. Nothingness. Without reason. Sudden. Straightforward –Concise Dictionary of Mandarin Chinese.

### II. White Terror Thinking

In 1983 I left the army and embarked on a path that brought me to the Hualien valley for a teaching position in a grammar school. On summer days, the first peek of east coast morning rays to crest the peaks see me diving into a swimming pool and it is not until six in the evening that a leisurely wind picks up to blow the heat from the sweltering ground. Just before the start of classes in September, the shortage of teachers at the mountain village schools becomes painfully obvious. August is when the selection rolls get a boost by adding the names of substitute teachers. A middle-aged volunteer who referred to himself as a watermelon grower led a woman in for the exam and upon finding out I lived along the banks of the Da’an casually inquired, “Does anybody there grow watermelons?” I answered, no, but went on to say how as a child I had picked small yellow melons in the Hakka village across the river. Later I found out he was the poet whose work I had read while standing guard at the Jinmen garrison, a gun in one hand and a book of his *Sad Songs of the Southern Cove* in the other. I’ve puzzled for some time now over what it is about watermelons that drives poets to grow them?

The next time I came across the poet he had given up on the idea of raising watermelons and was hard at work in his native Da’an writing a novel, a section of which deals with the stormy upheavals of the 1950s. It begins with the Taiyuan prison which just happened to be located in the mountains above the school where I taught, set in a beautiful alpine valley. In the 1980s I once rode my Sanyang Wolf right up to Taiyuan, along a road through a forest that now contained only incomprehensible fragments of remote lore and long forgotten legend.

I know that the poet, in the dove-white days of youth, had gone into Taidong’s Taiyuan prison, a place built for the ideological incarceration of incorrigible believers. In 1962, construction was completed and in 1970 a violent incident broke out. This provoked the Ministry of National Defense into building the outer island “MND Green Island Reform and Reeducation Prison.” In 1971, one-hundred-seventy of Taiyuan’s longer sentenced political prisoners joined one-hundred-thirty-one inmates from the Jingmei Detention Center for Green Island incarceration as April 25<sup>th</sup> and May 2<sup>nd</sup> transfers, respectively. Later this would come to be known as the “Dongan May 1” transfer, as if in remembrance of the days of Japanese occupation when Green Island had been the off-shore destination for housing Taiwan’s despicable.

### III. On the Flip Side of Red is White

The year 1870 marked the start of the French Third Republic. In February 1871 the Thiers government sold the country out by signing with the prime minister of Prussia what could be called a “forerunner to the Treaty of Versailles.” The people of Paris, facing a Prussian military siege and the betrayal of their own government, prepared to take up arms and save their country. Insurrection lasted from March 18 till May 28 when the people’s armed effort to save their homeland was finally suppressed during the *Bloody Week of May*. When Thier’s reactionary army, supported by Prussian forces, broke through the Paris Commune, a woman worker ripped off a piece of her red skirt as a stand-in for the flag of the Commune. From this time forward “red” has stood as a liberating symbol that signifies the people’s passion, spirit of progressivism, opposition to inegalitarianism, and a confrontation with class injustice; whereas “white”, by contrast, has become a symbol of reactionary

conservative power.

These events happened a distant century ago, and after 70 or so years, red thought had blown across oceans to an island suspended on the western fringes of the Pacific, Taiwan.

#### IV. Children of the White Terror

*He was kept so long in prison without being let out that his skin had turned white and shiny; so much so that he no longer resembled my son. Even I, when I saw him, thought him as white as a corpse. This son of mine, even if the government were to lavish NT\$10 million in medical expenses on him, still couldn't be returned to me strong and sturdy as he once had been.* –Dumai Ali, talking of his son in our first interview.

Dense groves of light green bamboo line the shoulders of the Luoma Highway that traverses the Fuxing District in the mountains above Taoyuan City. Stalks of bamboo piled along the roadside silently await the trucks that will haul them off for processing. Meituishan (Slender Leg Mountain) along the Luoma Highway has its name for the long and beautiful bamboo sprouts that grow there. At the stop just before Meituishan is the tribe where I met a 64 year-old elder. Forty-three years prior, at the age of 21, this indigene elder surnamed Li was a just-graduated aboriginal elite from Taichung's teaching university. Married already a year, he had two children, the youngest not yet a month old. Idealistic and passionate, he had just finished teaching his "civics class" and walked home with a spring in his step. Later that evening after ten he was enticed into going to Daxi. Seven years went by before he made it back home. His eight and nine year-old sons had nearly nothing during this time in the way of memories of their father, only the schoolyard taunts of their classmates yelling "son of a traitor!" in their faces or jeering at their backs.

Elder Li brought back from prison a diseased body with a festering buttocks and ulcerated pelvis. Greetings of "Hi teacher!" had long ago been replaced by the frequent drumming of anguished shouting and piteous cries. As a result, most businesses wouldn't have anything to do with him and so he had nothing much else to do but fish along the Shimen reservoir. On one particular afternoon we sat at the table eating one of the elder's Shimen black carp sautéed in wine, retracing 40 years of useless memories accentuated by a plain-to-see desire for heavy drink as an expectorate for their pain, "My life story was written by *them* long ago." The indigene's father, Dumai Ali, cleared his 80-year-old throat, huskily stating, "If he had truly been guilty our Atayal ancestors would have let him die, they wouldn't have let him live on!" A somber vow with the gravest of meaning.

"A few years back, owing to all the time I've spent in the water fishing, the rotting of my festering buttocks greatly accelerated and I had no choice but to go under the knife. Now I have an iron pelvis, an artificial ass!" He said this with playful deprecation as he got up and crookedly hobbled off. I couldn't be sure whether he was pulling my leg, and just acting out his modern day version of the story of *Old Lai* who in old age played the jester to entertain his parents as a sign of filial piety? But of one thing I could be sure and that was how today's black carp seemed to be chock full of bitter bones.

Two months later I brought along my draft transcript of our interview to check-over with the elder. But when I got there he was sprawled out drunk in the yard and his blurry eyes couldn't make much sense out of the words on the page. After hurriedly wrapping up and getting on my way, with darkness setting in, I saw how "the children of the white" were being gradually blacked-out with time.

#### V. Fruit of the Poisoned Tree

The easiest evidence to come by is a *confession*, but it is also the easiest way by which the rights of the accused get neglected. In the Anglo-American legal systems, illegally gathered evidence,

such as that of the *fruit of the poisoned tree*, is not permitted in court.

Political prisoners are prisoners of conscience. They believe in their convictions and ideals and are certain of their behavior and the path they have chosen. They do not lightly set aside reality for a *confession*, and, as a result, their confessions mostly come about through illegal methods: precisely by such means as getting sold down the river, betrayed, narked on, lied about, framed, charged for a crime or being the subject of illicit leaks and forced admissions through torture.

## VI. The Forgotten of the White Terror

A white Citroen speeds along the winding narrow asphalt of the northern cross-island highway leaving behind the red spans of the newly built Luo Fu suspension bridge that fade quickly into the distance against a background of green mountains. Ascending a steep slope brings the vehicle into the *back mountains* of Fuxing District, and off to the left the massive peak of Cha Tian mountain juts up into the heavens much like the head of a lion. During Japanese occupation, after an opening salvo in the *Battle of Cha Tian Mountain*, the Atayal adversary was eventually defeated soundly and forced to resettle in the lower reaches of the Takekan Creek, along a narrow and infertile low-lying left bank. The stretch of the northern cross-island highway we are traversing today was actually, in centuries past, the footpaths, game trails and conjugal byways of our ancestors, which got turned into military supply routes for Japanese attacks on Taiwan's aborigines. But before that, in the waning days of the Qing Empire, military commanders who feared the malaria infested miasma of the high mountains had no choice but to lead their troops up the creeks where they suffered a punishing defeat by the Kwilan tribe in the *Battle of Takekan Creek* and had to make a forced retreat. After several more kilometers we have come to the Kwilan tribal lands. A month earlier I had been to the home of an Elder Li of the Kwili, brought there by his son who works in construction casting cement molds. It was thanks to the Losing Wadang *White Terror* case that I came to know of this Li. This was the last case against aboriginals and came to be known as the *Mountain Youth Corps Case* of the year 1967. Seven individuals were believed to be the leaders of the *Armed Mountain Youth Brigade* and this Elder Li, who at the time was one of a very few proxy principals in the area, was one of them. Each of the accused was given a sentence of between five and twelve years. With simmering anger Elder Li explained, "The ones that seized me wanted me to confess to being a leader, saying that my weapons and comrades were all at Ali Mountain awaiting orders. In fact, the farthest I'd ever been in my life till then were the cities of Taoyuan and Taipei. I knew nothing of Ali Mountain. Someday I really would like for my son to take me to Ali Mountain so that I might see those supposed weapons and comrades of mine over there?" This was yet another obvious case without grounds in the history of the White Terror. On the far wall I caught sight of a Party honor certificate for a group leader.

Today is Elder Li's birthday and I had been privately hoping that I might be able to give him a surprise. With this in mind I didn't touch bases with him before setting out. Under my arm I held a bottle of sake as I walked up the pathway. I had expected a room full of children and grandchildren around a table celebrating his birthday, but to my surprise I met only empty silence in a room illuminated by a dim bulb. I called out and saw the lonely swaying shadow of the elder. On discovering why I had come, Elder Li managed a hollow reply, "The kids are busy working outside the village!" I thought to myself that today was no day for an interview, better to share a bottle!

After about a half year of interviews and I had come to slowly apprehend the context of the aboriginal White Terror cases. In 1952, after the *Mountain Workers Committee* case had resulted in the arrest of the Atayal and Tsou elites, a larger number of counterintelligence agents infiltrated the mountain areas, conducting at least 17 years of terror that included the use of informants, frame-ups, and broad accusations. "In those days, teachers and cops who came to Fuxing district were mostly student exiles from the northeast. They spoke Japanese and found it easier making a living on the mountain," Elder Lin, another resident of the Fuxing highlands who had also gotten caught up in

the Fuxing case, went on sorrowfully, “Our aboriginal brothers also became informants owing to the high rewards paid for catching spies, but their fate was even crueler since once they were no longer of use they too were arrested in the last batch of indigenes.” I thought about the abandoned Elder Li. Our next interview had us at the home of an *Assistant Commissioner*, Elder Wang, in a Kwilan village around 1,300 meters above sea-level; although, we had already confirmed that Elder Li had, in fact, engaged in informant work, we weren’t willing to say anything about it as our revelation would have dealt him a grave blow! Perhaps it was something to be glimpsed at only in the dark of night after many an agonizing nightmare! On leaving Kwilan, Elder Li hadn’t spoken a word; could all those memories of white terror ever truly get forgotten?

## VII. Genetics

Policies implemented through terrorism are among the pathological phenomena of society. Even if resistance can be suppressed in the long or short-term, still the human resistance-gene can never be to eradicated. Taiwan’s White Terror is a case in point.

## VIII. Give Us Back our Clean White Slate

*“I have no regrets as I did nothing wrong! Everything I did was done to give our mountain peoples the opportunity to save ourselves. I haven’t ever killed a man. I have absolutely no regrets. I’m telling you straight-up, the KMT wanted nothing to do with me so I went off to be a communist. It’s a fact that we set up a Peng Lai Self-Help Youth Federation, but there’s nothing illegal about that. I never killed anybody. We were locked up five years; I should be given back the lily white innocence of my youth.”* –Elder Chao of the Saisiyat, recounted orally.

Zhudong is a multi-ethnic township with frequent interactions amongst peoples speaking to each other in Hokkien, Hakkan, Indigene, or Han voices. East of Zhudong are the Atayal lands and to the south are those of the Atayal and Saisiyat. According to the oral histories passed down by the elders, the Saisiyat lands had once encompassed the area north of the Dahan River as well as the hills and forests along its south margin. In later days, owing to rapid influxes that expanded Atayal numbers, the Saisiyat became comparatively fewer and lost their dominant position. In the end they managed to hold onto only what are today known as the townships of Nanzhuang in Miaoli and Wufeng in Hsinzhu. In the forward mountains of Hsinzhu up the Youluo Creek in the Mekarang region remnants of artifacts from historic battles involving the Atayal and Saisiyat can still be found. It was only after the Atayal penetrated and settled in these lands that they discovered caches of molar teeth and so named the area Mekarang (meaning ‘molars’).

Heading south from Zhudong along the Shanping River past the Wufeng checkpoint is the welcoming sight of Egongji (*Gander Tuft*) Mountain. Continuing our ascent, we reach the village of Penglai. This is where in 1952 the National Security Bureau broke open the so-called *Penglai Ethnic Struggle Self-help Youth Federation* case. Three indigenes, made up of the Saisiyat Elder Chao and two other Atayals from Wulai and Fuxing, were all youth of less than 24-years and not long out of the thatch, but because of the big wheel of crushing repression, they had come to relinquish their shared histories of settling feuds and came to form a community of fate that crossed ethnic boundaries.

When I met Elder Gao he was already an *old man* of 60 odd years. The scars of time had left him without front teeth, and also in want of the taut muscles that help form a full face. What could not be taken from him though was the measure of passion in his bosom, “We people of the mountain don’t have a written language. When we were imprisoned on Green Island, we wanted to invent one and me and Jiansheng Gao set about to do it.” If only they had had the Romanized written language at that time, I dreamed to myself. In a moment I was back to reality, and thinking

of all those elders nearing their twilight who had been sent off to far-away Green Island and so the dream evaporated! This filled me with sorrow, knowing that if only for the earlier development of a written language then all those once condemned as “traitors” could still be incorporated in a collective ethnic memory ravaged by political struggles. From what I heard mentioned by Elder Gao, Jiansheng Gao, an Wulai Atayal, was considered by his peers to be exceedingly brilliant. After 1981, fed up with being harassed by agents of the intelligence and public security bureaus, he made his way to China by way of Japan where he took a teaching position in the foreign languages department of the Fuzhou teaching university. On August 4 of 1983 he succumbed to the residual effects of that forced prison confession he had been subjected to in Taiwan and passed away. Communist authorities interred his body in Beijing and erected a monument that called him a “National Patriot.” When I abruptly inquired as to his being “a patriot of what country?”, we couldn’t break the silence for some time.

I forgot to ask before leaving the mountain village whether there was any relation between the *Penglai Ethnic Struggle Self-help Youth Federation* and the *Penglai Village*? At the end of June, when I returned to Zhudong with the intention for a follow-up interview both with Elder Chao and at the same time his fellow Saisiyat political prisoner Elder Gao, I was told: “I haven’t been able to contact him for the time being. A few days ago he left for the Guandong Bridge Luguang military resettlement community to work as a nurse taking care of enfeebled old veterans resettled from the mainland.” The hand of history is not without its fair share of irony. During his time on Green Island, Elder Gao had earned a reputation for chivalry by catching a barking deer to succor a fellow inmate, a Nan’ao Atayal prisoner of conscience, in his recovery from a lung infection. Now, some 40 years later, owing to difficulties in making a living, he had been forced to accept work as nurse in the midst of those he had once opposed.

#### IX. The White Tally

According to conservative estimates, since the start of the 1950s *White Terror* there have been at least 5,000 deaths attributed to it and more than 8,000 Taiwanese and Mainlander “commies”, nationalist intellectuals, academics, workers, and peasants sentenced to between ten years and life in catastrophic confinement. Not until December of 1984 were the last two 1950s politically imprisoned lifers, after serving upwards of 34 years and seven months, finally announced to have completed their terms.

#### X. A White Wish

*Pointing at the wall he said, “Look there!” Shit, when I looked, I saw that it was the announcement of my father’s execution by firing squad and with that came the realization that my father was no longer of this world!*

*When I brought my father’s ashes home not a single relative or friend would venture near me. This was because on the public notice had been written the most damning of accusations, ‘Traitor’. So no one wanted to be seen with me for fear of incriminating themselves. As a result, a funeral couldn’t be arranged! All that could be done was to take the ashes home to rest in our Buddhist shrine, where they remained for forty years. No chance for a funeral, no way to bury them.*

– the words of Lin Mao-cheng  
(Losing Wadang’s Atayal son)

I first met Lin Mao-cheng in the Luofu borough of Fuxing district. He had just gotten back from working in the field next to his house and removed the bamboo field-hat that shaded his slight frame, revealing the beads of sweat covering his balding brow. A few portraits hung on the parlor wall, astonishingly one of which was a picture of Chiang Kai-shek inspecting Fuxing with Losing Wadang

standing next to him. At the time Losing was a provincial legislator. Because he had expressed a point of view that was not tolerated in those days, namely that “Taiwan Retrocession should include the return of the Japanese occupied *Takasago* lands to the indigenes, otherwise, it would only be a Taiwan retrocession for the Nationalist government and the *Takasago* would not be liberated,” and so he was imprisoned in 1952 and then murdered by execution in November of 1954.

A couple yellowing pictures of Dabajian Mountain also graced the wall to which Elder Lin pointed and said, “We are children of Dabajian Mountain; that’s what my father had told us. Don’t ever forget that you are Atayal.” Elder Lin’s heritage can be traced back seven generations to Mahong with a clearly delineated ancestral home in Tashak, situated near the geographic center of Taiwan in what is modern day Renai Township of Nantou County. Mahong lived from around 1772 to 1812 CE. In the fourth generation, Shetsu Kainu, migrated and settled in the Sanxia District, known as the place of the leopard society, where the clan remains to this day. His second and fourth sons died in separate battles defending the tribe against Qing soldiers and the Japanese army, respectively. Losing Wadang also upheld ancestral values, engaging everywhere in furthering the best interests of the tribe. As a provisional member of the provincial legislature he offered “advice” that ultimately led to his tragic prison execution at the age of 55. Elder Lin travelled afterward to the Taipei mortuary to identify and bring back his father’s remains that lay amongst dozens of scattered corpses. His ashes, however, had to wait until 1993 before being be put to rest at the base of a mountain in Luofu village, at a site named the *Lin Family Shrine*. Elder Lin said, “Things had settled down and so I made a grave and family shrine for my father so that father, son and grandson could be together forever. This was my life’s desire.” When I left, Elder Lin didn’t hand me a name card, even though he is now chairman of the Fuxing agricultural committee. The long years of his family being under surveillance had cultivated in him the habit of not using name cards, of not leaving behind any trace for evidence. The elder’s parting words were, “Mustn’t cause our friends any harm.”

Out of all the many trips I made to tribal mountain lands and settlements, I have found it hardest to forget the heart-wrenching emotional changes expressed during Elder Lin’s oral narratives. I have also developed a deep sense of anxiety for the fate of our ethnic communities. In my many conversations with elders I have always found it unbearable when having to reopen their unseen wounds. The words of one elder will always stay with me, “I hope that there is never again something like this. There should be democracy, never again should authority be used to repress a people.”

#### O. In the Name of the Father

According to available data, no fewer than 4,500 of Taiwan’s indigenous people got caught up in the “White Terror,” six of whom were executed by a bullet to the head. Their second and third generations, comprising more than 200 people each, have all suffered through childhoods tainted by taunts of “traitorous spy”, and having no one ever saying to them that their fathers or grandfathers were in fact innocent, and even more so that they were heroic ethnic warriors. If in the years to come, this “white” shadow continues to cling to them as they go on to give birth to the next generation, then their progeny will also carry the burden of this historical (mis)labeling.

*Translated from the Chinese by Scott Faul*