

Epilogue: Looking Forward

IT HAS BEEN TWENTY YEARS since martial law was lifted in 1987, which ushered in dramatic changes in every aspect of Taiwanese citizens' lives. Most noteworthy are the unprecedented civil liberties that guarantee the freedoms of speech, press, and congregation. Gone are the thought police who patrolled their daily lives; no longer do they have to fear persecution for expressing dissenting views now that the White Terror has become a part of Taiwan's less than glorious past. These two decades have also witnessed a surge in remembering the past, especially the 2/28 Incident and the government persecution during the White Terror era. Scholarly research, compilations of eyewitness accounts, oral histories, and re-creations in film and fiction have helped fill in gaps in Taiwan's recent history. In this book, I examined the politics, strategies, and pitfalls of literary and cinematic renditions of Taiwan's past. Recent literary works are now moving toward a self-reflexive interrogation of the writing process as writers grow increasingly aware of the problems and limitations of realist, even mimetic, representation. In this epilogue, I focus on a novel by Lan Bozhou, likely the most prolific writer/researcher on the period of martial law, to recapitulate the issues I raised.

Lan Bozhou's *Vine Intertwining Tree* recounts the story of a young Hakka man, Ali, who tries to uncover and write about the life of another Hakka man, the fictional Lin Minghua, who was executed in the early 1950s for his leftist thoughts and activities.¹ The novel touches on problems of investigating atrocity, interviewing eyewitnesses, interpreting material, and narrating the story of victims. As does Lan's earlier work, "Song of the Covered Wagon," the novel

begins with the end, when Ali has finished his project on Lin Minghua and returns with his wife, Ajing, to Lin's village to give a presentation on his book. The first third of the novel deals with Ali's research into Lin Minghua's life through interviews and correspondence with survivors and eyewitnesses. The remaining two-thirds of the novel are a metafictional probing of interpreting and representation, as Ali struggles and experiments with a variety of genres to find the most suitable voice in which to recount Lin's story. He finally settles on a novelistic form and finishes a novel also entitled *Vine Intertwining Tree*, on Lin Minghua and Lin's wife, Fu Shuangmei. In the meantime, Ali's personal life also seems to have taken on metafictional characteristics, with letters from his former girlfriend examining and explaining the reasons for their breakup. The end of Lan's novel returns to the beginning, when Ali and Ajing meet with the villagers at the publicity gathering for his novel. Because Lan's novel is too complex for me to discuss in only a few pages, I will concentrate on Ali's search, research, and re-creation.

BETWEEN FACTS AND FICTION

The strategies that both Lan Bozhou and Dong Nian used in their earlier novellas to create the impression of factual accounts appear again in Lan's novel: eyewitness testimonials and news reports. In *Vine Intertwining Tree*, fictive reports and essays from the print media and sentencing documents also are incorporated into Ali's research. These self-contradictory documents generate even more confusion in Ali's understanding of Lin Minghua's life. Indeed, Lan may be reflecting on problems he has encountered in his own research on major figures in Taiwan who perished in the late 1940s and the 1950s. What he reveals in this novel, whether or not intentionally, further underscores the legacy of atrocity: not only were the victims executed, but their stories usually were buried for years, and many were greatly distorted. Some intellectuals who were executed in the aftermath of the 2/28 Incident were simply labeled "Communist" or "Communist spies," or "traitors," even though their "offense" was simply organizing a reading group or expressing dissenting views. Under the totalitarian control of thought and interpretation, however, facts become fiction and fiction becomes

facts. To be sure, Lan's intention is not merely to emphasize this gray area but to stress what was best summed up by James E. Young:

The aim in comparing several variant versions of the same event is not to find the truest, or the one that corresponds most closely to the reality, or to undermine the credibility of these witnesses. It is rather to trace the manner in which this act has been grasped by several different survivors, how they have assimilated it to other pre-existing legends and to their own understanding of the camp, how it has reinforced particular truths already held, how it was molded to conform to their beliefs, and how it was sustained imaginatively as a kind of inspiration to other victims.²

The strategy of using eyewitness accounts is questioned partly because they unavoidably contradict one another. Moreover, not everyone is willing to talk to Ali (Fu Shuangmei being the most important figure in this regard). One person who does talk to Ali withholds information until he feels he can trust him. Some of the eyewitnesses are reluctant not simply because they are traumatized but also because the lingering fear of persecution still exerts a great deal of influence on these former political prisoners. We recall in *Super Citizen Ko* Ko's friend You Minshun, who repeatedly changes the subject of their conversation when Ko asks about Chen Zhengyi's grave site. The difference, of course, is that both Ko and You are former political prisoners, whereas Ali is from the younger generation, whose sketchy knowledge of the past comes from furtive references made by the older generation.

In "Song of the Covered Wagon," Lan Bozhou uses a forum style of representation, with each eyewitness coming forward to recount and supplement information about Zhong Haodong and his life. Since we are not privy to the questions that the interviewer asked his interviewees, we inevitably get a uniform picture of the victim. This *monologic* style is ideologically driven to serve a political function: the tragic and unjust death of a good man. In *Vine Intertwining Tree*, Ali's questions are often placed alongside the witnesses' answers, in the form of a conversation. As studies of Holocaust witnesses show, the interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee can affect the accounts, which demonstrates the importance of including the interviewer's

questions. Even though Lan's interviews are fictional, by emphasizing Ali's presence the novel draws our attention to the interview process as well as to the complex politics and psychology behind the questions and answers.

VICTIM AND VICTIMHOOD

In the beginning of *Vine Intertwining Tree*, Ali arrives at Zhutouzhuang, where he was born, to work as a member of a research team compiling "A Cultural History of Zhutouzhuang." He is to work on an important aspect of Hakka culture, the folk songs, but his interest in Lin Minghua and Fu Shuangmei takes him further and further away from collecting and compiling them, until finally he has to resign from the team. Lin Minghua, Ali's research shows, was a Communist engaged in an armed struggle against the Nationalist government. Lin's political affiliation has several ramifications. On a textual level, Chen Wanli, Ali's friend who employed him, objects to including a Communist in the village chronicle, mainly because the funding for the chronicle was raised by an anti-Communist, pro-Taiwan independence politician. From the cold and unsympathetic way in which Chen Wanli raises his objection, we see that he also personally opposes the idea. Ali therefore has no choice but to resign if he wishes to continue investigating Lin Minghua's life and death.

The larger implication of Chen's opposition concerns the victims of atrocity in Taiwan, as some people advocate distinguishing among the different kinds of victims: those mostly innocent people who were killed before and during the March massacre of 1947; those who were falsely accused of sedition in the martial law era; and the Communists or Marxists who engaged in antigovernment activities. The last group was most active during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, the activists in the opposition (*dangwai*, literally "outside the Nationalist Party") were the dissidents associated with the magazine *Formosa* who were incarcerated after the Formosa Incident depicted in *Heart-break Island*. Some people, like Chen Wanli in Lan's novel, believed that Marxists and those who promoted Communism deserved to be punished and thus were not victims. But Ali disagrees: "Politics is politics; history is history."³

Politics and history are, of course, intertwined, and so an examination of them requires a different forum. For our purposes, the ambiguous status of Lin Minghua's victimhood is reminiscent of that of Super Citizen Ko, Zhong Haodong, and Chen Linlang. The first two were intellectuals (both high-school teachers) reading prohibited material; Zhong was a leftist; and Ko's political affiliation is not made clear in the film. Neither Zhong nor Ko seems to have engaged in outright armed struggle, as opposed to Lan's character, Lin Minghua, who learned how to make bombs. Would the fact that he intended to use those bombs deprive him of victimhood? If so, how should we regard Chen Linlang in Dong Nian's "Last Winter"? By characterizing Lin Minghua as a violent revolutionary, Lan Bozhou apparently intends to question the whole notion of victims and their proper status in Taiwanese history.⁴

PAST/PRESENT/ETHNICITY

As Ali embarks on his writing project, he sends chapters to his wife, Ajing, who has remained in Taipei, where she works. In their correspondence, they discuss Ali's work, which in itself makes Lan's novel an interesting meta-meta-fictional work. What is pertinent to unearthing and writing about historical facts is the appearance of Ali's former girlfriend, Awen, which sets up a contrast between Ali's attitude toward the historical and personal pasts. After receiving several anonymous phone calls, Ajing finally realizes that the caller is Ali's former girlfriend and, without consulting Ali, gives her his address, to which Ali objects: "I believe that what happened in the past should remain in the past and need not be brought up."⁵ Historical past and personal past often are intertwined and entangled in their unfolding and interpretations. Ajing responds with the following comment: "If you think exploring the past of Lin Minghua and Fu Shuangmei has significance in our contemporary society, then you should examine the romance between you and Awen, for it would be meaningful to you, to me, and to Awen."⁶ But it turns out that Ali, like Liang Jing in *Good Men, Good Women*, is incapable of coming to terms with his personal past.

Ali's past with Awen has another level of symbolic importance. Both of Awen's parents are from the mainland, and her father is a

Guomindang official, which means that almost inevitably the issue of ethnicity plays a significant role in Awen and Ali's romantic relationship. Just as in the fictional works analyzed earlier, romance or the impossibility of it becomes a trope for an insurmountable obstacle in ethnic harmony. Interestingly, however, in Lan Bozhou's novel, ethnic relations have a contemporary implication; that is, the search by Awen, the second-generation mainlander, for the Hakka man some years after she left him presents an impression of an identity reorientation. Mainlanders have traditionally regarded the mainland as their real homeland, which sometimes creates an identity crisis for their children born in Taiwan. This reorientation, however, seems short-lived and fraught with ambiguity, which Lan refuses to resolve at the end of novel. Although a letter from Awen's psychologist informs Ali that Awen, a mental patient suffering from hallucinations, has left the clinic without proper authorization, this piece of information elicits no reaction or action on the part of Ali. In fact, the last we hear about Awen is from her final letter to Ali, in which she relates an erotic dream involving the two of them. The letter ends with her wish that she could have Ali's child. We recall that in Zhong Zhaozheng's *Angry Tide*, the mainland woman Han Ping and the Hakka man Lu Zhilin eventually lose their baby, symbolizing the impossibility of peaceful ethnic coexistence. In *Heartbreak Island*, the mainlander Chen Linlang also loses a baby by the Taiwanese Wang Rong. But in Lan's novel, this is just a wish from a woman who may or may not be mentally unstable. More important, Ali's reluctance to confront his own past, represented by Awen, shows that he is better equipped to deal with other people's pasts than with his own. In a way, this alludes to Taiwan's past and future, both of which are intertwined with ethnic issues whose resolution is forever suspended.

REPRESENTATION

Among the literary and cinematic texts that I have studied in this book, *Good Men, Good Women* is clearly the most conscious of its fictional characteristics and constructedness. The structure of a film within a film highlights the artificial process of filmmaking, which creates a distance between the viewers and the film. Similarly, Lan

Bozhou's novel about researching and writing displays his recognition that all representations are simulations. Such an approach to representing the dark side of Taiwan's past is problematic to some readers, for the detached manner in which the narrative is constructed may appear to lack a sense of engagement, which is one of the reasons why *Good Men, Good Women* was so poorly received in Taiwan. In contrast, even though the audience was more receptive to *Super Citizen Ko*, the ending may have shut the door too quickly on that part of Taiwan's history. The realization that there may not be a suitable form of representation is reflected in the remaining two-thirds of Lan's novel, in which Ali explores this possibility and shares his thoughts in his letters to his wife.

Ali's original plan is to retell Lin Minghua and Fu Shuangmei's story in the form of reportage, with himself as the alter-ego narrator/investigator. For readers familiar with the postmodern notion of historical writing, Ali's decision may not come as a surprise. His choice of narrative style also enables Lan Bozhou, the author, to consider issues regarding the representation of atrocity and its victims. Interestingly, however, Lan Bozhou the author eventually decides that Ali should not use Lan's own self-reflexive narrative technique, so Ali rejects the genre because he does not have enough historical facts and explanations. He then adopts the style of a realist novel, which mingles historical facts with fictional re-creation, deeming it to be the most "suitable" style to deal with such discrepancies and ellipses. In one instance, Ali believes that one of his eyewitnesses may have betrayed Lin Minghua and caused his death. Hence a fictional work—a novel—based on facts becomes a convenient vehicle, in that the author cannot be held responsible for any mistakes, inaccuracies, or allegations. For Lan Bozhou and anyone engaged in research on Taiwan's past, the recognition that what they represent should never be taken as verbatim truth is critical, for without that knowledge, they are simply replicating the errors made by the Nationalist government during the martial law era, except that they are replacing one version of the alleged truth with another.

Ali decides to write a realist novel in a linear style, and his protagonist is to be born into a poor farming family.⁷ This narratological choice (from the perspectives of both Ali and Lan Bozhou) originated from authorial intent to explain why Ali's protagonist (Lin Minghua) eventually became a Marxist. Aside from this intriguing doubling, this

need to explicate in Lan's and Ali's novels reveals their anxiety over the victims of the White Terror. That is, family background is the motivation for their ideological inclination, and it is therefore both understandable and acceptable that they should become Marxists. Similarly, this also explains why patriotic Han Chinese in Taiwan rose up against the Nationalist government, whereas they seemed to be docile and complacent loyal subjects of the Japanese emperor. Ali devotes two sections of his novel to the corruption of the Nationalist officials and the indignation felt by the Taiwanese. Portrayals of the chaotic situation immediately following the arrival of the Nationalist officials can be found throughout historical accounts and memoirs and are used widely in book-length novels, such as Li Qiao's *Buried Injustice of 1947* and Zhong Zhaozheng's *Angry Tides*. Lan Bozhou implicitly questions the incorporation of such historical information through Ajing's somewhat contradictory comment on Ali's writing: "As a reader, I think that what you wrote in these four sections is basically laying out the historical process . . . and there's no moving story in it. . . . Nevertheless, I still believe that, to people like me, who don't know much about that part of Taiwan's past, reading it is, to some extent, helpful."⁸

WOMEN/EYEWITNESS/ATROCITY

Like many Taiwanese youths, Ali arrives in the Hakka village with no knowledge of the events that took place before his birth. It is only from conversations with the local elders that he learns about Lin Minghua and Fu Shuangmei, which is clearly Lan Bozhou's way of highlighting the collective amnesia caused by the White Terror. Interestingly, what first catches Ali's attention is the elders' comment on Fu Shuangmei, the surviving wife of the political victim. As we have seen, the majority of the Taiwanese imprisoned or executed were men, so women naturally became testimonial figures and a source for unearthing historical injustice. In other words, women as victims proves to be a powerful image in the indictment of injustice, but at the same time, women as a trope tend to strip them of their subjectivity in the depiction of atrocity. Ultimately women are either victimized twice or reduced to mere representational tools, to be called to testify about their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons.

Ali searches for Fu Shuangmei in order for her to verify or refute what Ali has gathered from other witnesses:

Ali believed that, more than any one else, Fu Shuangmei would be the one eyewitness who could clarify many of the contradiction and ambiguities, whether for the purpose of understanding Lin Minghua's life or reading his [Ali's] account as a story.⁹ Since their romance would be what interested people most, he figured that if he could interview Fu Shuangmei, then this reportage about Lin Minghua could be narrated along the plot line of their love story.¹⁰

Unlike in "Song of the Covered Wagon," in which the author's presence is effaced with the employment of multiple eyewitnesses/narrators, Lan Bozhou narrates the story in *Vine Intertwining Tree* solely from Ali's perspective and maintains the distinction between the narrator and the author.

In Ali's quest for the story behind Lin's arrest and execution, Fu Shuangmei remains an elusive figure. Although he finds eyewitnesses who give him information about Lin Minghua, what sparks his curiosity and interest is forever out of reach. Even when he finally locates Fu, she refuses to be interviewed. If Fu Shuangmei, who knows Lin Minghua better than anyone else, holds the key to a more complete picture of him, then she symbolizes knowable history. But the closest Lan can get is a glimpse of her at the end of the novel at the village gathering for his book. Her elusiveness may thus be a metaphor for the impossibility of finding facts and truth. Unlike some of the writing on this subject,¹¹ Lan Bozhou's novel does not question whether dissidents really were persecuted. Although Ali is unable to meet with Fu Shuangmei, she does send him the bullet-holed suit that Lin Minghua was wearing on the day of his execution. In other words, even though we may not know the whole truth, traceable evidence of what happened remains.



In the investigation and re-creation of Taiwan's historical past, intertextuality and cross-reference are pervasive, as evidenced in the expansion of Chu T'ien-hsin's "Once upon a Time There Was a Man Called Urashima Tarō," the allusions to Chen Yingzhen's "The Mountain

Road,” and the evolution of Lan Bozhou’s works. These literary and cinematic re-creations become the sedimentation of a form of collective memory, which, “redefined as a social and individual practice that integrates elements of remembrance, fantasy, and invention, . . . can shift from the problematic role of standing for the truth to a new role as an active, engaging practice of creating meaning.”¹² What is most important, then, is the continuing search for information while being aware of the incomplete nature of truth, facts, and knowable history.