

Refugees with Guns, *Laobing* with Phallus: Ghost of Taiwan circa 1949[❖]

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ABSTRACT

Approximately one million Nationalist (Kuomintang) mainland Chinese and their families retreated to Taiwan in 1949, having lost China to the Communists. Taiwan had recently emerged from Japanese colonization of 1895-1945 with a population mostly of Fujian, Guangdong, and Hakka descent, whose ancestors had migrated across the Taiwan Strait during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), subduing the indigenous Austronesian peoples. The historical conundrum of Taiwan, thus, culminates in 1949 when Nationalist soldiers arrived with their weapons and young families. Was this flood of military personnel and civilians an occupation force, taking over control from the Japanese Empire and from southern China's settler-colonizers of aboriginal lands? Were they war refugees? Were they both or something else altogether, awaiting half a century later their proper name?

Dubbed by Wu Zhuoliu as *Orphan of Asia* (1945), Taiwan has long been a convenient waystation for the Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish, British, Japanese, and even dynastic Chinese colonizers to stop and replenish, or even to settle. Taiwan has been the “founding foundling” fathered and abandoned by these foreign masters, the last one in 1949 claiming to be Taiwan's biological father. This essay focuses on novels and short stories, personal and historical accounts, and films of that fraught moment when refugees, some with guns, fled to Taiwan for dear life, crushing other lives in their wake. Their settling in unsettled those who had already settled there, a karmic cycle entirely man-made. Specifically, I explore the shared literary motif of *laobing* (老兵, old soldiers or Nationalist veterans, in the plural or the singular) as pedophiles, perverts, and phantoms. Represented largely by second-generation *waishengren* (外省人) or mainlander writers, many of these old soldiers or veterans—armed no longer with guns, but fetishized as

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phantasmagoric phalluses—had relocated to Taiwan without much education and life skills, some of whom even drafted at gunpoint in China, the so-called “snatched soldiers.” One of the most wretched groups in postwar Taiwan without money and family, *laobing*-cum-sexual predators displace the ambivalent subconsciousness of Nationalist refugees with guns and their children, who project their collective trauma and sin onto the scapegoat in their midst. Although deemed strangers ill-adapted to the island, *laobing*, ironically, embody Taiwan, the orphan ghosts that come in handy as tropes since they can be unhandedly anon. *Waishengren* and Taiwanese writers do unto *laobing*—the sacrificial lamb straitjacketed in wolf’s clothing—what China and the international community have done unto Taiwan.

KEYWORDS: War Refugees to Taiwan, *Laobing*, veterans as sexual predators, Zhu Tianxin, Bai Xianyong, *Detention*

Approximately one million Nationalist (Kuomintang) mainland Chinese and their families under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek retreated to Taiwan in 1949, having lost China to the Communist troops under Chairman Mao Zedong. Taiwan had recently emerged from Japanese colonization of 1895-1945 with a population mostly of Fujian, Guangdong, and Hakka descent, whose ancestors had migrated across the Taiwan Strait during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911) subduing the indigenous Austronesian peoples.¹ The historical conundrum of Taiwan, thus, culminates in 1949 when Nationalist soldiers arrived with their weapons and young families. Was this flood of military personnel and civilians an occupation force, taking over control from the Japanese Empire and from southern China's settler-colonizers of aboriginal lands? Were they war refugees? Were they both or something else altogether, awaiting half a century later their proper name?

The conundrum of their historical identity crystalizes in my late mother's memory when she, always reluctantly, shared snatches—themselves stylized—from her saga of *taonan* (literally “escape disasters or wars”), the well-worn phrase of “fleeing disaster” deployed by her generation of mainland Chinese to describe their escape from the Japanese first and then the Chinese Communists of the 1930s and 1940s. *Taonan* is a lexicon seared in the Chinese consciousness because it recurs throughout millennia of dynastic history with endless wars and waves of refugees. A young mother of a toddler, whose second child perished months after birth for reasons unknown, she and my father jostled with the masses at the Guangzhou dock, trying to board any ship bound for Taiwan before the communist attack. I recall her frenzied eyes and hands and voice, as though shaking still after all those years, when she described how the crowd fought on the gangplanks to the ship, many falling into the sea. In total despair, they suddenly spotted my father's Huangpu Military Academy classmate Zhu Jinfeng (Zhu Gold Peak), an Army officer commanding his squad of *qiangbing* (槍兵 “armed soldiers,” literally “gun soldiers”). Zhu ordered his soldiers to commandeer a boat, ferrying my parents and eldest brother to the far side of the ship for boarding.

Without Zhu and his “gunmen,” I would not have been born, at least not in Taiwan. Had I been born and come of age in China to an ex-Nationalist family during the Cultural Revolution, I would not be writing this in English as a foreign-born American academic. Every Lunar New Year when I was

¹ See Fu-chang Wang's *Ethnic Imagination in Contemporary Taiwan*, p. 147.

growing up in Taiwan, Zhu was our honored guest since he stayed a bachelor for years, a factory foreman in the remote town of Tucheng, “Dirt City,” which suggested to a child’s imagination how far he had fallen, from his namesake tiptop to the ground. The child also came to see “foreman” as possibly the parents’ euphemism for doorman. Throughout my childhood, I had difficulty deciphering his heavy accent, nor the patience to follow his slow, labored speech. (How could Taiwanese-speaking workers on the factory floor understand their foreman’s instructions?) He lost all his pensions and assets in a failed marriage to a young Taiwanese or indigenous wife, plus his jaw due to a botched surgery. So heavily bandaged was he one Lunar New Year that he could hardly eat. Our “savior” Uncle Zhu soon vanished; his “gun soldiers” might have fared even worse in Taiwan, had they made it across.

By reading doorman into foreman, do I restore or distort the truth? Do I disrespect the dead and, in Susan Sontag’s words, “the pain of others”? If Zhu were my father’s classmate, why did my father not command his own “gunmen”? To seize a boat in front of a horde of panicked refugees by the dock, how many guns with bayonets had Zhu arrayed to prevent the melee of scrambling onboard? If Zhu had at his disposal such an overwhelming force, what was his military rank and why did he fall so precipitously in Taiwan? Had my parents ever shared their escape on Zhu’s boat in Zhu’s company? If so, did details vary? If not, why did they not retell the story, since gratitude seemed due for the Ma family’s redeemer on his annual visit? Conceivably, Zhu’s marital debacle had never been the subject around the Lunar New Year dinner table in Zhu’s presence. How did the family lore of Zhu’s coming to the rescue in Guangzhou devolve into his tragic end in Taiwan? How did the narrative of Zhu’s fall relate to the Ma’s generational exodus from China to Taiwan and to America? The Ma family embarked on a journey to Taiwan, only to disembark decades later in America in an endless flight of the Taiwanese Other or *waishengren* (foreign province people or mainlander) morphing into white America’s “perennial aliens.” Like a long shot into family and collective history, my focus is decidedly off, the details blurred. The truth may never be known, only questions surrounding my late parents’ reluctant and perhaps unreliable memory and my own postmemory of trauma twice removed. The occluded vision herein rather befits Taiwan, a ghost island in history and in collective unconscious specializing in spectrality.

Dubbed by Wu Zhuoliu as *Orphan of Asia* (1945), Taiwan has long been a convenient waystation for the Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish, British, Japanese, and even dynastic Chinese colonizers to stop and replenish, or even to settle, ever since the sixteenth century. Taiwan has been the “founding foundling” fathered and abandoned by these foreign masters, the last one in 1949 claiming to be Taiwan’s biological father (Sheng-mei Ma, *Last Isle*).² This essay focuses on novels and short stories, personal and historical accounts, and films of that fraught moment when refugees, some with guns, fled to Taiwan for dear life, crushing other lives in their wake. Their settling in unsettled those who had already settled there, a karmic cycle entirely man-made. Specifically, I explore the shared literary and filmic motif of *laobing* (老兵 “old soldiers or Nationalist veterans, in the plural or the singular”) as pedophiles, perverts, and phantoms. Represented largely by second-generation *waishengren* or mainlander writers, many of these old soldiers or veterans—armed no longer with guns, but fetishized as phantasmagoric phalluses—had relocated to Taiwan without much education and life skills, some of whom were even drafted at gunpoint in China, the so-called “snatched soldiers.” One of the most wretched groups in postwar Taiwan without money and family, *laobing*-cum-sexual predators displace the ambivalent subconsciousness of Nationalist refugees with guns and that of their children, both of whom project their collective trauma and sin onto the scapegoat in their midst. Also transferred onto *laobing*, precisely because of their disempowerment, is *waishengren*’s awareness of their own increasing irrelevance to Taiwan(ese)-centric politics and culture. So goes the historical irony of host/age. Like any foreign body multiplying itself in a host body, one becomes the host by taking hostage the natives and their land. The uroboros of time in the form of rise and fall, death and rebirth, would eventually loop back, as it has for *waishengren*, devouring that which used to devour. Although deemed strangers ill-adapted to the island, *laobing*, serendipitously, embody Taiwan, the orphan ghosts that come in handy as tropes since they can be unhanding anon. *Waishengren* and Taiwanese writers do unto *laobing*—the sacrificial lamb straitjacketed in wolf’s clothing—what China and the international community have done unto Taiwan.

Taiwanese writer Li Ang (李昂) has long ago availed herself of Gothic metaphors for Taiwanese women under patriarchal oppression, attested to in

² The trope of “founding foundling” for Taiwan is used in Chapter 1, “Trauma and Taiwan’s Melodrama: Seven Orphans of *Cape No. 7*,” in Sheng-mei Ma’s *The Last Isle* (2015).

her “Preface” to *Kan De Jian De Gui* (《看得見的鬼》 *Visible Ghosts*, 2004): “Such a ghost island is borderless and not a country, and its voices are outside the center of the grand national body and can be taken as extraterritorial ghost talks and indiscernible ghost sounds” (8, qtd. in Chia-rong Wu, *Remapping* 35).³ Li Ang in effect splices Taiwan’s body politic with the female body. To call oneself a ghost beyond humanity smacks of the posture of self-abasing and self-caricaturing, reminiscent of Freudian psychologizing of jokes in *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). Rather than Freudian subconsciousness, Taiwan is explicitly treated as a political pariah by the international community, not quite a Nation, the Taiwanese not quite a people as the twenty-three million Taiwanese are de facto stateless, if not homeless, in the eye of all but thirteen countries, plus the Holy See, last I checked. The collective disenfranchisement rubs off even more on Li Ang’s five female ghosts at the mercy of “a patriarchal, Han-dominated society” in *Visible Ghosts* (34). Magical disabilities, however, animate Li Ang’s ghostly tropes. In her 2011 novel *Fushen* (《附身》 *Possessed*), she likens Taiwan’s repeated colonization to spiritual possessions with supernatural affinities, albeit implied. By giving voice to specters, *Visible Ghosts* further capitalizes on spectrality, Li Ang’s and Taiwan’s area of specialization. This heritage extends to Taiwanese-Australian scholar Chia-rong Wu. In citing Li Ang’s *Visible Ghosts* in his *Remapping*, Wu borrows from Li Ang in seeing Taiwan as a “ghost island,” an apt term for the nation’s increasingly beleaguered and precarious “half-life” under the long shadow cast by Beijing’s “Chinese Century.” The voices emitted from the not so “grand national body” are indeed “ghost sounds,” not excepting those sounds shoved into rather than generated from the mouths of apparitional *laobing*.

I. *Laobing* and Their Makers

If *laobing* were the pedophilia, perverted, and phantasmagoric Frankenstein’s Monsters, then the mad scientist Frankenstein, or the rapacious Republican China and Nationalist Taiwan, had made them, particularly early Nationalist policies in Taiwan forbidding soldiers from marrying. Taiwanese sociologist Antonia Chao (趙彥寧) lays out the crux of the issue:

³ I translated 《看得見的鬼》 as *Visible Ghosts*. All translations herein are mine unless otherwise noted.

It was towards the end of the Chinese Civil War of 1946-49 that the Nationalist (KMT) government attempted to counteract its military failures by means of recruiting involuntarily people from the rural areas of the Mainland Throughout the 50s, marriages to these ‘snatched soldiers’ was legally forbidden by the KMT’s Taiwan-based government-in-exile for the purpose of maintaining national security. The result of this enforced provision was that for the next fifty years thereafter the majority of this cadre of “snatched soldiers” (now officially singled out as “glorious citizens”), remained unmarried. (“Modern State” 2)

“Recruiting involuntarily” means to coerce joining up, often at gunpoint. “[G]lorious citizens” may well be translated as “honored citizens.” Sexual problems, however, come to taint and dishonor their images. Chao has detailed such sexual abjection in a series of sociological articles, touching on all three organizing motifs herein.

Chao in her “Abstract” to “Nationalistic Language as an Open Secret: Diaspora, Cultural Citizenship, and the Materiality of Mainlanders’ Self-Narratives” cites interviews of “first-generation of Mainlanders” to analyze the “Open Secret” of their sex life, one labeled as “magic realism” (46). These *laobing* interviews preserve their voices, albeit in a piecemeal fashion. The keyword “Materiality” in her article’s subtitle refers to economic transactions that are the basis for marriages and families. The title’s “Open Secret” describes rampant cheating in the miserable life of *laobing* eking out a living by duping one another. Chao records a Ms. Sun who finds *laobing*, including the subject Uncle Dai, “physically perverse, and psychologically perverse” (70). Another interviewee “Uncle Dai” has devoted his retirement to appease “*laobing*’s hungry ghosts” (72). Conceivably, helping these ghosts find peace can be interpreted as Uncle Dai trying to find peace himself. What is perversion in the eye of Ms. Sun is but Uncle Dai’s sense of urgency for his fellow comrades, all the late *laobing*.

In “The Modern State,” Chao studies “Taiwan’s Glorious Citizens and their Mainland Wives.” Twice in her field study, Chao was invited by two “Medicinal Liquor Uncles” to partake liquor spiked with proverbial aphrodisiacs “good for men and women” (“Modern State” 4). A college researcher collecting primary materials is mistaken for a sex worker by these

lonely, aging bachelors. An Uncle Zhang even solicited explicitly: “My bed is not so small, we’ll manage, no problem!” (6). Yet another *laobing* Uncle Jiang enjoys multiple partners, practically his “four wives” (17), reflected in one of Chao’s subheadings in quotation marks: “All honored citizens are perverts” (20). This negative public perception seems to justify treating *laobing*’s private sex life as fair game. By way of materialist and socioeconomic analyses, Chao seeks to dismantle the assumption of *laobing* aberration. The alleged perversion reaches into the ghostly realm in “Intimate Relationships and Ethical Practice.” Recalling the forced march near Hankou, China, in 1948, an Uncle Wei mocks himself: “I was between man and ghost that time anyway. If I die, I become a ghost. If I survive, I wouldn’t be all that different from being a ghost” (Chao, “Intimate Relationships” 538). Uncle Wei belittles his younger self to satirize his present, frail and phantom-like, left to waste away at an “Honored Citizens’ Home,” an assisted-living facility in Taiwan. Self-pity and self-mockery are designed to shame the society that has deprived him of dignity.

Chao’s realistic portrayal of *laobing*’s lifelong dilemma parallels literary representations of *laobing* by *waishengren* writers, mostly second-generation Taiwanese writers of mainland Chinese descent. Many were born and raised in Taiwan, quite a few in *juancun*, military dependents’ villages dotted across Taiwan to accommodate the flood of mainlanders. The moniker of *waishengren* aims to distinguish the subjects from *benshengren* (literally “people of the Taiwan province”), Taiwanese residents whose ancestors arrived from Fujian, Guangdong, and other mainland provinces long before 1949, some as early as the eighteenth and nineteenth century. *Waishengren* or second-generation writers coalesced around a re-envisioning of *laobing* at the turn of the century as a collective root-searching to counteract, even if subconsciously, *benshengren* or Taiwanese writers’ home-soil or nativist movement.⁴ As *benshengren* formed their ethnic identity and took over governance through democratic elections, *waishengren*, approximately ten percent of the twenty-three million Taiwanese, felt compelled to claim their own heritage. In a modernizing, majority-ruled Taiwan, the disappearance of obsolete, housing project-style *juancun* and other *waishengren* symbols, most of all the Nationalist-dominated government, came to inspire second-generation writers to launch nostalgic backward glances. That the literary and artistic glance

⁴ See Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang’s *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance: Contemporary Chinese Fiction from Taiwan* (1993) for the tension of the island’s modernist and nativist movements.

converges around *laobing* as pedophiles, perverts, and phantoms is already foreshadowed by Chao's sociological treatises unwittingly skirting all three p-
s, to be read in Mandarin's fourth tone *pì*-s 屁 for "farts" in the plural—
unseemly, malodorous, undesirable, yet recurring outbursts from the bottom,
pun intended, of Taiwan's humanity. At a minimum, *laobing* are symptomatic
of Taiwan's digestive problems, a case of constipation, so to speak, after having
consumed snatched soldiers and extracted their sweet youth. More broadly,
laobing stand as a clue to the endemic malaise of the ghost island's traumatic
history and culture.

Given the fact that *laobing* live on largely through *waishengren* writers
and artists, i.e., children of "refugees with guns," my opening's "project[ing]
their collective trauma and sin onto the scapegoat" ought to be revised as
"posttrauma and original sin." After all, few of these chroniclers of *laobing*
have experienced the cross-strait flight themselves, nor were they grown up
enough to enact Nationalist discriminatory policies to personally,
systematically sin against the Taiwanese population, schoolyard bullies
excepted. Yet faced with the aging of the first-generation mainlanders, the
dissipation of *juancun*, and the erosion of other Nationalist icons, they
reconstruct the past through a race to the bottom, as it were. The abominable
laobing existence signals *waishengren*'s elegy for themselves, mourning the
demise yet, paradoxically, sounding like the mea culpa for past sins, or
transgressions against the deceased as well as the living, against mainlanders as
well as Taiwanese. Although narrated oftentimes from the *laobing* perspective
and set in their lives, these *laobing* stories have less to do with *laobing*
memory than with second-generation *waishengren* writers themselves, less to do with *laobing*
memory than with *waishengren*'s perversion of postmemory, as Marianne
Hirsch defines it.⁵

This dynamic is antithetical to the prototype of trauma studies—Holocaust
narratives. Hirsch maintains in *Family Frames* (1997) that "Postmemory is
distinguished from memory by generational distance, and from history by deep
personal connection" (22). Postmemory is deemed:

⁵ What Marianne Hirsch terms postmemory is variously named "'absent memory (Ellen Fine), 'inherited
memory,' 'belated memory,' 'prosthetic memory' (Celia Lury, Alison Landsberg), 'mémoire trouvée'
(Henri Raczymow), 'mémoire des cendres' (Nadine Fresco, 'vicarious witnessing' (Froma Zeitlin),
'received history' (James Young), 'haunting legacy' (Gabriele Schwab)" (*Generation 3*).

a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. (22)

Hirsch concludes on a lyrical note: “[Postmemory] is as full and as empty, certainly as constructed, as memory itself” (22). Indeed, memory floods the mind’s eye, even fills one’s eyes with tears, when it has no corporeal existence other than a surge of synaptic, electromagnetic signals, fleeting and intangible.

Squarely taking on the subject of the Holocaust in *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012), Hirsch reiterates the heft of Holocaust family lore that has been weighing on her since 1997, so much so that she pronounces: “the magnitude of my parents’ recollections and the ways in which I felt crowded out by them” (4). Opposite to Hirsch’s felt inadequacy, *laobing* are largely “bumped off” in narratives purportedly dedicated to them; they are replaced by *waishengren* writers’ preoccupation with the here and now. Literally, *laobing* denotes “old soldiers,” where veterans and bachelors are rolled into one, without family or children. No *waishengren* writer claims Hirschean family lineage, or bloodline, to *laobing*; none of them professes an “evacuat[ing]” of his or her creative self by *laobing* memory. The inextricability of Hirsch’s postmemory and her Holocaust survivor parents’ memory does not disturb *waishengren*, who are at liberty to project fallacies onto *laobing*. Take, for instance, Taiwan’s celebrity writer Long Yingtai (龍應台).

Long served as Taipei’s Director of Culture from 1999 to 2003 under Mayor Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), and subsequently as Taiwan’s Minister of Culture from 2012 to 2014 under President Ma Ying-jeou. In 2009, during the lull of her two government tenures, Long published *Dajiang Dahai 1949* (《大江大海 1949》), or *Big River, Big Sea—Untold Stories of 1949*, (2009) in *The Commonwealth Magazine* (《天下雜誌》). The Afterword pays tribute to Professor Kong Liangling, “who created an unprecedented ‘Distinguished Humanities Scholar’ Chair” at the University of Hong Kong, allowing Long “a yearlong retreat devoted solely to writing,” apparently this book (Long 281).

Long likens Kong's academic maneuvering in Hong Kong to the Sanskrit-Buddhist blessing: *jiachi* (加持 *adhiṣṭhāna* or blessing). Thus blessed by political figures in Taiwan as well as academic figures in Hong Kong, Long endows us with a loose, messy collage of interviews, reminiscences, historical facts, imaginary reconstructions, and personal reveries in the name of the Nationalist exodus from China to Taiwan in 1949. Long's personal, narcissistic proclivity is sprung on the reader right from the outset when an unidentified photograph of a possibly mixed-race young man graces the epigraph, who turns out to be Philip, Long's son educated in Germany. The book thus opens with Philip's interview of Long, who was born in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, in 1952, an overture that is tangentially related to the exodus of 1949 and a preview of Long's power of association spanning not just "Big River Big Sea" in the title but also, far more expansively, continents, histories, and whatnot. This metanarrative of interviews within interviews sets the stage for the palimpsests of the book. The epigraph of sorts identifies the *waishengren* as "losers" in China's Civil War, concluding with "I, proud of being the next generation of 'losers.'"

Although Long's very first interviewee, Guan Guan (管管), a Taiwanese modernist poet, is a typical *laobing*, one of the snatched soldiers "kidnapped" by the Nationalists (Long 108), Long proceeds to focus on an array of Taiwan's Who's Who, renowned figures of politicians, entrepreneurs, scientists, and military generals, all from the upper crust of society in both China and Taiwan, far removed from "snatched soldiers" who are the "bottom feeders." For example, Guan Guan's interview is immediately followed by that of Ya Hsien (痲弦), an even more celebrated modernist poet, but a *liuwang xuesheng*, or refugee students who fled the Japanese and the Communists in groups constituted by the school principal, teachers, and schoolmates. Both poets cry during the interviews at the point of their departure from home (52, 65), comforted by Long, an affective reaching out.

But even Guan Guan himself stands as a counterexample to *laobing* desolation, for he has developed into a wordsmith and climbed up the social ladder. By featuring Guan Guan as a premier "model *laobing*," de facto the only case of *laobing*, Long borders on repudiating *laobing* en masse who have failed to, as Americans love to boast, "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps," as though they had never exploited Native Americans, Black slaves, Chinese coolies, and Hispanic labor. Long's choice of Guan Guan and only Guan Guan

rings of the nomenclature of Asian “model minority” deployed by mainstream white people in the US to castigate, underhandedly, Blacks, Latinx, and Native Americans. If Long intends a tribute to the refugee generation in *Big River, Big Sea*, the bottom rung of the exodus is “drowned out,” or, as Hirsch puts it, “crowded out.”

Long branches into a remapping of Taipei via China’s geography, since most urban streets are indexed and coordinated with China’s provinces and cities in four directions. A brilliant touch, Long, however, chooses to flaneur across not only the coalesced maps of Taipei’s city streets and China’s cities, but also numerous armed conflicts, ranging as far as Germany during World War II, courtesy of Philip’s German ancestry. Superficial skimming of collective memory and warfare signals a flight of fancy away from the cross-strait exodus of 1949, a flight long presaged by Long’s overture with Philip. Long’s vast dabbling closes in the last one hundred pages or so on postwar resettlement of the Japanese, the Nationalist troops, and of the aborigines drafted by the Japanese. Rather than her titular 1949, “circa 1949” befits her rambling across wartime Leningrad, postwar Germany, Southeast Asia, Japan, China, the US, and Taiwan.

Long is not the only *waishengren* writer who proffers counterexamples to *laobing* degeneration into the three p-s. *Laobing* are downright virile, if not the alpha males and ladies’ men, in Zhang Fang (張放), Ma Xiu (馬修), and, to a lesser extent, the film *Lao Mo De Di Er Ge Chuntien* (《老莫的第二個春天》 *Lao Mo’s Second Spring*, 1984). Despite their shared theme of *laobing* protagonists as manhood incarnate, Zhang and Ma are in fact diametrically opposed writers. Born in 1932 in Shandong and part of Taiwan’s Nationalist literary establishment, Zhang Fang in *Zhangchao Shi* (《漲潮時》 *When the Tide Rises*, 2001) pens a counternarrative to the second-generation mainland authors, mostly born and raised in Taiwan. Instead of an aging, disenfranchised *laobing*, the protagonist Zhao Tiejuan (Zhao Iron Origin) epitomizes masculinity, giving tremendous sexual pleasure to his indigenous wife twenty years his junior as well as a lovelorn widow across the street, not to mention a teenage sweetheart in Shandong.

Zhao makes a living by selling *jiaozi* (dumpling) and other foodstuffs along the highway in Eastern Taiwan. His wife sees Zhao as both her “husband and father” (Zhang Fang 17). The title suggests the high tide as though Zhao climaxes in midlife or Zhao’s sexual partners invariably achieve multiple

orgasms, courtesy of his sexual prowess. Postcoitally, Zhao is commended by the widow as suitable for “Taipei’s midnight cowboy or Ximen Qing in *Jinpingmei*” (63). *Jinpinmei* 《金瓶梅》, also translated as *The Plum in the Gold Vase*, is a graphic, even pornographic, novel in 1610. Ximen embodies, of course, the quintessential lecher in China, who is turbocharged by a legendary surgical intervention of grafting strips of a dog penis onto his male member. Parallel to Zhao Tiejuan, Zhang Fang develops a parallel plot where another *laobing* singer Gao Shu, Zhao’s acquaintance, is wooed by a daughter-like singer, whose father is two years younger than Gao Shu. A reiteration of the Electra complex rampant in *laobing* fantasies, Gao winds up marrying a local widow from the Pescadores. A happy ending ensues when the Zhao and Gao families, along with lovers, converge on the Pescadores Islands, forming a ménage à quatre, or even larger. Financial prosperity hinges on sexual prowess across the land mass of China and the islands of Taiwan and the Pescadores.

According to the “Author’s Note” to *Zhongshan Bei Lu Pintie 1964* (《中山北路拼貼 1964》 *Collage along Zhongshan North Road 1964*, 2002), Ma Xiu was born in 1964, over three decades after Zhang Fang. Ma describes himself as “an unemployed drifter, graduated from Shilin Elementary School [in Taipei], with no other commencement ceremony” in his life. “Having languished in the city, he strolls along the streets still at the age of thirty-eight” (Ma Xiu 11), the exact age when he published his novel in 2002. The author’s proximity of age to the saxophone-playing, forty-two-year old protagonist Lao Shu encourages a reading of Lao Shu as the author’s alter ego, a masturbatory self-transference onto someone adored by three females young enough to be his daughters: twenty-four-year-old Georgie, daughter to the “fallen royalty” of mainland military general, a Zhongshan North Road bar singer entertaining Vietnam War American GIs on R&R; nineteen-year-old Yuanyuan, a first-year economics student at Taiwan’s premier university, daughter to a Taiwanese city councilman and power broker; and Xiao Lian, a runaway from southern Taiwan’s *juancun*. All three young women find in the middle-aged saxophone player a dependable lover. While Georgie and Lao Shu indulge themselves in passionate sex to the tune of live performance by the Glenn Miller Band at Taipei’s Zhongshan Hall, Yuanyuan peeps from outside the bar window. The voyeur is as much Yuanyuan as it is the reader. Thus inspired by the thrill of a Peeping Tom, Yuanyuan prevails upon Lao Shu to accompany her to the Children’s Amusement Park. Riding the merry-go-round hobby horse,

Yuanyuan “leans her whole youthful body into his aging, slouched back” (87). This pedophilic fantasy blossoms in Yuanyuan’s handjob in public: “He senses her hand reaching into his suit pants pocket, gentling stroking. He is surprised and embarrassed. His whole body thrills to it, and not just the male member” (88). Ma Xiu’s idealized masculinity Lao Shu is beloved by young women of both mainlander and Taiwanese descent, notwithstanding the age difference, the social class divide, and his physical handicap—a limp from having the tendon of his left leg severed during the Kinmen (Quemoy) Islands heavy shelling in the August 23, 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis (37). Impregnated by her sugar daddy, Xiao Lian also seeks Lao Shu’s help in an illegal abortion, with Lao Shu signing as her husband at the underground clinic.

Narratologically, Ma Xiu switches amongst the three females as if they were like-minded concubines serving their benevolent master Lao Shu. His lower social class stems from his veteran, *laobing* background. Having grown up in Harbin, China, he joined the Communist Party’s People’s Liberation Army before switching to the Nationalist Army, retiring only after the 1958 shelling. Such nostalgia waxing over the past in China of the 1930s and 1940s and on Zhongshan North Road in Taipei in 1964 are filaments of imagination from an author born in 1964. Ma Xiu graces his novel with occasional reflections of Taiwan’s multilingual universe when Georgie visits her elementary school classmate’s grocery stand in Shilin, and across the bar counter between the Mandarin-speaking Georgie and the bilingual Yuanyuan.

February 28 Incident in 1947 and the ensuing White Terror set the stage for the latter half of the novel when Yuanyuan and Georgie reminisce their childhood growing up on different sides of the White Terror.⁶ In addition to switching among the two women, the latter half does so against the backdrop of February 28, complemented by Lao Shu’s wartime experience with the two rivaling armies. More gratuitous sex between Lao Shu and the virgin Yuanyuan enlivens the latter half on political struggles. This novel was a finalist of the fourth Crown Popular Novel competition in 2002, a contest supposedly based on reader votes. Taiwan’s long-standing mass-market publisher Crown (皇冠) specializes in such soft porn to appeal to the general readership under the Nationalist puritanical, paternalistic apparatus, with a nod to political correctness now that the mainlander-majority Nationalist government had been replaced by the Hoklo-majority Democratic Progressive Party. Crown’s novels,

⁶ For Taiwan’s White Terror, see Sylvia Li-chun Lin’s *Representing Atrocity in Taiwan* (2007).

be it erstwhile Qiong Yao's (瓊瑤) self-indulgent romances or Ma Xiu's twenty-first century soft porn in the name of nostalgia, serve as a release valve for sexual repression and political discontent. That Ma Xiu's protagonist happens to be a *laobing* bespeaks the author's and his reader's identification with this relic of history fast disappearing in their midst.

Whereas Long Ying-tai, Zhang Fang, and Ma Xiu idolize *laobing*, the far more prevalent approach among *waishengren* writers appears to distance themselves while lamenting *laobing* as objects of pity, even of abomination in extreme cases. Liu Daren's (劉大任) *Fuyou Qunluo* (《浮游群落》 *Plankton Tribe*, 1990) crystalizes the second-generation's duality. Set around 1965, the novel revolves around a group of college bohemians devoted to modernism, editing journals, and critiquing politics. The opening is ominous as a Taiwanese intellectual is arrested. Idealistic and rebellious, the novel concludes tragically as the protagonist Xiao Tao falls out of love and studies abroad, some native Marxist rebels are betrayed and arrested during the White Terror, and some others flourish in combining modern Westernization with commercial enterprise. Xiao Tao's rebellion against his stern mainland Chinese father represents the generational divide, deepened by the Taiwan Strait wedged between the China-born, first-generation *waishengren* and the Taiwan-born second-generation. A case in point: Xiao Tao "relinquishes them [his parents]. Their entire generation, the cautious, discreet generation. He has folded them into history, a failure, inglorious, a history of flight with neither beginning nor end" (Liu 127). Ironically, Liu Daren revisits his parents' generation in *Plankton Tribe*, discursively resurrecting them even as his protagonist consigns them to the dustbin of history.

II. *Laobing* as Pedophiles

Seminal to *laobing* (mis)representations, Zhu Tianxin's (朱天心) autobiographical essay "Xiang Wo Juancun De Xiongdi Men" (〈想我眷村的兄弟們〉 "Thinking of My *Juancun* Brothers," 1992) unfolds in a stop-and-go fashion for twenty-three pages, three of which are devoted to Lao X (老 X, Old X, so named with an English letter in the Chinese original), a veteran from the Nationalist Army and an alleged pedophile. Guilty until proven innocent, Zhu condemns these *laobing* codenamed Old X with anecdotal evidence. Undoubtedly, some of these old soldiers were unscrupulous, even malevolent;

bad apples exist in every corner of society. Yet to stigmatize all old soldiers in such a broad stroke betrays psychological scapegoating, which exorcizes Zhu's and the second-generation *waishengren*'s own fear, guilt, and shame. The naming of "Old X" joins the negativity of aging with the placeholder "X" for the unknown, thus for every single *laobing*. Zhu's naming is "name-calling": *Laobing* from China, languishing amongst the Taiwanese population, are xenophobically Othered, and Anglicized in such a way that it denotes mystery in English, doubly so for non-English speakers.

Zhu imagines that on the wedding night of an imaginary *juancun* woman, on the verge of conjugal intimacy, she would suddenly recall not only her childhood crush Brother Bao in "her father's military undershirt" but also Lao X from her childhood *juancun* (76). One impending watershed moment that turns a young woman into a married woman triggers a long-buried traumatic memory of sexual knowledge involving two father figures, especially the latter: the "bad" *laobing*-father. Zhu nicknames this woman: "Let's call her Xiao Ling," whose childhood shame emerged when several daredevil *juancun* boys, in Zhu's narration, peeked from Lao X's window:

They usually see Lao X and Xiao Ling doing strange things. Either he strips or he strips off Xiao Ling's clothes and pants. Because of impotence or caution, these Lao X-s won't go so far as to make Xiao Ling bleed or to be found out by the mother at the evening bath . . . While listening to the story or playing Chinese chess, [these boys] would be dazed, staring at Lao X's crotch, recalling his big cock. Without passing any judgment, they just feel: Fuck! What a King of the Beasts! (78).

Naming the molester "Lao" (老 Old) and the molested "Xiao" (小 Little) sets the stage for pedophilia. Yet self-contradiction remains: Lao X's alleged impotence and colossal penis, which stems from fetishizing *laobing* as an ambivalent phallic symbol that is there and not there, that is larger-than-life and symbolically castrated. Zhu's essay, alas, becomes one of the two sources—more anecdotal than factual, more literary than historical—for the historian Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang to damn all old soldiers as sexual predators: "Many of the young, the mentally handicapped, and the impoverished became targets of the old soldiers' sexual advances and molestation" (246). Such a

monumental historic project on the forgotten genesis of mainlanders in Taiwan, such slapdash reliance on Zhu's hearsay, such cavalier conviction of *laobing* en masse!

Zhu's "Thinking of My *Juancun* Brothers" in 1992 is a thinly veiled revision of two characters in an otherwise identical chapter title of eight characters in Ku Ling's (苦苓) *Waisheng Guxiang* (《外省故鄉》 *Foreign Province Hometown*, 1988). Zhu's "Brothers," (弟兄 *Dixiong*), reverses the word order of Ku Ling's "Xiongdì" (兄弟), while preserving the meaning. Zhu's unacknowledged borrowing tantamount to plagiarism is comparable to, to use an analogy in English, a shortening of Ku Ling's "Brothers" to "Bros" and calls the title her own. Akin to the rebelliousness of Liu Daren and other *waishengren* writings, Ku Ling's characters also manifest the urge to "get out" of mainlanders' *juancun*.⁷ In utter loneliness, the narrator of Ku Ling's autobiographical "Thinking of My *Juancun* Brothers" confesses: "I stare at the tiny source of light [in the skylight], my heart filled with the impulse to break out of this little house." Under duress, a young girl Maotou also vociferates: "I only want to leave home, the farther the better!" (Zhu 178). As the narrator moves away, his "brothers" and "sisters" see him off. Yet the symbiosis of leaving and returning haunts the narrator: "They are probably like me, wishing to get out of that place as early as possible. But so many years after having left, my urge to return grows stronger. I'd very much like to go back to see our village" (Zhu 190). *Waishengren* wish to return precisely because there is nowhere to return to; what has been lost remains lost forever.

Ku Ling's Preface, "Ancestral Origin," demonstrates part of the reason behind his collection. A child of a Mandarin-speaking father and a Hakka-speaking mother, Ku Ling grows up polylingual, mastering Mandarin, Taiwanese, and Hakka, an admirable achievement in and of itself. Growing up among these dominant tongues in Taiwan gives him a unique perspective on the notion of ancestral origin, one closely tied to one's language(s). In the Preface, Ku Ling offers a fleeting glimpse of sexual molestation perpetrated by a retired *laobing* working at the government unit where Ku Ling's father served. The *laobing* "often offered her [Ku Ling's precocious classmate] money to molest her" (Ku 12). For that reason, the young Ku Ling was tasked to escort the female student back home. How to comfort these nameless victims? How

⁷ See Sheng-mei Ma's "Get Out of the Village" not only for the contradiction of "get out" versus "get back in" but also for the double entendre of "departing" and "learning/acquiring from."

to atone for our sins? A sense of futility and resignation may have contributed to rounding up the usual suspects of *laobing* pedophiles in Zhu Tianxin and Ku Ling. Ku Ling's short story "Zhang Dragon Zhao Tiger" (〈張龍趙虎〉) succinctly chronicles how the two comrades from China's anti-Japanese and Civil War to the present share the bride price as well as the marital bliss with a fifteen- or sixteen-year-old mentally unstable girl. The two protagonists' names—Zhang Dragon and Zhao Tiger—are so random that they have served as placeholders for actual names and, in this case, for everyman, i.e., every old soldier.

Beyond hints of pedophilia, Ku Ling gives other deviant images of *laobing*, such as outlaw criminals bordering on the heroic swordsman in wuxia fiction and film, thus harking back to Zhang Fang and Ma Xiu's alpha males and dialectical opposites to *laobing* representations. The name of the title character in Ku Ling's "Uncle Ke Sili" (柯思理伯伯) anagrams the word order of Li Shike (李師科), an old soldier who committed the first armed bank robbery in Taiwan's history.⁸ Beyond northern China, the hissing sound of "si" and the retroflex "shi" are not as sharply differentiated anyway as they are for the Beijingers. After having purchased a color TV, the bank robber Li Shike entrusted a fellow veteran with the remainder of the money to help with the education of the veteran's child. Li was turned in to the police, put on trial, sentenced to death on May 21, 1982, and executed five days later. The lightning speed with which the case was closed sought to erase the miscarriage of justice of the earlier coercion of another suspect as the bank robber, who, according to the police, jumped to his death on May 7, 1982.

The ambiguous distancing from and identifying with *laobing* surfaces in the relationship of Uncle Ke Sili and Ku Ling's narrator, the fellow veteran's teenage son. The robber was "thin and slight, his size just like mine" on the TV footage, the adolescent recalls (Ku 39). The adolescent is the one who, in the presence of Uncle Ke earlier, scoffs at three young robbers of a jewelry store. The teen boasts that he would rather rob a bank, which would be the first of its kind like acing a "first choice school" in Taiwan's annual college entrance exam. That Uncle Ke actually did it and stashed the cash with the teenager's father suggests that Ke did it in a peaked cap and mask to prevent the teenager from such notoriety. The magic in switching Li Shike into Ke Sili reprises Zhu's

⁸ See Chuang Wen Fu's "Exploring the Subject of Old Soldiers in the Book *Wai-shen-gu-shan* [sic] Written by Ku-lin."

wordplay on her titular “Dixiong,” or “Brothers.” Both *waishengren* writers breathe life into dead or dying organism of the mainlander identity. *waishengren*’s vanishing, albeit aesthetically resuscitated in short stories and essays, seems all but certain, given that they are collapsed into the bottom feeders, *laobing*. Symptomatic of *waishengren*’s vacillation, the teen narrator’s affinity to Uncle Ke morphs into the father-son hostility in another of Ku Ling’s story, “Father and Son” (〈父與子〉) which minces no words in curses lobbed across the generational chasm: The father calls the son “Rebel! Subversive! Damn!”, which is countered by the son’s “Rigid! Backward! Idiotic loyalty!” (72).

III. *Laobing* as Perverts

The shock of *laobing* pedophiles culminates long-standing representations of *laobing* as perverts. These nightmarish figures double, uncannily, as having initiated *waishengren* writers’ dreamscape of storytelling. The duality goes back a long way to Taiwan’s modernist pioneer Bai Xianyong (白先勇), whose “Houji” (〈後記〉 “Afterword”) to *Jimo De Shiqi Sui* (《寂寞的十七歲》 *Lonely Seventeen*, 1976) offers a cameo of Lao Yang.⁹ That this *laobing* graces the Afterword rather than the Preface circles back to the fetish of *laobing*: the alpha fallen to the omega, one that continues to haunt the alpha. The army cook Lao Yang used to serve Bai’s eminent father Bai Chongxi (白崇禧), the military general who presided over China’s southwestern theater of war. Lao Yang became the family cook at the Bai estate in Taiwan, now that Bai Chongxi was relieved of his command after having retreated to the island. From their hometown Guilin, China, Bai’s father must have retained Lao Yang’s service in part because of ancestral ties. Lao Yang is hailed by Bai Xianyong as “the teacher who initiated me” through his stories of the Tang dynasty folk heroes and heroines, launching Bai into a career of imaginative storytelling (Bai 329). This tribute resembles Zhu Tianxin’s Lao X, elevated as *juancun* children’s “initiating master” with endless tales of the “Extermination War against the Communists, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Outlaws of the Marsh*, or countryside ghost and monster stories” (Bai 77).

⁹ “Bai Xianyong” is the English translation in pinyin of 白先勇, which is rendered as Pai Hsien-Yung in the Wade-Giles Romanization.

Although soon forgotten in the rise of such a precocious novelist as Bai Xianyong immersed as much in Chinese classics as in Western modernism, this *laobing* of a cook entertained the seven-year-old Bai bedridden with tuberculosis with stories of the Tang dynasty. In his “greasy, coal-dusted military cotton coat, with dirty fingernails,” Lao Yang regaled the young master with “Eastern Expeditions [to Korea] of Xue Rengui” and “Western Expeditions” of Fan Lihua (330). Like the mother’s womb, Lao Yang played the role of a progenitor of Bai’s imaginative life, only to receive a nod that is too little too late. Lao Yang is *laobing* writ small in Bai Xianyong, the pioneer of second-generation mainland Taiwanese writers. Bai’s belated, minimalist tribute to Lao Yang echoes Zhu Tianxin crediting *laobing* in general for the power of storytelling in “Thinking of my *Juancun* Brothers.” The irony lies in the fact that although *laobing* appear to tell stories to the child Bai and Zhu’s *juancun* brothers, it is the other way around: Bai and Zhu are telling stories about *laobing*. Given that the stories are far from complimentary, with the odious ring of stereotypical Othering and scapegoating, the telling amounts to telling on them.

In Bai’s magnum opus *Wandering in the Garden, Waking from a Dream* (1971), Lao Yang-esque Wang Xiong has already charted the lowest hell into which *laobing* characters are prone to fall. Despite its original Chinese title *Taipei People*, Bai’s collection of short stories focuses on the mainlanders stranded between nostalgia for China and their youth, on the one hand, and, on the other, aging and decay in Taipei. From the home-soil perspective, Bai’s characters are non-Taipei people, their hearts lying elsewhere, their bodies poisoned cups of memory and melancholia. Wang Xiong in “A Sea of Bloodred Azaleas,” translated by Bai Xianyong and Patia Yasin, embodies not only *laobing* but spans all three p-s under discussion, an early prototype of the controversial representations by the second-generation, as Bai was born in 1937, fled to Hong Kong in 1948, and then the family settled in Taiwan. Wang Xiong is a forty-year-old family servant obsessed with his six-year-old young master, who bears resemblance to his spoiled child bride back in China. Wang Xiong was “originally . . . a peasant boy from the Hunan countryside . . . trotting off to town to sell the two baskets of grains on his carrying pole; the minute he stepped outside his village he was taken away” (Pai 69-70). This snatched soldier winds up serving the narrator’s relatives in Taipei. Owing to the class difference, this obsession has never had the opportunity to fester into

pedophilia, for the willful young master mocks and dismisses him in English, which Wang could not possibly understand: “*You are a dog!*” (Pai 73). The young master then switches to Chinese, which Wang does understand: “He looks like a big gorilla!”, a put-down resonating with his namesake Xiong for “bear” (Pai 73). Such slights turn Wang Xiong into a morose pervert of sorts, silently watering “bloodred azaleas” that used to be the young master’s favorite.

In the wake of the family maid taking up the taunt: “Big Gorilla—Big Gorilla—” (Pai 75), Wang assaults her, leaving her unconscious, “her skirt ripped to shreds, naked to the waist, her breasts covered with bruises and scratches, a ring of finger-marks around her neck,” as though mauled by a beast (Pai 76). After Wang Xiong’s bloated, fish-nibbled body is retrieved from the Keelong seashore, the young master’s mother believes “every night . . . someone water[s] the garden,” resulting in azaleas “exploding in riotous bloom as if a chestful of fresh blood suddenly had shot forth from an unstanachable wound and sprayed the whole garden, leaving marks and stains everywhere, bloodred” (Pai 77). The representation of Wang Xiong spans the fall of a masochistic, pseudo-pedophilic slave into a perverted beast savaging a maid and finally into a ghost watering azaleas that his beloved used to love. Reminiscent of Zhu Tianxin’s and Ku Ling’s sleights of hand over their essay and short story titles, Bai’s aesthetic ending sublimates *laobing*’s spilled blood into beauty, a precursor to problematic aesthetics of violent psychosis in Hao Yuxiang’s (郝譽翔) *Nilü* (《逆旅》 *Travel in Reverse*, 2010).

Travel in Reverse is set in a dysfunctional family with a mainlander father who is irresponsible and sexually promiscuous, fraternizing with different women at the expense of his own family. The three p-s incontrovertibly rubs off on Hao’s father figure. Hao’s “Afterword” concludes with her indebtedness to “my father and mother. All because of them, I am able to read the big book of life” (190). Nonetheless, this acknowledgement jars with the thinly veiled autobiographical fiction beset by a dead-beat dad, caring little for the young daughters he left behind as he flirted with his hospital staff and marrying various mainland wives, reminiscent of Antonia Chao’s “Medicinal Liquor Uncles.” More ironically, the book opens with the author accompanying her father in the return to his ancestral home in Shandong after half a century of separation. Her father becomes helpless and disoriented, to be babied by the daughter. In keeping with his lifelong shirking of responsibility, the father takes off for a nearby city, abandoning the author to a family of strangers. Part of *waishengren*

writers' pathologizing of *laobing*-style characters, Hao rebels against the father figure and the mainland heritage, while loving them obsessively. Hao's ambivalence is evidenced by Chen Jianzhong's commentary appended to the final pages of *Travel in Reverse*, as though Hao wishes the critic to reveal what she could not bring herself to confess. Chen dubs the protagonist's psychological complex "a daughter passing judgment on her father and her Electra obsession" (Hao 192).

The author recalls her junior high school trauma of witnessing an exhibitionist's "smooth black testicles, weighed down, on the verge of breaking and dropping" (Hao 47). The School Discipline Director reprimanded the class, all of whom clamored to peek at the exhibitionist, so much so that the schoolgirls continued to "immerse themselves in the scene of the fattened sausage, the joy of the sizzling meat lingering still as they smack their lips" (47). The narrator's reverie is externalized in her classmates at large, a fig leaf for the incestuous metaphor of oral sex. Hao's first-person narrative voice simultaneously pushes off and highlights the Electra complex: "I was the only one who felt ashamed because this man didn't look like my father at all. But what led me to such an absurd notion?" (47-48). Like the *laobing* fetish, Hao's father figure overlaps with an exhibitionist bearing scant physical resemblance to the father yet evoking him nonetheless. The sighting of the patriarchal testicles also comes dismembered from the penis, yet the "sausage" in absentia is viscerally savored in the smacking and licking of lips. Paradoxically, the phallic father is eaten, a castration that sires the father in girlish fantasies. In primitive fantasies of *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Sigmund Freud theorizes that the cannibalizing of the father by usurping sons allows the sons to acquire the patriarchal power. Hao enacts a female, Electra version of uniting with the father orally, incestuously.

Such convoluted neurosis parallels the narrator's memory of her father mistaking a girl at a stationery store to be herself, although "I don't wear glasses, nor have any hair braid" (Hao 48). Her father's incredulous mistake is a projection of the daughter's own subconscious desire to cease being herself in order to bypass the incest taboo. The forbidding psychosis climaxes in "He is no longer my father. He is more like a son whom I gave birth and raised." Eventually, the daughter character's abortion realizes the incestuous drive. The bald doctor performing the abortion comes to montage with her father:

I climb up from the operating table to caress my father's hair. His hair is as soft and golden as a baby. Out of my vagina flows pearly green blood. He stretches his tongue to lick it. The soft tongue gently strokes my vulva back and forth (169).

The symbolic fetus secreted within “pearly green blood” is her morally bound self, making way for the desired consummation with the father. That the fetus is invisible reprises the exhibitionist's missing penis that should have fronted his “smooth black testicles.” In her idiosyncratic style, Hao exemplifies how the second-generation's portrayals of the first-generation have much more to do with the children themselves than with the parents.

IV. *Laobing* as Phantoms

The physical presence of *laobing* as pedophiles and/or perverts in literature of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century enjoys a digital and cinematic afterlife, virtual and phantom-like, in Taiwan's video game *Detention* (《返校》) launched in 2017 and the subsequent eponymous film in 2019. The franchise of *Detention* does not cancel out literary representations of *laobing* as phantoms in Zhang Dachun's (張大春) “Giang Chun Pai” (〈將軍碑〉 “The General's Gravestone”), Zhen Xin's (振鑫) *Laobing* (《老兵》 *Old Soldier*), and other writings. Zhang Dachun's general suffers from not only dementia in his last days, but his spirit wanders the land and advises what to carve on his gravestone, apparently falling on the living's deaf ear. Zhen Xin's web story is set at one of Taiwan's sea defense outposts, where the master sergeant Old Deng (老鄧) is an old soldier who fought the Communists before retreating to Taiwan. To survive on the battlefield, Old Deng and his comrades resorted to cannibalizing enemies' corpses. This transgression against fundamental human taboos has forever marked Old Deng as a grotesque branded by the likeness of disfigured faces on his back. “On his back is a large uneven pustule of a deep brown color. It looks revolting, the pustule as though moving, squirming. Upon a closer look, it resembles several twisted faces” (Zhen). While the military doctor calls it “cadaver poison” for those who have consumed human flesh, Old Deng believes that it is but “human face tumor. . . cackling whenever I can't bear the pain” (Zhen). Owing to his evil past and mark, Old Deng is assigned to the outpost to fend off ghosts, ranging from the “water ghosts” of the

Communist frogmen in night raids, to anti-Japanese resistance fighters' souls, and to multiplying specters with unknown origins.

Outstripping thousands of words, however, is a single image from the film *Detention*. Meet Uncle Gao in Figure 1, the *laobing* and high school janitor with one eye gouged out and front teeth pulled by the White Terror police interrogators for his alleged treason and communist sabotage in sharing the school storeroom keys with a reading group in its secret, prohibited night gatherings. Out of a film unfolding in a female ghost's repetition compulsion fraught with trite conceits of the horror genre, only one character shocks and repels viewers via frontal facial mutilation. No other character—neither the student protagonist-cum-female ghost Fang, nor her love interest Teacher Zhang, nor Teacher Yin in the love triangle, nor any member of the reading group—countenances such distortion, from which viewers instinctively recoil. Before turning around for public viewing in Figure 1, Uncle Gao, his back to the camera, drinks and throws dice in a big rice or noodle bowl, mumbling to himself. Sins such as alcohol and gamble are endemic among the have-nots in an attempt to anesthetize the pain of living and to dream of striking it rich. In a Shandong accent sprinkled with the constant refrain of “*An*” (俺) for “I,” Uncle Gao grumbles under his breath that he had fought with the troops in China and loves the [Nationalist] Party, only to be relegated to the abjection of janitorial duties, trading access to the storeroom for a few cigarettes. The reference to cigarettes is not accidental, since the Nationalist policemen's roughing up of an illegal cigarette vender at Taipei's railway station on February 28, 1947 caused the chain reaction of the White Terror.



Figure 1: The *laobing* janitor Uncle Gao's facial disfigurement in the horror film *Detention*. Screenshot capture by the author.

For this alleged crime, viewers witness in the next shot that Gao's eye was hollowed out, half his face in a bloody pulp, and several front teeth extracted. The horror is foreshadowed by a close-up of the bowl containing not dice, but bloody teeth. As though cloned from *The Lord of the Rings*' Treebeard, a mammoth Tree Man in the high school teacher-officer Bai's military uniform and cap would soon strangle Gao to death.¹⁰ Whereas members of the reading group would all be suspected of communist sabotage, arrested and tortured in prison, bloodied and waterboarded, none of them manifests Gao's frontal defacement. Younger characters, students and teachers alike, are afforded cinematic decency, some blood stains and bruises notwithstanding. By contrast, stomach-churning, nauseating abomination is reserved for the most unbecoming character from the lowest rung of the society: *laobing*.

Whereas film reviews and scholarly analyses converge upon the White Terror, encapsulated in the cold, violent teacher-officer Bai, whose surname means "White," no attention has been paid to Uncle Gao, a marginal character befitting *laobing* as the fetish, flashing just once for the shock value, doomed to recede into oblivion. Plenty of ink has been spilled over the teacher-officer Bai instead, who mutates into the looming Tree Man. In the video game, this monstrosity used to be in a Taiwanese peasant's tunic and high-water pants with a conical hat.¹¹ In contrast to the local, traditional costume of the specter, the face of the video game's teacher-officer Bai resembles, according to Chia-rong Wu in "Spectralizing the White Terror," the former president Ma Ying-jeou (81).

Detention's Chinese title, *Fanxiao* (《返校》), alludes to the custom of designated dates during the summer vacation whereby students report back to school for check-up of their summer homework and for school grounds cleaning. However, *fan* puns with subversion or insurrection against the school, which is the synecdoche of the Nationalist Taiwan. The Chinese title appeals to young video game players more attuned to a student life. Yet would high school students be so fixated on the banned books of Tagore and Turgenev that they engage in underground meetings to discuss *Fathers and Sons* and the like?

¹⁰ For an explanation of the system of teacher-officers in Taiwan's educational system, see Sheng-mei Ma's "Forgotten Taiwanese Veteran's Memory of Compulsory Service."

¹¹ Chia-rong Wu in "Spectralizing the White Terror" describes this monster as "the long-haired Lantern Specter (*guichai* 鬼差) that wears a Tang suit and a bamboo hat with a lantern in his hand" (77). Evidently, the film transposes a native ghost in video games into a symbol of Nationalist teacher-officer. Wu calls the school storeroom in which the reading group holds secret meetings a "bunker" (80).

Would not students in puberty be more drawn to the other sex than to an Indian and a Russian writer? On the other hand, would not Marxist treatises be more pertinent to the implied subversiveness? To place the reading group in universities seems more credible, which may put off young consumers. The White Terror, the martial law era, the first-generation *waishengren*, including my late parents, and, in particular, *laobing* are all fading memories to Taiwan's youth, who may dismiss them as a bad dream. Second-generation *waishengren* writers have failed to preemptively preserve *laobing* as round, three-dimensional, and evolving individual characters with their own agency. Instead, *waishengren* writers project onto the most disenfranchised in their midst, *laobing*, their own sense of marginalization and precarity in Taiwan's political and cultural life. Over time, *laobing* imagery has petrified into the triptych of pedophiles, perverts, and phantoms on the altar of Taiwan's collective unconscious.

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