

BEYOND WAR

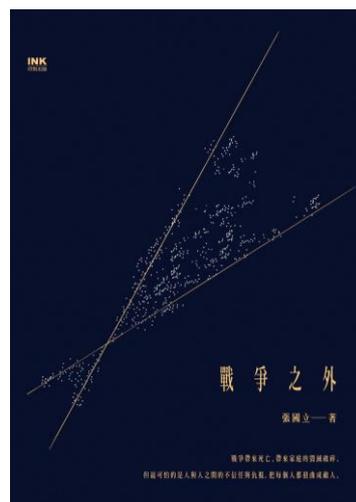
戰爭之外

One dark, rainy night, Yu Ching-Yang gets a knock on his door. It's the police, claiming they may have found his father's body. But that can't be right – Yu Ching-Yang's father, Yu Kuei, was cremated and buried years ago after being crushed by a train. No, the police reply, we found his remains on a mountainside, complete with his heirloom watch. Moreover, the body crushed under the subway had had a bullet hole in the forehead.

How could this have happened? Amidst the trauma of this new discovery, Yu Ching-Yang does his best to help the police by looking back through his mother and father's early history. But some of what he finds does not want to be uncovered – secrets of the Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War, dark connections to Wang Jing-Wei and the Japanese puppet government in Shanghai, eerie coincidences that somehow brought the young man and young woman together. But, as Yu Ching-Yang has found out, bodies never stay buried...

Chang Kuo-Li 張國立

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By Chang Kuo-Li. Translated by Eleanor Goodman.

1.

Just as in previous years, rain fell nonstop over Taipei. Longjohns hidden in closets turned yellow with mold, and people's throats constantly threatened to close up. The TV admonished viewers that low temperatures from the polar regions had arrived and all of December would be wet and cold. On Christmas Eve, a man in his thirties stood beside a service vehicle, its blue and red emergency lights flashing. His head and shoulders were already soaked, but he opened an umbrella anyway. He pulled out a handkerchief to mop his face, and then strode over to an apartment on the ground level of an old four-story building on the fifth section of Minsheng East Road and rang the bell. *Ding, ding*—it rang a dozen times before the door opened. A tall, thin man appeared, still yawning. His hair was gray, and he wore striped pajamas beneath a long, black windbreaker. The man outside pulled out his wallet and flashed his ID card. "Police. Are you Mr. Yu Ching-Yang? Is your father Yu Kuei?"

Yu Ching-Yang's mouth hadn't completely closed from his yawn as he looked at the ID and then back at the policeman.

"Is your mother at home?"

"She's already asleep. She's not so young anymore." Yu closed his mouth.

"I'm going to need you to come down to the station."

Yu looked back inside the house. "This late?" He shrank back a bit. "Is something wrong?"

The policeman hesitated, then said, "Don't worry. It has nothing to do with you." He paused. "Well, it does have something to do with you. We need your help with a case." He pushed a few strands of wet hair from his forehead. "We might have found your father."

Yu Ching-Yang stared at the policeman. He was completely awake now.

"Is this some kind of a joke? Officer, my father is lying in the columbarium at Shandao Temple. He's been there for forty-one years. Now you show up in the middle of the night to tell me that you've found him?"

"It'll take a bit to explain. You'd better come with me, maybe you can tell us what's going on." The policeman began to turn back, motioning Yu in front of him.

"Okay, okay. Give me a minute."

Yu disappeared inside the house, and then reappeared a few minutes later in different clothes and a down jacket. He was followed by a middle-aged woman in a nightgown who held a TV remote in one hand and a cell phone in the other.

She glanced at the policeman coldly, then said to Yu Ching-Yang, "Do you want me to call a lawyer?"

Yu didn't have time to answer before the policeman interrupted, "Are you Mrs. Yu? There's no need for a lawyer. We just want Mr. Yu to come identify an object for us. I'll bring him back in an hour."

Yu patted the woman on the back and said, "It's okay. Go to bed, and don't wake up Mother. If anything comes up, I'll give you a call."

Yu squeezed into the back seat and turned to wave out the rear window as the dim lights of the apartment building disappeared behind the closed door, into the misty rain and darkened alleyway. "So, Officer, your name is Lei Meng?"

"Impressive, Professor Yu! Most people don't know how to pronounce my name. It's spelled like 'men,' but with the added 'g,' and pronounced 'mung.'"

"I know." Yu continued, "It's an old word for 'roof.' The old poem says: 'Adjoining houses are connected by their roofs, a thousand wings and ten thousand rooms.' Are you the eldest son?"

Lei Meng turned to Yu from the passenger seat and smiled, "Yes, I am. In fact, I'm an only child, and my father hoped I would protect the Lei family like a roof protects a house."

"Every name has a meaning." Yu spoke so quietly no one else could hear him.

They fell silent. The streets were empty, and they traveled quickly, soon turning into the police station near the intersection of Chonghsiao East Road and Keelung Road. Lei took Yu in the elevator up to the third floor and led him to a small office at the end of a long hallway. The door was open; inside, three young officers busied themselves with files and folders. They paid no attention to them. Lei pulled over a rolling chair and said, "Have a seat."

He turned on the computer on the desk and clicked the mouse to show Yu some photographs. He looked at the screen as he asked him, "Do you recognize this man?"

On the screen was a picture of an older man in his seventies.

"I've never seen him before."

"Do you recognize the place?"

It was somewhere in a bamboo grove, next to a shrine dedicated to a local Earth God.

"I've never seen it before."

"And the watch?"

The watch, which was spattered with mud, was of simple design, with a coffee-colored wristband and analog numbers. It showed no date, day, or month. The gold finish on the face had already been rubbed off, showing the plain metal below.

"It isn't digital, so it doesn't need a battery," Yu said. "It's an old kind of watch that has to be wound every night before you go to bed. If I'm not mistaken, it's my father's watch. His name would be engraved in the back."

"Yu Kuei. Yes, the name Yu Kuei is engraved on the back. That's how we found you. And that name was the first thing that made us wonder." Lei clicked through a few more photographs. "We dug some bones out of this bamboo grove, and we think they might belong to Yu Kuei."

Yu's face didn't change as he looked at the photos. "It looks like my father's watch. My father wasn't wearing it the day it all happened. It had disappeared. But the bones can't be his. Forty-one years ago, I went with the police to the railway hospital to collect his remains. We had him cremated at a funeral parlor in Taipei. Then we buried him in a sandalwood urn my mother bought, and laid him to rest in Shandao temple."

"I understand how confusing this must be."

Lei pointed to the sign over the door. "Department of Unsolved Crimes," he read. "This newly established division will deal with unsolved cases, as well as cases that have been closed but contain unresolved questions, especially those from 1949 to 1979 whose materials have not yet been digitized. We must seek out the questions, and try our best to find the answers."

The three other policemen in the room had paused in their work to watch Yu.

"Your father Yu Kuei is part of our caseload. The suspicious part has to do with the fact that his body was ripped apart by the 128 train from Keelung to Changhua...I'm sorry, I shouldn't have put it

that way.”

Yu shook his head. “It happened a long time ago. I’ve gotten over it.”

“According to the investigation, the body was totally destroyed by the time all eleven train cars ran over him. But the case was classified as a suicide when the clothes and the ID in his pocket were identified by your mother as belonging to Yu Kuei.”

“How did it get labeled a suicide?” Yu agitated the chair beneath him. “I remember the police telling us that my dad had crossed the tracks by mistake and been hit by the train.”

Lei Meng looked down at the dusty pile of files in his hand. “Mr. Yu, please don’t upset yourself. Your mother will surely know better what happened. She was the one who signed the statement back then.”

Yu looked at his mother’s youthful signature, “Shan Chian-Ping” signed in a careful hand.

“The forensic report also uncovered some curious information. For instance, Mr. Yu’s skull had been crushed, but they found something like a bullet hole in the middle of his forehead. Look,” Lei Meng clicked onto a new page, “we scanned the original records into the computer, and this is it. See, the two words ‘something like’ have been scribbled in between ‘there is’ and ‘a bullet.’ We couldn’t find sufficient evidence to show the hole had been fully examined, or whether it could have been from something other than a bullet.”

He didn’t give Yu a chance to interject before he continued.

“The skull is very hard, and theoretically, if it had been a bullet, it would have remained in the bone. What’s strange is that none of the evidence mentions the discovery of a bullet or casing on the scene. So maybe the bullet went through the forehead, traversed the brain, and continued out through the back of the head. But unless he was shot from very close range, the bullet wouldn’t have been able to pierce both sides of the skull.”

“My mother never told me any of this.”

“I just mentioned that there was no bullet or casing found at the scene,” Lei continued, ignoring Yu. “What’s unfortunate is that the skull of the deceased was crushed by the train, and with the technology of the time, they had no way of reconstructing the bone from what was left. In May of 1974, the Taipei police and the railway police both signed statements agreeing that the case was a suicide. It wasn’t that senior officials didn’t have suspicions. After all, if the deceased had shot himself, where was the gun? Where was the bullet that killed him? Someone who kills himself can’t very well hide the gun after he’s dead. Let’s see: It was the last train of the night, the 10:42 southbound from Keelung. It had just passed Songshan Station. In the 1970s, everyone went to bed early, and there wasn’t a late night scene around there like there is now. Plus, it was raining so hard, no witnesses were ever found.”

“What are you saying?” Yu finally managed to get a question in.

“Going through this old case, we all had the same question. How could the gun not be near the scene of the death? How could it just disappear? If it had also been run over by the train, there would still be a fist-sized chunk of iron somewhere. It wouldn’t be impossible to find. But we never even found the bullet or the casing.” He looked at Yu. “What I mean is, your father’s death is suspicious. In July we opened the case again and made it the top priority for this division. We haven’t yet given a report to our superior officers, but coincidentally, yesterday the Hsinchu Police Department sent over a case. They found a skeleton in the mountains near Chienshih, and it was wearing a watch on its left wrist. The watch was inscribed with Yu Kuei’s name.

“Hsinchu? In Hsinchu? So you’ve brought me to the police station in the middle of the night so I can collect my father’s watch, which you found out in the mountains?”

“Not just that.” Lei stood up and stretched. “We’d like you to do a DNA test, and if the bones

prove to be your father's, then – how long has it been? – we can start to reinvestigate a case that's been cold for forty-one years.”

“If the tests show that the bones really are my father's, then who was killed by that train forty-one years ago?”

Lei didn't look at Yu. He clasped his hands behind his back and paced over the computer cords in the tight space between the small messy desk and the file cabinet. He said, “That's a good question, Professor Yu. And it's the second question our division hopes to answer.”

Lei Meng dropped Yu Ching-Yang at his home on Minsheng East Road at 4:32 in the morning. The emergency lights were off, but as they stopped the police car, the door was already open. Mrs. Yu stood there in her raincoat and holding umbrella. “Why didn't you call me?”

Lei and Yu ducked under the umbrella, not knowing which one of them Mrs. Yu was scolding.

The lights were on inside. A frail, white-haired old woman sat in the middle of the room. Lei turned to leave as Yu went to greet her, but Mrs. Yu caught one of Lei's sleeves and said, “You can't leave yet. Weren't you looking for Mom? Now she wants to talk to you.”

The interior was arranged like a professor's home. The walls were hung with calligraphy and paintings. Lei recognized one scroll in the middle: “Let the sounds of wind, rain, and words all enter your ear; let family, national, and world affairs be your concern.” Hung on the wall across from the door was a small altar that held a memorial plaque and a few offerings. He couldn't see the name on the plaque. The incense had already burned halfway down, meaning the old woman had been awake for a while. To the left was a television and a set of Kenwood speakers; on the table were some porcelain bottles of sorghum liquor from Kinmen and Matsu, as well as *Maotai* and *Fenjiu* from mainland China. The right side of the wall was taken up entirely by books, and in front of the bookshelves was a rattan couch covered by a cushion.

Lei Meng suddenly wanted a drink.

The old woman was wearing a thick, pink-checked nightgown. When she saw Yu Ching-Yang she levered herself up with the arm of the chair. Embracing her, her son sobbed, “Mom, they found Dad's watch.”

Lei had never seen a mother and son seem so close. Yu hugged his aging mother, whispering to her, and her expression changed with his words. At last, the old woman broke out of his embrace, and walked daintily toward Lei. She held out her tiny hand, “Officer Lei, I am Shan Chian-Ping, Yu Kuei's wife. Is what Yangyang just told me true?”

Lei nodded. The hand he held was so warm, it didn't seem like an old person's hand. He remembered seeing on an old household registry form that Shan Chian-Ping had been born in the fourteenth year of the Republic, 1925, which meant she was already eighty-nine years old.

“Yangyang wasn't very clear about the last part. Come,” she said, taking his hand, “let's sit down and have a good talk.”

The old woman said to Mrs. Yu, “Hsiao-Fen, bring us two bowls of rice dumplings in osmanthus wine. Officer Lei has been working hard.”

Lei knew that he wouldn't be able to go back home to sleep it off before daybreak, but when he heard the name of the sweet dish, he nodded instinctively and smacked his lips.

“His watch was in the mountains near Chienshih in Hsinchu? There was just a skeleton, not even a casket?”

Lei nodded.

“Why wasn't there a casket? Lord, what did he do to make you punish him that way?”

And before Lei Meng could even take a bite of his dumplings, Yu led his sobbing, shaking mother out of the room.

2.

At first, Yu Ching-Yang planned to go with Lei Meng alone to Chienshih in Hsinchu, but his mother insisted on going too. Her rationale made sense: "I'd recognize Yu Kuei even from his ashes."

So Lei borrowed a nine-person van from the department, and they set out like an army on the march: Professor Yu, his wife, and their college-aged son Yu Nien-tzu along with old Mrs. Shan, and an attorney named Tsai, Mrs. Yu's colleague. Lei brought a female officer from his division named Huang Su-Chun to help keep an eye on Mrs. Shan. The old woman refused to be left behind, and that was quite an inconvenience as far as Lei was concerned.

It was past noon by the time they reached the Chienshih police station. When the police chief saw Mrs. Shan, he recommended that they not go into the mountains. The body, all the evidence, and the witness statements had been brought to the station, and the scene itself wouldn't offer much else of use. Yu Ching-Yang went in to identify the body. It consisted of a dozen bones, which couldn't be identified as anyone in particular, but Yu stared at the watch in the plastic evidence bag for a long time.

It had been found on December 7 by three college students who were out hiking. It had rained hard, so halfway up the mountain they decided to turn around. One slipped on the trail and fell into a small bamboo grove two meters below. When he tried to climb back up, he grabbed a handful of mud that had bone in it.

It turned out the student broke his ankle, so the others called for help on their cell phones. The fire brigade and police force formed a seven-person rescue team that arrived on the scene three hours later. They found that the heavy rain had washed out a rather large hole where bones were mixed in with the mud. From the skull, they could identify the remains as human. The police station down the mountain contacted an attendant at a temple near the makeshift grave. He told them that he'd never heard of corpses being buried in front of the temple. Perhaps it was an unofficial burial site from many decades ago, he noted, and rain had gradually washed away the burial mound and tombstone. This last downpour brought the bones to the surface again. The local police chief rejected the idea; no matter how unofficial the burial site was, no one would be buried without a coffin. With that in mind, he issued a report to the city police department.

Yu Ching-Yang saw the temple attendant sitting on a bench in a corner of the meeting room. It was the old man in his seventies he'd seen in the photograph in the police station. He seemed completely at a loss, and kept telling Lei Meng that aside from some unofficial graves, no one could possibly have buried a body so deep in the mountains. It would have been much too much effort.

With Lei's agreement, Yu showed the watch to his mother. Mrs. Shan felt it gently through the plastic bag, and said, "Yangyang, it's your Dad's watch. He said that the year he tested into the University of Nanking, his father, your grandfather, sent someone to Shanghai to buy it for him. Your dad had that watch for more than half his life, and it was supposed to be passed down to you, along with his pipe."

Mrs. Shan lowered her head. Her shoulders quivered, and tears dripped onto the plastic bag.

In the afternoon, the police chief from Guanxi, a town further down the mountain, hurried over to the station, bringing a patient registry list from 1974 that had been copied from the renovated Guofu Medical Clinic. One of the patients was listed as Yu Kuei.

Yu glanced at his father's name on the yellowing registry list and noticed the ID number was correct. His wife Hsiao-Fen looked further down the line and said that his father had complained of flu

symptoms, fever, and headache.

On December 29, 1973, Yu Kuei had been killed by a southbound train on the tracks near Songshan Station. On January 1, 1974, Yu Kuei had checked into the Kuo-Fu Medical Clinic in Guanxi complaining of flu, and his body was subsequently buried in the Chienshih mountains. Assuming the man who had been killed in Taipei wasn't Yu Kuei, why had Yu Kuei come to Hsinchu? And how had he come to die there in the mountains?

As Lei and the two police chiefs discussed the case, the Yu family sat silently. Professor Yu and his son sat on either side of old Mrs. Shan, while Mrs. Yu and the lawyer stood behind them, their faces serious.

At dusk, they left the mountains to return to Taipei. Lei asked directions from the local police, and signed a few receipts to take all of the relevant evidence back to his department. In the car, old Mrs. Shan softly asked Huang Su-Chun, who was sitting next to her in the car, "When will I get Yu Kuei's bones and watch back?"

"Not for a while," Lei Meng heard Huang Su-Chun say. "All of the evidence will have to be kept until the case has been closed." Lei added that the most important thing at the moment was to identify the skeleton.

Yu nodded. He agreed to the DNA test. Lei hesitated, then said quietly, "From what I know, when it all happened, it was already pretty late at night. Why didn't you know where your father had gone?"

Yu watched the windshield wipers passing rhythmically over the windshield. He had a faraway look in his eyes. "My father had been hospitalized for quite some time at the Air Force hospital. My sister was going to school in England, and my mother and I took turns being with my father in the hospital. That day, my dad's condition had improved a little, and he told me to go home early. So I went back around 9:00 p.m. that night."

"What disease did your father have?"

Yu didn't answer. He just stared numbly at the road in front of the van. Lei didn't ask again. He didn't want Mrs. Shan in the back to get upset.

It was already close to 9:00 p.m. when they got back to Minsheng East Road. Mrs. Yu got out of the car first, while Yu Nien-Tzu carried his grandmother's and his father's bags. Yu Ching-Yang took his mother's hand to help her out of the car, but she held onto the door and wouldn't move. She held out her arms to Yu – tired, perhaps, or sad. Lei Meng moved to help her, but Yu stopped him, smiling. Yu bent down and gently picked his mother up, a white-haired man carrying a tiny old woman, slowing making their way into the house.

Instead of going home, Lei took the van back to the police station. Over the past few days, two colleagues had written up three reports related to the case. One had to do with Shandao Temple, and proved that Yu Kuei's ashes had been sent there on February 7, 1974, after which a Daoist mass had been performed. The second report was a statement from a retired medical expert who remembered the case. It was extremely unusual for the body of someone who had committed suicide by jumping in front of a train to have a bullet hole in it. But his examination had come to no conclusions about that, and when his bosses had asked to settle the matter quickly, he hadn't objected. He had reminded his commanding officer that suicide cases weren't eligible for life insurance payouts, and so the family likely wouldn't agree to it. He hadn't expected that the family wouldn't object at all. The third report was a railroad hospital document, Yu Kuei's death certificate. The record was quite clear: the blood type matched Yu Kuei's, and the victim's wife Mrs. Shan Chien-Ping, and her son Yu Ching-Yang, both identified the body as belonging to Yu Kuei.

Lei walked over to the whiteboard and wrote:

Fix a date for Yu Ching-Yang's DNA test soon

Acquire Yu Kuei's 1973 medical records from the Air Force hospital

Ask the Guanxi police station to investigate all local hotel check-in registrations from December 1973 to February 1974.

He stopped writing, thought for a moment, then added:

Do the bones found at Chienshih belong to Yu Kuei? – Check against Yu Ching-Yang's DNA.

If Yu Kuei's body pulverized, should still be identifying characteristics. How did family recognize body as Yu Kuei? – Ask Yu Ching-Yang.

If man killed by train not Yu Kuei, why would Yu go to Hsinchu, despite being ill? And how would son not have known about? – Ask Yu Ching-Yang.

Lei tossed the marker aside and grabbed his jacket. He was about to go to the evidence room to see if anything had been overlooked when Huang Su-Chun came in and put a bento box down in front of him. "Officer Lei, have some spareribs. I've heated them up for you."