



Once Upon a Time, a Train Came to the Island

從前從前，火車來到小島

Author: Huang Yi-Wen **Illustrator:** Huang Yi-Wen **Publisher:** Taiwan Interminds

Date: 12/2021

Right's contacts: bft.children.comics@moc.gov.tw

48 pages | 20.5 x 30 cm **Volume:** 1

Rights sold: Korean

Award: 2024 The 46th Golden Tripod Awards, Children's and Youth Books Category

BFT2.0 Translator: Kirsten Han

Once upon a time, a train came to the island, seizing control of all life.

This train created its own rules, enforced them arbitrarily, and decided who would live and who would die. It carried away anyone who dared to resist, separating families and crushing dreams.

Then one day, the train suddenly vanished. Those left behind had to piece together their past.

In this award-winning book, a grandfather recounts the story of the train to his granddaughter. *Once Upon a Time, A Train Came to the Island* encourages young readers around the world to reflect on authoritarianism and state violence. Author and illustrator Huang Yiwen drew inspiration from Taiwan's history of martial law. Roughly three decades after martial law was lifted, Taiwan has become one of the most free and democratic societies in the world. As Huang put it, "In remembering our past, we ensure that those who disappeared do not vanish into thin air."



Huang Yi-Wen

Huang Yi-Wen is a freelance illustrator and the author of several award-winning picture books. She has devoted herself to the craft of storytelling after attending a picture book workshop by Liu Hsu-Kung since 2018. Using her gift for mixed media, Yi-Wen creates books that she hopes will appeal to children and adults alike.

She is the recipient of a Golden Tripod Award as well as the 2022 Openbook Book Award in the children's book category. Her illustrations were selected for both the 2021 and 2022 Bologna Illustrators Exhibition. Her other works include *Secrets at the Zoo*.

“This is a Difficult History, But I Hope That People Will Carry On With Courage”: Author Huang Yi Wen Shares Her Inspiration For Her Book

Translated by Michelle Kuo

The initial idea of using a “train” as the theme for this book came from walking through the National Human Rights Museum in Taipei. As people in Taiwan know, this museum preserves a part of a prison that held political dissidents, some of whom were executed. Passing through a maze of iron gates, I looked at one narrow, empty cell after another. I had the sudden impression that the people imprisoned there were like passengers trapped in the carriages of a train.

In my book, the train does not move, yet it takes away countless people. This is a stationary train without a destination or meaning. Time slips away and disappears. Lives and dreams vanish like the unseen scenery outside the windows. This train

occupies the entire narrative universe, suddenly appearing, controlling people, and forcibly carrying them away. It dictates and restricts people, determining their lives through its rules, reasons, and preferences.

This is an absurd story, yet it is part of Taiwan’s history of authoritarianism. While reading *Undeliverable Letters*, a collection of letters that were never delivered to people imprisoned in Taiwan under martial law, the repeated use of the words “far away” left a deep impression on me. One letter from a father to a son reads, “Dear Jianguo, I send you millions of kisses from a very faraway place.”

Where exactly is that “faraway place”? It’s never stated, yet it is the last ray of

hope left for their families. In my book, a father is taken away from his son. To the child, that place is faraway— indescribable and unreachable. The child hopes constantly for his father’s return. When that return never comes, the child’s thoughts are perpetually directed towards the place where his father might be. “Faraway place” describes the chasm of enforced separation.

This is a difficult history, but I hope that people will carry on with courage. In remembering our past, we ensure that those who went far away do not vanish into thin air. That’s why the book begins with a grandfather telling his granddaughter a story.

I wanted the book to reflect the

continuous flow of time, as well as pay tribute to survivor Mr. Chen Qinsheng. Over the years, he has told his story countless times in front of countless people. Yet each time feels emotional.

“The more you tell the story, the more there is to tell—it never ends,” he says. But at the end of his lecture, he added mysteriously: “My story ends here.”

I was deeply moved and, over time, felt the pain and inspiration to

create this story. Through it, I remember what this island has gone through.


This originally appeared on the author’s social media and has been edited and published with her permission.

“The more you tell the story, the more there is to tell—it never ends,” says one survivor of martial law.



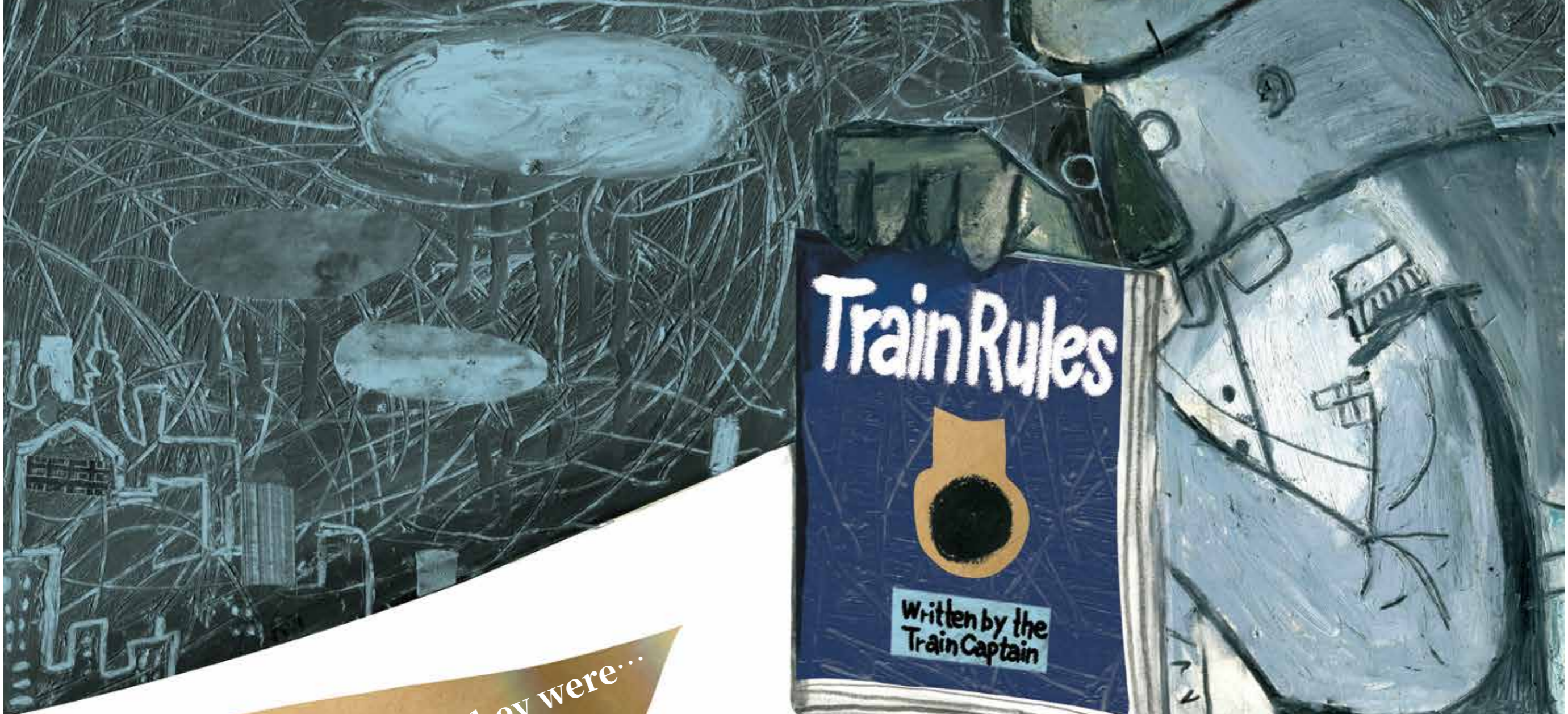
Where did the Great Train take them?

More and more and more
people were taken away by the Great Train.

The illustration is a dark, textured composition. In the upper right, a child's face with dark hair and a white complexion looks out from a window. The background is filled with dense, dark, cross-hatched lines. In the lower left, a large, stylized figure is depicted with a white face, a large black mustache, and a white shirt with blue spots. A red hat is visible on the left side of this figure. The overall style is expressive and somber.

My father once stood out bravely.
The Great Train took him away.

He never came home again.



They were....

The people, terrified, were desperate to know:
"What exactly are the Great Train's rules?"

