

# LOCAL HEROES: TAIWAN NEW WAVE CINEMA

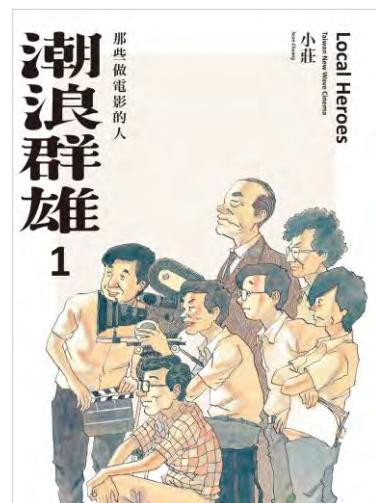
## 潮浪群雄

*The story of the film industry outsiders who helped remake one of Taiwan's most conservative film studios into an art-cinema powerhouse, thereby laying the foundation for a cinematic revolution: the Taiwan New Wave.*

In the 1980s Taiwan was taking the first steps towards opening up after decades of authoritarian rule. The economy was booming, consumers had cash to burn, and a flood of Hong Kong movies arrived met the demand for high-quality entertainment. This presented an existential challenge to Taiwan's Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMP), a stodgy film studio under direct control of the ruling KMT political party.

General manager of CMP Ming Ji made the bold decision to hire two fresh-faced industry outsiders to help transform the company culture. Wu Nien-jen was an independent screenwriter who was still finishing an accounting degree in night school. Hsiao Yeh was a part-time novelist who paused his PhD studies in the USA to return to Taiwan and join CMP. The results of this decision are well known – the CMP-produced films of the Taiwan New Wave movement were soon making waves at film festivals and art-house cinemas around the world. But what exactly happened inside CMP during those transformative years? What did the new blood at CMP manage to produce such outstanding work within the confines of a bureaucratic corporate studio, while simultaneously dancing around the restrictions of the KMT's authoritarian censorship system?

This up-close-and-personal account of the birth of the Taiwan New Wave was adapted to graphic novel form by Sean Chuang, a comic book artist/filmmaker who has worked directly with many of the



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booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com

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great directors of Taiwan cinema. His work captures the political and social atmosphere of 1980s Taiwan, as well as the spirit and aspirations of the seminal movie makers of the era. *Local Heroes: Taiwan New Wave Cinema* is more than a docu-comic – it is an inspiring tale of the triumph of idealism over ideology, authenticity over propaganda, and artistic freedom over censorship.

## Sean Chuang 小莊

Sean Chuang is a commercial film director. He published the highly acclaimed *A Filmmaker's Notes* in the form of a graphic novel in 1997. In 2009 he finished his second work in the form, *The Window*, a full-color dialogue-free comic that was over a decade in the making. In 2013 he finished his third graphic novel, *80s Diary in Taiwan*, which has been sold in the French, German, and Italian language markets. English language rights have also been sold for his graphic novel adaptation of Wu Ming-Yi's novel *The Illusionist on the Skywalk*. Sean Chuang continues to work both in film and illustration.

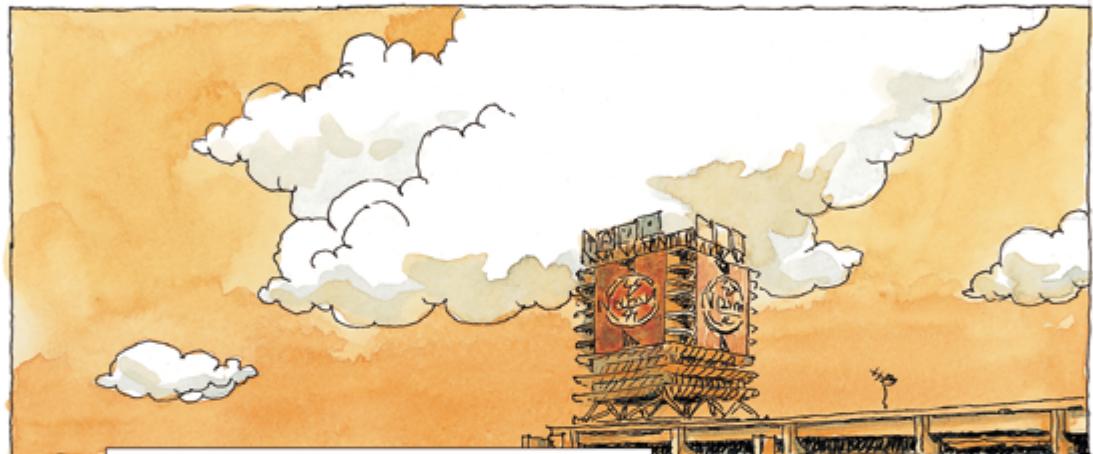




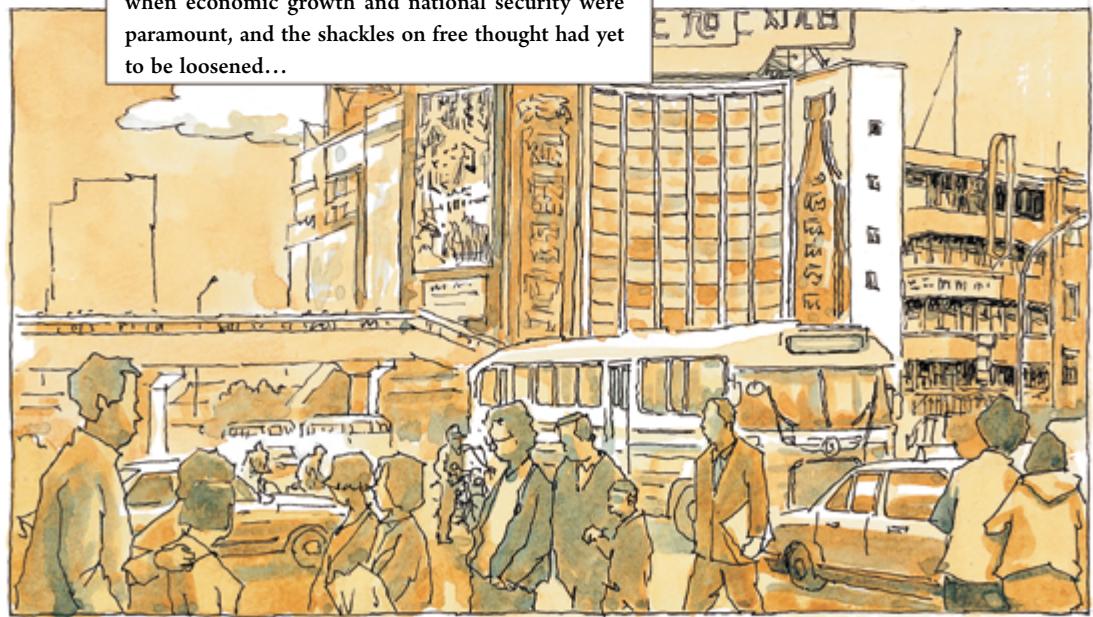
Action!



Taiwan, the 1970s,

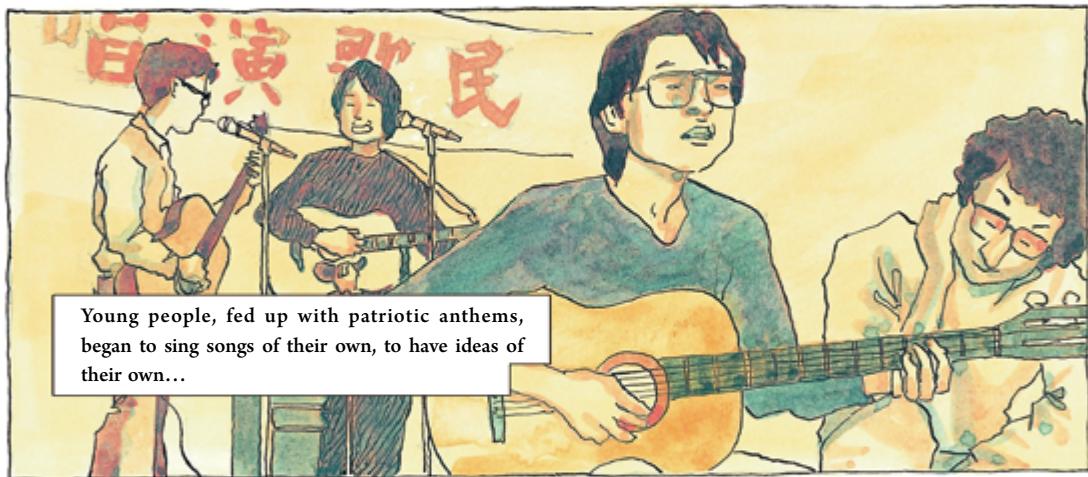


when economic growth and national security were paramount, and the shackles on free thought had yet to be loosened...

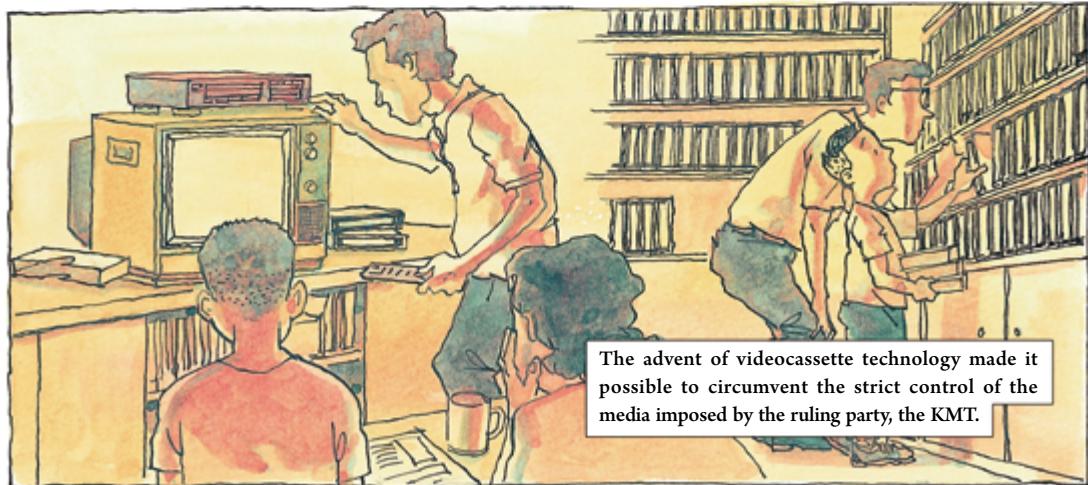




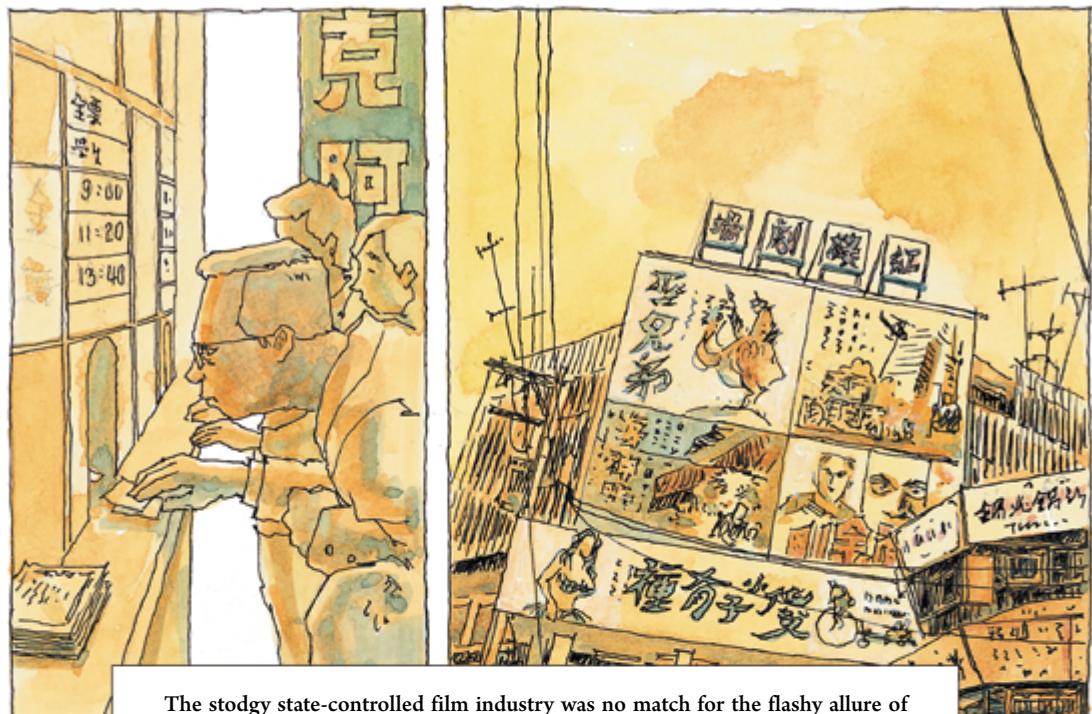
Taiwan's international relations were in crisis, and its authoritarian system was feeling the first tremors of a nascent democracy movement. Clouds of uncertainty hung over the island's future.



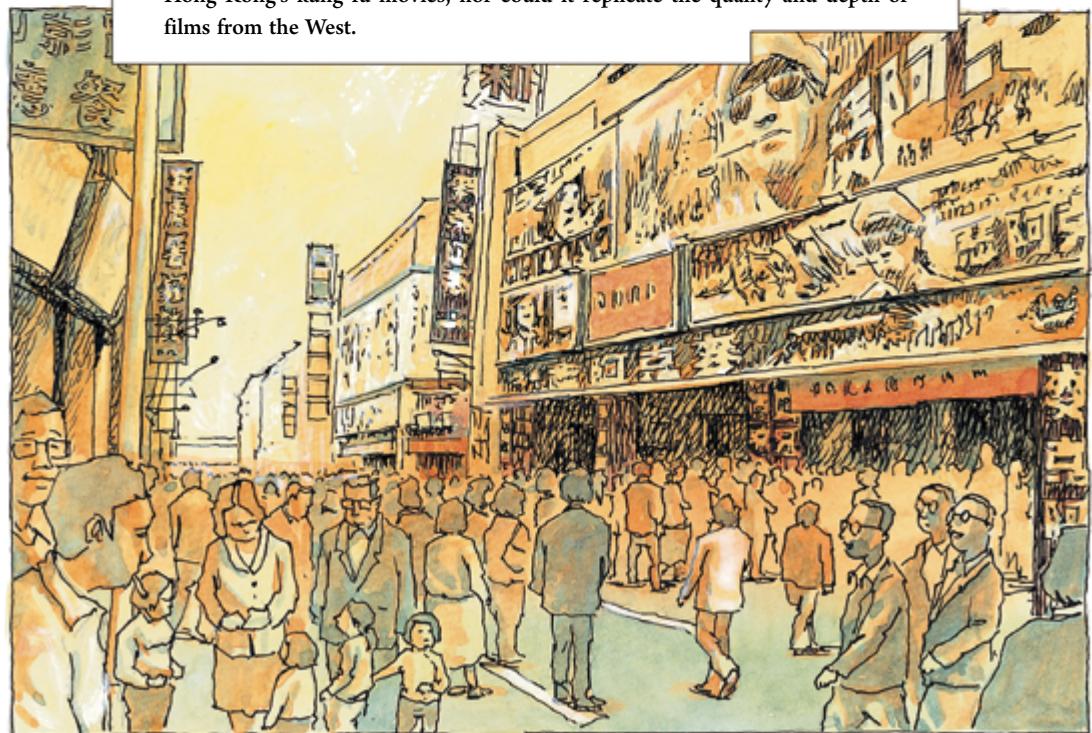
Young people, fed up with patriotic anthems, began to sing songs of their own, to have ideas of their own...



The advent of videotape technology made it possible to circumvent the strict control of the media imposed by the ruling party, the KMT.



The stodgy state-controlled film industry was no match for the flashy allure of Hong Kong's kung fu movies, nor could it replicate the quality and depth of films from the West.



In the prosperous neighborhood of Ximending, cinemas and film studio offices tower over the streets, but in truth, it is an industry in desperate need of revitalization...



It is a dark and confusing time for the industry,  
but, within the stagnation and decay new life  
begins to stir.





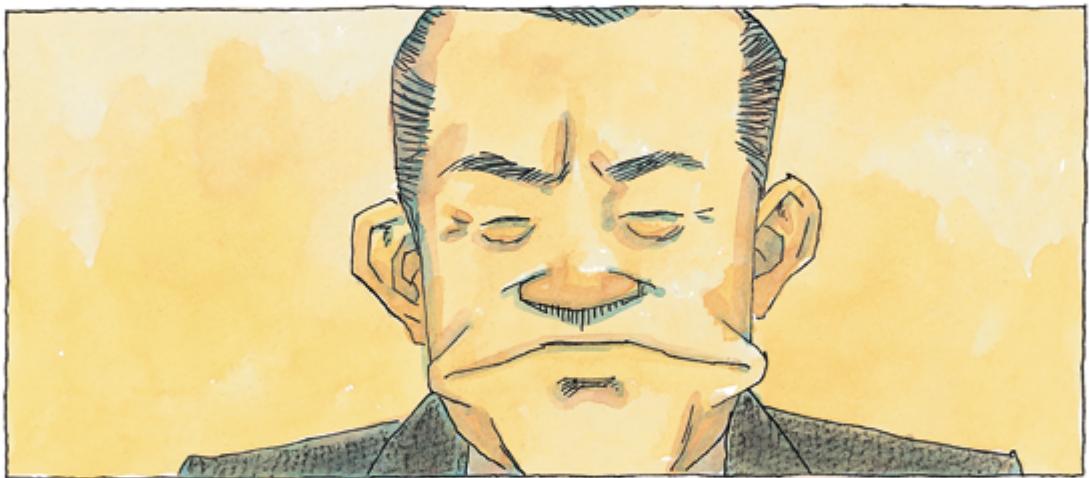
He



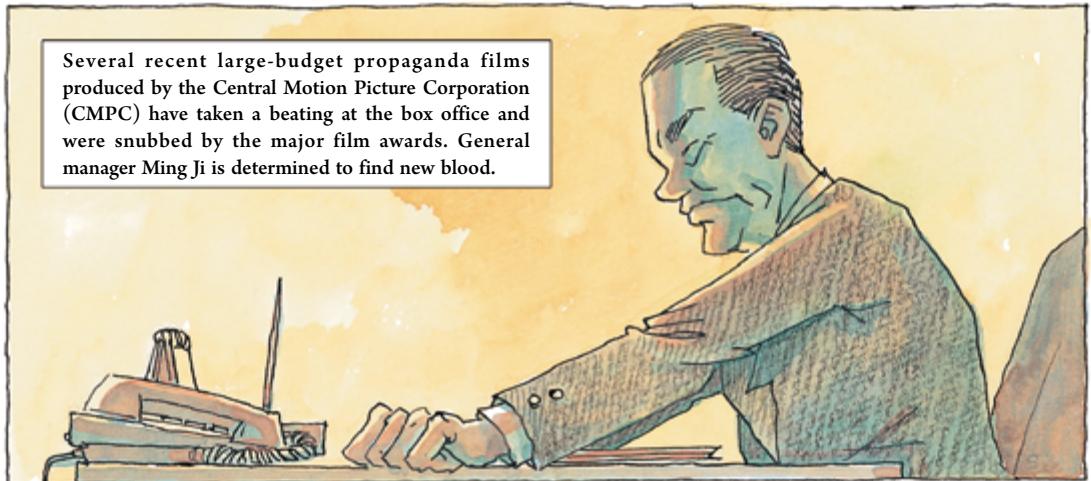
Scene 1

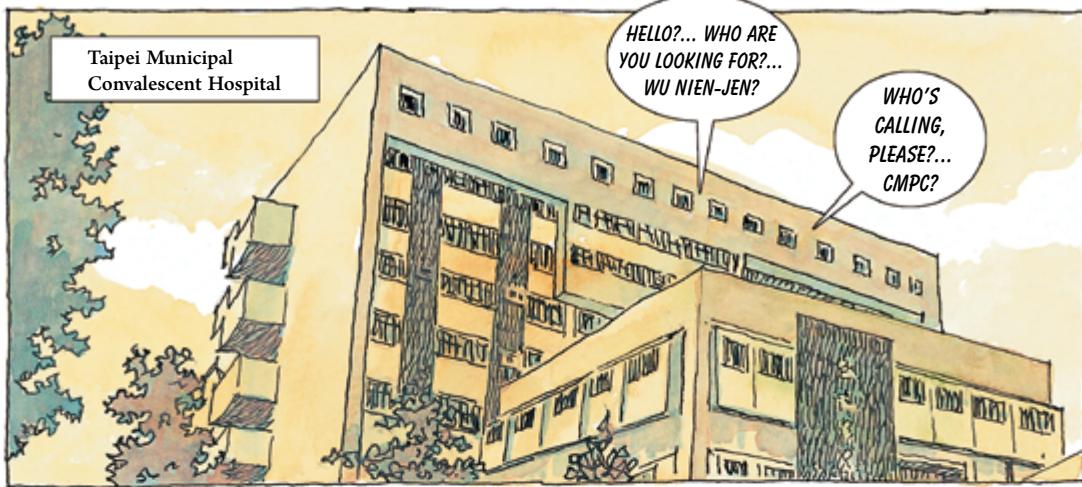
Taipei, 1980.

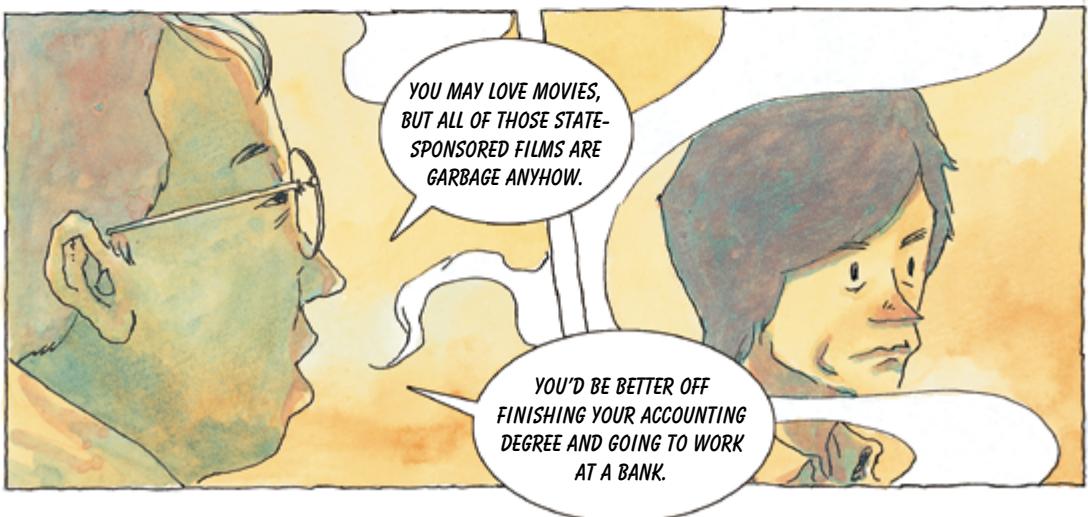




Several recent large-budget propaganda films produced by the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC) have taken a beating at the box office and were snubbed by the major film awards. General manager Ming Ji is determined to find new blood.

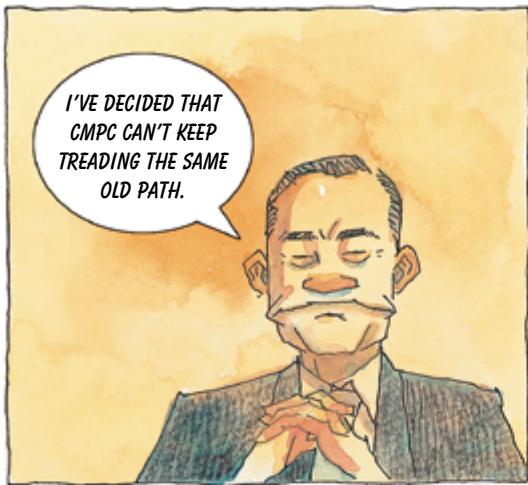


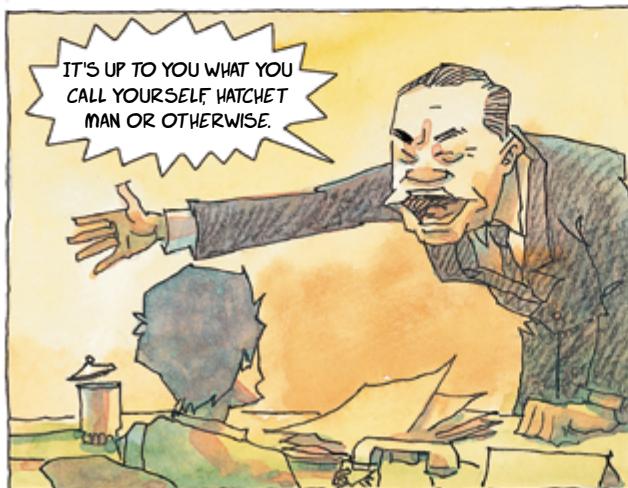
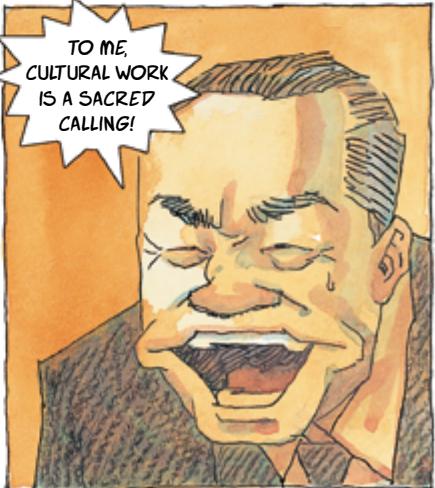
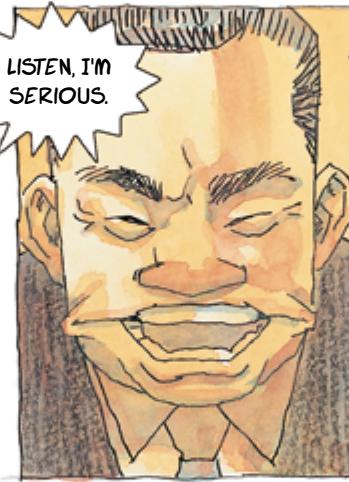
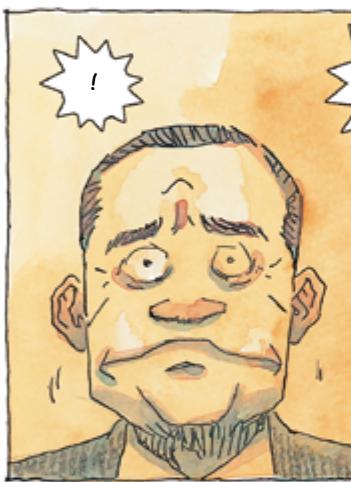














I'll agree to any movie  
you want to make. How  
does that sound?

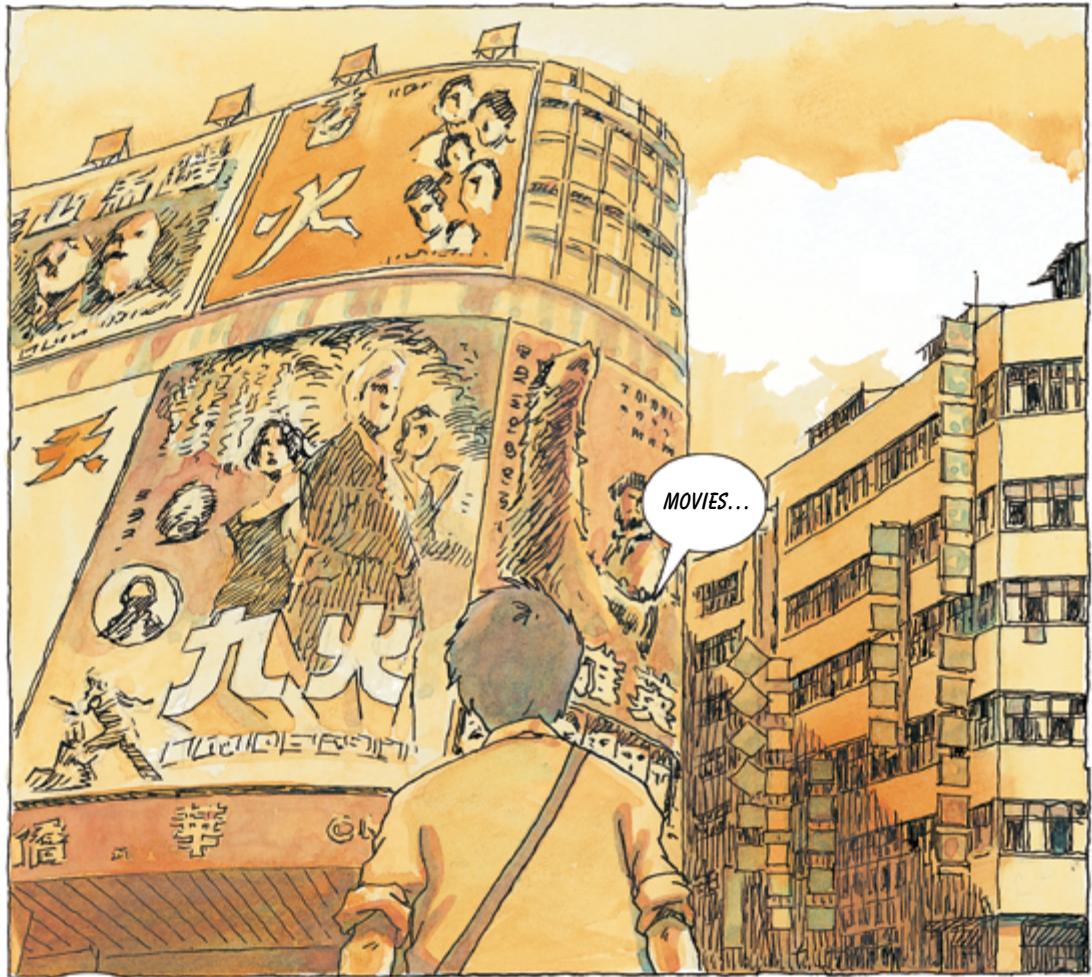


You're such a good writer!  
Are you really gonna go  
work in an office after  
you graduate?



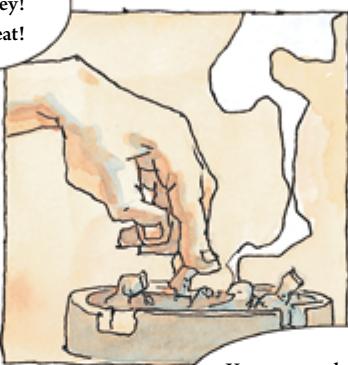
You've got the talent to  
make a real contribution  
in cinema.

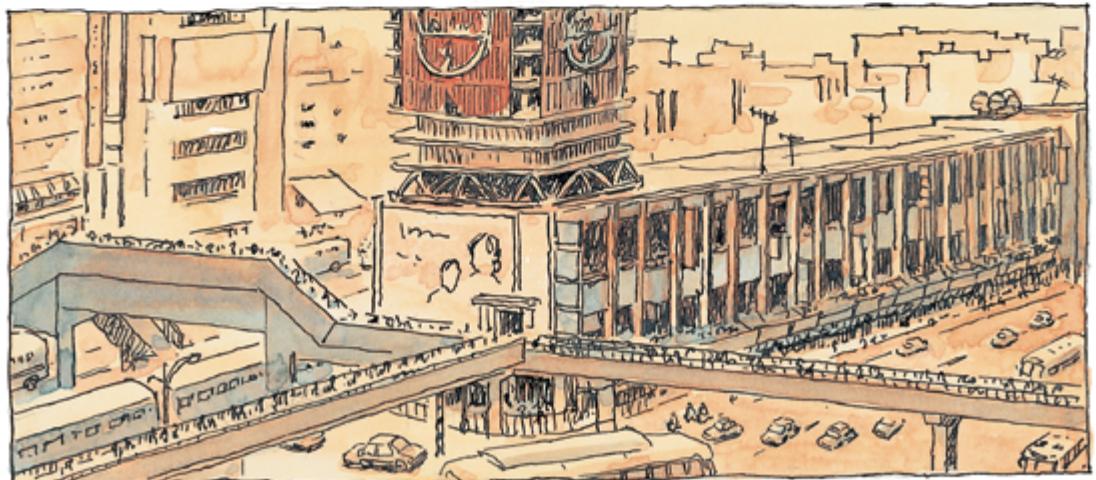
...  
What about  
your passion  
for movies?











\* Cultural Work Committee: the common name for the Cultural Broadcasting Work Committee of the ruling KMT political party, which acted as censors of broadcast media in order to guide public opinion in favor of KMT policy and limit the expansion of pro-democracy thought.





1980. Wu Nien-jen is 28 years old. He's written a few screenplays, and in one year's time he will graduate from night school with a degree in accounting, but he still feels uncertain about his future.

UGH.

## The Movie Makers

### Ming Ji ( 明驥 ) 1923-2012

Born in Hubei Province, China, Ming Ji was a well-known figure in Taiwan's movie industry and an educator of Russian language. During his lifetime he served as a major general in the army of the Republic of China, general manager of the Central Motion Picture Corporation, and a professor at Chinese Culture University.

Ming Ji began working as a studio head at CMPC in 1973, organizing film technology training courses, and nurturing a generation of film industry professionals such as Lee Ping-bing, Liao Pen-jung, Tu Duu-chih, Liao Ching-sung, Chen Kuo-fu, and Hu Ding-yi. In 1978 he took over as general manager of CMPC. Though Taiwan was still ruled under martial law at the time, Ming sought out talented young directors and screenwriters such as Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, Chang Yi, Wan Jen, Hsiao Yeh, Wu Nien-jen, and Ko I-chen, to assist in the production of a four-part film titled *In Our Time*. A milestone in Taiwan movie history, the film's realist depiction of contemporary society ushered in the era of Taiwan New Wave Cinema. In the 1980s he produced three classics of the style, *One Day at the Beach*, *The Sandwich Man*, and *Growing Up*. Many films of the Taiwan New Wave Cinema movement were well received in international art-house cinemas and garnered major international film prizes, bringing international recognition to Taiwan filmmaking.

Ming Ji is remembered as the father of Taiwan New Wave Cinema. In 2009 he received the lifetime achievement award at the 46th Golden Horse Film Festival.

### Wu Nien-jen ( 吳念真 )

Born Wu Nien-chin in 1952 in the town of Ruifang in northeast Taiwan, Wu began writing short stories in 1976. He has received the Wu Zhuoliu literary prize, and for three consecutive years he won the United Daily short story award. A man of many talents, Wu has had successful careers in the arts, film, advertising, and theater.

Wu began writing for film in 1981, going on to author 75 screenplays and winning five best screenplay awards from the Golden Horse Film Festival and two from the Asia-Pacific Film Festival. His screenplays include *City of Sadness*, *Dust in the Wind*, *Second Spring of Mr. Muo*, *Hill of No Return*, and *Song of the Exile*. His directorial debut, *A Borrowed Life*, a film adaptation of his father's life story, earned Wu a best picture award from the Torino Film Festival.

In television, Wu has worked on dozens of commercials as both director and spokesperson, and hosted the TVBS television show *Truly Taiwan*. Wu's first stage play, *Human Condition*, was performed by Greenray Theatre Company in 2001. The following year, Wu wrote and directed the play *Forever Youth*. In 2006, the first of Wu's seminal series of plays *Human Conditions 2 – The Men in Her Life* was performed.

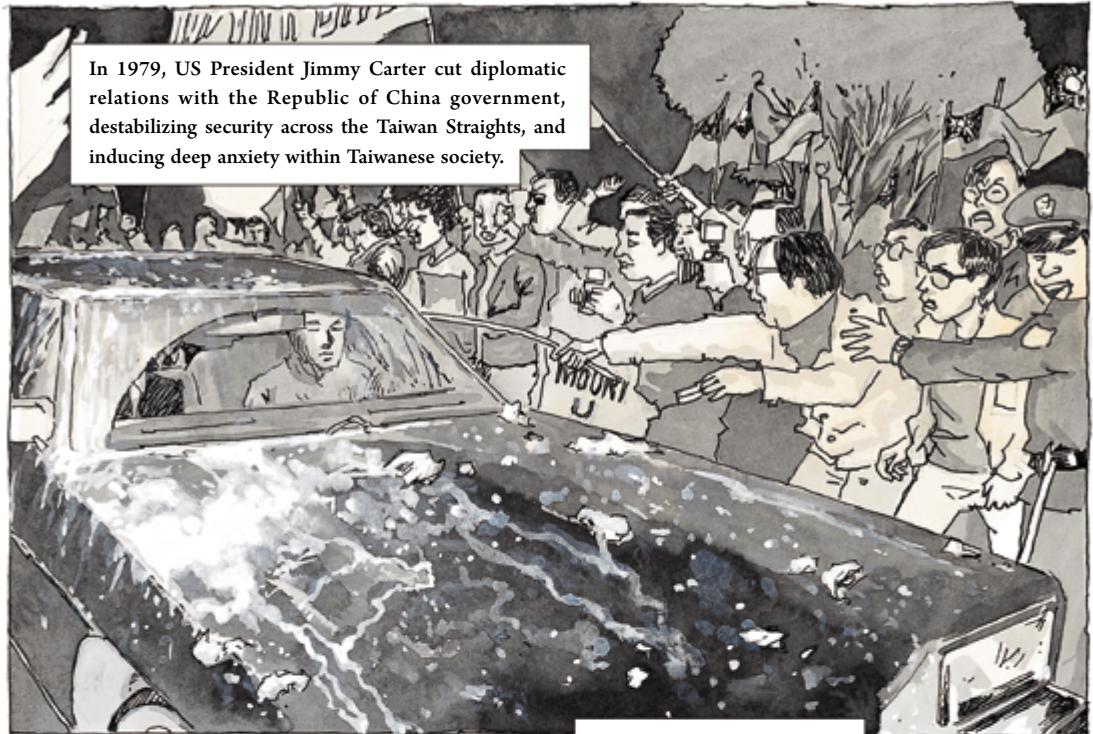
Wu currently serves as chairman of the board at the Wu's Productions.

And him

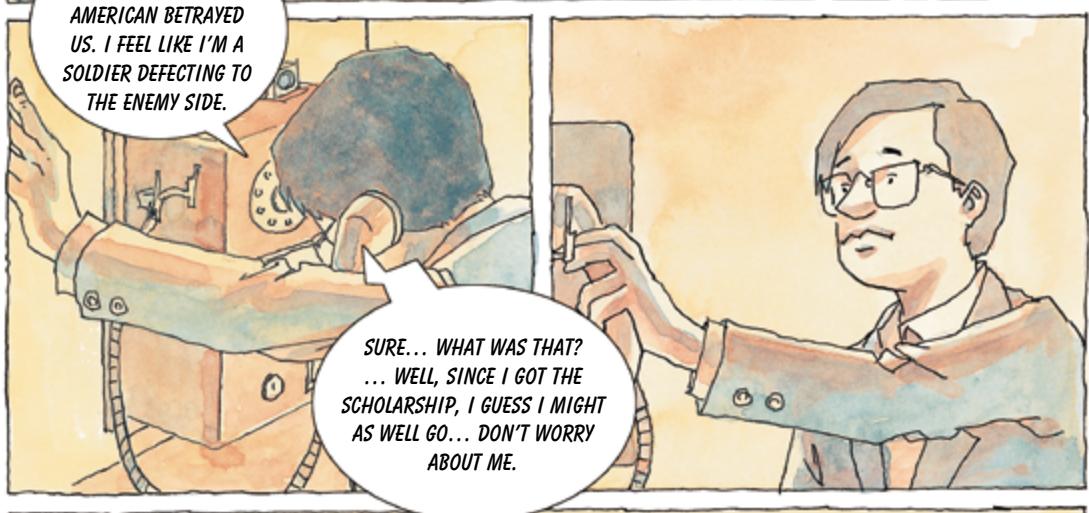
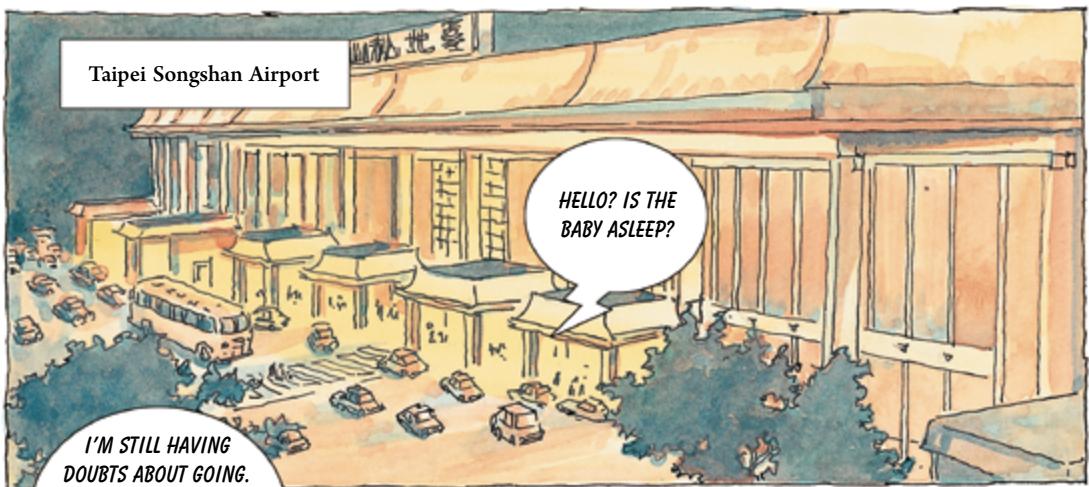


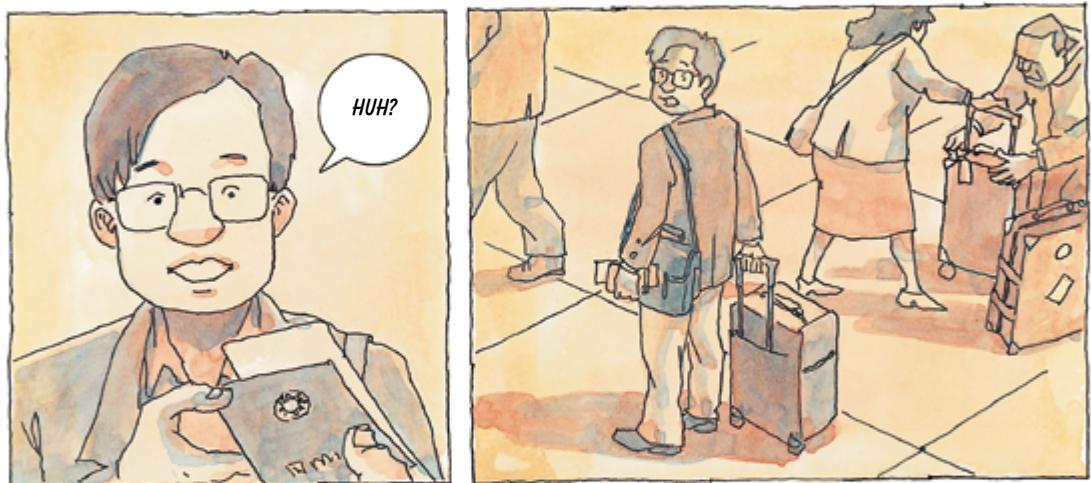
Scene 2





Taipei Songshan Airport

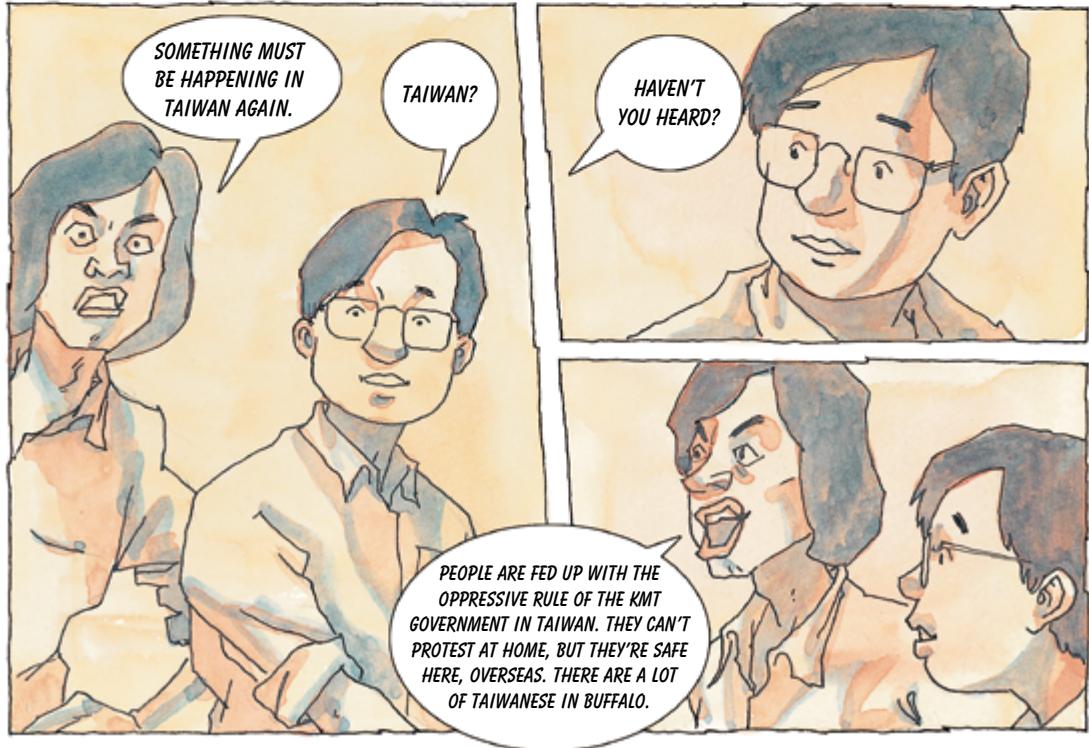


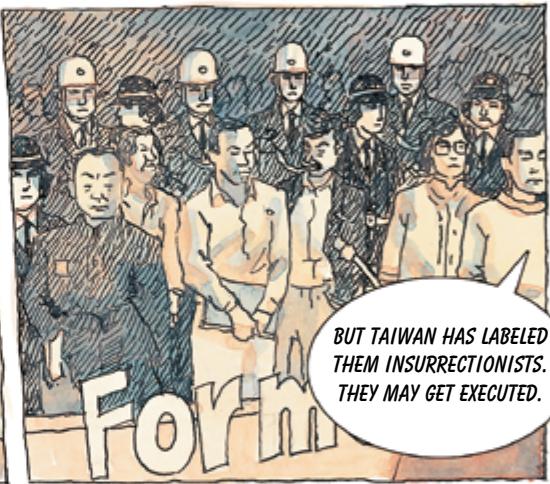
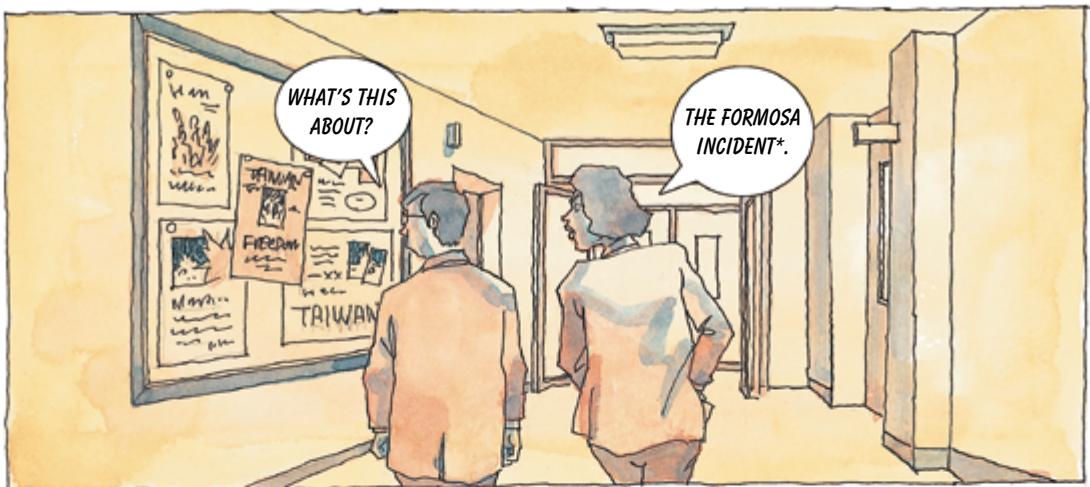




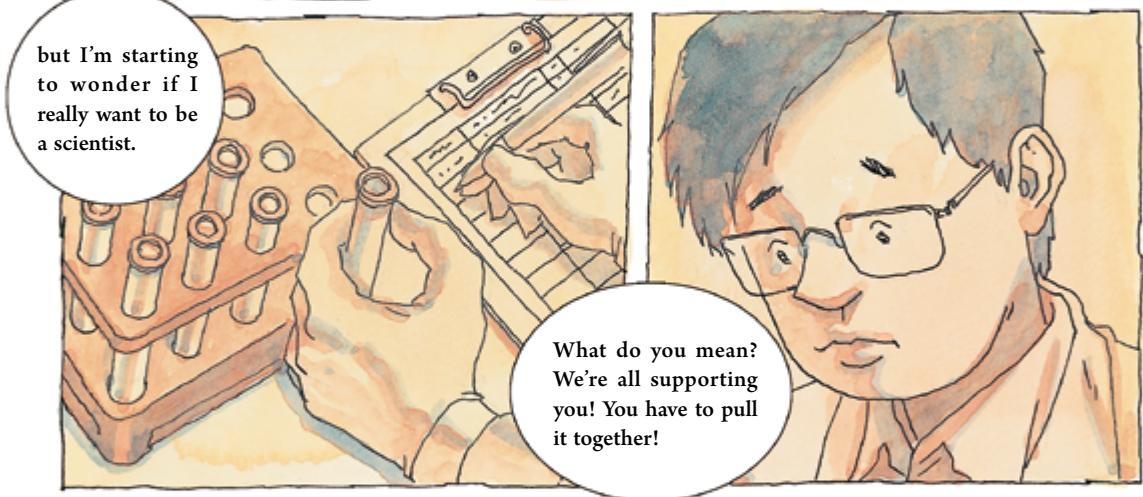
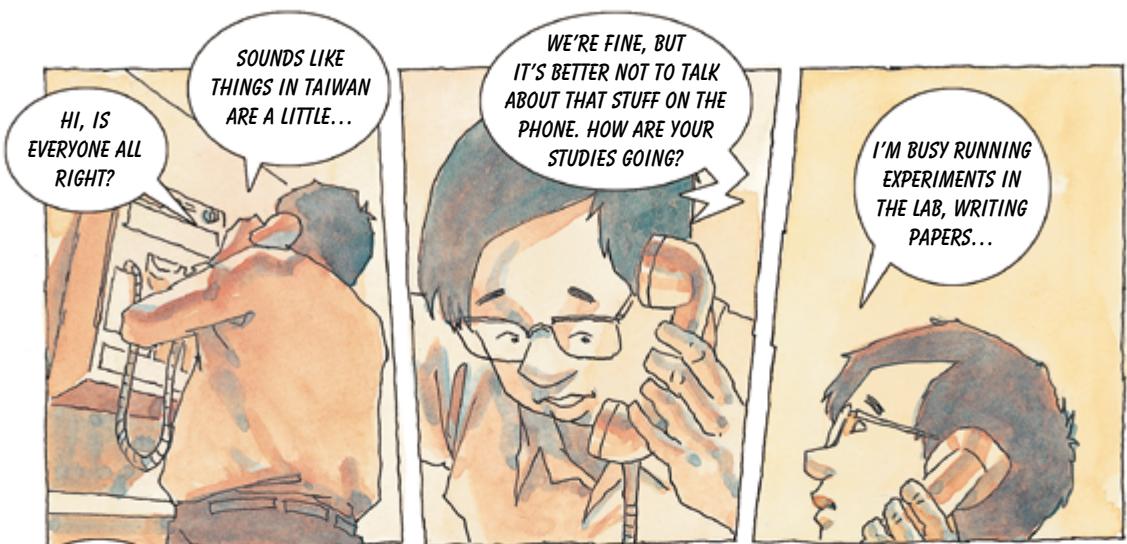
State University of New York, Buffalo

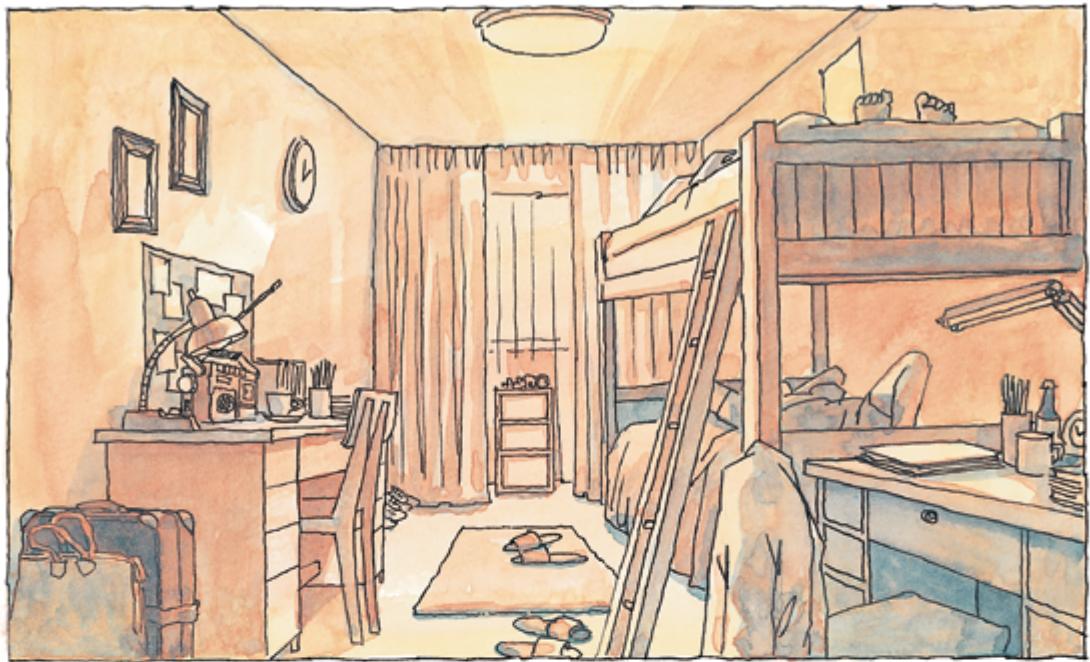




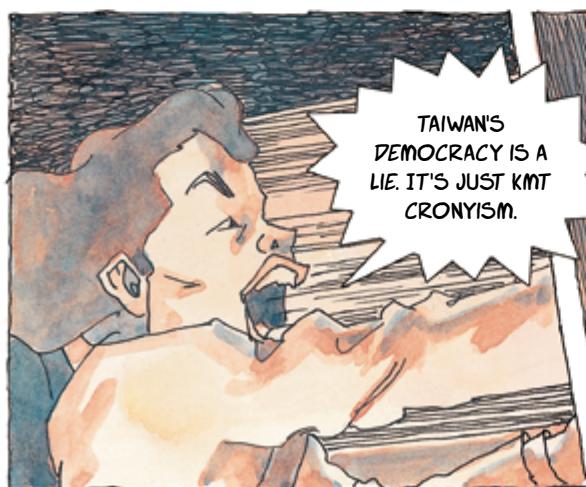
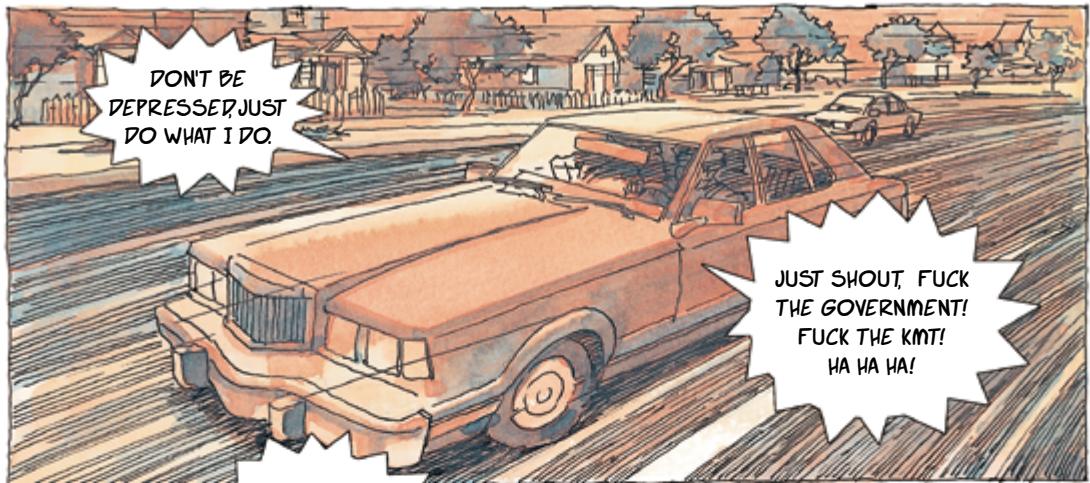


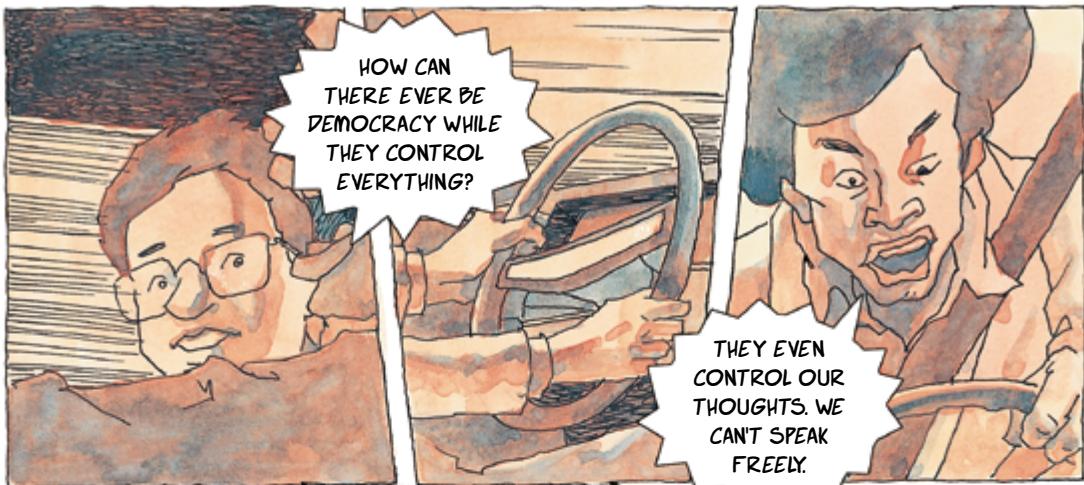
\* The Formosa Incident was a protest involving a march and public speeches that took place in Kaohsiung on December 10, 1979, National Human Rights Day. The organizers were mostly employees of *Formosa Magazine*. The purpose of the event was to advocate for democratic reform and greater individual liberty, and demand the legalization of opposition political parties and the end of martial law. The incident concluded with the arrest of many of the organizers and speakers, including Annette Lu, Chen Chu, and Shih Ming-teh.





A LITTLE  
NIGHT  
DRIVE?



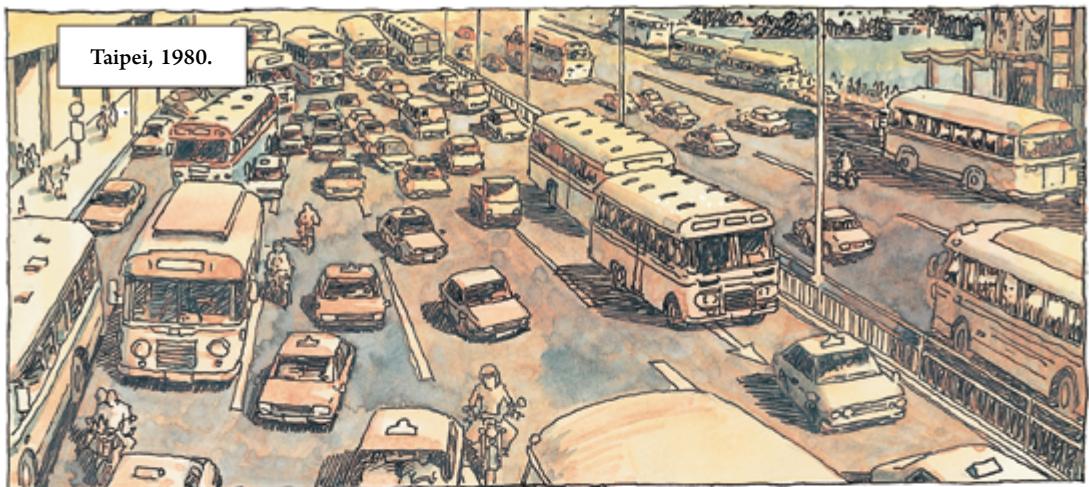


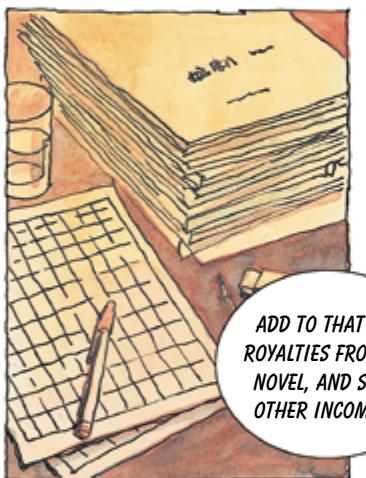












In 1980, at 29 years of age, Hsiao Yeh took a break from his studies to spend the year back in Taiwan. His dream was to become a successful novelist and screenwriter.



## The Movie Makers

### Hsiao Yeh ( 小野 )

Li Yuan, born 1951, better known by his pen name Hsiao Yeh. After graduating from Taiwan Normal University with a degree in biology, he went on to pursue graduate studies in molecular biology in the USA, later serving as an assistant professor at SUNY Buffalo and National Yang Ming University in Taiwan.

In 1980 he began working at CMPC where, together with other young writers and directors, he helped create the foundational films of the Taiwan New Wave Cinema movement. In the early 90s he became the chief writer and curator of the television show *Searching for the Lifeblood of Taiwan*, which was funded by *Global Views Monthly*. He has also served as the chairman of the board of the Taipei Culture Foundation, and co-founder and chairman of the first two seasons of the Taipei Film Festival. In 2000 he became the first programming manager of Taiwan Television. In 2006, he joined Chinese Television to serve as the first general manager after the station was reorganized as a public television station.

Hsiao Yeh became a best-selling author with the publication of his novel *Life of a Chrysalis* in 1970. His creative work spans multiple forms of media, garnering numerous accolades ranging from the UDN Grand Literary Award, to best screenplay awards from BAFTA, and the Golden Horse and Asia Pacific film festivals. In 1990, *Life of a Chrysalis* was selected by readers of the *China Times* as one of the ten most influential books of its era.