

# The Torrent

Ō Chōyū (Wang Changxiong)

Translated and with an introduction by Erin L. Brightwell

**The Asian Studies Department of Cornell University is proud to announce the recipients of the 2017 Kyoko Selden Memorial Translation Prize competition, concluded on November 1. The prize for an unpublished translator has been awarded to Erin L. Brightwell, Assistant Professor of Premodern Japanese Literature at the University of Michigan, for her translation of “The Torrent” (奔流, *Hon’ryū*, 1943) by the Taiwanese writer Wang Changxiong (王昶雄, also known by his Japanese name, Ō Shōyū/Ō Chōyū), who lived from 1916 to 2000. Brightwell’s translation is a welcome contribution to recent scholarship on Japanese-language literature produced in the era of Japan’s multi-ethnic empire. The translation vividly renders into English the numerous subtly charged dialogues in this story, with their attendant psychic repercussions.**

## On “The Torrent”: Introduction

**Erin L. Brightwell**

Despite growing and complex work on the literature of Japan’s imperial period, relatively few Japanese-language stories by colonial subjects have been translated into English: most typical are fairly unambiguous narratives that recount the toll Japan’s imperial dreams took on its occupied territories.<sup>1</sup> Such works offer normative readings wherein Japan’s imperialist expansion is condemned, and

resistance to it is praised.<sup>2</sup> If this is the desired image of colonial writings, it is easy to suppose that one reason for the scarcity of translations is that many stories produced under varying degrees of censorship simply may not fit the model.

At the same time, even those that have been translated hint at exclusionary typologies. The case of Wu Zhuoliu’s 1945 novel *Orphan of Asia* epitomizes this: it appears under the *Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan* series of titles, but the foreword explains it is a later addition due to “the amount of time needed to translate it from Japanese into English.”<sup>3</sup> Given the novel’s slight 247 pages, it is tempting to infer an additional factor, perhaps the problem of where Japanese-language writing belongs within the category of Chinese literature. The politics of writing in the language of the empire, after all, is a topic that can be endlessly probed without ever yielding a clear answer.<sup>4</sup> Not only that, through the act of translating, these problems are exacerbated. For instance, should the author of *Honryū* 奔流 (The Torrent, 1943), 王昶雄, be referred to as Ō Chōyū (alternatively romanized as Ō Shōyū)? Wang Changxiong? Committing to either choice has a political valence and obscures the issue at the heart of “The Torrent”: the “double lives” of Taiwanese as imperial subjects. Thus, I call him “Ō” when discussing his Japanese writings, and “Wang,” his Chinese.

Ō Chōyū (Wang Changxiong, 1916-2000), a Taiwanese writer under Japanese colonial rule educated largely in Japan, was the author of

several Japanese-language works that appeared in the 1930s and 1940s, including *Ri'en no aki* 梨園の秋 (Autumn in the Theater World, 1936), *Tansuigawa no Sazanami* 淡水河の漣 (Ripples on the Danshui River, 1939), and most famously the 1943 short story *Honryū* 奔流 (The Torrent). “The Torrent” first appeared in the journal *Taiwan Bungaku* after Ō’s 1942 return to Taiwan,<sup>5</sup> and unlike the pieces typically translated into English, “The Torrent” is ideologically muddled.<sup>6</sup> Although it can be read as criticizing the imperial project, it is deeply unsettling. Ō’s tale lacks clear-cut heroes, and his characters speak in ways at times uncomfortably close to nationalistic: the narrator in particular presents an almost dissociative persona that swings back and forth between admiration for Japanese ‘spirit’ and hatred for what the system that supports it demands of its colonial subjects.

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The work centers around the relationship between the narrator, Dr. Kō (Ch. Hong), and the local Japanese teacher, Itoh Haruo (né Zhu Chunsheng). It opens with Kō’s reluctant return to Taiwan after a ten-year stay in the Tokyo metropole; isolated and bored, Kō is overjoyed when he meets Itoh, a Taiwanese who has likewise lived in Japan and now passes as Japanese. Kō initially idolizes Itoh as a Taiwanese who has successfully “remade” himself as Japanese: here is someone with like interests and experiences. Yet, when he learns of the lengths to which Itoh has gone to deny the fact that he is Taiwanese, Kō experiences an abrupt, nearly pathological about-face. As becomes clear, however, the real target of Kō’s hatred is himself. Trying to analyze Itoh’s motivations, Kō finally admits that had he been given similar opportunities, he likely would have made the same decisions. In the final scene, Kō sets out to share news of a former student/patient with Itoh; yet when he catches sight of him in the distance, Kō remains caught, trapped by the realization that both because and in spite of all that they share, he cannot forgive Itoh. The closing image is of the impossibly positioned Kō, who, having just made a silent vow to embrace his Taiwanese identity and plea for future generations of Taiwanese to be able to do the same, suddenly flees the scene, crying, cursing, and running. There is no pat solution.

Wang produced a revised Chinese-language version of “The Torrent” in 1991,<sup>7</sup> claiming “strict censorship by the colonial government” of the original work as justification for many changes to the text.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Okubo Akio’s comparison of the Japanese and Chinese versions reveals the latter to be much more palatable ideologically in post-colonial Taiwan: the narrator is purged of his “sympathies” for Japan and Itoh, and a new emphasis is given to an independent “Taiwanese identity.”<sup>9</sup> Yet I



would like to suggest that the original Japanese version merits translation precisely because as a text it embodies the mechanics of colonial oppression. With its flawed characters and dissatisfying resolutions, the Japanese version of “The Torrent” reveals an ugly reality, to be sure, but one that nevertheless deserves to be acknowledged.

## The Torrent

By Ō Shōyū/Ō Chōyū (Wang Changxiong)

### Section One

It was in the spring of three years ago that I left behind Tokyo, my then familiar home of ten years. Even now, when I close my eyes, I can clearly recall that night. When the snake-like 9 PM night train bound for Shimonoseki had departed Tokyo Station, the lights of Yūrakuchō, Shinbashi, Shinagawa, Ōmori vanishing one by one, something hot welled up in my chest, but, of course, there was nothing I could do. It wasn’t so much the pain of parting that left me with an unbearable sense of loss; rather, it was the thought that once I had returned to my hometown, when would I again set foot in the imperial capital? This wasn’t just youthful sentimentality. After completing the course at the S-- College of Medicine, I still had to finish my research residency in the anatomy lab at the university hospital’s clinic. But no sooner had that begun—not even a year had passed—than I was met with the sudden death of my father, who had run a medical practice in my home village, and I had to go back as quickly as possible. Despite my desire to see my research through, and despite my attachment to my life in the *naichi*,<sup>10</sup> in the end, faced with reality, I surrendered without the slightest fight. Still, there was no denying that succeeding my father to a life buried away as a country doctor was quite unbearable to me.



**An 1898 Shinto shrine in Taiwan  
(Photograph by E. L. Brightwell)**

Seeing the village again after so many years, I really did find it beautiful, and I breathed a sigh of relief. But that didn’t last forever. The simple work of a country doctor was not bothersome, but somehow, I couldn’t get into it; the days vaguely continued one after the other. With nothing to dispel the boredom, I wished, body and soul, to chuck the whole thing. Where would I be able to turn for stimulation with such a simple lifestyle given my ambitions from my time in the *naichi*? This was the kind of dead-end thought that was constantly and ever more hotly percolating in my breast, bearing off my dejected heart infinite distances. Even though it was my hometown, there was no one who could genuinely comfort or talk with me, and the boredom of being completely adrift constantly

depressed me. “When am I going to just throw in the towel and go back to the capital?” I thought, but at the idea of my elderly mother, my resolve would fail me.

It was around this time. My meeting one Itoh Haruo. In so many words, just when I was completely drowning in that fierce sorrow like the gloom of homesickness, the very one who gave my parched throat a sip of soothing tonic—that was Itoh Haruo. That was, as it were, the motivation for my becoming close with Itoh, as well as a factor that intensified the degree to which we hit it off at once. So much for background.

Although nothing remained of October, the late summer heat was still fierce. But once night fell, the temperature dropped and grew cold, as though in betrayal. Because of this, stomachaches were going around, leaving me so busy that I lost track of whether it was night or day. It was one evening. In the midst of examining patients one after the other, someone proudly strode in, saying, “Greetings.” It was a man who looked to be 34 or 35, of good build. His eyes were bloodshot, and his face was flushed and red. He had casually thrown on a *yukata*, but somehow there was something imposingly vigorous about him. That was Itoh Haruo. I immediately pressed the stethoscope to his chest, and after venturing to examine his throat, I saw it was clearly a terrible cold. He also had a fever of 38.5°.

“As you can see, I’ve been pushing myself too hard. Even if I grin and bear it, I suppose that’s no match for an illness,” Itoh said with a laugh. There was a shadow or trace of something complicated lurking behind the laugh that didn’t go with the carefree expression on his face. It seemed to speak to a desire to win, a desire that asserted the dignity of the individual. When I asked about his job, he said that he was a Japanese National Language & Literature teacher at the Taidong Secondary School<sup>11</sup> at the edge of town. Somehow, my

gaze drifted to Itoh’s face. When he said what his job was, I stared intently at him, just as though he were under observation. It was because Itoh, this apparent *naichi*-person—I couldn’t tell based on his accent, but based on the contours of his face, his bone structure, his eyes and nose—there was something about him that looked to me like an Islander.<sup>12</sup> Maybe I can call it a hyper-aware, sharpened sixth sense from being born in a colonial territory? When I was in the *naichi*, with just a glance, I could predict, without exception, whether someone was from the *naichi* (of course)?<sup>13</sup> Or the peninsula?<sup>14</sup> Or Chinese? And, assuming that this sharpened sixth sense of mine hadn’t been compromised, there shouldn’t be any mistaking what had caught my eye this time. This was enough to arouse my extreme curiosity. It spurred my impulse—the desire to pin down Itoh’s true identity as soon as possible and even to try to have a heart-to-heart with him. And if Itoh were, as I suspected, a Taiwanese, I felt that this would be a big part of the quality that invited my interest and kindled my hope. But I thought it would be rude and overly familiar to ask any more questions at the time, and patients were clogging the way behind him, so I gave him two days’ medication and told him to come back—with that, we parted.

I saw someone come in as he was headed out—well, if it wasn’t one of the fifth-year students from the local secondary school, Lin Bonian?<sup>15</sup> I guess Lin Bonian saw Itoh’s face; he raised his hand in greeting. I was happy that Lin Bonian had come at a good time. At 18, his physique, honed by kendo, was all muscle, and there wasn’t anything childlike about it. By nature fond of sports, he dabbled in other things in addition to doing kendo, and in his impetuosity, he had pushed his body too hard. Because of this, the membrane around his lungs had suffered damage, so he’d been coming to my hospital for two and a half months. I tapped lightly on his chest, and after some simple inquiries about how things had

been of late, I asked, “This seems like a strange question, but where is Teacher Itoh from?”

“That teacher?” Bonian was indeed put on the spot. “That teacher is Taiwanese. Although, of course, his wife is from the *naichi*.”

“I was right, wasn’t I?” I thought with a satisfied grin. It wasn’t so much pleasure at the fact that my sixth sense hadn’t weakened, it was more an indefinable happiness following the strange-yet-cheery thought that this person’s existence was somehow connected to me. Be it because he was in charge of National Language & Literature, or be it because of his sophistication that was no different from that of *naichi* Japanese, I felt that the presence of this Taiwanese in my hometown was unbearably hopeful, and it seemed that happiness bubbled up from the very bottom of my heart.

“A good teacher, isn’t he?” I unthinkingly asked this stupid thing in the next instant.

“Well...I can’t say that.”

Why had Bonian immediately responded so obstinately? This person was of rather slight build, and there was something unapproachable about him. Maybe I was imagining it, but his eyes seemed to narrow as though he were sizing up the situation. I didn’t like this apparent evasiveness, but I found the redoubled strength of his youthful sense of justice touching. I didn’t ask him anything else about Itoh, but from that moment on, the wait for Itoh’s return to the hospital was unbearable.

However, three days, then five days passed without a trace of Itoh. His cold had probably gotten better. I told myself that was why, and since it would be a bother for me to initiate a conversation, I decided to wait for some sort of opportunity to come along. From around that time, the number of colds dropped off somewhat, but in their place, the rains particular to this town rolled in. It was basically

a mist that never coalesced. One night, after all of the patients had left, I was hoping to distract myself from my feelings of depression by reading; the clock had struck 9, but, luckily, just as I was about to lock up, someone came in with a “Good evening.” It was Itoh. It goes without saying that I truly welcomed this unexpected visit of his. Although he had been going to thank me for the other day and then head home, I did everything in my power to detain him, showing him to my study.

“This is quite a library, isn’t it? You’re a scholar, yes?” Itoh said as he cast his gaze over the two large bookshelves. “What’s this? Haven’t you got more literary works than medical?”

Laughing, I offered him a floor cushion. “Some of these books belonged to my late father. Present appearances notwithstanding, at one time in my youth, I was quite the literature fan. I wanted to become an author, but as it turns out, that was just a long-ago dream.”

“Really? But I think that people need to have dreams. Human growth and advancement are inspired and driven by people’s dreams. My school only takes in Taiwanese children, but they don’t have big dreams. In a nutshell, character is never what one might wish in the colonies, which is a problem.”

“Indeed. They don’t have ambition, do they?”

“Their vision is, in a word, narrow. Anyway, when people can’t conceive of anything other than their own world and are afraid of everything, they shrink, don’t they? They’ve got no backbone, no mettle. For instance...”

Just then, my mother came in with some tea and a tray bearing simple sweets. “Welcome,” she greeted him in Japanese. “The awful rainy season has started, hasn’t it? It makes things difficult.” This she said in Chinese.<sup>16</sup>

“This is my mother. She only understands a

little bit of Japanese,” I said by way of introduction.

“Ah, your mother? How nice to meet you. I am Itoh Haruo. I apologize for the intrusion.” This greeting was in Japanese. I was struck by an unexpected feeling. Even in this kind of situation, Itoh would not speak Chinese. At that moment, I thought, “Itoh’s life philosophy is awfully hard-core.” I had no choice but to translate the greeting for my mother.

“Are your parents in good health?” I ventured to ask him after my mother had left.

“Uh, the old folks manage somehow,” Itoh said, as though to completely avoid the topic. “Since you’ve spent a long time in the *naichi*, and since you especially seem to have an interest in aspects of spiritual culture, this has probably occurred to you, but though people commonly talk of a ‘Japanese spirit,’ this is really something that has no meaning at all if one doesn’t view it via the classics. For example, *The Record of Ancient Matters*, right? What draws us to it, you know, is the way that the purity of its sense and words emerges not warped in the slightest. As a certain great scholar put it, ‘Young children draw near to throw themselves on their grandparents’ knees, with curious eyes a-sparkle, and delight in lending their ears to that ancient tale.’ There is no Japanese spirit without the Japanese classics.”

While Itoh was chattering, his eyes were ablaze, and even the skin on his face was alight. “This is a greater man than I had realized,” I thought, gazing at him in secret admiration. Thinking that his way of life was truly splendid, I swallowed with a shudder. You should try to imagine it. This Taiwanese had taken a wife from the *naichi*, and in language, in behavior—no, in his very essence—he had become completely Japanese. This man stood on the sacred pulpit of the secondary school and majestically taught National Literature. The people of the past could not have dreamed

of this, but the scent of esoteric knowledge associated with some truth had turned into passionate words that seemed to gouge my companion’s heart; when I saw him describe playing a major role in cultivating a sublime mind, awakening a heart with a longing for true scholarship, or rousing a feeling of unstoppable love for ‘spirit’ in the breasts of the Taiwanese secondary school students at that time when they were at their most receptive, my eyes somehow filled with tears. These weren’t because I was happy or anything, just a feeling that my soul was strangely shaken. I guess I should say I was moved.

Although this was the first time we two had gotten wrapped up in talking, we were able to converse just as though we had known each other for years. When Itoh went home, it was after twelve, but I had the sensation that the formally-ordered-yet-soulless, empty loneliness of my return from the *naichi* itself had dispersed.

## Section Two

It was a small town, but the foothold left by my father was unexpectedly firm, and patients were always gathered outside my door. A month and a half had flown by, but faced day in, day out with crowds of the sick and pained who were the very image of human suffering, I was up against a lifestyle so hectic I could hardly breathe. In the wake of one of Itoh’s visits, we kindred spirits had begun socializing, but I could not step one foot beyond the misery of my practice, so usually it was Itoh who came to see me.

In the meantime, the year drew to an end, and eventually it was time to ring in the New Year. I, usually lethargic by nature, had the sudden idea to visit a shrine, and I got up while it was yet early. In the chill air of the still semi-dark pre-dawn, not a thing was stirring, and not a sound could be heard. The shrine was on top of

a hill that couldn't have been more than two blocks outside of town, but the blue-black mountains visible on the opposite shore looked as though they were more than a day's journey distant. The sparkling light of the stars in the sky that faintly illumined the tops of the mountains was a clear light blue-green. The rain had finally lifted, and in the lovely darkness, the sky looked distant. When I finished my visit, like one liberated from quotidian worries, I strolled carefree through the area. The piercing cold made me nostalgic for the *naichi* winter. The beauty of the winter clarity on the Kantō Plain at just that time of year was beyond compare. And it was in that distant time that I had felt the winter sunlight and dry grass strangely warm, that the winter air washed over my entire body and even to my very soul. In Taiwan, this was unthinkable. When I thought of Taiwan with its long burnt-to-a-crisp seasons, my mood began to flag. "Am I not getting more and more stupid, bit by bit?" I thought. How far had I walked? The eastern sky had gradually brightened. For the moment, I returned home.

Since I had visitors, I didn't get to Itoh's home until around 4 in the afternoon.

"Weeeellcome." Itoh, in a figured *hakama*, greeted me in a voice that was almost over-the-top.

At my overly grand "Felicitations for the New Year," Itoh brusquely replied, "No—that's old-fashioned. Let's do it in the new way."

"All right, all right," I said, scratching my head. We looked at each other and started to laugh. I'd been escorted into an eight-mat sitting room. And if it wasn't Lin Bonian sitting there cross-legged, looking thoroughly bored. Catching sight of me, I guess, he sat up straight; placing his palms on the ground to bow, he said, "Felicitations for the New Year."

In imitation of Itoh, I said, "No—that's old-fashioned. Let's do it in the new way," and

everyone laughed merrily again. Only Lin Bonian just smiled a bit for some reason, his face returning at once to its earlier unmanageable expression devoid of the slightest good humor.

"He's a strange one," I thought to myself, but then again, this youth was by nature not of a cheerful disposition, always silent with a lonely air.

"Mother will be here in a moment," Itoh said, offering me a floor cushion. I wanted to see the mother of such a great man. Probably she would be none other than a woman raised in the old style. While I turned over such images in my mind, I looked up at the sky: it had taken on a slightly cloudy appearance. But that had been completely unthinkable in the chill air of that morning; on the contrary, it had looked as though a thoroughly bright warm current had been on the verge of wafting our way.

Before long, the *shoji* opened, and Itoh's wife and Mother entered. I sat up straight, and my eyes widened in spite of myself. The woman who must have been Mother was in Japanese clothing that suited her to a T. She must have been well past sixty. She was an old woman with narrow eyes and broad shoulders whose hair wasn't thinning—instead it was mostly white. "I am ever so pleased to make your acquaintance," Mother politely greeted me, bowing with her palms on the floor in front of her. Maybe it was because her teeth were loose, but her pronunciation was muffled. His wife offered us tea. I thought that there was something strange about this, but then I intuited in a flash that this was his wife's mother. Still, what was going on? It wasn't that Itoh didn't have birth parents—perhaps she was planning to do a bit of sightseeing in Taiwan and had become her son-in-law's responsibility. After exchanging two or three words, Mother quickly withdrew, but his tactful wife chatted with us about various things. Lin Bonian remained sullenly silent from start to

finish, his expression suggesting he wished he hadn't come. I happened to be seated to the right of the *tokonoma* alcove, and I noticed an ikebana arrangement. It was probably his wife's. There was an *usubata* vase from Sentoku with a brilliantly beautiful nandina bearing adorable scarlet berries. It was in solid good taste—appropriate for a sitting room at New Year's. A book of noh libretti had been placed next to it, and a *shakuhachi* stood next to that. Though his wife was not a beauty, her brow was of an incomparable purity, and the straight bridge of her nose called to mind an inimitable class. Poised, in her fresh kimono and dusty violet *haori* coat—I felt as though I were at long last back in the *naichi*.

By no means were all of the memories of my ten-year stay in the *naichi* happy ones, but it was during that time that I discovered the true beauty of Japan, that I came into contact with a human touch that warmed me as though I were bundled up in hay, and that I experienced a spirit verging on a high ideal much, much loftier than I had longed for and a matter that profoundly moved me. Unable to be content with being a southern-colony-born Japanese, I wasn't going to be satisfied unless I could become a pure Japanese. It wasn't that I actively labored at Japanizing myself; it was more a feeling that unconsciously *naichi* blood would take possession of my blood vessels and in no time silently circulate in me.

On that note, too, there was a girl from a good family in Tokyo whose existence I cannot forget. The fact that I understand the appeal of ikebana or Tea Ceremony, that I have an affection for kimono or the Takashimada hairstyle, that I can be enchanted by noh or kabuki—all of this is because of that person. Her round eyes were always sparkling with intelligence, and though something in her features suggested a competitive coldness, she herself made an exceptionally warm and passionate impression. The way her exuberant black hair was loosely bound, or the

easygoingness of the lines traced by her strange movements: all of this cast a fascination as purely Japanese over me, a southern-born. Afterwards, she ended up becoming an ikebana instructor or something, but I had intense memories of how by means of ikebana, she thought to personally search ever deeper and how she had a way of life devoted to the single-minded pursuit of something. In other words, hers was a ceaseless probing within the heart, an endless directing of her life force in the service of a noble artistic practice. There is a desire for truth that probably constantly stirs her heart; though buffeted countless times by rough seas, a day when the sun shines for her will surely come. She who boundlessly enlightened me—she was my teacher, my friend, and my lover. I remember how when I met with her gaze coincidentally washing over me, I would feel as though unspeakably hot blood were coursing through my body; but at the same instant, I would be ashamed of my own un-ripeness and feel a sincere drive to personally temper myself further.

Just a week before I was to return home, I received a slip of paper with an inscription on it from her in farewell. It said “a first-class person of the realm.” This was probably in reference to the great Confucianist Satō Issai's line: “He who sets his goal firmly must surely be a first-class person of the realm.”<sup>17</sup> I decided not to meet her and sent a letter of thanks, after which I soon received a letter in reply. Part of it read: “Please don't say that a slip of paper is a wonderful thing. It makes me think that if there were a cave, I'd about feel like crawling into it. When I was writing those characters, I reflected that perhaps my only worth was in presenting those words to you. I am utterly embarrassed. But no matter how many times I hesitated, I had to write them. This feeling finally drove me to write the slip. With all my heart... I believe that the gods will surely forgive me for such insolent behavior. And of course, you, too...”



I resolutely withstood my rising passions. Even if we had described what was in our hearts to each other, this was goodbye. Personally speaking, had I become qualified to marry this person? No—more than this, as an only son, I would have to bring this person to the hinterlands of Taiwan, but when I asked myself whether the happiness we'd known up until then could endure and considered the situation from all possible angles, I felt as though I were walking a tightrope. I cried at my lack of courage.

Compared to this, Itoh was a super-star. While I didn't know the ins and outs of his situation, hadn't he made up his mind without hesitation and wonderfully persevered to the present? Itoh had brought that comfortable feeling and lifestyle of the *naichi* back to our village completely intact. I was convinced he was wonderful.

When the clock struck five, Lin Bonian said that he was heading home. I had hoped to stay a bit longer, but thinking that it was high time we wrapped things up, I got ready to take my leave. But Itoh grew scarlet and held me back. "It's New Year's—what's the rush? Neither you, Doctor, nor Lin Bonian seem to have much energy. Today you should take it easy and relax."

"Uh..." Lin Bonian hesitated and scratched his head.

Then his wife moved to detain us. "Anyway, it's nothing special, but won't you stay for dinner?"

The two had made up their minds to invite us to dinner.

There were five of us in attendance. In spite of myself, I fixed my eyes on the tables Itoh's wife brought in: I was overwhelmed. As I set to my *ozōni* rice cake soup with my chopsticks, I looked out over the numerous practically wasteful treats that bedecked the tables. A large sea bream, herring roe, chicken soup,

shrimp tempura, and so on—it seemed as though it had been absolutely months since I had been thus wined and dined! When I looked at him, Lin Bonian had not made a move towards the side dishes. He simply mutely consumed his *ozōni*.

There was the faint sound of the front door opening. Itoh's wife set down her chopsticks and went to the entryway. "Oh, my! If it isn't Taipei Mother. Please do come in," she said.

"It's fine, it's fine. I'm leaving in a minute. Is everyone well?" The owner of the voice sounded like a fairly elderly woman, and based on her halting Japanese, I at once understood her to be a Taiwanese. For some reason, Itoh seemed a bit rattled, and he went out to the entryway.

After a bit, I could hear the elderly woman's voice again. "I didn't have any special reason, but I wanted to see your face after so long, and, Chunsheng, your father has suddenly weakened, and he's always saying how lonely he is, so please come see him once in a while." This was in Chinese. The last part was said in tears and was not clearly audible.

"Oh, enough already. I'm going back inside." Itoh flung out the words as though he were discarding a pot and returned to the sitting room. Agitated, he drew in air through pursed lips. I could see in his face that he was suppressing a feeling of things having gone awry. I couldn't definitely put my finger on what the matter was. But it flashed through my mind that that Taiwanese woman was none other than Itoh's birth mother. If that were the case, why would Itoh need to so despise her and keep her at a distance? I naively wanted to believe that there was surely some deep secret reason for this. I hadn't noticed until now, but Lin Bonian had set down his chopsticks and sat hunched over, chewing on his lower lip. His eyes were moist with tears.

Before long, Itoh's wife returned. It seemed

that the elderly Taiwanese woman had gone home. “I am terribly sorry,” Itoh’s wife said. But the room had already sunk into an empty silence, and the only sound was the overlapping in-and-out of our breathing. Actually, I felt as though something hot were clogging my throat, and I couldn’t even speak.

Perhaps thinking that this was inappropriate, Itoh suddenly was in high spirits. “I’m ready to go, ready! I might even recite my pet Ina ditty,” he said and recited as follows

*How depressing*

*The journey along the Kiso road.*

*The leaves from the trees*

*Scatter over my umbrella.*

However, Lin Bonian seemed unable to bear it, and without regard for whether Itoh had finished reciting, he said, “My stomach is really killing me, so I ask to be excused. Thank you very much for dinner.” And with that, he quickly stood up and sprang for the door. Had anyone clumsily tried to stop him, his momentum would have sent them flying; when I saw Lin Bonian’s unyielding expression, I was stunned more than anything. But now I felt that I understood Lin Bonian’s feelings of thorough repulsion towards Itoh, feelings that were probably lodged in the nooks and crannies of his consciousness. Still, I couldn’t just sit there without stopping this. “Lin Bonian, aren’t you being rude to Teacher?”

But Itoh just said, “Leave it, leave it,” as he straightened things up. “One has to imagine that such things as this will happen over the course of a long life of teaching. As someone said, ‘Bringing up students is not just stacking up bricks; a lot goes on at once in their daily management.’ Especially given Taiwanese students’ tendency towards a contrary

character, one just has to beat them into shape from the ground up.”

Though he explained this business with Lin Bonian under the guise of education, I preferred to get to the real story behind the exchange in the entryway. But for some reason, I couldn’t get myself in the mood to ask about it. I felt that I couldn’t reveal the brittleness or collapse of the trust and respect I’d had for Itoh of late.

“A strange child, isn’t he,” mumbled kimono-clad Mother, who had been silent up until now. His wife had been staring out of the window the entire time, her expression suggesting she was fretting about something—something ungraspable that wasn’t exactly sadness or loneliness flowed about her.

About an hour and a half later, I took my leave. It was fairly dark outside. The January wind was, in the end, cold upon my skin, and it looked like I’d be shivering—*brrrrr*. The countless stars overhead continued to twinkle pleasantly. I was trying to forget the earlier scene, but for some reason, it kept flickering in and out of my thoughts.

“Is that Lin Bonian? What are you doing out again...?”

“Doctor,” he was at my side before I knew it. In the eventide darkness, his trembling voice was low, but the words gushed out in an excited torrent. He was terribly agitated. “Itoh Haruo—no, Zhu Chunsheng—he trampled on his own birth parents...”

“Well, let’s take it down a notch,” I chided him firmly. “Don’t be inappropriate towards your teacher. You should show some restraint.”

“Doctor, you probably don’t realize it, but that old woman in the entryway was Itoh’s real mother. He has cast aside his real mother and father and is living like that. He thinks that as long as he’s happy...”

“Hadn’t you better stop?” I couldn’t stand any more.

“No—please let me talk. Please hear me out. Itoh’s birth mother is m- m- my aunt. I know my aunt’s suffering better than anyone. Please imagine the feelings of someone who has been abandoned by her only son in the entire universe. Doctor, are you going to take Itoh’s side about this, too? About this, *this...*?” His shoulders shaking, Lin Bonian finally burst into tears. Those raging feelings that had always been secreted away inside had finally smashed through, just at that moment when he faced me. It was strange to imagine that Lin Bonian, mute and with a cowardly streak that didn’t match his physique, had such passionate depths. Lin Bonian was thus agitated, but the distress that infected me, too, was just as great. Something—I didn’t know exactly what—was battling up in my chest, and I felt curiously helpless as I stood there.

“It’s all right. Your indignation is fully correct, but can’t you try to think about it a bit more cool-headedly? As a teacher, Teacher Itoh has a great life philosophy, so I think there are probably things that can’t be measured by your simple sense of justice alone. It’s cold out tonight, and it’s already late, so for now, go home and get some sleep.” I comforted him thus, and Bonian went home.

I couldn’t sleep at all that night. Bonian’s agitation must have transferred itself to me. My eyes were increasingly clear, and my mind was extraordinarily excited. I felt that there was some kind of convergence between Lin Bonian’s normal attitude towards Itoh and Itoh’s apparent evasiveness when I asked him about his parents. Itoh’s agitation in that instant—didn’t it reveal something? As for its interpretation—with the appearance of his unsightly Taiwanese mother, significant circumstances that had been kept silent up until then suddenly ran into reality. This was the discomfort I sensed. Had Itoh, as Bonian

said, gone so far as to sacrifice his flesh-and-blood parents in pursuit of his own pleasure? I had to pray that the dream that he had once explained to me did not aim for this sort of frivolity.

### Section Three

One day when this lingering grievance still had grown no lighter, something awful happened that cast a shadow over my thoughts from that day forward.

Itoh’s birth father, Zhu Liang’an, died at last. Chronic diabetes had weakened his physical condition with each passing day, and to make matters worse, about a half a month earlier, he had contracted a flu-like lung inflammation that was pronounced the cause of death. According to what I later heard from Lin Bonian, Itoh had been to see him only once. While this might have been a symptom of the flu-like pneumonia, he frequently experienced confusion and delusion, and he was constantly blurting out ghastly mixtures of expletives and curses. He was endlessly embittered about the extinction of his bloodline, and even on his deathbed, his eyes shone brilliantly with a bizarre light as though expressing a deep anguish that would outlive him, even in death.

For some reason, even on the day of the funeral itself, I still had not heard anything from Itoh. Although I had never met Itoh’s parents, I decided that I wouldn’t wait for news from him and definitely would attend the funeral. While it’s true that this was in part because of our standing friendship of kindred spirits, it might be more fitting to say that having straightforwardly accepted what Lin Bonian had told me, I was spurred by a curiosity to see the every move of him who should be the filial son (the chief mourner), Itoh. This extreme feeling of my dishonesty towards him did, to be sure, rub me the wrong way, but I couldn’t help what was, frankly, my maliciousness.

Well, when the day arrived, I was all geared up and ready to go, but because of an emergency, I wasn't able to make it on time in the end. I gave up the idea of reporting to the ceremonial hall in Taipei and decided to hurry to what should have been the burial site, which was a bit outside of the city. But when I got there, the coffin was already in place before the grave, surrounded by wailing surviving family members. It was probably just after 5 PM. The sun, on the verge of setting, was dipping in the west, and though a lethargic light lingered, the sky was tinged with darkness. As a result, the scene was tainted with a blackness bordering on eerie. The grave was partway up a hillside. Graves were scattered here and there along the way, shrouded in weeds and unknown plants that had been allowed to run wild, and the reddish earth stretched drearily in all directions. As I climbed, I felt something warm surging up in my chest. There were quite a few mourners. I hid behind them and quickly surveyed the group. My attention was caught by the sight of Itoh, drawn up to his full height, to the right of the coffin encircled by hemp-clad mourners. He was in a black suit with a black armband. It might have been my imagination, but his face looked dispirited and ashen. Next to him, his wife stood modestly in a kimono that bore the family crest. Her gaze was directed slightly downwards, but her eyes seemed a bit red. Just when I thought the wailing might go on forever, Itoh, who looked as though he couldn't bear it, thundered, "I've already said this is unseemly enough." Pulling his owlish expression still further into a grimace, he urged one of the monks, "How about getting on with the ceremony?" With a timid air, the monk hastened to direct the mourners away from the coffin and made ready to proceed to the next step. But there was an elderly woman who clung to the coffin and wouldn't let go. She was a short thin woman. Feelings that had withstood containment for so long suddenly reached the point of explosion, and her desperate sobbing that seemed to blame the deceased, cursing him and everything, went on

and on without the least inhibition. "I've heard that voice somewhere before," I thought. It struck in nearly the same instant. The intuition that this was Itoh's mother. I pictured this pitiful woman, without a soul in the world upon whom she could rely anymore—the idea of her firmly seized hold of my heart and squeezed it tight. In the next instant, someone protectively led this sorry old woman away from that place. But it wasn't Itoh—it was a youth in a simple hempen robe. It was Bonian. Large teardrops were visible in his eyes, red and swollen from crying. For an instant, I was moved by a desire to call out, "Bonian!"

As the caretaker finally took his shovel and covered the coffin with dirt, the surviving family members began to arrange themselves along the mat in front of the spirit tablet in order to make prostrations and take their final farewells from the deceased. The Itohs remained standing and performed a simple *révérance*. One of the monks struck a gong, and the sound was born off by the evening breeze, swelling and contracting, you could hear it sometimes coming near, sometimes even right up to your ears—a weird thing that seemed to summon all the souls from the depths of the earth. After a while, the bun-shaped grave was completed, whereupon a temporary grave marker was put in place.

What time must it have been that this ceremony was finally finished? Beneath the completely darkened sky, the sea, visible in the distance, and the mountains on the opposite bank appeared only blue-black. People went down the hill, gazing back lingeringly at the fresh grave from the newly completed funeral. I couldn't help it—Itoh came to look increasingly hard-hearted to me. In the meantime, Itoh's wife had approached the old woman from earlier and said, "Mother, how about coming to our place before you go home?"

"No, I must straighten up the house in Taipei, so it's probably better for me to get back early.

I'll come by some other time," she said, and after simply clasping Itoh's wife's hands, she headed down the hill. I didn't want to believe my eyes or ears. But this wasn't a dream or anything of the kind. When it sunk in that this had actually just happened, I bit my lip in anger and frustration. I felt a never-before-tasted heavy pressure to vomit. At the mere sight of this pitiful elderly woman, I experienced a horrible feeling. At that moment, a loud voice suddenly cried out from off to the side, "Auntie, shall we go home together?" and the owner of the voice took the old woman's hand. It was Bonian. It was as though he didn't even notice me. His voice could only be taken as in defiance of Itoh's behavior. His lips quivered violently, perhaps with rising anger. This spread to his entire body, and even in the dark, I could tell that he shook with much too great an excitement. Bonian was easily moved, and from his perspective, this was a fairly serious shock. With sluggish steps, I made my way down the hill. I wanted to call out to Bonian, but to be honest, I was filled with the desire to try to think over and reflect on various things in quiet.

I thought about my time in the *naichi*. When I was asked, "Where's your hometown?" what kind of psychological process was there? I would usually answer that it was in Kyūshū or Shikoku. Why was I embarrassed to promptly reply, "It's in Taiwan"? Because of that shame, I always had to brandish the pseudonym "Kimura Bunroku." When I went to the bathhouse or out drinking at the *oden* restaurant, I went under this name. And since I planned to become a full-fledged Japanese, I would self-satisfiedly square my shoulders and chatter away. Once in a while, I'd spit out some idiotic dialect bits and dazzle my companions. That's why, when I was together with friends who spoke in broad local dialects, I was invariably on tenterhooks about whether something might not give me away as Taiwanese. And when my cover was finally blown, I would flee like a squirrel. I spent ten

years like this, with my nerves on edge.

("What kind of a low-life are you? Isn't this clear proof that you despise Taiwan itself? Taiwanese aren't Chinese, and they aren't Eskimos either! In fact, how should they be any different from people born in the *naichi*? Be proud! Just like a Japanese citizen is!")

When I finally grew tired of my masquerade, I told myself this as though it were established fact.

("Hey, wait! I'm not a low-life. Can't we also say that the dedicated concealment of my true character is a kind of acceptance of the benevolent wing of the parent bird that always provides me with a warm bed? In other words, it's not something I'm driven to by force, but rather, shall we say, an aspiration that has seeped into me, be it in terms of lifestyle or in terms of spirit, while I was unawares. And I embrace it. And a great benevolence essentially feeds me my fill.")

Another me repeated this over and over. Itoh had been able to sustain this feeling even after returning to Taiwan. As someone who himself had experience in the *naichi*, I, more than anyone, ought to have been able to understand Itoh's feelings easily. But had he really had to use his parents as a steppingstone? Itoh had taken a woman from the *naichi* as his wife. It was natural that through her, he should practice a dedicated filial piety towards his Japanese parents; but couldn't he surely do his best to be filial towards his Taiwanese parents at the same time?

While I thought about various things, the road I was walking along gradually grew dark. I couldn't help crying. "I have no idea what I ought to do now," I thought. "Does a world that could sustain such desolation as this exist?" My thoughts were on the point of fragmenting into thousands and thousands of such questions.

## Section Four

After that, I didn't see much of either Itoh or Bonian. My mind was blank, just like someone who had gathered together all of his hopes and discarded them, and the days passed emptily by. When I realized that Itoh's way of life, which had seemed a profound way of survival filled with gumption, regardless of whether the end was justified, was actually one of nervous hypersensitivity with such an unstable shallow basis—for good or for ill—it provided me with a credo. This was that through my medical practice I would live an outstanding life. Don't doctors fail to cure by focusing only on the body and forgetting that humans have psyches, too? To be able to simultaneously examine a person's body and his/her emotions or psychological strength! I began to understand that the cowardice of just gaining confidence in making an accurate physical diagnosis would be dishonest. Given the extent of the blind adoration the Taiwanese felt towards doctors, this probably wouldn't be a shallow way of life.

One afternoon, I had just returned home after my rounds when there was a phone call from the Taidong Secondary School. It was from Itoh. One of the students had fainted with cerebral anemia, so would I please come at once? Without wasting any time, I picked up my bag and went. At Itoh's instruction, the patient was resting in the first-aid room, and I lowered his upper body and head somewhat and raised his lower body; I loosened the clothing around his chest, and once he seemed to be breathing freely, I gave him an injection of cardiotonic. After a little while, he seemed to be recovering bit by bit—this student was a member of the group under Itoh's charge. While this was going on, Itoh tried to anticipate the patient's every need. During that time, his eyes shone with sincerity. How can I describe it? It was like a window into his soul. Wasn't it unthinkable that even the slightest shadow of guilt at having rejected that old woman might have lingered in those pure eyes? I was

wondering whether I could go home soon when Itoh turned serious and said that there was a district-level kendo match in ten days; the athletes were undergoing strenuous training every afternoon until late, and he invited me to come take a peek. More than curious, I was hopeful. This was a secondary school that only accepted Taiwanese. Just the image of those Taiwanese students at that very moment proudly wielding bamboo swords gave me a thrill.

The dojo was a rather broad planked space. In fact, several sets of athletes, their faces and chests covered, were clashing with a fiery vigor as though it were a decisive match. From time to time, I could hear an impervious voice that sounded as though it belonged to an instructor. "Don't raise your weapon and stand there as though you were going to face down the enemy. He's not bad so much as he doesn't know the right way to do it.... If you face your opponent and switch to skewing the sword left and right from the center of your own body, the hands end up reversed, creating an exposed area! ...You don't have enough fight, not enough. Can't you muster more courage and strike?"

Itoh watched with an earnest gaze. After a brief interval, he explained. "At last year's match, we came up short. We were lacking something, and we let the big one get away. That's why this year we've got to do something... But when you try to think about it, the problem is not so much whether we win or lose the match—more than anything, it's how to get Japanese-like blood coursing through their bodies."

Without taking my eyes off of them, I nodded at what Itoh was saying.

"Especially in the case of Lin Bonian," Itoh continued. I turned then to Itoh for the first time. "Since his chest lining is supposed to be done for, I suppose such strenuous practice as this is not really possible. But Doctor, what is your diagnosis?"

For the first time, I remembered Lin Bonian. “Ah, yes, right. No wonder he hasn’t put in much of an appearance at the hospital of late. If possible, it might be better for him to hold back.”

“Ah, there he is.” Itoh pointed to one of the pairs among them. He said that the one facing the opposite direction was Bonian. He was practicing. The awfulness of that moment of his complete absorption—with his sword directed at the eyes of his opponent, his entire body was overflowing with energy. Was it fury? Was it an unfettered wildness? He seemed as though he were moving four long-restrained limbs at will. The boy watching him, on the other hand, was damp with sweat. Although there was no trigger for all of this ceaseless movement, Lin Bonian must have had such energy concealed away somewhere. At some point that evening, I happened to remember the frightful zeal of that time when he had grilled me about Itoh. But then again, I thought that if he was this vigorous, any pain was probably gone.

As we sat there watching, unable to tear our eyes away for even an instant, a loud penetrating voice called out from behind us.

“Well if it isn’t the doctor from the Muyang-tang Clinic. This is a first.”

I turned around to look, and there was Vice-Principal Tajiri, who had been to see me two or three times with a cold and was in charge of the History & Geography lesson. He was already middle-aged with salt-and-pepper hair, and his somewhat hunched shoulders seemed the product of having long withstood a complicated life, but his restlessly weirdly moving gaze did not convey the slightest gentleness. I bowed politely back. “Mr. Vice-Principal? Excuse the intrusion. They’re all getting fired up, aren’t they? What are the odds of victory this year?” I asked and tactfully looked at the water.

“Ha ha ha! Well, what indeed? They’re scared

and ready to turn tail at the mere sight of a dog, right? They say that he who despises himself is in turn despised by others, but I can’t imagine anyone being despised by that piece-of-shit team—a victory is most unlikely. Don’t you think so, Itoh?” He looked at Itoh while making this high-handed speech.

Itoh looked very humbled and said, “I feel the same way. Almost daily, I think how regrettable it is.” I compared the faces of the two and then kept my eyes on the practice.

Before long, Vice-Principal Tajiri said, “Well, please enjoy the match,” and busily left the dojo. Despite this exchange, the athletes continued to smash away with their bamboo swords to cries of “Break his arm!” and “Make him scream till he can’t!”

A few tears formed in my eyes. “Youth of Taiwan!” I called out in my heart.

(Now, we must study and provide for both the progress of history and that of ourselves. Aren’t we steadily climbing the mountain a little at a time? And resisting the occasional backtracking down the mountain path. When it comes to our endless road ahead, not one bit of indolence or decadence is allowed. With unflagging tenacity, we forge a new path wherever it may lead.)

After a bit, the coach suddenly gave the command, “Stop—15 minutes’ rest.” The athletes stopped practicing at once and after formally exchanging bows, undid the ties on their masks and let in some air. Bonian must have caught sight of me, for he suddenly made as though he would rush over; but for some reason, he turned midway towards the exit and left. I watched Bonian go.

“Bonian.” When called, Bonian stopped. Grinning, he approached. Maybe it was because he was nervous, but his smiling face looked strangely stiff. “How are you feeling? I hope you’re taking it easy,” I said.

“Nah, don’t worry about me, Doctor. Thanks to you, here I am, and when my arm gets the itch, there’s no stopping it. I’ll show you victory,” Bonian said, stroking his wrist and smiling with great confidence. There was sweat steaming down his lightly tanned skin, but that made me feel as though he were suffused with a strong life force.

“Definitely do! Bonian, whether or not you like the course of history, every day you are confronting a strong current, and the time has finally come when Taiwanese can ascend the stage as great Japanese. That’s why this time, you know, your victory will have especially deep meaning.” Despite myself, I said this sort of difficult thing by way of encouragement, but it immediately washed off of my companion.

“Yep. No matter how hard it is. Taiwanese are great Japanese, too. It’s impossible being told that we’re cowards as though it’s a given. Yeah, and on top of that, we’re definitely going to do it, to take down those guys who despise Taiwanese despite being Taiwanese themselves.”

“Taiwanese” and so forth was probably in reference to Itoh. The way that lingering anger from another time could leave endless ripples was a frightful thing. His highly impressionable heart was exactly like tangled thread—I didn’t know how far it might go on if I made a misstep or something in teasing it out.

“Enough already,” I hurriedly raised my hands to rein him in. “I really get your determination, but it’d be better to just lay off the cynicism. Come on, don’t force things.”

“Not forcing things’ is lame, Doctor!” Instead, he turned defiant and suddenly dashed off. But it didn’t escape my notice that there were traces of two streaks of tears, belying him, on his cheeks. You could say that this was the first time that I encountered this side of him—his hell-bent drive never to lose—and it pained me unexpectedly.

The next ten days went by. But I was on pins and needles the entire time. Even if the Taiwanese boys did their best, they had never won a match in the past. This lack of confidence coupled with an anxiety about their untested abilities churned together, and I found myself caught up in it and unable to relax, as though this directly concerned me, too. But the horse had already left the starting gate. They had won. I found this out on National Foundation Day, that is, the evening of the day of the match.

I wasn’t dreaming. Taiwanese boys had mastered the national sport of kendo. Was it because they had been able to become one with the sport and respond to the challenge with so-called emptied minds and tranquil thoughts? It was probably because their fiercely aflame fighting spirit had been able to crush all of their opponents, but in any case, they had won. The district championship was the equivalent of the island-wide championship. Even though they were despised as mere dogs, and even though they didn’t know what they were doing, it looked like this would be the stuff of legends. Was it not the case that the ancient flowers of the Way of the Warrior were consciously sprouting in the hearts of Taiwanese youth? Was now not the time for Taiwanese boys to wipe away feelings of abjectness and try to soar? I was too happy to breathe. My chest swelled for no reason, and I couldn’t help my blood being so alive that it hurt. “I’d like to see Vice-Principal Tajiri’s face,” I thought.

But I forgot that there was someone even happier than I. It was Itoh. It was the day after they had won the match. Thanks to Itoh’s good will, I was able to attend the round-table talk involving the athletes, and something happened on the way home. I was heading home, walking shoulder to shoulder with the hero of that day, the “Center,”<sup>18</sup> Lin Bonian, when Itoh called to us. “Lin Bonian, come to my place. Doctor, you, too, please.”



Itoh's happiness probably wouldn't allow Bonian to just go home. I, too, was feeling light-hearted. I thought Bonian would probably bend today, but...

"No, I'm going home." He drew his mouth firmly shut, showing his typical strangely defiant attitude. I grew a bit irritated.

But Itoh smiled still larger and said, "I wanted to give you a bit of a celebration. Won't you come by?"

"That's unnecessary. Anyway, I'm going home." Bonian set off on his own. I was dumbstruck.

"Bonian, wait." Itoh was finally angry. He overtook Bonian and grabbed him by the chest, I think, and his sturdy hand flew at Bonian's cheek over and over. But Bonian made no sign of resistance. He just let himself be hit. "You've got a lot of nerve. What are you hoping to accomplish with such a rotten spirit?"

"You should ask!" Bonian hadn't been broken. "Do you think you can educate? With a spirit that could abandon your birth parents?"

"Idiot. You understand how I feel? But someday, you will. Of course you say today is 'unnecessary.' Well, you can feed your perverse nature to the dogs."

Itoh said these things as though regurgitating things heard countless times. I didn't know what I should do. But Itoh just smoothed his wild hair several times and then hastened away.

"Bonian." I spoke for the first time. "You're being rudely obstinate, aren't you? You probably have no idea how Teacher Itoh is constantly thinking about you. As I said once before, your feelings are, at first glance, justified, but Teacher Itoh's perspective on life looks at the big picture, and there are elements to it that can't just be explained by casual common sense. No matter what, he is your

teacher. Why don't we go together to apologize?"

"I don't want to."

It seemed my repeated efforts were going nowhere. But in that moment he sniffled in an effort not to show tears, and large teardrops suddenly fell. And several more continued to fall. He made no attempt to stop them.

I thought that maybe today of all days I might go to Itoh's. I was afraid that if I didn't get to the bottom of how he was feeling—no holds barred—and clear away the hovering dark clouds, their mutual tragedy might conclude as precisely that. But at the last moment, I hesitated. Was I worried of always being pushed by the strength of Itoh's shove? Or maybe I had an ulterior motive of not wanting to disturb the happiness I had finally attained? I fretted. When it came right down to it, what I was fretting about was the spiritual void suggested by thoughts that were I to have been put in the same circumstances as Itoh, would not I, too, have made the same mistake? And would not I, too, have become servile?

## Section Five

The sad and the happy memories of those times accumulated in a uniform flow. The time finally came for Lin Bonian and the rest to leave the school nest. Leaving with us an unsurpassable gift—the memory of that sparkling victory. One day, I came back from having spent more than half the day making my rounds in the country, and the pharmacist reported that Lin Bonian had come by about two hours earlier with a trunk in order to say good-bye. I stamped the ground in frustration and thought that it was too bad, but that the ship had already sailed. I silently closed my eyes, and Bonian's narrow, drooping, dispirited eyes, his small nose with an intellectual sharpness somewhat blunted, and his lips pulled into an inverted 'v' floated

before me. It was probably the result of the environment, but even if I admitted that his temper was perverse, when push came to shove, the grit and strength of his nature had made a deep impression on me. The first time that he came to the hospital, his face was pale, and looking down on the nape of his neck, a youthful weakness still lingered, but during that last fierce practice, he had exuded a determination of one a year or two older. When I thought about it, we were nothing more than doctor and patient, and we unfortunately hadn't ever talked at length, but somehow it seemed that he trusted me more than anyone. I wanted, time permitting, to inquire about his aspirations and future course as well as to snoop further for information on his cousin Itoh's household.

From that point forward I was strangely increasingly consumed by the thought of wanting to meet with this boy. I thought, "Maybe I'll go to his home village of Nantou." However, because of a ceaseless stream of patients at the hospital, I couldn't find any free time; at last, one Sunday morning three weeks later, I made up my mind and left my house. Bonian's home was a little outside of Nantou City. I could more or less infer from the address and its condition that the household was not very well off. I was greeted by a thin elderly woman who was perhaps pushing sixty. It was Bonian's mother. Speaking of which, I thought she vaguely resembled Itoh's mother. I simply told her that I had a medical practice in such-and-such a town, that I was extremely close with both Itoh Haruo and her son, and my purpose in coming. At this, the elderly woman bowed deeply over and over again, her awe evident. Tears streamed from her eyes, and faintly, in a trembling voice, she said, "Unfortunately, a mere two days ago, Bonian departed for the *naichi*. As you can see, this household only gets its income from Bonian's father and a single older brother who are employed at the same company, and we just don't have the resources to even send that boy

to the *naichi*. But Doctor, when it came to that boy, he *did* love to study from when he was small, and even though he was poor and struggling, in the end, he proved himself wonderfully, so... even an outsider would have had sympathy with his entreaty! His father would roll his eyes and hit him—but he made nothing of it. It was impossible. But now we're thinking that if Bonian were to become a doctor like you, even if it meant debt..."

Touched by the utmost parental love that flowed out from the old woman's mouth by virtue of her unadorned artless Chinese, I was choked with hot tears in spite of myself. I hadn't foreseen in the slightest Bonian's journey to the *naichi*, and seeing that we were left behind thus, a loneliness that was, as one might expect, unlike a parent's, welled up. "Why didn't he consult with me even once?" I thought rather resentfully, but I told myself that no matter what the future held, he who had left me here was no average lad. I wanted to yell "Banzai!" at how well he had persevered. I'd missed the chance to ask him about his future plans, but when I heard his parents' fantasies that he might become a doctor, a chill ran down my spine. Wasn't it precisely this generation's ardor for developing its full youthful potential without prejudice that was so desirable to the generation of their parents? The phrase "medicine cures all" was not a well-loved one here. But when I met Bonian's mother's eyes charged with sharp hopes, my spirits completely sank. "Well, but, how were you able to let him go?" I was unable to refrain from asking.

"Well, Doctor, it was about two days before that boy's graduation ceremony, and Mr. Itoh came all the way here. Maybe it was due to talk of Bonian definitely aiming to go to the *naichi*, but Itoh said no matter what the school was, to please let him go. Instead of us, he'd somehow do what he could in terms of the school expenses. It's really an embarrassing story, but we got worried about that, and we reminded

him he'd better become a doctor. Ha ha ha." In her expressiveness, the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes were remarkably deep—probably telling of the travails of this person. Since Itoh had come up in the conversation, I grew excited in spite of myself, and I let her bend my ear as though utterly fascinated. This one gesture of Itoh's struck me like a thunderbolt from out of the blue, and when I regained hold of myself, I felt that I understood Itoh to the core. When the extent of his resolve hit home, it seemed as though I would suffocate at any moment. And I was certain that were Bonian to be aware of this gesture of Itoh's, he would grit his teeth and refuse.

"Oh, really? Teacher Itoh is quite fervent, isn't he? He is determinedly kind and also thinks about Bonian's future, so I think you ought to accept," I proposed, thinking I'd worm some information about Itoh out of this woman. "I haven't known Teacher Itoh for very long, but it seems as though his family situation is extremely complicated."

At this, the old woman's face instantly grew dark, but she regained her composure at once. "That can't be helped. You just have to leave it to fate," she said, and from there, she continued talking at great length. I feared that touching upon something best left unmentioned would do unnecessary injury to her, a relative, but I relaxed when I saw how very philosophical she was about it. The story began with Itoh's birth. She was given to repeating herself, and the content was extremely tangled up and difficult to pull together, but if I adapt it all and keep my personal opinion in check, it is as follows.

"Zhu Liang'an, that is, Itoh's father, was a merchant. But this being said, he wasn't a merchant born and bred. Liang'an's father was said to have been a 'senior licentiate'<sup>19</sup> of the Qing court, so they were definitely an esteemed old family. That was why from a young age, Liang'an had been exclusively educated in the

Four Books and Five Classics<sup>20</sup>—a man with a so-called intellectual temperament who thought that society business had nothing to do with him; however, when times changed, being satisfied with being an 'intellectual' was no longer tolerated, and he was in a position that threatened his very ability to survive unless he converted to something else. The quick transformation to 'merchant,' as might be expected, did not produce very desirable results. This drove him to the point of frustration, and when he met with his wife's nagging stinginess, serious clashes arose fast and furious. It was truly stormy seas, day after day. Itoh was their only child. For that reason, he ought to have been doted on, but the provocations he experienced up through his completion of 'public school'<sup>21</sup> at the age of thirteen were truly convoluted. That is to say, the maelstroms born of his parents' frequent clashes certainly did not leave this child untouched. His mother's hysteria only grew more violent. These two emotional pillars were like gales stirred up against each other. It happened frequently that they would change direction and then usually descend, in an avalanche, upon the child. Although he felt parental love, Itoh's heart must have had to endure ceaseless pressure as a child in that household. He announced that regardless of whether he finished public primary school, he wanted to enter secondary school in the *naichi* immediately. At first, his parents were of course unwilling to seriously accept this unforeseen proposal. But, given the unexpected strength of this seemingly timid child's attitude, as well as the presence of distant relatives in the imperial capital, and moreover, since it wasn't the case that they couldn't cover the costs of having him obtain a secondary education in the *naichi*, even though business had not produced marvelous results, they grudgingly sent this child to Japan. However, only under the condition that he enter medical school.

Itoh studied hard. Like a bird released from its

cage, he spread wide his giant wings—wings that up until then it had been doubtful that he possessed—and soared towards the wide, wide firmament. In secondary school, he pushed through so that his marks were always in the top five. In five years, he returned home only once. He had become an unrecognizable youth with a robust frame. What was still more surprising was that neither his attitude nor the accent of the National Language that he used differed a hair from those of the Japanese. He would not utter a word of Chinese, not towards his parents, who only spoke bumbling Japanese, nor even to people who could not speak Japanese at all. His parents rejoiced inwardly at their son's splendid maturation, and sent him to the *naichi* again, but here, an unforeseen problem arose. They had hoped that he would enter medical school, but didn't he turn his back on his parents and enter the National Literature department of B--University? His father was angry. To say nothing of the carryings-on of his hysterical mother, which reached the abject. Even with the threat that unless he changed his mind that instant the money for his schooling would stop at once—Itoh's resolve did not even waiver in the face of poverty. From that time until his graduation from B-- University, without any mind for whether he'd have his parents' financial support or not, he surrendered to his youthful passion and somehow or other managed to tough it out and work his way through university. He was spurred on by the desire to rebel against his parents and their inability to think of a plan, as well as his overflowing youth; and having experienced putting himself through school, he developed into a tough-as-nails individual.

The sighs of my older sister, who had lost her only son—those were difficult. I, too, was stuck, since there wasn't anything I could do for her. But, well, the whole thing, it's all fate, I suppose. It's good that Bonian, too, went to the *naichi*, but it's too bad that those two ended up enemies."

The old woman's account ended here, but something glistened in her eyes. Yet she had some expression other than one of tears or laughter, a vacant look. I had been listening fixedly, arms crossed, but I suddenly noticed that my entire body somehow throbbed with a feverish pain. The truth of the matter was more or less clear now, but I was at a loss as to how I ought to understand Itoh's mental state. However, there was no room for doubt at that moment. I simply had to tell the old woman the following: "While Teacher Itoh's conduct certainly wasn't praiseworthy, his motivations, however, seem most upright. It's too bad. Of course, I can't say anything about Bonian's future, but there's *nothing* to worry about. As I've seen myself, that boy has a good head on his shoulders and a sense of purpose, so I don't think his intellect will develop in a skewed direction. No doubt he'll come back the embodiment of education."

And I didn't forget to say this at the end, either. "Moreover, Mother, the road to advancement for Taiwanese is not just limited to medicine. The Taiwanese of tomorrow may become famous soldiers or bureaucrats, or even pioneering artists. So to kill someone's innate individuality—such talk would be an awful waste indeed."

At that, the old woman smiled vaguely: it wasn't clear whether she had understood or not. Thinking my business finished, I deflected her efforts detain me with the promise that the head of the household and his son would soon be home, and I headed for a station where I ought to be able to catch a night train.

It was about half a year later that I received Bonian's letter.

Doctor Kō,

Greetings. I've finally entered a military academy. Against the wishes of those around me. I'm

always just swinging around a bamboo sword. Bursting with energy. I am the first Taiwanese at this school. The ego-less happiness when I resolutely stand my ground and raise the bamboo sword instantly frees me from my earlier gloom. Please imagine my liberation! Really, the feeling I have, you know it's like a strange force that stirs me. It's that instant when there is a sensation of a gentle power running through something, like when the buds on a twig have not yet bloomed. In any case, we don't have long-honed methods or convoluted theories. Isn't our only weapon our simple youth? I realized that in order to be connected with the great "Yamato" spirit, we have to silently persevere, until it is in our very blood. No matter how you look at it, that's the heart of it.

However, I think that the more I become a great Japanese, the more I must be a great Taiwanese. I'm southern-born, but that doesn't mean I'm the least bit abject. I soak up the lifestyle here, but that doesn't at all mean that I look down on my hometown as out in the sticks. No matter how much of an unsightly native my mother is, I love her with all my heart. For instance, even if my mother were to come here just as she is, unseemly, I would not be the least abashed. Because when my mother hugs me, my feelings—happiness, sadness—are all those of her child.

The other day, the news came from my father that they were somehow getting together the money for my schooling. But I worry about

causing difficulties for my parents. I'm going to do the best that I can. There are still a lot of things that I want to write, but I'll leave them for my next letter. Doctor, please write to me, too. It's taken me a while to write, but I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all of the care you took of me when I was in our town.

From Bonian

Even after I had finished reading it, I didn't set it down. I tried to picture Bonian, with his strangely flushed cheeks, his youthful skin glistening with sweat, his black eyes, though narrow, a-flash with light. I also tried to imagine that passion that seemed about to overflow his body and the bulging wrist tendons, knotted together, too. However, frankly, what I felt still more promising was Bonian's character. Though not so much time had passed since he had crossed the sea to Japan, he wasn't becoming the least bit servile. It seemed that he hadn't heard that Teacher Itoh was supplying the money for his schooling. In this letter, there wasn't anything about Itoh. Yet maybe Itoh was gradually becoming comprehensible to Bonian. But this youth had taken the position that he would always condemn turning one's back on one's own mother, yokel or not. Simply put, it was because, compared to Itoh, Bonian was too innocent.

One Sunday afternoon, thinking that I definitely wanted Itoh to read this letter, I visited the secondary school dormitory. Unfortunately, Itoh was out. Since there was nothing I could do, I put the letter back into my breast pocket and went for an aimless stroll. Walking along a long cobblestone street, I came to an old flight of stone steps. When I ascended them, they led out onto a pretty, rather high grass-covered hill from which I could look out over the entire harbor. White clouds threaded across a

flawless sky. Although it was mid-April, the sun was warm enough that a brief walk was enough to make me break out in a sweat.

I sat down on the grass and gazed at the ocean. I just sensed that my present position was on a par with the height of the mountains in front of and behind me. My surroundings were literally “the world below.” *As though soaring aloft and riding the wind, not knowing whither it takes me*—these were apt words of a poet of yore.<sup>22</sup> Mountains, ocean, and the forest on the opposite bank, the homes lining the streets below—all of them looked as though they were smoking in the glare of the sun, but that unexpectedly heightened the scenic beauty of the abandoned harbor. In the distance, I could see the inhospitably widening Taiwan Straits. The blue of the ocean dissolved into the blue of the sky: it was a color to sigh for. The way this abandoned harbor, formerly long the cradle of Taiwan’s culture and a trading port whose fame had been celebrated in verse, now quietly slumbered in the midst of nature suffused with the color of late spring—it strangely struck a chord in my heart, giving rise to a sensation of connection to something eternal, something bigger than human intelligence could grasp. Where the endlessly uniformly radiant mountains and rivers, plants and trees, encountered the blindingly brilliant sky, I could feel the vital strength of something alive. I realized with a start that only the splendor of the Japanese winters had been seared into my brain while I had completely forgotten the goodness of my homeland’s endless summers. It became clear that my own affection for my homeland was lacking. Wasn’t I learning two simple, earthly things from Itoh and Bonian? From this point on, I had to firmly plant these feet on this soil. Whatever the birth pangs my country experienced, whatever the individual pain I had to swallow, by thinking of each as the last, I would be able to endure however many things, each time praying it would be the final one.

I’m not sure how much time had passed when I became aware of a person approaching along the road at the immediate base of the hill. When I realized that it was definitely Itoh, I flinched, but at once decided to call him over. Yet in the next instant, for some reason I decided to let him go. It was a strange feeling. Was it because his attitude at the grave the other day still rankled me? No, wasn’t it perhaps because in the face of such resolve, my courage simply to display the contents of the letter had deserted me?

I hadn’t noticed it until then, but looking down from atop the hill, I could count the hairs on Itoh’s head, so clearly visible were they. I felt that I had seen something I ought not to’ve, something that I could in no way undo. Weren’t two-thirds of those thirty-three or -four hairs white? Suddenly, I had to recognize Itoh’s worries and anxieties, unknown to others. Despite his extraordinary robustness, he seemed unexpectedly frail. From Itoh’s standpoint, becoming a Japanese through and through had meant completely distancing himself from the backwardness of his native land. In order to do that, he had even had to walk all over his own flesh and blood. In effect, it was the same as destroying his own parents for the greater cause. Young people who had been educated to “be pure Japanese, be pure Japanese” at school or in society tended to be set apart in a completely different circle when they went home even briefly. This is the acute anxiety that underlies the ‘double lives’ of the youth of this island. That’s why, in order to overcome this suffering, one probably has to veer to one extreme and attack it head on, trampling it into a fine dust. Besides, should our present generation wage a desperate battle to seize our liberation from ossified toxic habits, the next generation—our children—could have it as their birthright. And depending on how you look at it, perhaps this is just Itoh breaking his back to atone for the sin of casting aside his countrified parents, itself the result of the guidance and education of the

youth of this island, which engenders a purely emotional, violent feeling of horror at an uneducated way of life. The affection he showed for Bonian can't be glossed over as mere affection. In any case, if Itoh's white hair isn't a manifestation of this filthy war, what is it? Although I kept on repeating and repeating, "Let it go, let it go," for some reason, that scene at the grave continued to flicker

ceaselessly in my mind. I was filled with a desire to cry.

Eventually, I ran down from the hill, yelling, "Shit! Shit!" And I ran like a child, tripping and sliding. And buffeted by the wind, I kept on running.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, the translation of Kim Sa-ryang's 1939 *Hikari no naka ni* 光の中に (Into the Light) in Melissa L. Wender's collection of translated writings *Into the Light: An Anthology of Literature by Koreans in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011): 15-38.

<sup>2</sup> Faye Kleeman observes, "With the nationalist discourse of 'resistance' dominating the post-colonial interpretation of colonial texts, the typical reception of this body of literature [by imperial-subject writers] has been unsympathetic and disapproving." Faye Yuan Kleeman, *Under an Imperial Sun* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003): 198. I suggest a similar trend exists for translations.

<sup>3</sup> Wu Zhuoliu, *Ajia no koji* アジアの孤児, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008): v.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Wender, 2-5.

<sup>5</sup> *Taiwan Bungaku* 臺灣文學 3.3 (Fall 1943): 104-129.

<sup>6</sup> Faye Kleeman notes that Ō "is sometimes considered an imperial subject-writer," before pointing out that *The Torrent* can be assessed more positively than other similar writings in that it at the very least "proposes a dual identity" for Taiwanese subjects. Faye Kleeman, 215-216. See also Leo Ching's summary of Lin Jui-ming's similarly sympathetic evaluation of "The Torrent." Leo Ching, *Becoming Japanese: Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001): 120-121. Yu-lin Lee's more recent study of the psychological toll the imperial project takes on the characters in the story appears to be based on Wang's 1991 Chinese-language version. See Yu-lin Lee, "The Dislocation of Empire: An Identity Paradigm of Colonial Displacement in Wang Chang-hsiung's *A Raging Torrent*," *Taiwan Literature Studies* 1.1 (2007): 7-31.

<sup>7</sup> Okubo Akio 大久保明男, "Ō Chōyū 'Honryū' no kaiteiban ni tsuite—Nihongo-ban to no hikaku kara" 王昶雄「奔流」の改訂版について—日本語版との比較から, *Komazawa daigaku*

*gaikokugobu ronshū* 52 (August 2000): 177.

<sup>8</sup> Leo Ching, 121. See also Okubo, who also calls attention to Lü Xingchang’s speculation that this may have been Wang’s attempt to “prove he was not writing as an ‘imperial subject,’” before himself pointing out that documented examples of censorship on “The Torrent” are very few. Okubo Akio, 177-178.

<sup>9</sup> On the narrator and Itoh, see Okubo Akio, 181-186. For identity (and Lin Bonian), see *ibid.*, 187-189. Both points are summarized on the same page, 189. \* This translation is based on the reprint of the 1943 original found in Kurokawa Sō, ed., *“Gaichi” no Nihongo bungaku-sen (1): Nanpō, Nan’yō/Taiwan* (Tokyo: Shinjuku Shobo, 1996): 220-250. All annotations, unless marked otherwise, are likewise from this edition. Notes merely offering lexical glosses for obsolete Japanese terms have been omitted.

<sup>10</sup> Japan proper [as opposed to its colonies].

<sup>11</sup> Translator’s note: “middle school” would be a more literal, albeit misleading, translation of *chūgakkō* 中学校, since under the educational system of the time, the *chūgakkō* was comprised of five years of high-school education.

<sup>12</sup> *Hontōjin* 本島人 (islander) refers to Han-Chinese Taiwanese (Fujianese or Hakka). [Translator’s note: hereafter, I will use “Taiwan” or “Taiwanese” for *hontō* and *hontōjin*; given the importance of geography in the rest of the paragraph, however, I opted for a more literal rendering here.]

<sup>13</sup> I.e., ethnic Japanese.

<sup>14</sup> I.e., Koreans.

<sup>15</sup> Translator’s note: I have chosen to transliterate the names of the openly Taiwanese characters based on Mandarin pronunciation in pinyin. Thus, *Rin Hakunen* 林柏年 becomes “Lin Bonian.” The narrator’s surname, 洪, I render as “Kō” rather than “Hong,” because the one instance in which he is referred to by name is clearly in Japanese. This was done in order to help the reader keep clear who is Taiwanese and who is (passing as) Japanese. I have done the same with place names, with the exception of using the conventional English spelling of Taipei, rather than Taibei.

<sup>16</sup> Translator’s note: the original term here, *hontōgo* 本島語 literally means “the language of this island.” While it refers to a language of the Han Chinese in Taiwan, it is unclear whether the characters in the story are speaking Mandarin, Southern Min, or Hakka. Given the political implications of going with any one of these choices, I have opted for “Chinese” in the sense of a blanket term encompassing all three of the aforementioned related languages/dialects.

<sup>17</sup> Satō (1772-1859) was a late-Edo Confucianist. From 1841 onwards, he lived out his days as an official Confucian academic of the shogunate. Although on the surface a follower of Zhu Xi, he was strongly influenced by Wang Yangming and was referred to with “Zhu and Wang/Yin and Yang” [literally Yin-Zhu, Yang-Wang].

<sup>18</sup> In a kendo team competition, the athlete who competes in the middle, between the “spearhead” [the first competitor] and the Captain.

<sup>19</sup> During the Ming and Qing dynasties, individuals who attended an imperial college after being recommended on the basis of outstanding study and conduct at a provincial academy.

<sup>20</sup> The four fundamental texts of Confucianism (*The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *Analects*, and *Mencius*) and the Five Classics (*The Book of Changes*, *The Classic of*



*Documents, The Odes, The Spring and Autumn Annals, and [The Book of Rites]*).

<sup>21</sup> The primary school attended by most Taiwanese children.

<sup>22</sup> A line from the “First Poetic Exposition on Red Cliff” by the Northern Song poet Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036-1101), one of the Eight Masters of the Tang and Song. The original reads, “We were swept along in a powerful surge, as if riding the winds through empty air. And not knowing where we would come to rest [...]” [Translator’s note: the translation of Su Shi is taken from Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996), 292.]