

**Chu Yu-hsün 朱宥勳: The Testimonies will be denied 以下證言將被全面否認**

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**Review by Thilo Diefenbach**

The increasing number and the large extent of China's military manoeuvres demonstrate the great danger Taiwan is presently facing. The threat against the island republic has recently gained more and more attention in Western media, which, of course, is a good thing — the only unfortunate detail being that it took a war (the Russian invasion of Ukraine) to wake up all those who thought they could still believe in the goodwill of brutal dictatorships.

But while the public in Taiwan and elsewhere are discussing matters like a possible invasion, a sea and air blockade, or the relaunch and extension of compulsory military service, Taiwan's literary authors tend to shy away from the topic as a whole. In the 1950s and 1960s, by contrast, 'anti-communist war literature 反共戰鬥文學' was extraordinarily fashionable — mainly because the Kuomintang government heavily promoted it. Its close connection with Taiwan's dark past, i. e., the martial law era, may be one of the reasons why today's writers do not wish to choose warfare as a topic, let alone revive the genre itself. Another reason could be a certain reluctance to face a scenario as horrifying as a war that could become reality all too soon. This attitude is perfectly understandable and apparently not restricted to Taiwan — in West Germany of the 1970s and 1980s, only very few authors ventured upon the topic of a nuclear war with the Eastern Bloc.

One of the few quite recent literary publications concerning a related subject is *Selected Texts on the Army in Taiwan* 臺灣軍旅文選, an anthology of essays from 2006 edited by T'ang Chüan 唐捐. The authors presented in this volume (among them Chang T'o-wu 張拓蕪, Kuan Kuan 管管, Yang Mu 楊牧, Yang Chao 楊照, Yüan Che-sheng 袁哲生 and Ch'en Ssu-hung 陳思宏) describe their personal experiences during their military service, and while quite a few of them tend to ridicule or even vilify Taiwan's National Army, virtually nobody reflects upon the need to prepare for a war that the Chinese leadership is obviously willing to force on Taiwan.

Bearing all this in mind, Chu Yu-hsün's new book is quite an exceptional phenomenon in Taiwan's literary scene since it not only tackles the hot topic directly, but does so in a complex, elaborate way. The author has already published several volumes of fiction, essays and literary criticism since 2010, and here he poses as an editor having the same name as the author himself, but this fictional Chu Yu-hsün was born around 2038, not in 1988. From the year 2067, he looks back on Taiwan's war of independence (which had raged twenty years earlier) by presenting

five accounts of eyewitnesses who lived through the event in very different ways. All of them offer details which, according to the 'editor', do not occur in the official historical account of the conflict, and in some cases those details even contradict the official version (which is the reason for the book's ironic title). The reader gets to know a former member of the 'People's Liberation Front of Taiwan 台灣人民解放陣線', an underground organization of the Chinese Communist Party who tried in vain to incite the Taiwanese population against their own government; a high-ranking advisor of the president of Taiwan with private contacts to the highest level of the Chinese government which prove decisive for Taiwan's eventual victory; a former Chinese paratrooper who was allowed to stay on the island after the end of the war and now recalls the demoralizing effects of Taiwan's psychological warfare; and a nurse who worked in a hospital taking care of traumatized soldiers and who was able to relive certain moments of the war simply by touching paintings drawn by a young patient. The last chapter consists of an article that should have been (but was not) published shortly after the war in some political magazine; it recounts the story of a particularly cruel incident in central Taiwan where Chinese paratroopers suddenly occupied a hospital. This led to a large-scale massacre and, after the war, to the demolition of the hospital. In its place, the local inhabitants erected a temple dedicated to the consolation of the souls of all the people who died during the incident (including the Chinese soldiers).

Fans of Tom Clancy or Dale Brown may be disappointed by this book since it does not employ lots of fancy future weaponry; even the digital media and their usage seem to be more or less the same in 2047 as they are today. But in my view, this is a not a flaw at all, not only because the author demonstrates that he is knowledgeable in today's military affairs, but also because it is obvious that he wants to focus on individuals and their stories. At the same time, he skillfully makes sure that readers can never know if his characters are actually telling the truth, and also avoids answering all the questions that arise when reading this book (e.g., who destroyed Shanghai's Oriental Pearl Tower and how? Did the paratrooper succeed in killing the young girl whose voice was used for psychological warfare transmissions? What role exactly did the USA play during the war?). It is no coincidence that Po Yang's 柏楊 book *Alien Realm* 異域 (1961) is mentioned twice, a story of remnant forces of the National Army stuck in the borderlands between China, Burma, Thailand and Laos after their defeat in the Chinese civil war in 1949: Even though *Alien Realm* claims to be a first-hand oral history account, it is in fact nothing of the sort, and Chu seems to use this clue in order to remind his readers that the individuals presented in his book tend to be unreliable (which makes the book all the more gripping since it keeps the reader involved). It is also noteworthy that Chu is never too optimistic or simplistic when depicting the aftermath of the war: even though Taiwan has won, the Chinese Communist Party is still in charge and vows to give 'liberation' another try as soon as possible; the island's economy is down while its crime rate soars, and

infighting and intrigue between Taiwan's political factions start all over again as soon as the war is over.

The author himself considers this book to be a collection of short stories, but since all five chapters are connected with each other, I would rather call this book an episodic novel. It ends with a really funny afterword, written by a fictional Chinese researcher surnamed Lin who welcomes Chu's book as a sign of growing mistrust amongst Taiwan's youth towards their own government. For this appendix, Chu not only uses simplified characters, but also imitates in a very amusing way the bureaucratic diction typical of Communist China.

All in all, "The Testimonies will be denied" is a remarkable book that deserves to be translated soon.

**Thilo Diefenbach**