

Select Taiwanese American Books & Writers

curated by the TACF Cultural Exhibit Committee & TaiwaneseAmerican.org



TAIWAN IN THE LITERARY IMAGINATION / BAY AREA BOOK FESTIVAL



HISTORICAL NOVELS SET IN TAIWAN

May is Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, and during the second week of May each year, we proudly recognize and celebrate Taiwanese American Heritage Week! In the past decade, several authors, writers, creatives, and poets have emerged from our community. Below, we have compiled a list of nearly 50 titles from this talented pool. In no way is this an exhaustive list, and we're certain there are other talented storytellers who we have inadvertently missed. However, in the meantime, check out the ones we've discovered. Most of these books can be purchased in bookstores or online.

Set in History

Several of our favorite Taiwanese American authors have literally written their heritage and history into dramatic historically-accurate novels. In recent years, Showna Yang Ryan's *Green Island* and Julie Wu's *The Third Son* have received several glowing accolades. For anyone looking to understand the Taiwanese experience and immigration story, we recommend you start your collection with these two books. Another notable novel is Jennifer J. Chow's *The 228 Legacy*, which weaves a story about the ramifications on three generations of a Taiwanese American family as they discover the truths about the February 28th 1947 Incident that sparked an uprising. We also include an honorable mention for the English-translated version of Wu Ming-Yi's *The Stolen Bicycle*, which recently made headlines as it entered the final round of the Man Booker International Prize. He is widely considered the most influential writer of his generation in Taiwan.

Family Matters

The Taiwanese American experience comes in all forms, and several authors create captivating storylines driven by tragedy, family tension, and identity struggles. Debuting this year on the New York Times' Bestseller list is Emily X.R. Pan's beautiful debut novel, *The Astonishing Color of After*, which tackles the subject of depression and suicide through a young woman's journey to meet her maternal grandparents in Taiwan for the first

time. Anelise Chen's debut "experimental" novel, *So Many Olympic Exertions*, blends elements of sports writing, memoir, and self-help to explore what it means to live after the narrator's friend dies by suicide. In the multigenerational novel by Esmé Weijun Wang, *The Border of Paradise*, she transports readers into the world of an iconoclastic midcentury family from Brooklyn to Taiwan, then to California. The heirs of the family wealth must confront their past and the tragic reality of their future. For more romantic drama revolving around millionaires, check out Lianna Shen's coming-of-age story of a Taiwanese Canadian in *A Chance of Clouds*.

Living the Life

Many Taiwanese American authors have written novels loosely inspired by their own experiences or the people around them. Here are a few noteworthy titles to check out: The highly-reviewed *Taipei* by Tao Lin, follows a young Brooklyn-based author who lands in Taiwan. As his drug addiction spirals out of control, he confronts issues of self-esteem and loneliness. Closer to home, Stephanie Wu (also the editor-in-chief of Mochi Magazine) chronicles the hilarious to disastrous experiences of friends and frenemies in *The Roommates: True Tales of Friendship, Rivalry, Romance, and Disturbingly Close Quarters*. San Francisco/Bay area audiences will relate to Annie Yen's novel, *Sophia of Silicon Valley*, which in short can be described as the "nerd whisperer" who is the key to success for a CEO's transformative new company. But, in the highly-competitive "boy's club," can she find her way? Another new book release is Stephanie Suga Chen's *Travails of a Trailing Spouse*, which actually starts with a successful accomplished female lawyer who sets aside her career to follow her husband to his new job in Asia. For the young at heart, start with Gloria Chao's *American Panda*, which follows a young 17 year old student at MIT who struggles balancing both family expectations and personal passions. We include Taiwanese author Chu T'ien-wen's *Notes of a Desolate Man* here as an added extra. Her contemporary tale of a Taiwanese gay man who reflects on his life, loves, and intellectual influences has been described as "among the most important recent novels in Taiwan."



GREEN ISLAND

Taipei, February 28, 1947: As an uprising rocks Taiwan, a young doctor is taken from his newborn daughter on charges of speaking out against the government. Although he eventually returns to his family, his arrival is marked by alienation from his loved ones and paranoia among his community. Years later, this troubled past follows his youngest daughter to America, where, as a mother and a wife, she too is forced to decide between what is right and what might save her family.



THE THIRD SON

In the middle of a terrifying air raid in Japanese-occupied Taiwan, Saburo, the least-favored son of a Taiwanese politician, runs through a peach forest for cover. It's there that he stumbles upon Yoshiko, whose descriptions of her loving family are to Saburo like a glimpse of paradise. Meeting her is a moment he will remember forever, and for years he will try to find her again. When he finally does, she is by the side of his oldest brother and greatest rival.

Unique Taiwanese Experience

In these books, the connection to Taiwan isn't what one would expect but adds depth to our collective journey: Julia Lin's **Shadows of the Crimson Son** details the life of a man born in Taiwan under Japanese colonization, raised in Manchuria who fights for Taiwanese democracy after immigrating to North America. Milo L. Thornberry's **Fireproof Moth: A Missionary in Taiwan's White Terror** is an autobiographical account of his time in Taiwan during the 1960s that reads like a mystery thriller. A translated classic, **Orphan of Asia** by Wu Zhuoliu, is widely regarded as "a groundbreaking expression of the postwar Taiwanese national consciousness." T.C. Locke's memoir **Barbarian at the Gate: From the American Suburbs to the Taiwanese Army** is the unique account of a white American who loved Taiwan so much that he became a citizen, but then was called up for military service.

Personal Reflections

The most authentic experiences of our Taiwanese American community come from the first-hand memoirs and biographies. In recent years, celebrity chef Eddie Huang's personal memoir, **Fresh off the Boat**, is familiar to many because of its adaptation for the ABC prime time TV show of the same name. He reflects on his experiences growing up Asian in America. But don't miss another profound and timely memoir about how being Asian in America contrasts with other minority experiences. Teacher turned lawyer Michelle Kuo's critically-acclaimed **Reading with Patrick: A Teacher, a Student, and a Life-Changing Friendship**, made it into Oprah's summer reading list. Kuo shows us that we can be more than our careers. In a similar vein, Dr. Pauline Chen--an accomplished transplant surgeon--steps away from her chosen profession to rediscover humanity in **Final Exam: A Surgeon's Reflections on Mortality**.

Adoptee Journeys

With over 2300+ adoptions from Taiwan to the U.S. since 1999, this topic and population deserves more care and attention within our community. Read both Mei-Ling Hopgood's **Lucky Girl** and Marijane Huang's blog-turned-memoir **Beyond Two Worlds**. They are heart-wrenching yet touching stories on the search for identity and family in Taiwan.

Collections, Reflections, and Shorts

The following wonderful collections and themed essays come from the heart and shed light on the Taiwanese diasporic journey. In Dmae Roberts' **The Letting Go Trilogies**, this accomplished two-time Peabody Award-winning writer and radio producer deals with love and loss through the lens of her biracial experience. In Brenda Lin's **Wealth Ribbon: Taiwan Bound, America Bound**, she presents another angle in interconnected essays that explore her transnational identity. For our North American counterparts, Julia Lin's **Miah** is the first Taiwanese Canadian story collection ever published and gives a rare look into their immigrant stories. Finally, we take pride in a recently published creative collection spearheaded by TaiwaneseAmerican.org's Andrea Chu and her team: **Chrysanthemum: Voices of the**



Taiwanese Diaspora is available only for a limited time through blurb.com. We also send a shout-out to award-winning writer Timothy Tau, whose short stories, some set in Taiwan, have been published in various magazines and online publications.

Poetic Justice

The creative rhythm of words and imagery allows one to convey a deeper picture of identity and struggle. Your contemporary Taiwanese heritage collection should start with these: Leona Chen's **Book of Cord**, Victoria Chang's **Barbie Chang**, and Irene Hsiao's photo-poetic **Letter from Taipei**. We also highly recommend the classic, **No Trace of the Gardener**, by Yang Mu who was born in Taiwan in 1940 and immigrated to the US in 1964.

The Dark Side

Are you a fan of mystery and crime stories, or those that challenge the darker side of humanity? Be sure to check out all of Ed Lin's books, but look for these two, which are set in Taiwan: **Ghost Month** and **Incensed**. Francie Lin's **The Foreigner** is a riveting story full of Taiwanese secrets, shady business, and the criminal underworld exploring what it means to be a foreigner even in one's own family. Can half-Taiwanese detective Lana Lee solve a murder by shrimp dumpling? Find out in Vivien Chen's **Death by Dumpling**. In Winnie M. Li's **Dark Chapter**, a Taiwanese American tourist in London falls victim to a horrifying act of violence. We laud Winnie for bravely writing this gripping and gut-wrenching novel based on her real-life events.

Futuristic Imaginations

Our Taiwanese American sci-fi writers are all rising stars, and we wouldn't be surprised if their books turned into films! Lawyer-turned-author Charles Yu, previously named a "5 under 35 honoree" by The National Book Foundation, has published three books: **Third Class Superhero**, **Sorry Please Thank You**, and **How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe**. Check out the latter, a novel where the main character--named after himself--searches for answers to the father-son relationship. Another talent, Wesley Chu, is now writing his third sci-fi trilogy series, but look to **Death of Tao** to see how he weaves Taiwan in as a setting. Hollywood has noticed... His novel **Time Salvager** was optioned to Paramount, with Michael Bay attached to direct.

For fans of dystopian stories reminiscent of *Handmaid's Tale*, you'll want to read Maggie Shen King's **An Excess Male**, which envisions a dark future for China. From critically-acclaimed author Cindy Pon comes **Want**, an edge-of-your-seat sci-fi thriller, set in a near-future Taipei, about a group of teens who risk it all to save their city.

A Youthful Take

These are for the kids, the teens, and young-at-heart: Grace Lin's book series is loosely based on

her own childhood experiences growing up as a Taiwanese American. Pacy Lin is the main character in **Year of the Dog**, **Year of the Rat**, and **Dumpling Days**. Love her books? She has published over 40 other titles. One of our favorite Teen & Young Adult authors is Justina Chen who gives young women a powerful voice through her stories and real-life book launch partnerships. Her first novel, which featured a half Taiwanese protagonist, **Nothing But the Truth (and a few white lies)**, won the 2007 Asian/Pacific American Awards for Literature. Also, check out **Return to Me**, which is loosely based on events that happened to her family. For 5th Grader competitive drama, check out Peg Cheng's **The Contenders**. Another accomplished pop-culture author who needs no introduction is Taiwanese-Chinese American Gene Luen Yang. His best-selling graphic novel involving a new immigrant from Taiwan, **American Born Chinese**, was awarded so many recognitions there's not enough room to list them here. Kids will also be surprised to learn that he's a writer behind **Avatar: The Last Airbender** graphic novels. The youngest of our talented group of authors is Rosalie Chiang who, at just 10 years old, worked with her father Robin to publish **A is for Albatross: Birds A-Z**. We heard that she's writing another nature book. The talent starts young.

Cultural Influence

James Beard award-winner, writer & blogger Cathy Erway's **The Food of Taiwan** is more than a recipe cookbook as it uncovers and details unique histories and culinary influences of Taiwan. Cora Cheney's **Tales from a Taiwan Kitchen** is a collection of traditional Taiwanese tales that reflect the varied cultural heritage of the island. Sit down, enjoy a Taiwanese snack, and learn from them both.

THE FINAL WORD

Thank you for supporting these authors, many of whom donated their books for our exhibit. Most titles can be purchased on Amazon.com.

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