

*Clipped Wings, a History (Excerpt)*¹

Wang Wen-hsing

Translated by Darryl Sterk

He stayed a bit late reading articles, so it was already past eight by the time he left campus. He went to look for a P L A C E for dinner, then HE took—a highway bureau²—home. The

¹ Editor's note: The Chinese title of *Clipped Wings, a History* is 剪翼史, a novel to be published by Hongfan Bookstore in Taipei in August 2016. The editor would like to express her sincere gratitude to Professor Wang Wen-hsing for granting permission to translate and publish the excerpt.

² Translator's note: "highway bureau" is a metonym for highway bus. Back in the day, highway buses were state operated and under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Highways, now the Directorate General of Highways. The implication is that the main character, Ho Tsung-cheng, whose name means roughly praise the ancestor's achievement, lives quite some distance from the university where he works.

In general, I have translated as literally as possible, the form not just the content, to try to convey the challenge of Wang's text. "Forensic," for instance, is a portmanteau of foreign domestic (helper). In the original, the portmanteau is something out of the ordinary, just as an acronym like FDH, foreign domestic helper, isn't out of the ordinary in English. I translate it sometimes as an acronym, sometimes as a portmanteau, in order to participate in the experimental playfulness of playful variation that animates Wang Wen-hsing's novel. Playfulness, of archaic and modern as well as of Taiwanese and Chinese forms of

moment—he, turned into, the, shadowy, alley, he glimpsed the sundry goods store in ði 'æli—the light, was, only, half-lit—the lamp in the doorway, and the i'lektrik lait of the big sign had been switched off—this evening he—didn't actually need to go into the store, to go buy a little something—bread for tomorrow's breakfast—because he already—had some.—when he passed by this little sundry goods store, he thought of someone—who—often shopped there, a foreign domestic helper Sadie. This FDH was an Indonesian of overseas Chinese descent, —who could speak a little Mandarin—she was a chubby, plain-looking—lady who often smiled a shy threadof a smile— — — but mostly didn't talk much. Normally, usually—you could see her—walking for a l t e r i n g.—She worked in a house, in the home of a family—of two old folks—where—the old man had been—sick—for years and the wife—she could still care for him—but needed the assistance of a forestic a factotum—usually the three daughters in the family took turns returning to the residence to take care of them.—One day he heard—Old Liu the proprietor of that sundry goods store saying:—saying about—the foreign labor— — — I feel quite s o r r y for her, 'juʒə-uually the two old folks—and the two elder daughters—treat her alright, but theyoungestdaughter is **quite** s t r i c t—with her—. Recently—it's been the youngest daughter's turn—so poor Sadie has been sufferen quite a lot. Thys—youngest daughter—yells at her—a l l d a y l o n g—either calling her dumb—or sayin that she moves too slow—or else that she don't sweep that floor clean enuf—these things—Sadie—never complainedabout it was Sadie's friend,—

characters, leads to a hybridity that reflects contemporary Taiwanese society. The same experimental spirit has informed renderings such as P L A C E and dīnər. Neither would have been possible in the original Chinese, because written Chinese is not alphabetic. They, along with many other renderings, represent my attempt to replicate Wang Wen-hsing's willful disruption of norms of punctuation and spacing.

who's also a foreign labourer—Dinah she's the one who blurted it out—Dinah, who was also working as a FDH in this neighbourhood—minding a kid for a couple.

Later, one day, he heard the proprietor—Old Liu—say:—the situation—lately— — has gotten more s e r i o u s, it,—this youngest daughter—has lately even forced her, punished her, made her kneel,—and doesn't let her :eat imeals—she claims:—nobody ever |died of missing a meal—and got her, to combine it with the next. Proprietor Liu said, a servant is still a human being—she şud not be sooo harstic. Later soon thereafter—This Proprietor Liu— took a glance at this—Sadie—saw her come in, perceived half of Sadie's face verily swollen, oneofthereyelidssoswollenupshewouldnotopenit.—Sa die, she did n o t say anything— — — I t w a s Dinah who said it—solely on account of a lot of c o c k r o a c h e s—in the house lately—that youngest daughter had given her some Roach-B-Gone—for her to set out, — but she forgot to set it out—whereupon, that youngest daughter up and punished her, put a d e a d cockroach one she had smäkt dead, put it in her bowl, and told her to **GULP IT DOWN**, — — Sadie, of course, couldn't swallow that, and could only drop tears— — —there after, she, Sadie, took that bowl of rice and emptied it out— — —which, greatly |||angered, the youngest daughter. She yelled: “Just s c r a p e a w a y the crust alright,—what are you doing tossing out the rest huh?!” So she smackedheronthecheek with the sole of her slipper—which, was, why, she, ended up looking like that. Dinah, she was furious, but lacked a remedy. Sadie needs the money—So, all, Sadie, could do was grin and bear it. Prop. Liu and his wife, could only shake their hedz.

Dinah said, Sadie's fate was bitter,—Sadie, according to her,—had been married— — —but, later—her hus-band had another woman ontheside—her hus band well he just went and left her. She had no children—So she went back, to her brother's house. But, the food you sponge off others, never tastes

good, so she , came all the way to Tiewan, to be a factotum .

Ho Tsung-ch'eng—just like the others—could only — shake his head —as for the rest, there was $\lambda\theta\eta$ he could do in, the mean time ,—sometimes, he saw —Sadie—in—the alley—walking solitary as usual, mincing along, just without her typical shy smile. Ho Tsung-ch'eng he thought —he—could only— pray —to the L O R D A B O V E for her— Therefore every night—when he prayed—he added a f e r v e n t prayer , for her , beseeching the Lord Above bless our very own S A D I E••

After—this—Ho Tsung-ch'eng—had prayed fervently—about two weeks later ——word had it that Sadie—she had a lucky turn —Dinah she said that youngest daughter well she had to deal with some—URGENT FAMILY MATTERS ; consequently it was up to the eldest daughter to take over, to come along, and run the household.—These three, house-sitting, daughters, did NOT come everyday—and spend the night t h e r e — They —sometimes—stayed day and night for daysonend —most of the time, they came during the day and come nightfall they went back to their own homes.—The three daughters—all lived on the outskirts of Taipei , —— where each had her own home ~

Once that —eldest sister—once she came to render service, he never ever again heard —that Dinah—mention— cases of this Sadie bitterly afflicted—Once again, he espied her chubby figure strolling with dignity in the lane.—Ho Tsung-ch'eng felt very — h a p p y for her — He felt **GRATEFUL TO THE LORD IN HEAVEN** for His protection — —He, there after,—nor did he cease, |pray|ing , for her—He understood, Sadie , her days—as a foreign laborer a factotum — were still many—Ho Tsung-ch'eng decided —he, would—pray—every—day —for—her he'd keep praying on and on . At that moment , he seemed again to see —Sadie—had again —her— hint of a curve of a smile.

Another two months passed probably ,—Ho Tsung-ch'eng, on this shore —saw Sadie — and felt — she looked a bit d i f f e r e n t her complexion slightly pale, and she lookt a

bit thin ——then he heard this—Prop. Liu—explaining, sayin Sadie she's been ((s i c k lately —and he claimed she'd been in pain and also suffered bleeding Dinah had—accompanied her—to hospital. The doctor—did what must have been—a preliminary examination — and said it didn't look good —and asked her to do a n o t h e r exam the next week— but was afraid it was goingtobe **BaD nEwS** Δ oh .

This phenomenon of—sickness— , can be presumed to be chronic—accumulatinginhercorporeally—over the long term . No, matter, whether, it, was, this, Prop. Liu, and, his wife , —or other people, of course —including Ho Tsung-ch'eng— —everyone, all of them ,—may have felt **HeLpLeSs** not knowing what to do. He,—Ho Tsung-ch'eng—appealed for her all the more ardently—During which appeals, he even, recited—the rosary for her. On the day of the re—examination—it was said Dinah again took leave—to go with her. Dinah—she again left that three year old toddler—she was caring for—at Prop. Liu's store, — so Proprietor Liu and his wife could serve as surrogate care-givers . ——Ever since, Sadie, went for her examination, —the eldest daughter in the family —had been, treating her al right— — many things—it was said she allowed Sadie— to do a b i t l e s s , and not to e x e r t h e r s e l f .

In—the—time— t h i s —Sadie—went to the hospital for examination, and re examination, Ho Tsung - ch'eng, kept ardently importuning the powers that be—for her—, and had—many times—said the rosary.

A week later, there came a day,—Ho Tsung-ch'eng—wunce again stepped into —this Prop. Liu's sundry goods store, when—he saw the faces of the husband and wife, both very, happy, —he, heard, Old Liu, say t h u s : “ Sadie—'s r e s u l t s a r e o u t —everything's ||okey-dokey—there 's no need to worry .” Just then, —at that moment he saw this Dinah strolling, ebulliently,—stepped intu the shore to buy groceries. Ho Tsung-ch'eng —right then and there—felt a load lifted from his heart—

he lukt at th em with a smile— —while in his heart, he **loudly gave praise**: “—Thanks be to God—Thanks be to God—” — After, he got home, he sat in his chair, a shadow of a smile on his visage, — **remembering** how things hadcometopass.

After the,—heavy gloom of this catastrophe had passed, Ho Tsung-ch’eng, he at his daily sreyarp, kept praying for her — May, the Lord, continue, to bless her corporeal well-being. And so it continued nearly half a year,—Sadie—her contract expired —hence , Sadie she had—without a hitch—fulfilled her obligation. As per contract she returned to—her—home in distant Indonesia bye and gone.

Ho Tsung-ch’eng—afterwards—often thought of her plump figure, leisurely gait, and her hintofa grin. He — gave thanks—to the **LORD** .

And after that, — although he wasn’t praying for her any longer — — he still wished her the best after she went back to Indonesia and everlasting peace .

Selected from *Jianyi shi* [Clipped Wings, a History]. Taipei: Hongfan Shudian, August 2016, pp. 127–33.