

Blood and Mother's Milk

The 1950s in Taiwan was an era that saw mass arrests. Dissenters were disappeared, interrogated, trialed, and executed in secret, akin to being murdered. Most female political prisoners stopped menstruating due to fear and shock. The majority of those who were pregnant when they were arrested gave birth prematurely. Newborns were kept with their mothers in prison until the baby had been weaned before handing them over to family members outside. Some political prisoners had breast milk to spare, which they offered to the other inmates (who were suffering from substance abuse) as nourishment.

Kao Tsao was menstruating when she was arrested. The agents complained afterwards rather than letting Kao Tsao clean herself up. "She was bleeding all the way, making it embarrassing for us."¹ They demanded that Kao Tsao write "confessions," which were really a way to obtain denunciations of others, namely "to bite." "To bite" was the only way to escape a death sentence. Kao Tsao wrote and ripped, and ripped and wrote these confessions. After a month or so, she stopped eating. She was murmuring to herself. The prison handed her over for psychological assessment, but the hospital refused to take her in, claiming there was no room. She bit her index finger till she bled, and wrote a letter in blood to Chairman Chiang: "I'm sorry. I, Kao Tsao have done many wrong things here. Please forgive me. Long live the Republic of China!" After submitting the bloody letter, she wrote another one with a brush the next day: "I mean no ill will with the letter in blood. Please forgive me. The suicidal behavior was due to my feeling anxious, and seeing no way out. I did it out of fear..."² Nevertheless, these deeply messy and flustered confessional letters were never delivered. The interrogators used her "hysteria" to look for "clues" in her words. As a result, Kao Tsao's confessions were a soliloquy. Her letters remained unanswered. She could only try to fathom the will coming from above. She wrote again and again, correcting, rewriting, and correcting.

"Please Judge, allow me to quickly confess. Let me die as soon as possible – beaten, killed, electrocuted, shot, burnt... I don't care. Please, let me die..."³ With these words, Kao Tsao at once begged to turn herself in, in order to live and to die immediately. She tortured herself, imagining all the cruel ways of dying she'd

1
Lan Bou Chou, *Good Women in Taiwan* (Taipei: Unitas Publishing Co., Ltd, 2001). Huang Su-Chen, who was in the same treason case as Kao Tsao, recalled the agent's words that she overheard after her arrest to the author years later. She was rehabilitated, put under house arrest for several month and then released.

2
National Archives Administration of Republic of China, dossier of Kao Tsao.

3
National Archives Administration of Republic of China, dossier of Kao Tsao.

could be subjected to. Such excruciating psychological torment was something that she could no longer endure. She wanted to leave, to leave this moment, this time and space. In this barbarous zone of unattainable death, meaning had become evacuated from language. Kao Tsao was no longer Kao Tsao. She no longer believed she was herself anymore.

Awaiting capital punishment is like facing “the world’s exit.” Kao Tsao’s psychological fissure was perhaps her only escape route. Maybe, in a schizophrenic trance, she would return to the memory of that beautiful night three years ago. She had been singing with her friend (the one the agents wanted her to “bite”) until late into the night. She would recall the stone roof tiles above her head had started to clatter, bong, and boom. The neighbour was probably throwing stones and protesting, she might have thought. They looked outside the window. My God, it was hailing. That was the summer of 1948. The mass arrests had not yet started. Kao Tsao was just twenty-three years old, and she was in love with a man. She was responsible for a lot of covert operations. She had a future, nothing but a future.

Kao Tsao’s family learnt about her execution by a firing squad from the newspaper. They dared not claim her body. Following this, a couple of years later, her younger brother went to Taipei to scope out the whereabouts of her body. Quietly, he found the grave. He clandestinely gathered her bones and took them with him. In 1993, forty years later, a group of unmarked graves were discovered in Liuzhangli, Taipei. These are the remains of the unclaimed political prisoners. There were two hundred and one graves.⁴

Author’s notes

I moved around often when I was a student. Consequently, roommates alternated. Each time I moved and welcomed new roommates, my period would descend into chaos and keep readjusting until finding accord with their frequencies. Slowly I came to realize that my roommates would go through uncannily similar processes, until their periods were in unison with mine. In other words, the menstruations of women who live in the same apartment would gravitate towards one another. The precision that they manifest astonishes me. Every body is a planet with its own tides. Gravitational pull between planets allows all frequencies to correspond with each other. This phenomenon can be found in the oral documentations of women political prisoners. During my research into White Terror, I was particularly attentive to the politics of women’s bodies and the “bodiliness” of political violence. Such consideration is derived from an extremely small, immediate question: how did they cope with their menstruation?

Then, I came across the story of Kao Tsao.

Biography of Kao Tsao

Kao Tsao was born in Yunlin, Taiwan in 1926. Her family worked in the agricultural sector and ran a grocery store on the side. She graduated from Hu-Wei Girls’ Senior High School in 1944. During the wartime of material deprivation under Japanese colonial ruling, as one of the very few women who received higher education, she had to commute between school and home for several kilometers by foot. At the later stage of Second World War, she was drafted by the Japanese army and sent to Canton Province, China as a nurse. After the war, she became acquainted with the Taiwanese-born left-wingers in China and in turn became informed about the impacts of imperialism and capitalism. Upon her return to Taiwan, she joined the underground Communist Party and was responsible for secretarial and communication work. In May 1949, the Chinese Nationalist Party declared Martial Law and the White Terror ensued. Kao Tsao was arrested in June, 1951 and executed on February 2, 1952. She was twenty-six years old.

4
After WWII, Chiang Kai-shek’s Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) took over Taiwan. The February 28 Incident took place in 1947. Subsequently, martial law was declared in 1949. Massive arrests of Taiwanese and Mainlander Chinese leftwing supporters occurred during this period referred to as the White Terror. At the peak of White Terror, from 1949 to 1959, more than eight thousand left-wingers were arrested and more than a thousand were executed. Kao Tsao was one of them.

血與乳

一九五零年代，是大逮捕的年代。異議者秘密消失、秘密偵訊、秘密審判、秘密槍決，形同謀殺。因為驚恐的緣故，女性政治犯大都停經，被捕時正懷孕者多半早產。孩子出生後跟著媽媽，在獄中哺乳至斷奶，再交給外面的親屬。有些政治犯乳汁豐盛，分贈給同監的煙毒犯，讓她們補身子。

高草被捕時正好來月經，「一路流著經血，搞得我們很難堪。」特務寧願事後抱怨，卻不讓高草整理自己。他們要求高草寫「自白」，而所謂的自白就是咬人。咬人是免除死刑的唯一方法。高草寫了又撕，撕了又寫，大約一個月後，她停止進食，喃喃自語，獄方送交精神鑑定，但醫院拒收，理由是病房不夠。她咬破食指，寫下給「蔣主席」的血書：「對不起，高草在這裡做錯好多事情，請原諒我，中華民國萬歲！」又在呈送了另一封血書的隔天，以毛筆再寫了一封信，「昨天所寫血書不是惡意，請為原諒」，「自殺行為是一時心裡不安，找不到出路，恐怖心所做的……」然而，那些凌亂起伏的陳情書，完全沒有送上去。偵訊者利用她的「失常」，在語句中追蹤可用的「線索」，以致，高草的陳情自始自終都是自言自語，得不到回覆，只能揣摩「上意」，一次次重寫，修正，再寫，再修正。

「請法官：趕快讓我自首，最短時間讓我死，打、殺、通電、槍斃、燒，我現在不管，請趕快開始，讓我死……」高草在這段文字中，既要自首求生，又要即刻赴死，並且在對各種死法的殘酷想像中，鞭笞、折磨著自己。那是一分一秒再也過不下去的、精神的至疼至痛。只求離開，離開當下，離開此時此地。在這求死不能的殘酷地帶，語言已經離亂脫軌，高草已不是高草，我已不再是我。

面向死亡，等待極刑，如同面向「世界的出口」。高草精神上的裂變，或許是她逃逸的唯一方式。在精神分裂的恍惚中，不知她是否曾經回到三年前、那個美麗的夜晚：她與好友（特務要她咬的人）歌唱到深夜，忽然，頭頂的石瓦片砰砰作響，大概是鄰居丟石頭抗議吧，兩人往窗外一探，天啊，天空正在下冰雹呢。那是一九四八的夏天，大逮捕還沒開始，高草才二十三歲，心裡戀著一個男人，堅毅地承擔各種地下工作，擁有的除了未來，還是未來。

高草槍決的消息，家人是看報紙才知道的，他們不敢去收屍。兩三年後，弟弟上台北打聽，默默找到墳塚，偷偷撿回屍骨。四十年後的一九九三年，六張犁發現一群墳墓，埋葬的全是無人領回的政治犯遺體，總共兩百零一處。