

[**HARDCOVER: US**]

The inescapable law of perversity

BY **ALEXANDER LINKLATER**
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

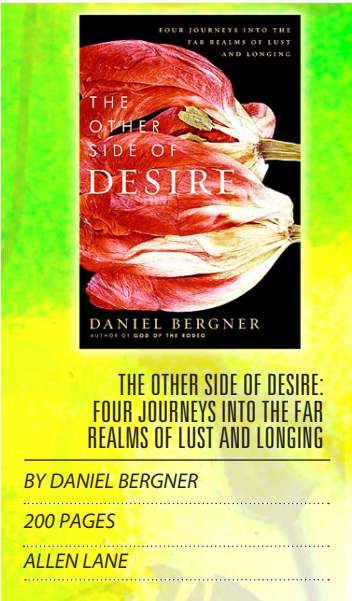
Daniel Bergner is a *New York Times* journalist whose previous books have examined life in a maximum-security prison in Louisiana and the fallout from war in Sierra Leone. This fine, brief, intense study is not a departure from such territory so much as a development of his interest in existential extremes. *The Other Side of Desire* is the result of long periods Bergner has spent in the company of paraphiliacs — people who operate in what are for many remote regions of erotic experience.

He tells the stories of four subjects. There is Jacob, a discreet man desperate to be cured of a fanatical foot fetish that, though it shames him, also offers a route to transcendent ecstasy. More morally confounding is Roy, a husband on probation for attempting to seduce his 12-year-old stepdaughter. Operating (just) on the legal side of consensual, but at eye-watering levels of sadism, is a well-known New York dominatrix called the Baroness, who gets true erotic satisfaction from her work. And then there is Ron, a “devotee,” whose insatiable yearning for sex with amputees gives rise to a redemptive love story.

Bergner evinces remarkable levels of trust and candor, not only from his subjects, but from the sexologists and psychiatrists whose clinical sessions he attends and who also provide him with a hinterland of incidental case histories — from the harmlessly eccentric to the sexually murderous. These cases are presented neither as circus parades of the weird, nor as mere clinical accounts of deviant sexuality. Instead, with the utmost sensitivity and intellectual curiosity, Bergner extends an invitation to view all such variants as belonging to a continuum of ordinary human desire.

His most obvious moral-psychological dilemma comes in the confrontation with pedophilia. While Roy is a man at war with himself, and not guilty of actually having sex with his stepdaughter, Bergner inserts clear signposting (the only time he does so) to make sure the reader does not confuse the author’s curiosity with anything too close to empathy. Yet having done so, he incorporates the findings of research showing that 21 percent of a study group revealed sexual attractions to children, while 7 percent indicated they might have sex with a child if not caught. “Given the probable social undesirability of such admissions,” an eminent British psychiatrist observes, “we may hypothesize that the actual rates were even higher.” What makes Roy and other more predatory pedophiles socially deviant is less the character of their desire than the extent to which they are

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BY DANIEL BERGNER

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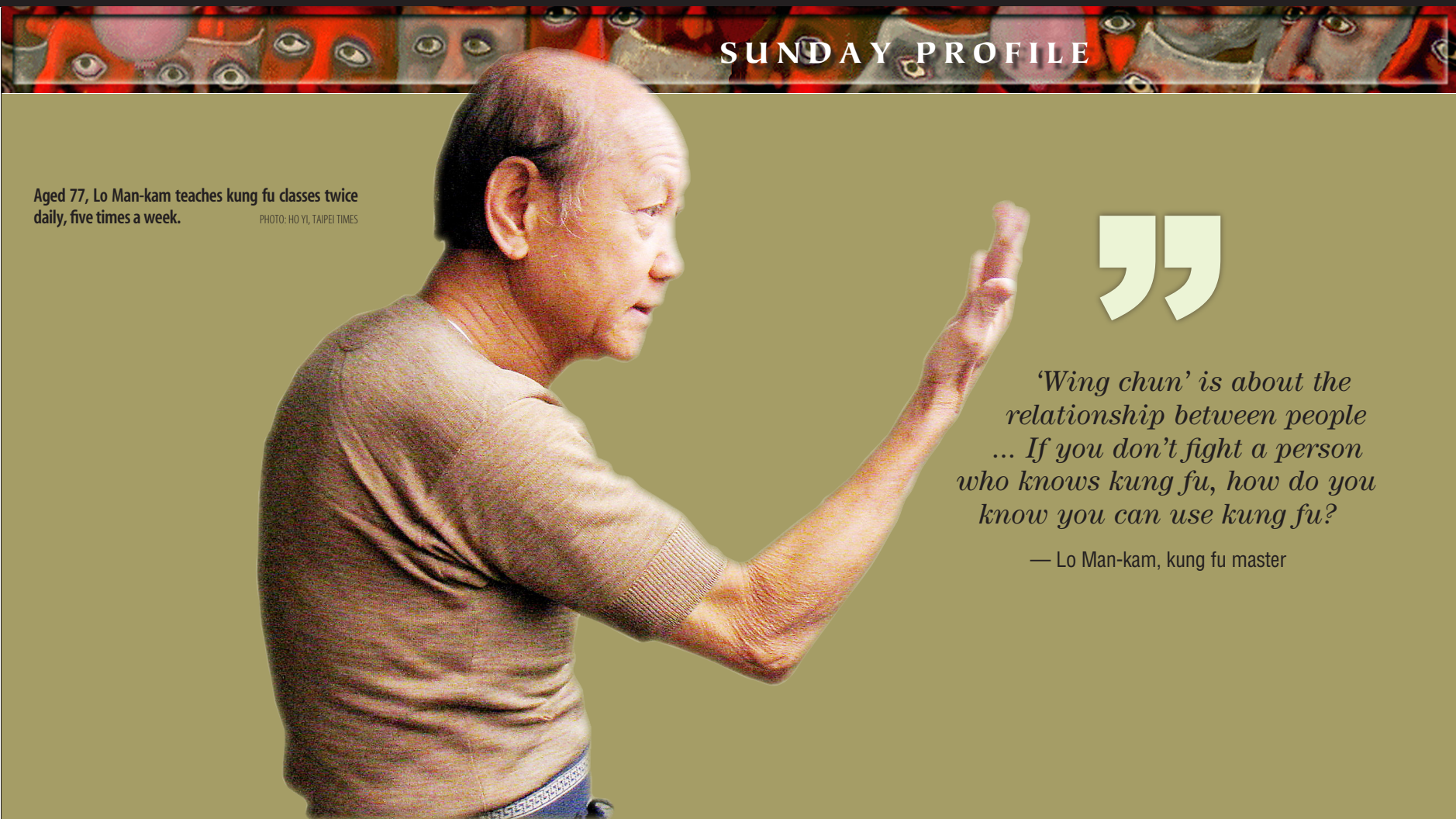
ALLEN LANE

compelled to act on it.

The moral stand-off between desire and action is what underpins the finely nuanced counterpoints of Bergner’s writing. If, in the case of the pedophiles, it is only in resisting action that they remain within a moral framework, what of unfortunate dreamers such as Jacob, whose desire is harmless? If only he could have admitted his foot fetish to his wife, instead of trying to annul his yearnings with prescribed medication, he might have gained unique happiness.

The story Bergner tells that most movingly reveals the paradoxical naturalness of perversity is that of Ron, the amputee fetishist. “Devotees,” as they are known, are often considered repulsive even by amputees themselves. That’s how Laura views Ron when they first meet. A car-crash victim, her legs were severed near the tops of her thighs. As a result, she left her husband, despaired of being a good mother and attempted suicide. Yet, having overcome her initial misgivings, she now lives with Ron, a man whose socially alienating desire dovetails exactly with her physical handicap. This, it transpires, is not merely a compensatory relationship, but one in which Laura finds a fulfillment that was absent in her previous existence. In this union of the misshapen, Ron and Laura uncover a deeper geometry.

What is desire and what shapes it? This is not just a nature-versus-nurture muddle. Some of the cases in this book reveal a clear biology of desire. Others reveal the delineations of social or cultural formation. Make no assumptions about which may be which, however, because that may lead you to miss the less palatable realities of human psychology — of how a pedophile may be born and not made or how a rape victim may experience orgasms.



Aged 77, Lo Man-kam teaches kung fu classes twice daily, five times a week.

PHOTO: HO YI, TAIPEI TIMES

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‘Wing chun’ is about the relationship between people ... If you don’t fight a person who knows kung fu, how do you know you can use kung fu?

— Lo Man-kam, kung fu master

Kung fu’s ultimate warrior

A nephew and pupil of Ip Man, Lo Man-kam is one of the world’s leading ‘wing chun’ masters

BY **HO YI**
STAFF REPORTER

As a teenager, Bruce Lee (李小龍) was often bullied. On one occasion, while walking down the street with a friend, a gang of ruffians picked a fight.

Lee: “Quick, let’s get out of here.” The friend: “Don’t be silly. I will beat the hell out of them.” And he did. “Don’t you know I’m practicing *wing chun* (詠春)?” the victor asked.

Shortly afterwards, in 1956, Lee asked his father for US\$25 and followed in his buddy Lo Man-kam’s (盧文錦) footsteps by becoming a pupil of Ip Man (葉問).

Lo can recall many stories like this from his youth in 1950s Hong Kong, where he studied kung fu under his uncle Ip, the grandmaster of the *wing chun* style of kung fu.

A world-renowned *wing chun sifu* (師父), or master, Lo doesn’t exude awe-inspiring seriousness as might be expected. Rather, he likes to crack jokes and make visitors and students feel relaxed and at ease at his apartment on Bade Road where he resides and teaches *wing chun*.

In the living room, replete with trophies, medals and memorabilia, several faded photographs of Ip stand out and affirm Lo’s status as a kung fu legend.

Rewind to 1950, when Ip fled to Hong Kong from Guangdong Province shortly after the Chinese Civil War ended. An acquaintance helped to get him a job teaching kung fu at a hotel. At first, there were only five or six students, one of which was Lo.

Studying under the *wing chun* master didn’t come cheap. While *taichi chuan* (太極拳) and *shaolin chuan* (少林拳) teachers charged US\$5 a month, US\$15 to US\$25 was required to become Ip’s pupil. At the

time, a police officer’s monthly salary was about US\$90.

“It was just like my grandmaster [Ip’s *sifu* Chan Wah-shun (陳華順)] who had taught only 16, 17 pupils during his entire life. He couldn’t really make a living out of it if he didn’t charge more,” said the 77-year-old Lo, which explains how *wing chun* became known as “boxing for rich men’s sons” (少爺拳).

A *wing chun sifu* can only take in a limited number of students at one time because of the martial art’s unique teaching method. Its practitioners’ skills and knowledge come from one-on-one practice and training because the school focuses on honing reflex reactions and not fancy moves and techniques that can be learned through group drills.

“*Wing chun* is about the relationship between people ... If you don’t fight a person who knows kung fu, how do you know you can use kung fu?” Lo said.

After a decade-long apprenticeship under his uncle, Lo left Hong Kong for Taiwan in 1960 and joined the military. On re-entering civilian life in 1975, Lo opened a school in Taipei and has taught and promoted *wing chun* ever since.

Members of the elite strata of society have studied under Lo, such as one of Chiang Kai-shek’s (蔣介石) grandsons and the King of Brunei and his brother and sons.

The master’s expertise in combining *wing chun* with judo and other close-range combat techniques makes him a sought-after instructor by intelligence, police and military bodies, both at home and abroad. He has achieved many firsts during his professional career. Lo was the first head coach of Taiwan’s SWAT team and the first Chinese coach to train US military personnel.



Lo Man-kam, left, in action on the rooftop of his Bade Road apartment in Taipei.

PHOTO: HO YI, TAIPEI TIMES

To Lo, the trick of his trade is to maintain an open mind about other martial art styles. “You don’t know who your rival is, nor can you anticipate his or her moves. Therefore, there is no assumption in fighting. You contact, sense and respond. That process becomes part of your physical reflexes, which can be called *wing chun*, or any other name for that matter,” said Lo.

Over the years, Lo has traveled extensively, to France, Germany, Switzerland and Hungary, giving lectures, demonstrations and training and has taught foreign students hailing from more than 50 countries.

Lo makes sure he has room for students from abroad to stay at his place. The current tenant is a young Japanese man, who comes to Taipei for three months each year to study *wing chun*.

Owing his popularity among Westerners partially to Bruce Lee’s fame, Lo has developed a distinguished teaching method

that employs physics, mathematics, kinematics and military tactics to explain and dissect the martial art.

“In Chinese culture, it is all about ownership and authority passed down by the father and grandfather. For Westerners, it’s science and reasoning,” he said.

The going is tough for students at Lo’s school. During his teaching career that spans 34 years, some half a dozen students have mastered the martial art to Lo’s standard.

At his advanced age, Lo stays active teaching classes five days a week, and traveling. He is as popular as ever, partly thanks to Donnie Yen’s (甄子丹) *Ip Man* (葉問), which was released last month and elicited a surge of interest in *wing chun*.

“I must have received more than 50 phone calls and taken in 10, 15 new students [after the movie was released]. But I can assure you, three months later, only five will remain,” Lo said.

[**SOFTCOVER: US**]

It’s war in the Taiwan Strait

Many authors have written about possible scenarios in the Taiwan Strait, but very few have used the novel form to give the nightmare flesh

BY **J. MICHAEL COLE**
STAFF REPORTER

The year is 2012. In Taiwan, a charismatic new leader named Yo Tuan occupies the Presidential Office — and he is filled with ambition to make his county independent. Across the strait, president Hu Jintao (胡錦濤) has been replaced by Wei Ching-chun, an inexperienced and somewhat stoic leader whose ability to steer the Chinese Community Party (CCP) remains unproven. In Washington, President Jocelyn Adams, an African-American woman, succeeded George W. Bush in 2008 and is seeking reelection in a country weighed down by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and severe water shortages that are threatening to create domestic instability.

Thus opens Cooper’s novel, with the added threat of a Mayan prophecy that appears to predict the end of the world on Dec. 21, 2012, due to a polar shift. Hit by scandals — the nail in the coffin exposed by an investigative reporter at your very own *Taipei Times* — the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government that replaced Chen Shui-bian (陳水

扁) in 2008 has been ousted by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), whose leader, Yo Tuan, is portrayed as a Chen on steroids, a man with an almost supernatural ability to fire up his supporters. Riding on the backlash against the KMT, a majority in the legislature and led by a firebrand charmer, the DPP government has called for a referendum on a new constitution that would proclaim a new, independent Republic of Taiwan.

In Beijing, the developments in Taiwan are a nightmare scenario for the new president, who fears that any move toward independence on the island could have a domino effect on other parts of the country, especially Tibet and Xinjiang, as well as in Hong Kong, where activists have grown impatient with a series of broken promises by Beijing. Wei is also aware of the power plays within the CCP, with Mei Ying-jeou, who vied for the presidency with Wei, and others, such as Admiral Tang, waiting for him to commit a mistake so as to sideline him. Wei, portrayed by Cooper as an otherwise sensible man, therefore has no option but to order a determined response to Taipei’s

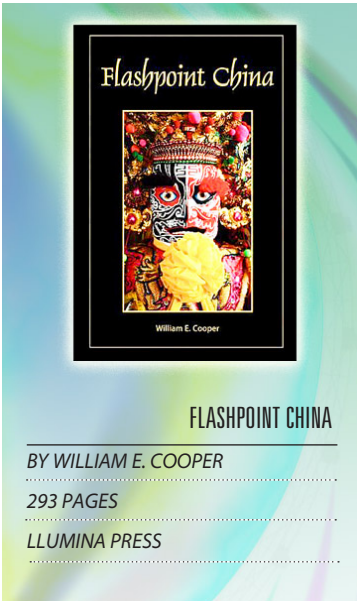
move toward independence.

What follows is fairly predictable and draws from a scenario outlined in Richard Bush III and Michael O’Hanlon’s *A War Like No Other*, which characters in Cooper’s book consult on a few occasions. Taiwanese overwhelmingly vote in favor of a new constitution, Beijing imposes a blockade and Washington ends up caught in the middle. Exacerbating the pressure on President Adams is the presidential campaign, in which her opponent, Governor Todd Williams of Georgia, plays the part of the archetypal Republican who does not waste a second to accuse Adams of being soft on China or of abandoning a fellow democracy when she vacillates.

Undaunted by the blockade and the threat of war, Yo stays the course, China sinks a few vessels approaching Taiwan, the US and Japan retaliate and the situation escalates, bringing the participants to the brink — a Cuban Missile Crisis of the 21st century that will need leadership just as great as that displayed by John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev.

As the crisis intensifies, Cooper does a fine job exploring the

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FLASHPOINT CHINA

BY WILLIAM E. COOPER

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process of decision-making in Beijing and Washington, the assumptions that guide decision-making in all three capitals, and how Taipei and Beijing play Adams against Williams to their benefit. All of this is very plausible and instructive. Cooper also skillfully exposes the inherent contradictions

in the Taiwan Relations Act and “dual deterrence,” which when push comes to shove appear to be more straightjackets than useful instruments of diplomacy.

Given the complexity of the situation in the Taiwan Strait and the lack of understanding of — or interest in — the matter outside Asia and academic circles, Cooper’s approach is an interesting one, as the novel form, in this case a political thriller, could reach a wider audience and generate interest.

Unfortunately, Cooper tends to be a little to didactic and tries too hard to teach the reader. By telling rather than showing and doing this repeatedly throughout the book, Cooper intrudes on the narrative and ends up undercutting it. Far too often the dialogue is contrived, his characters sounding unnatural, like history or travel books, giving the impression that the author is trying to impress the reader with the places he has visited or the books he has read. In one instance, Wei is having dinner with his wife and moments after talking about their daughter’s new boyfriend, he embarks on a long, jargon-laden discussion on the three conditions necessary for a successful

amphibious assault, to which his wife replies: “Remind me, my dear leader. What are the three precious advantages that make for a successful landing?”

This is not to say that novels should not teach us a few things, as Michael Crichton, despite all his faults as a novelist, did to perfection. In Cooper’s case, however, the lessons interrupt the narrative rather than improve it, and on many occasions he becomes didactic on topics — the environment, clean energy, water — that though would all make interesting essays, do nothing to complement the narrative. In fact, as with the often trite dialogue between Adams and her globetrotting daughter, these passages are distracting and would likely have been deleted by a professional editor — which was probably lacking with Cooper’s book, given that Llumina Press is a self-publisher.

Cooper’s novel also suffers from Western bias, with both Chinese and Taiwanese characters often quoting Shakespeare, W.H. Auden and other authors from the Western cannon, all of which is rather unlikely. At one point, we

learn that the mother of Admiral Feng — the closest we get to an “evil” character in the book — sought to pacify her son by giving him a copy of *Moby Dick*.

A few factual errors also stand out, such as Cooper’s contention that Taiwan’s population (23 million) is greater than Canada’s (33 million), that the assassination attempt against Chen occurred in 2000 (rather than in 2004) or that the time difference between Taipei and Washington is 14 hours (it is either 12 or 13).

The scenario has a few good surprises, an improbable Chinese plot involving a biological agent inexplicably introduced in Taiwan while the blockade is at its height, and the denouement is based on an agreement between Beijing and Washington that would unlikely work in the real world.

In all, Cooper’s book is a worthy effort that may just be what is needed to draw attention to the Gordian knot that is the Taiwan Strait. Unfortunately, his desire to instruct and the absence of an editor’s swift knife make the book much longer, and perhaps less entertaining, than it should have been.