

Open Eyes, Open Mind!

小乖的人類觀察日誌

Author: Pei-Chia Lan **Illustrator:** Pam Pam Liu **Publisher:** Dyna Books

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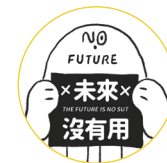
196 pages | 14.8 x 21cm **Volume:** 1 (END)

BFT2.0 Translator: Jenna Tang and Michelle Kuo

Fifth-grader Angel is buried under endless homework, unfinished exercises, and a packed schedule of extracurricular classes. Now, she's stuck on her latest art assignment: "Getting to Know Someone."

What does it really mean to get to know someone? Is it by learning their name, birthday, or social media account? Some people see each other every day yet remain strangers.

With a gentle touch and humor, Pam Pam Liu adapts Pei-Chia Lan's *Raising Global Families*, offering a vivid and lively observation of Taiwanese family life from a child's perspective.



Illustrator **Pam Pam Liu**

Pam Pam Liu is a freelance illustrator and comic artist. In 2021, she became the first comic artist in Taiwan to win a novel award with *A Trip to Asylum*, and that same year, she also won the Golden Comic Awards for Best Comic of the Year. She has been an artist-in-residence at Angoulême's Cité Internationale de la Bande Dessinée et de l'Image and Berlin's LCB. Her works have been featured multiple times on the Books from Taiwan comics list. In 2021, *A Trip to Asylum* won the Taipei International Book Exhibition Award for Best Novel and the 12th Golden Comic Award for Best Comic of the Year.



Author **Pei-Chia Lan**

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Pei-Chia Lan is a professor in the Department of Sociology at National Taiwan University and the director of the Center for Asian Comparative Social Research. Her research focuses on gender, family, international migration, and social inequality. Her first book, *Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domesticity and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan*, and its adaptation have won numerous awards, including from the American Sociological Association, the Taipei International Book Exhibition, and the Golden Tripod Awards. Her second book, *Raising Global Families: Parenting, Immigration, and Class in Taiwan and the US*, published by Stanford University Press in 2018, compares family dynamics in Taiwan and among immigrants in the US, exploring how globalization and migration challenges have shaped different parenting strategies.

The Storytelling and Art of Pam Pam Liu

by Jenna Tang

Angel, a fifth grader with a passion for art, spends her days attending cram schools, learning piano, English, drawing, and more. Her mother, Amy, meticulously arranges every possible program to ensure Angel remains “competitive.”

At school, a new art teacher assigns a project called “Getting to Know Someone,” prompting Angel to search for a candidate for her final presentation. Along the way, Angel begins to see those around her in a new light. There’s Jun, who spends her time alone while her father is often absent and creates her own art without attending any cram schools. Then there’s Chen Chia-Sheng, a former friend who has grown distant after Angel witnessed him being scolded in public. And Lin-Lin, who is rumored to have a famous artist father—only to reveal that this story was her grandmother’s fabrication.

But what does it really mean to get to know someone we think we already know? In the end, Angel chooses to interview her own mother, Amy, gradually uncovering her reasons for filling her life with classes and activities. Amy, like many Taiwanese parents, wants her child to be competitive, capable, and successful enough to achieve her dreams. However, the pressures of this social structure often lead to overwhelming demands on both parent and child.

This heartwarming and thought-provoking story explores the complexities of family relationships, societal expectations, and the true meaning of understanding one another.

Published in 2022, the graphic novel *Open Eyes, Open Mind!* adapts the social concepts and themes discussed in *Struggling to Raise Children:*

Globalization, Parental Anxieties and Unequal Childhoods by National Taiwan University sociology professor Pei-Chia Lan. The story delves into Taiwan’s cram school system, the educational culture of “making your children learn a lot,” toxic competitiveness, and parental anxieties.

Despite the weighty themes, artist Pam Pam Liu deftly incorporates them into engaging visual storytelling, offering readers a more personal and accessible way to connect with the topics.

The graphic novel has broad appeal across generations. Its vibrant art and relatable language make it engaging for young adults and younger readers, while its exploration of parental anxieties and critique of the education system offer fresh perspectives for parents and educators. Narrated from the viewpoint of a fifth-grader, the story balances the

experiences of children and parents, reflecting the realities of the world we live in and prompting readers to reconsider what education truly means.

For years, I have been an avid reader of graphic novels from around the world. Graphic novels often strike a unique balance between conversational storytelling and vivid illustrations, many of which capture slices of life to make the stories feel more personal and accessible—even to readers unfamiliar with the cultural or social contexts. Graphic novelists have their own distinct ways of using art to guide us on a journey, whether it’s a physical adventure or an exploration of emotional landscapes. Pam Pam Liu’s illustrations and narrative voice are a prime example of this style, and they hold significant meaning for me as an artist.

After I had completed my first novel in translation, on a cold winter day in Taipei, for the first time, I was introduced to Taiwanese artist Pam Pam Liu's graphic novel, *A Trip to the Asylum*. The book was the first graphic novel to have won a National Fiction Award in Taiwan. It is a journey in which readers were brought to explore childhood trauma, the lack of care in our societal system and family structure, and violence that comes from the society when one most desperately needs emotional support. The book itself deeply reminds me of the sense of dark mystery, sarcasm, and psychological journey that I have savored with American artist Nick Drnaso's works, such as *Sabrina and Acting Class*, which were both translated into Taiwanese Mandarin.

In this book, elementary school students, including the protagonist Angel, are tasked with an end-of-semester presentation based on the concept of "getting to know someone." Through

Angel's exploration of who she might want to understand better, the story vividly portrays life as an elementary schooler in a long-distance, dual-income nuclear family in Taiwan.

At the same time, it delves into the challenges faced by parents in such circumstances as she navigates educating their children about societal roles, family expectations, and personal identities. The story invites readers to reflect on what it truly means to understand someone we thought we already knew—doing so with greater depth, empathy, and respect.

Bonjour, Angoulême! is an earlier work by Pam Pam Liu, vividly capturing her experiences participating in the residency program and art festival in Angoulême, France. The book explores the joys of traveling to a new city as an artist, meeting other international creatives, and navigating cultural shocks and differences, all infused with Liu's signature wry humor.

More recently, Liu documented her participation in the MOCCA Festival in New York in 2024 through short comic strips on social media, offering readers a real-time glimpse into her journey as an artist in different parts of the world. Her acute, quirky, and intriguing observations of international social environments and cultural habitats reveal her effort to connect with a much larger world. This intention is further reflected in her choice to incorporate multiple languages into her graphic novels, emphasizing her global perspective.

Having read Liu's graphic novels over the years, I've found myself, as a writer, translator, and artist, deeply moved by her work. Her stories make me feel seen and accompanied, especially as I reflect on my own journey living overseas and returning to Taiwan, where my personal upbringing and experiences continue to shape me.

The iconic ghost figure often

featured in Liu's recent work, to me, symbolizes more than just the reality of being an introvert living in liminal spaces—both physically and emotionally. It embodies the experience of existing with an internal journey to navigate, process, heal, and grow from. These narrative voices serve as powerful reminders to readers that, no matter how isolating our paths may feel, we are never truly alone.

Jenna Tang is a Taiwanese writer, educator and translator who translates between Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, French and English. She is a board member and chair of the Equity Advocates Committee at the American Literary Translators Association.



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CHAPTER 2 CRAM SCHOOL ROBOT

Chapter 2

機器人



