

ADORABLE ENEMIES

可愛的仇人

This metafictional novel follows the journey of a dedicated historian on her journey collecting, translating and editing five little-known historical documents dating from the late-nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries, hoping to bring to light the voices of women from that period.

A Japanese expeditionary force dispatched to Taiwan's remote southern cape in 1874 in reprisal for the massacre of shipwrecked Okinawan fishermen captures an injured indigenous girl. Curious about the potential of "civilizing" Taiwan's Austronesian natives, they take her to Japan for schooling. A contemporary news illustration of her in a kimono is captioned with her adopted Japanese name – Otai. Repatriated to her home village in Taiwan, the sad news breaks just several years later of her ostracization and suicide.

A historian, inspired by Otai's story, turns her attention to five obscure documents from the early twentieth century centering around the female experience in colonial Taiwan. One, a long essay work, follows the furtive romance of the author (a Japanese architect) and a "woman of mystery". Next, a letter from an indigenous Taiwanese participant in the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition details the reasons why she has chosen to reject a proposal of marriage from a Japanese academician.

The last three are works of fiction. The first, written by a Japanese author caught between two cultural landscapes, centers on Taiwan's *shim-pua* (child-betrothed) marriage traditions. The second, penned by an author who was once a *shim-pua* bride herself, narrates a young Taiwanese woman's knotty relationship with a Japanese policeman. The final work, written by a former subject of Japanese-ruled Taiwan, learns Mandarin in the postwar era and weaves a narrative centered around the knottingly entangled, ill-starred relationships between two Taiwanese comfort women and a Taiwanese man serving in the Japanese army.



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In actuality, all five documents are works of fiction. Societies colored by patriarchal norms generally leave little room for female perspectives on history, making it only natural for women's experiences to be filtered and interpreted through the men who wrote about them. In rejecting the imperial, patriarchal mores of the time that mask the true experiences of women such as Otai, Hsieh Yi-An's ruminations in *Adorable Enemies* help readers ponder and empathize with the experience of womanhood in colonial Taiwan.

Hsieh Yi-An 謝宜安

Hsieh Yi-An was born in the historic town of Lukang, graduated from National Taiwan University, and now lives in Taipei. As a core member of Taipei Legend Studio, Hsieh researches, conserves, and promotes local legends centered on monsters and mysterious happenings. She is a contributing writer on the *Daemon Tales* book series and helped develop the eponymous tabletop game. Her recent work covers both non-fiction, including *Taiwanese School Ghost Stories and Where They Come from*, and *Taiwan Urban Legends and Where They Come from*, and novels such as *The Snake Lord: Bride of Pearlesque Bluff* and *Adorable Enemies*.

ADORABLE ENEMIES

By Hsieh Yi-An

Translated by Sahana Narayan

White Termites

Translator's Note

This manuscript was found among the personal effects of the late Nakai Megumi. It was discovered by my colleague, M, while researching the architectural history of the Japanese colonial period in Taiwan. While looking through Nakai-shi's diary, they found this manuscript, and shared it with me. Curiously, this was not included within the diary itself, but as a separate series of pages under the heading "The Termites' Rampage" with the subtitle "Recalling the Construction of the Governor-General's Office". I am translating it here for research purposes.

From its contents, it is clearly meant as a personal recounting of Nakai-shi's time during the construction of the Governor-General's office, the seat of power during the Japanese Colonial Era. The building still stands and now serves as the Office of the President. His account begins after the unveiling ceremony for the Commander Saigō Jūdō Monument (located in present-day Mudan Township, on the Hengchun peninsula), which took place on March 15th, 1936, meaning the manuscript was likely written sometime later that year. The narrative then circles back to the past, centering around events occurring between 1910 and 1915, Nakai-shi's first years in Taiwan. This manuscript was found in an envelope, along with a postcard of the Governor-General's office printed at the time of its unveiling.

Nakai Megumi (1879 - 1944) was an architect. He was born in Gifu, and graduated from Tokyo Imperial University with a degree in architecture. After graduation, he joined the Tatsuno-Kasai Architecture Office and worked under the famous architect Tatsuno Kingo. He first came to Taiwan in 1910, to assist in the construction of the Governor-General's office. During his tenure in the colony, he designed many buildings, and indeed became one of Taiwan's most important architects. While some parts of the manuscript match up with events in Nakai-shi's career, much of it doesn't jibe with his contemporaries' impressions of him at the time, making it difficult to tell how much is a true recounting of the facts. Perhaps Nakai-shi was writing a short story inspired by his own life experiences. However, he wasn't otherwise a writer of fiction. If it is factual, the child in this story must have been born into this world around 1915, and thus has most likely passed from it.

The sun glistens against the slopes. My perch is high. I can see the whole country at a glance – flat farmhouses scattered across the mountains, mountains surrounded by valleys that give way to even steeper mountains in the distance. Sixty years ago, there was a war here.

This is the view from Ishimon at Kōshun-gun, Takao Shū. I designed this monument. It was unveiled days ago, on the 15th of March. The monument stands at the top of a towering mountain. The view is breathtaking. Enough to set a heart to aching.

I originally hoped that the completion of this monument would let me finally lay down my troubles. But alas, they continue floating to the fore. I had thought that twenty years of life would let my heart digest it all. I did not anticipate it would simply deepen my longing.

These notes should not exist, but I have written them down anyway to escape from my memories. They are for myself alone, existing in the freedom of this moment alone. Aside from that, they should not, and cannot, mean anything else.

If you happen to be the unfortunate reader of these notes, please treat them as fantasy. And when you finish reading, burn them.

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What kind of place is colonial Taiwan? In the past, I could not help but fantasize over this question. Like my many senpai before me, I graduated from Tokyo Imperial University and joined our mentor Tatsuno-sensei's architectural firm. Afterwards, some of us made our way to Taiwan, and became the architects of this new world.

Perhaps it was not us who chose this colony, but rather the colony that chose us. The year I entered Tatsuno-sensei's firm just so happened to be the year of an era-defining architectural competition. This competition was a topic oft-discussed but never realized in the mainland, yet it happened here in our colony. Who would have ever imagined such a thing? And such an unbelievable goal it set...to design none other than the colony's seat of power: The Governor-General's Office.

The winning blueprint, made by the labor of one's own hands, promised to be more than a building; it would be a symbol for all of Taiwan. As an architect, what could be a greater source of pride? If you could best the competition and stand out from amongst the pack, your name would be recorded in the annals of history. Even though I was doing my military conscription service at the time, I couldn't stop my heart from fluttering. I had no time for preparations of my own, but I nevertheless could not help but bask in the glory of the moment, bearing witness to the grandness of it all. The newspapers carried advertisements for applicants and gatherings were abuzz with talk of who would take the top prize. The architectural association even released a booklet, "Applicant Guidelines", of which I obtained a copy. The information within was incredibly detailed. Inside was a scale map of the reserved site as well of the surrounding area. It even included a stratigraphic cross-section of the site.

Was this to become sacred grounds? Whereupon a grand building would be erected, reflecting pride down upon the entire island?

I had never been to Taiwan, but with this booklet in hand, I felt my fate become inextricably entwined with it. I read through these guidelines multiple times. Just knowing that this competition was to be the battleground for the finest Japanese architects was enough to set my heart to trembling with excitement. If only I'd been released from military service earlier...The competition deadline was set for just a month after my discharge. I could only watch my senpai from the sidelines as they fought for glory on this marvelous stage.

The review stage lasted for a long time, and first-round results were released the following year. Moriyama-senpai, a senior who had made a name for himself during his time at Tokyo Imperial University, had made the cut. Moriyama-senpai was one of Tatsuno-sensei's disciples, and also an architect I respected greatly. At the time, he was working in the colonial government, and when Tatsuno-sensei visited Taiwan for the second review, he received Moriyama-senpai's welcome and personally inspected his work.

"That pump station was beautiful. Drinking water supplied from there will fill people with joy."

"And the train station hotel here, designed by Matsuzaki-san – truly a representative work in the colony. The efficiency of this government is staggering. What would normally take three years was completed in a mere fourteen months. Such a beautiful building. It could not have been easy."

So said Tatsuno-sensei. He even told me: "Nakai, Moriyama has gone to a good place. My recommendation of him to Chief Goto was definitely the right choice. I firmly believe Taiwan is a stage where my students can flex their talents."

Moriyama-senpai was a blinding star, born to nobility and a talent known to all. But he was also a playboy, and a famous layabout. Tatsuno-sensei had expressed worries about him numerous times. Knowing all this, I could fathom just how much my mentor's consideration meant.

Not long after, the results of the competition were announced. Moriyama-senpai's plan had not been selected. In fact, no top prize was named, and the second-place honor went to the plan submitted by Nagano Uheiji-sensei. Because the Governor General's office was not fully satisfied with Nagano-sensei's design, the Civil Engineering Bureau drew up a revised building plan using Nagano-sensei's plan as their basis. Then, in a twist of fate, the colonial government appointed Moriyama-senpai as construction supervisor for the project.

"How does a loser become construction supervisor?" This naturally sparked an awkward controversy which, in no small part, led to my move to Taiwan. Tatsuno-sensei tapped me to go and assist Moriyama-senpai in his work. This is why I first came to Taiwan.

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Tatsuno-sensei would frequently say that most designers neglect Taiwan's natural conditions in their work, leading many buildings, which would have been fine for the home islands, to fare poorly in the colony's tropical climate. Even after studying the "Applicant Guidelines", many would remain willfully ignorant of this issue.

The mountainous landscape of my birthplace in Gifu is reminiscent of Taiwan. However, Gifu's mountains get biting cold, while Taiwan's flatlands are scorching hot. New arrivals on Taiwan consistently protest that the heat here is enough to send one into a drowsy stupor, a state of complete ineffectiveness, a totalizing burn. I could not help but laugh at the notion: do we architects not have readily available methods to combat such heat? Balconies and more – how could humans ever be truly without an effective response?

However, my first impression upon arriving in Taiwan in September was not of heat; It was of never-ending feasts.

In my professional capacity, my first months in Taiwan were a whirlwind of welcome banquets, farewell parties, new-years parties, staff appreciation dinners, celebrations, exhibitions, dinner parties...I had no notion of refusal, and foolishly accepted a rash of invitations. Thus began an indigestible torrent of banquets. At one such event, I ran into Murakami-kun, a classmate of mine at First Higher School. I would never have expected to meet him in Taiwan, of all places. Murakami-kun was well-versed in these types of affairs, and would introduce me to all sorts of people: "this is *so-and-so* commissioner and his wife, *so-and-so* entrepreneur and his wife." It was an endless parade of officials and their wives... Murakami-kun was tall and talkative, and the madams all loved him. As for me, just a few feasts in and my head was spinning towards the floor. I don't believe I could remember anyone's name, even if pressed.

I expressed my desire to retire to Murakami-kun. In the future, unless absolutely necessary, I would very much like to put an end to these exhausting soirees and enjoy the company of my books instead.

"It's necessary! This one is of the utmost importance!" Murakami-kun would say.

According to Murakami-kun's standards, every banquet had an absolutely unique and vital reason to attend. And yet, in reality, I was a new official of no particular importance. It's not as if I were a senior section chief! Not a single social event required my presence.

"Listen to yourself! Are you not the scion of a reputable family, the descendant of a distinguished Waka poet?"

"You must be joking."

"Alright, but the Emperor's birthday celebration is being held at the Governor-General's residence! There will be many higher-ups!"

I could never manage to decline Murakami-kun's invitations, and thus agreed to attend. The chance to see that residence, designed by Fukuda Tōgo-sensei, provided at least one good reason to go. At the insistence of former Governor-General Kodama, no expense had been spared in its construction, exhausting much of the treasury and provoking public resentment.

The party began at dusk, delicate rosy clouds wafting in the darkening sky. Bright lamps had been lit, so many as to dazzle the eye, making the space brighter, I imagined, than at midday. Their light fell upon the residence's many tropical plants and fresh flowers, revealing colors more vivid than possible under sunlight – so dreamlike as to be surreal. And in the midst of this fantastic white light was the stone gray façade of the residence itself – the richest of all imperial beauties,

beauty enough to leave one breathless. To me as an architect, such beauty is truly worth any expense.

The guests assumed their seats. There was a stage before them, specially erected for the occasion. The madams wore kimonos of terrific beauty, with glittering accessories to match. Salaries in the colony were high, which helped explain the splendor.

Murakami-kun, sitting at my side, must have seen my gaze drawn to the ladies. As if to instigate something, he told me: "There will be geisha tonight." I knew he was making a big deal of nothing. After all, I'd been to the ryōtei many times, enough that they had long since lost their luster. And yet, I had heard that officials displayed a level of impropriety in the colonies unheard of in the home islands, a situation not even their wives could rein in. Murakami-kun had told me once that even Governor-General Kodama had once taken a long-acquainted geisha to bed in the residence itself, resulting in a thief running off with his clothes.

"When even the Governor-General is like this, who can blame others?"

As the fireworks subsided, the geisha began to perform. They entered the stage in delicate kimonos, holding fans as they danced, mesmerizing in their grace. Their entrance should have brought the atmosphere to a climax – but the opposite happened. The air froze. Something strange was afoot.

"...Oh my, what a coincidence..." Murakami-kun mumbled to himself. I turned to ask him. He raised his chin, and nodded at a couple seated to the right. Everyone was watching them.

I recognized the couple as Director Takeda and his wife. Madam Takeda was a real beauty, and held a key position in the Women's Association. While Director Takeda wore an unconcerned expression, his wife seated next to him was looking down, visibly shaking.

However, the awkwardness did not last long. The lady sitting next to Madam Takeda dropped her glass of wine, a tactless action that immediately took center stage. Madam Takeda hurriedly produced her handkerchief and helped the lady clean up. At first glance it seemed like the lady had made an error, but everyone knew it was done deliberately, to give Madam Takeda space to breathe. As she dabbed at the lady's kimono, Madam Takeda's expression of anxiety slowly eased. The lady asked Madam Takeda for help cleaning her kimono, and they left together.

The lady's brave and measured thinking had saved Madam Takeda. How thoughtful! I could not help but presume this upstanding lady to be of noble birth.

And while only the briefest of moments, I still remember her captivating beauty.

I only learned the truth from Murakami-kun as we left the banquet. Madam Takeda's discomfort came from seeing Saeko, a geisha, on stage. She was Director Takeda's mistress.

This was a rumor well-known in our social circle. There was a story that one night, people had arrived with important matters to discuss with Director Takeda. They searched his residence from top to bottom, but could not find him anywhere. At this point, Madam Takeda revealed, with some difficulty, that the director was resting that evening at another house. Sleeping next to him was none other than Saeko.

That a high-ranking official would keep a mistress was not uncommon, nor was it uncommon to have geisha perform at such a banquet. And yet, no one would anticipate such an embarrassing coincidence.

"Madam Takeda was so composed. It must have been hard to hide her turbulent heart! ... And while everyone was watching too. How awkward! With so many busybodies about, wishing to savor her distress!" The normally breezy Murakami-kun, in the moment, couldn't help but speak up for the downtrodden Madam Takeda.

"So that's what happened." I could understand Madam Takeda's discomfort...but could not understand why Director Takeda could appear so unconcerned.

"Who was the lady who left with Madam Takeda?"

"That's the wife of Section Chief Kazushima. Her name is Kazushima Towako. We're lucky to have her; otherwise those busybodies would have gotten their way."

"So that's her name..."

Murakami-kun grinned, returning quickly to his usual breezy manner: "She's a real beauty, isn't she? The section chief's a lucky man."

I corrected him: "She's a refined lady." But as I said it, I couldn't look at him.

Murakami-kun saw through my discomfort, and smiled even brighter.

"Section Chief Kazushima is one of the rare good people here. It's said he was once no stranger to the nightlife – but after marriage, he's been a good husband. He's humble and gracious, worthy of respect. They're a good match, wouldn't you say? If only everyone was like them."

More than once, Murakami-kun had remarked to me on the depravity of colonial officials. From top to bottom, they lived lives of debauchery. Nearly every police inspection turned up a wayward official...sometimes even their own superiors. The awkwardness of those moments were likely not less than the awkwardness of this night.

"For the awkwardness of tonight, the blame rests solely with Director Takeda. And yet, his wife is forced to shoulder his shame. How utterly disgraceful."

I could not help but rebuke Director Takeda. Murakami-kun did not deny it either. He was silent for a long while before speaking again.

"... To be honest, I've heard that Director Takeda wasn't like this back in the home islands. He was a model of good behavior. I would've never expected him to change this much after coming here."

"What?"

"I can't say why, and I don't know if the rumors are even true. But as far as upstanding Japanese coming to Taiwan and descending into debauchery – Director Takeda certainly isn't the first."

Hearing Murakami-kun's words, I could not help but think about how upright and honest Murakami-kun himself had once been. And now, these parts were hidden. Perhaps it was because he saw only too clearly that in this system, hard work changes nothing. Perhaps that is why he became like this.

"Coming to the colonies changes everyone.... We become completely different people."

Murakami-kun was sitting on my dormitory tatami, his glass long empty. He raised the glass to his lips, pretending to drain it again. It felt like he'd been pretending his whole life.

In the colonies, we become completely different people.

I didn't want to believe it. But seeing the way Murakami-kun quaffed the air in his glass, gripped by some musing yet still uttering such words, left no room for doubt.

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Despite what Murakami-kun had said, I could not entirely give up on Taiwan. I imagine this is because I am an architect.

Nagano-sensei was incensed when informed he had won only the second prize. He lodged a protest with Governor-General Sakuma, only to be met with the response: "Protests are not permitted." Nagano-sensei even fought with my mentor, Tatsuno-sensei, declaring: "No matter what, a competition must always have a victor!" This left Tatsuno-sensei considerably displeased.

Nagano-sensei's ire, of course, had personal dimensions. However, I could not help but think he must have spent many months imagining what the Governor-General's Office would look like; bent over his desk, scratching out the design line by line; every page infused with his blood, sweat, and tears.... But it wasn't just him. Moriyama-senpai, Kataoka-sensei, Sakurai-sensei...everyone had worked so hard. Perhaps some may consider my thinking naïve, but I cannot help but believe that a place that spurred the most elite of architects to give their all can never be second-class.

Moreover, upon my arrival in Taiwan, for both public and private reasons, I arranged visits to buildings throughout the colony. The railway hotel was just as my mentor Tatsuno-sensei had described – a miracle that left me without words. As for Moriyama-senpai's great works – pump rooms, telephone exchanges, and more – they rang as true as poetry. Even the widely criticized Governor-General's Residence was an exemplar of eloquence. Any man who truly loved these buildings could never accept Taiwan as a place of debauchery; nor would they ever deign to debase themselves here.