



# BLOSSOM

A Full English translation is available.

## 百花百色

**Author:** D.S. **Illustrator:** D.S. **Publisher:** Gaea Books

**Date:** 01/2019 **Rights contact:** bft.children.comics@moc.gov.tw

210 pages | 14.8 x 21 cm **Volume:** 1

**Awards:** 2020 Japan International Manga Award Bronze Award

**Rights sold:** French, Italian

**BFT2.0 Translator:** Michelle Kuo

Yufan has always been told to “act like a girl”: learn the piano, stay quiet and dignified, wear skirts, and never be noisy or rough. Pressured by her mother and grandmother, she hides her true self and conforms to the image they demand.

Her world shifts when she discovers she is intersex—and that her mother performed a Daoist ritual during pregnancy to ensure a boy. As puberty arrives, Yufan realizes her body is not developing like other girls’, deepening her confusion and isolation.

Published shortly before Taiwan legalized same-sex marriage, this award-winning graphic novel offers an intimate portrait of one young woman’s exploration of gender, identity, and belonging. It confronts the weight of family expectations, the grip of tradition and religion, and the pain of social scrutiny. Seeking refuge, Yufan feels lost—until her cousin invites her to join a queer rights protest and attend a same-sex wedding slowing, a door to acceptance and solidarity opens.



## Author D.S.

D.S., a native of Keelung, loves the sea despite rarely venturing outdoors. An optimistic creator, she is dedicated to portraying the inner lives and emotions of young women and girls. She won the 2020 Japan International Manga Award Bronze Award.

# Breaking Free from Gender Roles, A Taiwanese Coming-of-Age Story: A Review of the Comic *BLOSSOM*

by Mei-hsuan Liao  
(originally published on OpenBook)

*BLOSSOM*, a manga by Taiwanese artist D.S., tells the coming-of-age story of Yufan, a queer teenager burdened by gender expectations. As a child, her non-conforming traits set her apart, and family pressure only deepened her confusion. In college, she discovers others like her—queer identities hidden in plain sight.

While LGBT narratives are no longer rare, *BLOSSOM* distinguishes itself by blending the story of an intersex protagonist with Taiwan's folk ritual, known as the "Flower of Transformation," rooted in the worship of Chen Jinggu, the Lady of the Water. Women seeking children pray at her temple and walk across the Hundred Flowers Bridge. Flower buds represent future children—white for boys, red for

girls. No flowers mean infertility, prompting a ritual to "plant" fertility. Pregnant women may also "swap" flowers to symbolically change a baby's gender—red for white if they wish for a boy.

The ritual's vibrant imagery comforts women hoping for children. Yet it also hints at sorrow. If a daughter is born after a flower swap, blame often falls on the mother. If a son is born, she may still feel guilt for giving up a daughter's soul. Beneath its beauty lies emotional weight.

The story begins with a mother's guilt. Though raised as a girl, Yufan preferred boyish clothes and resisted feminine stereotypes, drawing constant scolding. She later learns her parents had prayed for a boy, but she was born

intersex. Due to underdeveloped male genitals, they chose to raise her as a girl. Her mother, mocked by her in-laws, was determined to mold Yufan into the perfect daughter. Whenever Yufan's behavior strayed from this ideal, it reopened old wounds. Her mother responded with coldness, retreating into trimming plants—a symbolic escape.

Unlike other mothers who anxiously await the gender of their child, Yufan's mother faced dual disappointment: she didn't bear a boy, and her daughter didn't act like one. Elders' gossip pierced deeply. Unknowingly, she became an agent of patriarchy, forcing femininity onto Yufan's body.

It's unsettling how generations of women, once they become elders, enforce the very norms that once confined them. Men also face limits, but patriarchy often offers them escape—Yufan's father disappears into work, avoiding family conflict. Caught in this tension, Yufan feels like neither a red nor white flower—just a monster in between. She asks, "If I don't know where I belong, how can I know where to go for freedom?"

After leaving home for university, Yufan embraces newfound freedom and finds strength among other queer individuals—especially her cousin Ling, once the family's model young woman. In a surprise twist, Ling comes out as a lesbian to Yufan's mother and is unexpectedly accepted. This shift is partly due to her emotional appeal, but also because

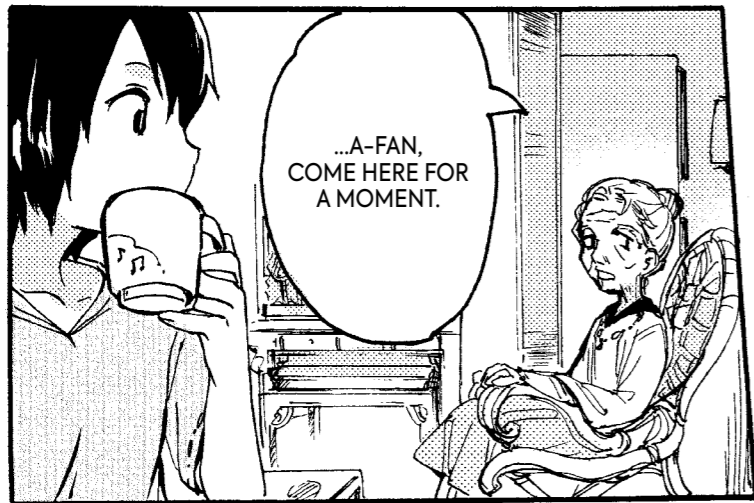
the grandmother—long the enforcer of tradition—has passed away, easing the atmosphere.

Ling, known for her quiet devotion to temple gods, later celebrates her same-sex wedding at the temple gates after marriage equality is legalized. Watching Ling, rooted in tradition yet embracing queerness, and Yufan, strong in her own difference, their mother begins to soften. Like flowers of many colors, none are less beautiful in the eyes of one who loves them.

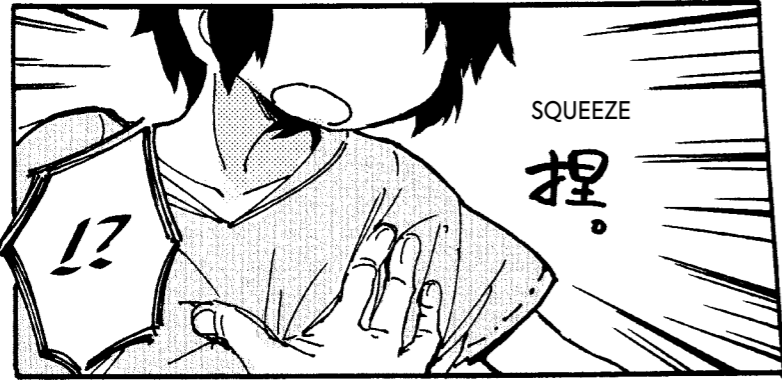
*BLOSSOM* gains resonance through its use of ritual, showing how tradition can both constrain and heal. Yufan's grandmother clung to authority; Ling found emotional connection. The mother, once rigid, begins to empathize with her child. Flowers once symbolized gender control; now they bloom as signs of reconciliation. Flowers grow in different soils, yet under the same sky—just like people, seeking space to breathe.

*This essay has been edited for the purposes of this booklet.*

*Mei-hsuan Liao, born in 1978 in Chiayi, Taiwan, double-majored in History and Foreign Languages at National Taiwan University. She enjoys damp weather, insomnia, and the color moss green. Her works include Dialogue des oreilles, published in France, and At Her Grandfather's Memorial Service.*

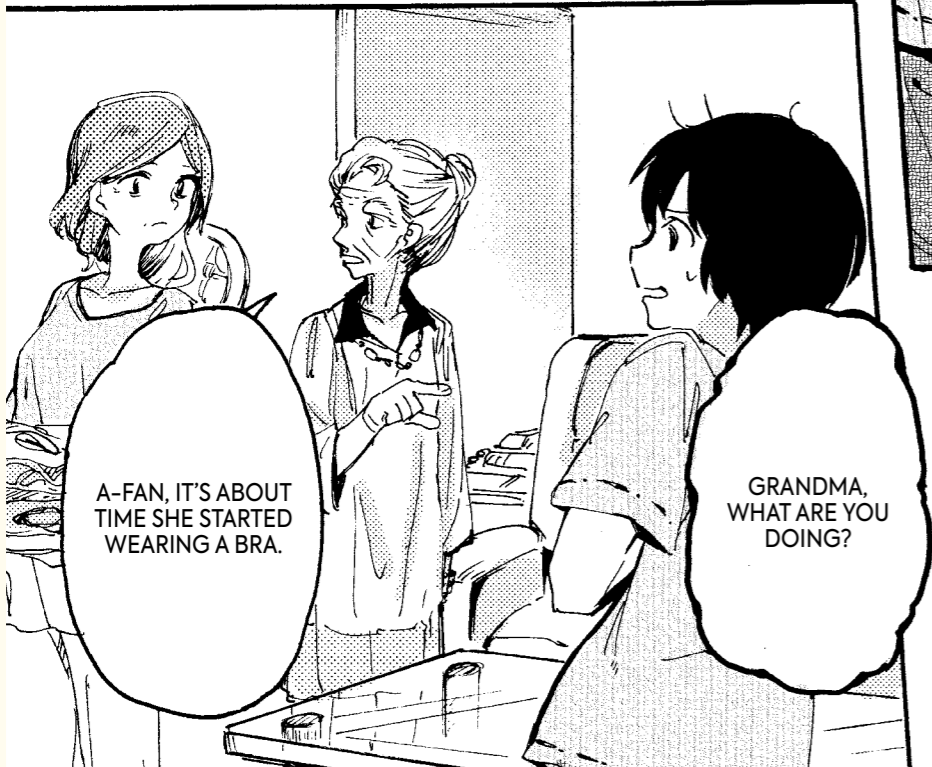


...A-FAN, COME HERE FOR A MOMENT.



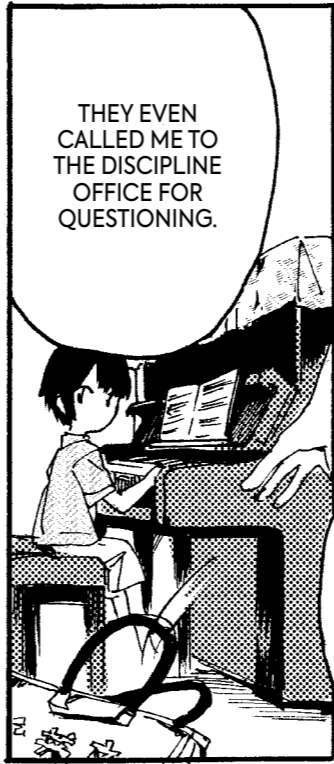
SQUEEZE  
捏。

MAYBE THIS IS MY PUNISHMENT—



A-FAN, IT'S ABOUT TIME SHE STARTED WEARING A BRA.

GRANDMA, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?



THEY EVEN CALLED ME TO THE DISCIPLINE OFFICE FOR QUESTIONING.



YUFAN, DID YOU GET INTO A FIGHT AS SOON AS YOU GOT TO SCHOOL TODAY?

POKE POKE POKE POKE



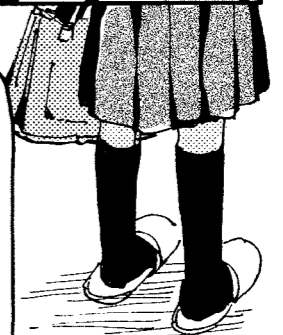
I REALLY DON'T WANT TO GET DRAGGED INTO IT EVERY TIME.

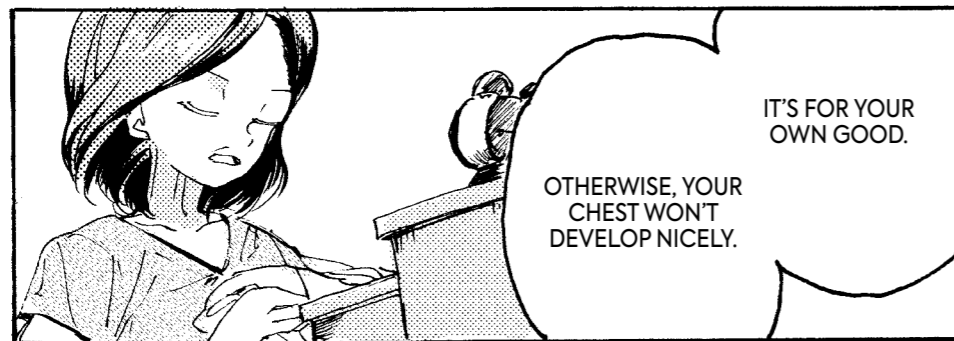
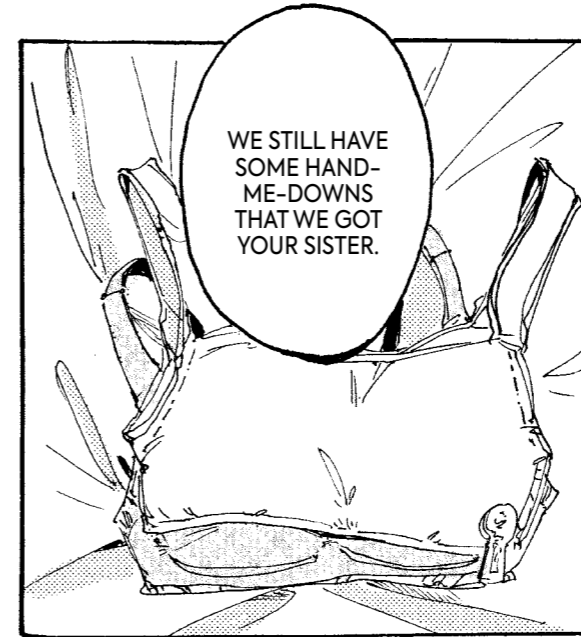
I DON'T CARE WHAT THE REASON IS. IF YOU'RE GOING TO CAUSE TROUBLE, AT LEAST WAIT UNTIL I GRADUATE.



IT'S REALLY EMBARRASSING.

MOM'S ALWAYS LOOKING AFTER YOU, AND YOU STILL ACT LIKE THIS...





GRADUALLY, MY BODY FEELS LIKE IT NO LONGER BELONGS TO ME.



IT'S TERRIFYING.





LIFTS  
衫.

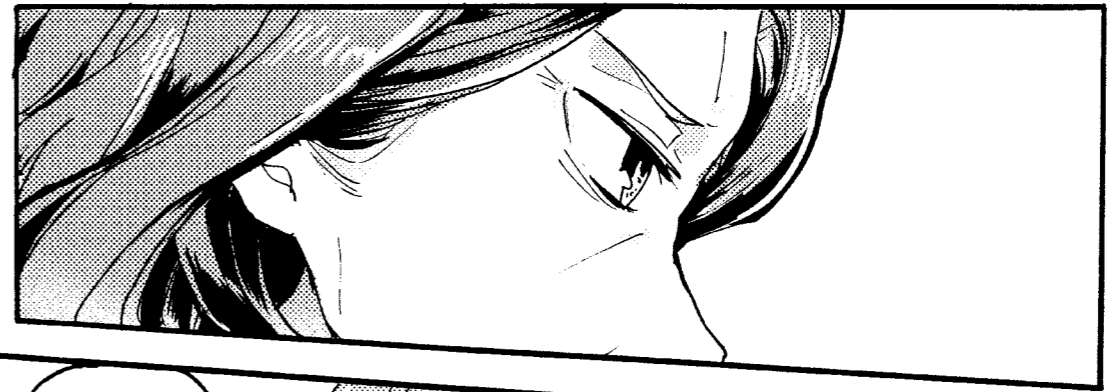
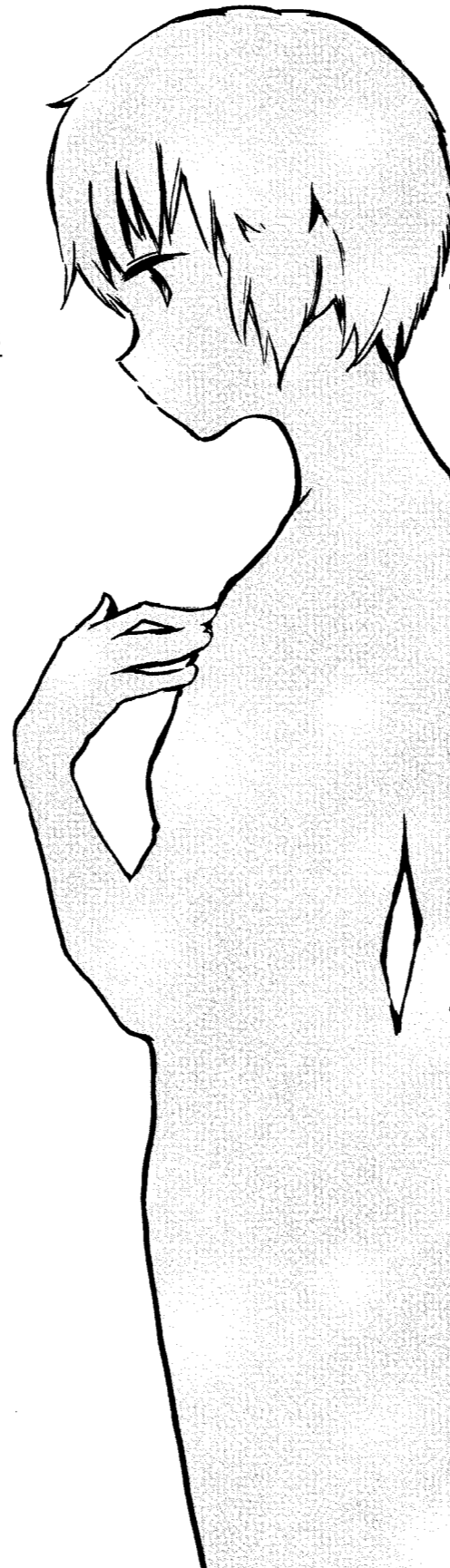
IF MY BODY IS  
NOTHING BUT  
A JOKE,

HOW CAN YOU  
CONSIDER  
ME LUCKY?



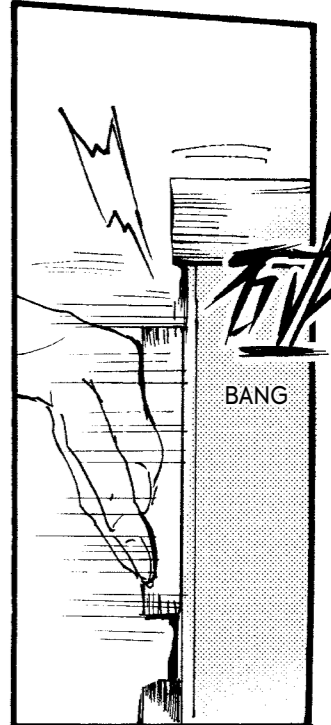
A-RU, DO YOU  
THINK MY BODY  
LOOKS FUNNY?

HUH?



BOYS ARE BOYS.

BUT IF A GIRL GOES  
OUT WITHOUT  
WEARING A BRA,  
SHE'LL BE A JOKE!



BANG



KIDS THESE  
DAYS DON'T  
EVEN REALIZE  
HOW LUCKY  
THEY ARE.



BACK IN OUR DAY,  
WE DIDN'T HAVE  
ALL THESE FANCY  
THINGS TO CHOOSE  
FROM—

WE HAD TO SEW  
EVERYTHING  
OURSELVES.