



The Mystery of Alishan Forest Railway

A Full English translation is available.

阿里山林鐵奇事

Author: Chien Chia-Cheng **Illustrator:** Chien Chia-Cheng **Publisher:** Gaea Books

Date: 08/2016 **Rights contact:** bft.children.comics@moc.gov.tw

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

BFT2.0 Translator: Michelle Kuo

Chih-Hsu has finally fulfilled his lifelong dream: driving a train on the Alishan Forest Railway through lush mountain forests. One day, during a passengerless run, he makes an exception and stops for a mysterious girl named Seedlings. Before he realizes it, the train enters the long-abandoned Tunnel No. 21—and beyond it, Chih-Hsu glimpses the forest's memories spanning a century.

Using the history of the Alishan Forest Railway as its narrative backbone, this book guides readers through the evolving relationship between humans and nature, environmental conservation and modern development. Alongside its thought-provoking themes, it vividly portrays Alishan's breathtaking landscapes and rich local culture. Through the eyes of Chih-Hsu and the enigmatic Seedlings, readers are transported through bamboo groves, thick mountain mist, and ancient trees.

Meanwhile, Seedlings' fierce resistance—and that of the mountain residents—succeed in protecting Taiwan's indigenous culture and longstanding traditions against rapacious corporate interests.



Author **Chien Chia-Cheng**

Chien Chia-Cheng is an independent comic artist and visual storyteller renowned for blending meticulous historical research with cinematic visuals. His body of work explores a diverse range of themes, spanning from railway and film history to the complexities of war and collective social memory. His books include *Wind Chaser Under the Blue Sky*, *Memories of an Actress*, and *The Movie Painter*. He is a multiple Golden Comic Awards winner, with works recognized by Taiwan's Ministry of Culture. His *Wind Chaser Under the Blue Sky* won the Grand Prize at the 17th Japan International Manga Award in 2023.

Riding the Alishan Forest Railway Through a Century: The Eternal Struggle Between Humans and Nature

by Shan-Chung Yang

In Hayao Miyazaki's prescient *Princess Mononoke*, the forest and the earth revolt in anger against human greed. The ancient boar god Lord Okkoto transforms into a demon to destroy his enemies. Meanwhile, the heroine San—a human raised by wolves—wages a relentless war against Lady Eboshi, the industrial leader whose ironworks threaten to destroy the forest.

Similarly, Ryusuke Hamaguchi's *Evil Does Not Exist* depicts a tranquil Japanese village whose quiet existence is threatened by a corporate proposal to develop a "glamping" site. The villagers, acutely aware of the risk to their land and water, rise in a collective protest against the intrusion. The film suggests

that the tension between environmental preservation and human development has no perfect resolution; instead, it remains an intractable, endless struggle.

Chien Chia-Cheng's *The Mystery of Alishan Forest Railway* evokes these two classic works. Its protagonist Seedlings, the girl of the forest, is like San in her fierce devotion; she's willing to expend her life force to protect the forest she loves. Meanwhile, much like the villagers in *Evil Does Not Exist*, Alishan residents resist corporate attempts to bypass Environmental Impact Assessments to build a large-scale resort.

Yet Chien's story goes beyond familiar tropes. The comic cleverly uses the historical development of the Alishan

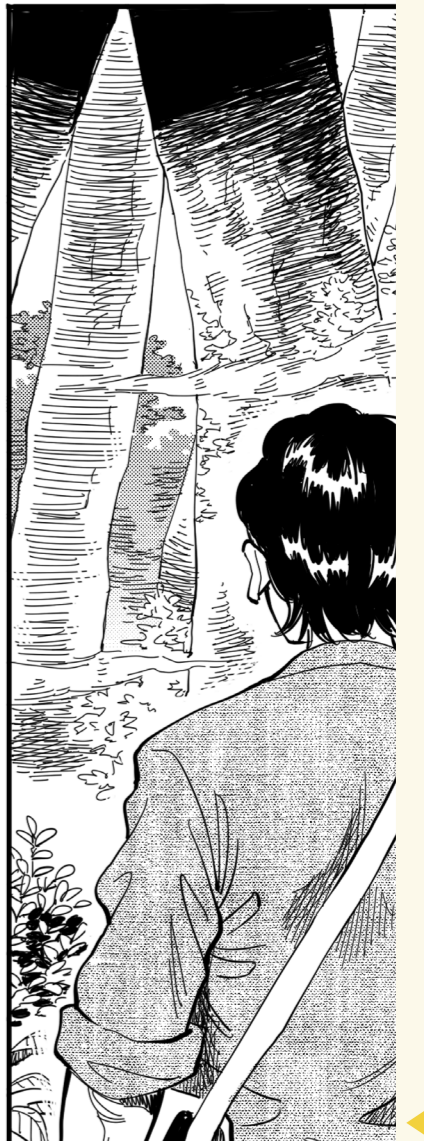
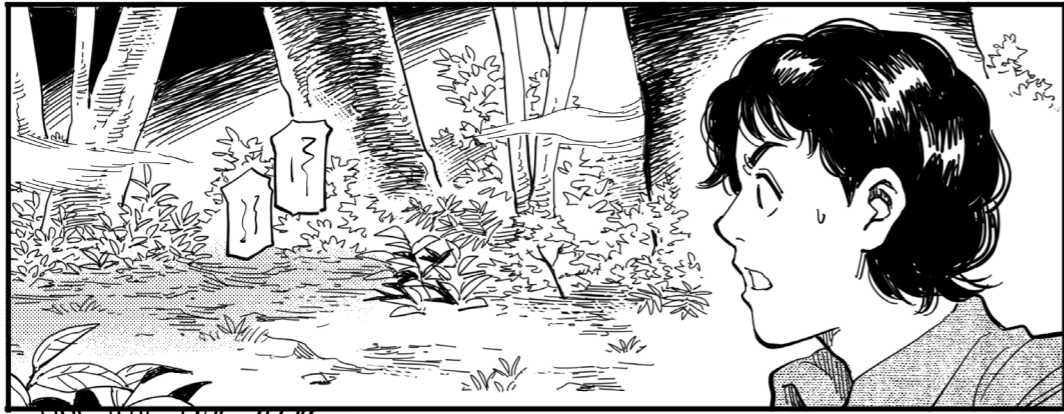
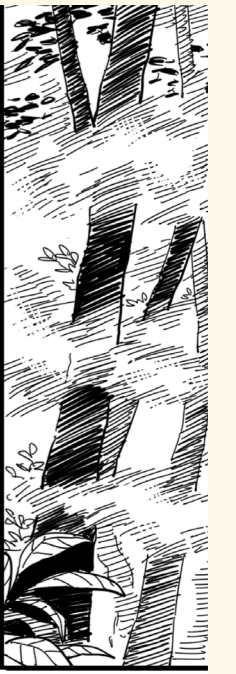
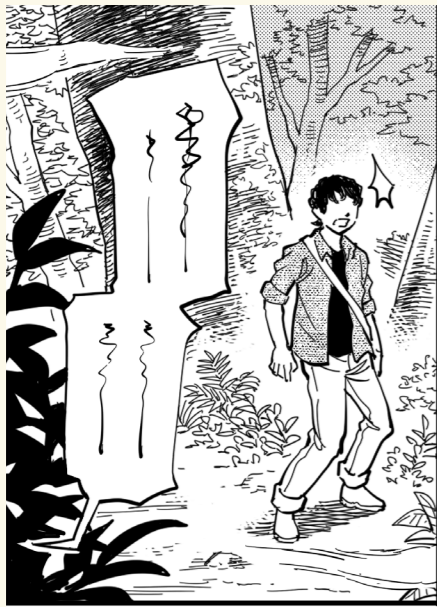
Forest Railway as a narrative backbone, blending fictional and fantastical elements. The resistance of the Seedlings, and more broadly of the residents, reflects a defense of Taiwan's indigenous culture and longstanding local traditions against encroaching external corporate interests. Through the eyes of Chih-Hsu, a passionate Alishan train driver, and Seedlings, readers are transported through bamboo groves, thick mountain mist, and ancient trees. The journey unfolds the complex history of Alishan and the many transformations of its storied railway.

From Japanese colonial development to government deficits, landslides, typhoon damage, and local resistance, the century-long history of the Alishan Forest Railway is condensed into fewer than 200 pages. Two additional essays and a timeline help readers understand the controversies behind the project and trace the long-term effects

of development and natural disasters, deepening their understanding of Seedlings's anger.

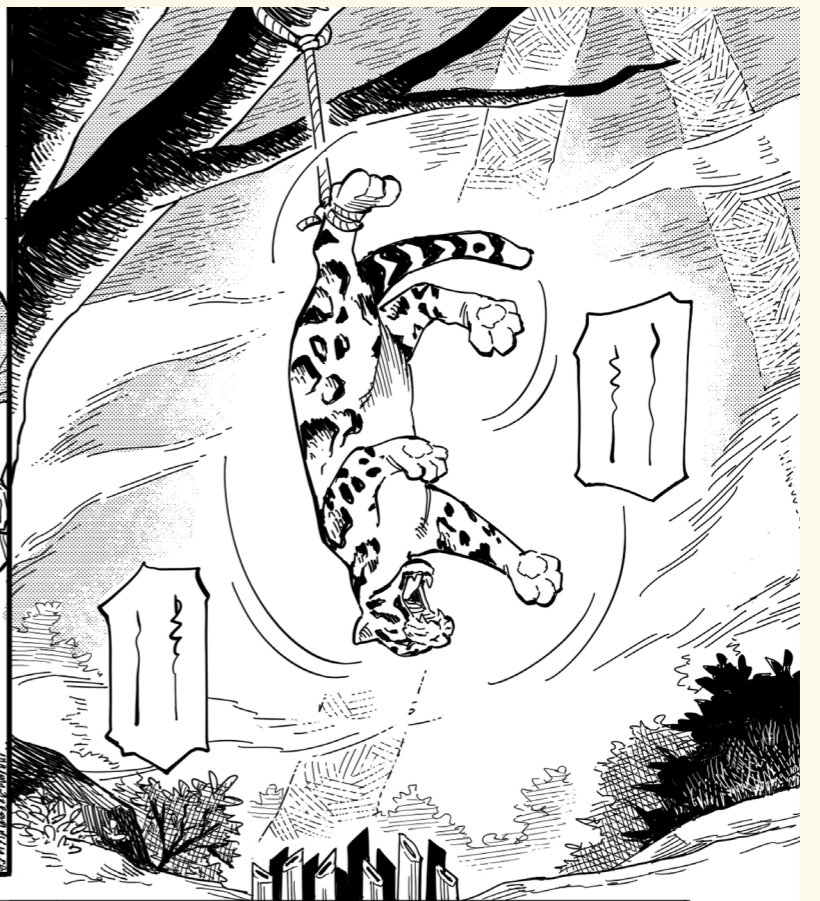
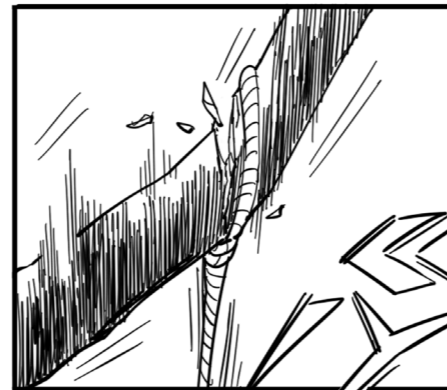
In the end, with the resort contract canceled and power restored, the story seems to offer a relatively happy resolution. Yet the author leaves subtle foreshadowing: Seedlings disappears from the hospital, suggesting that as long as humans exist, the struggle between nature and civilization will remain eternal and unresolved.

Shan-Chung Yang, a graduate of the Department of History at National Taiwan University, has worked as a teacher and a literary arts programmer. Born in the subtropical winter of a humid island, she loves the trees and climate of the temperate zone. She is a devoted bear enthusiast, and her life idol is the Adélie penguin.





Thrash! Thrash!

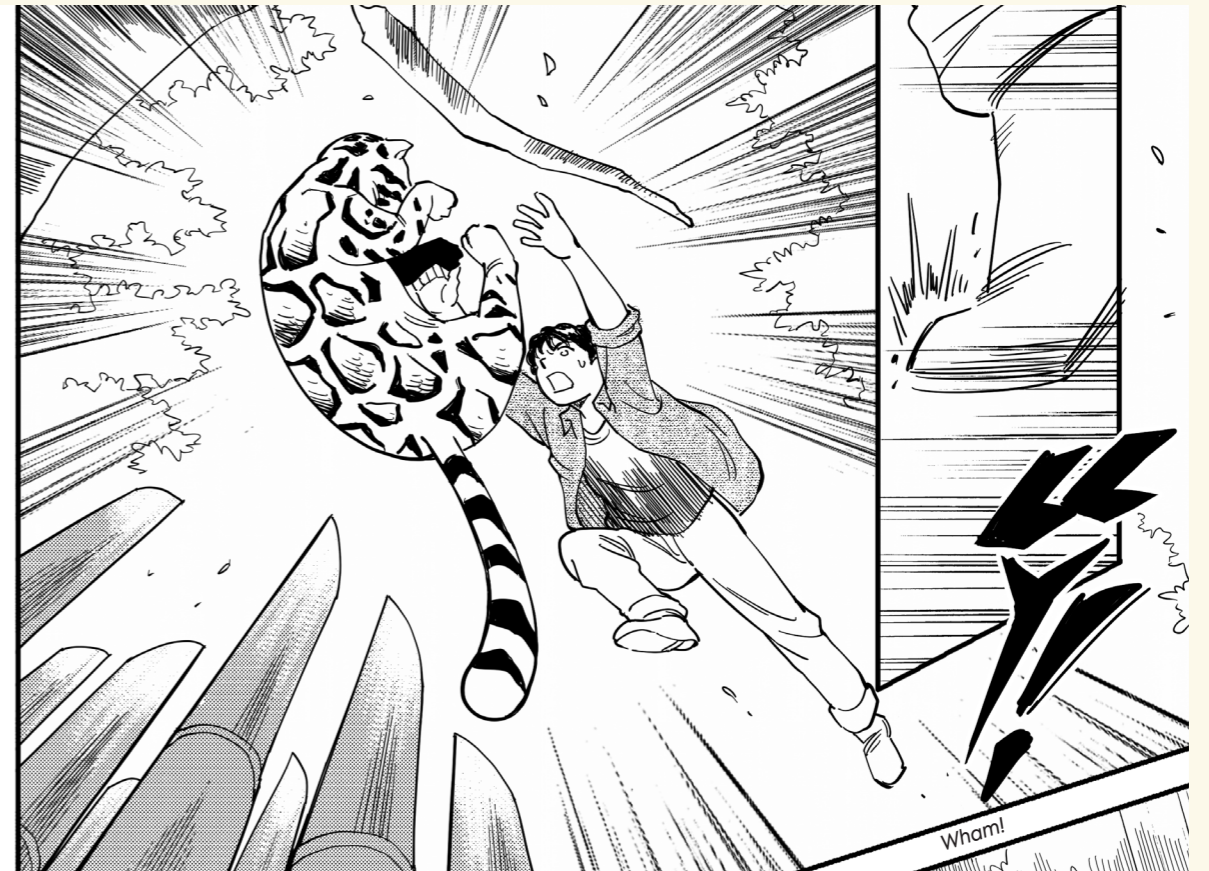




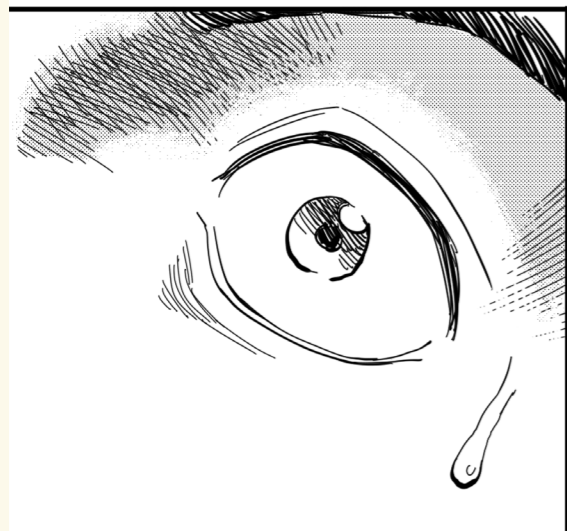
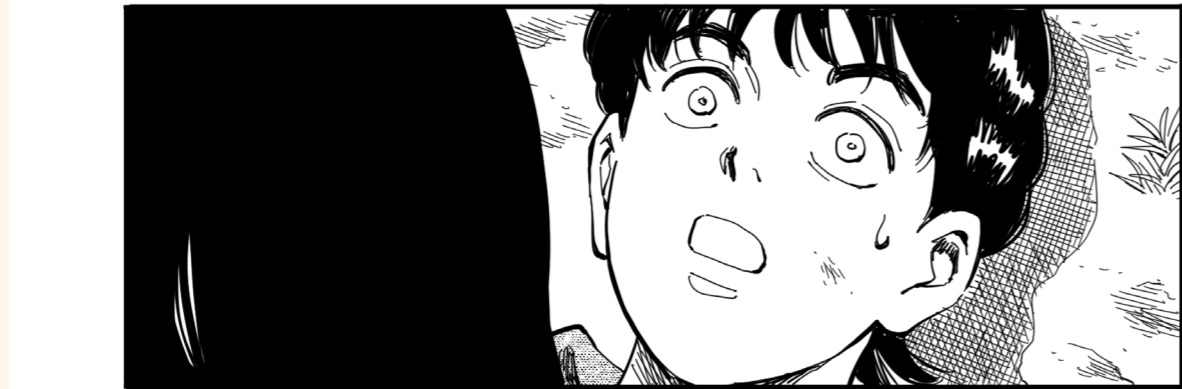
Thud!



OUCH...



Wham!



Thump! Thump!

