



The Nature Chef

A Full English translation is available.

Mararum : 山間料理人

Author: Nananrih **Illustrator:** Nananrih **Original Concept:** GoodTrip Creative

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BFT 2.0 Translator: David Knight

Wild vegetable tempura made with shell ginger petals and native grasses. Bamboo mackerel wrapped in shiso leaves and grilled in the mountain style. A tamago-rolled omelet seasoned with prickly ash.

During World War II, a brilliant young girl named Panay, gifted in cooking, works as a housemaid for the Ikegami family. Panay is Amis, one of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples, while the Ikegamis are Japanese and have relocated to Hualien Harbor. In an age of scarcity, Panay blends local ingredients with tribal culinary traditions, creating distinctive Japanese-style dishes. Her food awakens the palate and comforts the homesick hearts of the Ikegami family. Meanwhile, her friendship with Shinsuke, a Japanese policeman and the family's eldest son, slowly blossoms.

Rising comics artist Nananrih portrays the everyday food culture of the wartime period and, through these humble meals, evokes the longing and nostalgia of ordinary lives.



Author **Nananrih**

Nananrih is a comics creator who delights in observing and portraying people, reading the pulse of the times through the crowd, exploring the world from diverse perspectives, and seeking to resonate with readers through their works.



Original Concept **GoodTrip Creative**

Founded in 2016 by Golden Bell Award-winning producer Hsin Tsui-Yun, GoodTrip Creative Co., Ltd. focuses on developing original stories and expanding them across film, television, print, comics, and theater. Its works have received wide recognition from major domestic and international awards, including the Golden Bell Awards, Golden Comic Awards, Asian TV Awards, and Asia Academy Creative Awards. Representative projects include *Listen to the Voice of Taiwan*, *Travel Running Cheering Squad*, *The Nature Chef*, *VR101*, and the cross-media comic *Island Rhapsody: Listen to the Voice of Taiwan*.

Cooking a Meal in the Cracks of Colonialism: Humble Meals that Reveal Place, Time, and the Longing of Ordinary Lives

by Wen-Chien Hsu

Taiwan has long existed at the crossroads of shifting empires. From Spanish and Dutch rule to the Qing administration and Japanese colonial government, and later the postwar regime, each transition left behind new languages, systems, and norms—while erasing fragments of what came before. As a result, Taiwan’s cultural memory and sense of identity often resemble a map repeatedly taken apart and patched back together.

Against this complex historical backdrop, a comic that focuses on everyday life can reveal a more intimate truth. Instead of asking, “Who does Taiwan belong to?”, it shows us how people of different identities once lived side by side—

meeting, clashing, relying on each other, and surviving together.

In the 1930s and 40s, under the shadow of war, Japanese and Taiwanese residents relocate to Hualien Port, on the eastern coast of Taiwan, to rebuild their lives. Panay, a girl from Taiwan’s Amis Indigenous people, leaves her village to work as a maid in a Japanese household, hoping to earn money for the medical treatment of her sister, who is sick. Despite food shortages, Panay’s careful and resourceful cooking brings warmth, nourishment, and comfort to the family she serves.

One day, Panay and her companions go to the coast to gather food, an Indigenous tradition prohibited

under colonial rule. Her friend is arrested, but Panay is unexpectedly spared by a Japanese police officer, Shinsuke Ikegami. Determined to save her friend, she visits the police station again and again. Moved by her persistence, Shinsuke eventually helps secure her friend’s release.

What truly transforms their lives, however, is what follows. When Shinsuke finally returns to his family’s home, having been away for some time due to his posting, he realizes that the maid cooking for his family is the very same girl he spared by the shore. Panay recognizes him too. In a time shaped by war and dislocation, two people whose paths were never meant to cross suddenly find their lives intertwined.

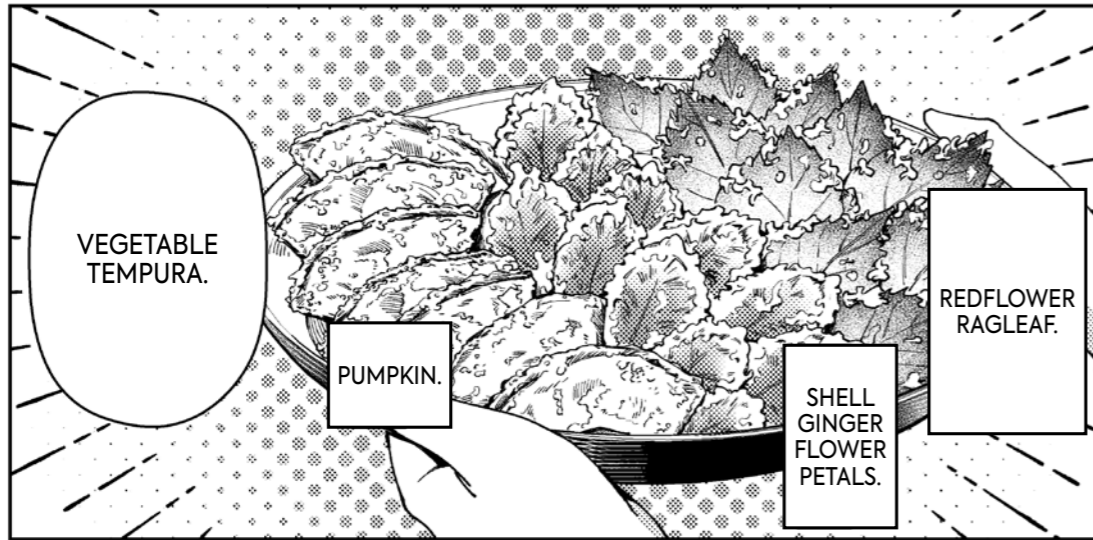
Artist Nananrih depicts this unlikely connection through the language of food. Indigenous ingredients blend with Japanese home-style dishes. These dishes form compelling instances of cultural exchange: tamagoyaki infused with indigenous herbs, wild vegetables wrapped in shell ginger petals and fried into tempura, and horse mackerel grilled with shiso. These hybrid dishes are more than recipes—they are evidence of

cultures meeting, adapting, and changing one another.

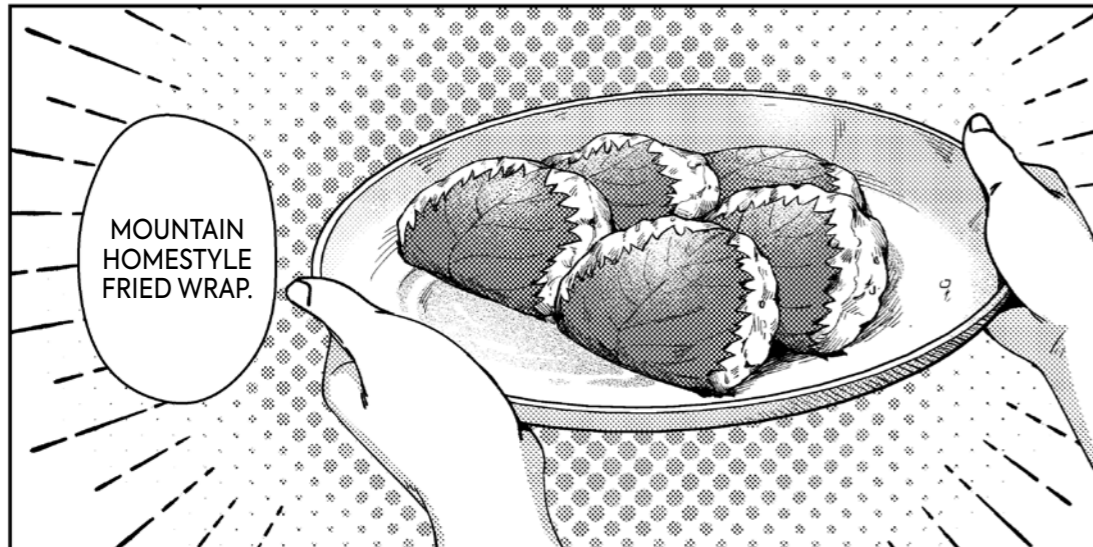
The true strength of this work lies not in historical explanation, but in offering a different way to interpret history. Rather than narrating events from the perspective of regimes or nations, it draws us close to the people who lived through them. Through steam rising from a kitchen and the mingled flavors of a shared meal, we see how individuals held on to one another in times of uncertainty, how understanding emerged from unfamiliarity, and how kindness could take root even within structures of power.

Perhaps these small, ordinary moments come closer to the truth of memory than any grand historical narrative ever could.

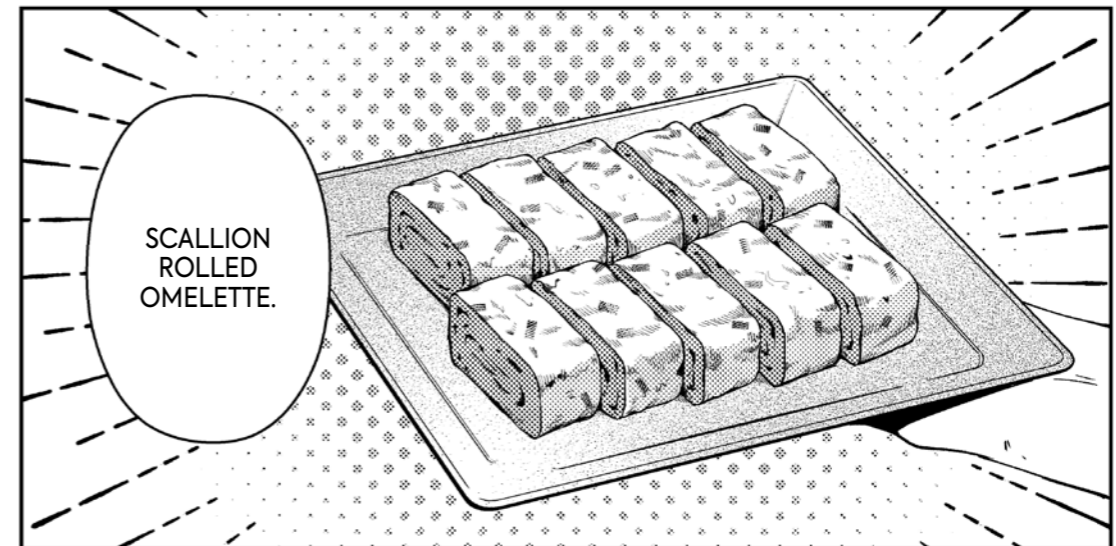
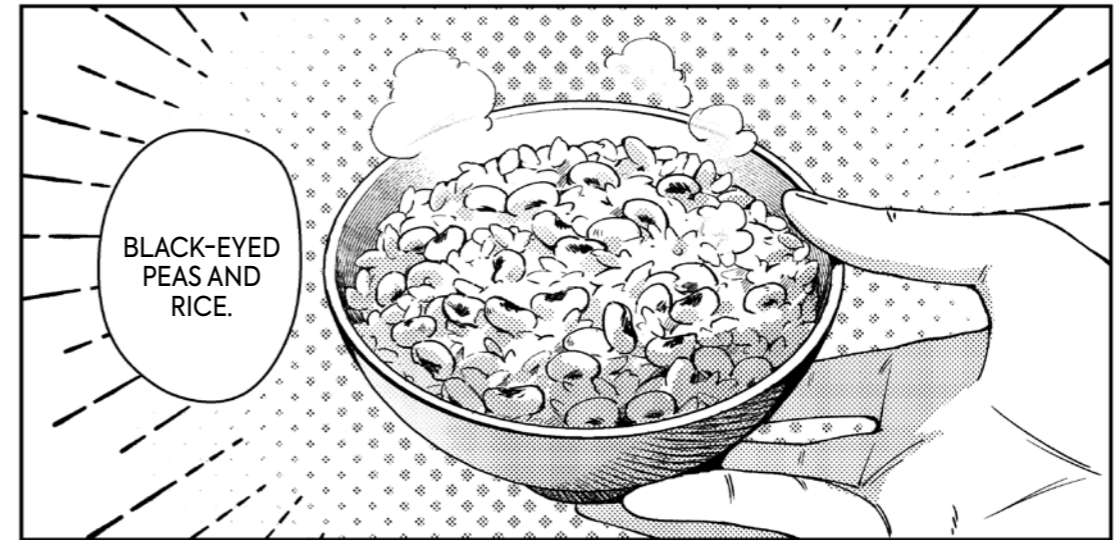
Wen-Chien Hsu possesses a free-spirited soul. She has worked at LGBTQ+ organizations, the 113 Domestic Violence Hotline, and works as an editor of Books from Taiwan 2.0. She is dedicated to bringing Taiwanese comics and picture books to a global audience.

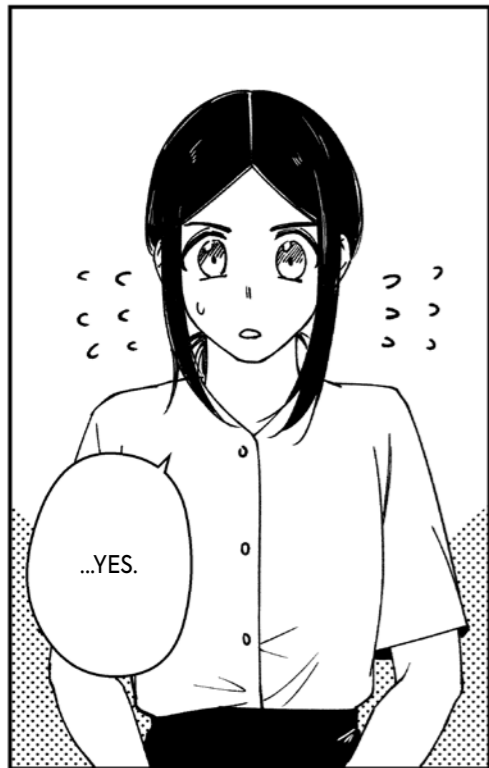


※Redflower ragleaf is another name for the leaf of the *Gynura crepioides* plant, or "Okinawan spinach."



※A local Japanese dish from Chiba prefecture. It consists of mackerel, miso, ginger, and scallion wrapped in a shiso leaf.





...YES.



PANAY, DID YOU MAKE THIS ALL YOURSELF?

IKEGAMI TADAO:
FATHER OF SHINSUKE,
MASTER OF THE
IKEGAMI HOUSEHOLD.



WAAAAA....!



I COME WITH ME.
跟我来!

OF COURSE! DIDN'T YOU JUST SET OUT A PORTION THAT CAN BE YOURS?

BUT... WASN'T THAT PORTION SET OUT FOR A GUEST?



REALLY??

PLEASE COME SIT AND SHARE THE MEAL WITH US.

WELL, THEN YOU MUST EAT SOME.

GRANDFATHER HAS ALREADY FINISHED AND SO IS UNLIKELY TO OBJECT.



I HAVE TO SAY THAT THE LAST SOUP IS NOT EXACTLY RIGHT.

WELL, NO.

PANAY HAS REALLY STEAMED UP A STRANGE SOUP!

AND YOU EVEN HAVE THE HOMESTYLE FRIED WRAP, SANGAYAKI.
OH HOW I HAVE MISSED THAT!

WHAT A BOUNTIFUL TABLE!

HEH. HEH.

