



Editor's Note

Yen-Ting Kuan

- 2 As the Taiwanese artist collective Walking Grass Agriculture (Liu Hsing-yu and Chen Han-sheng) were preparing for their residency project in Rotterdam, in a casual conversation with the two artists, I unexpectedly realized that the duration of the Dutch occupation of southern Taiwan coincides with my age this year. Dutch Formosa refers to the period from 1624 to 1662 when the Dutch Republic and the Dutch East India Company occupied the southern part of Taiwan. During these 38 years, the Dutch introduced a wealth of natural products from Latin America, China and Southeast Asia to Taiwan, the influence of which can still be seen today in Taiwan's culinary culture and agricultural landscape. Interestingly, the fast-growing bubble tea culture has also achieved global success within 38 years. Bubble tea, which was introduced to the market between 1985-1987, was born almost at the same time as me, in my

hometown of Taichung, Taiwan.

Bubble tea is a sugared milk tea drink with chewy tapioca pearls, made from cassava starch. The description also reveals many of the keywords of colonization: sugar, tea, and cassava. In Southeast Asia, jelly-like substances made from starch were first used in desserts and drinks. When cassava was introduced to Southeast Asia from South America during the colonial period, it originated as an alternative to the native starch source.

In this issue of Melon, we want to explore whether we can uncover more overlooked historical factors and the materiality of important natural resources in Taiwan, such as the aforementioned cassava, or the water chestnut in the work of Han-sheng. In “From a Name to a Process: Unveiling Future Histories,” Giulia 3 explores the historical and cultural significance of cassava from the perspective of indigenous culinary practices and future sustainable materials. She's a co-organiser of the Future Materials Bank initiative, which archives ecologically conscious materials used by artists and designers.

Florian's “Water Chestnut Collapsology” first recalls his experience in Taipei, where he attended a performance that combined bar food, cocktails, and contemporary art. In this event, artist Chen Han-sheng examined the last remaining water chestnut field in the Taiwanese port city of Kaohsiung, exploring agriculture and ecology in a post-industrial urban landscape.

Walking Grass Agriculture's interest is also interested in the impact of human activities, such as colonialism and migration, on the introduction of

new plant species. For example, crops such as sugar apples, wax apples, and mangoes were introduced to Taiwan during the Dutch Formosa period. Even the sweet potato, which is often used as a metaphor for the Taiwanese because of its resemblance to the island of Taiwan, was brought to Taiwan during this period as a consequence of the Columbian Exchange and eventually took root on the island. In addition to its symbolic imagery, the sweet potato is also an important source of food in Taiwan. Its starch derivatives have played a crucial role in times of crisis and resource scarcity. We offer a few anecdotes about Taiwanese street food to illustrate how, over the years, starch has not only been vital in times of emergency but has also evolved with economic development to become internationally known as a popular street food ingredient.

The Rotterdam-based food art collective Sumerie (Soyean An, Yi-ting Shen) contributed two recipes for classic Korean dishes: Budae Jjigae (Army Stew) and Gimbap (Korean Rice Rolls), both of which evolved in response to Japanese colonization and the Korean War. Budae Jjigae, a hearty stew made by simmering all available ingredients together in a pot, is reminiscent of hutspot, a Dutch dish developed during the famine after the Eighty Years' War. Again, we can be thankful again that the Dutch occupation of southern Taiwan lasted only 38 years, not long enough to introduce Dutch culinary culture (if there is such a thing) to Taiwan.



From a Name to a Process:

Unveiling

Future

Histories

Giulia Bellinetti

- 6 What is tapioca? When researching for this text, I discovered tapioca derives from one of the most common products of the Empire: cassava, the root of the plant from which tapioca is extracted.

Cassava is one of the hidden goods of colonial trade. Commonly disregarded by colonial settlers, it was traded in significant quantities for internal markets. Originally from Yucatán, Mexico, this tuberous root traveled to and across South America, Africa, and Asia along the routes of the Empire, becoming a globalized good ante tempore. Depending on the route followed, it acquired different names: yuca, mandioca, casabe, arrurruz, cassava, manioc, tapioca. Following a name can unveil histories.

“They are mostly concerned with their cassava leaves!”. This statement expresses the contempt of ‘progressive’ farmers and colonial officials for the majority

of the local population in various regions of so-called South America and Africa, whose main crop and staple food was cassava. Cassava was a very controversial crop for the colonial mindset. Settlers saw these tuberous roots as an emergency famine crop with high productivity but poor nutritional values. They also thought it had a negative ecological impact. Moreover, due to its high levels of hydrogen cyanide, cassava also caused severe, and sometimes fatal, poisoning in European settlers in the early stages of colonial expansion.

Yet, cassava is a precious ingredient in indigenous and local traditional communities, particularly in Central and South America, Africa and, more recently, Asia. Traditional communities in these regions have learned the complex ritual required to extract hydrogen cyanide from cassava and make it safe to eat. The elaborate preparation involves scraping, grating, washing the root, boiling it, fermenting the paste for several days and finally baking it. This complex ritual, which completely detoxifies the root, is the result of centuries of accumulated knowledge: each generation has improved the process learned from their ancestors and passed it on to future generations. These cooking rituals are part of the traditional knowledge that Western knowledge has rejected as “primitive”, with fatal consequences for the local and indigenous populations and paradoxically for the same European settlers who disregarded local knowledge when they tried to include cassava in their diets.

Cassava is a common ingredient not only in culinary recipes but also in the production of sustainable materials, such as bioplastics. In material design, starch

in general, and cassava starch in particular, stands out as a biodegradable binder with properties remarkably similar to synthetic polymers. The process of extracting starch from cassava roots is very close to the cooking ritual used to prepare cassava. It involves an elaborate series of subsequent phases: cleaning, washing, crushing, separating, concentrating, dehydrating, and drying. Cassava is a valuable root in the face of anthropogenic climate change: not only is it a climate-resilient crop, resistant to drought and pests, and a highly nutritious food ingredient in subtropical countries, it also provides an essential ingredient for post-fossil, future-proof material design.

8 As with the culinary preparations, also the knowledge of cassava starch has been created and passed down through generations and generations. In Mexican tradition, there is a saying that states that the future is behind us. This is certainly true for cassava, tapioca, and yam. Tracing these names reveals problematic histories but also allows traditional knowledge to be revived and honored. Working with cassava, whether to prepare pancakes, tapioca pearls, or bioplastics, means engaging with ancestral knowledge. The process of cleaning, scraping, grating, boiling, fermenting, and baking cassava, does not only separate its chemical and physical components. It also interweaves the ancestral past with future-proof design. This is probably the hidden meaning and most valuable lesson nested in the cassava root. The future is behind us.

- To explore the use of cassava starch in the production of bioplastics see: www.futurematerialsbank.com/ingredient/cassava-starch/





Water Chestnut

Collapsology

Florian Cramer

12 On the 31st of October 2022, guests of Taipei's stylish cocktail bar Bar Pine became the subjects of an artist's experiment in controlled food poisoning. The event, called "Isn't It a Beautiful Meadow?", was hosted by Hansheng Chen of the Taiwanese artist duo 走路草農 / 藝團 Walking Grass Agriculture. Their overall work reflects rural culture in its relationship to farming, plants, the environment, and society at large, often using their southern Taiwanese home region of Kaohsiung as a reference and point of departure. The bar event, which accompanied Hansheng's solo exhibition at Powen Gallery 紅野畫廊 Taipei, featured cocktails and snacks made with water chestnuts harvested in Kaohsiung. The drinks were also based on the drinking water distilled and filtered in that city.

All courses were intercut with videos made by Hangsheng explaining what we were eating and

drinking. We learned how the intense industrialization of the formerly rural Kaohsiung has so thoroughly poisoned its groundwater that all residents are now forced to drink bottled water. And we learned that this water comes from local distilleries, but that trust in the water is low, due to fraudsters selling unsafe water as distilled water. This, of course, could have also included the water in the drinks we were having at the bar. The gallery exhibition and the entrance to the bar featured installations of large, green glass bottles, the containers formerly used by Kaohsiung's distilleries to sell their drinking water. Since the distilleries have recently replaced them with plastic canisters, Hansheng collected and repurposed them for his exhibition.

Served with the distilled water was water chestnut, 13 once Kaohsiung's local food specialty and signature plant, for which the city's Zuoying district was once nationally famous, Hangsheng explained. He pointed out how chestnut farming was once a lucrative business, allowing local farmers to hire large harvesting workforces - first Taiwanese locals, later Southeast Asian immigrants - and buy real estate. Eventually, this led to Kaohsiung's transformation into a modern metropolis of nearly three million people with a skyscraper skyline. One of the videos at the bar event showed Kaohsiung's last remaining water chestnut farmer, a 94-year-old man, harvesting the fruit in a polluted puddle under a highway flyover, an image seemingly from a post-apocalyptic dystopia.

The water chestnuts harvested by this farmer were also the ones served at the cocktail bar: both as

food and as cocktails made by Bar Pine's chef Ariel. They reappeared as shapes in Hansheng's minimalist artwork and silkscreen prints, which were displayed in the bar and in the gallery exhibition.

The event reflected a number of issues: the safety of the water and food we consumed, the relationship between rural production and metropolitan consumption, and ultimately: whether Kaohsiung's water chestnut isn't a pars pro toto of a post-industrially transformed, post-apocalyptic habitat (much like the matsutake mushroom in Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World*). In Bar Pine, it became a symbol - very much in the sense established by Goethe and later in romanticist literature - where physical form and meaning are an inseparable unity. Serving the chestnut and distilled water from Kaohsiung, while educating the audience about their origins, meant that the post-apocalypse became a shared experience, and the medium became the message. (Though no one seemed to show symptoms of food poisoning that day.)

Isn't It a Beautiful Meadow? at Bar Pine was exemplary of how food has become an important medium in 21st-century art. In a conversation with me in 2015, the Faroese experimental musician and artist Goodiepal recalled how he had been invited to a so-called sustainable art festival in France and ended up despising it because it consisted mostly of video installations by artists who had taken plane flights to rainforests to shoot their material, and then flights to the exhibition venue: "So far from being sustainable! It was not (claps hands) practical". It boiled down to



symbolic gestures, in the worst sense of the word. Food on the other hand is hands-on by definition and therefore “symbolic” rather in Goethe’s sense. This can also be a trap. Making food can be a too-easy solution for creating communality in art - just as video has been a too-easy solution for signaling awareness of mass media (in the 1970s/80s) and social reality (since the 1990s) in contemporary art. It’s a different story, however, when food is a simultaneously popular and playful yet thorough medium of socio-ecological investigation, as in Hansheng’s bar event.

The exhibition and bar event also referenced dinosaur footprints found when Taiwan’s water basins dried up in the historic drought of the summer of 2021 (which also affected the global chip industry, as two-thirds of the world’s computer chips are manufactured in Taiwan, particularly at its foundry TSMC; chip production consumes large quantities of ultra-purified water. The global chip industry consumption is estimated at 100 million liters per day).



Sweet Potato Starch and Tapioca

*From Food in the Famine Time
to Internationally Popular Drink*



18 As I write this, Taiwan is bracing for Typhoon Gaemi, the first typhoon to make landfall within the past eight years. Some cities have even taken the rare step of closing schools and businesses for two consecutive days. Typhoons are cyclones that form over warm tropical waters in the Northern Hemisphere. When these cyclones intensify into typhoons, they bring strong winds, thunderstorms, and torrential rain, posing a significant natural hazard.

In anticipation of a typhoon, Taiwanese people, who are accustomed to eating out, typically stock up on groceries to comfortably shelter at home. Instant noodles are a particularly popular food choice during typhoons. Easy to store and prepare, they can be cooked on a gas stove even during power outages, and with the addition of vegetables and eggs, they offer a nutritious and satisfying meal.

Bah-oân (Crystal Meatball)

In the era before the food processing industry was developed, there were meals created in response to natural disasters and emergencies. One example is Bah-oân, which originated in central Taiwan. It is said that in 1989, Changhua, a city in central Taiwan, experienced a severe flood, leading to a temporary food shortage. A resident of Changhua added sweet potato starch to a small amount of vegetables, cooked it into a chewy starch ball, and after several generations of improvements, this starch ball became what is now popular in central and southern Taiwan. The modern ba-wan has a glistening, semi-transparent outer skin and a filling of bamboo shoots and pork.

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O-a-tsian (Oyster Omelette)

There are many similar anecdotes. The origin of the Taiwanese snack, oyster omelette, or o-a-tsian, is also varied, with one version suggesting it was created in response to an emergency situation. It is said that during Koxinga's (Zheng Chenggong) defense against Dutch invaders, limited ingredients were mixed with sweet potato starch to make oyster omelettes. Although this story can no longer be verified, it is certain that during times of emergency, the more accessible the ingredients, the more likely they are to become make-shift delicacies.

Bubble Tea

Bubble tea, which currently enjoys international fame, has an origin that many might not be aware of. This popular drink, featuring chewy tapioca pearls in sweet milk tea, originated in Taiwan. Taiwan has a flourishing tea culture, and two teahouses each claim to have accidentally added tapioca pearls to milk tea sometime between 1985 and 1987. Tapioca pearls are snacks made from cassava starch. According to “A History of Food in Taiwan,” co-authored by Academia Sinica researchers Ong Chia-yin and Tsao Ming-tsung, the precursor to tapioca pearls might be sago, imported during the Dutch period. Sago is a grain-like food made from the starch of the sago palm tree stem. The “Diary of Fort Zeelandia” records this as “tree poeder” (meel van boomen) in Dutch. Originally, tapioca pearls were made from sweet potato starch, but later, tapioca, the starch of cassava, which is easier to cultivate and has a higher yield, was added. It is indeed hard to imagine that materials originally used to cope with emergencies have now become the ingredients of a globally popular beverage.

Korean Army Stew

Byproduct of Korean War(1950-1953) Budae Jjigae. Korean Army Stew, A Food of ordinary people
The Korean War broke out in 1950, five years after the end of Japan's colonial period. At that time,
²² there was the Cold War between the United States and Russia. The war, which arose out of a conflict between the two political ideologies of communism and democracy, lasted three years on the Korean Peninsula, after which communism was established in North Korea and democracy was established in South Korea. American soldiers

came to South Korea for protection, but after the war ended, the lives of the citizens were poor — many refugees, war orphans, injured people, etc. Most people suffered from hunger, and canned food from U.S. military units became an important food source for those citizens. Korean people began
²³ cooking in their way using canned foods such as sausages, spam, and beans that they received from US military bases, and combining kimchi, the soul food of Koreans. That is how Budae Jjigae was created.

Korean Army Stew: Recipe

INGREDIENT

- 6 strips: sausage (any kind)
- 1 can: spam(lunchen meat)
- 1 can: baked beans
- 1 pack: rameon noodles
- 1 big handful: cabbage kimchi
- 1/2 onion
- 2 leek
- many garlic
- 1-2 slices: cheddar cheese
- 350ml: (cow) bone broth

SAUCE

- Korean chili flake 'gochugaru' 2tbsp
- Korean fermented chili paste 'gochujang' 1tbsp
- soysauce 2tbsp
- cooking wine 1tbsp
- black pepper a little

STEPS

- ① Slice long the sausage, spam, onion, leek
- ② Chop the garlic
- ③ Place all the ingredients together, except the garlic, cheese, and rameon noodles in the big pot
- ④ Pour the broth
- ⑤ Add some water until the ingredients just submerged
- ⑥ Make sauce and add it to the pot, let it boil
- ⑦ Once it's boiling, add the garlic and stir it few times
- ⑧ At last, add the cheese and rameon noodles let it boil 3mins
- ⑨ Season with salt and pepper

Gimbap

Gimbap, originated from Japan during the Japan's colonial period in Korea(1910-1945)

The taste and ingredients of today's gimbap are different from the Japanese food, norimaki sushi, but the form is similar. The recipe for norimaki sushi probably began to become known in Korea when Japanese people started living in Seoul after the late 19th century. The first published recipe was written in the 1930s, and the column at the time introduced kimbap as a lunch box to prepare when going to the zoo or picnic. Probably from

this time on, kimbap was considered a picnic food by Koreans.

In the 1990s, gimbap specialty stores began to appear in Korea, and since then, various types of kimbap have been sold, including cheese Gimbap, chili Gimbap, bulgogi Gimbap and nude Gimbap. Around this time, kimbap, which originated from Japan's norimaki sushi during the colonial period, was fully established as a Korean type of kimbap. And now it is enjoying popularity in Japan as well, just like its Korean name.

Ref. Korean History on the Table. 2013

Gimbap: Recipe

the most common version of it

INGREDIENT

- 2 cups: sticky rice (for 4 slices of gimbap)
- 4 strips: ham, long (can be alternative to other cooked meat such as bulgogi)
- fish cake 1 slice, big rectangular shape
- pickled daikon 4 strips, long
- cucumber 1
- carrot 2/3
- burdock 1/3
- eggs 2
- spinach 1 pack
- nori 4 slices

SEASONING

- sesame oil
- salt
- soy sauce
- corn syrup
- cooking wine

STEPS

- ① Cook the rice and season the rice with salt and sesame oil
- ② Slice long the ham, cucumber, daikon, carrot, and burdock
- ③ Blanch the spinach and squeeze the water out
- ④ Stir fry carrots, fish cake and burdock in the pan. Carrots with oil and salt, Fish cake with soy sauce 1/2tbsp, cooking wine 1/2tbsp, water 1/2 cup, sugar 1/2tbsp, Burdock with soy sauce 1tbsp, corn syrup 1tbsp, cooking wine 1tbsp, sugar 2tbsp
- ⑤ Beat the eggs and make crepe style in the pan, Slice it length wise
- ⑥ Place the rice evenly on the nori and place all the ingredients too
- ⑦ Using sushi roll, slowly wrap the nori
- ⑧ Close the edge with some rice glued
- ⑨ Apply the sesame oil on top of the gimbab and cut it like a saw.

Melon #2

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Melon is a publishing project initiated by Jhen Chen and Yen-Ting Kuan. It focuses on contemporary art and its relationship with politics, food and ecology. Melon also seeks to explore the possibilities of graphic design, print and self-publishing.

Contributions: Yen-Ting Kuan, Florian Cramer,
Giulia Bellinetti, Soyeon An

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