

to wear out in Fujian province, farmers began to arrive by the boatloads, chasing the ghostly memory of full-bodied rice rolling across their tongues. It is, in fact, partly because of Taiwan's food sources that we remained, after the Ming Dynasty, under control of the mainland. In 1684, Admiral Shi Lang wrote in a letter, urging Qing officials in Beijing to maintain rule over the island: "Both mulberry and field crops can be cultivated; fish and salt spout forth from the sea; the mountains are filled with dense forests of tall trees and thick bamboo." He continues, "This is truly a bountifully fertile piece of land."

One weekend, on a drive out toward the sea, my father tells me that during Taiwan's blistering summers, he and his college friends used to dive into the calm waters of Long Dong Bay and pluck sea urchins from ocean reefs. I imagine them: slender, bronzed bodies baking on the rocks, the Pacific Ocean swelling and lapping against the rocky coast. The young men sliced the spiky creatures in half with a pocketknife. They scooped out the urchin's flesh with their hands, bright and golden like the sun, and slipped the buttery souls onto their tongues, into their mouths.

In the car, my father licks his lips, remembering, "It was more delicious than the uni we have in sushi bars. It was so fresh, and so, so free."

We speed past Long Dong Bay. Its deep blue waters are speckled with stand-up paddle boarders and guided rings of snorkelers, sunscreen oils reflecting off of the surface of the sea. I keep thinking that my father's Taipei sounds like such an idyllic place, but I don't dare ask: So what happened? What happened to the sea urchins that had clung to our corals? What happened to the shrimp my father and his siblings used to catch in the rivers and grill right on those pebbled banks in the mountains? Where did their brick-and-mortar farmhouse go, those long, boisterous nights of my grandmother's meals plucked from her farm, gathered around a table with extended families and neighbors and merchants and fishermen passing by?

In a vegetable stall at the end of my grandmother's long-ago market, I run my fingertips across greens I do not yet have the words for. I think about