



Tomoe's Memories of Koumeya

A Full English translation is available.

友繪的小梅屋記事簿

Author: Shimizu **Illustrator:** Shimizu **Contributor:** Sanshokubou Haku **Publisher:** Gaea Books

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Rights sold: Japanese

BFT2.0 Translator: Mike Fu

Set in Taishō-era Taipei—a period of flourishing urban entertainment, vibrant social life, and a richly diverse food culture—this story follows Tomoe, a high school student and heir to a renowned traditional restaurant (ryōtei). Tasked with organizing the food for her school's upcoming festival, Tomoe is determined to prove herself to her grandmother, the restaurant's formidable first-generation proprietress.

Joined by friends and family, Tomoe embarks on a flavorful journey across Taipei. Together they visit celebrated chefs and eateries, confronting challenge after challenge to assemble a dazzling menu. The international flavors they gather become the highlight of the festival, delighting everyone in attendance.

Grounded in historical records and extensive research into 1920s culinary culture, this work vividly reconstructs the atmosphere of old Taipei—from vanished streetscapes to surviving architecture. It is a story that transports readers into a city alive with cultural exchange, where food becomes both memory and celebration.



Author **Shimizu**

Shimizu is a storyteller drawn to themes of youth and nostalgia. Inspired by both historical and contemporary cultures from around the world, Shimizu weaves these influences into creative narratives. Currently, Shimizu works at WeiComic Studio, a collaborative space where creators support and inspire one another.



Contributor **Sanshokubou Haku**

Sanshokubou Haku is the leader of a small indie (dōjin) circle. He describes himself as an “editor” and has a deep love for both history and manga. Once, after buying a broken Plarail toy train to repurpose for a video, he accidentally repaired it—forcing him to hunt down another broken one instead.

After a Taste of Good Food? A Look at *Tomoe's Memories of Koumeiya*, Vol. 1

by A-P'ao Lin
(originally published on OpenBook)

The manga *Tomoe's Memories of Koumeiya* is set in Taipei during Japan's Taisho era. Its protagonist, Tomoe, is a second-year student at Taipei Second Girls' High School and heir to Koumeiya, a well-known ryotei (Japanese-style restaurant). Though her dream is to become a refined and capable *okami* (mistress of the house) like her mother, she's still often scolded by her strict grandmother as being "not up to standard."

Eager to prove herself, Tomoe volunteers to handle food vendor coordination for her school's upcoming garden party. Her initiative, however, meets fierce opposition from her grandmother, who fears the family restaurant is already overworked. Taking

on extra tasks, she warns, could even put their reputation at risk. With her mother's quiet encouragement, Tomoe chooses to press on in secret, enlisting the help of her uncle—behind her grandmother's back.

This setup cleverly creates dramatic tension: the disobedient act promises a clash of generations, but also reveals the older generation's efforts to train the next. As Tomoe and her uncle begin visiting restaurants across the city, readers are treated to a vivid tour of 1920s Taipei's culinary landscape—from Japanese sweets in Sakae District and black tea from Tsujiri, to Western cuisine at the elite Railway Hotel, and eventually, into the heart of Daitotei (present-day Dadaocheng), a vibrant Taiwanese district.

Tomoe's foray into Daitotei is not just narrative flair—it reflects historical reality. In 1922, the colonial government implemented a "Japanese-Taiwanese co-education" policy. The principal and teachers in the story hope the garden party can symbolically reflect this spirit, encouraging Tomoe to source food from local Taiwanese vendors and include native cuisine on the menu. This might be the most politically charged element of the otherwise romantic tale of girls, food, and youth during the Japanese occupation.

During the manga's serialization, readers debated whether the story overly romanticized Japanese rule. One character, Michiko, expresses fear and disdain toward Taiwanese food and avoids entering Daitotei, which understandably irked some Taiwanese readers. Still, given that the protagonist is Japanese, the manga offers an honest portrayal of the prejudices held by Japanese youth in colonial Taiwan—prejudices that gradually unravel through cultural encounters.

Guided by their Taiwanese classmate Renho, Tomoe and her group explore Daitotei's alleyways and temple markets. There, they sample *gua bao* (pork belly buns) and *aiyu jelly*, the latter even surprising Michiko with its sweet, refreshing taste. After helping Renho when she was bullied, Tomoe and her friends earn the trust of her brother Rensei, a chef at the "Drunken Fairy Restaurant," who

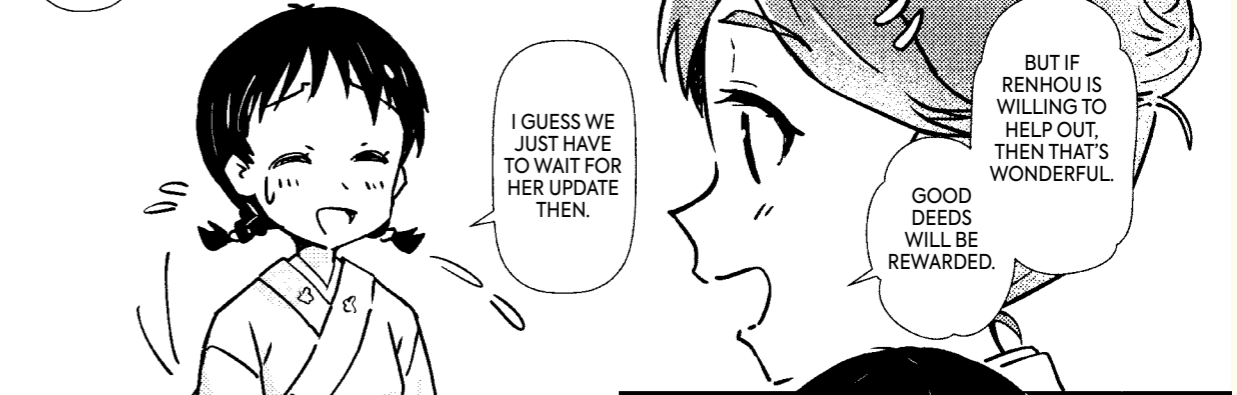
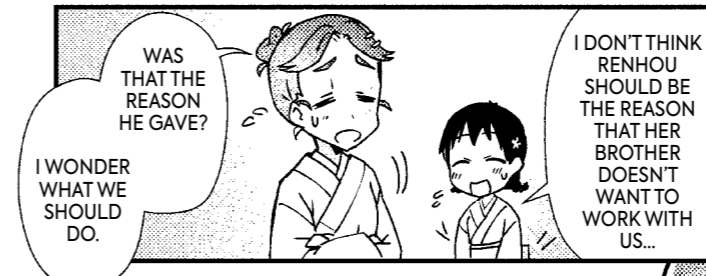
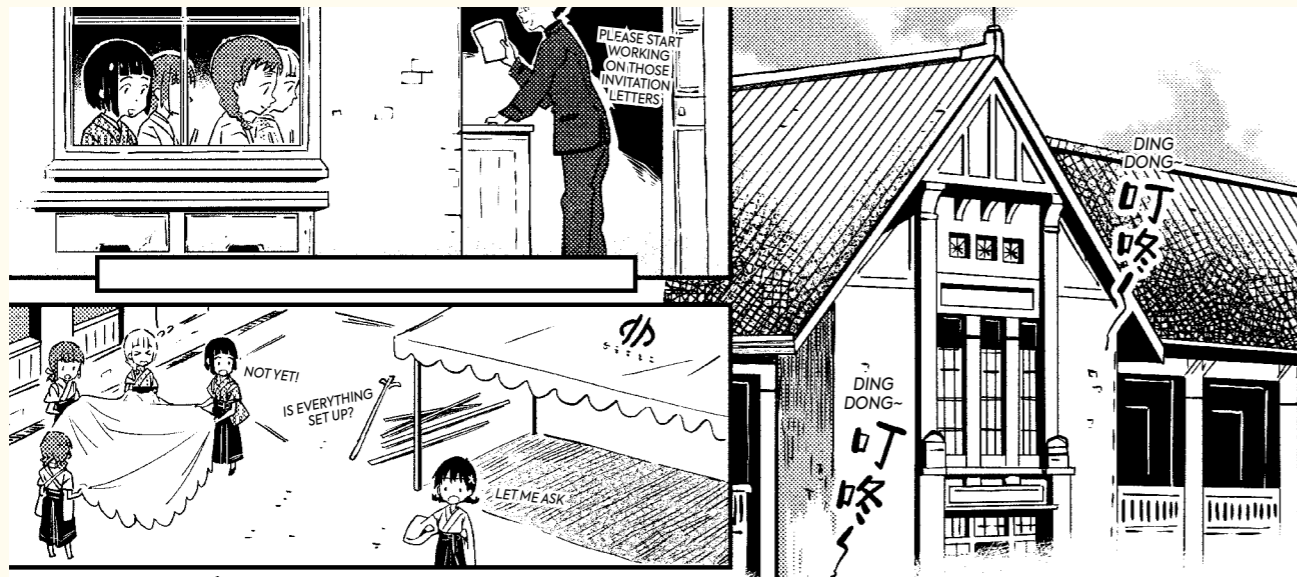
helps them prepare Taiwanese dishes like crab balls, pork rolls, spring rolls, and fried plantains for the event—all of which become crowd favorites.

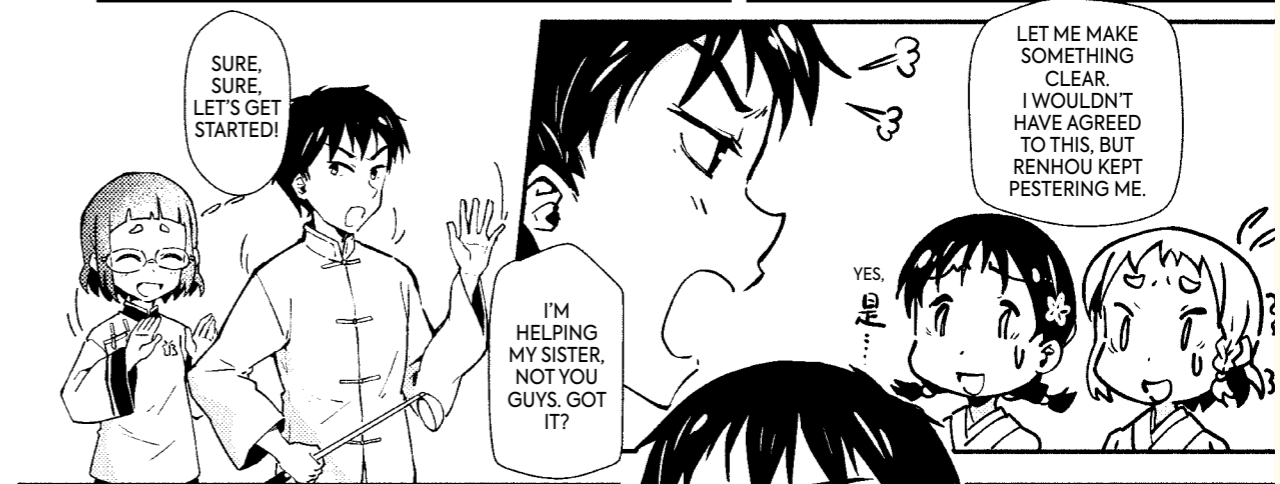
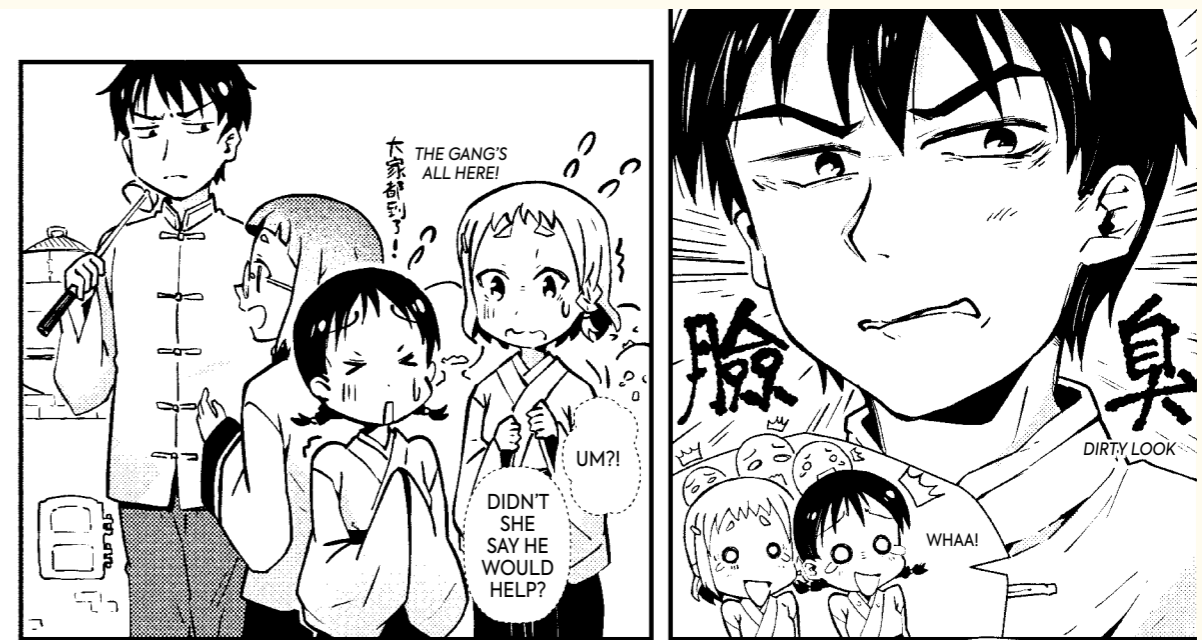
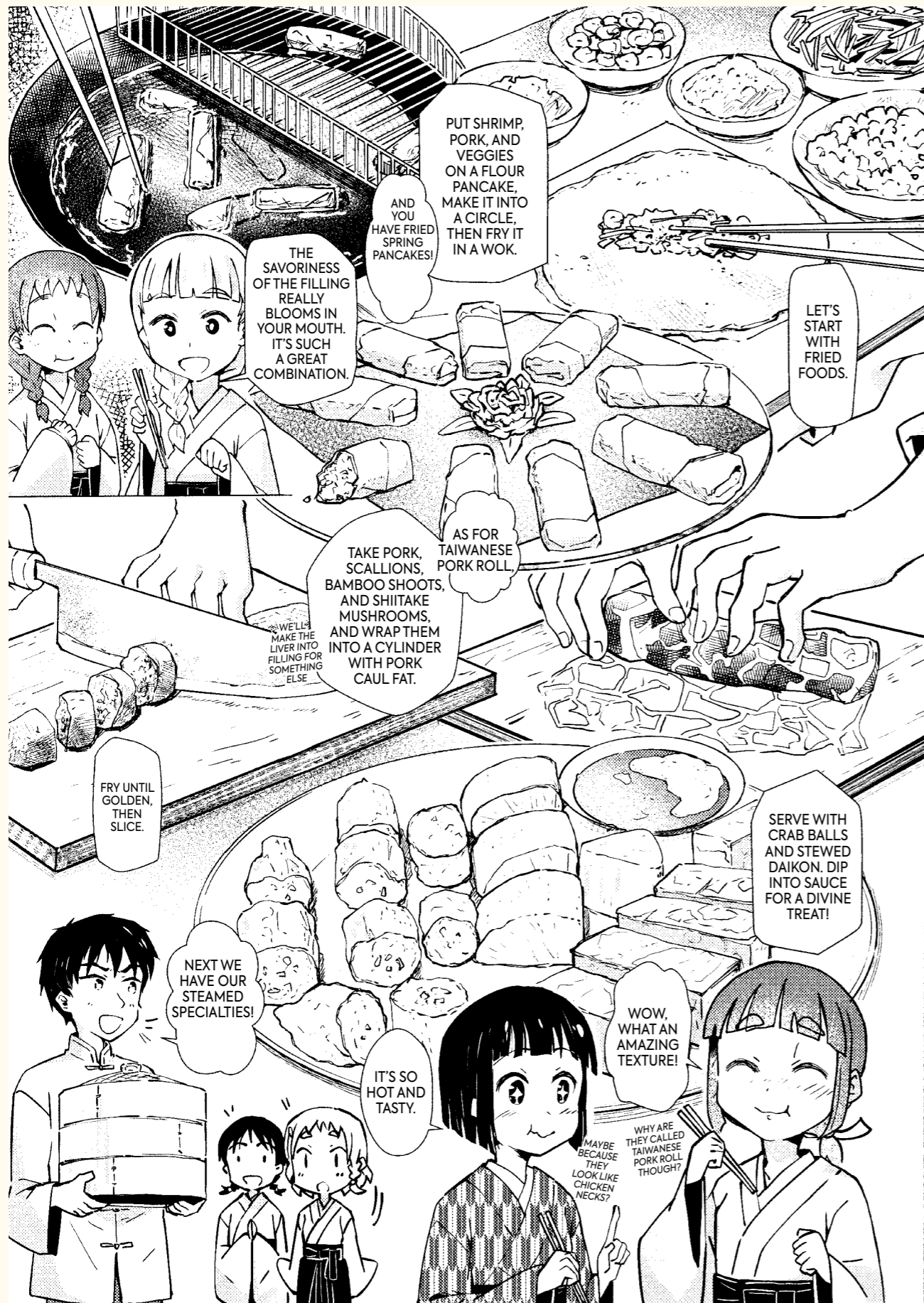
Volume one of *Tomoe's Memories of Koumeiya* showcases detailed historical research, smooth storytelling, and beautifully framed panels. The wide array of Taiwanese and Japanese dishes—along with the appendix section "Koumeiya's Kitchen Time," which offers historical food facts—makes it a mouth-watering read, inspiring cravings for chicken rolls or a juicy *gua bao* at your local night market.

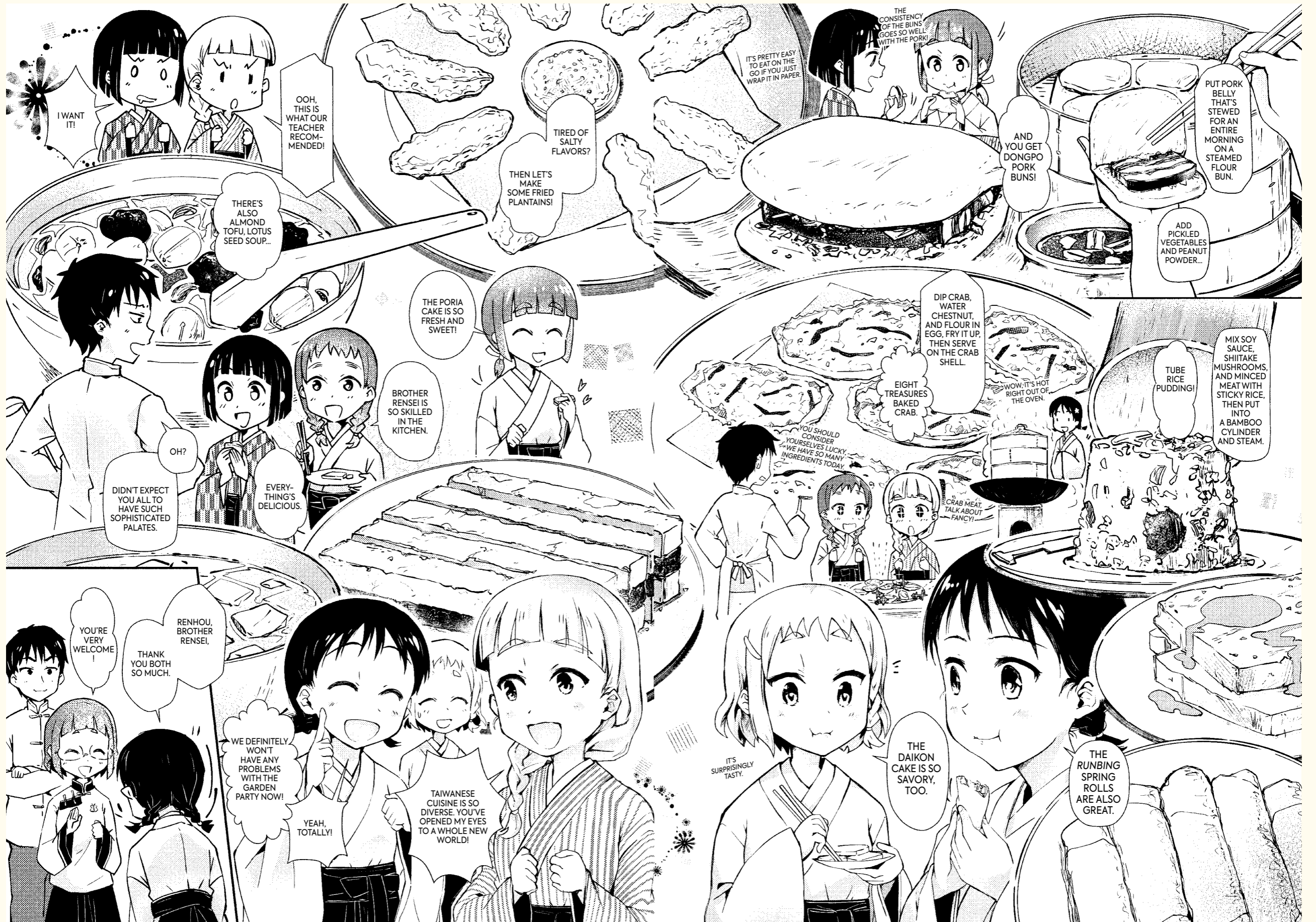
As the series progresses, will it explore the rigorous life of an *okami*, spotlight food craftsmanship, or explore family ties—and perhaps even Taiwan's complex colonial history? For now, we leave the questions open and continue watching, page by delicious page.

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

A-P'ao Lin (real name Chao-li Lin), holds a PhD in Taiwanese Literature from National Cheng Kung University, with a specialization in Taiwan-Hong Kong literary and cultural studies. He is now shifting his focus toward food culture research. His reviews and essays appear in *The News Lens*, *Youth Literary*, *Giloo*, *Initium Media*, *UNITAS*, and *INK Literary Monthly*.







I WANT IT!

OOH, THIS IS WHAT OUR TEACHER RECOMMENDED!

THERE'S ALSO ALMOND TOFU, LOTUS SEED SOUP...

TIRED OF SALTY FLAVORS?

THEN LET'S MAKE SOME FRIED PLANTAINS!

IT'S PRETTY EASY TO EAT ON THE GO IF YOU JUST WRAP IT IN PAPER.

THE CONSISTENCY OF THE BUNS GOES SO WELL WITH THE PORK!

AND YOU GET DONGPO PORK BUNS!

PUT PORK BELLY THAT'S STEWED FOR AN ENTIRE MORNING ON A STEAMED FLOUR BUN.

ADD PICKLED VEGETABLES AND PEANUT POWDER...

THE PORIA CAKE IS SO FRESH AND SWEET!

BROTHER RENSEI IS SO SKILLED IN THE KITCHEN.

DIP CRAB, WATER CHESTNUT, AND FLOUR IN EGG, FRY IT UP, THEN SERVE ON THE CRAB SHELL.

EIGHT TREASURES BAKED CRAB.

WOW, IT'S HOT RIGHT OUT OF THE OVEN.

MIX SOY SAUCE, SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS, AND MINCED MEAT WITH STICKY RICE, THEN PUT INTO A BAMBOO CYLINDER AND STEAM.

TUBE RICE PUDDING!

YOU SHOULD CONSIDER YOURSELVES LUCKY. WE HAVE SO MANY INGREDIENTS TODAY.

DIDN'T EXPECT YOU ALL TO HAVE SUCH SOPHISTICATED PALATES.

OH?

EVERY-THING'S DELICIOUS.

CRAB MEAT, TALK ABOUT FANCY!

YOU'RE VERY WELCOME!

THANK YOU BOTH SO MUCH.

RENHO, BROTHER RENSEI,

WE DEFINITELY WON'T HAVE ANY PROBLEMS WITH THE GARDEN PARTY NOW!

YEAH, TOTALLY!

TAIWANESE CUISINE IS SO DIVERSE. YOU'VE OPENED MY EYES TO A WHOLE NEW WORLD!

IT'S SURPRISINGLY TASTY.

THE DAIKON CAKE IS SO SAVORY, TOO.

THE RUNBING SPRING ROLLS ARE ALSO GREAT.