



The Drifting Chronicles

A Full English translation is available.

案渡卷河

Author: Jian-Xin Zhou **Illustrator:** Jian-Xin Zhou **Publisher:** Slowork Publishing Ltd.

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BFT 2.0 Translator: David Knight

History and virtual space intertwine in this highly original work by a celebrated Taiwanese artist. Roa, an elementary school teacher, and Riv, an AI assistant whose appearance is constantly changing, travel along the Tamsui River from 1582 to 1983. What unfolds is a century-spanning journey through time.

Through ancient texts and archival materials, the pair reconstruct five significant historical events that took place along the riverbanks. Gradually, they discover that history does not merely record facts, but is a complex puzzle woven from contradictions, personal interpretations, and imagination. Using the river as weft and time as warp, the book invites readers to reconsider the nature of truth and history.

At the end of the story, readers learn that Roa is actually a teenager living in a future world who has chosen this virtual reality avatar to interact with them. This twist deepens the story's exploration of how we preserve knowledge—and how we learn—in an age increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence.



Author **Jian-Xin Zhou**

A picture book and comic creator, Jian-Xin Zhou has received the Hsin Yi Children's Literature Award for picture books, the Golden Comics Awards Best New Talent, and the Golden Tripod Award. His published works include the picture books *Puppy and I* and *Missing Cat Posters*, as well as the graphic novels *The Boy from Clearwater* and *The Drifting Chronicles*.

What Do You See at the Threshold of the Virtual and the Real?

by Gou-fong Chi
(originally published on OKAPI.BOOKS.COM.TW)

Creating a narrative where history and virtual space coexist, *The Drifting Chronicles* follows its protagonists on a journey spanning 400 years along the Tamsui River basin. Readers enter a single historical event through the perspective of the main character, Roa, only to find themselves shifting between different versions of “truth” constructed by diverse documents and social contexts. Meanwhile, the AI assistant Riv, seemingly omniscient, offers no definitive answers—only an expanding web of possibilities. Through these fractures in fact, the book reveals a central idea: whether in the realm of humanity or technology, critical thinking is what truly matters.

How can a compelling story connect a bridge, a river, and the world

at large? Jian-Xin Zhou chose the Kuan-tu Bridge as the conceptual foundation of this work. For him, the bridge carries personal history: his years of university study and teaching all unfolded along the Tamsui River basin, shaping both his source material and his emotional ties to the place. Through historical archives, Zhou explores what the bridge has witnessed across past and future. Before the bridge existed, how did people live here? Across different eras, what traces of interaction between humans and the environment were recorded?

In an age when AI can efficiently handle data collection, analysis, and visualization, how should creators respond? Zhou believes that AI does not replace creators. Rather, during the

conceptual process, AI becomes both a thinking counterpart and a creative partner. By exchanging keywords and prompts, Zhou explores the gap between human and machine interpretation, allowing those differences to spark new ideas.

Zhou even deliberately preserves traces of AI collaboration in the book. The waves on the cover, with their unnatural lines, are AI-Generated images. Although he could have redrawn them to appear softer and more refined, he chose to keep them as visible evidence of human–AI interaction. In doing so, Zhou physically enacts one of the book’s central questions: how should we, as contemporary individuals, learn and think alongside AI?

Across Zhou’s creative path—from picture books to graphic novels—his visual style remains fluid rather than fixed. For him, technique serves the story. Each narrative demands its own visual language, shaped by its unique historical and spatial context, making the establishment of a single personal style secondary. In *The Drifting Chronicles*, Zhou combines AI-assisted imagination with multiple artistic techniques to match the themes of the book’s five chapters. For example, Episode One, titled “1582, Tamsui Man,” depicts the first encounter between Westerners and the island of Taiwan. It is rendered in fine technical-pen lines that echo the Western silverpoint tradition.

Zhou recalls being asked by his editor to summarize the book in a single

sentence. After some reflection, he offered a question: What is real? This inquiry moves beyond distinguishing truth from falsehood, instead probing the nature of reality itself.

The coexistence of reality and fiction in this work unfolds on two levels. First, in content: the factual authority of archival records is paired with imaginative interpretations that fill historical gaps. Second, in method: human thinking and hand-drawn images are set alongside AI-Generated analysis and compositions. Fiction, in this sense, becomes a way of questioning—and testing—reality.

French historian Marc Bloch once wrote that causes in historical research cannot be assumed in advance but must be sought and investigated. *The Drifting Chronicles* powerfully echoes this idea, reminding us that written records are never entirely objective and that all history is, ultimately, contemporary history. Every act of interpretation reflects how we, in the present, imagine and reconstruct the past. To read history, then, is to create an organic connection between past and present.

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

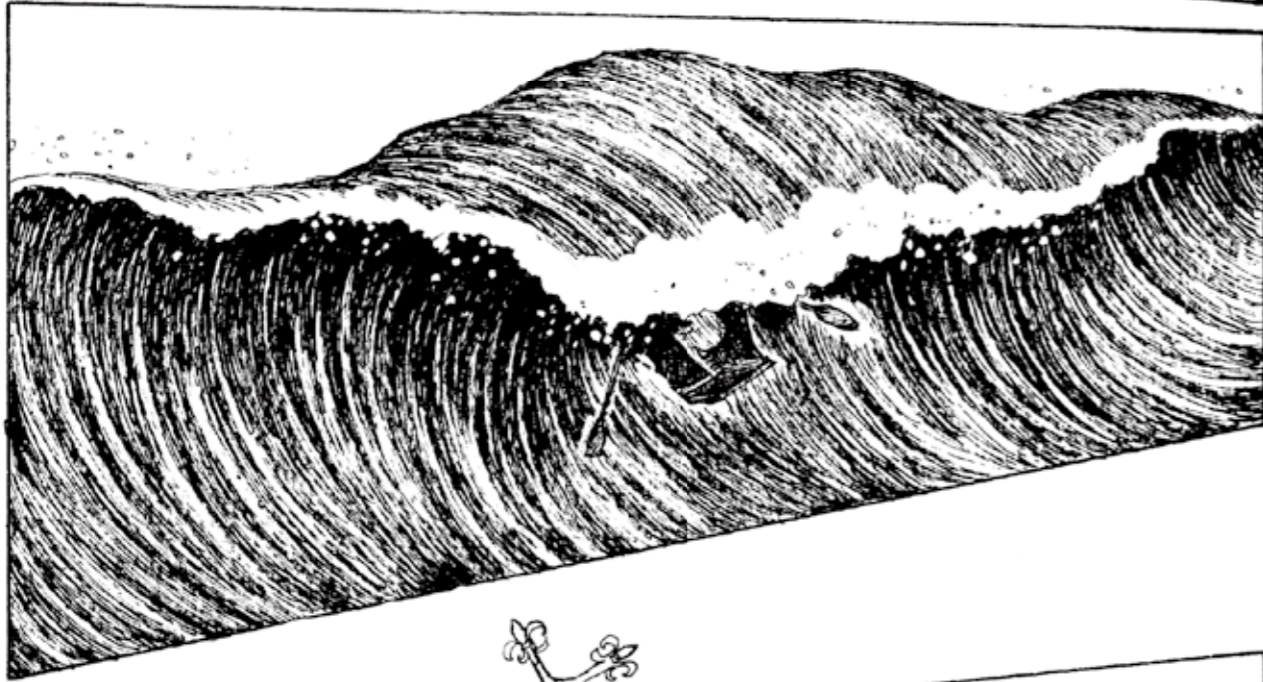
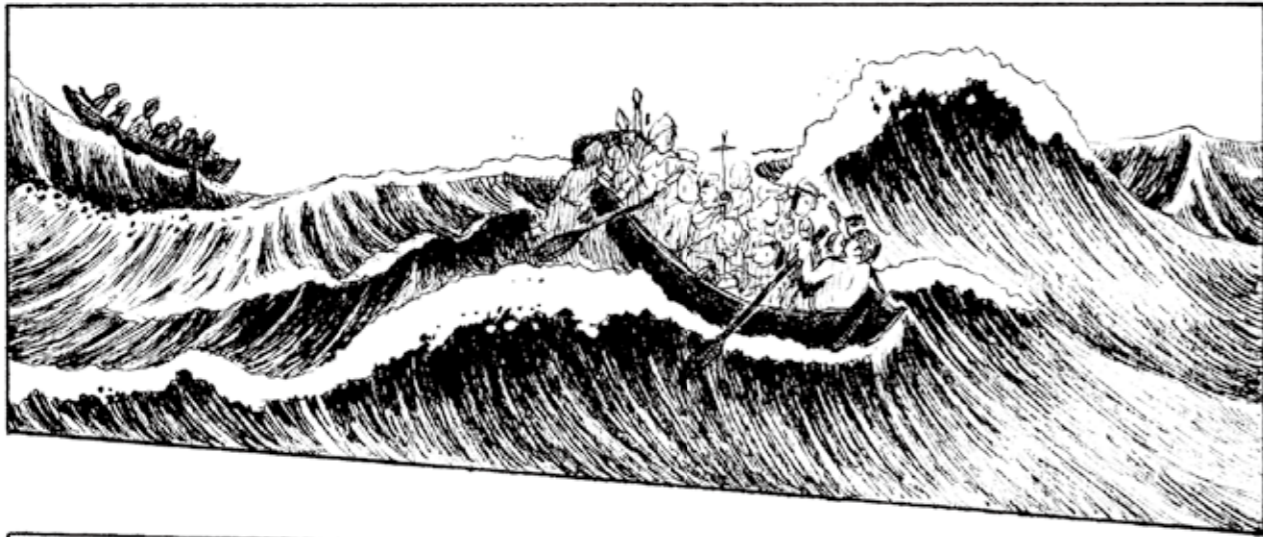
Gou-fong Chi received a master’s degree in history from National Taiwan Normal University. Chi loves ice cream and believes that words have the power to move people’s will.

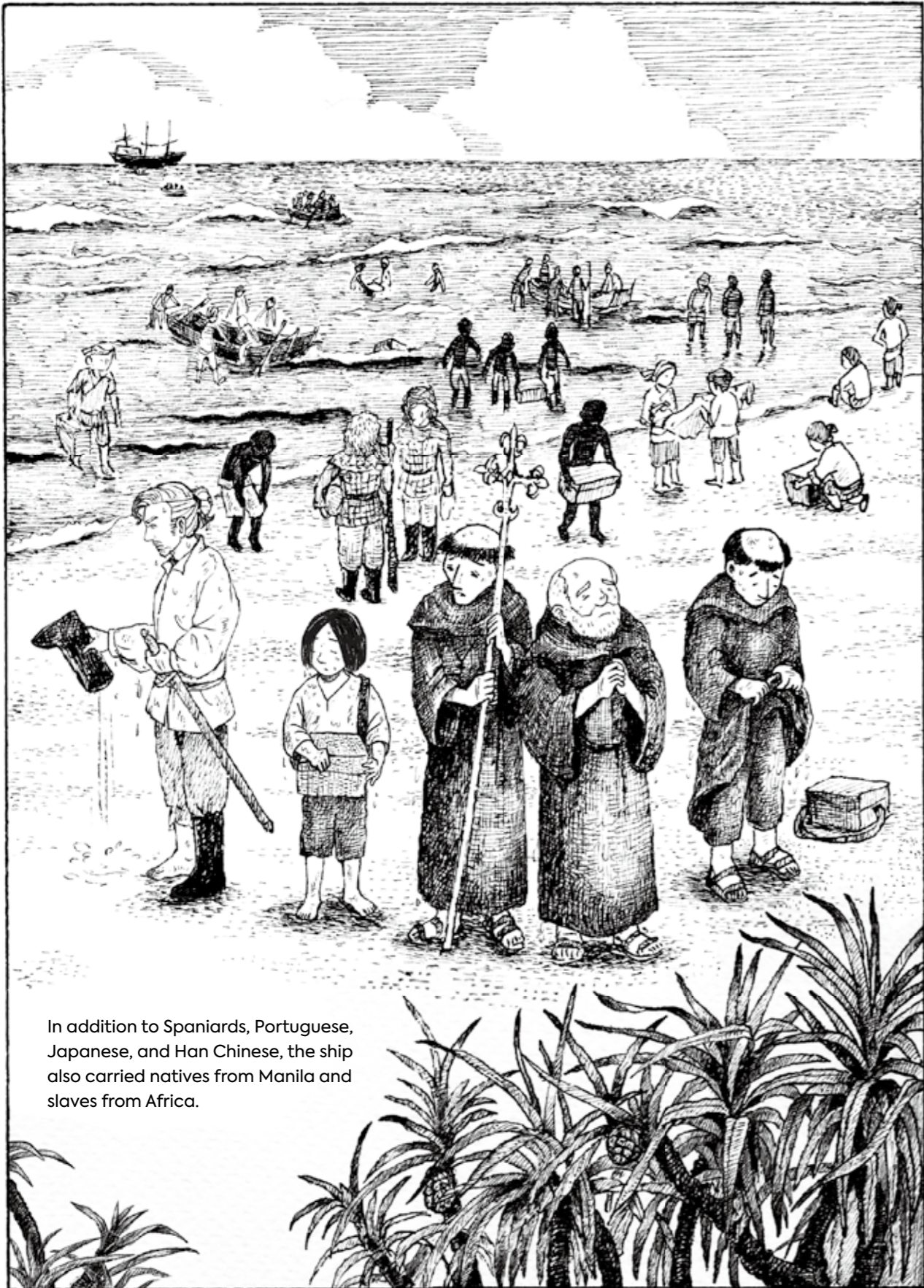
Episode One:
1582, Tamsui Man

We drifted on the ocean waves
for three or four days, until we struck
the shallows off the untamed coast
of Hermosa.

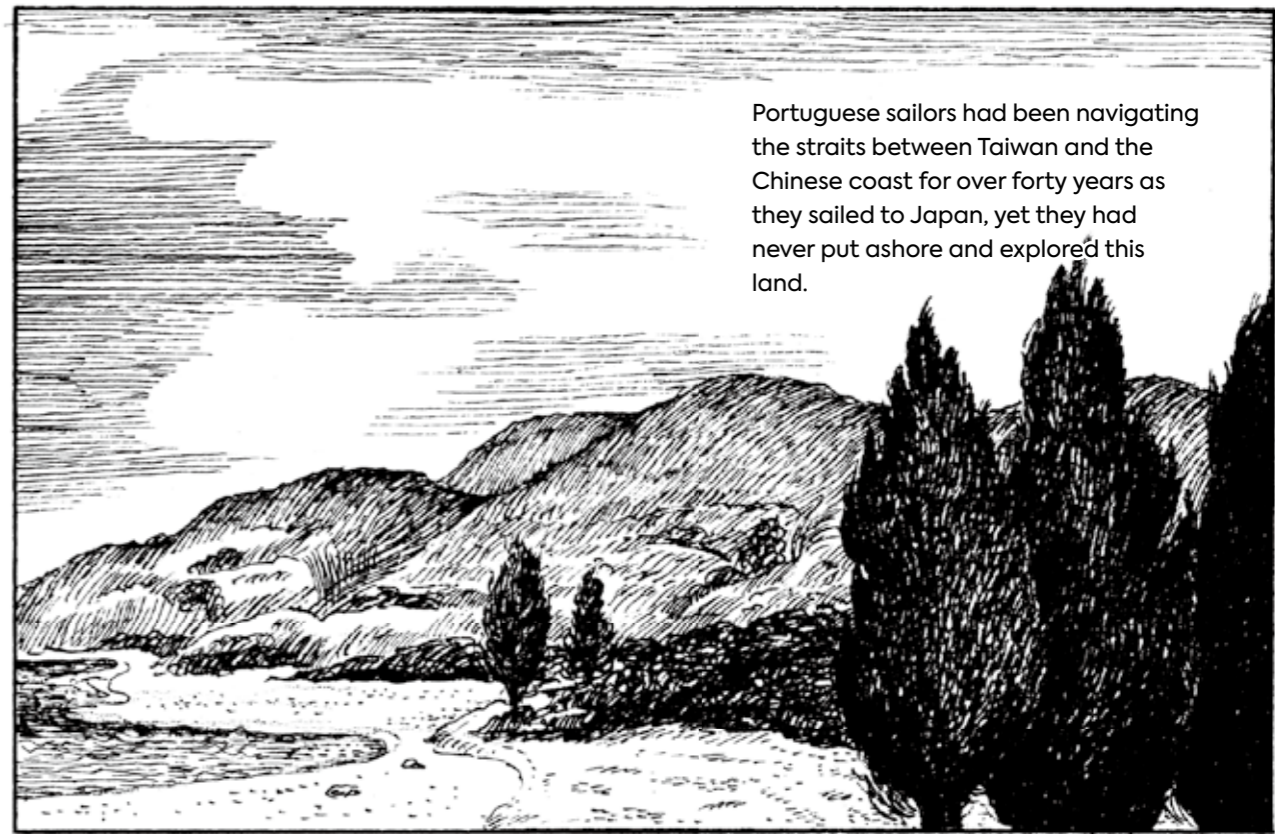
* Spanish speakers in the 16th and 17th centuries referred
to Taiwan by the name "Hermosa" (beautiful).







In addition to Spaniards, Portuguese, Japanese, and Han Chinese, the ship also carried natives from Manila and slaves from Africa.



Portuguese sailors had been navigating the straits between Taiwan and the Chinese coast for over forty years as they sailed to Japan, yet they had never put ashore and explored this land.

