

The Representation of Food in Delicious in Dungeon and Golden Kamuy

Ella Taplin

Submitted to the Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies in candidacy for  
the BA (hons) Degree in (Animation DL832)

Submitted 7th March 2025

## **Declaration of Originality**

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) (Animation). It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

---

Ella Taplin

## **Acknowledgements**

A special thanks to Elaine McDevitt, who has given me the best advice and encouragement through the writing process, as well as Michael Connerty and Sherra Murphy for their excellent years of teaching and academic guidance in my time in this course.

I would also like to thank my family and friends, who have supported me endlessly through my journey through college and the past few months of writing, for which I never could have done without.

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the depiction of food in the manga *Delicious in Dungeon* and *Golden Kamuy*. Both feature food to different extents but with comparable emphasis. Food is used to enrich story immersion, cultural expression, personality and symbolism. The food a character is presented with or pictured consuming, and how they consume it, are depicted very deliberately in both manga to convey levels of trust, hierarchy, and their role in the story. This thesis will explore scenes of food-sharing and the lack thereof, and their symbolic implications, the depiction of meat, butchery and the consumption of meat, both that of animals and humans, and how culture, role and identity manifest through a character's food choice, as well as how characters conform to typical roles within the *gurume* or gourmet manga.

The examination of food in manga is interesting because the attention food is given in Japanese media reflects a society with a strong food culture. This food culture is a product of the post-war period in many ways, such as the economic bubble of the 80s that led to the creation of the *gurume* manga genre, which celebrates the cooking and eating of delicious, diverse food. While both manga are primarily action and fantasy manga respectively, they both feature key elements of *gurume* manga, following a trend of *gurume* combining with other genre of manga in recent times.

## Contents

List of Figures	6
Key of characters/ terms	7
Introduction	9
Chapter 1: Meal-sharing, sweets and manipulation	12
Chapter 2 : Meat Eating	22
Chapter 3 Culture, role and Identity	33
Conclusion	42
List of Works Cited	44

Word Count: 8,717.

## List of Figures

FIGURE 1.1 KUI, RYOKO. DELICIOUS IN DUNGEON, CHAPTER 1, 2017. THE PARTY SHARING FOOD TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME.	12
FIGURE 1.2 NODA, SATORU. GOLDEN KAMUY, CHAPTER 5, 2017. THE SOUP EATEN BY ASIRPA AND SUGIMOTO.	13
FIGURE 1.3 NODA, SATORU. GOLDEN KAMUY, CHAPTER 287, 2023. TSURUMI EATING THE DANGO.	14
FIGURE 1.4 NODA, SATORU. GOLDEN KAMUY, CHAPTER 148, 2020.	15
FIGURE 1.5 NODA, SATORU. GOLDEN KAMUY, CHAPTER 41, 2018.	15
FIGURE 1.6 KUI, RYOKO. DELICIOUS IN DUNGEON, CHAPTER 61. 2021. KABRU AND MITHRUN SHARING THE WALKING MUSHROOM. NOTE THAT THEY ARE LITERALLY SITTING AT THE SAME LEVEL, SUGGESTING THE EQUALISATION OF THEIR DYNAMIC.	18
FIGURE 1.7 KUI, RYOKO. DELICIOUS IN DUNGEON CHAPTER 17, 2017.	19
FIGURE 1.8 NODA, SATORU. GOLDEN KAMUY, CHAPTER 16, 2017. TSURUMI OFFERS DANGO TO SUGIMOTO DURING HIS NEGOTIATION.	19
FIGURE 2.1 NODA, SATORU. GOLDEN KAMUY, CHAPTER 24, 2017.	23
FIGURE 2.2 KUI, RYOKO. DELICIOUS IN DUNGEON, CHAPTER 3, 2017.	24
FIGURE 2.3 NODA, SATORU. GOLDEN KAMUY, CHAPTER 1, 2017.	24
FIGURE 2.4 NODA, SATORU. GOLDEN KAMUY, CHAPTER 2, 2017. SUGIMOTO CUTTING AWAY GOTOU'S SKIN.	25
FIGURE 2.5 NODA, SATORU. GOLDEN KAMUY, CHAPTER 39, 2018. HENMI FANTASISES ABOUT SUGIMOTO CUTTING HIM UP LIKE THE BLOCK OF HERRING-MEAL.	27
FIGURE 2.6 KUI, RYOKO. DELICIOUS IN DUNGEON, CHAPTER 94, 2024. THE DRAGON MEAT, AS NONDESCRIPT CHUNKS.	31
FIGURE 2.7 KUI, RYOKO. DELICIOUS IN DUNGEON VOL. 14. THE LOWER HALF OF FALIN'S BODY ENCASED IN ICE.	32
FIGURE 3.1 NODA, SATORU. GOLDEN KAMUY, CHAPTER 119, 2019	37
FIGURE 3.2 NODA, SATORU. GOLDEN KAMUY, CHAPTER 73, 2019.	38
FIGURE 3.3 KUI, RYOKO. DELICIOUS IN DUNGEON, CHAPTER 85, 2023.	40

## Key of characters/ terms

**Laios:** The protagonist of *Delicious in Dungeon*, a human exploring the dungeon.

**Falin:** The sister of Laios, who is eaten by a dragon in the events preceding the story.

**Marcille:** An elven mage and party member to Laios.

**Senshi:** Party member to Laios, a dwarf with skills in cooking and survival.

**Kabru:** Laios' narrative foil, an adventurer who hates monsters.

**Mithrun:** An elf tasked with investigating the dungeon.

**Milsril:** An elf who raised Kabru.

**Sugimoto:** The protagonist of *Golden Kamuy*, a Russo-Japanese war veteran.

**Asirpa:** The deuteragonist of *Golden Kamuy*, a young Ainu girl skilled in hunting and survival.

**Henmi Kazuo:** A minor character in *Golden Kamuy*.

**Tsurumi:** The main antagonist of *Golden Kamuy*, a lieutenant in the Japanese army.

**Koito:** A soldier serving under Tsurumi.

**Abashiri prison:** A real and historic prison in Hokkaido, Japan, which features in *Golden Kamuy* as it would have been in heavy use during the time period of its setting.

**Dango:** Japanese sweet of pounded rice balls, usually glazed and skewered.

**Mochi:** Japanese sweet that consists of pounded rice cakes, usually filled.

**Anpan:** Japanese sweet bread, usually filled with red or white bean paste.

**Ainu:** Indigenous group who live in parts of northern Japan, Sakhalin, and south-eastern Russia.

This thesis will explore themes and content which some readers may find uncomfortable, including murder, suicide and cannibalism.



## Introduction

Japan has a rich food culture, both in the cuisine and the rituals surrounding it. Food is so engrained in the Japanese society that its appreciation and terminology seeps into all aspects of daily life, especially manga. However, it was only in the post-war period that food began to receive such attention in Japanese media, with a gourmet boom in the 1980s<sup>1</sup> that crept right up with the manga boom of the 80s-90s<sup>2</sup>. Manga is another all-encompassing part of Japanese culture; it surrounds people from advertisements on commuter trains lit up with colourful characters to pop-up shops and events centred around the latest manga craze. For this reason, it is interesting to examine how food manifests in manga, what it represents and how it can be used as a storytelling device.

The appreciation and elevation of food is so widespread in Japanese society that entire manga are written around it, such as Ryoko Kui's *Delicious in Dungeon*. The characters in this story eat their way through a dungeon crawling with fantasy monsters to rescue their fallen healer, who has been eaten by a dragon. The party eat monsters out of necessity, as they cannot afford to buy provisions for the journey, blending monster of the week with meal of the day. The format of the cooking, or *gurume* manga has been laid down by works in the genre such as *Oishinbo* and *Cooking Papa*<sup>3</sup>, presenting readers with culinary delights in domestic and everyday settings such as the home or the office. In recent years, *gurume* has found new formulas, combining cooking with action and fantasy such as *Toriko*, a manga about the titular hero, a gourmet with superhuman strength who hunts and eats fantastical beasts<sup>4</sup>.

McQuillan describes the characters of George Gissings' novels as being neglected because they do not possess a 'zest' for good food<sup>5</sup>. If there is anything the

---

<sup>1</sup> Aoyama, Tomoko. *Reading Food in Modern Japanese Literature*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i press, 2008.) p.131.

<sup>2</sup> Gravett, Paul. *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics*. (London: Laurence King, 2004.) p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Aoyama, Tomoko. *Reading Food in Modern Japanese Literature*, p. 131.

<sup>4</sup> Shimabukuro, Mitsutoshi. *Toriko*, volume 1, chapter 1. (San Fransisco: VIZ Media, 2010.)

<sup>5</sup> McQuilland, Louis J. 'Food, Drink and Fiction'. *The Lotus Magazine* 8, no. 7 (1917): p. 335.

characters of *Golden Kamuy* and *Delicious in Dungeon* lack, it is certainly not zest, and this can be no coincidence as they are often depicted enjoying their meals. This effect on the perceived energy and realism of the characters is just one of the ways this thesis will show how the depiction of eating and food being eaten contributes to the narrative and symbolism of the manga being discussed.

What makes the act of eating and preparing food so important in both manga is that it humanises the characters and makes them feel real. When the characters spend most of their time fighting extravagant battles while riding trains and hot air balloons and battling fantasy monsters, the audience can immediately be drawn back into what they identify with in the character when they witness them partaking in a meal, being reluctant to try a food they have never had before and sharing it with their companions.

This thesis will examine food and its related processes, as well as symbolic forms of consumption by engaging directly with the manga *Golden Kamuy* and *Delicious in Dungeon* as primary sources.

Both manga are notable for their treatment of food. As mentioned in *Delicious in Dungeon*'s case, food itself is a large part of the work, and there is a large focus on what and how the characters eat. This is worth examining as the frequency with which different dishes and food treatments appear provides a lot of material to compare within the work. *Golden Kamuy* does not have the same focus on food, but what food is represented is done so very deliberately and in immense detail which invites opportunity for analysis. Both manga, having been serialised in very recent years concurrent with one another and only having finished in recent years, are due examining in all forms, which this thesis should remedy to a degree.

A deliberate effort has been made to examine foods and eating practices from a Japanese and Ainu perspective, as both manga are written in a Japanese context and will reflect Japanese ideals and culture. In the case of *Golden Kamuy*, an Ainu angle must be considered as Ainu culture is heavily featured in the work. The Ainu are a real indigenous group native to parts of northern Japan<sup>6</sup>, whose cultural

---

<sup>6</sup> "History", *The Foundation for Ainu Culture*, <https://www.ff-ainu.or.jp/web/english/details/post-5.html>

foods and practices are heavily represented in *Golden Kamuy*, as it features many Ainu characters. Discussions of Western media and contexts will still be utilised as manga is a medium which has continually been influenced by Western media and culture. The discussion will be facilitated with direct engagement with the manga as a primary source through close reading and visual analysis. This analysis will be framed in a literary and cultural context through broader academic discourse relating to food and its representation.

Chapter one will discuss food-sharing in the selected manga. What food is being presented and how characters eat it provides insights into their mentalities and relationships with each other. The depiction of how characters eat inform the reader of their relationships and themes present in their writing.

Chapter two will specifically look at meat, and through that the treatment of the butchery of animals versus the butchery of humans. The meaning and value of this process's depiction in these manga will be explored. Following that cannibalism and other forms of violence present in the manga will be discussed, and the inherent intimacy which links these acts of violence with consumption.

Chapter three will discuss cultural exchange, identity and belonging and the role of food in these processes in relation to characters from these works, as well as their treatments within the context of the standard tropes of *gourmet* manga. Both manga use food as symbols of cultural identity, which will be discussed in contrast with each other.

## Chapter 1: Meal-sharing, sweets and manipulation

In *Delicious in Dungeon*, the meal of the day is usually only determined by what creature or plants the party have encountered to that point in their adventure, and what real-life dish can be made from that creature. However, many of the meals represented convey a specific symbolic meaning in the context of the story. Riley and Cavanaugh discuss food itself as a communicator; the way in which the food is consumed, the food itself and the context in which it is consumed tell their very own story within the piece in which they are depicted<sup>7</sup>.

One found to be quite notable is the first meal eaten by the party in its full composition being in the form of hot-pot<sup>8</sup>. This is a dish traditionally consumed with friends, especially on special occasions or reunion<sup>9</sup>. Sharing food has long been a form of intimacy between people, and to the observer is a strong indicator of closeness between those depicted sharing food<sup>10</sup>. The event of the party coming together, welcoming a new friend and uniting to save Laios's doomed sister Falin is further accentuated by the fact they have chosen to make this dish. By sitting together and eating communally from this bowl of steaming broth, the characters are saying they trust each other, that they have affection for one another and that they will stick together through this crisis.



Figure 1.1 Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 1, 2017. The party sharing food together for the first time.

<sup>7</sup> Riley, Kathleen C. and Cavanaugh. "Tasty Talk, Expressive Food: An Introduction to The Semiotics of Food-and-Language," *Semiotic Review*, no. 5, (2017).

<sup>8</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, volume 1, chapter 1. (New York: Yen Press, 2017-2024.)

<sup>9</sup>"A Staple of Winter: The Origin and Types of Nabe," Japan Culinary Institute, 2022.

<https://www.japanculinaryinstitute.com/post/a-staple-of-winter-the-origin-and-types-of-nabe>

<sup>10</sup> Miller, Lisa, Paul Rozin, and Alan Page Fiske, "Food Sharing and Feeding Another Person Suggest Intimacy; Two Studies of American College Students," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 28, no. 3 (1998): p. 429.

Notably, this dish is used in almost the exact same way in *Golden Kamuy*, as the first time the protagonists Sugimoto and Asirpa sit down and share a cooked meal together, Asirpa prepares a soup made with minced squirrel meat<sup>11</sup>. In her words, the dish is made this way because she believes the meat will be more to his taste than eating it raw as she normally would<sup>12</sup>, but the imagery of the two sitting and sharing a meal which stews in a pot between them paints a very clear picture of the newfound partnership between the characters. Once she builds up her trust with Sugimoto, Asirpa begins feeding him food with more traditional Ainu treatments, such as serving the meat minced raw, or offering him the brains and eyeballs of the butchered animals.



Figure 1.2 Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 5, 2017. The soup eaten by Asirpa and Sugimoto.

In *Golden Kamuy*, the main cast of protagonists often eat together, and this is true of some of the antagonists too, but Tsurumi and the 7<sup>th</sup> regiment almost never eat

---

<sup>11</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 5. (San Fransisco: Viz Media, 2017.)

<sup>12</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 5, p. 13.

together, except when Tsurumi is making one of his soldiers eat, or only he is eating. Even when Tsurumi and Koito share anpan, a cake with sweet red bean paste in it, together at the site of Koito's brother's grave<sup>13</sup>. This is done before Koito is an underling of him in the army for the sole purpose of making Koito fond of him and remember this 'chance' encounter before Tsurumi can begin his more direct manipulation of him. Tsurumi is not pictured eating any of the anpan, only Koito visibly consumes them.

One of the few times Tsurumi does eat in front of his men is when he is presented with a box of Onuma dango, a local specialty of soft rice cakes with sweet soy sauce and red bean paste<sup>14</sup>. Tsurumi immediately eats the sweets, turning his back to his men so that he doesn't face them and eats them standing up. Not only do his men not get to share the confections with him, they don't even get to share in Tsurumi's enjoyment of them. Tsurumi gives his full attention to no one thing in this moment, not taking time to sit down and enjoy the sweets nor saving them for later so that he can commit to talking to his men. Everything around Tsurumi must serve him.



Figure 1.3 Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, Chapter 287, 2023. Tsurumi eating the dango.

In another chapter, Tsurumi tries to convince one of his officers to eat during recovery, tempting him with the promise of morphine should he obey him<sup>15</sup>. The dynamic here is almost parental, furthering Tsurumi's dominance over his men and the implication of punishment if they disobey him, even in matters of mealtimes.

---

<sup>13</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 197, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 287, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 148, p. 13.



Figure 1.4 Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 148, 2020.

The absence of shared meals within the 7<sup>th</sup> division also highlights the superficiality of their ‘bond’. Sugimoto and Asirpa’s friendship blossoms both as a result and as evidenced by the frequency of the meals they take together. Tsurumi and his men are never pictured eating together, and thus there is nothing to suggest a sense of friendship or comradeship between the men.

“To labour alone and, especially, to eat alone, is not only shameful in many cultural contexts, it is often considered monstrous or sub-human<sup>16</sup>.”

Never depicting Tsurumi relaxing and eating a meal also shows the audience that he’s of a completely different calibre than the main cast, something almost non-human. If Tsurumi never eats, is he even alive? Tsurumi’s apparent lack of humanity is referenced multiple times in the manga. When Sugimoto and his companions escape with the body of Henmi Kazuo, who was almost eaten by a killer whale, Tsurumi compares himself to a bottom-feeder, even adopting the mannerisms of a bottom-feeding crustacean<sup>17</sup> by using his hands to mimic their mandibles. Tsurumi



Figure 1.5 Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 41, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> West, Harry. The MIT Press. ‘We Are Who We Eat With: Food, Distinction, and Commensality’. *The MIT Press Reader*, 9 December 2021. <https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/we-are-who-we-eat-with/>

<sup>17</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 41, p. 16.

has accepted using unpleasant and underhanded means to reach his goals, even if it means becoming something 'inhuman'.

In *Delicious in Dungeon*, the first time Kabru, Laios's narrative foil<sup>18</sup>, and his party are shown, they're sitting at a tavern eating a meal before they go on their own dungeon expedition, lamenting the fact they won't get to eat a high-quality meal until they return to the surface<sup>19</sup>. This is one of the few times we get to see Kabru's party enjoy a meal. As opposed to the protagonists of the story, Kabru is repulsed by monsters, and even more so by the idea of consuming them. While a skilled leader and communicator, Kabru is unwilling to engage with practices that would ultimately lead to more successful dungeon expeditions like his peers. His parties' reliance on prepared rations reflects a disconnect from the dungeon and thus an inability to traverse it at the depth that Laios' party does. Kabru refuses to use what is inside the dungeon already to his advantage, keeping himself outside of the 'ecosystem' present in the dungeon already.

Kabru's entire relationship with food is interesting. Orphaned by the overflow of monsters from a dungeon in his hometown, he was raised by Milsiril, an elf who took an interest in humans. Kabru is often pictured being fed cakes and treats by Milsiril. Cake and the consumption of it in the context of Japanese media and manga especially, is depicted as something inherently feminine<sup>20</sup>, and thus emasculating. There is also the fact that children have a higher disposition to enjoy sweet foods<sup>21</sup>, and elves by and large in *Delicious in Dungeon* are depicted as tending to view other, shorter-lived races as inferior and vastly immature, no matter their age. When young Kabru expresses an interest in going to a dungeon to discover what happened to his family, Milsiril resists this and attempts to convince him otherwise, telling him to stay where "it's warm and there's cake."<sup>22</sup>. Kabru is once again offered cake by the elves when they come to take control over

---

<sup>18</sup> "Foil," Encyclopædia Britannica, J.E. Leubering, ed, <https://www.britannica.com/art/foil-literature>.

<sup>19</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 10, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Ting, Grace En-Yi. "The Desire and Disgust of Sweets: Consuming Femininities through Shōjo Manga." *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, no. 54 (2018): p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> Britt van Belkom, Ilse van Lier, Alexander Umanets, Edgar van Mil, Remco C. Havermans, "Sweetness in a glass: A study on children's sweet preference and sensitivity, *Food Quality and Preference*, Volume 110, 2023

<sup>22</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 61, p. 4.



the dungeon from the island lord, once they realise he is the orphaned child who Milsiril raised<sup>23</sup>.

Kabru eventually overcomes the elves' infantilisation of him by becoming the caregiver to an elf himself. When the elves come to take possession of the dungeon, Kabru ends up becoming stranded in the lower levels of it with the elves' captain, Mithrun. Mithrun's desires were eaten away by a demon in the past, leaving him with no drive at all to eat, bathe or rest. He physically cannot keep himself alive unless someone else helps him. Kabru is forced to become self-sufficient by taking charge of Mithrun's daily needs, requiring him to hunt monsters in the dungeon just like Laios' party and overcoming his disgust and trauma tied to them.<sup>24</sup>

The first meal Kabru and Mithrun eat together is a roasted walking mushroom- a creature unique to the dungeon that resembles an oversized mushroom with legs. Prepared crudely and with little expertise in monsters or cooking, the meal is unsatisfying and solely for the sake of survival. To flourish, Kabru must improve in these areas to ensure he and Mithrun can keep progressing in the dungeon. Soon after, Kabru attempts to cook a meal from his childhood, a mutton stew made of the mythical creature, barometz. He is excited for the meal and seems to enjoy cooking it, stating his biological mother used to cook it for him frequently. Kabru learns to enjoy the process of caring for another and in extension, himself, by confronting his past and his relationships with his caregivers through becoming somewhat of a caregiver himself. The substituting of sweets and travel rations with food inspired by cherished memories represents a more wholesome sense of care than that which the elves provided Kabru.

---

<sup>23</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 45, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 61, p. 16.

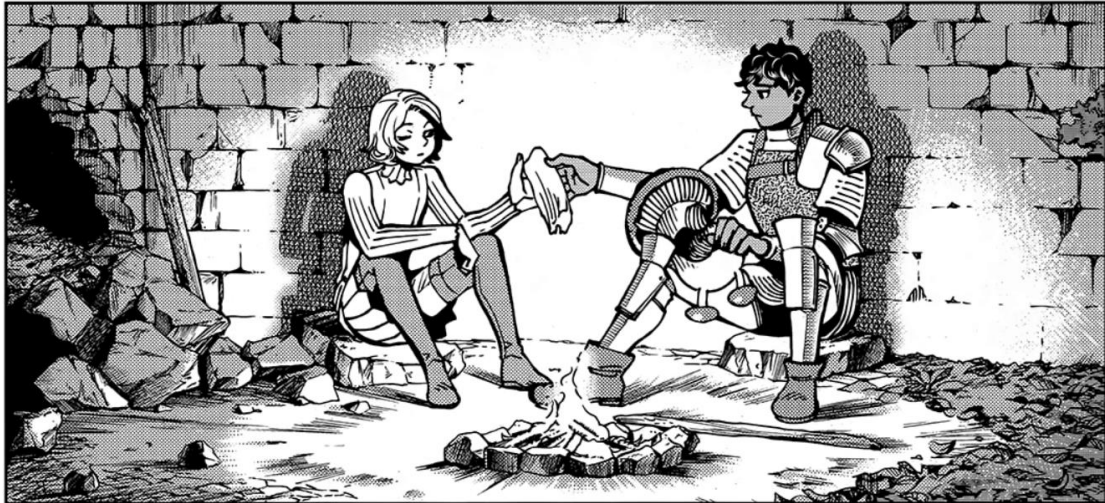


Figure 1.6 Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, Chapter 61. 2021. Kabru and Mithrun sharing the walking mushroom. Note that they are literally sitting at the same level, suggesting the equalisation of their dynamic.

In Marcille's recollection of her first meeting with Falin, Falin offers her foraged raspberries from a bush on the way to her cave hideout<sup>25</sup>. While Marcille initially refuses the berries out of caution, she soon gives in to trying the wild berry, remarking on its tastiness. This initial caution, and then cherishment is a direct parallel to Marcille's initial attitude toward Falin; first seeing her as a slacker with sloppy magic work, Marcille eventually realises Falin's connection to the magical world of dungeons and her carefree understanding of magic and the ecosystems which support it. The eating of this wild berry immediately draws to mind the forbidden fruit Eve ate in the Bible.<sup>26</sup> However, Christian art also presents raspberries as a symbol of kindness<sup>27</sup>. The berries they share represent Marcille's straying from book knowledge and eventual trust in an instinctual and more wild magic, a struggle which she continues to battle throughout the manga. Marcille is also a researcher of old and so-called forbidden forms of magic and this eating of the wild berries may be seen as the beginning of her exploration into using the dungeon for her exploration of forbidden magic.

---

<sup>25</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 17, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Genesis 3:6-7 (New International Version)

<sup>27</sup> Alexander, Courtney. "BERRIES AS SYMBOLS AND IN FOLKLORE", *New York Berry News*, Volume 06, Number 1, January 24, 2007, p. 12.

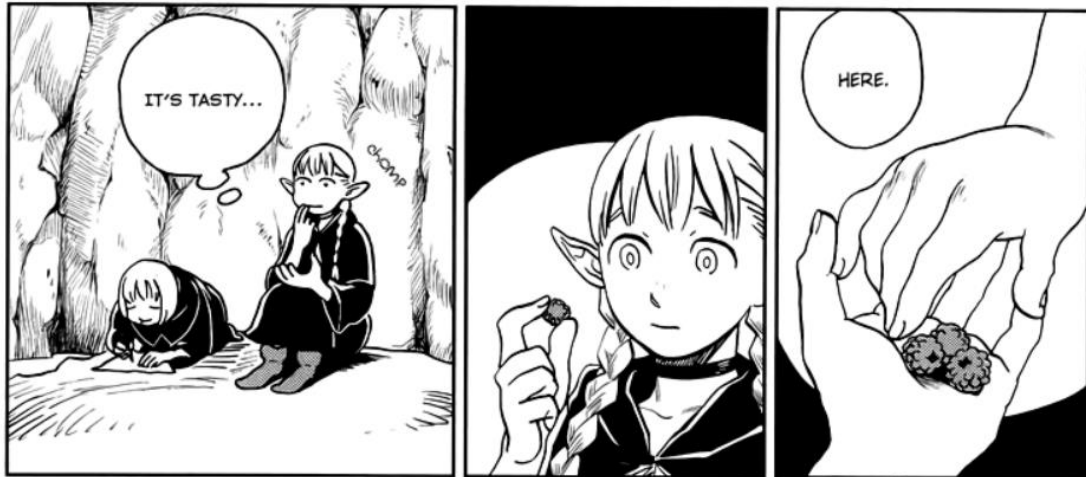


Figure 1.7 Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon* chapter 17, 2017.

Returning to *Golden Kamuy*, Tsurumi often engages conversation through offering sweets such as dango, like in his interrogation of Sugimoto in chapter 16. Tsurumi's affinity for sugary food evokes his behaviour towards his men; often rallying them through praise and false promises, 'sweet' things, and earning their loyalty through manipulation. Tsurumi makes his soldiers reliant and literally infatuated with him, making betraying or disappointing him unthinkable.

Tsurumi's offering of sweets to Sugimoto is very similar to the elves' offering of sweets to Kabru. By offering potential followers sugary treats while he sweet-talks them into working for him, Tsurumi is asserting his dominance as older, more masculine and assertive.

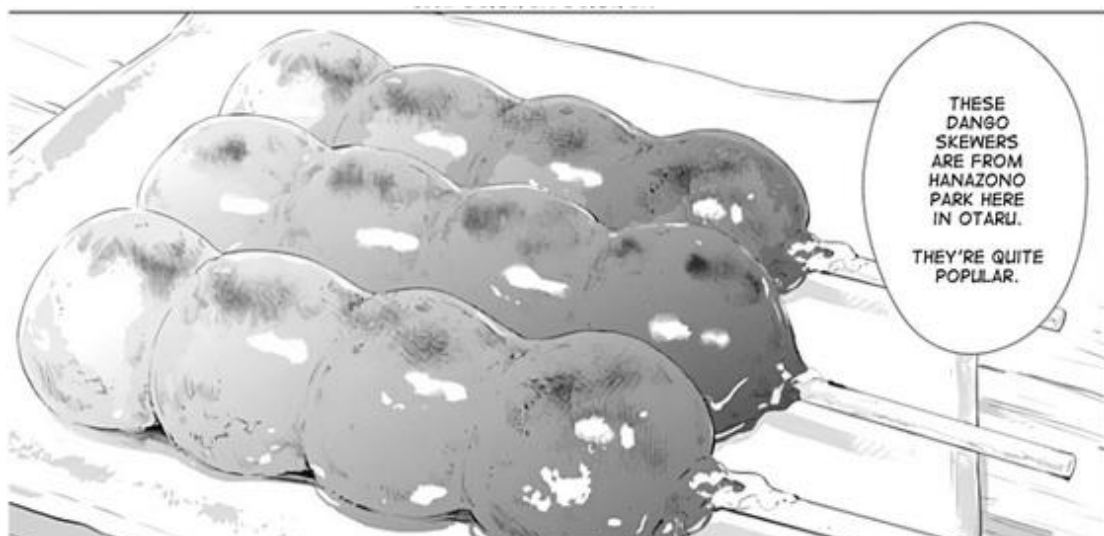


Figure 1.8 Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 16, 2017. Tsurumi offers dango to Sugimoto during his negotiation.

The sweets Tsurumi offers are usually *wagashi*, Japanese confections, and local to whatever area the regiment is currently in. His obsession with domestically made sweets reflects his nationalist goals, to create a military state in Hokkaido for those wronged by the Japanese government<sup>28</sup>. Anna Cwiertka states in *Modern Japanese Cuisine* that the idea of a national cuisine is representative of an ‘imagined national identity’.<sup>29</sup> Keeping in mind Japan was only developing this national identity in the Meiji era, when *Golden Kamuy* is set. Tsurumi’s fondness for local desserts represents that desire to create a strong and homogenous identity amongst the country he wishes to lead. There was also the notion that the increased consumption of sugar products, specifically of refined sugar, was representative of a more ‘modern’ Japanese diet.<sup>30</sup> However, Tsurumi is primarily interested in Japanese confections which traditionally use more ‘old-fashioned’ methods of sweetening, suggesting his mindset is stuck in the past, focused on the idea of a nation from antiquity.

In Chapter 197, there is a flashback to when Tsurumi first met Koito, one of his most devoted soldiers in the present. At the time of the flashback Koito is a young boy and directs Tsurumi to a graveyard. Tsurumi shares anpan with Koito, and has Koito talk about his deceased brother to stir up his emotions and create a bond between them. This feeding of anpan to Koito is just the start of Tsurumi’s slow and deliberate manipulation of him. Only a few years later Tsurumi has his men stage a kidnapping of Koito under the pretence of being Russian soldiers so that Tsurumi can ‘save’ him, making Koito believe their meeting a few years previous to be fate and influencing him to join the military academy out of respect for the man who saved him.

Tsurumi uses sweets to foster a one-sided sense of intimacy with his men, using food tied to happy memories and familial feelings to play on their emotions and force a sense of understanding and comradery between them. In Koito’s case with the anpan, Tsurumi manufactured this memory himself; sharing the sweets with

---

<sup>28</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 16, p.14.

<sup>29</sup> Cwiertka, Katarzyna, *Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and National Identity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006.), P. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Barak Kushner, ‘Sweetness and Empire: Sugar Consumption in Imperial Japan’, *The Historical Consumer* (Palgrave Macmillan, London.), P. 128.

Koito and presenting himself as a male role model to be comforted by in the absence of his older brother and father. With another soldier, Tanigaki, Tsurumi listens to him talking about a friend from his hometown who died during the Russo-Japanese war. Tanigaki explains that he comforted the man in his last moments by feeding him sweet mochi rice cakes with walnuts- a special inclusion particular to Tanigaki's mochi. Tsurumi invites Tanigaki to share these walnut mochi with him, inviting Tanigaki's trust.

The use of sweet foods is used in both manga to symbolise feelings of manipulation as well as infantilisation, typically in the sharing of them between characters with significant power and age differences. Food sharing is also used in both manga to differentiate healthy bonds and unhealthy bonds, in the sharing of food or the lack thereof respectively. How food is consumed in the company of others is also used to imply levels of trust and power dynamics.

## Chapter 2 : Meat Eating

The depiction of the process of butchery is effective in both manga on thematical and technical levels. The butchering of a carcass is an intimate process. The act of cutting, pulling apart a body and removing the innards forces one to understand where their food comes from. The process of butchery has long been sacred to many cultures, and the level of care for the process demands a respect which must be paid to the animal that died to be eaten. Taglialatela describes the butcher as “responsible for death, for the wellness of an entire community<sup>31</sup>”, *Delicious in Dungeon* and *Golden Kamuy* depict the process in quite different ways that reflect the tone of their stories as well as the theme and genre.

When it comes to butchering animals, *Golden Kamuy* gives more attention to the actual gory process of butchery than *Delicious in Dungeon* tends to, rendering the animals in a much more realistic style. There is also the fact they are real animals rather than mythical creatures. This serves to reaffirm *Golden Kamuy* as a manga about survival, that the characters are living off of the land and in a way that is connected to nature. The ‘rawness’ of the animals being depicted also adds an extra primality to the act of hunting and eating them, making animals themselves of the people eating them.

Takada defines the Japanese term ‘nama’ as meaning raw, used in relation to food such as draft beer and fresh meat but also to refer to live and ‘unedited’ performance as well as the appearance of bare legs without socks or tights.<sup>32</sup> The use of this word, to use rawness as something intensely desirable and in some ways sexually titillating highlights the value of food in Japanese culture. In all uses of the word, the ‘rawness’ of what is being consumed makes the consumption of it more pleasurable.

---

<sup>31</sup> Taglialatela, Antonio. “The Figure of the Butcher across Language and Socio-cultural Traditions: A Focus on the Italian Region of Campania.” *Cultural and Linguistic Perspectives*, p.26, 2019

<sup>32</sup> Takada, Akira. “Consumerisation of cannibalism in contemporary Japanese society”, in *Eating and Being Eaten: Cannibalism as Food for Thought*, 2018. Ed. Nyamnjoh, Francis. (Oxford: Langaa RPCIG) p. 321-322.

“Not only is the wildness associated with raw meat marked but it is also actively invoked or even created for the purpose of attracting customers<sup>33</sup>.”

*Golden Kamuy* uses ‘nama’ to further enhance the viewing experience and immersive depiction of the meals shown. The audience is assured of the food’s freshness as in most cases, the animal is depicted being killed and butchered just moments before it is eaten, emphasising its perceived tastiness.



Figure 2.1 Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 24, 2017.

*Delicious in Dungeon* uses this too, showcasing the entire butchery process of the monsters that the characters eat. While the process of butchery may not have the same level of detail or realism as *Golden Kamuy*, the methods in which monsters are processed and prepared still evokes the same immersion into the process, reflecting methods the reader may use while cooking at home, such as the preparation of the basilisk, a monster that resembles a giant rooster combined

---

<sup>33</sup> Takada, Akira. “Consumerisation of cannibalism in contemporary Japanese society”, *Eating and Being Eaten*, p. 322.

with a snake. The basilisk, once defeated, butchered, and cooked, strongly resembles a whole roast chicken, becoming more familiar and 'edible' to the audience.



Figure 2.2 Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 3, 2017.



Figure 2.3 Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 1, 2017.

However, animals and monsters are not the only things being butchered in these manga. In *Golden Kamuy*, escaped convicts of Abashiri prison are given intricate tattoos which, together, contain a map leading to a stash of hidden Ainu gold. With the tattoos split at the bodys' butchering lines, these people are literally marked for death, or at least extreme violence. Marking the men in this way reduces them to the level of



animals to the eyes of their tattooer and to those who pursue them, game to be skinned and made profit from.

It can also be argued that the convicts are animalistic by nature. Shiraishi, a comrade of Sugimoto and Asirpa and one of the convicts, is frequently compared to that of a fox or tanuki, creatures represented as tricksters in Japanese folklore<sup>34</sup>. Shiraishi often gets caught in Asirpa's animal traps, such as when he gets caught in a trap Asirpa sets to catch a fox<sup>35</sup>, placing him on the same level as these creatures. Another one of the convicts who ends up affiliated with the protagonists is named Ushiyama, which contains the Japanese word for an ox, 'Ushi', representative of his strong build and boorish demeanour.

The actual skinning of these men is very rarely shown, and the first one depicted carrying it out is Sugimoto. Despite the fact Gotou's body would be long cold by the time it is being skinned, the panel where Sugimoto cuts into his flesh depicts Gotou's torso surrounded by puffs of steam, as if Gotou was living and breathing only a moment ago. The implication of heat surrounding his naked body gives an



Figure 2.4 Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 2, 2017. Sugimoto cutting away Gotou's skin.

<sup>34</sup> Foster, Michael Dylan. *Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yokai*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.) p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 35, p.17.

air of sensuality to his skinning, an 'undressing', along with Sugimoto's hand on his chest, dripping with sweat.

The fact that Gotou is one of the only convicts the audience sees being skinned highlights the impact of this act; that from here, these men will continue to be treated like game. Any more depiction of this act is unnecessary as the audience has been shown what this act entails.

If the process of butchery is a form of intimacy, the same can be said about the process that directly precedes butchering, the act of killing.

One character that encapsulates this in *Golden Kamuy* is Henmi Kazuo, one of the tattooed convicts and a serial murderer. Henmi kills people because he wishes to remember what his brother looked like in his final moments as he was eaten alive by a boar. He is inspired by the intense ferocity in his brother's eyes as he tried fruitlessly to fight off the hungry animal. In this memory of his brother's death Henmi is almost voyeuristic; with no way to stop the boar he has no choice but to watch his brother die a horrible death and live with the image of it in his mind forever. Seeing this resulted in Henmi developing a fascination with the act of murder. He is described by other characters as killing as naturally as he breathes. This fascination culminates in Henmi's ultimate fantasy of being killed violently, 'just like his brother'<sup>36</sup>.

Takada describes suicide as a form of self-cannibalism, and suicide through a facilitator as auto-cannibalism.<sup>37</sup> Henmi wants to be killed and thus consumed by someone or something much more powerful than himself. Henmi's suicidal fantasy is a final attempt to feel close to his late brother through experiencing the same things as him. However, he will not allow himself to be killed by just anyone, he waits for the 'right one', as if waiting for a perfect suitor. His selectiveness about the process shows what an intimate one it is for him, it is as much a sexual fantasy as it is a murderous one, especially when coupled with the fact that when Henmi

---

<sup>36</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 39, p.12.

<sup>37</sup> Takada, Akira. 'Consumerisation of cannibalism in contemporary Japanese society.', *Eating and being eaten*, p. 313,

fantasises about his death, he becomes flushed and sweaty, indicating his arousal<sup>38</sup>.

Henmi eventually decides to attempt to kill Sugimoto, as he believes Sugimoto will fight back hard enough to grant Henmi the death he desires. He fantasises about Sugimoto killing him, watching him cut up a block of herring meal and picturing himself in its place. In comparing his facilitated suicide with the processing of herring, Henmi is made an object of consumption.



Figure 2.5 Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 39, 2018. Henmi fantasises about Sugimoto cutting him up like the block of herring-meal.

Cannibalism is also implied and discussed quite literally in *Delicious in Dungeon*. From the start of the manga, the characters set a clear line that they will not eat 'humanoid' or even bipedal creatures, such as goblins and fish-men, because these creatures have traits humans can see themselves in, such as humanoid faces and bodies, or perceivable traits of civilisation such as using tools. When questioned about it, the character Chilchuck gives no clear answers, just saying that it 'feels'

<sup>38</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 39, p. 17.

wrong, because while primitive, he still perceives these creatures as at least in some form, human<sup>39</sup>.

Joy identifies this line of thinking as an issue of perception; for example, most Americans see dogs as family members and will be disgusted at the prospect of eating them, because dogs have been humanised in their identity in the household as a companion.

“One reason we have such different perceptions of beef and dog meat is because we view cows and dogs very differently. The most frequent—and often the only— contact we have with cows is when we eat (or wear) them. But for a large number of Americans, our relationship with dogs is, in many ways, not terribly different from our relationship with people:”<sup>40</sup>

This same idea is present in *Golden Kamuy*, when Sugimoto fails to land the killing shot on a deer because for a moment, he sees himself in the animal and hesitates, letting the deer charge at him<sup>41</sup>. Sugimoto, defining himself as immortal for his supposed refusal to die, sees that same trait in the deer, charging him despite its sustained injuries and inevitable death. Sugimoto’s projection on and humanisation of the deer blurs the line between human and animal, questioning the acceptability of killing.

The humanoid cannibalism debate is not *Delicious in Dungeon*’s only discussion of cannibalism. In chapter 49 Senshi reveals that he has been exploring and eating in the dungeon because of a failed expedition with other dwarves. During this expedition he and his peers became lost in the dungeon and were stalked by a griffin, which slowly killed them one by one until only Senshi was left. Before his remaining two companions died, Senshi was served a soup which he could not identify as being made of the griffin or from the body of his dead companion. The dilemma as to whether he had committed cannibalism or not is one that weighs heavy on Senshi for a long time, leading him to obfuscate his identity and past to the other party members.

---

<sup>39</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 15, p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> Joy, Melanie. *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism ; the Belief System That Enables Us to Eat Some Animals and Not Others* (San Francisco: Conari Press, 2011) p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 24, p. 12.

Senshi essentially isolates himself in the dungeon, avoiding the griffin for fear of having to taste its meat and confront his past. In Sanday's examination of the cultural treatment and value of cannibalism, she identifies hunger cannibalism as an extreme taboo, stating:

"Hunger cannibalism is generally treated as revolting and reprehensible, the ultimate antisocial act, in some cases punishable by death."<sup>42</sup>

Senshi's cannibalism dilemma demonstrates this belief, that even though it allowed him to survive, in partaking in potential cannibalism he has committed an extremely vile act against society and thus cannot re-enter it<sup>43</sup>. In Senshi's situation it is also worth considering the Japanese attitude toward hunger cannibalism, as seen in discussion of alleged cannibalism committed by Japanese soldiers during World War 2 and the Asia-Pacific war. Senshi's guilty indulgence in the potential crime is reminiscent of testimonies by soldiers who had allegedly committed wartime cannibalism, thinking of themselves as both victims and perpetrators of the terrible act.

"Depending on the context, victim status can be spread widely, and even a soldier who practiced cannibalism may be perceived to be a victim (his hand was forced by a brutal military system that abused and abandoned its own soldiers, and he must endure the psychological torment of committing cannibalism), a perpetrator (he committed a reprehensible and inexcusable act), or both simultaneously (he committed a horrific act but had little choice, and must suffer the consequences)."<sup>44</sup>

Senshi in this situation is the soldier whose hand is forced, having no choice but to eat the dubious meat and survive, potentially facing the social consequences should someone discover his crime.

Furthermore, cannibalism ends up being vital in saving Falin. When the party find and kill the dragon that consumed Falin, they must cut open its insides and salvage her remains, using them along with the dragon's flesh to rebuild her body and resurrect her<sup>45</sup>. In using the dragon's flesh for her body, Falin's body itself is still

---

<sup>42</sup> Sanday, Peggy Reeves, *Divine Hunger. Cannibalism as a Cultural System*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.) p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 49, p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> McGrath, Kenta. "White Pigs and Black Pigs, Wild Boar and Monkey Meat: Cannibalism and War Victimhood in Japanese Cinema." *(In)Digestion in Literature and Film* (Routledge), 2020, p. 2

<sup>45</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 26, p. 12.

under control of the ruler of the dungeon, Thistle. They lead her away in the night and combine her body with the rest of the unused dragon carcass, fusing her being with that of the dragon's. This means that the party must remove and destroy the dragon's body that remains attached to Falin, and Laois proposes to do so by eating it<sup>46</sup>. The party initially object until they are convinced this is the only viable solution to this problem. While they may only be eating the dragon's body which happens to be attached to Falin's, it still evokes the feeling of cannibalism. The discomfort may also stem from the fact that cooking this part of Falin will involve 'killing' her again and dismembering her after spending so long putting her back together. To save Falin, the party must accept her death.

However, in Falin's situation, the cannibalisation of her body is portrayed as something forbidden but still necessary and eventually accepted by wider society. The eating of Falin's body is deemed to be acceptable by the cast of the manga because the part of her body they will be eating is animalistic in shape, and also because her consumption serves the higher purpose of her being resurrected. Falin is not just being eaten to satiate hunger; her consumption is made into ritual and thus legitimatised. The final consumption of the dragon she has been fused with requires the enlistment of many people, both friends and strangers to the main party. Falin's body is kept preserved with ice magic so that once the dragon's meat has been eaten she can be resurrected with minimal damage or decomposition<sup>47</sup>.

"In many cases, ritual cannibalism physically enacts a cultural theory... that enables humans to regulate desire, to build and maintain a social order<sup>48</sup>"

The eating of Falin's body is legitimatised through the ritual of her consumption. As there is so much meat to be eaten, the party has to enlist the help of many people to both process it and eat it. This transforms the meal into a grand feast, where in organising and facilitating the feast, Laios and his party assert control over the social dynamic. While initially reluctant to eat her flesh, the attendees of the feast partake willingly and take their roles as subordinates to the party. They

---

<sup>46</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 52, p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 94, p. 14.

<sup>48</sup> Sanday, Peggy Reeves. *Divine Hunger*, p. 214

accept breaking the taboo of cannibalism as they are told by someone more powerful than them that they must do so to save Falin.

Once the *Delicious in Dungeon* party begin the act of cutting up the dragon-half of Falin's body, the act of cutting it up after the initial separation of the upper half of her body and the lower half is largely done outside of frame, only seen as chunks of meat falling in the air. There is never even a severed dragon limb or identifiable body part shown at this stage, except for one panel where we can see the cross-section of what appears to be the bodies' chest cavity. However, it is encased in ice and rendered in a less precise line, still obscuring the dismembered body part from detail. The disappearance of the dragon's body represents Falin's body being separated from the influence of the dungeon. By not showing the audience the butchery of the dragon in detail, the intimacy of the act is removed. Falin's body being encased in ice provides a literal 'chilliness' to the removed intimacy of the act, contrasting the steamy skinning scenes of *Golden Kamuy*.



Figure 2.6 Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 94, 2024. The dragon meat, as nondescript chunks.

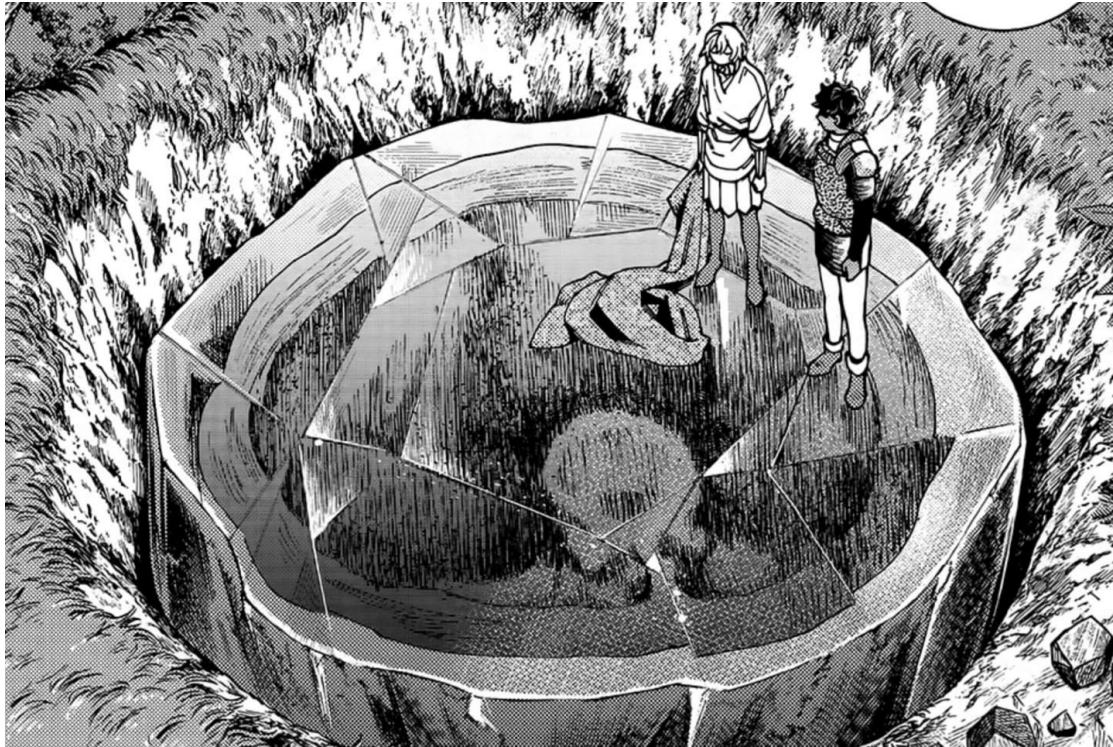


Figure 2.7 Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon* Vol. 14. The lower half of Falin's body encased in ice.

Both *Delicious in Dungeon* and *Golden Kamuy* use the depiction of meat and butchery to enhance the viewer experience as well as their storytelling. Given that both works deal with the cycle of life and the consumption of animals, they also present valuable discussion of both metaphorical cannibalism as well as literal cannibalism. This places the human characters within the food chain and really emphasises the themes of survival and moral struggle in both manga.



## Chapter 3 Culture, role and Identity

"To pay attention to food symbols across genres is to recognize the deepest human desires and anxieties, as well as ways of conceptualization of self and others<sup>49</sup>."

Both manga use food to represent and discuss cultural and identity issues. Food preference can be used to discuss gender and age, as discussed in chapter one with the use of sweets in expressing themes of infantilisation. The treatment of food reflects both in-world cultures and real-world cultures as discussed in each manga respectively, as well as which characters do the cooking and their proficiency in it. These methods of using food as a vehicle for character development will be explored further in this chapter.

Asirpa's role in *Golden Kamuy* is very similar to Senshi's in *Delicious in Dungeon* in that she, being more familiar with and integrated into her environment, acts as a guide and provider for Sugimoto and her less wilderness-learned companions. Senshi's role makes sense for him as a character, as he is older and acts as a sort of sage to the others, but Asirpa, being a child, does not have this presence but shows the same skill and expertise as Senshi. Asirpa's role as Sugimoto's teacher also presents her as a sort of folk goddess, showing man how to make food from what he perceives as a barren wasteland. In many Asian folk stories, man is shown to 'discover' staple crops with which he can nourish himself and his community by a mysterious female figure, or the crop itself is 'planted' by the female, who sows her nourishing female essence in the earth to produce grains<sup>50</sup>.

In the context of Japanese craftsmanship and professional cooking, women are rarely seen in positions of power or tutelage, usually delegated to the role of a helper or a pupil to male superiors<sup>51</sup>. Asirpa subverts this as a 'master' of her skills, guiding and teaching Sugimoto in tracking and hunting, butchery and cooking wild

---

<sup>49</sup> Andrievskikh, Natalia. "Food Symbolism, Sexuality, and Gender Identity in Fairy Tales and Modern Women's Bestsellers." *Studies in Popular Culture* 37, no. 1 (2014), p. 150.

<sup>50</sup> Sunarti, Sastri, Ninawati Syahrul, Atisah Atisah, and Erli Yetti. "The Rice Myths in Asia: The Comparative Literature Study". In *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Democracy and Social Transformation, ICON-DEMOST 2021*.

<sup>51</sup> Brown, 'Food Wars: Impacts of Gender on the Japanese Kitchen', *Afficio Undergraduate Journal* 2017, p. 5.

game. Marcille does not have the same authority as Asirpa when it comes to mastery of her environment and coexistence within it. In fact, it is Marcille's by-the-book approach that frequently causes her trouble in the context of her world. For example, Marcille only knows how to harvest mandrake plants in theory and feels challenged when she realises Senshi has been harvesting them by a completely different method his whole life<sup>52</sup>. To gain respect from her peers for her learned approach, Marcille attempts to put her theory into practice and while she does successfully harvest a mandrake, she is injured in the process. While Marcille's efforts are not entirely in vain, her relative inexperience conforms to the stereotypes of women cooking and preparing food in manga. She does not usually lead in the cooking and eating process, but rather helps with smaller cooking-related tasks.

The lead cook in manga is usually a man, with the cooking process and product often presented as a means for the cook to earn the affection of a female and to affirm his patriarchal status. The process of cooking in *Golden Kamuy* is more for the sake of survival and the showcase of Ainu cultural practices and foods. It presents the process of cooking and sharing a meal with friends as something that should be cherished, not as a service, but as a process vital to life itself. The sharing of food with Sugimoto and others ensures that even when they hunt big game, each part of the animal will be consumed and returned to the cycle of life. In this way *Golden Kamuy* is also subversive, as there is never an expectation of a transactional love earned from cooking, rather, the process of cooking and sharing food contributes to a natural platonic relationship. The acts of service are mutual; Asirpa handles the cooking and managing of survival skills, and Sugimoto does the 'dirty work', fighting those they come into conflict with in their quest for the gold.

Senshi's presence as the cook in *Delicious in Dungeon* can be seen as softly patriarchal. He is deeply concerned with the health of his companions and takes the implementation of a varied diet very seriously. His gentle and stoic personality is quite reminiscent of the titular main character of *Cooking Papa*, one of Japan's most iconic gurume heroes. However, Senshi is never 'rewarded' with prospects of love or conventional success. He pursues cooking out of a scholarly desire to

---

<sup>52</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 4, p. 8.

perfect his craft. In this way, Senshi still fulfils the role of the male cook in Japanese literature; a nomad who lives outside of social expectations and domesticity.

“First there is an aversion to everyday domesticity... Cooking man’s expeditions are motivated by a desire to escape mundane life and it’s commitments... Second, such nomadic movement, which may involve physical danger and great financial burden, normally only possible for men with some power and privilege... as someone who is somehow exempt from ordinary social codes<sup>53</sup>.”

Asirpa’s love for hunting and storytelling is also a clear demonstration of her Ainu culture and her connection to it. The choice of showcasing Asirpa’s culture mainly through her eating habits implies just how important food and food sources are to the preservation of a culture. Iwasaki claims food can serve as a symbol for a community<sup>54</sup>, so the choice to showcase the real-life culture of the Ainu people through Asirpa’s eating practices provides a very evocative and tangible way for people unfamiliar with Ainu culture to experience it. It is also stated by Iwasaki that in studying the effect of Ainu food and culture sharing from mother to daughter, that participants became less hesitant to identify themselves as Ainu when their communities became more aware of Ainu food and cultural practices.

“Now that more people are exposed to various aspects of Ainu culture such as food, dances, language, and craft making, the positive comments expressed by the community, both Ainu and non-Ainu, are helping the Ainu overcome their hesitation to identify their heritage<sup>55</sup>.”

Asirpa has much more security in her identity and her culture because she has a clear and tangible connection to it, especially through food. Even when Asirpa is singled out and dehumanised by Japanese characters for being Ainu, she can shrug it off, and many characters who previously insulted her for being Ainu accept her

---

<sup>53</sup> Aoyama, Tomoko, ‘The Cooking Man in Modern Japanese Literature,’ in *Asian Masculinities: the Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*, ed. Louie, Kam, Low, Morris. (London: Routledge, 2003) p. 164.

<sup>54</sup> Iwasaki-Goodman M. ‘Transmitting Ainu traditional food knowledge from mothers to their daughters.’ *Maternal Child Nutrition*, 2017, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Iwasaki - Goodman, Masami. “Transmitting Ainu Traditional Food Knowledge From Mothers to Their Daughters”, p. 7.

identity and engage with her culture through food and storytelling, such as Shiraishi. On their first meeting, Shiraishi teases Asirpa, asking Sugimoto if she is his 'pet Ainu' and what tricks she can do, dehumanising her.<sup>56</sup> A few chapters later, Shiraishi eats with the two, becoming familiar with Ainu foods which he continues to eat later into the manga<sup>57</sup>.

Iwasaki also states that the plant pukusa, or wild onions were once highly stigmatised foods due to the strong taste and the Ainu were often discriminated against for consuming it<sup>58</sup>. However, Asirpa eats pukusa often and speaks of it fondly as a way to flavour meat and soups. This further shows Asirpa's pride in her culture and how cultural experience through food has strengthened her sense of identity.

Asirpa asserts herself as a 'new-age Ainu woman', refusing to get a mouth tattoo that will identify her as a candidate for marriage, and has no interest in 'women's chores' such as sewing and working with textiles.<sup>8</sup> In rejecting the tattoo, Asirpa is rejecting not only a literal gender marker, but also a marker of her entering adulthood, a hint toward her inner childishness.

---

<sup>56</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 6, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 25, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> Iwasaki-Goodman, Masami, Satomi Ishii, Takahiro Kaizawa, Harriet V Kuhnlein, Bill Erasmus and D. Spigelski. "Traditional food systems of Indigenous Peoples: the Ainu in the Saru River Region, Japan." 2009, p. 146.



Figure 3.1 Noda, Satoru. Golden Kamuy, chapter 119, 2019

At times Asirpa is depicted literally feeding Sugimoto and their other companions by spooning food into their mouths, as shown in figure 3.1. Asirpa, in knowing more about nature and how to survive alongside it, has had to become the caregiver to men much older than her. Asirpa craves the constant emotional support and companionship she used to have in her father, and if she can continue to provide for Sugimoto in the wild she can ensure he will always stay by her side. Asirpa wants Sugimoto to be dependent on her because in truth, she is dependent on him so she does not have to feel alone.

While she keeps up her mature facade, Asirpa's age shows in subtle ways, such as when her face gets covered in black marks from eating butterbur shoots, a usual snack of Ainu children when they go outside to play, as seen in figure 3.2.



Figure 3.2 Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 73, 2019.

Asirpa is also initially repulsed by Sugimoto's miso, a Japanese condiment of fermented bean paste, as she believes it looks like faeces<sup>59</sup>. Miso is one of the key elements of washoku, or Japanese cuisine<sup>60</sup>. The humorous conflict between Sugimoto's insistence that it is in fact not faeces and tastes good, and Asirpa's stubbornness, serves as a colourful anecdote about personal taste and cultural exchange. The comparing of miso, a quintessentially Japanese foodstuff to literal filth also shows that in the context of the manga, Japanese food is not automatically depicted as better than or more 'civilised' than Ainu food. Asirpa's eventual acceptance and enjoyment of miso, regardless of the dirty association within her mind represents an ideal that Japanese people and the Ainu people can get along and understand each other.

Marcille of *Delicious in Dungeon*, being a half-elf, is expected to live for almost 1000 years, making outliving her friends an inevitability. This fear of hers is only made stronger by the fact that she has already outlived her human father. His death has a huge impact on her decision to study ancient magic, with her goal being prolonging human life. Marcille's age and status as a half-elf play a big role in how the rest of the cast, and the world she lives in, interact with her, and this is reflected by the treatment of food in relation to her.

While posing as a court magician, Marcille plays along with a story about being at a banquet with the elf queen, discussing what food was served to her. However, not being familiar with elven society, she doesn't realise that the 'foods' served at this banquet are actually elaborate sweets, made in different shapes to convey blessings to guests from the queen, and is caught out in her lie not because she fails to realise this, but because the elves knew she was lying all along as a half-elf

---

<sup>59</sup> Noda, Satoru. *Golden Kamuy*, chapter 8, p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> Rath, Eric C. 2016. *Japan's Cuisines : Food, Place and Identity*, p. 20. (London: Reaktion Books) ProQuest Ebook Central.

would never have been acknowledged by the queen<sup>61</sup>. The choice to portray the elves as serving sweets at an elaborate dinner calls back to the discussion of sweets in relation to both Kabru and Tsurumi. It suggests an air of falseness and luxury in elven society, as well as an inherent exclusivity in having to interpret messages from one's food.

In a study of mixed-race people of minority and white backgrounds in Canada, the authors state, "individuals who do not resonate strongly with their minority background commonly attribute this absence of cultural connection to a remarkable extent to food as well<sup>62</sup>." While not stated outright by Marcille in the text to be the reason for her disconnect with elf culture, it is clearly shown here that her lack of context for foods at a royal banquet, no doubt a huge event in elven society, is a means of excluding her from this culture. She does not have the same security in her identity that Asirpa does because she does not have a tangible link through food to her elven identity.

In chapter 81, where the party must regain control of Marcille after she is influenced by the demon controlling the dungeon, they attempt to do so by feeding her comfort food related to her culture, something so filling she will have to stop and rest for a while. However, none of the characters know much about where Marcille is from, and while the context clues within the story hint to the audience that her cultural foods are Italian given the suggestion of pasta, the gag is that the characters misread these clues and instead serve her Japanese ramen noodles. The situation is set up and played for laughs, but it does highlight Marcille's lack of connection with any given culture of hers. In Chapter 50, the party eat soup dumplings made of hippogriff meat, and while each member of the party has something to say about how different these dumplings are from ones they may eat back home, Marcille is silent.

While Marcille is still under the power of the demon in chapter 85, she becomes overwhelmed with defending herself from the onslaught of people trying to reach her. She hides herself in a tower, wishing first for a pie with 'plenty of sugar and

---

<sup>61</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 74, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> Cleveland, Feng Zhao, and Ghebrai, "I'm like, Whatever You Want Me to Be. I'm the Flavor of the Day", *Food Quality and Preference* 121, 2024. p.6

butter', then fruit, and more comfortable adventuring equipment. The immediate turn to sugary and fatty foods reflects her panicked state where she becomes more child-like. Guindon describes pies historically as a food made to serve many people, sweet fillings being popularised only once the general populace became more fortunate<sup>63</sup>. Marcille summoning a sweet pie symbolises impracticality in her thinking and her wishes. What she ultimately wants is something sweet but not sustainable to consume in the long run.



Figure 3.3 Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 85, 2023.

The size of the pie that Marcille summons cannot be ignored either; it and the fruits and other items that follow almost crush Marcille's companions who have come to talk to her. The size of the food represents the level of fantasy Marcille is using to cope with the stress of her situation. The large size also reflects her desire to keep her friends close and for as long as possible, even if it defies the natural process of aging. Moderation is continually encouraged by Senshi when preparing the party's meals, emphasising the importance of a balanced diet for maintaining physically healthy and sound of mind<sup>64</sup>. Marcille's exaggerated desire for the sweet pie is unsustainable. This complete denouncing of moderation through the manifestation of a giant pie is a clear signal of indulgence and escapism.

---

<sup>63</sup> Guindon, Grace. 'Exploring the Connection: The Scale of Time and Effort Within American Baked Goods', p.6, 2023.

<sup>64</sup> Kui, Ryoko. *Delicious in Dungeon*, chapter 3, p. 23.



However, as Marcille's friends get through to her, the food summoned takes a more familiar size, suggesting her coming back to reality.

Food is used in both *Golden Kamuy* and *Delicious in Dungeon* to showcase cultural expression and repression in characters respectively. Foods used can reflect real life cultures as well as suggest similarities between real cultures and fictional ones. It is also used as a vehicle to express characters' mental states regarding ageing and safety, with its representation and proportion being used to show extreme ends of this. The two manga differ however in their treatment of female characters within the cooking process, with *Golden Kamuy* being subversive and *Delicious in Dungeon* conforming to archetypes within cooking manga.

## Conclusion

This thesis has examined manga as a primary source to analyse the representation of food and its related processes, both within its cultural context in Japan as well as from broader cultural perspectives. Research has been done through close visual analysis and reading of the texts as well as academic sources regarding food, culture, and media analysis. This analysis of food has been used to identify key themes of the sources, such as violence, intimacy, caregiving, infantilisation, belonging, friendship and identity. This demonstrates the deliberate use of food in manga as a storytelling tool using culturally established meanings.

Manga, being a relatively new medium only innovated in the last 100 years, has endless scholarly potential, especially as the medium continues to evolve. Examining *Delicious and Dungeon* and *Golden Kamuy* closely also gave good insight into the medium, as both can serve as comparison for the other, making for an interesting case study of a more recent example of manga authorship and artistry. The effect of the treatment and status of food in Japanese society can be seen clearly in these media through their extensive and detailed depiction.

There are many meanings that can be interpreted from the representation of food and cooking in manga. Scenes depicting food sharing can have immense significance via the food being shared and the characters partaking in it. Food is used to imply infantilisation in character relationships using cultural associations with types of food. Sweets are used in both *Golden Kamuy* and *Delicious in Dungeon* to convey infantilisation through the offering of them by figures with power. In *Golden Kamuy's* case sweets can be a tool of manipulation, and their form can be linked to notions of national identity. Both manga use the sharing of meals as a symbol of comradery, featuring prominent meal-sharing scenes at the beginning of their stories to establish character alliances quickly. In turn, the lack of depiction of other characters eating is used to exaggerate immorality in them.

The depiction of meat and butchery also are used to discuss the intimacy of violence and consumption, and how the two are linked. There are also clear symbolic processes of consumption present which evoke intimate feelings and sexuality. *Golden Kamuy* expresses the inherent intimacy in the process of the butchery and killing of animals, exploring it further through its human characters

which end up in the place of the 'hunted'. *Delicious in Dungeon* identifies the thought processes behind the ethics of eating 'humanized' animals and explores beliefs around survival cannibalism versus ritual cannibalism.

Cultural identity and experience are something both manga explore through the depiction of food and cooking processes. How characters interact with food implies mental state and personality traits as well as how they express or repress cultural identity. *Golden Kamuy's* Asirpa reflects a strong cultural identity which is enhanced due to her engagement with cultural foods and practices. *Delicious in Dungeon's* Marcille does not have this same engagement and thus possesses little cultural identity which is used to explore themes of belonging in her character. In Asirpa's case food is also tied to themes of maturity and caregiving. Asirpa subverts stereotypical female treatment in the gurume genre, fulfilling the role of the 'master chef', while Marcille conforms, taking a more supportive role in the cooking process to the 'master chef' of *Delicious in Dungeon*, Senshi. The use of food in both manga greatly enriches the symbolism and narratives present in both manga.

The research of food in media has endless potential. As a quintessentially human activity, the act may often be overlooked in media analysis where it may provide further insight. At the same time, naturally not every single instance of food in media will provide symbolic meaning, emphasising the need for thorough and informed scholarship to choose the right material of study. This thesis should begin more discussion on food representation in manga as well as other media, such as in animation or western comics. In analysis of food imagery in *Delicious in Dungeon*, a surprising amount of biblical imagery was discovered, which would make for very interesting study. *Golden Kamuy* already has a large amount of scholarship dedicated to its depiction of the Ainu people, which may encourage more studies of its treatment of Ainu food and other cultural symbols.

## List of Works Cited

- Alexander, Courtney. 'BERRIES AS SYMBOLS AND IN FOLKLORE', *The New York Berry News*, Vol. 6 No. 1, p.11-13, (2007.)  
<http://www.hort.cornell.edu/fruit/nybn/newslettpdfs/2007/nybn61a.pdf>  
Accessed 06/11/2024.
- Andrievskikh, Natalia. 'Food Symbolism, Sexuality, and Gender Identity in Fairy Tales and Modern Women's Bestsellers,' *Studies in Popular Culture*, Vol. 37, No. 1 p. 137-153, (2014.) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24332704>. Accessed 25/02/2024.
- Antinucci, Raffaella, Carolina Diglio, and Maria Giovanna Petrillo. 'THE FIGURE OF THE BUTCHER ACROSS LANGUAGE AND SOCIO-CULTURAL TRADITIONS: A FOCUS ON THE ITALIAN REGION OF CAMPANIA' in *The Wor(l)ds of Neapolitan Arts and Crafts: Cultural and Linguistic Perspectives*, edited by Raffaella Antinucci, Carolina Diglio and Maria Giovanna Petrillo, p.27-39. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019. <http://hdl.handle.net/2067/46896>. Accessed 07/03/25.
- Aoyama, Tomoko. *Reading Food in Modern Japanese Literature*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i press, 2008.
- Aoyama, Tomoko. 'The Cooking Man in Modern Japanese Literature,' in *Asian Masculinities: the Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*, ed. Louie, Kam, Low, Morris. London: Routledge, 2003. doi:10.4324/9780203987933. Accessed 06/03/2025.
- Belkom, Britt van, Ilse van Lier, Alexander Umanets, Edgar van Mil, and Remco C. Havermans. "Sweetness in a Glass: A Study on Children's Sweet Preference and Sensitivity". *Food Quality and Preference* 110 (2023)  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0950329323001337>  
Accessed 06/11/2024.
- Brown, 'Food Wars: Impacts of Gender on the Japanese Kitchen', *Afficio Undergraduate Journal*, Nova Scotia, Saint Mary's University. 2017.  
[https://smu.novanet.ca/discovery/openurl?institution=01NOVA\\_SMU&vid=01NOVA\\_SMU:SMU&rft.date=2017&rft.atitle=Food%20wars:%20impacts%20of%20gender%20on%20the%20Japanese%20kitchen](https://smu.novanet.ca/discovery/openurl?institution=01NOVA_SMU&vid=01NOVA_SMU:SMU&rft.date=2017&rft.atitle=Food%20wars:%20impacts%20of%20gender%20on%20the%20Japanese%20kitchen) Accessed 06/03/2025.

- Cleveland, Mark, Chenzi Feng Zhao, and Sam Ghebrai. “‘I’m like, Whatever You Want Me to Be. I’m the Flavor of the Day’”: A Mixed-Methods Study of the Food Dispositions and Behaviors of Mixed-Race Individuals’. *Food Quality and Preference* 121 (2024)  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0950329324001617>  
 Accessed 24/1/2025. Accessed 06/03/2025.
- Cwiertka, Katarzyna. *Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and National Identity* London, Reaktion Books, 2006.
- Foster, Michael Dylan. *Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yokai*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=837291>. Accessed 06/03/2025.
- ‘Genesis 3 – New International Version.’ Bible Gateway. Last modified 2011.  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%203&version=NIV>  
 Accessed 06/03/2025.
- Gravett, Paul. *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics*. London: Laurence King, 2004.
- Guindon, Grace. “Exploring the Connection: The Scale of Time and Effort Within American Baked Goods”. 2023. BSU Honors Program Theses and Projects. Item 612.  
[https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1615&context=honors\\_proj](https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1615&context=honors_proj)  
 Accessed 11/02/2025.
- “History” The Foundation For Ainu Culture. <https://www.ff-ainu.or.jp/web/english/details/post-5.html>. Accessed 06/03/2025.
- Iwasaki-Goodman, Masami. “Transmitting Ainu traditional food knowledge from mothers to their daughters’ *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, Volume 13, Issue S3, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.12555>. Accessed 06/03/2025.
- Iwasaki-Goodman, Masami, Satomi Ishii, Takahiro Kaizawa, Harriet V Kuhnlein, Bill Erasmus and D. Spigelski. “Traditional food systems of Indigenous Peoples: the Ainu in the Saru River Region, Japan.” (2009).  
<https://www.fao.org/4/i0370e/i0370e08.pdf> Accessed 06/03/2025.

- Japan Culinary Institute, 'A Staple of Winter: The Origin and Types of Nabe'. 18 January 2022. <https://www.japanculinaryinstitute.com/post/a-staple-of-winter-the-origin-and-types-of-nabe> Accessed 29/10/2024.
- Joy, Melanie. *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism; the Belief System That Enables Us to Eat Some Animals and Not Others*. San Francisco: Conari Press, 2011.
- Kui, Ryoko. '*Delicious in Dungeon*'. Volumes 1-14, New York: Yen Press. 2017-2024.
- Kushner, Barak. 'Sweetness and Empire: Sugar Consumption in Imperial Japan'. In *The Historical Consumer*, edited by Penelope Francks and Janet Hunter, 127–50. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012.
- Leubering, J.E., ed. "Foil." *Encyclopædia Britannica*  
<https://www.britannica.com/art/foil-literature>. Accessed 6/03/2025.
- McGrath, Kenta. "White Pigs and Black Pigs, Wild Boar and Monkey Meat: Cannibalism and War Victimhood in Japanese Cinema." *(In)Digestion in Literature and Film*, 71-87. London: Routledge, 2020.  
doi:10.4324/9781003047889. Accessed 06/03/2025.
- McQuilland, Louis J. 'Food, Drink and Fiction'. *The Lotus Magazine* 8, no. 7, p. 333–35. (1917) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20543892> Accessed 06/03/2025.
- Miller, Lisa, Paul Rozin, and Alan Page Fiske. 'Food Sharing and Feeding Another Person Suggest Intimacy; Two Studies of American College Students'. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 28, no. 3, p. 423–36. (1998)  
[https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-0992\(199805/06\)28:3<423::AID-EJSP874>3.0.CO;2-V](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/(SICI)1099-0992(199805/06)28:3<423::AID-EJSP874>3.0.CO;2-V), Accessed 06/11/2024.
- Noda, Satoru. '*Golden Kamuy*', San Fransisco: Viz Media, 2017-2024.
- Nyamnjoh, Francis B., ed. *Eating and Being Eaten: Cannibalism as Food for Thought*. Oxford: Langaa RPCIG, 2018.
- Rath, Eric C. *Japan's Cuisines: Food, Place and Identity*. London: Reaktion Books, 2016.  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4882194>. Accessed 06/03/2025
- Riley, Kathleen C., Jillian R. Cavanaugh, and Susan D. Blum. "Tasty Talk, Expressive Food: An Introduction to The Semiotics of Food-and-Language." *Semiotic Review*, no. 5. 2017.

<https://www.semioticreview.com/ojs/index.php/sr/article/download/1/2?inline=1>

Accessed 05/11/2024.

Sanday, Peggy Reeves, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Shimabukuro, Mitsutoshi. *'Toriko'*, volume 1. San Fransisco: Viz Media. 2010.

Sunarti, Sastri, Ninawati Syahrul, Atisah Atisah, and Erli Yetti. 'The Rice Myths in Asia: The Comparative Literature Study'. In *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Democracy and Social Transformation, ICON-DEMOST 2021, September 15, 2021, Semarang, Indonesia. 2022.*

<http://eudl.eu/doi/10.4108/eai.15-9-2021.2315613> Accessed 06/02/2025

Ting, Grace En-Yi. 'The Desire and Disgust of Sweets: Consuming Femininities through Shōjo Manga'. *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, no. 54, 52-74. (2018.)  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27159866> Accessed 02/11/2024.

West, Harry "We Are Who We Eat With: Food, Distinction, and Commensality". *The MIT Press Reader*, 9 December 2021. <https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/we-are-who-we-eat-with/> Accessed 06/03/2025.