

The Everyday

Taiwanese

Kitchen



Recipes with love from

The Robot Book Club

The Everyday Taiwanese Kitchen

*Authentic Flavors and Comforting Recipes for
the Home Cook*

The Robot Book Club

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Preface

This book, and The Robot Book Club, is an experiment large scale AI generation. Every page, from layout to images to copy, was generated with zero human review.

The authoring and publishing teams were implemented in the Kaya scripting language. They were given only the input: Taiwanese.

This is the only page authored by a human: Hello there!

— Ted Benson

Prologue

Forget the silk-road fantasies. Forget the sanitized, white-washed approximations engineered for a gentrified palate. This is about what happens when you are five thousand miles from Taipei, it is a rainy Tuesday evening, and you desperately need a bowl of something that tastes like home.

Look at the modern diaspora kitchen. It isn't a museum of unattainable authenticity. It is a tired professional standing under the fluorescent glare of a local Kroger or Trader Joe's, hunting for the holy trinity of ginger, garlic, and scallions. It is the uncompromising demand for the unctuous, dark-soy-stained perfection of *Lu Rou Fan*, flatly refusing to call it a "pork ragout." It is the rhythmic, comforting chug of a dented Tatung steamer bubbling on the countertop, coaxing a cheap cut of pork rib and daikon radish into a broth so clear and restorative it could wake the dead.

Taiwanese food has never been precious. It is a scrappy, beautiful, fiercely resilient cuisine, forged by indigenous roots, complex histories of colonization, and the relentless, pragmatic adaptation of a people who know how to eat very, very well. This book honors that exact spirit. It is a roadmap for the rent-week budgets, the quick weeknight dinners, and the quiet, solitary moments of homesickness.

It understands that you might not have access to a bustling morning street market, but you can still harness the unapologetic alchemy of black vinegar, toasted sesame oil, and crispy fried shallots to make something sublime.

If that means hacking a frozen green onion pancake with a perfectly fried egg and a smear of chili crisp to get you through the morning, so be it. That isn't a compromise. That is survival. That is authentic because it is deeply, genuinely lived.

There are no white tablecloths here. There is no apologizing for the funk, the fat, or the glorious mess of a proper high-heat stir-fry. There is just a wok, a cutting board, and the soul of a culture insisting on its place at the table, exactly as it is.

Here is the everyday Taiwanese kitchen. Turn the burner on high. Let's get to work.



Chapter 1: Zaocan (早餐) - Saturday Morning Breakfast

Translating the high-heat, bustling energy of traditional Taiwanese breakfast shops into accessible home-kitchen methodologies for nostalgic weekend mornings.

The Taiwanese breakfast shop is a marvel of synchronized chaos. Flattops hissing, plastic bags snapping, the relentless chop-chop-chop of spatulas against blackened steel. It's a kinetic, high-heat ritual that cures whatever you did to yourself the night before. But bringing that specific energy into a quiet home kitchen takes a little translation. You don't need an industrial griddle or decades of muscle memory to make it work. You just need a frying pan, decent timing, and a healthy respect for the hustle.

Here, the nostalgic heavyweights of zaocan are stripped down for the home cook without losing an ounce of their soul. The snappy chew of a proper dan bing, the savory, curdled comfort of xian dou jiang, and the strangely perfect, mayo-laced breakfast sandwich. These are the reliable, unpretentious rites of a weekend morning, built from the supermarket up.



Dan Bing (蛋餅) - The Classic Taiwanese Egg Crepe

Original: 蛋餅

Dan Bing



If there is a dish that defines a Taipei morning, it is this. You walk the streets at 7:00 AM, and the air is thick with the hiss of batter hitting hot iron griddles. Dan Bing is pure, unpretentious genius—a thin scallion crepe fused to a blistered egg, wrapped around whatever you have in the fridge, and sliced for the road. Street vendors might use a kneaded dough that takes a lifetime to master, but down South they figured out a liquid batter that gets you that same chewy, crispy, perfect bounce with zero hassle. It is fast, forgiving, and the only right way to start your Saturday.

INGREDIENTS

3 tablespoons

soy sauce

2 tablespoons

water

1 1/2 tablespoons

brown sugar

1 large clove

garlic

1 teaspoon

cornstarch

1 tablespoon

cold water

1/2 cup

all purpose flour

2 tablespoons

cornstarch

3/4 cup

cold water

1/4 teaspoon

fine salt

2

scallions

4

large eggs

4 teaspoons

cooking oil

to taste

assorted fillings like cheese ham or

sweet corn

PREPARATION

- **Combine the soy sauce, water, and brown sugar in a saucepan over medium-low heat.**

Stir until the sugar dissolves and it simmers, then whisk in a slurry of the one teaspoon of cornstarch and one tablespoon of cold water until it thickens like warm maple syrup. Pull it off the heat, stir in the grated garlic, and let it cool.

- **Whisk the flour, two tablespoons of cornstarch, salt, and three-quarters cup of cold water in a bowl until smooth.**

Stir in the chopped scallions and let it sit for ten minutes to hydrate. It should look thin and watery, much like heavy cream.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Heat a lightly oiled skillet over medium and pour in a quarter cup of the stirred batter.**

Lift and swirl the pan immediately so it forms a thin, even circle about eight inches across. If it sets the second it hits the metal, your pan is too hot.

- 2 Cook until the edges curl and the bottom spots brown, then flip and cook briefly before removing.**

Slide the cooked crepe onto a plate and repeat the process until all the batter is gone, giving it a good stir each time to keep the starch from settling.

- 3 Drop the heat slightly, add a splash of oil, and crack an egg directly into the pan.**

Quickly break the yolk and scramble it into a rough circle. While it is still wet and runny, slap a cooked crepe right on top of it and press down gently so they bond.

- 4 Flip the entire thing over so the cooked egg faces up.**

Line the center with a slice of cheese, a piece of ham, or a spoonful of sweet corn, and let it go for a few seconds until things start to melt.

1 Tightly roll the crepe into a cylinder around the fillings.

Slide it onto a cutting board, hack it into bite-sized pieces, and drench it in the garlic soy paste before it gets cold.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip the cornstarch.**

That is what gives the crepe its signature bounce and chewy texture.

You can even use a gluten-free flour blend and it still works, provided you keep the starch.

- **Control your pan heat.**

If the batter sets the second it hits the metal, pull the pan off the flame for ten seconds before swirling the next batch.

- **Let the crepe release naturally.**

If it tears when you try to flip it, you either spread it too thin, did not use enough oil, or tried to move it before the edges visibly dried out.

Xian Dou Jiang

Original: 鹹豆漿

sh-yen doh jyahng



If you walk the scooter-choked streets of Taipei at dawn, you will find the soul of the city in a bowl of Xian Dou Jiang. It is less of a morning beverage and more of a brilliant, rapid-fire soup where steaming hot soy milk hits a splash of vinegar and instantly transforms into savory, silken clouds. It is a humble, glorious masterclass in contrasting textures that you can pull together in five minutes using entirely familiar pantry staples.

INGREDIENTS

3 cups

unsweetened pure soy milk

1 tablespoon

rice vinegar

2 teaspoons

soy sauce

1 teaspoon

toasted sesame oil

2 tablespoons

sauerkraut

1

scallion

2 teaspoons

chili crisp

1 cup

french baguette cubes

PREPARATION

- **Finely mince the sauerkraut.**

You want it small enough to distribute evenly and provide a tangy crunch in every bite.

- **Thinly slice the scallion.**

- **Toast the baguette cubes.**

Toast them heavily in an oven or pan until they are entirely crisp and dry so they hold up in the broth.

INSTRUCTIONS

- **4 Prepare the serving bowls.**

Divide the rice vinegar, soy sauce, and toasted sesame oil evenly between two medium soup bowls.

2 Add the savory base ingredients.

Drop half of the minced sauerkraut and half of the scallions into each bowl, keeping your toasted bread chunks nearby.

3 Heat the soy milk just to the edge of boiling.

Pour the soy milk into a medium saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally until it steams heavily and simmers slightly around the edges.

4 Pour the hot milk into the prepared bowls from a slight height.

The height agitates the mixture so the vinegar instantly curdles the milk into soft ribbons; let the bowls sit undisturbed for about forty-five seconds.

5 Garnish and serve immediately.

Top generously with the toasted bread chunks and drizzle with chili crisp to your liking.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Check the soy milk label.**

This recipe will unequivocally fail if your soy milk contains stabilizers, gums, or flavorings. The only ingredients on the carton should be soybeans and water.

- **Fix a stubborn curd.**

If the milk does not curdle, it simply was not hot enough when poured. Microwave the bowl for thirty seconds to force the proteins to coagulate.

- **Seek out the traditional crunch.**

If you find yourself at an Asian grocer, pick up pickled mustard stems and frozen Chinese crullers to swap in for the sauerkraut and baguette.

The Taiwanese Breakfast Sandwich

Original: 台式三明治

Tái shì sān míng zhì



Dawn in Taipei smells of hot oil, toasted bread, and scooter exhaust. The local corner breakfast shop is a masterclass in efficiency, serving up impossibly soft, crustless sandwiches slathered in a distinctly sweet, translucent mayonnaise. It is a brilliant, high-low collision of pillowy milk bread, crisp cucumber, salty ham, and a violently hot fried egg, wrapped tightly in plastic for the commuter rush. For the home kitchen, bypassing the delicate emulsion of raw yolks by spiking Japanese Kewpie mayo with a hit of sugar is a fast, dirty, and absolutely perfect hack, getting this iconic morning comfort food onto the plate in minutes.

INGREDIENTS

4 slices

Asian style white milk bread

3 Tbsp

Japanese mayonnaise

1 tsp

Granulated white sugar

1/4 cup

Persian cucumber

2 slices

Thinly sliced deli ham

1

Large egg

1 tsp

Neutral cooking oil

2 Tbsp

Pork floss

1 pinch

Ground white pepper

1 pinch

Salt

PREPARATION

- **Wash and thinly slice the cucumber diagonally to create paper-thin rounds.**

Avoid standard waxed cucumbers as they hold too much water; Persian or English cucumbers are best.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 4 Whisk the mayonnaise and sugar together in a small bowl until the sugar dissolves completely.**

This mimics the iconic, sweet, and slightly translucent mayonnaise found in Taiwanese breakfast shops without the hassle of a raw egg emulsion.

- 6 Stack the four slices of bread and trim off the crusts with a sharp bread knife.**

Cutting them together ensures perfectly uniform squares, which is critical for the sandwich's delicate, cloud-like texture and final structural integrity.

- 7 Warm the ham slices in a skillet over medium heat for fifteen seconds per side, then set aside.**

- 8 Fry the egg in the same skillet with a drizzle of oil until the edges crisp but the yolk remains jammy.**

Season the egg lightly with a pinch of salt and ground white pepper.

- 9 Smear a thin, even layer of the sweetened mayonnaise on the first slice of bread and top with the sliced cucumber.**

Spread the mayonnaise entirely edge-to-edge; it acts as a waterproof barrier to keep the wet cucumber from turning the tender bread into mush.

- 10 Smear mayonnaise on both sides of the second slice of bread, place it over the cucumber, and lay the fried egg on top.**

- 11 Coat both sides of the third slice of bread with mayonnaise, place it over the egg, and add the warmed ham and pork floss.**

- 12 Spread mayonnaise on one side of the final slice of bread and place it mayo-side down to crown the sandwich.**

Press down gently with your palm to compress the layers, then slice diagonally corner-to-corner with a serrated knife to reveal the vibrant strata inside.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Serve immediately with a warm glass of fresh soy milk or a strong black breakfast tea.**

The rich, sweet, and savory elements of the sandwich demand a beverage that can cleanse the palate between bites.

Tie Ban Mian - Iron Plate Black Pepper Noodles

Original: 鐵板麵

Tie Ban Mian



At seven in the morning in Taipei, the air belongs to the relentless, aggressive sizzle of the flat-top griddle. Tie Ban Mian is a glorious, chaotic collision of East and West, dragging night market steakhouse flavors—butter, ketchup, and unapologetic black pepper—into the daylight to feed people who need real calories to face the day. For the home cook, standard spaghetti stands in perfectly for alkaline oil noodles, soaking up a glossy umami-bomb of a sauce that requires nothing more than a hot cast-iron pan and the absolute commitment of a liquid egg yolk broken right over the top.

INGREDIENTS

2 Tbsp

Unsalted butter

1/2 medium

Yellow onion very finely minced

3 cloves

Garlic minced

1.5 to 2 Tbsp

Coarse black pepper

2 Tbsp

Ketchup

2 Tbsp

Oyster sauce

2 Tbsp
Worcestershire sauce

1 Tbsp
Soy sauce

1 Tbsp
Granulated sugar

1 cup
Water or low sodium chicken broth

1 Tbsp
Cornstarch mixed with two
tablespoons cold water

8 oz
Dried spaghetti

1 Tbsp
Neutral cooking oil

2
Large eggs

PREPARATION

- **Mix the sauce base.**

In a small bowl, whisk together the ketchup, oyster sauce, Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce, and sugar.

- **Prepare the cornstarch slurry.**

In a separate small dish, mix the cornstarch with the cold water until completely smooth.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 7 Cook the noodles until al dente.**

Boil the spaghetti in heavily salted water according to the package directions, then drain, toss with a tiny drizzle of oil to prevent sticking, and set aside.
- 6 Build the aromatic base.**

Melt the butter in a skillet over medium-low heat, then add the minced onion and garlic, sautéing gently for 3 to 4 minutes until soft and highly fragrant.
- 5 Toast the black pepper.**

Add the coarse black pepper to the butter and onions, stirring constantly for 30 seconds to wake up the essential oils and deepen the heat.
- 4 Simmer the black pepper sauce.**

Pour in the pre-mixed ketchup and oyster sauce base, followed by the water or broth, and let the mixture bubble gently over medium heat for 2 minutes.
- 3 Thicken the sauce into a glossy gravy.**

Give the cornstarch slurry a quick stir, slowly pour it into the simmering sauce while stirring continuously, and reduce the heat to low once it is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon.

13 Fry the eggs.

In a separate non-stick pan, fry the eggs sunny-side up until the whites are set with crispy, lacy edges, but the yolks remain perfectly liquid.

14 Sizzle and toss the noodles.

Heat a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat with a splash of oil, toss in the cooked spaghetti to hear that signature sizzle, and immediately pour the warm black pepper sauce over the top, tossing vigorously for 1 to 2 minutes until absorbed.

15 Plate and break the yolk.

Divide the noodles between two warm plates, crown each with a fried egg, and instruct everyone at the table to ruthlessly mix the liquid yolk into the dark, peppery sauce before taking a bite.

CHEF'S NOTES

• **The spaghetti shortcut is perfectly authentic.**

While breakfast shops use specialized alkaline oil noodles, standard dried spaghetti mimics the necessary chew remarkably well and has the structural integrity to stand up to heavy, aggressive tossing.

• **Turn it into a night market dinner.**

True to its Taiwanese steakhouse roots, this dish easily welcomes a pan-seared pork chop, boneless chicken thigh, or sirloin cutlet sliced directly over the noodles.

- **Vegetarian adaptation.**

Swap the traditional oyster sauce for vegetarian mushroom oyster sauce to easily accommodate a plant-based diet without losing any of the deep, caramelized umami.

Jiucengta Cong Zhua Bing Jia Dan

Original: 九層塔蔥抓餅加蛋

jiu-ceng-ta cong zhua bing jia dan



A proper Taiwanese breakfast isn't just fuel; it is a glorious, fat-slicked event. Walk down any alley in Taipei at dawn, and you will find the undisputed king of the morning rush: a pan-fried, fiercely scrunched scallion pancake, shattered into hundreds of crispy layers. Smashing this laminated marvel into a fresh egg and a handful of wildly aromatic Thai basil elevates it from simple flatbread to something deeply soulful. Thanks to the modern freezer aisle, you can replicate this street-side masterpiece in your own kitchen in under ten minutes.

INGREDIENTS

1
frozen scallion pancake

1
large egg

1/4 cup
fresh Thai basil leaves

1 tsp
neutral cooking oil

1 pinch
salt

1 pinch
white pepper

2 tbsp
soy sauce

1 tbsp
brown sugar

1 tsp
cornstarch

1 tbsp
cold water

1 tbsp
Sriracha

1 tbsp
honey

PREPARATION

- **Combine the soy sauce and brown sugar in a small saucepan over medium-low heat.**

Once bubbling, stir in a slurry made from the cornstarch and cold water, stirring constantly for about a minute until the sauce is glossy and thick, then set aside to cool.

- **Mix the Sriracha and honey in a small bowl.**

This creates an instant, flawless substitute for traditional Taiwanese sweet chili sauce.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 7 Fry the frozen pancake in a non-stick skillet over medium-high heat with a single drop of oil.**

Cook for about three to four minutes until golden brown and starting to puff, then flip it over.
- 6 Scrunch the pancake to shatter the crust.**

Using two spatulas, aggressively push the opposite edges of the pancake toward the center to force the internal dough layers to separate and fluff, then remove it to a plate.
- 5 Crack the egg directly into the center of the skillet and lightly break the yolk.**

Immediately scatter the fresh basil leaves directly onto the wet egg and season with salt and white pepper.
- 4 Press the scrunched pancake firmly on top of the cooking egg.**

Do this before the egg sets entirely so it binds to the flaky dough, trapping the basil underneath to steam its aromatic oils straight into the bread.
- 3 Flip the assembly over to sauce and fold.**

Once the egg adheres, turn it over, slather it generously with your thick soy paste and sweet chili sauce, roll it up tight, and eat it immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Let the supermarket do the heavy lifting.**

Brands from Asian grocers or Trader Joe's make excellent frozen scallion pancakes that are specifically designed to puff and laminate without any from-scratch hassle.

- **Sweet basil can substitute for Thai basil in a pinch.**

It yields a softer, sweeter profile rather than the sharp, licorice-forward punch of the original, but still makes for an excellent breakfast.

Luobo Gao Jia Dan (蘿蔔糕加蛋) - Pan-Fried Radish Cake with Egg

Original: 蘿蔔糕加蛋

Luobo Gao Jia Dan



Walk down a humid Taipei street on a Saturday morning, and you will hear the rhythmic clatter of spatulas and smell the sizzle of garlic. At the heart of this street-corner symphony is Luobo Gao Jia Dan, a dense radish cake pan-fried until audibly crispy, then bound in a scallion-studded egg. There is no shame in using a high-quality, store-bought cake here; the true art lies entirely in the patience of the pan-fry. You are looking for what locals call *cha cha*—a blistered, deeply golden crust that shatters against the teeth before yielding to a steaming, tender center. Served with a pungent swipe of sweet-and-savory garlic soy paste, it is a magnificent, unpretentious breakfast achievable in any home kitchen.

INGREDIENTS

1 block (approx. 400g)

Store bought radish cake

2 tablespoons

Neutral cooking oil

2 to 3

Large eggs

1 stalk

Scallion

1 pinch

Sea salt and white pepper

2 tablespoons

Taiwanese soy paste

1 clove

Garlic

1/2 teaspoon

Sugar

PREPARATION

- **Slice the radish cake into rectangles.**

Cut the block into uniform pieces roughly half an inch to three-quarters of an inch thick.

- **Pat the slices entirely dry with a paper towel.**

This is the most crucial step; any residual surface moisture will cause the oil to splatter and force the cake to steam instead of fry.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 4 Mix the scallion egg.**

Crack the eggs into a medium bowl, add the finely chopped scallion, salt, and white pepper, and beat vigorously until the yolks and whites are fully combined and slightly frothy.

16 Whisk together the dipping sauce.

In a small bowl, combine the soy paste, grated garlic, and sugar, adding a few drops of warm water if the mixture needs thinning to a drizzly consistency.

17 Heat the oil until shimmering in a large skillet over medium-high heat.

A well-seasoned cast-iron or large non-stick pan works best here.

18 Lay the radish cakes into the pan and leave them completely undisturbed for five minutes.

You should hear an immediate, violent sizzle; do not move them until the bottom develops a deep, blistered golden-brown crust known as cha cha.

19 Flip the cakes and fry the second side for another five minutes.

Gently turn each piece with a spatula and wait until the other side is equally golden and crispy.

20 Reduce the heat and pour the egg mixture over the sizzling cakes.

Let the egg set for about thirty seconds, then gently fold the edges over the cakes or flip the entire mass like a rough pancake to briefly cook the other side.

21 Slide onto a plate, drizzle heavily with the garlic soy paste, and serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Hack your own soy paste.**

If you cannot find Taiwanese soy paste, mix two tablespoons of standard soy sauce with one tablespoon of dark brown sugar and a slurry of half a teaspoon of cornstarch mixed with cold water, then microwave for fifteen seconds until thick.

- **Prevent sticking with patience.**

Ensure the pan is properly preheated before adding oil, and never try to flip the cakes too early; the starches will naturally release once a proper crust has formed.

- **Make it a heavier meal.**

Feel free to add diced ham, cooked bacon bits, or a spoonful of canned corn to the beaten egg mixture before pouring it into the pan.

- **Bring the heat.**

Drizzle with Sriracha, chili crisp, or Dongquan Chili Sauce to provide an acidic, fiery counterpoint to the rich, starchy oiliness of the fried cake.

Tuna and Corn Dan Bing

Original: 鮪魚玉米蛋餅



In Taipei, breakfast isn't just a meal; it's a finely tuned, scooter-dodging daily ritual. The dan bing—a soft, slightly chewy egg crepe born from post-war wheat subsidies and Northern Chinese ingenuity—is the undisputed king of the morning rush. This modern iteration is a beautiful, unapologetic collision of cultures, wrapping the nostalgic comfort of an American tuna melt inside a toasted flour tortilla. It's the kind of fast, unpretentious, highly satisfying food you want on a lazy Saturday morning, requiring nothing more than a hot skillet and a quick raid of the pantry.

INGREDIENTS

5 oz

canned tuna

3 tablespoons

canned sweet corn kernels

2 tablespoons

mayonnaise

1/4 teaspoon

ground white pepper

3

large eggs

1

scallion

1/4 teaspoon

kosher salt

1 teaspoon

toasted sesame oil

1 tablespoon

neutral cooking oil

2

large flour tortillas

2 slices

American cheese

2 tablespoons

soy sauce

1 tablespoon

sweet chili sauce

1 teaspoon

sugar

PREPARATION

- **Drain the canned goods ruthlessly.**

Water is the enemy of a crisp dan bing; squeeze the tuna dry and pat the corn with a paper towel before mixing.

- **Mix the dipping sauce.**

Whisk the soy sauce, sweet chili sauce, and sugar together in a small ramekin until the sugar dissolves.

- **Chop the scallion.**

Finely mince the entire green onion, utilizing both the white and green parts.

INSTRUCTIONS

- **-6 Mix the tuna salad filling.**

In a small bowl, aggressively fork together the drained tuna, corn, mayonnaise, and white pepper until completely cohesive.

- **-5 Beat the egg binder.**

In a separate pouring jug, whisk the eggs, chopped scallion, salt, and toasted sesame oil until no streaks of albumen remain.

- **-4 Preheat the skillet.**

Place an 8 to 10-inch non-stick skillet over medium heat and swirl in the neutral oil to coat the bottom evenly.

- **-3 Sear the egg and fuse the wrapper.**

Pour half the egg mixture into the pan, swirling to form an even circle, and immediately press a flour tortilla directly into the wet egg.

- **-2 Flip the crepe and layer the filling.**

Once the egg cooks and adheres to the tortilla—about 45 seconds—slide a spatula underneath, flip the entire thing over, turn the heat to low, and place a slice of cheese and half the tuna mixture in a horizontal line across the bottom third.

22 Roll it tight and toast the seam.

Give the cheese 30 seconds to begin melting, then use your spatula and fingers to fold the bottom edge over the filling, rolling it upwards into a tight cylinder and pressing the seam into the pan to seal.

23 Slice crosswise and serve hot.

Move the rolled dan bing to a cutting board, chop it into one-inch, bite-sized medallions, and serve immediately with the dipping sauce.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The authentic batter option.**

If you want the traditional chewy texture of Taiwanese street food, whisk half a cup of all-purpose flour, two tablespoons of tapioca starch, three-quarters of a cup of water, and a pinch of salt. Let it rest for ten minutes, then use a third of a cup of this batter cooked in a skillet in place of the tortilla.

- **The cheese rules.**

Processed American cheese is actually the highly authentic, supreme melting choice of Taiwanese street vendors, but shredded mozzarella or mild cheddar work well in a pinch.