



Married owner Tsuo Wen-chan offers handmade sticky rice free of any chemicals. The shop works hard to maintain its old-style delicious flavors and a concern for customers' health.

Taichung's 5th Market: Filled with affection

Heartwarming stories from an old market

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As author Liu Ke-hsiang asks about Taichung's traditional markets in his book, "Market for Men", "What comes to mind as this city's most representative traditional market? I would say the 5th Market, behind Zhong Xiao Elementary School. It provides everything, including the beauty of life, that is worthy of writing about."

The 5th Market was once known as the "5th Department Store". During the Japanese colonial era, vendors there mainly sold preserved vegetables, but the market gradually became a hub for daily necessities. With over 80 years of history, the tiny market offers all one needs and is surrounded by residential areas and government-employee dormitories. Anyone walking through this flourishing area will also appreciate its pleasant atmosphere.

Taichung's 5th Market was established in January, 1938 on the northwestern side of Shang Gong Elementary School (today's Zhong Xiao Elementary School) during the Japanese colonial period and was surrounded by government administrative offices, educational institutions and public-servant dormitories. After World War II, an influx of immigrants from China brought a greater variety of products and concepts to the market.

In the modern Internet age, it is common for bloggers to introduce eateries in Taiwan's many traditional markets, including special delicacies found at the 5th Market. Sought out by bloggers who believe that traditional-style markets are in a gradual decline, highlighted spots have mostly been take-out food places where customers line up and well-known grocery vendors. Several old shops at the market have retained decades-old traditional flavors and many stores are the source of treasured,

touching stories, impressing visitors as they explore.

Lequn Breakfast's Taiwanese Huangqiao Sesame Pancakes

Lequn Breakfast is among the famous line-up eateries publicized in the blogosphere. Born in 1945, store owner Mama Chen started helping her mother out in a grocery store when she was 8. After getting married, she and her husband opened a rice-selling business but didn't make much money. Later, after meeting a military veteran surnamed Fei from China's Jiangsu province, she decided in 1961 to turn her mom's grocery store into a breakfast place, and Lequn Breakfast became famed for its Master Fei's Savory Pancakes and Scallion Pancakes.

However, Mr. Fei often suffered from stomach problems and had a gambling addiction, which meant he frequently showed up late for work. Thus, Mama Chen used the skills learned from Fei to make her own savory pastries, including pan-fried buns, sesame bread, scallion pancakes and triangular-shaped bread. Soon after the breakfast shop opened, Mr. Fei passed away and, as he didn't have any relatives in Taiwan, Mama Chen took care of his cremation service. In the end, she also decided to promote Fei's authentic Huangqiao sesame pancake recipe via Lequn Breakfast in the 5th Market.

A popular store founded on family affection: Wandong Meatballs

Wandong Meatballs is run by 5th Market president Li Hsi-tung, who has remained busy promoting 5th Market events and activities in recent years. Li was born in 1959 and grew up in a Nantun family which had been farming for generations. The family's eldest son believed that studying hard would bring good business, so he became an educator, while Li himself decided to become a businessman, starting out as an apprentice in junior high school. When he turned 19, he began working at the famous Wanwun Meatball Shop in Taichung's First Market. Although he originally was supposed to serve as an assistant, the departure of three out of the eight meatball masters at the shop meant that he ended up working in their place. Although it usually took apprentices three to four months to simply master meatball-making, Li was running his own business 18 months later.

In 1978, his family supported him by selling a hectare of farmland to buy two stores at the popular, high-end 5th Market district. Since then, Li has worked hard to establish a good reputation for his fish paste and meatball business, and Wandong Meatballs has become a trendy place for visits by bloggers and the media.

Tour guide: Tsai Chin-ding

Well-known Taichung cultural expert and historian Tsai's parents worked as fish vendors in a traditional market, and the pork vendor used to be his napping place. His academic research includes the cultural economy and social studies, and he has a special interest in the subject of socially-marginalized groups of people.



- 1.2. The 5th Market presents neat and uniform store signs together with creativity in its interior, lacking the messy chaos and noise of many other traditional markets.
3. Hsi Tung-li's Wandong Meatballs is a must-visit in the market.

As 5th Market president, he faces the challenges of an overall decline in traditional markets, sadly noting, "Customers' consuming habits have changed. Young people mainly request pre-cooked food. Therefore, we will eventually have to confront the decline of traditional markets, and the key point now is to slow this trend." Towards this goal, he has maintained his old shop while trying hard to transform. To prove that traditional market brands are still up-to-date, Wandong Meatballs will



1. Wandong Meatballs' second-generation owners have opened Wandong Rice Pudding on LeQun Street, selling both cooked and uncooked items in a symbol of the market's transformation and commitment.
2. Home of the Rice Cake, selling charming and delicious rice cakes and rice-made snacks, holds precious memories for many locals.
3. Lienfa Noodle Factory features several types of noodles.

be collaborating with a popular hot pot chain from this year, providing 600 kilograms of product per month.

Seeking the traditional flavors of handmade rice cakes

"Home of the Rice Cake" has been in business for the past six decades, attracting many loyal customers who come for a taste of classic dry rice noodles. From 1957, owner Mr. Won sold dry rice noodles, tapioca, vermicelli and flat noodles in the summer, and rice cakes, radish cakes and rice balls in the winter. All of his specialties were learned a long time ago and customers lined up for his most popular item, sticky rice cakes.

Unfortunately, he passed away last July, taking his specialties with him. Because his wife wanted to keep her husband's old shop going, his daughter decided to help out by learning rice cake-making skills.

With emotion, Ms. Won notes, "The art of making rice cakes is difficult and strong arms are required. My father did not want me to learn this because it is rare for girls to perform such challenging cookery. He was in this business until he was 80 years old, and many old customers would return to him, looking for the old-style flavors. Many wept when they found out that he had passed away, and that made me sad, too."

Her mother injured her spinal cord due to long hours of standing at the shop, but she remains determined to look after the business. Together, mother and daughter offer many types of rice cakes, while Ms. Won's brother ships the ingredients to the market during holidays. The family often prepares delicious rice cakes together, honoring their father at the same time.

The noodle maker: Lienfa Factory

(Uncle Yen's) Lienfa Noodle Factory is one of the most highly-recommended stores in the 5th Market. Uncle Yen, also known as Chi Lin, was born in Taichung's Shengang district. After learning noodle-making techniques, he opened a business in his home district (then a town). In 1966, Lin and his family moved to the city and lived in an illegal house on the banks of the Liuchuan Canal. (Note: With the relocation of the ROC government to Taiwan under Chiang Kai-shek after World War II, many immigrant families settled along the canal. However, their great numbers meant that many illegal houses were built along its banks.) Lin's son, Lin Lung-tien was only 3 when they moved to Taiwan, and his father started his noodle-making business with a cart pushed along the market streets.

In the beginning, Lin spent a lot buying flour to make noodles, which were easily ruined in the heat and humidity. Life was tough, as they had to give away leftover noodles for free every

day. However, he also became well-known for the chewy noodles he made. Eventually, the Lin family moved into the market and established their own store in 1972. Today's second-generation owner, Lin Lung-tien, spent his childhood in the attic above the store. He graduated from Tunghai University's Department of Food Science and used his professional degree to work in a food factory. However, when his father fell sick, Lin Lung-tien quit his job to continue his father's business for another 30 years.

Business at Lienfa Noodle Factory is excellent and it serves a variety of handmade noodles. The store plays music from the 1960s, as if recalling earlier times along the banks of the Liuchuan Canal. What continues to stand out here is the fact that the staff members are all relatives working together, showing the power of family love. Lin's nickname (Uncle Yen) was added to the Lienfa Noodle Factory name, so that local residents will not forget the origins of this decades-old store.

The generous Da Fan Roasted Chicken Restaurant

The owner of this restaurant, Mr. Li, was born in the Qingshui district. When he was young, he used to make meatballs and meat floss, and he opened his business at 5th Market in 1971. At that time, his neighboring vendor was an uncle from China who sold roasted chicken. While his neighbor's business was great, Li's was not. Then, in old age, his neighbor decided to pass on his roasted chicken business to Li. The uncle also generously provided his roasting methods and secret recipe. This led to the creation of the Da Fan (literally meaning "generosity") Roasted Chicken Restaurant.

The traditional chicken-roasting method takes quite a lot of work. Freshly-boiled chicken is marinated with soy sauce and over 10 kinds of herbs for an hour until it cools. The chicken is then simmered in a pot with sugarcane until the sweet flavors are fully absorbed. Once it cools off, the chicken needs to be placed in a refrigerator to tenderize.

Owner Li only sells 10 roasted chickens per day. His 35-year-old son grew up in the attic above the store and has sold chicken with his father since he was 20 years old. After two decades of working side by side, father and son notably share the same characteristic shy smile.

In the old days, there were many low-income families--known as "the merchants"--living in the market. These individuals sold small items during the day and slept in the attics above their shops at night. Each of them faced a variety of difficulties but are much better off in today's transformed era.

Many more delicacies can be found in the 5th Market,



Rong Quei Deep-Fried Vegetables has been in the market for 60 years. Considered high-end in the past, today its dishes are considered common vegetarian snacks.

including old-style Wen Chan Sticky Rice, Wen Zhou Wontons, and Rong Quei Deep-Fried Vegetables. Hard-to-find Shandong Buns and Cheng Ki Crab Paste have also brought swarms of customers to the market. Finally, the second-generation owners of Wandong Meatballs are opening a delicacy shop selling savory rice pudding and fish paste cuisine on LeQun Street.

The 5th Market is not falling apart and, in fact, the story of Taichung's traditional markets will continue. As you walk into the market, there isn't a trace of a distant or aloof attitude. Rather, what you'll see and experience are the beauty of humanity and a variety wonderfully-delicious eateries. 🌿