



WINTER 2021

Of Cool and Contrasts

COVER STORY

With Each Ending, a Beginning:
Hellos and Goodbyes in a Taipei Winter

TAI^台PEI^北

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EDITOR'S
INTRODUCTION

CITY OF CONTRASTS



To some, winter seems a gloomy season. But in Taipei, it's a joyous time of fun and festivities, a contrast of color and culture emerging against the gray backdrop of the colder months.

For this issue of *TAIPEI*, our theme is "Of Cool and Contrasts," and we invite you to discover all that surprises this city has to offer as we usher in this festive time.

Winter often gets us thinking about endings and new beginnings. So, it follows that our cover story takes a look at the end of a day, a season, and a year in Taipei, and the subsequent starts to each that follows quickly on their heels.

Jump next into our City Scene section, where we showcase the contrasts, twists, and turns created by the capital's unique mix of old and new. From the glory days of the Taipei railway system to the way ancient and modern sit side by side in the Shilin neighborhood, you won't want to miss these amazing stories.

Daily life, too, has its fair share of contrasts in Taipei. From the way in which old religious customs, such as worshipping the Tiger God, are kept alive, to the digital trends that are reshaping creativity in the city, we've got features exploring the many ways in which Taipei is keeping its past alive while embracing the future.

Another thing Taipei has come to embrace in recent years is accessible travel for tourists and locals with mobility issues. Check out our article on DuoFu Holidays, an agency opening up a world of travel to a segment of the population overlooked no more.

Of course, we can't get through winter without some good comfort food, and this season we're running the gamut through the sweet, the sour, the savory and the spicy, to make sure you know how to warm both body and soul when the weather turns cold.

And finally, we introduce you to a fascinating man, a brilliant professor who has brought the worlds of science and art together in ways you can't imagine.

All this and more, as *TAIPEI* takes winter in a warm embrace.

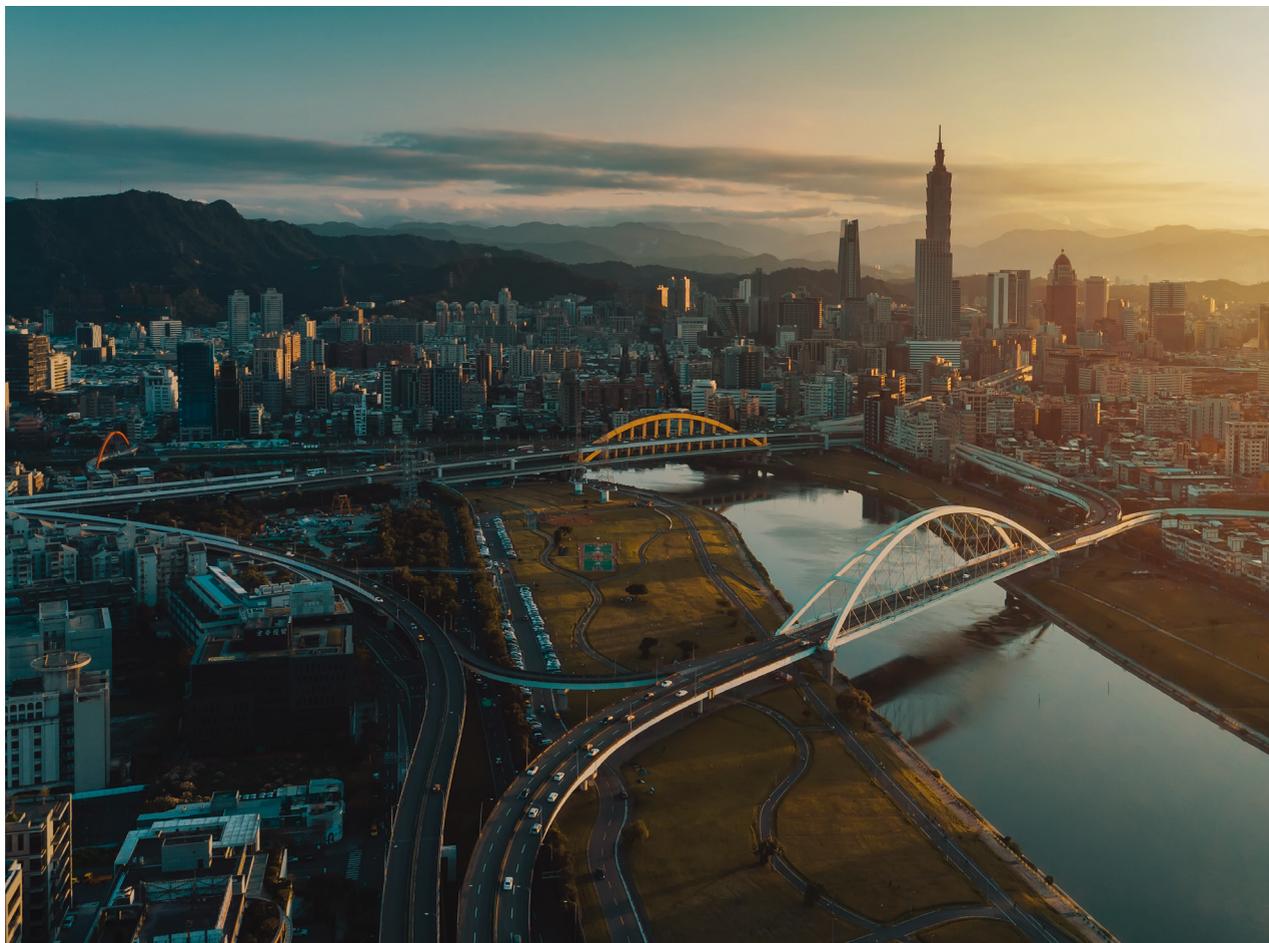
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- There are many private profile pictures published in this issue, hence no masks are worn by the figures present.



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WINTER 2021

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With Each Ending, a Beginning: Hellos and Goodbyes in a Taipei Winter

Author Rick Charette

Photographer Samil Kuo, Yengping, Taiwan Scene, Fleisch, Department of Information and Tourism, Taipei City Government

The strong contrasts experienced in a city are central in defining its unique character. Visitors to Taipei invariably go home with deeply etched memories of — for example — such cultural contrasts as how the city’s lovingly preserved works of heritage architecture stand side by side with bold, innovative modern architectural artworks, and how the people of this city revel in all the world’s latest tech trends while at the same time warmly embracing their home’s deep cultural inheritance, witnessed by tourists in such forms as busy centuries-old temples and the city’s legion of old-style shops and eateries run by their founders’ descendants.

With entry into the winter period, time seems to approach an end. Yet within the city’s spirit, the seeds of new journeys and new beginnings have already been planted, and burst open with great color with the dawn of each new day, new season, and new year. This Taipei season of endings and beginnings brings a cavalcade of dynamism, old and new and traditional and modern blending in unique ways to present a city that is fresh and original.

In these pages we’ll tell you all about how you can immerse yourself in the winter/spring turnover, showcasing the deep changes you can experience during a winter visit. From morning through night on a single day, we’ll explore the seasonal experiences local folks most enjoy as winter plays host to an arriving spring, and the cultural experiences you can be a part of as locals welcome the two “new” years — the Western-calendar new year on January 1, and the lunar-calendar year on February 1, 2022. The “contrasts” witnessed in these transitions will bring you a deeper understanding of this city’s one-of-a-kind personality.

01. For each new day, season, and year, Taipei offers unique contrasts that bring color to the city. (Photo/Department of Information and Tourism, Taipei City Government)



01



Your Start and End of a Taipei Day

Here is no surprise — the Taipei day rises in the east and sets in the west. The city's morning/evening contrast uniqueness is thus, mostly, provided by its geo-setting — it takes up much of an almost-sea-level basin surrounded by mountains and high hills, with a single river route to the nearby sea.

So, the key is getting up to high points to enjoy the local sunrises and sunsets. The area's highest points are way up in beautiful, sprawling Yangmingshan National Park (陽明山國家公園), at the crown of the mighty

Yangmingshan (陽明山, Mt. Yangming) massif. Various lookouts there provide magnificent views of sunrises, sunsets, and right down into the city itself. In the mornings, from most park lookouts there are unfettered views of the forest of peaks down-island coming to life. At the highest points, atop Mt. Qixing (七星山) and Mt. Datun (大屯山), there are also views north to the coast and ocean.

Back down in the basin, one of the best places to go for sunrises and sunsets is Elephant Mountain,



officially called Xiangshan (象山), immediately southeast of the heaven-scraping Taipei 101. High up on the popular Xiangshan Hiking Trail (象山親山步道), you'll find the glass of the Taipei 101 building and a forest of other shimmering facades sparkle to life as the sun pops up stage right. At dusk here, you can watch the sun slowly sink behind the mountains and feel the tranquility of nature away from the city. Don't forget to bring your camera, since it's worthwhile recording this beautiful moment!

Even if you cannot make it to Xiangshan, there is still a way to grasp the view. With the 4K Taipei Travel Live Cam (台北觀光即時影像), wannabe visitors can use their devices to see the coruscating views northwest across

the city past Taipei 101. You can virtually check the city's ever-changing moods 24 hours, throughout the transitioning days, seasons, and years. The cam periodically changes its angles and zooms in and out, continually providing new perspectives. Inside Taipei 101 itself, the 89th-floor Taipei 101 Observatory (台北101觀景台) offers a 360-degree panoramic view of the city and gives ocular access to dramatic eagle-eye sunset and night-scene landscapes.

Two other prime viewing venues are Bishan Temple (碧山巖) and Maokong (貓空). Bishan Temple, located in the Baishihu Recreational Agricultural Area (白石湖休閒農業區) in Neihu District, is perched high up on Mt. Bishan (碧山) and directly overlooks the Taipei Basin. Its location affords viewing of both sunrise and sunset rollouts.

The Muzha Tourist Tea Plantations (木柵觀光園區) in Wenshan District take up a side valley off the Taipei Basin. The many quaint and comfy rustic teahouses here, which also serve hearty cuisine, provide soothing sunset/night viewing, with the higher reaches of Taipei 101 seen off in the distance. The most popular way to get here is the thrilling ride over forest canopy in a Maokong Gondola (貓空纜車) car, enjoying the refreshing breeze above the leafy tea plantations.

02. Visitors to Bishan Temple can enjoy the grand view of neon lighting up the Taipei night. (Photo/Samil Kuo)

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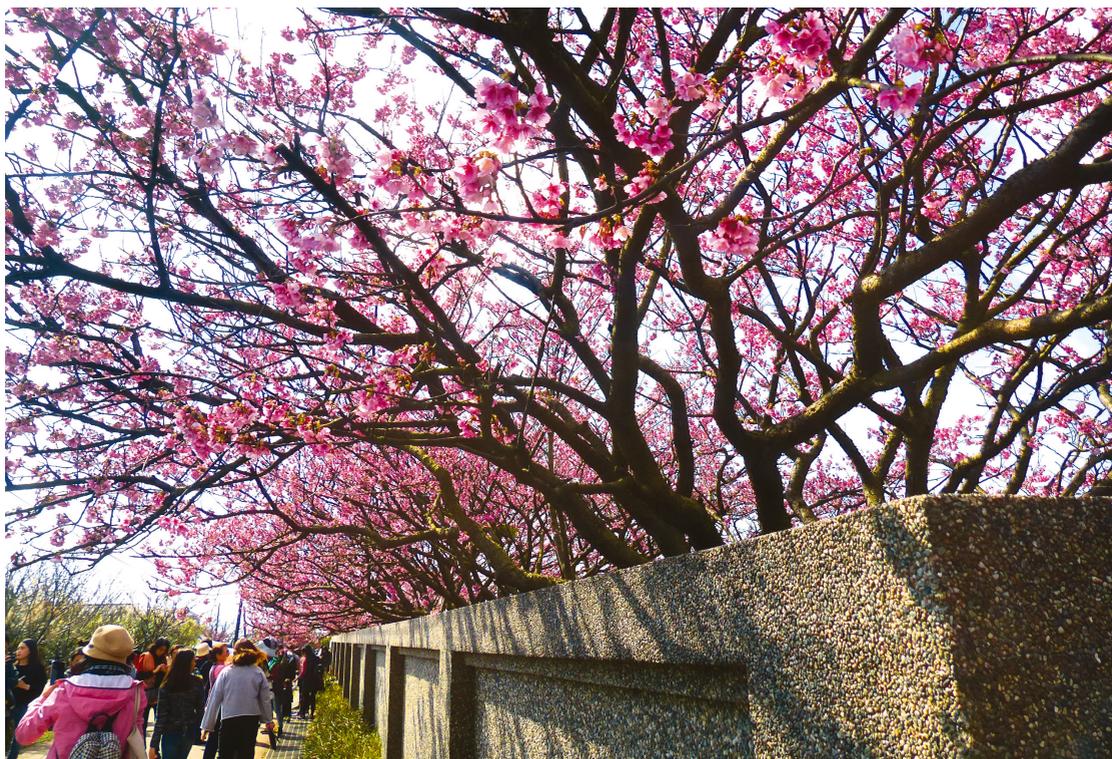
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02



03

Your Start and End of a Taipei Season

The Winter Solstice marks the formal beginning of winter (December 21 in 2021), while the Spring Equinox formally marks the end of the cold (March 20 in 2022).

The solstice is celebrated with the traditional Winter Solstice Festival (冬節), also known as *dongzhi* (冬至), literally meaning “winter’s extreme.” It’s believed that after this day, with daylight hours getting longer, more positive energy flows in. This is a time of family reunion, symbolized with the eating of *tangyuan* (湯圓), a type of small glutinous rice ball. Their round perfection represents the “perfection” of the full family together. The custom is for each family member to receive at least one large *tangyuan* in addition to numerous smaller ones, served in a bowl with either a sweet or savory soup. Moreover, eating *tangyuan* also attracts prosperity — the white ingot-like balls symbolize silver, the red symbolize gold.

In Taiwan, invigorating tonic foods are also taken during this festival, and throughout the cool winter period. The age-old belief is that this is a time akin to “hibernation,” when the metabolism slows, and tonic foods provide nourishing protection from the cold. Especially popular are dishes that are meatier and fattier, such as mutton hotpot and ginger duck stew.

If it so happens that you won’t be regularly sitting down at private homes with local families to dine, fret not — during the season these dishes will be readily findable at local night markets and other locations.

As January heads for February, warmth creeps back into the world as the sun’s rays linger ever longer, and thoughts of spring bloom. Taipei folks get outdoors to revel in the succession of iconic floral blooms that march through these months.

The expansive grounds of Chiang Kai-Shek Shilin Residence (士林官邸), home to a great many plum trees, is one of the most popular plum blossom viewing spots from January through February. From early February through March, Yangming Park (陽明公園), inside Yangmingshan National Park, is painted with cherry blossoms. And just before the Spring Equinox, Taipei's azaleas — the city's official flower — burst onto the stage. The two best azalea admiration locations are the National Taiwan University (國立台灣大學) campus and Daan Park (大安森林公園), both in the city's heart, with metro stations right on their doorstep.

The Spring Equinox, or astronomical start of spring, is marked with the eating of *chunjuan* (春捲), or spring rolls (also eaten during the Spring Festival/Chinese New Year). These rolls are comprised of a combination of fresh vegetables like shredded carrots, radish, bean sprouts, and cucumbers, with crushed peanuts and sugar serving as the final touches. Today the rolls are commonly fried, with pork or shrimp also added. Their shape and golden-brown color are said to echo gold ingots, and their consumption thus attracts good fortune for the coming year.



04

03. At the end of winter and the beginning of spring, cherry blossoms bloom in Yangmingshan, attracting lots of tourists. (Photo/Yengping)

04. With the flavors of shredded carrots, radish, crushed peanuts and more, eating fresh spring rolls is the best way to say hello to spring. (Photo/Taiwan Scene)

05. Eating *tangyuan* on the Winter Solstice Festival symbolizes a year's passing and the reunion of family. (Photo/Taiwan Scene)



05



Your End of an Old and Start of a New Taipei Year

If you thrill at the festivities and traditions involved in seeing out one year and ringing in the new — we've got some great news for you. Decide on an extended winter stay in Taipei, or visit twice during the season, and you can double your fun!

Taipei locals throw themselves into Western-calendar year-end Christmas and New Year celebrations. Then they do it all again about a month later, with a wholly different set of festivities and traditions, for the Lunar New Year, which shifts, falling anywhere from mid-January through mid-February. This extended joy-seeking season brings much warmth to the cool days.

Various areas of the city are festooned with Christmas decorations, bringing mirth to hearts. And as they should, things reach a crescendo on New Year's Eve, with the raucous joys of the jumbo-scale Taipei New

Year's Eve Countdown Party. The highlight draws are the hours-long parade of performing stars on a stage outside Taipei City Hall (台北市政府), and the famous midnight fireworks spectacular that envelops the Taipei 101 skyscraper, with hundreds of thousands attending.

The Lunar New Year holidays are primarily a time of quiet celebration with family and friends, but there are various busy public traditions that you can dive into. Before the holidays, locals clean their homes spic-and-span, to "sweep out the old and sweep in the new" — i.e., to sweep out bad luck and bring in new fortune. Goodies and other items must be bought, notably new clothing (especially auspicious red apparel), and commercial streets selling *nianhuo* (年貨), or "New Year goods," flow with happy folks in the weeks running up to Chinese New Year's Eve.

06





07

06. To welcome the New Year, people in Taipei count down to midnight in front of Taipei 101 as the splendid fireworks show begins. (Photo/Samil Kuo)

07. One of the traditions of the Lunar New Year is to shop for New Year goods such as jerky and sausages. (Photo/Yengping)

08. Souvenirs for the Lunar New Year are combined with traditional paper-cut goods, making it a festive gift for friends and family. (Photo/Fleisch)



08

The Taipei Lunar New Year Festival (台北年貨大街), centered on major heritage areas' commercial districts, is a huge draw. The star of the two-week-long shopping extravaganza, which features streets ablaze with colorful painted lanterns and other traditional decorations, many special deals, live demonstrations of traditional arts and crafts, and multi-language guided tours, is historic Dihua Street (迪化街), Taipei's oldest high street. This is northern Taiwan's greatest emporium for traditional goods, especially famed for traditional regional specialty goods, Chinese medicines, and fabrics.

As said, the local custom is to wear new clothing at the New Year, inviting good luck. Look for shops specializing in items with auspicious visuals, such as dragons (a symbol of royalty and nobility) and goldfish (wealth; as they resemble ancient Chinese gold ingots). You'll see these same motifs used on multifarious New Year decorative adornments as well.



► For more on all the seasonal travel joys that Taipei has in store for you, check here.

Drop in at Little Garden (小花園), opened in Shanghai in 1936, moved to Taipei in 1949. It brims with exquisite traditional embroidered shoes, purses, scarves, *qipao* (旗袍), children's outfits, and much else. You can choose items with such good-luck visuals as dragons and goldfish. Another choice for immersing yourself in New Year festivities and purchasing New Year goods is Fleisch (福來許), an elegant café/tea house/bar/restaurant in a renovated four-story building long home to Chinese-medicine firms, with the retro décor and staff attire bringing back Dihua Street's 1920s glory days. Unique themed items sold at the New Year include auspicious decorative hangings showcasing Taiwan's traditional paper-cut and embroidery art as well as Chinese zodiac animal table decorations, passport holders, and mobile-phone pouches.

Beyond the aforementioned guided tours of the area's heritage architecture and old shops, there are also DIY experiences led by craft masters, such as creating your own auspicious decorative spring couplets, a perfect way to sum up 2021 and start the new year with the best possible beginning. ◆

Straight Tracks, Winding History: Hop a Train to Taipei's Railway Department Park

Author Jenna Lynn Cody
Photographer Yenyi Lin

Near MRT Beimen Station (捷運北門站) sits a splendid example of Japanese-era architecture in Taiwan: the Railway Administration Building. Now the main building of the National Taiwan Museum Railway Department Park (國立台灣博物館鐵道部園區), it first opened in the 1920s, and was used by officials overseeing the Taiwanese railroad system. After a period of disuse and neglect, from the early portion of the 21st century, the park then underwent repairs and renovations for 16 years before reopening to the public in 2020.

Although train tracks are built in a straight line whenever possible, the history of Taiwan's railway system more closely resembles a curving, winding road, from the first railroad built under Qing Dynasty governor Liu Mingchuan (劉銘傳) in 1887 to the island-wide train system we enjoy today.

Looking at the past through the theme of modernization, the Railway Department Park invites visitors not only to learn about the history of Taiwan's railroads, but to admire both the vintage edifices and the restoration work done to create the park that exists today.

01



The Railway Administration Building

It was the Japanese colonial government's "trunk line (縱貫線)" railroad from Keelung (基隆) to Kaohsiung (高雄) that necessitated the creation of an administration building in the capital. The edifice, which sits across from Beimen (北門, the North Gate), boasts a brick first floor with an impressive Art Deco-style rounded entrance and grand staircase. The second floor, including the roof frame, is made of cypress from Alishan (阿里山), which boasts the most famous forest railway in Taiwan. In some rooms, the cypress fragrance still lingers.

The building remained in use throughout the Japanese era (1895-1945) and after World War II, and was abandoned around 1989. In 2005, an urban regeneration project was launched, leading to a 2009 cooperative effort with the National Taiwan Museum. Restoration began in 2014, and was completed in 2016. People nowadays can see how this building looked like in the 1990s, when it featured in the 1991 movie *A Brighter Summer Day* (牯嶺街少年殺人事件), directed by Edward Yang (楊德昌), and in the video for Chinese pop singer CoCo Lee's (李玟) 1998 hit "Di Da Di."



02

In addition to administrative offices, the building also contains a stunning Beaux Arts-inspired conference room. Called the Oval Hall for its dramatic oval ceiling, the sumptuous decorations incorporate tropical fruits, including pineapples carved into the column capitals. This room was not painted a uniform white upon restoration; instead, the mottled surface was kept to show how it was maintained over the years.

Now, the Administration Building and the other buildings in the annex showcase Taiwan's railway history throughout time.



03

01. The National Taiwan Museum Railway Department Park has recreated the glory days of Taiwan's railways in the early 1900s.

02. The magnificent entrance to the lobby has been used as a set for movies and music videos many times.

03. The oval ceiling is decorated with stucco sculptures, displaying fine craftsmanship that stands out in any age.

The Railway Culture Exhibition

The history of Taiwan's rail development curves and bends across centuries. Showcasing this is the Railway Culture Exhibition (鐵道文化常設展), divided into four sections exploring the past and discussing the role of modernization in rail travel.

Our Railways (咱的鐵支路) explores Taiwanese rail travel through the years. Liu Mingchuan's visionary railroad connecting Keelung to Hsinchu (新竹) was built in northern Taiwan in the 1880s. In Taipei, the old tracks ran along what is now Civic Boulevard (市民大道). However, due to the increasing demand for railway cargo transport, these tracks soon fell into disuse and disrepair as the track materials, designs and construction did not meet the requirements of modern use, prompting the Japanese government to hire Kinsuke Hasegawa (長谷川謹介) as chief engineer to take over the job.

In 1908, the same year that the north-south railway was completed, the Japanese moved these tracks to what are now Zhongxiao West Road (忠孝西路) and Zhonghua Road (中華路), where they essentially replaced the old city walls. However, travel from north to south in a day was impossible. That changed in 1956,

when the Fei Kuai line (飛快車, Limited Express) completed the journey in just 5.5 hours. Hot *bentos* (便當, lunch boxes) and pretty "Miss Express Train" attendants became shared cultural memories. Now, even faster trains, including the Taiwan High Speed Rail (台灣高鐵), have further revolutionized train travel around the country.

Trains History (火車日常) and *Railway Signals Explained* (解碼鐵路信息) look at the evolution of trains and the complexity of the systems that support them, including signals, bridges and tunnels. Vintage items, including old tickets, turnstiles, departure boards and train seats — set up in a long room at the back where you can sit in them and relax — are exhibited.

Modern Temporal and Spatial Order (現代性時空秩序) shows how trains connect people through both space and time. Changes in the location of train tracks, train stations and new branch lines such as the one to Tamsui (淡水) have certainly had a physical effect on Taipei City. However, they influenced Taiwanese cultural notions of time as well. Set departure schedules cultivated a new sense of punctuality: after all, the train is leaving whether you're on it or not!



04



05

04. From the ticket booths to the gates, replicas from the railway station's various periods throughout history can be seen everywhere in the museum.

05. The mini railway model gives people a glimpse of the train entering the fan-shaped garage for maintenance and overhaul.



06

The Canteen

Now a souvenir shop, classroom area and exhibition room, the old canteen for railway administration workers had not originally been attached to the main building. It was not completed until 1933, and remained separate until the expanding workforce caused additional offices to be built. Now, visitors can see how the beveled cypress exterior walls became interior walls.

In the past, the second floor of the canteen was reserved for higher-level officers, with regular workers eating on the first floor. The canteen is an excellent example of choosing preservation over perfect restoration. Along with the exterior-turned-interior beveled walls, the darker wood molding where the stairs between the two levels once stood was left intact.

06. The corridors have also been transformed into retro carriages, allowing railway fans to travel back in time.

07. The canteen in the park is a wooden Western-style building, with fine restoration from the ceiling to the windows.



07

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WEBSITE www.ntm.gov.tw/en/exhibitionlist_195.html



08

08. Various entertaining exhibitions in the Engineering Building are also set up for visitors to learn about the inner workings of Taiwan's railways.

09. Many machines used in the railway systems in the past can also be seen in the park.



09

The Power Building and Engineering Building

The Power Building was built around 1925, with the main function of powering the Railway Department's telegram, telephone and electrical timer systems. This was a generator room, which meant a lot of heat needed to be dissipated. Hence, covered sidewall openings were added for ventilation. After the 1970s, this building served as office space for a time, and is now used as a café.

The Engineering Building was built in 1934. It was used by the public works unit, and later the transport unit under the post-World War II government. Here, visitors can look a little deeper into the antique items left behind, and how decisions were made on what to keep and what to replace through an exhibition on the historic site itself.

Examples of the restoration effort include attempts to restore the site with items such as original roof tiles. Not all original tiles were in suitable condition for reuse, however, and new ones were also added. On a dry day, you can tell which is which by their color: the older tiles are darker. Attempts were also made to use old timber alongside new. This was a complex process necessitating the careful numbering and noting of different timbers, including cypress from Taiwan and Vietnam, that resulted in a quality restoration.

The Taipei Machinery Bureau

Near Exit 2 of MRT Beimen Station, an evocative stone wall with window cutouts stands, with exposed brick peeking out the sides. This was once the Taipei Machinery Bureau (台北機器局), founded in 1885 by Liu Mingchuan for the purpose of manufacturing ammunition and repairing firearms, as the Qing government in Taiwan did not have the ability to manufacture new ones locally. That said, it was a symbol of modernization and industrialization coming to Taiwan.

While restoring the site, an old cobblestone road was found near the Machinery Bureau. As most Taiwanese roads at that time were not paved, it is speculated that this flagstone road likely curved away from the Taipei City wall — specifically, through Beimen — to the first train station in Taipei, built to service Liu Mingchuan's original railroad.

The Wartime Command Center and the Octagon

The Railway Department Park also contains two interestingly-shaped buildings: the Wartime Command Center and the Octagon. The command center is also an air raid shelter. Originally built in 1943 in a bell shape, an outer wall was added 14 years later to create a rounded cement pyramid. Inside, a command room features a wall map of Taiwan; in the event of an attack, sheltering officials could visualize the situation across the island in real time. As railroads are of course vital to the functioning of a modern nation, it is no surprise that the Railway Department was deemed important enough to outfit with such a shelter.

Nearby sits a pretty octagonal building constructed of brick and gray concrete, which was built in 1919. Inside, an umbrella shaped roof is held up by beams radiating from a central column in a design meant to facilitate good ventilation. Around the central column are dividers, with doors leading to small rooms along the wall. Rounded notches in an outer wall — not quite inside the building — once held sinks. In short, this was once a men's restroom! It now houses further exhibits on the history of the Railway Department Park.

10. The special appearance of the octagon and its classical design meant that this room was considered the "most gorgeous toilet" at the time.

10



Taiwan's railway history is a journey through both time and physical space. Both within Taipei and across Taiwan, railroads have connected communities and changed notions about distance and time. Southern Taiwan was once a full day away by train, then a little over five hours, and now the journey can be made in less than two hours. Taipei's Railway Department Park also uses physical space to wind its way back through time, with mottled walls, exposed architectural features and vintage railway paraphernalia. A trip by train from Taipei might take you in a straight line, but the history behind such a trip is all curves. 📍

The Old and New of Shilin

Author Richard Williams

Photographer Taiwan Scene, Shilin Elementary School, Chung Cheng Foundation, National Center for Traditional Arts, Max Oh, Yengping, Taipei Performing Arts Center

Nestled between the peaks of Yangmingshan National Park and the winding Tamsui River (淡水河), Shilin (士林) has a history that goes back as far as the Qing Dynasty (清朝, 1636 A.D. – 1912 A.D.). Since the 1700s, it has been an important northern suburb of Taipei, a dining and cultural hub home to ancient temples and significant monuments.

Former president Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) and his fellow Nationalists also favored the area. Nearby they erected two of Taiwan's most famous landmarks — the Grand Hotel (圓山大飯店) and the National Palace Museum (國立故宮博物院). In Shilin proper, Chiang Kai-shek built his residence and lived here with his wife Soong Mei-ling (宋美齡) for 26 years.

In more recent years it developed into a fervent tourist hub with a world-famous night market. A huge number of shops, stalls, and carts — some with decades-long history — serve up traditional Taiwanese staples and modern regional cuisine, from *shuijianbao* (水煎包, pan-fried stuffed buns) and bubble tea (珍珠奶茶) to craft beer and Vietnamese noodle soup.

But it is not just foodies heading to Shilin. Culture connoisseurs also flock to the area. Opened in 2017, Taiwan Traditional Theatre Center (台灣戲曲中心) hosts operas and other performances with histories dating back hundreds of years. The humongous Taipei Performing Arts Center (台北表演藝術中心), expected to open in 2022, is the new cultural icon of the area.

Both venues have turned heads with their striking and innovative design. They stand next to and around the landmarks of ancient culture and recent history and the sprawling night market. This is Shilin, a district with one foot in the past and one foot in the future but firmly grounded in the two main joys of life, entertainment and food.

01



01. The architectural marvel of the Taipei Performing Arts Center has brought an atmosphere of increased innovation to Shilin. (Photo/Taipei Performing Arts Center)



02

02. Shilin Night Market is the place to go when locals and tourists alike want to enjoy some great food or just feel the big city vibes. (Photo/Max Oh)

Little Eats

Shilin Night Market (士林夜市) is Taipei's worst-kept culinary secret. Come nightfall, people from Taiwan and beyond flock to the streets of Shilin to binge on shopping, eating, and gaming. High schoolers and university students meet their pals or sweethearts after they get out of class. Taiwanese aunts and uncles meet with old friends, returning to shops and stalls they have visited for decades. Tourists make a beeline from the airport, keen to get an authentic taste of Taiwan's famous *xiaochi* (小吃) or little eats, the array of snacks that line the streets. In fact, people in Hong Kong and other nearby cities have been known to fly in especially for a food tour at Shilin Night Market.

Having been revamped in 2011, the new arrangement of Shilin Night Market popped the famous stalls into a food court underground, reserving street level for shopping and gaming. This is your go-to one-stop-shop for Taiwanese street food staples such as fried chicken, stinky tofu, squid balls, and pan-fried stuffed buns. More shops, restaurants, stalls and other eateries crowd the streets to the north of the new building. Pedestrian-friendly streets sit next to the odd ancient temple, with Japanese colonial-era buildings and the old market buildings in the mix as well, a taste of Taiwan and the region. It has long been the frying, steaming, bubbling, barbecuing, beating heart of Shilin.

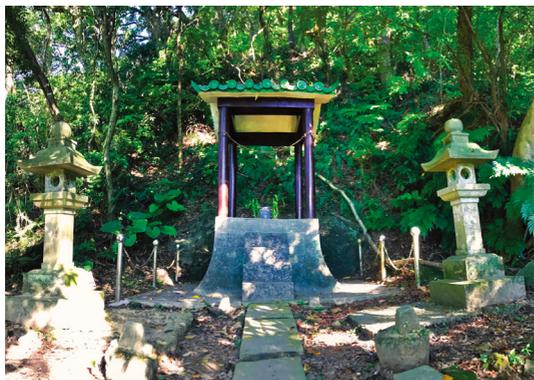
Bringing the Capital to Life with Running Water

One of only a handful of Shinto shrines left over from the Japanese colonial period, the Yuanshan Water Shrine (圓山水神社) is a fascinating yet often overlooked landmark. It tells a story of Taiwan's colonial past and Shilin's development throughout the 1900s.

Just a stone's throw from MRT Jiantan Station (捷運劍潭站), the secluded water shrine sits among beautiful hedge-lined gardens and a large lawn in Jiantanshan (劍潭山, Mt. Jiantan). It was once one of more than 200 Shinto shrines built by the Japanese when they ruled Taiwan from 1895 to 1945. Back then, one of the largest colonial projects was bringing running water to the burgeoning population of the capital. Around 1930, the Japanese began construction of a waterway system to funnel the abundance of rain on Yangmingshan down to a reservoir in Shilin.

The story goes that several of the engineers of the mega-project met with an accident and passed away during construction. Coworkers at the reservoir raised funds in their honor to build a shrine not only to the Shinto water god, but also as a memorial to their fallen colleagues.

03-04. Yuanshan Water Shrine marks the modern infrastructure left behind by the Japanese in Taiwan.



03

While most Shinto shrines were later removed or converted to more “Chinese” shrines, the Yuanshan Water Shrine escaped this fate thanks to the protection of the Yangming Branch of the Taiwan Water Corporation (自來水公司事業處陽明分處), which took over the site and revamped the shrine.

Stone lanterns flag a path up to a Chinese-style pavilion which now hosts the main shrine, a small wooden house that is home to the Shinto water god. The area is well-kept but still feels semi-forgotten. Aside from the main shrine you'll find a purification fountain, and some stone lions. If you're feeling adventurous (and have sturdy shoes on), head up one of the mountain paths to discover relics of the old reservoir, which was decommissioned and filled in the late 20th century.

04





05

Work and Play

Just as the Japanese developed and expanded Taiwan's infrastructure in Shilin, they also built other public buildings. The area's Bazhilian Public School (八芝蘭公學校) was the first educational institute established by the Japanese in Taiwan. An original wooden structure was later replaced by a brick school building in 1914, which still stands today. The facility was renamed Shilin Public School (士林公學校) in 1921, and finally became part of Shilin Elementary School (士林國小) as an important part of Shilin's regional history. The original arched windows and doors popular in the early 20th century remain intact on the old lecture hall, as does a grand entrance with traditional gateposts and a signboard which still reads Bazhilian Public School. Nowadays, it holds the school's historical artefacts, designated as important antiquities by the Ministry of Culture (文化部) in 2017.



06

05. The classic old building of Bazhilian Public School still stands on the campus of Shilin Elementary School. (Photo/Shilin Elementary School)

06. Pupils would exercise together on campus back in the times when the nation was under the Japanese education system. (Photo/Shilin Elementary School)

07. With its many different facilities, Taipei Children's Amusement Park provides a fun and relaxing place for both kids and adults.

It is not all work and no play in Shilin, however. The nearby Taipei Children's Amusement Park (台北市兒童新樂園) is the Disneyland of many young Taipei children's dreams. It is in some ways both the oldest and the newest amusement park in Taiwan. The Japanese built a children's amusement park in the Yuanshan (圓山) area in 1937. It changed hands a couple of times before the city government opened the latest reiteration in 2014. Families gather here all year round to enjoy some of the classic fairground rides, like the carousel, Ferris wheel, spinning tea cups and bumper cars.



07

Art Hub

Shilin's two most important modern cultural buildings are the Taiwan Traditional Theatre Center and Taipei Performing Arts Center. Established in 2016, the Taiwan Traditional Theatre Center is comprised of three striking, angular buildings with colorful straight lines reaching toward the sky. The two squat and one larger building are apparently inspired by two chairs at a table, which are the basic performing tools placed on the stage during performances of traditional Chinese theatre. They contain theaters, performance halls, and are the home of the Taiwan Music Institute (台灣音樂館), National Chinese Orchestra Taiwan (台灣國樂團), and GuoGuang Opera Company (國光劇團). People regularly come here from around the city to indulge in some Taiwanese opera or other traditional arts and music from Taiwan and around the globe. It also hosts the Golden Melody Awards for Traditional Arts and Music (傳藝金曲獎), which aims to mark the vitality of traditional arts.

08. The architectural design of the Taiwan Traditional Theatre Center carries elements of traditional Chinese theatre.
(Photo/National Center for Traditional Arts)

09. Performances at Taiwan Traditional Theatre Center often integrate traditional theatre with contemporary styles.
(Photo/National Center for Traditional Arts)



08

The Taipei Performing Arts Center is certainly a head-turner, with its space-age glass cube and a giant globe to one side and silver boxes protruding from two of the others. It is radical not just in how it looks, but how it works. The seats for the various auditoriums jut out from the main building, facing a stage area in the center of the large cube. This flexibility allows for endless possibilities for dynamic and sophisticated performances that are expected to bring performers from around the world.

09





10

Mansion of the Former President

Shilin Residence, which was a horticultural experimentation center under Japanese occupation, was turned into a residence for Chiang Kai-shek and his wife after their retreat to Taiwan. They lived very comfortably here among the orchid and rose gardens during the time when the island was ruled under martial law.

The veil was lifted in 1996 when the gardens were opened to the public. It is a wonderful place to wander among the traditional Chinese and Western-style gardens. Flower-lovers gather here for tulip and rose exhibitions in the spring and a chrysanthemum exhibition in autumn. In 2011 the main residence, including the living room, dining room and bedrooms, also opened to the public, allowing visitors to catch a glimpse of the living space of the former leader.

Locals and tourists alike now gather here to while away an afternoon. It is a symbol of Taiwan's transition from authoritarianism to democracy and another example of how Shilin modernizes while preserving its history. 



11



12

10. The Western-style main building of the Shilin Residence was once a horticultural research center. (Photo/Chung Cheng Foundation)

11-12. The once mysterious Shilin Residence is now open to the public, and has become a popular spot for locals and tourists. (Photo/Top: Chung Cheng Foundation; Bottom: Yengping)



Old buildings are critical elements for Taipei's landscape, contributing to the beauty of contrast in the city.
@ Lin An Tai Historical House & Museum



© Samil Kuo

The Gentle Beast Under the Table: A Guide to Worshipping Tiger God

Author Catherine Shih
Photographer Taiwan Scene

In Taiwan, people follow the folk culture of the 12 zodiac animals, with each animal representing a year and following this cyclic order: the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. In 2022, with the Year of the Tiger (虎年) arriving, *TAIPEI* dives into local customs and beliefs surrounding the Tiger God.

01. Tiger God is often hidden under the altar or sitting in a small cave at the corner of a temple, yet its importance is beyond measure for many Taiwanese.

02. In some temples, Tiger God's appearance includes an ancient coin placed in its mouth, as bringing wealth is one of its duties.

01





02

The Origins of Tiger God

When most people think of tigers, ideas of peace and protection are, unsurprisingly, not usually the first thoughts that come to mind. However, in Taiwan, that is not the case. *Huye* (虎爺), or Tiger God, whose origins date back all the way to ancient China, often functions more as a supporting deity rather than the main deity in folk religions such as Taoism. Tiger God is called in various ways according to the area it is worshipped in, the main deity it supports, and related legends of the region, sometimes also referred to as General Heaven Tiger (天虎將軍), General Flying Tiger (飛虎將軍), Venerable Garrison Deity of the Mountain (山軍尊神), Marshal under the Altar (下壇元帥), or General Black Tiger (黑虎將軍).

Since tigers are not actually native to the island of Taiwan, the image and concept of Tiger God undoubtedly originated in China. In traditional Chinese culture, taboos, and legends, the tiger's reputation for brutality and ferociousness in the eyes of Han (漢) Chinese triggered feelings of awe, as seen by its place in the Chinese zodiac as well as its highly revered (and sometimes taboo) place in weddings and funerals.

Nowadays, tigers are often considered auspicious yet menacing symbols, often excluded and isolated from large social gatherings, which serves to further highlight the complex emotions that they conjure in people's minds. This awe and reverence, combined with Taoist beliefs, is what has eventually evolved into the worship of Tiger God in contemporary folk religion today.

How Tiger God Appears

Mostly enshrined at the altar table or under the seat as a mount for main folk gods, Tiger God often appears in the shape and form of a tiger. In Taiwan's early days, its shape was mainly based on a prototype of the tiger. Only recently have some statues appeared in a figure of a semi-tiger, with a tiger head and human body or a human wearing a tiger hat. Representations of Tiger God are mostly comprised of wooden or stone carvings, with some carved in bronze or featured as pottery sculptures.

Most of Tiger God's expressions have human-like smiles with the corners of the mouth raised, plus a cat-like form to reduce its fierce tiger image, drawing a sense of closeness and affinity with its believers.

The Role & Duties of Tiger God

In temples dedicated to the Earth God, or Tudi Gong (土地公), Emperor Baosheng (保生大帝), King of the Western Qin Dynasty (西秦王爺), God of Wealth Zhao Gongming (財神趙公明), and Taoist ancestor Zhang Tianshi (道教祖張天師), Tiger God is often featured as their mount, serving as their main feet.

Tiger God's role is not that of an actual deity, but mostly that of an attendant or a porter. However, it is because of this accompanying role that it is granted the same divine powers that main deities receive, therefore becoming a powerful deity in its own right.

Since Tiger God accompanies the God of Wealth, it is thought that it has the power to bring wealth to the people. In addition, since it serves alongside Emperor Baosheng, it is also thought to have the ability to heal the sick or disabled. Although its status is not as high as some of the main deities, it is undoubtedly no less revered, no matter how big or small the temple might be, nor how popular the main deity is.

Some of Tiger God's many duties include exorcising evil spirits and guarding the property of its believers, acting as the guide for main deities, providing security for temples, and ensuring the protection of fishermen at sea and their safe return to their families.

03. With exorcising evil spirits and guarding people's safety being the deity's main duties, Tiger God is highly revered in Taiwanese folk beliefs.

03





04

04. You can find Tiger God at TaipeiFu Chenghuang Temple, where the god serves as the mount of *Chenghuang*.

05. It is believed that the Tiger God enjoys raw meat and eggs, which are both common offerings to the deity.

06. Visitors can also light a lantern for the Tiger God at some temples, praying for good fortune and wealth.



05



06

Where & How to Worship Tiger God in Taipei

Due to its role as an accompanying deity, offerings in Taiwanese temples to Tiger God are traditionally placed below the main deity. However, in some areas, offerings to Tiger God are placed on the table itself, and more and more new temples have begun popping up all over the island in its honor, particularly around central Taiwan.

The sacrificial offerings given to Tiger God are generally comprised of pork, lamb, beef, eggs, duck eggs, squid, and wine. In terms of fruits, offerings of apples represent peace, and pears represent removing or cleansing, while other fruits such as bananas, pineapples, and grapes are generally avoided as it is believed to invite trouble.

In Taipei, visitors can travel to the Canton Palace Embankment (台北廣堤宮 — 艋舺金虎爺會) to find a special Tiger God. The Tiger God there is originally from Hsin Kang Feng Tian Temple (新港奉天宮) in Chiayi (嘉義) and occupies a place on the main table, which is different from others. As some believe that Tiger God is the mount of *Chenghuang* (城隍), or City God, TaipeiFu Chenghuang Temple (台北府城隍廟) is also a place to pay your respects to this protective yet fierce animal companion deity. Taipei Tianhou Temple (台北天后宮) in Wanhua (萬華) is another place to find the Tiger God. No matter where you might travel in Taipei, though, when visiting temples in the city, do not forget to pay attention, and show some veneration, to the god right next to your feet. ⬇️

Aaron Nieh on the Digital Trends Reshaping Taiwanese Creativity

Author Seb Morgan
Photographer Samil Kuo, C-LAB
Graphic Design Aaron Nieh

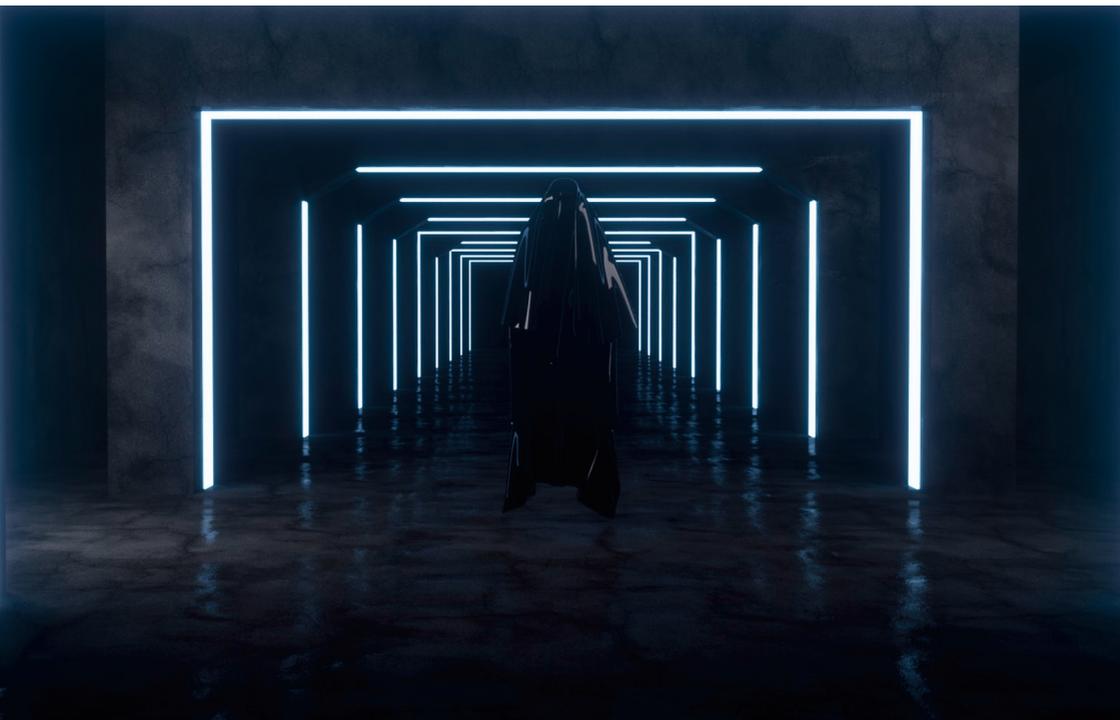
01. Aaron Nieh, who first gained fame in the field of graphic design, has recently stepped into the world of digital art in Taipei, and continues to create great works that surprise people.

Though it may lack the same historic international recognition as London or Paris, Taipei's art scene has been the focus of increasing international attention over the past two years, particularly due to Taiwan's successful handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. But while the mostly unfettered operations of the city's museums and galleries were what people were talking about in 2020, its local developments in digital art are driving conversations in 2021.

44-year-old designer Aaron Nieh (聶永真) is at the forefront of those conversations. Born in Taichung (台中) and based in Taipei, this homegrown creator has garnered a number of impressive accolades over the years, including a German Red Dot Award, an IF Communication Design Award, and an award for Best Album Design at the Golden Melody Awards (Taiwan's Grammy's). Ahead of our winter issue, *TAIPEI* met him at his Minsheng Community (民生社區) studio to talk about code art, Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), and other trends that are reshaping new media at home and internationally.

01





05



06

04. Through coding technology, the 600-page *Oxford English Dictionary* can be quickly composed from A to Z in just one minute. (Graphic Design/Aaron Nieh)

05-06. Taiwan Contemporary Culture Lab curates all kinds of immersive exhibitions in Taipei, offering visitors an unprecedented sensory experience. (Photo/C-LAB)



► Check out the digitized copies of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* online

The Secret Code to Digital Scarcity

Though creative coding lends itself to infinite creative possibilities, it was until recently very difficult for artists to sell their work. “Before, you needed to mount your work physically, either by printing it or displaying it on a digital screen if you wanted to bring it to market,” explains Nieh, adding that even then, piracy was still a concern for many digital artists. “That’s why NFTs are what most digital designers and artists are talking about right now.”

One of the tech-world’s big stories of 2021, NFTs are essentially certificates of authenticity that allow proven ownership of digital items. Just about anything can be turned into an NFT (songs, gifs, even tweets), but a lot of the financial focus so far has been on trading digital art.

“Being able to prove that a piece of digital content is the original and not a copy has huge implications for

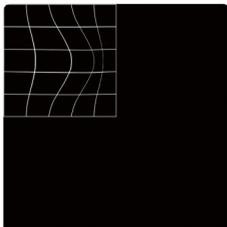
the art world. NFTs mean that we can directly trade online through virtual auction spaces, like *Foundation*,” Nieh says, referring to the platform where some of his recent works can be viewed and purchased. “Anyone can view the art, but because of NFTs, the pieces only have one owner.”

07. Nieh’s works of NFTs can be commonly found on the digital art platform *Foundation*. (Graphic Design/Aaron Nieh)

08. Despite already being a well-known designer, Nieh continues to refine his skills every day.

09. Plants and trees serve as inspiration for Nieh when it comes to his design work.

07



boyfriend  bulging

 @aaronnieh

Reserve price
1.00 ETH



Pudding Fountain

 @aaronnieh

Reserve price
4.00 ETH



The Door To

 @aaronnieh

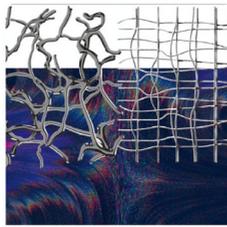
Reserve price
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Prosperity

 @aaronnieh

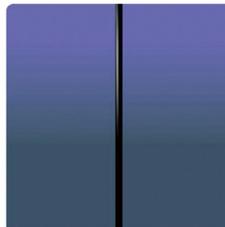
Reserve price
—



Universe Unknown

 @aaronnieh

Reserve price
2.00 ETH



Monolith #1

 @aaronnieh

Reserve price
2.00 ETH





08

Money Isn't Everything

At auction, many high-profile NFTs have sold for extremely high prices. In September, the first NFT to come to auction in Europe, a trio of graphics by the Bored Ape Yacht Club, sold almost immediately for an incredible £982,500 (US\$1,355,835). But as art investors scramble to ride the wave, Nieh is wary of what this high financial appeal might mean for the quality of the art itself.

"Buyers are sometimes only seeing NFT art as an investment, and they're buying pieces without much consideration of the art itself. It's a real shame because it has encouraged some creators to create high volumes of low-quality NFTs in the hope of making quick profits. They're not really pushing the limits of what they can achieve with digital art."



09

The Future of Digital Art in Taipei

The implications of the NFT technology aren't merely financial. Nieh points out that digital authenticity is helping us rethink how new media art can be displayed and experienced. "Previously, it was all about mounting the work in physical space. Like I said, normally on a frame or by printing it out. But by certifying the authenticity of a digital item, we can see the originals online or view them in a physical space using augmented reality."

Then there's the metaverse, the collective name for an immersive world of digital spaces that, to oversimplify things, combine gaming, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, virtual reality, and cryptocurrency. It sounds like science fiction, but in October legacy auction house *Sotheby's* launched a temporary run of their first all-digital NFT metaverse, featuring 53 works from 19 collectors.

"As digital artists, we're fascinated by the possibilities that lie ahead of us with NFTs and the metaverse," says Nieh. "We're talking about a virtual world that takes digital art far beyond image galleries and social media." 

DuoFu Holidays: Opening up a New World of Travel for the Mobility Challenged

Author Rick Charette

Photographer Samil Kuo, DuoFu Holidays, Taiwan Scene, Taipei Astronomical Museum

Traveling is an easy task for most people, but for those with mobility issues, it may be an impossible mission. Having to overcome the inconvenience of moving about from one place to another, physically-challenged people often instead choose to stay at home most of the time. DuoFu Holidays (多扶假期), an enterprise which started as a barrier-free shuttle service, found that many of its physically-challenged customers

actually needed more than just pick-up and drop-off: they also desired to travel with their family and friends. To realize these customers' dreams, the CEO of DuoFu Holidays, Jeff Hsu (許佐夫), was determined to do his part to improve the friendly environment of society as a whole, and therefore developed his company into a travel agency serving the mobility challenged.

01. With comprehensive SOPs in place, DuoFu has arranged diverse traveling services for its clients with special needs. (Photo/DuoFu Holidays)

01



Breaking the Barriers

Hsu has assembled a team of like-minded altruistic associates at DuoFu Holidays, Taiwan's first private travel firm dedicated to society's mobility challenged. "In terms of 'change,'" he says, "you could say we change night into day for our customers, bringing hope and freedom to people with mobility issues by opening up the travel world to them. Many, tentative about moving about in public and not wanting to be a burden to their family and/or caregivers, have effectively been shut-ins until taking advantage of our services, at best limited to their immediate neighborhoods."

Hsu states that government specialty transport services generally only take people from home to the hospital, clinic, etc. In contrast, DuoFu provides both pre-designed and custom-designed trips around Taipei, Taiwan, and even abroad. Its fleet of varied-size transport vehicles is custom-built, "Each very spacious and accommodating wheelchairs, with headspace allowing people to fully stand up, with a heavy-duty wheelchair lift," notes Hsu. "We also have a full range of equipment to meet customers' widely varying individual needs, handling everything from picking you up at home to handling your requirements at every travel site visited, hotels, restaurants, etc."

According to Hsu, DuoFu has developed specialized SOPs according to UN standards since all of its personnel are extensively trained, and it provides caregivers for all specialized situations. "Our personalized caregiver service — each mobility-challenged person has very different physical conditions — takes the burden off family caregivers, who are freed from handling the special situations," he says.

Furthermore, this customized caregiver service also gives a sense of freedom and hope to family members. "Everyone starts looking forward to traveling as a family group again, bringing families closer together," Hsu remarks proudly.



02

02-03. With custom-built vehicles that accommodate multiple wheelchairs, DuoFu Holidays invites people with mobility issues and their caregivers to relax and enjoy trips together.

03



A Mission Conceived

The DuoFu journey began with an unfortunate family event. In 2008, Hsu's grandmother had a fall, and was left confined to a wheelchair. "My family quickly learned that government-offered transport assistance was limited in scope, confined as said to hospital trips, etc. I bought a vehicle and fitted it out for optimal mobility. Soon I was offering transport services to others, and a new business was born. I decided to give up my career as a documentary filmmaker," Hsu says.

The first business, still in operation, was Taiwan's first private rehab bus service operator. Over the years, Hsu's customers began enquiring if he could arrange pleasure trips for them, and the DuoFu Holidays dream was hatched. "We opened in 2016 as a fully licensed travel firm, requiring a significant investment. We vet every travel site we visit, which requires continuing investment, and we have worked with the management of many sites to enable us to add them to our list. And as part of their training, all of our personnel must put themselves in the position of our mobility-challenged clients, experiencing exactly what they experience. This, as you can imagine, gives rise to much more attentive and intuitive service," he says, further noting that DuoFu has received "countless" complaints from their clients, but that all criticism is taken constructively, turned into fuel to drive their progress and perfection.

DuoFu Holidays has three primary customer segments: trips for seniors, for families with mobility-challenged members, and for organizations who have mobility-challenged staff members and/or employees with mobility-challenged family members coming along. "One-fifth of Taiwan families need the types of services we provide, and three to five percent of Taiwan companies have physically-challenged individuals on staff. Taiwan has one of the world's fastest-aging societies, so there is great need for what we do," Hsu says.

Easily Accessible Travel Spots in Taipei

Hsu states that the city of Taipei has made great progress in the past 10 to 20 years in terms of mobility access at major destinations, such as key tourist draws, hotels, and more. Mobility access is an intrinsic design element at comparatively young locations like the Taipei 101 Observatory, where there are braille elevators with a voice system as well as barrier-free bathrooms in the building, making visits relatively easy and pleasant for folks with mobility issues. On the other hand, in order to welcome visitors with different kinds of needs, the Taipei Astronomical Museum (台北市立天文科學教育館) has installed armrests, accessible ramps, and barrier-free seats for wheelchair users in its theater. Also, both places provide wheelchair rentals for visitors.



04. Jeff Hsu shares that the core value of their services is to let mobility-challenged people realize that they have every right to travel and have fun.

04



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05. Barrier-free seats for wheelchairs can be found in theaters and classrooms in the Taipei Astronomical Museum. (Photo/Taipei Astronomical Museum)

06. The National Palace Museum has taken the sight lines of people in wheelchairs into consideration when designing their lower display tables. (Photo/Taiwan Scene)

06



There are a number of other Taipei destinations and experiences, however, that Hsu feels are among DuoFu’s most special accomplishments and most valuable contributions to an inclusive Taipei/Taiwan society.

One of them is the National Palace Museum (NPM, 國立故宮博物院). The grand NPM, in Taipei’s north, is home to the world’s greatest collection of Chinese imperial-era artworks and artifacts, and a Taiwan tourism icon. Hsu states that DuoFu has earned the NPM’s respect and established a solid relationship. The museum was already wheelchair-accessible, but DuoFu has helped make it aware that on any given day it receives visitors from 10-plus countries and that accessibility needs to extend much beyond wheelchair access. “Today, every NPM happening is designed with full awareness of the UN’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. For example, exhibits are now designed so that those who are sight-impaired can enjoy a fuller sensory experience. We’ve also helped them

understand that folks in wheelchairs have very different sight lines, which can inhibit the viewing experience, and the NPM addresses these needs as well,” Hsu shares.

Taiwan is also a major hot-spring destination, and Taipei has a concentration of first-class facilities in the Beitou (北投) hot-spring resort area, in the city’s northwest at the foot of the Yangmingshan massif, as well as up on the crown of the massif in Yangmingshan National Park. DuoFu has developed unique SOPs for hot-spring bathing — as far as Hsu knows the first outfit to do so in East Asia, if not even further afield. “Our specially trained caregivers are right there at all times, getting bathers into the water and accompanying them. We were criticized heavily by many in the beginning, thinking we were putting mobility-impaired people in danger, but the buoyancy of the water is perfect, giving our clients maneuverability that would be impossible on land,” Hsu explains.

“Our clients have been deeply moved, experiencing a sense of freedom previously unimaginable to them. Some have informed us that they have not experienced the joy of a hot-spring outing for over 40 years,” Hsu goes on. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, DuoFu hosted customers from North America, Europe, and Japan, as they provided service in English and Japanese. “There is a solid component from Europe and Japan coming each winter specially for the hot-spring experience,” he adds.

According to Hsu, Songshan Cultural and Creative Park (松山文創園區), not far from Taipei 101, and the Yangmingshan American Military Housing complex (陽明山美軍宿舍群), up on Yangmingshan just outside the national park are both set up to facilitate maximum access for the mobility challenged.

Songshan Cultural and Creative Park is a former tobacco factory complex, completed by the Japanese in 1937 during the colonial period, that has been transformed into an incubator for cultural-creative

talent. The various heritage structures have been renovated, with several accessible installations such as wheelchair ramps and guides for the visually impaired, enabling visitors to explore the former warehouses freely. It also offers guided tours for individuals and groups with special needs to enable full access to the different exhibition buildings.

The Yangmingshan American Military Housing is another official heritage site, a sprawling former dormitory complex of over 100 ranch-style homes built in the 1950s for U.S. military officers, advisors, and their dependents. Today it is a quiet and exceedingly pleasant mountaintop getaway, with easy-navigation walkways that allow those in wheelchairs to explore without limitation. The residences have been renovated and fitted out with period furnishings, while adding extra facilities such as wheelchair accessible ramps and bathrooms. Brick Yard 33 1/3 (美軍俱樂部), the site’s integrated space combining a café, restaurant, and exhibition hall, is a totally flat place where people can move about freely with their assistive devices.

07





08

Rewards for a Difficult Mission Completed

“As you can imagine,” says Hsu, “we have chosen a very difficult mission for ourselves, with many obstacles presented. But there is no better reward than seeing a sense of hope and zest for living return to our clients, and know we played a role in that. To date, we’ve served over 140,000 travelers, and we’re very proud to report we’ve got a 97% satisfaction rate!”

The DuoFu goal is to work with as many people as possible, serving as a model and advisor, to continually raise the level of Taiwan’s obstacle-free services and environment, an aim they are working towards day in and day out. 📍

07. DuoFu Holidays provides inclusive travel services, enabling everyone to enjoy the fun of getting out and about around Taiwan. (Photo/DuoFu Holidays)

08. The American Military Housing complex in Yangmingshan is a flat and accessible spot for the mobility challenged to explore freely. (Photo/Taiwan Scene)



New media art creates a new viewing experience somewhere between the real and the virtual.



© Samil Kuo

Better with Age: Handmade Dry-Cured Meat in Taipei

Author Elisa Cohen

Photographer Samil Kuo

Food preservation and storage are techniques developed by humans in response to their own basic survival needs. As such, over the course of human history, people have developed ways to salt and dehydrate fresh vegetables, fish, and meat to extend their shelf life. Classic examples include Korean kimchi, Swedish pickled fish (*Surströmming*), and Spanish Iberico ham. In different geographical environments, these food preservation customs intertwined with social culture, and evolved into food with local characteristics over time.

In Taipei, Taiwanese-style bacon, Hong Kong-style sausage, and Chinese Jinhua ham (金華火腿) are traditional winter delicacies that are indispensable during the Lunar New Year, and are familiar to locals as cured meat. With more diverse culinary influences coming to the city in recent years, we now have the opportunity to try out European-style dry-aged meat dishes.

My Salumi (My手作) is a European-style dry-cured meat specialty store in Taipei that specializes in using local pork to produce European-style dry-cured meat by hand. They share with *TAIPEI* how they developed different flavored dry-cured meat products with pork proudly produced in Taiwan, and introduce creative ways of enjoying dry-cured meat in Taiwan.

01. Cured meat made from local ingredients is bringing more innovation to dining experiences in Taipei.

02. The marinated meat has to stay dry-cured in a controlled environment for months on end.



01



02

The Dry-Curing Process

“All types of cured meat around the world are essentially made by salting to remove moisture and preserve the meat for longer,” explains Mickey Yeh (葉星笛), founder of My Salumi, adding that there are generally three types of salted cured meat. The first is completely air-dried, which is how the highly popular Spanish Iberico ham, Italian Parma ham, and Chinese Jinhua ham are made. The second is low-temperature smoking, whereby the meat is smoked for more than 10 hours at 50 to 55 degrees Celsius. The third common method is marinating the meat, then cooking it at a high temperature, which is how common breakfast ham and bacon are prepared.

In the raw-to-cured process, everything starts from a piece of raw meat. The meat is first air-dried for three to seven days to allow the surface of the meat to dry and more easily absorb the spices before moving on to marination. Marination differs according to the products that are being made. The required salt, spices, or even sugar or alcohol are rubbed on the meat. After two to three weeks of marination, the spices are removed and the meat is dried for another week to ensure that no moisture remains, which could deteriorate the quality of the meat. The dried meat is then wrapped in a cloth and suspended by a rope to enter the final dry-curing process.

“There is a basic formula for dry curing. One kilogram of meat usually takes one month to cure,” Yeh points out. Because of the limited space they have to work with, they cut the meat procured from local livestock farms into three-kilogram pieces and keep the curing time between three and four months. “The meat is ready to be enjoyed after it has reached a certain stage of curing, but, like wine, the longer it ages, the richer the aroma and taste that is produced,” adds Yeh.

Challenges of Meat Curing in Taipei

Transplanting the taste of Europe to Taiwan to create a new taste with locally-raised pork is kind of like rally racing, taking not only time but also strategy. First and foremost, one must overcome the differences in environmental conditions. Taipei's warm and humid climate is vastly different from that of Europe, so it is impossible to let the meat cure naturally in the natural environment. The main reason is that once it comes into contact with moisture, the meat will easily become moldy and spoiled. Therefore, machines must be used to regulate the temperature and humidity of the curing space, greatly increasing the cost of production.

Leslie Liu (劉冠麟), My Salumi co-founder and a former bartender, adds that after selecting the right pork, the ratio of salt and spices must be precisely controlled, because once the meat is being cured, it takes four months to find out if the end result tastes good or not. If the taste is not suitable, the time and effort invested will be completely wasted. He stresses that "Many people think curing meat is like cooking, but it is actually more like doing experiments in a laboratory; the seasoning must be precise, and we must follow a step-by-step process to control the standardization as much as possible."

Sourcing the right ingredients is another challenge. Yeh points out that dry-aged meat is not cooked at high temperatures, but only seasoned with salt and spices. This means that the quality of the raw meat is pivotal to the flavor, accounting for 80% of the success or failure of the finished product. In Spain and Italy, raw ham manufacturers work from the farming of pigs to the process of cutting ham to ensure consistent quality.

In Taiwan, although the pork farming industry is solid, conventional livestock farming methods often inject nutritional additives into pigs to make them grow faster. As this can significantly affect the flavor of dry-cured meat, the only choice is procuring pork from pigs raised without artificial additives, which usually is more expensive and rare.

Fortunately, in recent years, consumer awareness in Taiwan has increased and more people are willing to purchase premium pork, which has led to more farms being willing to invest in premium livestock practices, giving cured meat producers more options for high-quality meat.

03. My Salumi has made various cured meats with different parts of pork, creating varied and rich flavors.

03





04

Creating the Flavor of Taiwan

Since the flavor of the pork itself is the source of the rich flavor of dry-cured meat, products made from Taiwanese pigs are able to bring out some unique local characteristics and aromas.

“Even when using the same spices, recipes and methods, the taste will be very different if the pork is of different species or even just from different farms,” Yeh observes. The fat of the pork is the source of the flavor of the cured meat, so the ratio of the pork fat will affect the taste and texture. For example, the Lotus Pork (蓮貞豚) from Hualien (花蓮) My Salumi often uses is rich in fat, while Choice Pig (究好豬) from Yunlin (雲林) has a unique aroma emanating from the meat itself, which makes a big difference in the cured meat. My Salumi also uses Taiwan's unique Meishan Boar (梅山豬) to make its cured meat products, which has resulted in an exclusive flavor unique to the island.

Regarding the taste of Taiwanese pork, Yeh has this to say: “Taiwanese pork is slightly sweet, with an aroma of fat and no unnecessary impurities. It's really delicious!”



05

04. As it ages, the meat will develop a unique taste and aroma.

05. Liu (left) and Yeh (right) combine Taiwanese pork with the European curing process, aiming to demonstrate new ways to enjoy local meat.

My Salumi blends European spices and adapts them to flavors preferred by Taiwanese people. These are then used with local high-quality pork and cured through different methods such as dry curing and smoking to produce more than 20 different meat products.

My Salumi's emphasis on using local pig breeds with European recipes is its signature appeal. Dry-cured meat recipes from Europe have come to Taiwan and evolved into local flavors due to the difference in ingredients, becoming a familiar yet fresh taste for foreigners, while also letting locals know that Taiwanese pork can be made into diverse yet profoundly delicious meat products.

Since the establishment of the brand in 2017, the two founders of My Salumi have overcome many difficulties to create a variety of European-style dry-cured meat products based on Taiwanese pork. They look forward to establishing a firm foothold and continuing to develop unique local flavors using Taiwanese ingredients to add more diversity to the dining table.



06. By using local pig breeds with European recipes, My Salumi created salamis that have unique Taiwanese flavors.

06



Cured Meat with Local Twists



07. Sliced cured meat is a flavorful appetizer or snack that goes well with many different kinds of beverages.

07

How to Enjoy:



With Wine

Despite the common belief that red meat should be paired with red wine, Liu, as a former bartender, says they believe dry-cured meat made from Taiwanese pork is actually better suited to white wine, champagne and other refreshing light wines. The taste of the cured meat itself can bring out the subtle flavors in white wine that may not be noticeable on their own, allowing the acidic aromas to shine through.



DRINK RESPONSIBLY



With Fruit

The classic European way is to serve raw ham with cantaloupe, but Taiwanese melons and cantaloupes are both so sweet that they will directly detract from the flavor of the meat. Instead, pair the meat with Taiwan's abundant wax apples, which are crisp and slightly watery and have a light sweetness that goes perfectly with cured meat. ◆

Celebrating Lunar New Year with Sweet and Savory

Author Elisa Cohen
Photographer Samil Kuo

In different cultures, specific foods often mark the arrival of a certain time of year or of some joyous festival, adding to the anticipation of the coming day. For example, Americans enjoy roast chicken on Christmas, the Spanish eat grapes on New Year's Eve, while Japanese celebrate the day by having soba noodles. This shows the important role these foods play in festivals and their implied cultural meanings in different countries.

In Taiwan, food is always a part of end-of-year gatherings, with various sweet and salty cakes made of rice figuring prominently during the Lunar New Year festivities. Most of the dishes enjoyed at this time of year embody the hope for abundance in the days to come.

TAIPEI went to Donghu Market (東湖市場) in Neihu District to talk to the woman behind "Know-Sticky Oil Rice (采緹油飯)," an eatery which has been in business there for over three decades. The owner, Lin Tsai-ti (林采緹), introduces us to the special rice-based dishes for the Spring Festival and Lunar New Year celebrations, and tells us about the inseparable links between these sweet and salty flavors and the local culture, as well as the symbols of good fortune and blessings for a prosperous future.

01





01. Hearty rice-based dishes play an important role during Taiwan's winter holidays.

02. Whether with fillings or without, *tangyuan* represents joyous gatherings with family and friends.

02

Auspicious Meanings Behind Rice-Based Dishes

Lin, like a kind aunt who always brings food to share during the holidays, first talks about Taiwan's various ritual foods locals indulge in during the cold winter months, starting from eating *tangyuan* during the Winter Solstice, which marks the beginning of the year-end rituals of sending out the old and welcoming in the new. "This symbolizes aging and means blessing and reunion," she says.

Next, on the 16th day of the twelfth lunar month, also known as *weiya* (尾牙), people usually prepare mochi to worship the local Earth God or Tudi Gong as he is known locally, hoping that this sticky dessert made of glutinous rice will bring wealth and good luck. People in Taipei also eat *guabao* (刈包) on the day, as the bun stuffed with pork belly and pickled vegetables resembles a purse full of money.

When the Lunar New Year officially begins on the 30th day of the twelfth month of the lunar calendar, every family prepares sweet and savory New Year rice cakes, such as sweetened sticky-rice cakes (*niengao*, 年糕), steamed sponge cakes (*songgao*, 鬆糕), steamed rice-flour cupcakes (*fagao*, 發糕), and steamed radish cakes (*luobogao*, 蘿蔔糕), to worship their ancestors and gods and to pray for peace in all seasons. The

Chinese word for cake "糕 (*gao*)" has the same pronunciation of "高 (*gao*, high in position)," which means to reach a higher stage in one's life and work, therefore symbolizing good fortune and the hope of prosperity for the family.

The 9th day of the first month in the lunar calendar is the day of the "Birth of the Lord of Heaven (天公生)." In the folk religion of the Han culture, the Jade Emperor (玉皇大帝), known also as the "Lord of Heaven (天公)," is believed to be the god who manages everything in the universe. Therefore, on his birthday, people prepare desserts with fillings wrapped with glutinous rice that is dyed red to celebrate. These include red turtle cake (*anggugui*, 紅龜粿) in the shape of a tortoise, which is a metaphor for longevity and good luck. There are also *qiana* (籽仔), which refers to the shape of ancient coins, representing money rolling in.

The 15th day of the Lunar New Year, which is also the first full moon, is the day of the Lantern Festival (元宵節). It is usually regarded as the end of the Lunar New Year. On this night, when spring returns, lights and decorations are displayed everywhere. When people go out to watch the moon and lanterns, they also eat *yuanyao* (元宵), which are similar to *tangyuan* but different in how they are made, as the New Year celebrations draw to an end with the symbolic meaning of reunion and safety.

Behind the Taste of Sweet and Savory

Each of the sweet and savory rice dishes made for different festivals has its own production techniques, cultural significance, and conventions.

Desserts such as *tangyuan* and rice cakes are usually made from round glutinous rice, which is ground into powder before being mixed with water to form dough. A little bit of it is taken to be boiled to form *banniang* (粩娘) or *guiyin* (糰引), which is a piece of gluey dough that is to be incorporated into the original glutinous rice dough to increase its stickiness. Then, depending on what is required for the subsequent processing, it is colored an auspicious and celebratory red, or mixed with processed mugwort. After that, various sweet or savory fillings are inserted into the dough.



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Lin shows us how to insert sweet red bean filling and savory shredded radish into the glutinous rice dough before sealing the opening and placing the dough on an oiled wooden pastry mold, then lightly patting the dough to flatten it. Then, the mold is carefully removed to produce a red turtle cake, symbolizing longevity.

Introducing the wooden pastry mold in her hand, she says, "We specially ordered it from an old store on Dihua Street, and all of these wooden patterns are hand-carved to make a deep and beautiful print." The wooden mold features not only a turtle shape, but also a peach, representing good luck on the other side. On the edges, there are three bronze coin shapes, allowing people to make different imprints on the rice cake, depending on what their needs are. "A good wooden mold will last forever, and many old bakeries have heirloom molds," says Lin. However, as the number of businesses producing handmade products dwindles, rice cakes with imprinted patterns are becoming rarer and rarer.

03-05. The pattern of this red turtle cake was imprinted using a handcrafted wooden mold.



06

When the imprinting is done, the cakes can then be placed into the steamer to be steamed for about 25 to 30 minutes. “We have to take care of the heat during the process though. Too high a heat can cause the rice dough to collapse and flatten out,” Lin remarks.

Lin also explains how steamed sponge cakes, symbolizing good fortune, are made. First, grind rice of the Penglai (蓬萊) or Zailai (在來) variety into pulp before adding brown sugar or caster sugar. Then, steam the rice pulp over high heat for it to rise naturally and blossom into the appearance of a flower. On the other hand, the soft and sweet New Year rice cakes are made by slowly mixing glutinous rice flour with sugar and oil, and then steaming the mixture over high heat for three to four hours. These are important desserts used for offerings during the Lunar New Year.

“In Taiwan, there are almost always different foods corresponding to different seasons and times of the year, so we are always looking forward to the upcoming festivals,” Lin says. She learned to make cakes that are linked to the rituals of different seasons and folk beliefs by hand when she was young, and has been selling them in markets so that Taipei residents can also feel the changing seasons and the blessings of heaven.



07

06-07. The sticky and chewy texture of mochi is believed to bind whoever eats it with good fortune.

Taboos Related to the Festive Dishes

Lin shares that in the past, when people made Lunar New Year cakes, there were always some traditional taboos to be aware of. People usually consider that if New Year rice cakes, which are made only once a year, are not made well, things in the year ahead will not go your way. Therefore, several rules are followed to ensure everything goes according to plan.

For example, when steaming sponge cakes, no one should ask whether they are done when approaching the stove. Neither should people argue or scold children around it. Otherwise, the cakes will not be fully steamed. Until today, some conservative families are very serious and cautious when making New Year rice cakes. Some even say that people born in the Year of the Tiger should keep away to ensure the success of cake, since the tiger in the Chinese zodiac is often considered intimidating.

However, Lin also explains that technology was not well developed in the past, so it was not possible to control the temperature and heat as easily as it is today. That is why it was necessary to exclude any and all negativity as much as possible that may (or may not) have affected the production process. Since many of these past difficulties can be overcome in modern times, lots of myths and folklores that carried much weight in times past are no longer as relevant in the modern context. Lin herself was actually born in the Year of the Tiger, but has been making rice cakes for over three decades. ⚡

08-10. With its dough mixed with mugwort, the green-colored rice cake with sweet or savory fillings is also used for paying respect to the gods in Taiwan.



08



09



10



Ways to Enjoy Sweet and Savory Rice Cakes



Steamed Sponge Cake

The flavor of this fluffy and slightly sticky cake most commonly seen in Taiwan is brown sugar, but recently many other variations like whole grain or pumpkin are becoming available.



Sweet New Year Rice Cake

This cake is often sweet and sometimes mixed with red beans and cheese. It is usually sliced and pan-fried or dredged and deep-fried, and can also be served as an after-meal dessert during the Lunar New Year holidays.



Red Turtle Cake

Printed or shaped like a turtle, this cake is often stuffed with sweet fillings such as red bean paste and peanuts paste. Shredded radish is also a common savory flavor.



Tangyuan

This ball-shaped dessert can be eaten without fillings and with sweet soup. There are also those with meat fillings for a savory taste and others with sesame or peanut fillings for a sweet taste. Nowadays, they are also available with novel fillings such as chocolate, Matcha, and custard cream.



Steamed Radish Cake

Commonly seen in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and around Southeast Asia, steamed radish cake is not only a New Year dish, but also an everyday staple. It is often pan-fried and served in local breakfast shops in Taiwan and can also be found at dim sum restaurants.



Savory New Year Rice Cake

Mixed with stir-fried shallots and minced pork, this kind of New Year cake tastes both savory and sweet, forming a unique, old-fashioned Taiwanese flavor. It can be eaten on its own or pan-fried with an egg wrap.

KNOW-STICKY OIL RICE

ADD 21-1, Ln. 315, Ankang Rd., Neihu Dist.

HOURS Please check the opening hours via website before visiting

WEBSITE www.facebook.com/tsai.ti.food/

Hot, Hot Soup on a Cold, Cold Day

Author AYCC

Photographer April Chen, Markus Winkler

Taipei, a city located in the subtropical zone, might surprise you with its damp and chilly winter that often makes people feel extremely cold. Though the winter here is relatively short, the unbearable coldness can sometimes send chills jolting from your core to your outer extremities. Thankfully, there is virtually no end to the different kinds of soup available in Taiwan, from hot pot to soup noodles, all of which integrate the knowledge of secret ingredients and/or Chinese medicine handed down from our ancestors which allows people to nourish their bodies and keep warm on a freezing day.

For this winter, we have selected five top soups and hot pots you can find in Taipei to enjoy the authentic flavors while lifting your spirits during this festive but frigid season. Here we go!

01. Gather round steaming bowls of hot pot soup with friends and family this winter to warm both body and soul. (Photo/Markus Winkler)

01



① Spicy Hot Pot 麻辣鍋

Hot pot is considered one of the national delicacies of Taiwan, with spicy hot pot (also known as *Chongqing* hot pot or *Sichuan* hot pot) being the absolute favorite choice of Taiwanese during wintertime.

The common base of a spicy hot pot is soup simmered with green *Sichuan* pepper, chili pepper, ginger, star anise and fennel. Green *Sichuan* pepper, which embodies the true spirit of the soup, not only creates a flavor known as *mala* (麻辣, numb-spiciness), but also removes the fishy smell of some of the meat and adds an extra, irresistible aroma. In addition, *Sichuan* pepper is considered a “warm Chinese medicine,” which wards off the common cold and brings heat back to chilled bones. You can add cabbage and pork slices as in other types of hot pots, but nothing goes better with spicy hot pot than tofu and duck blood.



RECOMMENDATIONS

OLD SICHUAN SPICY HOT POT 老四川

ADD 45, Sec. 2, Nanjing E. Rd., Zhongshan Dist.

HOURS 11:30am - 1:30am

LANJI SPICY HOT POT 藍記麻辣鍋

ADD 19, Sec. 1, Jinshan S. Rd., Zhongzheng Dist.

HOURS 5:30pm - 3:00am (Closed on Sundays)

② Pork and Pickled Cabbage Hot Pot 酸菜白肉鍋

If you think soup turning sour means it has gone bad, think again! As the name suggests, pork and pickled cabbage are indispensable to this hot pot favored by virtually every family in Taiwan. The pickled cabbage goes through the fermentation process in advance, where the lactobacillus bacteria decomposes sugars in the cabbage and creates lactic acid, which in turn stimulates digestion. The process also makes cabbages taste sour, and yet a sweet aftertaste arrives immediately after a few bites.

Meanwhile, pork belly slices are added to create a savory fragrance, making the soup even more appetizing when the sour taste neutralizes the oiliness of the pork. Mushrooms, ginger, and green onions are also common ingredients that elevate the flavor. Many foodies add seafood such as shrimp and crab as well, making this winter feast not only warm, but also fresh and fantastic.



RECOMMENDATIONS

CHANGBAI RESTAURANT 長白小館

ADD 53, Ln. 240, Guangfu S. Rd., Daan Dist.

HOURS 11:30am - 2:00pm, 5:00pm - 9:00pm
(Closed on Mondays)

SIHPING RESTAURANT 四平小館

ADD 45, Sihping St., Zhongshan Dist.

HOURS 11:30am - 2:30pm, 5:00pm - 10:00pm

3 Mutton Soup/Mutton Hot Pot 羊肉爐

With its high nutritional value, mutton is rich in protein, fat, vitamins and minerals such as calcium, iron, phosphorus and other substances craved by the human body. Since ancient times, mutton has been a high-end ingredient that was treasured in the hallowed halls of royalty. It is usually stewed with many Chinese herbs, including angelica, wolfberry, licorice, and stir-fried ginger, which give the soup its signature color of translucent black and a strong but sweet aftertaste that neutralizes the gamey smell of mutton.

After first gaining favor with royalty, the delicacy later became wildly popular among common people, who added in more affordable ingredients such as mushroom and tofu to enjoy it as a hot pot dish. For people who are prone to cold hands and feet in winter, mutton hot pot also helps to increase red blood cells and hemoglobin to stimulate blood circulation, warming your body from within.



RECOMMENDATIONS

XIA GANG E SPECIALTY MUTTON STORE 下港地羊肉專賣店

ADD 18, Tianxiang Rd., Zhongshan Dist.

HOURS 11:30am - 1:00am

MORE JOY YOUNG 莫宰羊

ADD 28, Sec. 3, Xincheng S. Rd., Daan Dist.

HOURS 11:00am - 2:00pm, 5:00pm - 1:00am

4 Ginger Duck Soup 薑母鴨

Permeating any room with a strong, succulent aroma, ginger duck soup is one of the best “tonic foods” widely enjoyed during the winter in Taipei. With ginger and pungent rice wine being the two essential components of the dish, it is believed that the soup has several medicinal and nutritional values. In the Chinese medical world, ginger has long been used as an herbal medicine to treat various physical ailments, including vomiting and cold symptoms, as it is rich in calcium and vitamin C. Meanwhile, the rice wine helps to purify the soup and warm the body up.

Duck meat, on the other hand, has a higher iron content than beef which aids the formation of red blood cells. Many restaurants in Taipei serve ginger duck on a charcoal or gas fire and add hot pot ingredients to enjoy with the soup. One thing that should be noted is that the 19.5-proof rice wine does not burn off after stewing which means this dish has a kick in more ways than one!



RECOMMENDATIONS

BAWEI GINGER DUCK 霸味薑母鴨

ADD 1-2, Ln. 160, Sec. 3, Minquan E. Rd., Songshan Dist.

HOURS 4:00pm - 1:00am

BRAVO DUCK 阿和師薑母鴨

ADD 131, Sec. 2, Xincheng N. Rd., Zhongshan Dist.

HOURS 4:00pm - 2:00am

5 Sesame Oil Chicken Soup 麻油雞

Sesame oil chicken soup is not only one of the most iconic chicken soups in Taiwan, but also the most aromatic and delicious braised chicken you will ever find. The main ingredients include chicken, rice wine, ginger, jujube, goji berry, astragalus roots and loads of sesame oil.

Unlike ginger duck soup or mutton soup that are often enjoyed with cabbage or tofu, there are usually no extra hot pot ingredients added in, which condenses the flavor to just the soup itself and the chicken infused with sesame oil.

Sesame oil has several health benefits. It helps to get rid of the body's surplus fat, enhances skin elasticity, and is rich in vitamins B and E. Therefore, sesame oil chicken soup is often served to new moms who consume it as part of a nutritional replenishment meal during their traditional month-long period of after-birth care. While the soup itself already makes for a perfect meal, people also eat it with vermicelli or string noodles (麵線), making it an extra comforting meal that fights off the winter blues. ◆



RECOMMENDATIONS

A NAN SESAME OIL CHICKEN 阿男麻油雞

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01

When Science Meets Art in Taipei

Author Catherine Shih

Photographer Yenyi Lin, Taiwan Scene, Cheng-Huang Lin

Connecting Sense and Sensibility

As an inclusive city, Taipei is composed of diverse cultural and natural features that are often considered as running parallel to humanity. But not for Cheng-Huang Lin (林震煌), a chemistry professor at National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU, 國立台灣師範大學). By leveraging his deep knowledge of chemistry, he initiates many fascinating research projects linking science and art, proposing innovative angles to viewing the capital.

Having grown up and conducted his studies in Taipei, Lin started his academic career here, eventually going on to study abroad in Japan for his doctoral degree in the early 1990s, and later to the U.S. for further research. Soon after returning to his homeland in 1998, he began his studies related to Taipei's natural environments.

"I still remember traveling with Japanese researchers to Yangmingshan National Park's Menghuan Pond (夢幻湖), Zhuzihu (竹子湖), and Datunshan to collect soil and water in places that tourists couldn't touch or

reach for conducting research on acid rain. So, I can say I definitely know that mountain quite well!" he shares, noting his understanding about the terrain of the area.

Based on his solid experience in chemical analysis, Lin was invited to join NTNU's Research Center for Conservation of Cultural Relics (文物保存維護研究發展中心) in 2015 to help the team better understand the composition of artifacts via scientific examination. Currently, he works as a cross-departmental professor in the Department of Chemistry and the Department of Fine Arts, equally splitting his time between them, two days a week in each. "I'm often traversing between the campuses of NTNU, enjoying the vibrant atmosphere between Guting (古亭) and Gongguan (公館)," notes Lin.

He further explains how his chemistry background could assist in the field of art conservation, "Most of the cross-field research I do requires knowledge of artwork materials and techniques such as gas analysis and Raman spectroscopy for the restoration of cultural relics like paintings and sculptures. Currently, I'm also highly interested in the research of indigo dye."

Blending Chemistry with Art

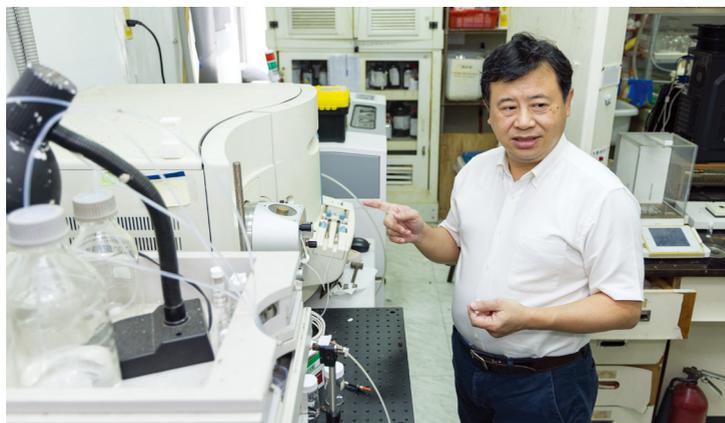
Lin offers invaluable insight and knowledge to the art restoration program at NTNU's Department of Fine Arts by teaching techniques and chemical analysis used in the preservation of cultural relics, such as infrared spectroscopy, lighting detection methods and material and surface analysis. Conversely, at the Department of Chemistry, he teaches a course on "The Application of Instruments and Chemistry in the Restoration and Preservation of Cultural Relics" in the hope that he can inspire budding chemistry students who might also be interested in art to become future experts in the art preservation and restoration field.

Through these courses, he is able to introduce the chemical changes and analysis of pigment materials commonly found in artworks. "The origins of blue paint come from lapis lazuli limestone found in the mountains of Afghanistan," he says, "Back in the 17th and 18th centuries, it was very expensive. In fact, the blue headscarf featured in the famous painting *Girl with the Pearl Earring* by Johannes Vermeer was painted using this exact material. Later on, since cheaper methods such as azurite were discovered and used in oil paintings, it became more difficult to distinguish the ingredients of paint, making restoration even more challenging. Therefore, chemistry uses spectral analysis to distinguish the difference," Lin further explains.



02

He used his own chemistry background when collaborating with the Research Center for Conservation of Cultural Relics to support the restoration and preservation of various artworks. The restoration of many of the paintings of early Taiwanese artists displayed at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (台北市立美術館) and the Museum of National Taipei University of Education (北師美術館) were based on Lin's expertise and scientific knowledge, paired with that of local restoration experts.



03

01. Artistic creations such as calligraphy might not seem to be linked to chemistry on the surface, but they can actually be created or restored through scientific techniques.

02-03. An expert in chemical analysis, Lin has extended his profession to discovering the chemical composition of artifacts.

Unearthing the Truth About Indigo Dye

Speaking of Lin's research on indigo dye, he recalls, "I went with my kids when they were young to an indigo dyeing activity. I was so interested in the dye that I even brought back a bottle. Later, when my work in chemistry overlapped with art, I decided to include indigo in my research."

He started with the indigenous plant called *Strobilanthes cusia*, and discovered that Yangmingshan was a suitable environment for it. He then collaborated with a local farmer to grow these plants to be used for dyeing.

Lin introduces the basic steps of creating indigo dye. "The first step is to soak leaves in water to release the chemical compound, indican. This in turn combines with another chemical compound, indoxyl, to become what we know as indigo," he says.

"This whole process requires oxygen to be blown into the water, which we call 'bluing,'" he goes on. "Then, lime is added to form a bluish clay. The blue clay has to be dissolved in water to become 'indigo white' before it can be used for dyeing cloth and paper."

This complex process inspired Lin to search for a natural yet easier approach to extract the blue dye, so he began experimenting with different materials like plum wine, Yakult yogurt, and baking yeast, finding they were all great for making indigo. "Actually, the best and most natural way is by using hot spring water from Yangmingshan. It's one of the most efficient ways of creating blue clay," Lin proudly shares his finding.

Through his own experiments and research, Lin hopes to further develop local education at the junior high school level so that students can use materials available at home to create their own indigo dye, thereby also enhancing their knowledge of local ingredients and cultural heritage.



04



05



06



04. With a simplified blue dye manufacturing process, people can try dyeing fabric at home. (Photo/Taiwan Scene)

05. Mixing the pigment extraction of the plant with oxygen and lime will create blue clay, the major component in blue dye.

06. Lin's team demonstrates how to dye paper or cloth with "indigo white."

07. Lin has been working with different materials for his blue dye experiments, creating a wide range of shades.

08. Combining his interest in calligraphy and his profession in chemistry, Lin made himself a set of Japanese shogi. (Photo/Cheng-Huang Lin)

07

Experiments Sprouted from Personal Interests

Lin is very skilled at transferring his hobbies into research projects. He tells *TAIPEI* that he was a flute player back in college, and even performed on TV shows. Later, he combined the concepts of flute playing with the knowledge of gaseous substances to work on a method of analyzing blood glucose using gas concentration. "My hope is that there will be opportunities in the future to identify potential diabetes in patients just by breathing into an instrument," he says.

Recently Lin began taking up calligraphy, thinking about the utility of brushes and how they might be useful for discerning the metabolic rate of the human body. "I initiated a research project that involves using writing brushes to test metabolism," says Lin. He asked participants to drink coffee and then rubbed their eyelids with brushes to transfer the metabolites. Afterward, he used a pulse of electricity to collect the ions from the brushes. "By determining the ionic concentration, we can then analyze the body's metabolic rate," he maintains.

As if all of that wasn't already enough to keep the professor busy, he has added yet another portion to his plate of late. "I also play chess at the Japanese Shogi League in Taipei twice a month," he says, "But since chess pieces are so expensive, I'm learning how to make them myself, including the calligraphy, laser engraving, and paint," he chuckles.

Lin is forever astounding us by coming up with new possibilities for scientific experiments that stem from his own life and interests, and combining his love of chemistry with music and art to create a more diversified life for visitors and locals alike in Taipei. **◆**



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