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A Hundred Years of Glory in Dadaocheng

Dadaocheng was once a large grain-sunning ground in the Datong District of Taipei. Today, it carries on, blending creativity with the old-time glory of its hundred-year history. Strolling the neighborhood, one smells the therapeutic aromas of tea and Chinese medicinal herbs in the cold winter air.

With the variety of dried foods and snacks, and the colorful cloth of the embroidery stores painting a pretty scene, this old neighborhood is looking fabulous again and bursting with creative energy. It provides a glimpse of Taipei as it was in those halcyon days when Tamsui Port first opened to foreign trade in the early 1860s.

The hustling, bustling and booming economic scene, crowded with people and busy with traffic, might not exist anymore, but today's Dadaocheng has had a rebirth, and some of those century-old stores here are prospering again. Visiting historical Dadaocheng, one experiences the cultural side of Taipei City, and the boundless inventiveness of the new generation.

The infusion of new with old appears not only in the history and renaissance of this neighborhood's streets, but is reflected in the cuisine as well. Taipei is a hub of worldwide culinary trends, and its vegetarian cooking is built upon a traditional base, with some innovative twists thrown in. Taiwanese chefs have mastered fresh local products, and by combining them with international elements, a brand new vegetarian gastronomy has been born. New ingredient combinations and unique homemade sauces make these amazing dishes totally scrumptious! The new Chinese food and Cantonese veggie eateries have developed innovative cooking methods and combos, turning Taipei into a "must-eat" city for vegetarian gourmands.



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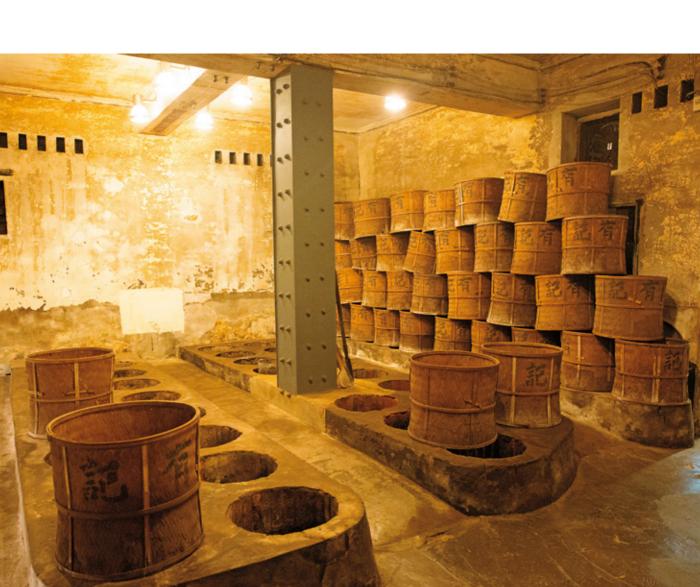
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Painting Hundred-Year-Old Stores in New Gouache

Article

Xu Cifang

Photos

Taipei Fine Arts Museum

Kuo Hsueh-Hu (郭雪湖, 1908~2012), one of the most important Taiwanese artists, was born in Dadaocheng and depicted the prosperous and bustling life of that neighborhood in his 1930 painting: *Festival on South Street* (南街殷賑). In this piece, one sees common people walking around, store signs everywhere, and businesses booming. If you look closely, you will even notice a sign reading "Sony," which indicates how prosperous trade was back then.

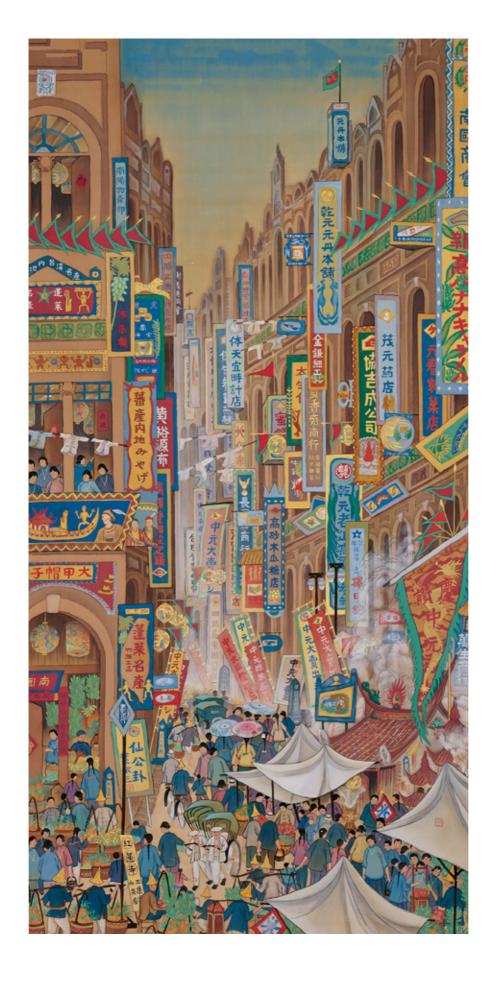
Some of these century-old businesses are still going strong with their oldtime glory inspiring the new rising generations. In Dadaocheng, the energies generated by heritage and innovation do not diminish each other, but rather combine, transfer and create a community that belongs to this generation, and one that will surely bring even more glory over the next 100 years.

> Artist: Kuo Hsueh-Hu Title: Festival on South Street

Media Technology: Gouache on silk Dimensions: 188x94.5cm

Collected by TFAM

Date: 1930



Taiwanese Tea Travels Overseas -

Tea Family Descendants Regain their Glory

ain their Glory

Article Photos

— — — — — — — Chen Wanyu Lin Weikai



In 1866, British businessman, John Dodd brought *Anxi* tea plants to Taiwan from China. He applied methods that were similar to the contractual farming system of today, in which farmers were given loans and encouraged to plant and produce tea. In 1869, he exported a shipment of boxes from Tamsui Port to New York with "Formosa *Oolong* Tea" printed on them. From that day on, Formosa Tea made a name for itself around the world, and everyone knew how delicious it tasted.

sifters strolled along the streets..." One can just picture the busy tea production scene back then from such

descriptions as this one in the book, Taipei City's Road

and Street History (台北市路街史).

The Heyday of Booming Export Trade

After that, foreign enterprises set up business in Taipei; even tea merchants from Fu Jian Province, China came to trade in tea. In its heyday, the trade saw 250-plus tea stores and foreign investment companies in the neighborhood covering Chongqing North Road (重慶北路), Yanping North Road (延平北路), Dihua Street and Guide Street (貴德街). Dadaocheng soon became the richest district in Taiwan.

Founded in 1890, Wang Tea (有記名茶) is one extant store that actually witnessed those glorious days. It stills does business at the old spot on Chongqing North Road. The father of fifthgeneration owner Wang Shengjun (王聖鈞) told him that his great grandfather would often stand on the pier at Dadaocheng supervising as tea boxes were loaded onto the ships. One year, they loaded 500,000 Taiwanese catties of *Baozhong* tea! At a very young age, his father asked the old man, "Five-hundred thousand catties of tea, exactly how big is that?" Great grandfather laughed and said, "Well, that's enough for us Taipeiers to drink for a whole year." This conversation shows how well the tea export business did back then.



Wang Tea maintains the only operating tea roasting room in Dadaocheng.



Wang Shengjun has taken over Wang Tea, transformed its business model, and added tea production tours to get more people participating.

Looking at Historical Buildings to Imagine Old Time Glory

Another tea store that had such a heyday was Sin Hong Choon Trade Co. (新芳春茶行). It was the biggest tea company of all in the 1930s, and in 2016, it reappeared as an exhibit hall and met its public again. Its docent, Chen Deen (陳得恩), knows everything about Sin Hong Choon. He says that the first generation of the Wang family settled in Dadaocheng in 1913. Old Wang started work as tea taster, and in six years' time had saved enough to open his own store, which he named Sin Hong Choon. It was built with three bays facing the street, which was the style favored by over 80% of the stores along Minsheng West Road (民生西路) between Chongqing North Road and Yanping North Road. Tea vendors carried bags that weighed 60 catties each in and out of those stores all day long.



Sin Hong Choon has been transformed into an exhibit hall for tea culture.

Sin Hong Choon is situated in an eighty-year-old three-story house. It was originally constructed to be a western-style residence that could be used for commercial purposes too. Luckily, it is so well-preserved that people nowadays can see how interior space is arranged and imagine the wealthy life a typical Dadaocheng tea merchant once had. One will learn from the exhibit that destinations for tea export included Amoy in China, London, Amsterdam, Casablanca and Thailand. *Oolong* tea was sold in Europe and America, and *Baozhong* tea in the South Seas. Taiwanese tea had spread its flavor and aroma all over the world!

As Exports Decline, the Tea Trade Focuses on Domestic Sales

After restoration from colonial rule, Taiwan, which had been badly damaged by the war, saw its overseas tea business decline substantially, with exports shrinking day by day. Many old tea stores had made their fortunes through exporting, but now



To deal with industrial transformation, Wang Tea keeps adjusting brand packaging and product design.

couldn't survive any longer. For example, Jinji Tea Co. (錦記茶行), founded by Chen Tian-Lai (陳天 來), one of Dadaocheng's most active tea merchants, closed up shop in 1952.

By the 1970s, Taiwan had gone through an industrial transformation, an increase in value of the New Taiwan Dollar, a shortage in tea production labor, and rising wages in the country overall. Tea



"In its exhibit hall, Sin Hong Choon preserves and promotes tea culture, hoping it will stay in people's minds forever."



Sin Hong Choon once did a booming export trade. These boxes are replicas of tea boxes from the early years.

production costs in Taiwan had increased so much that the country lost its competitiveness in the export market. Tea manufacturers in Dadaocheng gradually moved away to places with cheaper labor costs. The end came when the once-prosperous Sin Hong Choon closed its doors in 2004.

Wang recalls that there was a time when his family was doing both domestic and export tea business, but hardly any customers were dropping by the store. Around 2003, business started to get better, and about the same time, the economy turned prosperous again. More and more people were demanding a superb cup of tea, and the promotion of tea culture was becoming more widespread. So, Taiwanese consumers started paying attention to tea's quality.

Domestic sales became an opportunity for the old tea stores to regain their former glory. Wang's father decided to change direction, focus on domestic sales, and reestablish a well-known brand name.

The New Generation Pursues a Path of Cultural Creation

Wang Tea upgraded their seventy-year-old-plus factory, kept the production room's original look, and renovated the whole place into a small tea museum. They hired docents to give tours and tell people about such things as the different types of tea, the production process and the significance of preserved documentation. All of this allows visitors to get to know tea culture better.

In 2012, Wang took over the family business and brought new energy and creativity with him. For example, he started producing teabags for the younger set, gave the flagship tea a new name, and cleverly combined the tea's infusion process, its unique flavor, and life experience to create a culturally creative product.

Today, there are fewer than ten tea stores with a history like Wang's left in Dadaocheng. But a change in times won't stop these old emporia from moving forward. New generations will once again set sail from the port at Tamsui riverside, Dadaocheng! •



With a Thousand Years of Wisdom -

Chinese Medicinal Herbs Turn Over a New Leaf

Article

Chen Wanyu

Photos

Lin Weikai, Wang Hanshun

Dihua Street (迪化街) is pungently aromatic. The section heading north from Taipei Xia-Hai City God Temple (台北霞海城隍廟) to Mingshen West Road is called Dihua South Street, and is known for the soothing scents of Chinese medicinal herbs that linger in the air. Back in the Japanese era, the Dihua Street neighborhood was the chief Taipei location for wholesale Chinese medicinal herbs. Herbal medicine dispensaries are still mainly clustered around Minle Street (民樂街), which has caused it to be nicknamed "herbal lane" by the locals. A refreshing herbal essence lingers there.

"Walk out of the store and take action. Introduce Chinese medicinal herbs to more people. Erase the stereotype. Bring new life."



The owner of Shang Cian Yuan, Chen Jianguo works with both feet on the ground to pass down the knowledge and expertise this store acquired over a hundred years.

Before the Japanese period, trade in Dadaocheng mainly focused on groceries and tea; Chinese medicinal herb was only a side business. But when market demand increased, herbs parted ways with groceries and became a separate business unto themselves. In addition, experts were needed to do quality control due to the large disparity in product. Training these experts was something passed down from master to apprentice and from father to son. Once those young trainees had completed their education, they often opened their own businesses in the same neighborhood, and this resulted in a thriving commercial district.

There are today about 200 Chinese medicinal herb outlets in Dadaocheng. They come in a

variety of business models, of which 90% are wholesalers. Most enterprises are resellers, selling both wholesale and retail. This kind of store usually sells groceries as well. In the early years, sweet snacks were sold to customers to alleviate the bitterness that often comes with Chinese medicine. But later on these products became part of inventory simply to satisfy customer demand and convenience.

The second largest business segment is the wholesale market. Wholesalers purchase large amounts of imported Chinese medicinal herbs from many different sources, grade them as to quality, and then sell them to resellers. Also, many retail outlets include a pharmacy, where a doctor versed in Chinese medicine provides advice. Shang Cian Yuan Apothecary (上乾元參藥行) is one of these.

Import Restrictions Lifted and Price Becomes Affordable

In the early years, the availability of herbs was limited due to import restrictions. Products sold on Dihua Street were distributed mainly via the Taipei Chinese Herbal Apothecary Association (台北市中藥商業同業公會), and were hard to get and pricey. It wasn't until 1988 that the restrictions were lifted and the price of Chinese medicinal herbs became affordable. For example, jujube, which had cost NT\$960 per Taiwanese catty, dropped to NT\$70 per catty - less than one tenth the original price. With Taiwan's economy booming, more and more people wanted to buy these herbs as gifts or to improve their own health. Chinese medicinal herb stores on Dihua Street started to ride the "money wave" that tea merchants had enjoyed in bygone days. On a typical shopping day back then, the neighborhood

TAIPEI COVER STORY

would be just as busy as any commercial street before Chinese New Year is today.

Cian Yuan Apothecary (乾元參藥行), one of the stores appearing in the painting Festival on South Street by Kuo Hsueh-Hu, is now over one hundred years old. The third-generation owner of this business, Chen Jianguo (陳建國), has stepped into his father's shoes but changed the store's name to Shang Cian Yuan. Growing up in the store, Chen witnessed and participated in the glory that was the trading of Chinese medicinal herbs along Dihua Street.

Chen recalls that around 1990, the store stayed open until 10 pm and employed about twenty staff working until midnight in two shifts. In the daytime, seven or eight employees were on duty to take care of the non-stop flow of customers.

Changing Market Strategy for Chinese Medicinal Herbs

Over the past twenty years, western medicine has grown in popularity, the national health insurance has becomes a reality, and people now consider diet, and not Chinese medicine, as the main factor to be considered in staying healthy. As a result, demand for Chinese medicinal herbs has suffered and merchants have had to think of new ways to pass down the wisdom of ancestors and keep their

Service Community of the Community of th

Many old stores on Dihua Street employ a traditional type of separated package called a "tiger-head pack."

businesses going. Chen says that he doesn't have any fancy marketing methods or gorgeous store decorations to help him; instead, he simply walks out of his shop to spread the word and increase public exposure. He often hosts or attends seminars on health through Chinese medicine, introduces related activities whenever he can, and works with publishing companies to develop books on the topic. In these ways, he markets himself and promotes Chinese medicinal herbs at the same time.

Since 2015, another old store, Liu An Tang Chinese Medicine Co. (六安堂參藥行), has been part of the Store Reformation Project hosted by Taipei City Office of Commerce (台北市商業處). With the help of an advisory team, this shop has worked family history into interior design. Its fourthgeneration owner, Yang Kaiyu (楊凱宇) and his father Yang Shifu (楊世福) have developed products that are more convenient for consumers, such as single-use packages and tea bags filled with healthy Chinese herbs. These are sold at the store and online, which makes them very popular with the younger set and Japanese tourists.

"Traditional herbal medicine with attractive packaging to meet customer needs and develop new markets."



Liu An Tang's fourth-generation owner, Yang Kaiyu, has introduced new products designed for customer convenience. (Photo: Wang Hanshun)





After renovations, Yao de Herb' new industrial-style design attracts young people, making this a popular check-in spot. (Photo: Wang Hanshun)

Regulations Cause Herb Shops to Decline

The herb shops, particularly those along Minle Street, have faced the same fate as Chinese medicine stores. In the early days, taking herbs to improve health or for medicinal purposes was common. But along came the National Health Insurance (NHI) with its strict regulations and the amount of business they did with customers such as Kuo-Shu Guan (a type of Chinese physiotherapy clinic) and other purveyors of folk medicine dropped sharply.

Herb resellers have also struggled to maintain longstanding business relationships.

The third-generation owner of Yao de Herb (姚 德和青草號), Yao Shengxiong (姚勝雄) says that he started helping his father when he was in junior high school. Back in that booming era, the store usually opened between five and six in the morning, and closed at eleven or twelve at night. After the NHI took effect, only three of six herb wholesalers survived. Many of these shops began running tea stands and selling tea in addition to herbs.

Reformation Project Links Up With the New Generation

Once Yao Shengxiong took over, he continued to run both the wholesale and herbal tea stand businesses. Later, he decided to join the Store Reformation Project to give the store a new life. He admits that he was really struggling before the reformation. He worried that old customers wouldn't like it, but he also realized that a dying store needs a chance at rebirth. So now, this herbal tea stand has been transformed into a hipsterstyle tearoom, and thus linked up with the young generation and the international world of tourism.

At first, some of the old patrons could hardly recognize the place and stopped coming. But, eventually they came back and younger folk started stopping by to take pictures and check-in on social media. Thus, more and more people have gotten to know the store.

"Store reformation has changed more than interior design and product display – more importantly, it has inspired new operational strategies."

Herb businesses specializing in Chinese and folk medicine have withstood waves of modernity, confronted their fears of being replaced by newcomers, and held their rudders in rough seas. The new generation have selected a course that navigates close to the common people, while passing down their ancestors' thousand-year-old wisdom and keeping their businesses sustainable. •



The third-generation of Yao de Herb, Yao Shengxiong, welcomes the chance at rebirth that store reformation brings. (Photo: Wang Hanshun)

Witnesses to History: the Rice and Grocery Industries –

Finding New Expressions of the Spirit of Ancestors

Article

Chen Wanyu

Photos

Wang Hanshun, Lin Weikai



"Increase variety in your inventory, find new sources, and progress in faster, more innovative ways – you'll soon find yourself owning a piece of the market."

Walking along Dihua Street's middle north section between Minsheng West Road and Guisui Street (歸 綏街), one sees grocery stores everywhere. They stock all kinds of dried foods, snacks and canned goods, and the smell of seafood lingers in the air. The busy rice mills of yesteryear are long gone from the north section between Guisui Street and Daqiaotou (大 橋頭), and this neighborhood is now occupied by prosperous old stores and vibrant new cultural and creative businesses.

In the late Qing, most groceries were imported from mainland China. During the Japanese era, goods imported from Japan were tax-free, so you could find their dried salty fish and scallops among other items at these stores. In the 19th century,

Taiwan opened its ports to foreign trade, and since Dadaocheng was located near one, it became the most important grocery wholesale market in northern Taiwan.

Grocery Trading is Like Dealing in the Stock Market

Linfuzhen (林復振商行), founded by one of Dadaocheng's pioneers, Lin Youzao (林右藻) and his family, is one of the oldest stores in Taipei. Fifth-generation owner, Lin Zhaogang (林兆剛) remembers family elders saying that the Japanese era was a time of scarcity, and that prices fluctuated widely in Taiwan right after restoration from colonial rule. Grocers needed to

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