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The island was shaped like  
a big purple yam  
for my first dinner there  
I had fried rice with ham  
next morning early  
I went for a walk  
ate youtiao and shaobing  
but still couldn't talk

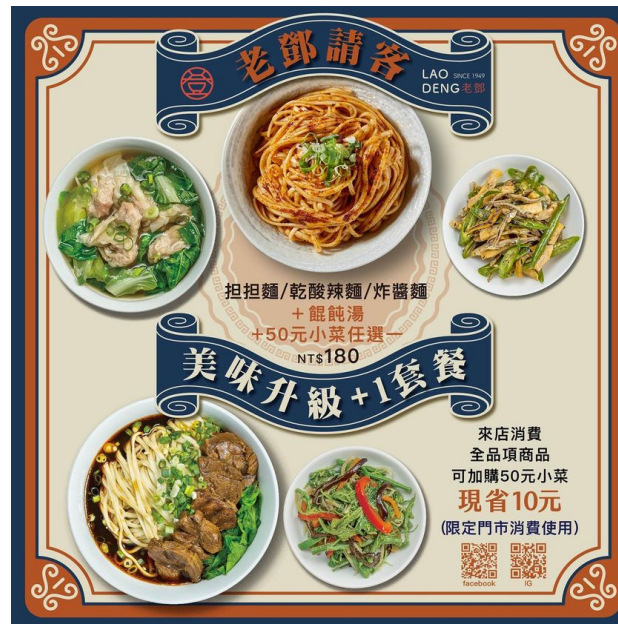


## Chapter 10 - Stinky Bean Curd and Other Fine Foods



Chinese food in Taiwan was the best Chinese food in the world in the 1970's. Nearly two million people from all over China descended on the island of Taiwan in 1949, bringing with them a plethora of delicious delicacies to combine with the great Taiwan food already on the island. And the best of the best was the cheap street food. I discovered Sour Plum Juice (酸梅汤 *sūanméi tāng*) near the New City Park, to be a great thirst quencher in the summer, and Star Fruit Juice (杨桃汁 *yángtáo zhī*) was a natural soother for a sore throat. Boiled and Fried Dumplings (餃子 *jiǎozi*) and (鍋貼 *guōtiē*) cost 2 NT\$ (5 cents U.S.), each. When I went out with my friends, I would always order at least 20 for myself. My friend, Cristy's favorite snack just outside of the front gate of Fujen University was Stinky Bean Curd (臭豆腐 *chòu dòufu*) - still a popular treat in Taiwan and Hong Kong. It is an acquired smell and taste. Sort of like limburger cheese in Germany and durian fruit in southeast Asia.

I can't forget the amazing noodles. In the winter time, it had to be beef noodles (牛肉面 niúròu miàn) at a cost of about 20 NT – 50 cents US – a bowl. In the summer, it was cool noodles (涼麵 liáng miàn) made with shredded chicken, julienned carrots, green onions, cucumber, fresh ginger, and sesame sauce. Another popular noodle in the 西門町 Xīméndīng area of Taipei was pork chop noodles (排骨麵 páigǔ miàn). I once told Cristy that they were called 屁股麵 pìgu miàn (lit. “butt noodles”). She never could remember which one was correct – and never forgave me for that. My favorite noodles, however, were Lao Deng's Dan Dan Mian (擔擔麵 dàn dàn miàn). Hot, spicy, sesame noodles, perfect any time of the year. I liked to pair them with sliced pig ear (豬耳朵 zhū ěrduǒ), dried bean curd (豆腐干 dòufǔ gān,, and sea weed (海帶 hǎi dài.) Later, I learned that Dandan Noodles were not originally from Taiwan. They were from Sichuan. But to this day, I still prefer Taipei's version of Dandan Mian to the Dandan Mian I've eaten in Cheng Du.



When I first landed in Taiwan, I was clueless. I had studied Mandarin in Missoula, Montana for only one year. Father Bartley F. Schmitz, a Catholic priest from Montana helped find a room for me with an elderly female judge who had come over from Shanghai with the KMT in 1949. I had an appointment the day after I arrived to enroll at Fujen University's Mandarin Language Center where I was given my Chinese name, 杜子文 Dù Zǐwén. I loved the name because it was easy to remember and because I was able to easily translate my given name as "child of literature." Only later did I discover that there was a former Premier of the Republic of China and a member of the infamous Soong family with the same given name. One of his sisters had been married to Sun Yat-sen and another to Chiang Kai-shek.

I left home at 7:00 every morning. On my way to school, I would pass the "Recover the Mainland Café" (復國餐廳 Fùguó Cāntīng) where smiling people would be enjoying their Chinese breakfasts. I really wanted to try the food, but I had no idea what they were eating or how to ask about it. One day as I stood there drooling at the steaming hot milk and the long pieces of deep fried dough, the cook came up to me and asked me in perfect English, "Do you want some of this?" I said, "Sure, what is it?" He said, "The white stuff is soy bean milk" (豆漿 dòu jiāng). You can get it salty or sweet. And that - he pointed at the fried long donut in a sesame bun concoction and struggled for a translation - is kind of like a Chinese hot dog without the meat." I later found out this was called 燒餅油條 shāobing yóutiáo. "OK", said I, "I'll give it a try." It was love at first bite. I became a regular. It turns out that the cook had picked up his English when he had served with the US military in Vietnam for five years.

