



Hit the road with Rotary

BY ROSALIND YANG

A taste of Taipei

Taiwan's largest city is bursting with flavor

It's 8:15 on a misty morning when Jeffrey Huang – right on time – picks me up. "Welcome to Taipei! What would you like for breakfast?" he asks. "Xi fan, rice porridge? You tiao, fried bread sticks? Or how about zongzi?" We decide on zongzi, a sticky rice pyramid stuffed with delectable goodies, wrapped in leaves, then steamed. My first lesson about Taiwan: When you come here, the most important thing is deciding what to eat.

Huang, charter president of the Rotary Club of Taipei Golden Eagle, is my guide to Taiwan's biggest city. "When people come to Taipei, there are three places everyone will tell you to visit," he begins. "The National Palace Museum, Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, and the observatory at Taipei 101." So that is exactly what we don't do.

"We're not going to the National Palace," he continues. "There are too many treasures there. Once you're in, you won't want to leave. Next time you visit, stay a few days, then we'll go to all these places!"

But just so I can say I've been to the tallest building in the world, we make a quick stop at Taipei 101, opened in 2004. "Today, all you would see is fog," Huang says, so we skip a ride on the elevator, which can zoom up to the 101st floor in a record-breaking 38 seconds. "The view from Yangmingshan would be much better," he

continues. "It's the highest, most beautiful mountain in the Taipei area."

Yangmingshan National Park, on the outskirts of Taipei, is famous for its cherry blossoms, hot springs, and hiking trails. I'm staying nearby, and I've already trekked a few of the trails, soaking in the breathtaking

views of the city, surrounding mountains, rivers, and the Taiwan Strait, so we decide to go seaward.

We head north from the city center, toward the port town of Tamshui, where the Spaniards established a mission in 1629. As we drive along the coast, reedlike foliage sways along the highway. It's alternately hazy and sunny. When the sun begins to peek out of the clouds, light splays across the highway and shimmers on the gray water.

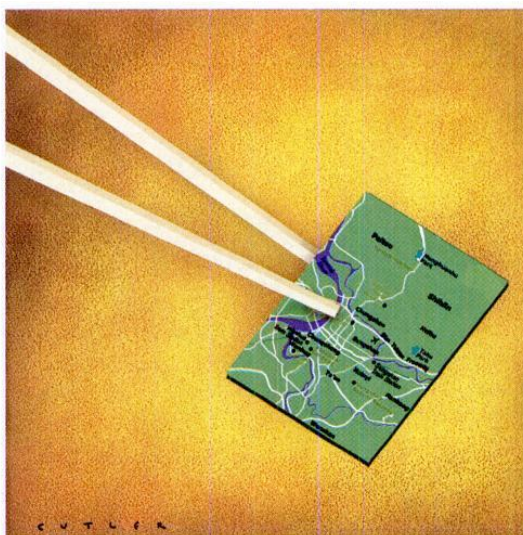
Food

We stop for zongzi at a small roadside shop. We've passed several that resemble bigger versions of hot dog stands in the United States, but Huang says this one's his favorite because it sells the "everything zongzi." We order two, packed with cuttlefish, peanuts, pork, small shrimp – that's about all I can identify. For only NT\$30 (US\$1), I could eat this for breakfast every day. We wash it down with cups of winter melon tea –

warm, sweet, and delicious.

Back downtown, we're swallowed by masses of people, cars, and motorcycles. As far as the eye can see, the streets are lined with shops, their doors thrown open, racks and tables spilling out onto the sidewalk. It's typical Taiwan.

Taipei, the political, economic, and recreational center of Taiwan, has become a place



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Rotarian Jeffrey Huang

to work hard and play hard, with a quarter of the adult population under 30.

The Rotary Club of Taipei, Taiwan's first, was chartered in 1948. There are now nearly 17,000 members in about 400 clubs, including Huang's, which was launched in 2002.

The Taiwanese Rotarians are generous supporters of The Rotary Foundation, with eight 100% Paul Harris Fellow Clubs, meaning that all members have contributed at least US\$1,000. To celebrate the Rotary Centennial in February 2005, Rotarians in Taiwan set a goal of recruiting 100 new Major Donors – and surpassed that by four, for a total of more than \$1 million.

More food

We have a late lunch, and the restaurant's signature dish is called "three-colored chicken," a platter with chicken made three different ways.

"There are night markets everywhere in Taiwan, each with its own specialties," Huang explains over lunch. Tamshui is famous for all its small shops, filled with souvenirs, crafts, and toys. Keelung is known for its small eats. Huang's older brother, Past RI Vice President Gary C.K. Huang, who has joined us for lunch, agrees to take me to the biggest, most famous one of all: Shih Lin, in the heart of Taipei.

But first, my guide takes me to Yingke, 30 minutes outside Taipei. This town, traditionally famous for its artisans, is known locally as "ceramics city." All along the streets, stores display plates, cups, bowls, vases, and pots.

We head back into the city for dinner, making a stop for *chou dou fu*, which means

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"stinky tofu." "You're not truly Taiwanese unless you love eating this dish," Huang says, insisting that I try the fermented bean curd. "The smell is stinky to some, but others consider it fragrant." With that kind of introduction, how could I refuse?

Even more food

Dinner is at He Shou Wu. I haven't fully digested lunch, but the dishes are so colorful and beautiful that it would be a shame not to try some. My favorites are bamboo with eel and, for dessert, a sweet ginger soup with tapioca.

Clearly, Taiwanese hospitality generally involves food. It's said here that one does not eat only with the mouth, but with the eyes and the heart as well. Of course, it helps that the food is remarkably good. "In Chinese, we have a saying to describe really good food: *Fo tiao chiang*, or 'Buddha jumps over the wall,'" my guide says. "When the food is really delicious, even Buddha will jump over a wall to eat it."

Adding to the mix is Taiwan's great ethnic diversity, influenced by virtually every region on the mainland, as well as Japan.

But there is still one more stop. I meet up with Gary C.K. Huang, who takes me to Shih Lin night market, where I experience *ren shan ren hai* – literally, "people mountain people sea." Exceeding even the ocean of people at the market, however, is the variety of items for sale: clothes, shoes, accessories, electronics, toys – and, of course, food.

Aside from the staple stinky tofu, locals cherish *o-a-chian* and *o-a-mi-soa*, oyster omelets and oyster vermicelli, and *ba wan*, a gelatinous dough filled with pork, bamboo shoots, and shi-take mushrooms, served with a savory sauce. There are Taiwanese sausages (spicy and sweet), scallion pancakes, skewered seafood balls. I try new fruits. My favorite is a *lian wu*, or "wax apple," which has the crunch of an apple and shape of a pear, but is juicier and sweeter than either. If only I had room for more. ■

ROSALIND YANG is a former intern for The Rotarian.

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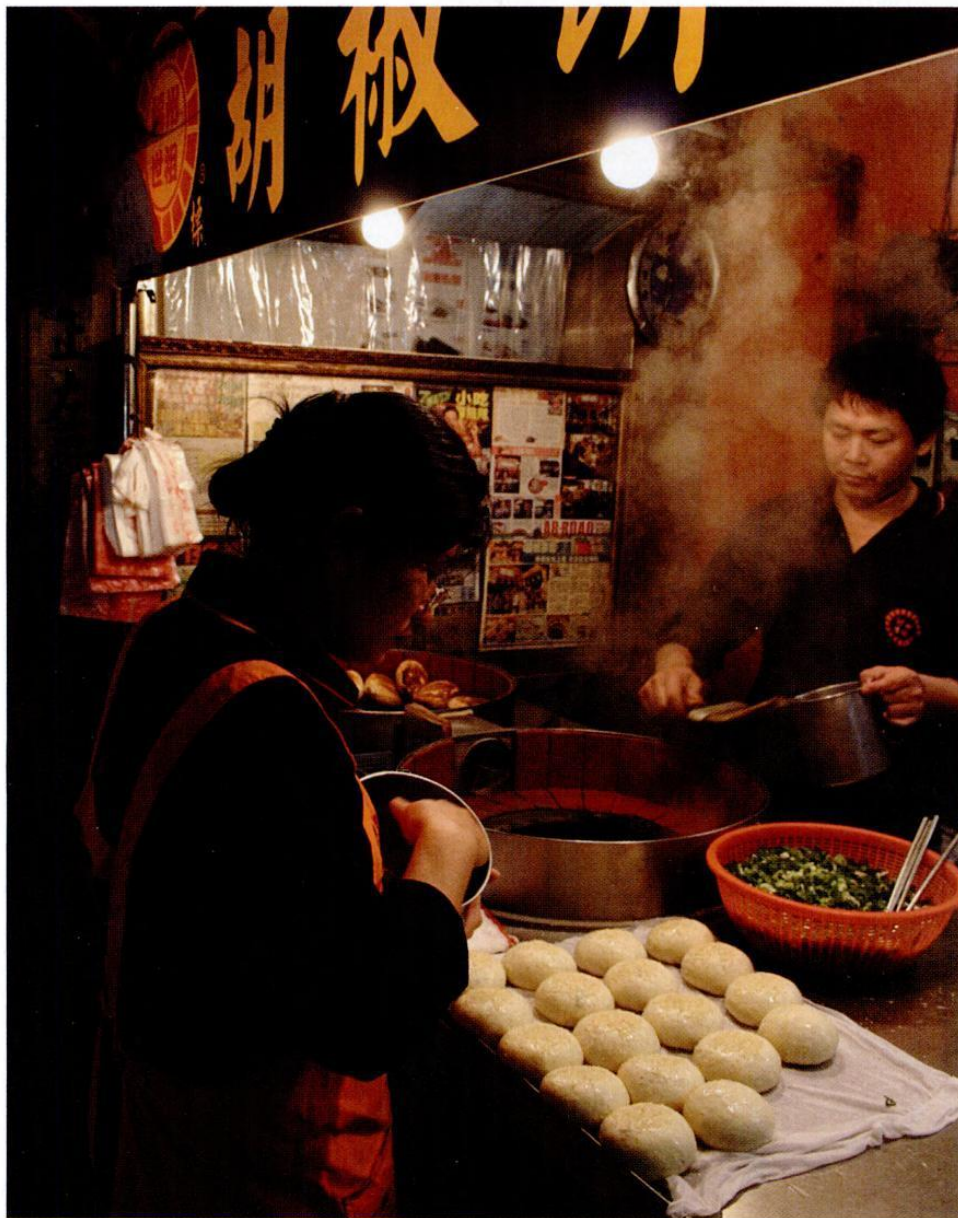
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PARTING SHOT



Midnight snack

From 4 p.m. to 2 a.m., workers at the famed Shih Lin night market serve up fried buns, bubble tea, and peanut candy, among other street treats. Read more in a culinary tour of Taipei with Rotarians Jeffrey and Gary C.K. Huang on page 19.

Glossary

This article was edited by Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) (Rotary China Historian) on 1 July 2014.

Rotary Club of Taipei Golden Eagle = 台北金鷹扶輪社

Jeffrey Huang = 黃其輝

Rotary Club of Taipei = 台北扶輪社

Gary C. K. Huang = 黃其光

Xi fan = 稀飯

You tiao = 油條

Zongzi = 糉子

The National Palace Museum = 國立故宮博物院

Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall = 國立中正紀念堂

Yangmingshan = 陽明山

Tamshui = 淡水

Keelung = 基隆市

Shih Lin night market = 士林夜市

Yingke = 鶯歌

Chou tou fu = 臭豆腐

He Shou Wu = 何首烏皇帝鷄餐廳

Fo tiao chian = 佛跳牆

o-a-chian = 蚵仔煎

o-a-mi-soa = 蚵仔麵線

Ba wan = 肉圓

Lian wu = 蓮霧