

## ES19 – Taipei Story House: The Taiwan Story of Sweets



*Photo of an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Taiwanese street sweets vendor.*

**Taipei Story House** is a unique museum dedicated to **showcasing** the historic cultural life of Taiwan and is situated in an English Tudor-style building located in Taipei City, Taiwan. It was built in 1913 by a Taipei tea merchant by the name of Chen Chao-chum on the Yuanshan section of the Keelung River for the purpose of entertaining clients.

From 1 December 2012 to 7 April 2013 Taipei Story House held an exhibition entitled *The Taiwan Story of Sweets*, which showcased a range of items and photos related to the ingredients and production of Taiwanese sweets as well as descriptions about their significance in the lives of people.

On the ground floor of Taipei Story House are three exhibition rooms which primarily described the history and manufacturing of an assortment of various Taiwanese sweets during the early and middle 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the influence of both Chinese and Japanese culture throughout the period. In the front room on the right-hand side was a photographic exhibition of notable Taiwanese bakery **proprietors** demonstrating their baking skills and traditions. Also on the ground floor were various wooden and metal **moulds** used to manufacture sweets and cakes, including a special iron wedding cake

mould engraved with the **motif** called *Dragon and Phoenix*, which together represent double happiness. Other common motifs engraved on the moulds included animals such as the tortoise, fruits such as peach, guava and pineapple; and plants such as plum blossom, lotus, peony, pine and bamboo while the gods of Fortune, **Prosperity** and Longevity were also displayed.

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the variety of sweets in Taiwan was limited by the availability of ingredients, and the sweets were usually made of wheat or rice flour with simple flavours and a hint of sweetness, such as sweet bread or malt biscuits. Their appearances were often plain while confectioneries such as mung bean cakes were usually prepared for important festivals, temple fares and other important occasions.

On the top floor were a series of rooms outlining in more detail the past cultural significance of various sweets throughout the seasons of summer, autumn, winter and spring. During summer, which is the time for the Ghost Festival, a confectionery tower made of pastries and buns was created. During autumn, **moon cakes** were and are still prepared for the mid-Autumn Festival and are made of black bean flavoured egg yolk. The black bean paste symbolises the night while the golden egg yolk symbolises the moon. While during winter, on December 24, according to the lunar calendar, families prepared candies and sweets as offerings for the gods and hoped that the gods would say nice things about the family in front of the Jade Emperor, ruler of heaven. And finally, during spring, on the birthday of Matsu, Goddess of the Sea, worshippers traditionally offered red bean tortoise cake while praying for prosperity.

The exhibition also outlined the significant role that sweets played and continue to play in the cultural life of Taiwanese people, particularly with regard to marriage and childbirth. During the wedding ceremony the groom used to give various sweets to the bride's family, including winter melon candy, rock candy, citrus cake and sugar; and in past years the size of the wedding cake was a measure of the groom's wealth. While on the occasion of a child's one-month birthday, stir-fried glutinous rice with sesame oil chicken were traditionally given to friends, relatives and the gods.

Taipei Story House is a wonderful museum dedicated to preserving and promoting the life and culture in Taiwan over the past century, and I think it is a must-see destination for any international visitor to Taipei as it provides a unique opportunity for visitors to gain insight into the richness of Taiwanese culture.

This story was written and read by Garry Strachan.

## VOCABULARY

Match the keywords with their meanings.

### Keywords

1. \_\_\_\_ (v) showcase
2. \_\_\_\_ (n) proprietor
3. \_\_\_\_ (n) mould
4. \_\_\_\_ (n) motif
5. \_\_\_\_ (n) prosperity

### Meanings

- a. To display or exhibit.
- b. A hollow container into which molten metal or some type of liquid is poured and then pressed to harden into are required shape.
- c. The owner of a business.
- d. A state of being wealthy or successful.
- e. A decorative design or pattern.

## COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

### True or false

1. \_\_\_\_ Taipei Story House is located on the Yuanshan section of the Keelung River.
2. \_\_\_\_ The Taiwan Story of Sweets exhibition specifically showcased the production of Taipei confectionery.
3. \_\_\_\_ Various moulds were engraved with motifs, including a range of fauna and flora.
4. \_\_\_\_ Black bean paste symbolises the night while the egg symbolises the sun.

## WRITING TASK

Describe a cultural exhibition or event you have attended.

You should say:

where it was located

when it was held

what was special about it

and what you like and/or dislike it about it.

\*All subscribed members can submit up to 5 IELTS writing tasks for correction.

## ANSWERS

Vocabulary:            1. a    2. c    3. b    4. e    5. d

Comprehension:    1. T    2. F    3. T    4. F

## STUDY NOTES

- **Taipei Story House**

**Taipei Story House**, was built in 1913–14 by Chen Chao-chun, a Dadaocheng tea merchant. It was originally a guest house for rich merchants, and other important local people. The ground floor was built using brick and the upper floors of wood with English Tudor-style beams. The staircase is constructed to look like a pagoda. The entrance portico is in the classical style with Corinthian columns. The Story House museum now has exhibits related to tea and local history. It is located immediately adjacent to the Taipei Fine Arts Museum and close to Yuanshan Station. (Referenced from Wikipedia)

## TRIVIA

**Mooncake** is a Chinese bakery product traditionally eaten during the Mid-Autumn Festival. The festival is for lunar worship and moon watching, when mooncakes are regarded as an indispensable delicacy. Mooncakes are offered between friends or on family gatherings while celebrating the festival. The Mid-Autumn Festival is one of the four most important Chinese festivals. (Referenced from Wikipedia)

## LINK

Taipei Story House

<http://www.storyhouse.com.tw/main/modules/MySpace/index.php?sn=storyhouse&pg=ZC83193>