

Yesterday I went to a restaurant not far from the National Taiwan University (Taida) for lunch. It's called Lung Hsian Chu (龍涎居雞膳食坊) and it was located in a small alley behind the Roosevelt Road. The restaurant served different chicken soups. I went by it many times when I worked in Taiwan. I went there yesterday for the first time.

Last year Jules Quartly from the Taipei Times wrote about this restaurant chain- *The Taiwanese version of sesame oil chicken uses stock boosted by various herbs. The result is a dish reeking of sesame that is served up in an earthenware chafing pot. It's simple but effective and goes best with plain rice and an order of vegetables. Other chicken dishes on offer include chicken with heshouwu (何首烏), a mixture of Chinese medicinal herbs that*



is guaranteed to fend off colds, according to the wait staff. Milk chicken, grape chicken, pineapple and bitter melon chicken, and dried vegetable chicken provide further variations on the same theme. The poultry ranges from the cheapest, regular chicken (NT\$110), to free-range chicken (NT\$140) and finally black-skinned chicken (NT\$160) - which is said to be the best of the lot. The adventurous may want to try some of the side dishes, which include sesame oil dried blood, dried cured tofu, or fragrant soft eggs. Wash it all down with the honeyed green tea or plum juice. This is unpretentious eating and the Taiwanese version of chicken soup that is good for the soul. A meal at Lung Hsian Chu more than fills the gap, as it also delivers a healthy dose of Chinese

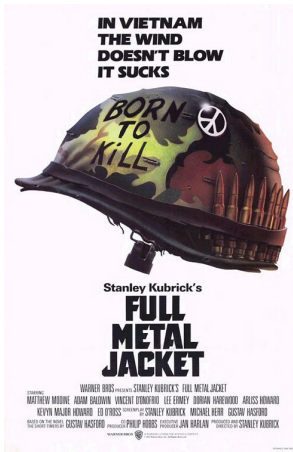
medicine. The decor is unassuming with dark wooden tables and white paper lanterns, large Japanese colonial-era windows and bare walls. The wait staff are reasonably helpful and friendly when you get to know them....

There were like 20 women in there when I walked into the Lung Hsian Chu. It seemed the women were having a small reunion. I was the only other customer in there. Since the restaurant was near to Taida, they probably graduated from it 25 or 30 years ago..... They were noisy. Fortunately they left 20 minutes later and I could really enjoy my "pineapple and bitter melon chicken soup." The soup was not bad except I found the chicken was not as tender as I desired.... I am not sure I will go there again.

Right across from this seemingly new restaurant was the old and desolate Chungking Szechuan House (重慶川菜館). It was closed yesterday. Many restaurants still closed yesterday as the typhoon Krosa just left. After lunch I went across the alley and got a closer look at this restaurant. There was nothing in there except with several bags of cement on the ground. I didn't know if it was being renovated or the Chungking Szechuan House was forever gone.

I walked by this Chungking Szechuan House many times in the past few years. I never went in there. I did go there often with friends when I was in college in the 70s. That place always reminds me of a dinner I had in there after the summer of 1974.

In my *Tokyo 1975* article I wrote- *Then it came the worst. I had to go for a six-week military training (it was part of the college credit requirements) at the Cheng Kung Ridge (成功嶺). It was hell in the beginning and I thought I would die up there in the summer of 1974.... I will write about that summer. You will laugh your socks off when I share with you some of the stories I had including Lin Ching-Hsia (林青霞) came to my rescue....*



The first two weeks up at the Cheng Kung Ridge was torturous, humiliating, and sheer hell. No one had yelled at me like that before. You could never recover from the yelling as it kept coming. We were treated like nobody. When I saw the Stanley Kubrick's "Full Metal Jacket" many years later with my wife, I told her up at the Cheng Kung Ridge we went through things like what we saw in the movie. My wife said it couldn't be that bad. She was right. It was bad but not that bad. We were only students. The officers worked us out in the first few weeks.



After that, the remaining weeks were actually quite fun. By then we already got used to the yelling. The best part of the training was when I got to fire shots from the M1 rifle. That was the first time and last time I fired a gun...



When we first got to the camp, we got our heads shaved. Then they gave us couple of shots in the arms. The guy behind me asked what they were for. The male nurse said one of the shots was to "suppress man's animal instinct." The guy behind me said, "Give me couple more of that one." In the first couple of weeks we saw only fellow students in uniform, underwear, naked,... The officers probably didn't want to see things got out of hand. The first time we got a military leave we flooded the nearest city. The time off was sheer heaven.



The last event of the training was an over 20 km hiking from the Cheng Kung Ridge to the Tunghai University (東海大學). Tunghai University was founded by Protestant missionaries in 1955. I went to the Tunghai University several times when I went to college in Taiwan in the 70s. The hiking to it in the summer of 1974 was the first time I went there. The campus of the Tunghai University always reminds me of the Luce Memorial Chapel (路思義教堂) designed by I.M. Pei. The architecture was considered one of the finest and most modern ones in Taiwan then. According to Wikipedia, *the Luce Memorial Chapel was named in honor of Rev. Henry Luce, an American missionary in China in the late 19th century and father of publisher Henry Luce. The project was originally planned in April 1954 but put on hold until July 1960. Construction took place from September 1962 until November 1963. Construction costs were USD \$125,000...* A mere \$125,000 to build a chapel? Now you can only buy a parking space in Taipei with that money.



I wrote about the *Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum* a few days ago. From the Tunghai University's website, one noted it said in its history webpage- *On November 11 of the same year (1953), American Vice-president Richard Nixon arrived in Taichung to preside over Tunghai University's ground breaking ceremony.....*

The Board also appointed Mr. Beauson Tseng (曾約農) to be the first President of the University.

Last year I went to a friend's wedding in Taichung. I planned to go to the Tunghai University afterward. It would be my first time back there since the 70s. I drank a little bit too much and I decided to drive back to Taipei. I missed the opportunity to see the Luce Memorial Chapel again....

As said above, the last event of the training was an over 20 km hiking from the Cheng Kung Ridge to the Tunghai University. We were to carry all our gear and the M1 rifle with the bayonet. The M1 with the bayonet already weighed 14.5 lbs by themselves. The officers knew that we were only students and many of us were not fit enough. Several military trucks tagged along in case some of us felt sick. All of us wanted to complete the hiking. A few of us, though really wanted to complete it, gave up along the way. I completed the hiking.

When we got to the Tunghai University, we were happy but were totally exhausted. My feet hurted like hell. I could just stay lying down for the rest of the day.... Looking up the bright blue sky, I felt though relieved. I made it through my first tough college year in Taiwan and I was also almost done with this training. The training by itself was once in a life time experience for me. After six weeks of solid training, I built up some strong muscles. I gained a good 4 kg and I had a very good appetite.... I felt good. I was ready to go back to school to take on the bad professors including the one who flunked my Chinese History....

Then someone told me to look behind us. There we saw something most refreshing. The Taiwanese director Bai Jing-Rui (白景瑞) was shooting a movie (likely the 1975 Girlfriend “女朋友”). There we saw the beautiful young Lin Ching-Hsia. She really came to our rescue. Our exhaustion disappeared in no time.... That was the summer of 1974. She was a few months shy of 20 years old.



I left Taiwan for US in 1978. That year she starred in the movie Off to Success (a.k.a. On the Cheng Kung Ridge, 成功嶺上)..... They should have asked me to play a part in the movie. I did go to the Cheng Kung Ridge.



I visited my boss's apartment in Taipei in early 2002. My boss was also the one who told me it took more than \$100,000 to buy a parking space in Taipei. While we were getting out of his apartment, he pointed at the next building and told me Lin Ching-Hsia's parents lived there. A few months later I read from the newspaper that Lin Ching-Hsia's mom, in depression for many years, jumped off that building.

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A friend and his wife took me out for a dinner at the Chungking Szechuan House when I came back from the Cheng Kung Ridge. I flushed down all the dishes along with six bowls of rice. My friend was amazed. Many years later it came to me the story that my friend became a compulsory gambler and he lost almost everything....

Life is always most unexpected.

