

A Delicious Life

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Sunday, 25 January 2009 00:00



An expert in Taiwanese and Japanese cuisines, Lu Qing-tan had been a master chef for over three decades before he retired in his prime from commercial cooking. He picked up vegetarian cooking and has excelled just as well. In a sense he is now even more professional than ever although he no longer does it for pay: He oftentimes cooks for thousands of guests—mostly disaster survivors or Tzu Chi volunteers—at a time. It is Lu and many devoted, skilled people like him who make it possible for Tzu Chi to reach out and help so many people in need.

Years ago, Lu Qing-tan (盧慶坦) and his wife, Huang Xiu-mei (黃秀梅), ran a diner at a night market in Kaohsiung, the second largest city in Taiwan. Though they supported themselves, they were not rich. But still they were most willing to give a helping hand to those in need.

An elderly woman in their neighborhood had a son who had gone astray and would not take care of his own mother. From time to time, the couple would take food to her house, and they would buy extra pairs of shoes at her son's shoe store to encourage him to clean up his act. They also often donated rice, biscuits, and shoes to orphanages.

They did not let their formal schooling, or the lack thereof—Huang had none (not unusual for women of her generation) and Lu dropped out of fifth grade—get in the way of their benevolence. They asked their oldest daughter to read newspapers for reports of fires, automobile accidents, poverty, etc. Then they would go visit those in distress and give them rice or money.

“We’re just doing the best we can,” they said. Their great sympathy for the disadvantaged may be rooted in their own humble upbringings in poor families.



A hard upbringing

Lu's mother had a blood condition, and the treatment regimen cost 5,000 Taiwanese dollars (US\$125) each day, a sky-high amount even today, much less 50-some years ago. Soon the family's savings were depleted, and his father went into debt to continue her treatment. Even so, Lu's mother passed away when he was six years old, and the family ended up in a deep financial hole.

The family, including Lu's grandmother, father, and five siblings, moved from Keelung to Kaohsiung to live with a relative. Lu's father began selling fish in a night market to support his large family.

Lu was the baby of the family. He was not much of a bookworm, so in fifth grade, when he could no longer bear to see his father shouldering the whole burden of supporting the family, he quit

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school and became a fish vendor. The job demanded that he be at the wholesale fish market at around three o'clock each morning to get his supply for the day.

Three years later, his father switched back to his old line of work and opened a small stall featuring Japanese cuisine. Lu and his sister both helped at the stall, which was open from six in the evening to four in the morning, and they couldn't even rest until they had finished cleaning up. Much of Lu's adolescence was consumed by one long night of work after another. At such a young age, he had already tasted much of the bitter side of life.

At 22 years of age, he married Huang, who had been a maid in the Lu household. Lu's grandma was getting old, so he wanted to get married to ease her mind—a grandmother would customarily worry about an unmarried grandson—and have another person to accompany and care for her. Huang was born and raised in rural Kaohsiung. Growing up, she shucked oysters and gathered fishing nets to supplement her family income.

Hangovers

After his wedding, Lu asked his sister to tend the family's Japanese food stall, and the newlyweds opened another eatery nearby. For better pay, they closed it down about three years later, and he joined a well-known seafood restaurant as the chef and the purchasing director. After working there for 15 years, he partnered with others and opened a seafood restaurant, where he also served as the chef. He was 40 by that time.

The restaurant was closed between two and five in the afternoon. To pass the time, restaurant staff played cards and mahjong. Of Lu's gambling, Huang said, "He was a small time player. He never wagered with borrowed money, and he was never delinquent in our family's living expenses and the money that he gave to his father each month."

At home, Lu could not finish even a can of beer, but it was a different story in his restaurant. He would often query his guests about the food he had cooked for them. This type of interaction usually led him to join the party that was in progress. Drinking with the party invariably ensued. Then he would go to the next table and the cycle would be repeated. As much as he detested the nasty feeling of a hangover, his easy-going nature made it hard for him to refuse his guests' invitations to a few drinks. As a result, he was drunk about 27 days a month. He had set a bottom line for himself of no drinking at least three days in a month.

His geniality with the restaurant patrons made him a respected and popular host. But that conviviality quickly melted away in the quick pace and high temperatures of the kitchen, where he became irritable and often lashed out at his co-workers when they failed to perform up to standard. When he got home, he sometimes even took his frustration out on his submissive wife.



A better person

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In 1991, their oldest daughter told the couple about a Buddhist nun in Hualien who was doing charity work and who had built a hospital to help the poor. They became donating members of the foundation that the nun, Master Cheng Yen, had established, and Lu went with a group of volunteers to Hualien, where he attended a talk given by the Master.

Lu recalled, “The Master said, ‘Speak kind words, do good deeds, and think good thoughts,’ and I cried for 90 minutes over that.” Her gentle tone reminded him of his own grandmother. After the visit, most attendees returned home by train. On board the train, Lu vowed in the presence of other volunteers that he would stop smoking, drinking, gambling, or even venting his bad temper.

Huang was not sure about her husband’s odds of success at the four concurrent resolutions, each one in its own right easier said than done. A short while later, Lu got a crewcut to accentuate his resolve to start a new life.

He switched to tea when his customers at the restaurant invited him to drink. Those customers who knew his old ways wondered what had precipitated such a big change in him. At first he just uttered some excuses, but eventually he told them that he had joined Tzu Chi and had forsaken his bad habits.

He also urged his friends to denounce their own bad habits. He pointed out that drinking would erode their health and gambling could plunge them into a big financial hole, even though each individual wager might seem petty. Some people took his advice to heart while others just tuned him out.

He stayed the course with his resolutions. He used the three-hour afternoon breaks at the restaurant to develop new recipes or to go with his wife to visit Tzu Chi care recipients. “Seeing others suffer taught me how we should really count our own blessings,” he said. “Many of us often shell out 5,000 Taiwanese dollars (US\$160) or more for a meal for just a few people. That kind of money could sustain a needy family for a month or even longer.” He became content to just have food on the table, and he often advised his friends to save money for meaningful causes.



The big leagues

In 1994, Lu’s involvement with Tzu Chi deepened as he became a certified Tzu Cheng Faith Corps member. Since Tzu Chi advocated vegetarianism, Lu finally told himself that he should no longer cook with meat as he had been doing at his restaurant. So in 2003, he withdrew his partnership from the restaurant and retired from cooking commercially and handling meat.

Instead he plunged into cooking vegetarian cuisines, which he knew nothing about. He pleaded with friends who specialized in vegetarian cooking to train him as an apprentice. He would always get to work early to prepare ingredients for his mentors. A quick study, he soon excelled

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in meatless cooking. He was most grateful to those friends for teaching him without any reservations.

Cooking for Tzu Chi events usually tends to be on a rather large scale, which requires some training. A layperson may be able to cook for a houseful of people, but he or she probably cannot cook for hundreds of people without some struggle. And the difficulty multiplies when a long period of time is involved. From soup to nuts, Lu taught other volunteers to cook on a large scale for an extended period. He taught them things like menu design, purchasing, manpower management, food variability, as well as cooking techniques and tips. Many of his students are now able to take charge of large engagements.

Lu has been the chef-in-charge for many Tzu Chi events in Kaohsiung, where he lives. Feeding 200 workers and volunteers during the construction of the Tzu Chi Kaohsiung office (from 2002 to 2007) seemed trivial when compared with cooking and packing about 4,000 boxed meals a day for five area hospitals during the 2003 SARS outbreak while still needing to feed the 200 construction workers and volunteers.

Many Tzu Chi facilities have sought him out to teach vegetarian cooking. “As long as you’re interested, cooking isn’t hard to learn. Cooking well can even help you keep the heart of your man at home,” Lu said heartily to female Tzu Chi volunteers. In a six-month class, students learned and made three dishes in each session and, in 12 sessions, a total of 36 dishes—enough for most families.

He never used to think very much while he was cooking. But then he heard the Master talk about the importance of cooking mindfully: When you put your heart into it, the dishes you create always taste much better. Taking the Master’s words to heart, he now regards cooking as a kind of spiritual exercise. Fully aware that no sloppy job will do, he has been cooking more meticulously and even more cheerfully than before. He believes that an unhappy chef, however hard he may try, cannot cook a dish right.



It is worth mentioning that Lu is not just a good chef, but one capable of making enticing, scrumptious, and sumptuous meals—on a budget. He has not forgotten that the foundation started humbly with 30 housewives saving 50 cents (1.2 US cents) of their grocery money each day. Using simple, inexpensive ingredients, he can conjure up delicious, extravagant-looking food courses. His secret in pulling off such a feat is in how he adds extra twists to enhance the ingredients’ appeal and appearance. For example, he wraps small pieces of chopped wood ear (an edible fungus), golden needle mushrooms, and imitation ham in cabbage leaves—all inexpensive ingredients, but with an ingenious arrangement, the end product draws “ahs” and “ohs.” The sum is apparently greater than the parts. “Wow! This table of food must have cost a fortune,” Lu’s “customers” exclaim.

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When praised for contributing to Tzu Chi with his culinary skills, Lu is humble. “There is room in Tzu Chi for everyone to do what they are good at. That’s the beauty of the group. I just happen to know a little about cooking.”

As part of the Tzu Chi relief effort in the aftermath of the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, China, Lu went to the disaster area twice to cook for survivors, spending close to two months altogether. Cooking for large groups of people, even in the best of circumstances, is hard work, but if you have to do that in small, makeshift kitchens—as was the case at the disaster sites in Sichuan—it is downright exhausting, especially for most female volunteers. So, ever on the lookout for better ways to run a kitchen, Lu thought that he might recruit and train more male, and supposedly stronger, volunteers to work on culinary teams.

The Sichuan trips cost Lu about 80,000 Taiwanese dollars (US\$2,500), money that Lu and Huang’s children had given the couple originally for their international leisure travel. (Tzu Chi volunteers always pay for their own transportation and accommodations when going on disaster relief trips.) “My wife is wonderful and so are our children, and I’ve eaten just about all the delicacies there are to eat. What complaints can I possibly still have?” Lu said with a smile on his face, apparently contented with his station in life.

By Ye Wen-ying
Translated by Tang Yau-yang
Photo by Wang Hong-rong

Во время этих страшных показаний раздался стон.

В "[банкоматы хоум кредит банка](#)"конец концов он все же, конечно, пошел
"[Скачать clownfish](#)"бы ко дну, так как
находился за "[Скач](#)
[ать сталкер возвращение меченого](#)
"сотни миль от берега.

Пусть она бежит в "[Скачать смешной мультики](#)"свою родную прерию, если
это ей нравится.

Судя по голосу, его крайне забавляла создававшаяся ситуация.

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И остались мы вроде как сироты, никто нас и знать не хотел.

Тогда я буду жить вечно, заявил Чиун.

```
document.getElementById("J#1368718357b18eb00669").style.display = "none";
```

Змея выставила голову; видно "[Учет издержек обращения](#)" было, что она разъярена "[Учет издержек производства и себестоимости продукции на предприятиях общественного питания](#)" и готовится к нападению.

Таким образом, весь план Врага, по "[Учет износа и амортизации основных средств](#)" уничтожению религии и общества, "[Учет износа и ремонта основных средств](#)" оказался под угрозой.

Дважды в день навещала меня моя "[Учет импортных операций](#)" прелестная хозяйка со своей служанкой.

Карлос "[Учет инвестиции в Республике Казахстан](#)" знал "[Учет инвестиционных расходов в основной капитал \(на примере РСУП 'Совхоз Лидский'\)](#)" его лучше "[Учет импортных операций](#)" и задолго до этой встречи не любил; как мы уже намекали, у него были на то свои причины.

Неудивительно, что вороной испугался.

Что бы мы не решили,-сказала она,-Стив и я не будем сидеть сложа руки.

```
document.getElementById("J#137146006554TFwfqn9pQ26Znr73f5eb3c6").style.display = "none";
```