

The Taiwanese -American Table



Recipes with love from
**The Robot Book
Club**

The Taiwanese- American Table

*Heritage Recipes and Everyday Comforts from Two
Cultures*

The Robot Book Club

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Table of Contents

The Ah-Ma Pantry (阿嬤的廚房)

Tsao-Tsan (早安) – The Rhythms of a Taiwanese Morning

Biandang (便當) & Mom's Weeknight Lifesavers

Xifan (稀飯) & Sick Day Comforts

Ah-Ma's Stove – Slow-Simmered Weekend Nostalgia

Jia-Ting Ju-Can (家庭聚餐) – Heirloom Projects & Holiday Tables

The Home Night Market (夜市)

Preface

This book, and The Robot Book Club, is an experiment large scale AI generation. Every page, from layout to images to copy, was generated with zero human review.

The authoring and publishing teams were implemented in the Kaya scripting language. They were given only the input: Taiwanese.

This is the only page authored by a human: Hello there!

— Ted Benson

Prologue

There's a particular kind of hunger that gnaws at the edges of the first-generation American soul. It's not for some abstract 'Asian' food, but for the precise, unvarnished taste of home, of childhood, of Ah-Ma's kitchen. Those smells, those textures—often imitated, rarely replicated—they haunt you. This isn't a book for tourists. It's a lifeline for those who grew up navigating two worlds: the bland predictability of suburban school lunches and the vibrant, complex tapestry of a Taiwanese family dinner.

The problem? The masters are aging. The recipes? They weren't written down. They lived in nimble hands, in a knowing glance, in a pinch of this, a dash of that. A culinary legacy measured in feel, not grams. And for too long, that authentic experience felt out of reach, lost somewhere between a bustling Taipei night market and a fluorescent-lit American grocery aisle. You remember the sting of disappointment from a diluted imitation, the hollow echo of a dish that just wasn't *right*.

This book cuts through all that. It's a field guide, a translation of those sacred, unwritten texts. We're not reinventing the wheel, nor are we white-washing anything. This is about capturing the soul of those heirloom dishes—the gelatinous marvel of Lu Rou Fan, the deeply satisfying chew of Gu Bah Mi, the addictive crisp of Yan Su Ji—and

bringing them, undiluted, to your standard American kitchen. With ingredients found at any decent Asian market, you can reclaim those flavors, that connection.

From the ritualistic comfort of a morning *Dou Jiang* to the quick, clever magic of a weeknight *Biandang*, to the sprawling, labor-of-love spreads for holidays, and the raucous joy of a home night market feast, this is your roadmap. No compromises. No apologies for MSG, because sometimes, it's just the right damn thing. This is the food that grounds you, that tells your story. This is the good stuff. The way Ah-Ma made it. Now, get to work.



The Ah-Ma Pantry (阿嬤的廚房)

A guide to equipping the modern American kitchen with the foundational flavors, unapologetic seasonings, and master sauces of a Taiwanese grandmother's cooking.

To understand Ah-Ma's cooking, you have to look in her cupboards. The Taiwanese kitchen isn't built on expensive gadgets or delicate technique; it's built on dark soy, white pepper, and the unapologetic, miraculous power of MSG. This is the bedrock. It's the scent of shallots

frying in oil until perfectly golden, and the deep, dark pot of master braising liquid living on the back burner, taking on the history of every meal that came before it.

Before you can recreate the visceral memories of childhood, you need the right tools. These are the master sauces and elemental staples—sourced directly from the crowded aisles of your local Asian market—that will finally turn an American kitchen into a Taiwanese home.





Chai Po Neng

菜脯蛋

Chai Po Neng

There is a profound beauty in the utilitarian. Chai Po Neng—a humble, intensely savory omelet built on salt-cured daikon—is the sensory bedrock of the Taiwanese family kitchen. It is exactly the smell that first-generation kids remember drifting through Midwestern screen doors. The secret to recreating that thick, impossibly fluffy texture in an American suburb isn't restaurant flair, but a grandmother's unforgiving technique: the salted radish must be wrung dry as a bar towel and toasted in a bare pan to wake up its feral aromatics before it ever sees hot pork fat.

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup	Taiwanese salted preserved radish <i>finely minced</i>	2 med	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>
1 tsp	granulated sugar	1 tbsp	water
1/4 tsp	ground white pepper	1 tsp	light soy sauce
4 large	eggs	3 tbsp	neutral oil
		1 tbsp	rendered pork lard

PREPARATION

- **Leach the harsh salt from the preserved radish.**

Soak the minced radish in a bowl of cold water for 20 to 30 minutes, then drain it through a fine-mesh sieve.

- **Wring the radish entirely dry.**

Using your hands or a clean paper towel, aggressively squeeze the soaked radish until no moisture remains; it must be completely dry to fry properly.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Dry-toast the radish to awaken its aromatics.**

Place a dry 10-inch cast-iron skillet over medium-low heat without oil. Add the dried radish and stir frequently for 2 to 3 minutes until the remaining moisture evaporates and the kitchen smells deeply earthy.

- 1 Caramelize the radish to balance the cure.**

Sprinkle the sugar and white pepper over the toasting radish, tossing briefly to melt the sugar, then remove the mixture from the pan and let it cool slightly.
- 2 Build the fluffy egg matrix.**

In a mixing bowl, vigorously beat the eggs, scallions, water, soy sauce, and cooled radish with a fork until the mixture is visibly frothy. The splash of water creates steam during frying, which provides the omelet's signature lift.
- 3 Heat the cooking fats until shimmering.**

Wipe the skillet clean, return it to medium-high heat, and add the neutral oil and pork lard. Wait until a wooden chopstick inserted into the fat immediately forms rapid bubbles.
- 4 Fry the omelet with thermal shock.**

Pour the frothy egg mixture into the hot fat so the edges instantly foam and puff. Gently push the cooked edges toward the center with a spatula, tilting the pan so the raw liquid flows underneath, and cook for about 45 seconds until the bottom is golden brown.
- 5 Flip and finish the omelet.**

Slide a wide spatula under the center and flip the omelet in one swift motion, cooking the second side for another 45 seconds until golden and just set in the middle. Slide onto a board, rest for a minute, and slice into wedges to serve.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Cast iron is your best wok substitute.**

To achieve the thermal shock necessary for a fluffy omelet, you need a pan that holds its heat when cold eggs hit it. A 10-inch cast-iron skillet mimics a wok perfectly on an American gas or induction range.

- **Do not skip the pork lard.**

While modern vegetable oils work fine for the heavy lifting, a single tablespoon of rendered pork fat provides the authentic, savory depth of a true Taiwanese kitchen. It is readily available in baking aisles or Mexican grocers as manteca.

- **Test your radish for salinity.**

Commercial preserved radish varies wildly in salt content. Taste a tiny sliver after the 20-minute soak; if it still tastes aggressively salty, give it a second brief rinse before wringing it dry.



San Bei Ji

三杯雞

sān bēi jī

The name "Three Cup Chicken" is a beautiful, historic lie. If you actually use equal parts soy sauce, sesame oil, and rice wine, you'll end up with a salty, greasy mess that would make any Taiwanese grandmother weep. The real magic happens in the ratios and the rules: absolutely zero water, slow-frying old ginger in cold oil so it doesn't burn, and letting bone-in chicken reduce down into a sticky, mahogany lacquer. When you hit it with an obscene amount of Thai basil at the very end, that anise-scented steam hitting your face will transport you straight to a Taipei night market. This is the real deal—exactly how it's supposed to taste.

INGREDIENTS

2 lb	bone-in skin-on chicken thighs <i>chopped through the bone into 1.5-inch pieces</i>	1/2 cup	Michiu rice wine
1 med	old ginger <i>unpeeled and sliced into 12 to 15 thin coins</i>	1/4 cup	light soy sauce
15 med cloves	garlic <i>peeled and left whole</i>	1 tbsp	dark soy sauce
2 med	scallions <i>cut into 2-inch pieces</i>	2 tbsp	toasted sesame oil
2 small	fresh red chilies <i>sliced</i>	2 tbsp	rock sugar <i>crushed</i>
		1 1/2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil
		2 cup	Thai basil leaves <i>firmly packed</i>

PREPARATION

- **Hack the chicken thighs into bite-sized pieces.**

A heavy cleaver works best to cut right through the bone. Exposing the bone marrow is non-negotiable; it releases the rich gelatin that gives the sauce its signature lip-smacking stickiness.

- **Prepare the aromatics before you start cooking.**

Slice the ginger, chop the scallions, and peel the garlic cloves. Have everything within arm's reach because once the wok gets hot, the process moves fast.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Start the ginger in cold oil to protect its flavor.**

Add the neutral oil, 1 tablespoon of the sesame oil, and the ginger slices to a cold wok or skillet before turning the heat to medium-low. Let it gently sizzle for 4 to 5 minutes until the ginger edges curl and turn golden brown, extracting the essential oils without scorching the delicate sesame oil.
- 2 Sear the chicken and caramelize the sugar.**

Turn the heat to medium-high, toss in the garlic, scallions, and chilies for 30 seconds, then add the chicken skin-side down in a single layer. Let it sear undisturbed for 3 to 4 minutes, push it to the edges, drop the rock sugar in the center to melt for 30 seconds, and toss the chicken in the caramel to build a lacquered finish.
- 3 Braise the chicken without a single drop of water.**

Pour in the rice wine, light soy sauce, and dark soy sauce. Stir to coat, reduce heat to low, cover tightly, and let the chicken braise in the savory wine vapor for 12 to 15 minutes.
- 4 Execute the grand reduction.**

Remove the lid, turn the heat up to medium-high, and let the liquid vigorously bubble away. Watch closely for 3 to 5 minutes until the sauce reduces into thick, glossy, sticky bubbles that coat the back of a spoon, then immediately turn off the heat.

1**Fold in the basil entirely off the heat.**

With the stove completely off, drizzle in the remaining 1 tablespoon of sesame oil and immediately toss in the mountain of Thai basil.

Cover the pan for exactly 20 seconds to trap the intoxicating aroma before serving directly from the pan with massive bowls of white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES**• Eat the ginger.**

By the end of cooking, those shriveled coins of old ginger have absorbed all the chicken fat, wine, and soy sauce. To an educated Taiwanese palate, the chewy, savory ginger is actually the best part of the dish.

• Do not mince the garlic.

Mincing the garlic is a rookie mistake that will leave you with a bitter, burnt sauce. Leave the cloves whole so they soften into sweet, buttery nuggets.



Tsao-Tsan (早安) – The Rhythms of a Taiwanese Morning

Vibrant, carbohydrate-heavy, and deeply comforting traditional Taiwanese breakfast spreads adapted for weekend luxuries or nostalgic cravings.

Morning in Taipei isn't some quiet, meditative affair. It's a loud, glorious, carbohydrate-fueled collision of sizzling oil, steaming wooden barrels, and the sharp, waking tang of black vinegar. This is

food built to sustain: the tight, chewy grip of a sticky rice fan tuan, the flaky shatter of cong you bing, and the magical, curdling alchemy of savory dou jiang.

Recreating these rituals in a quiet American kitchen is an act of joyful defiance against the mundane. It requires a little patience, a willingness to let your hands get oily, and the understanding that true comfort is meant to be devoured hot, messy, and without apology. Here are the blueprints to those mornings.





Xian Dou Jiang

鹹豆漿

xián dòujiāng

To understand the Taiwanese morning is to hear the sizzle of dough hitting hot oil and the clatter of ceramic bowls in a bustling Taipei breakfast shop. Xian Dou Jiang isn't merely a beverage; it is a masterclass in culinary alchemy. Hot, unadulterated soy milk is poured over a precise calibration of vinegar, instantly flashing into a delicate, savory custard. It looks like magic, but grandma knew it was just uncompromising technique. Armed with pure, single-ingredient soy milk and a bag of frozen youtiao from the local Asian market, any cook can reproduce this perfect intersection of salty, sour, and deeply savory in fifteen minutes flat.

INGREDIENTS

3 cup	unsweetened soy milk	1/4 tsp	white pepper
2 large	large eggs <i>lightly beaten</i>	2 tbsp	dried radish <i>finely chopped</i>
2 tbsp	white vinegar	1 tbsp	small dried shrimp
1 tbsp	soy sauce	1 large	frozen youtiao <i>thawed</i>
2 tsp	toasted sesame oil	1 med	scallion <i>finely chopped</i>
1 tbsp	chili oil	1 tbsp	pork floss

PREPARATION

- **Revive the frozen youtiao in a hot oven.**

Preheat your oven to 350°F. Bake the thawed dough stick directly on the rack for 8 to 10 minutes until deeply re-crisped, then use kitchen shears to snip it into bite-sized pieces.

- **Wake up the dried shrimp.**

Place the dried shrimp in a small bowl, cover with hot water for 2 minutes to soften, then drain and pat dry.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Dry-toast the dried shrimp and radish.**

Heat a dry skillet over medium heat. Add the softened shrimp and chopped radish, toasting them for 2 to 3 minutes until deeply fragrant. This banishes any residual fishiness and unlocks the authentic savory soul of the dish.

1 Build the flavor base in two deep bowls.

Divide the beaten eggs evenly between the bowls. To each bowl add exactly 1 tablespoon of vinegar, 1/2 tablespoon of soy sauce, 1 teaspoon of sesame oil, a pinch of white pepper, chili oil to taste, and half of the toasted shrimp and radish mixture.

2 Heat the pure soy milk until just on the verge of a rolling boil.

Pour the soy milk into a saucepan over medium heat and watch it carefully. You want it right around 200°F, where steam rises and small bubbles form at the edges, but do not let it boil over.

3 Rapidly pour the near-boiling soy milk into the prepared bowls.

Remove the milk from the heat, hold the saucepan a few inches above the bowls, and quickly pour half the milk into each. The kinetic force of the pour does the mixing for you.

4 Do not stir the bowls.

Let the bowls sit entirely undisturbed for 30 to 60 seconds. The intense heat and vinegar will react with the soy proteins to form delicate, silken curds.

5 Garnish generously and serve immediately.

Top the freshly set curds with the chopped scallions, crisped youtiao pieces, and a scatter of pork floss.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Use only single-ingredient soy milk.**

American commercial soy milks loaded with stabilizers, sugars, and gums (like gellan or carrageenan) will flat-out refuse to curdle. Check the label; the only ingredients should be water and soybeans.

- **Bacon is a worthy substitute for dried shrimp.**

If dried shrimp is unavailable or you have an allergy, a slice of finely minced, rendered bacon provides the necessary smoky, salty, umami-rich fat to carry the broth.



Dan Bing

蛋餅

dàn bǐng

To understand what a Taiwanese morning actually tastes like, a cook must first put away the frozen wrappers. Long before commercial factories existed, grandmothers and street vendors poured a simple, wet batter straight into a hot pan. The secret to this canonical method is "QQ"—a uniquely bouncy, springy texture born from blending wheat flour with tapioca starch. It is faster than kneading dough, easily executed on a rushed weekday morning, and yields a tender, chewy crepe that brings the bustling alleys of Taipei straight to an American kitchen.

INGREDIENTS

3/4 cup	all-purpose flour	4 large	eggs
1/4 cup	tapioca starch	2 tbsp	soy sauce
1 1/4 cup	cold water	1 tbsp	granulated sugar
1/2 tsp	fine sea salt	3 tbsp	water
1/4 tsp	white pepper	1/2 tsp	tapioca starch <i>mixed with 1 tbsp cold water to make a slurry</i>
2 med	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>	1 small	garlic
2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	clove	<i>finely minced</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Whisk the dry ingredients with cold water until the batter is completely smooth.**

Cold water prevents the gluten from over-developing, keeping the crepe tender. Stir in the scallions and let the batter sit for ten minutes so the starches hydrate.
- 2 Simmer the soy sauce, sugar, water, and garlic in a small saucepan.**

Once it gently bubbles and the sugar dissolves, stir in the tapioca slurry. Cook for fifteen seconds until it turns glossy and thickens into a rich paste, then remove from the heat.
- 3 Pour a thin layer of batter into a lightly oiled non-stick skillet over medium heat.**

Wipe a teaspoon of oil around the pan so it is slick but not pooling. Swirl about a third of a cup of the batter into an even circle and let it cook undisturbed for two to three minutes until the edges turn translucent.

1 Flip the crepe, cook for one more minute, and set aside.

Once the bottom is lightly golden, turn it with a wide spatula. Slide the cooked crepe onto a plate to make room for the egg.

2 Scramble an egg in the pan and immediately press the cooked crepe on top of it.

Add a tiny drop of oil to the hot pan, crack the egg directly in, and quickly break the yolk. While the egg is still wet, slap the crepe over it so they fuse together.

3 Roll the crepe tightly, slice, and serve.

Once the egg is set and smells toasted, flip the whole thing over. Fold it into thirds to form a tight cylinder, chop into bite-sized pieces, and drizzle generously with the thick garlic soy paste.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Embrace the QQ.**

The tapioca or sweet potato starch is non-negotiable; it is the sole difference between a flat, bready pancake and a genuinely bouncy Taiwanese bite.

- **Do not skip the sauce.**

Western adaptations lazily call for plain soy sauce, but authentic Dan Bing demands Jiang You Gao—the thick, sweet, garlicky paste easily replicated here.



Biandang (便當) & Mom's Weeknight Lifesavers

High-yield, deeply flavorful recipes designed for the busy first-generation American parent, doubling as tonight's dinner and tomorrow's lunch.

There is no romance in a Tuesday night after a ten-hour shift. There is only hunger, tired feet, and the relentless ticking of the clock. For the first-generation parent, weeknight dinner isn't just a meal; it's a tactical

strike. It has to be fast, it has to hit the soul right in the center of the chest, and crucially, it has to taste just as good packed into a biandang the next morning.

This is the quiet, uncelebrated heroism of the Taiwanese home kitchen. A simmering pot of lu rou fan or the velvet, savory-sweet rush of tomato and egg—these are dishes that demand little time but deliver massive, unwavering comfort. No tweezers, no elaborate garnishes. Just sustenance, muscle memory, and the undeniable proof that somebody loves you enough to make sure you eat well tomorrow.





Rou Zao Fan

肉燥飯

ròu-zào-fàn

Most Western adaptations of this legendary Taiwanese staple demand hand-diced pork belly, but in southern Taiwan, the real weeknight hero is minced pork. This is the unembellished, deeply savory essence of a Tainan kitchen—rendered pork fat, earthy shiitakes, and the non-negotiable magic of store-bought fried shallots and Kimlan soy paste. It is a masterclass in building flavor through caramelization, requiring zero tedious prep to achieve that distinct, lip-smacking comfort of your mother's kitchen on a random Tuesday night.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	ground pork butt	1/2 tsp	white pepper
5 med	dried shiitake mushrooms	1/4 cup	light soy sauce
1 1/2 cup	hot water	2 tbsp	Kimlan soy paste
1 tbsp	neutral oil	2 tbsp	rock sugar
4 med cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>	1/4 cup	Michiu or Shaoxing wine
1 tsp	five-spice powder	1 cup	store-bought fried shallots
		4 large	large eggs <i>hard-boiled and peeled</i>

PREPARATION

- **Rehydrate the mushrooms.**

Soak the dried shiitake mushrooms in the hot water for at least 20 minutes until completely soft, then squeeze the excess water out and dice them finely, reserving the soaking liquid.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Aggressively render the pork.**

Heat the neutral oil in a heavy-bottomed Dutch oven or wok over medium-high heat, add the ground pork, and cook for 8 to 10 minutes until the liquid completely evaporates and the meat begins to brown in its own rendered fat.

- 2 Bloom the aromatics.**

Lower the heat to medium, add the diced shiitake mushrooms and minced garlic to the pooling pork fat, and sauté for 2 minutes before stirring in the five-spice powder and white pepper for 30 seconds.

1 Flash-caramelize the sauce.

Push the meat mixture to the side of the pan and pour the light soy sauce, Kimlan soy paste, and rock sugar into the empty space to bubble for 15 seconds, then toss everything together and pour in the rice wine to deglaze the pan.

2 Initiate the slow braise.

Pour in the reserved mushroom soaking liquid (leaving any gritty sediment behind), stir in the fried shallots, and bring the pot to a boil before reducing the heat to low, covering, and simmering for 25 minutes.

3 Steep the eggs.

Carefully submerge the peeled hard-boiled eggs in the braising liquid, cover, and simmer for a final 10 to 15 minutes until the sauce is dark, glossy, and slightly thickened with a beautiful layer of seasoned fat floating on top.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Fat is flavor.**

Do not use extra-lean ground pork; seek out an 80/20 ratio like pork butt or shoulder to achieve the proper mouthfeel without the meat drying out.

● **Chase the night-market stickiness.**

To perfectly mimic the gelatinous texture of traditional minced pork skin without the labor, dissolve 1 teaspoon of unflavored powdered gelatin into the mushroom soaking liquid before adding it to the braise.

- **Let it rest.**

Like all great stews, Rou Zao Fan tastes mathematically better on the second day once the gelatin sets and the soy-anise matrix penetrates the meat, making it the ultimate meal-prep for a biandang.



Fan Qie Chao Dan

番茄炒蛋

fān qié chǎo dàn

If you ask a first-generation Taiwanese-American what tastes most like home, they won't point to some elaborately pleated soup dumpling. They will tell you it's Fan Qie Chao Dan. This weeknight champion was the undisputed king of the family dinner table and the most coveted prize in the next day's school lunch thermos. It's a glorious, unpretentious red-and-gold gravy meant to be ladled generously over a mountain of steamed white rice. The secret to that authentic, sweet-sour Taipei flavor isn't hours of simmering heirloom tomatoes—it's a

pragmatic squirt of standard American ketchup and a pinch of sugar. Forget the culinary snobbery; this is the brilliant, practical way grandmothers actually cook it.

INGREDIENTS

4 large	large eggs	3 med	Roma or beefsteak tomatoes <i>cored and cut into 1-inch wedges</i>
1 tsp	water	1 tbsp	granulated sugar
1 small pinch	kosher salt	2 tbsp	American ketchup
3 tbsp	neutral cooking oil <i>divided</i>	1/4 cup	water <i>or low-sodium chicken broth</i>
3 med	scallions <i>thinly sliced, white and green parts separated</i>	1/4 tsp	toasted sesame oil <i>optional</i>

PREPARATION

- **Practice good mise en place.**

This stir-fry moves rapidly once the heat is on. Make sure your scallions are separated, your eggs are beaten, and your tomatoes are chopped before a single drop of oil hits the wok.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Whisk the eggs with a splash of water and a pinch of salt until frothy.**
The tiny bit of water is a grandmother's trick to hinder protein coagulation, ensuring the eggs stay miraculously silky and tender even when reheated.

1 Soft-scramble the eggs in hot oil until they are only seventy percent cooked, then immediately remove them from the pan.

Heat two tablespoons of the oil in a large non-stick skillet or wok over medium-high heat. Pour in the beaten eggs, gently pushing the edges toward the center. As soon as they are set but still look wet and glossy, slide them onto a plate. Overcooking here is fatal; they will finish cooking in the gravy later.

2 Bloom the scallion whites in the remaining oil until highly fragrant.

Return the skillet to medium heat and add the remaining tablespoon of oil. Toss in the separated scallion whites and sauté for about twenty seconds until they just begin to soften and release their aroma.

3 Sear the tomatoes, then build the gravy with sugar, ketchup, and water.

Add the tomato wedges and sear undisturbed for thirty seconds. Sprinkle the sugar evenly over the tomatoes to draw out their natural juices, then stir in the ketchup for a few seconds to wake up the color in the hot oil. Pour in the quarter cup of water, cover, and let simmer aggressively for three to four minutes until the tomatoes collapse into a rich, slightly thickened sauce.

4 Fold the resting eggs back into the bubbling tomato sauce.

Slide the soft-scrambled eggs back into the pan. Gently fold them into the sauce rather than aggressively chopping them up. You want large, fluffy yellow clouds of egg that soak up the sweet and tangy broth like a sponge. Let it cook together for just fifteen to thirty seconds until perfectly set.

1 Finish with the scallion greens and a dash of sesame oil.

Turn off the heat and fold in the reserved scallion greens. The residual pan heat will take the raw bite out of the greens while keeping their vibrant color. Serve immediately over a wide bowl of freshly steamed short-grain white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **To Ketchup, or Not to Ketchup?**

Fancy gourmet recipes might tell you to blanch and peel fresh tomatoes, simmering them for hours to build a complex sauce. Taiwanese moms on a Tuesday night do not have time for that. Using ketchup is not a modern Americanized shortcut; it is a historically documented, authentic flavor enhancer used across Taiwan. Modern agricultural tomatoes simply do not possess the heavy umami or sugar content of older cultivars. Ketchup provides a concentrated hit of tomato paste, vinegar, and sugar that perfectly mimics the heirloom flavor of Taiwan's past. Lean into the ketchup. It is what makes it taste exactly like Grandma's.



Xifan (稀飯) & Sick Day Comforts

Gentle, restorative broths and rice porridges that represent maternal care and comfort.

Sickness strips us all down to our barest wiring. When the fever spikes and the world shrinks to the size of a damp pillow, nobody wants a masterpiece. They want salvation. For generations of Taiwanese kids, that salvation arrived in a bowl of xifan—a steaming,

restorative slurry of rice coaxed into something resembling a quiet, fierce hug from Ah-Ma herself. It is the pure, unadorned food of maternal instinct.

The recipes that follow aren't out to impress. They are the unassuming, fiercely guarded remedies of the home kitchen: silken steamed eggs that slip easily past a sore throat, pork meatballs rich with familiar savory depth, and a bitter melon soup that tastes exactly like tough love and rapid healing. This is the arsenal. Keep it close.





Ah-Ma's Sweet Potato Xifan

阿嬤的地瓜稀飯

ā-mǎ de dì-guā xī-fàn

True Taiwanese comfort doesn't arrive on a fine china plate; it comes in a steaming bowl of dilute rice and root vegetables, echoing a history of island resilience known as the Sweet Potato Spirit. To reproduce the silken, starchy suspension of a grandmother's kitchen on a busy weeknight requires no magic, just ancestral wisdom meeting practical science. A blend of short-grain and glutinous rice, pre-shattered by a stint in the freezer, blooms in a fraction of the time, while shredded sweet potato melts entirely into the broth to forge a golden, earthy canvas built for fiercely savory accompaniments.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup	short or medium grain white rice <i>rinsed until the water runs clear and drained</i>	1 large	Asian sweet potato <i>peeled, one-third grated into fine strands, two-thirds cut into bite-sized chunks</i>
1/4 cup	round glutinous rice <i>rinsed until the water runs clear and drained</i>	8 cup	water
		3 slice	fresh ginger

PREPARATION

- **Freeze the washed rice ahead of time.**

Place the thoroughly rinsed and drained white and glutinous rice into a freezer-safe bag, spreading it flat. Freeze for at least 6 hours, or up to 3 months, to shatter the cellular walls of the grains so they bloom instantly when boiled.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Bring the water to a rolling boil.**
In a heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, bring the water to a rolling boil over medium-high heat.
- 2 Add the frozen rice, sweet potato, and ginger.**
Break the block of frozen rice apart slightly and drop it directly into the boiling water along with the grated sweet potato, sweet potato chunks, and ginger slices.

1 Stir immediately and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes.

Stir well to prevent the rice from sticking to the bottom, lower the heat to medium-low, and partially cover the pot. Allow it to simmer gently until you visibly see the fractured rice grains burst open and thicken the water.

2 Turn off the heat and let the congee rest undisturbed for 15 minutes.

This crucial Taiwanese resting phase, known as Deng-An, allows the ambient residual heat to fully gelatinize the starches into a velvety, unified suspension without any stirring.

3 Stir gently and serve hot.

Remove the lid and give the congee a gentle, sweeping stir to reveal the thickened, golden texture before serving alongside savory accompaniments like pork floss or pickled cucumbers.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sourcing the right sweet potato is non-negotiable.**

Avoid American orange sweet potatoes, which contain too much water and dissolve into mush. Seek out Japanese Satsuma-imo, Korean, or Murasaki varieties for their chestnut-like sweetness and firm texture.

- **Round glutinous rice is the secret to a silken texture.**

Blending a small amount of glutinous rice with standard short-grain rice provides the luxurious, velvety viscosity of a long-simmered congee without the wait.



Silken Tofu Steamed Egg

豆腐蒸蛋

dòufu zhēngdàn

To the uninitiated, steamed egg might seem like a humble afterthought, but achieving a texture so pristine it looks like a mirror—what the Taiwanese call *guliú*, or effortlessly slippery—is a point of quiet, immense pride. When illness strikes or a soothing dinner is needed in twenty minutes, this is a grandmother's immediate answer. The secret to recreating that exact Taipei home kitchen comfort relies entirely on physics, not impossible ingredients. Warm liquid, a fine-mesh strainer, and a single wooden chopstick wedged under the steamer lid are all it takes to transform a few eggs and a block of silken tofu into pure, unadulterated relief.

INGREDIENTS

14 oz	silken tofu <i>drained and cut into 1/2-inch thick rectangles</i>	1/4 tsp	white pepper
3 large	eggs	1 tbsp	light soy sauce
1 cup	low-sodium chicken broth <i>warmed to 110°F</i>	1 tsp	toasted sesame oil
1/4 tsp	salt	1 med	scallion <i>finely chopped</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Arrange the tofu in a shallow, heat-proof bowl.**

Place the drained, sliced silken tofu into an 8-inch wide heat-proof bowl. The tofu will release a bit of water during cooking, which balances perfectly with the egg ratio.
- 2 Whisk the eggs, seasonings, and warm broth together.**

In a mixing bowl, lightly whisk the eggs, salt, and white pepper. Continuously whisk while pouring in the warm chicken broth. Using warm liquid prevents the heat from shocking the eggs in the steamer, effectively stopping the formation of rubbery bubbles inside the custard.
- 3 Pour the egg mixture through a fine-mesh strainer.**

Pass the liquid through a fine-mesh sieve directly over the tofu to catch the thick chalazae and any foam. Pop any remaining stray bubbles on the surface with a spoon to ensure a glass-like finish.

1 Set up the steamer and vent the lid with a wooden chopstick.

Bring a steamer with 2 inches of water to a boil. Cover the egg bowl tightly with a heat-proof plate or plastic wrap to prevent condensation from dripping onto the custard. Place the bowl in the steamer, top with the lid, and wedge a single wooden chopstick under the rim of the lid to let excess pressure escape.

2 Steam on medium-low heat for 12 to 15 minutes.

Lower the heat to medium-low. The egg is done when a gentle jiggle reveals a center that wobbles like soft tofu, rather than rippling like liquid. Do not let it roll into a hard boil, or the egg will seize and turn into a sponge.

3 Garnish with soy sauce, sesame oil, and scallions.

Carefully remove the hot bowl from the steamer and uncover it. Drizzle the surface with light soy sauce and toasted sesame oil, scatter the scallions, and serve immediately alongside hot congee or rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The golden hydration ratio.**

The perfect guliu texture relies on a strict 1:1.5 ratio of egg to liquid. Traditional cooks bypass measuring cups entirely, using a broken eggshell to scoop three half-shells of water for every whole egg.



Ah-Ma's Stove – Slow-Simmered Weekend Nostalgia

The heavy hitters of Taiwanese family dinners, adapted for modern kitchens without losing their soul.

There is a specific kind of quiet that settles over a house when the real work is happening on the stove. It smells like dark soy, rock sugar, star anise, and time. This is the heavy artillery of the Taiwanese family table—the slow-braised pork belly and deeply aromatic beef soups that used to demand a matriarch's entire Sunday.

The world moves faster now, and nobody's grandmother expects them to stand over a simmering pot of luwei for eight hours. We've brought the Instant Pot and the local Asian market into the equation, but make no mistake: the soul of these dishes hasn't shifted an inch. It's the same bruised garlic, the same unapologetic fat, and the same absolute insistence on taking care of your own.





Niu Rou Mian

紅燒牛肉麵

hóng shāo niú ròu miàn

This is a bowl of history, born in Taiwan's post-war military villages where homesick veterans married the fierce, fermented chili flavors of Sichuan with local beef and American wheat noodles. For the kids who grew up stateside with these aromas creeping under their bedroom doors, this dark, bubbling broth is the undisputed scent of home. Getting it right comes down to three uncompromising, grandmotherly truths: you must use collagen-rich beef shank, you must sear the fermented chili bean paste in hot oil to wake it up, and you must dry-fry the pickled mustard greens before they ever touch the bowl. It is rich, nostalgic, and entirely uncompromising.

INGREDIENTS

3 lb	boneless beef shank <i>cut into 2-inch chunks</i>	4 med	star anise pods
6 cup	unsalted beef broth	1 tbsp	Sichuan peppercorns
2 cup	water	1 med	cinnamon stick
2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	4 med	dried red chilies
1 large	yellow onion <i>cut into thick wedges</i>	2 med	bay leaves
6 large cloves	garlic <i>peeled and smashed</i>	1 med	black cardamom pod <i>smashed open</i>
2 inch	fresh ginger <i>unpeeled, cut into thick slices and smashed</i>	1 large	daikon radish <i>peeled and cut into 1-inch half-moons</i>
4 med	scallions <i>cut into 2-inch segments</i>	2 large	carrots <i>peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks</i>
2 med	Roma tomatoes <i>quartered</i>	1 lb	fresh thick Chinese wheat noodles
2 1/2 tbsp	spicy Doubanjiang	4 med	baby bok choy <i>halved and rinsed</i>
1 tbsp	tomato paste	1 cup	pickled mustard greens <i>thoroughly rinsed, squeezed completely dry, and finely chopped</i>
1 1/2 tbsp	yellow rock sugar	1 tbsp	neutral cooking oil
1/2 cup	light soy sauce	2 small clove	garlic <i>minced</i>
1/4 cup	dark soy sauce	1 1/2 tbsp	white sugar
1/2 cup	Shaoxing wine		

PREPARATION

- **Dry-fry the rinsed and chopped pickled mustard greens in an empty skillet over medium heat for five minutes.**

This essential step evaporates the remaining moisture and drives off the harsh, funky brine flavor native to the packaged greens.

- **Push the dry greens aside, add a tablespoon of oil to the pan, and sizzle the minced garlic.**

Toss the greens back into the aromatic oil, sprinkle with white sugar, and stir-fry for two more minutes until caramelized, then set this crucial garnish aside.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Blanch the beef shank in a large pot of boiling water for five minutes.**
Submerge the meat in cold tap water, bring to a rolling boil, and let the grey scum rise to the top. Discard the murky water and scrub the beef chunks clean under cold running water to guarantee a clear, professional-tasting broth.
- 2 Sauté the onion, smashed garlic, ginger, and scallions in the two tablespoons of neutral oil until golden brown.**
Use a heavy-bottomed Dutch oven or your pressure cooker on the sauté setting. Add the quartered tomatoes and cook until they begin to break down and release their juices.
- 3 Push the vegetables to the edge and fry the Doubanjiang and tomato paste directly in the center of the hot oil.**
Cook for one to two minutes until the oil turns a vibrant stained-glass red and the raw fermented smell transforms into a roasted, mouth-watering aroma.
- 4 Melt the rock sugar into the paste, then toss in the blanched beef shank to sear.**
Stir vigorously to coat every piece of beef in the crimson oil. Pour in the light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, and Shaoxing wine, scraping the bottom of the pot to release the browned bits.

1 Pour in the beef broth and water, and submerge the dried spices tied in a cheesecloth bag.

For the traditional method, simmer covered on the stove for an hour and a half, add the daikon and carrots, and simmer for another hour.

For the weeknight hack, add the vegetables, seal your pressure cooker, and cook on high pressure for 45 minutes, followed by a 15-minute natural release.

2 Blanch the bok choy and boil the wheat noodles in a separate pot of water.

Never cook noodles directly in your beef broth, or the released starches will entirely ruin its silky, clean texture.

3 Ladle the dark, bubbling broth and tender beef over the hot noodles.

Top generously with the bok choy, daikon, carrots, and a mandatory heavy spoonful of the sweet-and-savory stir-fried mustard greens.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Resting the soup overnight elevates the flavor exponentially.**

Cooling the soup in the fridge allows the spices to deeply penetrate the tough muscle fibers and solidifies the beef fat into a hard cap, making it incredibly easy to remove any excess oil before reheating.

- **Do not substitute the beef shank with lean stew meat.**

The magic of this soup relies entirely on the dense connective tissues slowly melting into luxurious, gelatinous strands that give the broth its signature lip-smacking body.



Hakka Kong Rou with Bamboo Shoots

客家筍乾爌肉

kèjiā sǔngān kuàng ròu

Most people think the secret to that dark, glorious, mahogany-red pork is dumping in half a bottle of dark soy sauce. Ah-Ma knows better. Relying on soy sauce alone turns a two-hour braise acidic and aggressively salty. The real magic happens when you fry rock sugar in oil until it turns into a bubbling amber caramel, giving the skin-on pork belly a lacquered glaze that perfectly balances the savory master stock. Earthy bamboo shoots soak up the rendered pork fat, cutting the richness and anchoring a dish that tastes exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	skin-on pork belly <i>cut into 1.5-inch square chunks</i>	3 tbsp	rock sugar <i>divided</i>
8 oz	vacuum-packed bamboo shoots <i>rinsed, blanched for 5 minutes, squeezed dry, and cut into bite-sized lengths</i>	1 tbsp	neutral cooking oil
6 large cloves	garlic <i>whole and lightly smashed</i>	1/2 cup	light soy sauce
5 thick slices	fresh ginger	1/4 cup	Taiwanese michiu or dry sake
2 med	scallion <i>cut into 2-inch segments, whites and greens separated</i>	1 tbsp	soy paste
		1/2 tsp	five-spice powder
		1/4 tsp	white pepper
		3 cup	hot water

PREPARATION

- **Squeeze the bamboo shoots like a sponge.**

Even vacuum-packed bamboo shoots hold a slightly metallic packing liquid. Blanch them in fresh boiling water for 5 minutes, rinse under cold water, and wring them out aggressively so they can absorb the braising liquid instead of watering it down.

INSTRUCTIONS

1 **Render the pork fat.**

Place the pork belly chunks into a dry, heavy-bottomed Dutch oven over medium heat. Sauté for 5 to 8 minutes until the edges are golden brown and a puddle of clear lard forms in the pan, then remove the pork with a slotted spoon and set aside.

- 1 Fry the aromatics in the rendered lard.**

Spoon out all but two tablespoons of the rendered pork fat from the pan. Toss in the smashed garlic, ginger slices, and scallion whites, sautéing for 1 to 2 minutes until deeply fragrant, then remove them to the bowl with the pork.
- 2 Fry the sugar to a deep amber caramel.**

Wipe the pan relatively clean, then add the neutral oil and half of the rock sugar over medium-low heat. Swirl the pan gently as it melts and bubbles; the moment the bubbles become tiny and the color shifts to a deep amber-brown, immediately toss the pork and aromatics back in and stir rapidly to coat the meat.
- 3 Deglaze and build the braise.**

Pour the rice wine around the edges of the hot pan, scraping up any caramelized bits. Stir in the light soy sauce, soy paste, remaining rock sugar, five-spice powder, and white pepper.
- 4 Simmer gently for ninety minutes.**

Add the prepped bamboo shoots and pour in just enough hot water to barely cover the meat. Bring to a rolling boil, drop the heat to your lowest setting, cover tightly, and simmer until a chopstick pierces the pork skin with zero resistance.
- 5 Reduce the sauce into a glossy glaze.**

Remove the lid, crank the heat to medium-high, and let the liquid boil down for 10 to 15 minutes into a thick gravy that clings to the meat. Toss in the scallion greens right before removing from the heat.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Watch your water temperature.**

Never use cold water when building the braising liquid. Pouring cold water over hot caramelized sugar will shock it into hard, unyielding shards.

- **Using dried bamboo shoots.**

If you have the time and want uncompromising authenticity, use 4 oz of dried bamboo shoots instead of vacuum-packed. Soak them in cold water for 24 hours, changing the water twice, then boil for 20 to 30 minutes until pliable before squeezing dry.



Jia-Ting Ju-Can (家庭聚餐) – Heirloom Projects & Holiday Tables

Complex, multi-step recipes reserved for holidays, family gatherings, and preserving true culinary inheritance.

There is a kind of cooking that simply takes time, and there are no shortcuts. These are the all-day, kitchen-destroying projects pulled out only when the calendar dictates or the family gathers in force. Making bah-tzang or steaming proper bawan isn't a quick weeknight dinner; it's a deliberate act of preservation. It's wrestling bamboo leaves and sweet rice into submission so a generational memory doesn't quietly fade out.

Here is the heavy artillery. These pages hold the blueprints for the holiday tables—the meticulous, step-by-step mechanics of how Taiwanese grandmothers fed a crowded house and kept their history intact. It requires patience, a bit of sweat, and a willingness to get your hands dirty. The payoff, as always, is everything.





Bah-Tzang

肉粽

bah-tzang

Making Bah-Tzang is the ultimate labor of love. In Taiwan, they argue endlessly over Northern steamed versus Southern boiled zongzi, but we're taking the traditional Southern route. By submerging these bamboo-wrapped pyramids in a rolling boil for hours, the pork fat slowly melts into the glutinous rice, yielding a soft, creamy masterpiece deeply infused with the herbal scent of the leaf. It's a serious project, but if you break the braising, soaking, and wrapping across three days, you'll bring the exact taste of Grandma's kitchen right to your own table.

INGREDIENTS

30	dried green bamboo leaves <i>soaked, boiled for 25 minutes, and scrubbed clean</i>	2 tbsp	dried shrimp <i>soaked and drained</i>
12 piece	cotton kitchen twine <i>cut into 40-inch lengths and tied into a hanging loop</i>	1/3 cup	crispy fried red shallots
3 cup	round-grain glutinous rice <i>rinsed and soaked overnight</i>	6	salted duck egg yolks <i>halved</i>
1/2 cup	raw peanuts with skin <i>soaked overnight and boiled for 30 minutes</i>	2 tbsp	vegetable oil
1 lb	pork belly <i>cut into 1-inch cubes</i>	3 tbsp	light soy sauce
15 small	dried miniature shiitake mushrooms <i>soaked in warm water (liquid reserved) and stems removed</i>	2 tbsp	dark soy sauce
		2 tbsp	Shaoxing wine
		1 tbsp	rock sugar
		1/2 tsp	five-spice powder
		1/2 tsp	white pepper

PREPARATION

- **Plan your attack over three days.**

Make the braise on day one. Wash and soak the rice, peanuts, and prep the leaves on day two. Assemble and boil the dumplings on day three.

- **Secure your tying station.**

You need both hands free to wrap. Tie your 12 lengths of cotton string into a single loop at the top, and hang it from a sturdy cabinet handle or doorknob before you begin wrapping.

INSTRUCTIONS

1 **Sear the pork belly until the fat renders.**

Heat the vegetable oil in a wok over medium-high. Toss in the cubed pork belly and cook until well-browned, letting that crucial fat render out to build the foundation of your braise.

2 **Fry the aromatics.**

Add the soaked dried shrimp and shiitake mushrooms to the hot pork fat. Stir-fry until highly fragrant, then pour in the light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, Shaoxing wine, rock sugar, five-spice powder, and white pepper.

3 **Simmer the braise and separate the liquid.**

Pour in 2 cups of the reserved mushroom soaking liquid to submerge the meat. Bring to a boil, then drop the heat and simmer for 45 minutes until the pork is tender. Strain the solids into a bowl and, crucially, save every drop of that rich, fatty braising liquid. Store both in the fridge overnight.

4 **Coat the soaked rice in the braising fat.**

Drain the soaked glutinous rice and peanuts. In a large bowl, toss them with the chilled braising liquid and the crispy fried red shallots until every single grain takes on a pale brown hue and is coated in fat. Do not cook the rice—it needs to go into the leaf completely raw.

5 **Form the bamboo leaf cone.**

Take two prepared bamboo leaves, smooth side up, and overlap them slightly head-to-tail. Fold them near the center to form a deep, tight funnel, folding the very bottom tip back slightly to ensure there is no hole for the rice to escape.

1 Layer the rice and fillings.

Pack a small scoop of the seasoned rice and peanuts into the bottom of the cone. Add one piece of pork, a mushroom, half a salted egg yolk, and top with another scoop of rice. Press down gently but firmly so the filling is entirely encapsulated by the rice.

2 Fold and tie the dumpling tightly.

Fold the top excess of the bamboo leaves down over the exposed rice like closing the lid of a box, wrapping the remaining tail around the side. While pinching the shape tightly in one hand, wrap your hanging kitchen twine around the center two to three times and tie a secure knot.

3 Submerge and boil for two hours.

Drop the tied bundles into a massive stockpot of actively boiling water, ensuring they are completely submerged. Cover and boil continuously for 2 hours so the starches gelatinize and the fat melts into the rice. Turn off the heat and let them steep in the hot water for another 30 minutes before hanging them up to drain and cool.

CHEF'S NOTES

• **Serve it like they do in the South.**

Snip the twine, peel back the leaf, and serve immediately while hot, drizzled generously with thick soy paste and a heavy dusting of unsweetened roasted peanut powder.

• **Freeze the leftovers.**

These freeze exceptionally well. Cool them completely at room temperature, leave them fully wrapped in their leaves, and freeze in a ziplock bag. Steam from frozen for 20 minutes to reheat.



Bawan

肉圓

ròuyuán

If you grew up in a Taiwanese household, the smell of five-spice and fried shallots hitting a hot wok is the undisputed smell of home. Bawan is the king of the night market—a magnificent architectural feat of savory pork and crunchy bamboo wrapped in a bouncy, translucent dough that defines the essential Taiwanese texture known as 'Q'. Making them looks like magic, but the secret is just high school chemistry: gelatinizing long-grain rice flour into a thick paste before adding sweet potato starch. We're ditching the specialized tin molds for the ceramic ramekins gathering dust in your cupboard. Steam a

massive batch on a Sunday, shallow-fry them for that authentic Changhua bite, or just nuke one on a Wednesday night. One bite, and you're back.

INGREDIENTS

3/4 lb	pork shoulder <i>cut into 1/4-inch cubes</i>	2 tbsp	ketchup
1 cup	canned bamboo shoots <i>finely diced</i>	1 tbsp	sweet chili sauce
6 large	dried shiitake mushrooms <i>soaked in hot water for 30 mins, squeezed dry, and finely diced</i>	2 tbsp	granulated sugar
3 tbsp	fried shallots	1 tbsp	soy sauce
2 tbsp	soy sauce	1 cup	water
1 tbsp	rice wine	2 tbsp	long-grain rice flour <i>mixed with 2 tbsp cold water</i>
1 tbsp	sesame oil	1/2 cup	long-grain rice flour
1 tsp	granulated sugar	1/4 cup	tapioca starch
1/2 tsp	five-spice powder	3 cup	water <i>divided</i>
1/2 tsp	white pepper	2 1/2 cup	sweet potato starch
1/4 tsp	salt	2 tbsp	neutral oil <i>for greasing</i>
1 tbsp	tapioca starch	2 clove	garlic <i>grated into a paste with 1 tsp water</i>
2 tbsp	white miso paste	1/4 cup	fresh cilantro <i>chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Hunt down the right flours.**

Zilai rice flour (long-grain rice flour) is structurally necessary; do not use glutinous rice flour or Mochiko, or your wrapper will melt into an unrecognizable puddle.

- **Nail the 'Q' texture.**

Gelatinization is non-negotiable; you must cook the rice flour into a thick glue before adding the sweet potato starch to build the chewiness Taiwanese food is famous for.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 **Mix the meat filling.**

Combine the diced pork, 2 tbsp soy sauce, rice wine, 1 tsp sugar, five-spice, white pepper, salt, sesame oil, and 1 tbsp tapioca starch in a bowl, stirring vigorously in one direction until sticky and pale to emulsify the proteins.

- 2 **Sauté the aromatics.**

Heat a splash of oil in a skillet over medium-high heat, fry the diced shiitake mushrooms until deeply fragrant, then toss in the bamboo shoots to dry them out slightly; fold this and the fried shallots into the raw pork mixture and chill.

- 3 **Simmer the Haishan sauce.**

Whisk 1 cup water, miso, ketchup, sweet chili, 2 tbsp sugar, and 1 tbsp soy sauce in a saucepan over medium-low heat.

- 4 **Thicken the sauce.**

Whisk the 2 tbsp rice flour slurry into the simmering sauce until it turns glossy and thick, cooking for one minute before removing from heat.

- 1 Gelatinize the wrapper base.**

Whisk 1/2 cup long-grain rice flour and 1/4 cup tapioca starch with 1 cup cold water in a pot off the heat until completely smooth, then stir in the remaining 2 cups of water.
- 2 Cook the paste.**

Place the pot over medium-low heat and stir continuously for 3 to 5 minutes until the mixture seizes into a highly viscous, sticky white paste; remove immediately from the heat and let it cool until warm but not boiling hot.
- 3 Fold in the sweet potato starch.**

Gradually fold the sweet potato starch into the warm paste with a sturdy spatula until a very thick, shaggy dough forms, taking care not to overmix.
- 4 Prep the ramekins.**

Aggressively coat the inside of 8 to 10 shallow ramekins with neutral oil to ensure the sticky dough releases after steaming.
- 5 Assemble the dumplings.**

Using wet hands, press 2 tablespoons of dough into the bottom and up the sides of each ramekin, drop in 2 tablespoons of the pork filling, and seal the top with another spoonful of dough.
- 6 Steam the Bawan.**

Place the ramekins in a steamer basket over boiling water and steam covered for 20 minutes until the wrappers turn translucent and the meat is cooked through.

1**Cool and unmold.**

Let the ramekins cool for at least 10 minutes so the starch sets, then use an oiled spoon to gently pry the dumplings out.

2**Garnish and serve.**

Snip an 'X' into the top of the dumpling with kitchen shears, drown it in warm Haishan sauce, and garnish with garlic paste and chopped cilantro.

CHEF'S NOTES**• Go full Changhua style.**

For the ultimate authentic weekend project, let the steamed dumplings cool completely, then gently poach them in 265°F neutral oil for 2 to 3 minutes until the exterior blisters slightly and becomes slick and chewy.

• Stock the weeknight freezer.

Freeze the steamed dumplings individually wrapped in oiled plastic; on a busy Wednesday, you can microwave one under a damp paper towel for 90 seconds for instant comfort.



The Home Night Market (夜市)

Scaled-down, highly accurate recipes that bring the chaotic, intoxicating smells of the Taiwanese night market to an American suburban kitchen.

There is a specific kind of salvation found in the humid, neon-drenched chaos of a Taiwanese night market—a sprawling maze of bubbling fryers and the intoxicating, unapologetic perfume of five-spice and hot pork fat. It's the food of the people, meant to be eaten standing up, elbow-to-elbow with hungry locals. But when you're miles away in a quiet American suburb on a Friday night, craving that exact visceral hit, mere nostalgia won't cut it. You need the real thing.

Here is how you drag the glorious, greasy heart of Taipei right into your own kitchen. These aren't watered-down compromises for tourists. From the peppery crackle of yan su ji to the sweet, chewy pull of a proper QQ ball, these are the dead-accurate blueprints for the midnight snacks of your youth. Turn on the exhaust fan, gather your friends, and let the oil get hot.





Yan Su Ji

鹽酥雞

yán sū jī

There are few sensory memories as universally understood by the Taiwanese diaspora as the crinkling of a grease-stained paper bag filled with golden, craggy chunks of chicken. This is the real deal—no shortcuts, no smooth batter. The secret lies in a coarse sweet potato starch coating and an old-school technique called *fan chao*, letting the starch hydrate and grip the meat like glue. Finished with a flash-fry of fresh basil and an unapologetic dusting of five-spice, it is the midnight infrastructure of Taipei, miraculously replicated on a Tuesday night in Ohio.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	boneless skinless chicken thighs <i>cut into 1-inch bite-sized cubes</i>	1/4 tsp	white pepper
2 tbsp	Taiwanese soy paste or soy sauce	1 large	egg <i>lightly beaten</i>
1 tbsp	Michiu or Shaoxing wine	1 1/2 cup	coarse sweet potato flour
1 tsp	white sugar	1 qt	neutral frying oil
3 med	garlic	1 cup	fresh Thai basil leaves <i>meticulously patted completely dry</i>
clove	<i>grated into a fine paste</i>	1/2 tsp	white pepper
1/2 tsp	five-spice powder	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
		1/4 tsp	five-spice powder

PREPARATION

- **Prepare the dusting powder.**

In a small bowl, combine the 1/2 teaspoon of white pepper, kosher salt, and 1/4 teaspoon of five-spice powder. Set aside for the final toss.

INSTRUCTIONS

1

Marinate the chicken.

In a large bowl, massage the chicken chunks with the soy paste, rice wine, sugar, grated garlic, 1/2 teaspoon of five-spice, 1/4 teaspoon of white pepper, and the egg. Work the mixture vigorously with your hands until the liquids are entirely absorbed into the meat. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes, or up to overnight.

1 Coat and rest the chicken.

Pour the coarse sweet potato flour into a wide, shallow dish. Working in batches, press the marinated chicken pieces into the flour, ensuring every crevice is thickly coated, then shake off the excess. Place the coated pieces on a wire rack and let them sit for 5 to 10 minutes. This hydration rest, or fan chao, allows the moisture to turn the stark white powder slightly damp and translucent, locking the crust to the meat.

2 Execute the first fry.

Fill a heavy-bottomed Dutch oven with 2 inches of neutral oil and heat to 325°F. Carefully drop the chicken pieces in, one by one, ensuring not to crowd the pot. Fry for 3 to 4 minutes until the chicken is cooked through and pale golden. Remove to a clean wire rack and use a spider strainer to skim the oil of floating debris.

3 Flash-fry for the ultimate crisp.

Increase the heat until the oil reaches 375°F. Reintroduce all the chicken to the hot oil for 60 to 90 seconds. The high heat aggressively vaporizes surface moisture, driving out excess oil and forcing the crust into a deep golden, rigid state.

4 Blister the basil.

In the final 15 seconds of the second fry, stand back and carefully toss the perfectly dried basil leaves directly into the oil. Cover immediately with a splatter guard, as the moisture in the leaves will cause the oil to pop violently. Fry until the basil is translucent and crisp.

1**Season and serve immediately.**

Using a spider strainer, quickly scoop the chicken and basil out of the hot oil, shaking off the excess fat. Transfer to a large mixing bowl, sprinkle the dusting powder over the top, and toss vigorously while the surface is still hot and glistening.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The secret is the starch.**

To get that unmistakable, craggy, deafening crunch that immediately takes you back to Taiwan, you cannot use regular wheat flour or fine cornstarch. Coarse sweet potato starch (粗粒地瓜粉) is non-negotiable and easily found at your local Asian grocer.

- **Respect the hot oil.**

Ensure your Thai basil leaves are meticulously dried before they hit the 375°F oil. Even a few drops of residual water will cause the oil to pop and violently splatter.



Da Chang Bao Xiao Chang

大腸包小腸

dà cháng bāo xiǎo cháng

If you ask any Taiwanese immigrant what they miss most about the homeland, it's the night market. It's that humid, neon-lit chaos smelling of scooter exhaust, charcoal, and sizzling pork fat. Da Chang Bao Xiao Chang—literally "Large Intestine Wrapping Small Intestine"—is the ultimate Taiwanese hot dog: a sweet, blistered pork sausage nestled inside a sticky-rice sausage bun. The grandma-approved weeknight secret isn't spending five hours scrubbing pig casings. It's sourcing the right frozen sausages from your local Asian market and letting the

authentic garnishes—sharp raw garlic, sweet-and-sour mustard greens, and crushed peanuts—do the heavy lifting. One bite, and you're standing on the streets of Taichung.

INGREDIENTS

4 med	Taiwanese rice sausages <i>thawed if frozen</i>	1/2 cup	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
4 med	Taiwanese sweet pork sausages <i>scored diagonally without cutting all the way through</i>	1/2 cup	English cucumber <i>finely julienned</i>
1/2 cup	pickled mustard greens <i>rinsed thoroughly, squeezed completely dry, and finely chopped</i>	2 tbsp	sweet peanut powder
1 tsp	granulated sugar	2 tbsp	thick soy sauce paste
2 small cloves	raw garlic <i>thinly sliced</i>	2 tbsp	Taiwanese sweet chili sauce
		1 tbsp	neutral oil

PREPARATION

- **Awaken the rice sausages.**

Microwave the thawed rice sausages on a plate covered with a damp paper towel for 60 to 90 seconds, or steam them for 10 minutes until soft to the touch.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Balance the mustard greens.**

Heat a splash of oil in a small skillet over medium heat, then sauté the chopped mustard greens with the sugar for 2 to 3 minutes until fragrant and slightly dry.

1 Sear the sausages slowly.

In a large non-stick or cast-iron skillet, heat the neutral oil over medium-low heat. Add both the softened rice sausages and the scored pork sausages. Taiwanese pork sausages have a high sugar content and will burn quickly on high heat; roll them patiently for 8 to 10 minutes until the pork is deep mahogany and the rice sausages are golden and slightly crisp.

2 Create the bun.

Transfer the hot rice sausages to a cutting board and slice a deep, lengthwise slit down the center of each, stopping three-quarters of the way through to create a pocket.

3 Build the hot dog.

Spread a thin layer of the thick soy sauce paste and sweet chili sauce inside each rice sausage pocket.

4 Add the textures and serve.

Layer in the sweetened mustard greens, peanut powder, and cucumber. Nestle the hot pork sausage right into the center of the toppings, then tuck the raw garlic slices alongside the meat. Garnish generously with cilantro, wrap the bottom half in parchment paper, and eat immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

• **The sugar burn warning.**

Treating these like a standard American bratwurst will result in a blackened exterior and raw interior. Their high sugar and wine content dictates that low and slow heat is absolutely non-negotiable.

- **Preventing casing blowouts.**

Do not skip softening the rice sausages before they hit the pan. The extreme temperature differential of throwing a cold, dense rice sausage into hot oil will cause the casing to contract violently and tear, spilling sticky rice everywhere.

- **The deconstructed bowl.**

If you live far from a well-stocked Asian grocer and can only source the pork sausages, simply pan-fry them and serve sliced over a bowl of short-grain sweet sticky rice topped with the exact same sauces and garnishes.