

STAMPS TELL YOU STORIES: THE LEGENDS AND CUISINES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

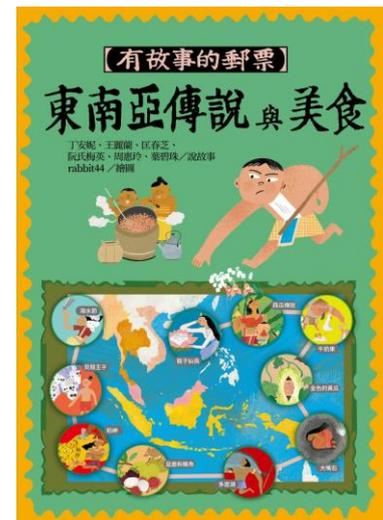
有故事的郵票：東南亞傳說 與美食

Introducing ten food-related folk legend with stamps from countries across Southeast Asia, this book invites immigrants from Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Indonesia to share the stories and culinary cultures of their homelands.

Even though stamps might be small, they don't just deliver letters to faraway places, they also feature illustrations that can tell incredible, unique stories. This book uses stamps as a starting point to tell ten folk tales from different countries throughout Southeast Asia.

Each story in this book was written by an immigrant from the country where the legend originated, evoking original flavors from across the continent. The book spans a vast range of stories, from the Chung cakes made at the Hung Kings' Festival in Vietnam, to the rice congee consumed during the Songkran Festival in Myanmar; from the Sarawak layer cakes and roti jala in Malaysia, to the fruit and vegetable carvings in Thailand, and the wealth of spices in Indonesia. While all the stories take food as a starting point, they also span a wide range of other topics, from the sources of myths and origins of festivals to amusing fables about animals!

The editor of this book, Chou Hui-Lin, has extensive stamp collecting experience of her own and the *Stamps Tell You Stories* series already consists of five titles, each of which takes on a different geographical theme. In addition to *The Legends and Cuisines of Southeast Asia*, the other titles include *Taiwanese Children's Stories*, *Popular American*



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Legends, Slovakian Fairytales, and Japanese Folklore and Haiku, with the series still continuing to expand. In addition to the stories, the series also contains a wealth of stamp-related knowledge for readers to uncover and explore.

Text by Chou Hui-Lin 周惠玲

Chou Hui-Lin is a multifaceted author of children's literature and a collector of fairytale-related stamps from around the world. Not only was she the curator of the 2013 World Classic Fairytale Stamp Exhibition at Zhongshan Hall in Taipei, but she also planned and co-wrote *Stamps Tell You Stories*. She is the translator of *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho, *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormie, and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll.

Text by Sri Handini 丁安妮

Born and raised in Semarang, Central Java (Indonesia), she moved to Taiwan alone in 2001 to work as a caregiver. In 2004, she married her husband who is Taiwanese, and she has been a resident ever since. Today, she hosts the *Happy United Nations* program on National Education Radio (Taipei), and she won the Educational and Cultural Program Host Award in 2015. Alongside her job, she is actively involved in social work where she helps migrant workers and immigrants resolve their job and life-related issues. She has served as editor of the multilingual magazine *4-Way News*, hosted events such as Eid festivities and singing competitions for immigrants, and she has also made guest appearances as an actress.

Text by Wong Lee-Lan 王麗蘭

Wong Lee-Lan has a PhD in Anthropology from Tsing Hua University in Hsinchu, Taiwan. She was born and raised in Klang, Selangor (Malaysia) and came to Taiwan to study at the age of 18. She has been a university lecturer since 2010, teaching Indonesian and Malay, and is committed to sharing her knowledge of Southeast Asian languages and cultures. She is a producer and host of *Happy United Nations* on National Education Radio, as well as the planner and host of a podcast called *Aunty's Talk*. She is the author of *We Volunteer in Malaysia* and *Learn Indonesian in One Go*.

Text by Kuang Chun-Chih 匡春芝

Kuang Chun-Chih is the host of a Thai language teaching program on National Education Radio and was a member of the review committee for the Ministry of Education's textbook for immigrants. She is currently training to become a Thai language instructor.

Text by Nguyen Thi Mai Anh 阮氏梅英

Born in Hanoi in 1983, Nguyen Thi Mai Anh began learning Chinese because she was interested in the cultural landscape of Mainland China and later immigrated to Taiwan. Currently, she is a host on *Happy United Nations* on National Education Radio and has given talks on Vietnamese language and culture in many schools.

Text by Ye Bi-Ju 葉碧珠

A native of Mandalay, Myanmar, she came to Taiwan without finishing her studies at Mandalay University and later earned her bachelor's degree from National Taiwan Normal University. She has been involved in Burmese language education in Taiwan for more than 10 years and has been a popular lecturer at National Chengchi University as well as at many companies. She is also a highly acclaimed Burmese translator and interpreter. She is the author of *Don't Laugh! Learn Burmese with Playing Cards: Burmese Flashcards for Life and Travel*, *My First Burmese Lesson*, *My Second Burmese Lesson*, and *Burmese in a Hurry*.

Text by Chen Yu-Lien 陳玉蓮

She is a senior philatelist and columnist for *Oriental Post* and *Fortune Magazine*, as well as a guide at the Soka Museum of Art (Taoyuan).

Text by Chen Chia-Hsiu 花格子

Chen Chia-Hsiu has a PhD in linguistics and has won the Chiu Ko Young Adult Literature Award and the Taitung University Children's Literature Prize, among many other domestic literary awards. She is the author of over a dozen titles including, *Let's Set Sail, It's Gale Force 8!*, *How Much Does Mom Love Me?*, *Buns and Afros*, *My Dad is on TV*, *No.99 Fangchung Street*, and *The Appetizing Avenue*.

Illustrated by rabbit44

Rabbit44 graduated from the Department of Fine Arts at National Taiwan Normal University. She has previously worked in the education industry and for magazines, and now specializes in illustration and graphic design. She draws for adults as well as children and particularly enjoys humorous and life-like content. Her work often appears in newspapers and other media.

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Translated by Helen Wang

Chapter 1: Children of the Dragon, Grandchildren of the Immortal (Vietnam)

By Nguyen Thi Mai Anh

The Vietnamese call themselves Children of the Dragon, Grandchildren of the Immortal, and this stamp tells you why...



A long time ago in the Lac Viet region, in the northern part of Vietnam, there was a dragon god. He was the son of the underwater dragon goddess, and his name was Lac Long Quan (Raccoon Dragon Lord).

Lac Long Quan had great magical powers. Sometimes he lived underwater, sometimes he lived on land. He helped humans eliminate harmful fish spirits, fox spirits, and wood spirits, and taught humans how to grow crops, keep livestock, wear clothes, and how to live.

Whenever he finished a job helping humankind, he would return to the water palace to be with his mother until the next time he was needed.

At that time, in the high mountains in the north, there was a very beautiful woman called Au Co, a descendant of Shennong. She traveled a lot and loved to go to places with beautiful scenery. Once, she overheard that the flowers in Lac Viet were very fragrant and the medicinal herbs there were very effective, so she went to the region, and happened to meet Lac Long Quan. They fell in love, got married, and lived together in a splendid palace on land.

Au Co soon became pregnant. She produced a hundred eggs, each of which hatched a son. Miraculously, these hundred sons did not need to breastfeed. They grew up as fast as you can inflate a balloon, and each son was as handsome and as fit and strong as his father.

One day, Lac Long Quan, who missed life in the underwater palace, felt he couldn't live the rest of his life on land. He said goodbye to his wife and children, and returned to the underwater palace. His wife raised the children on her own, and waited sadly for her husband to come back to land. Finally, she called him to the shore, and said sadly, "Why did you leave me? Why don't you bring up the children with me?"

Lac Long Quan said: "I'm a dragon from deep in the sea. You're an immortal from high in the mountains. People who live on land have different temperaments and habits from people who live in the sea; it's very difficult for them to live in the same place for a long time. It would be better for me to take fifty children into the sea, and you to take fifty children into the mountains, and each of us manage in our own place. Mountain people and sea people can still help each when necessary – don't forget that."

Au Co took fifty children into the mountains, and settled in Phong Chau, in the northeastern part of today's Vietnam. Lac Long Quan appointed his eldest son to be king. He arranged for his kingdom to be called the Van Lang Kingdom, for the king's sons to be called Guan Lang (officers), and his daughters to be called Mei Niang (beauties), and for his eldest son always to be heir to the throne.

The Van Lang Kingdom lasted for eighteen generations, and each king was called the Hung King.

Following the tradition laid down by the Lac Long Quan, the eldest son inherited the throne. However, the sixth generation Hung King had a different way of thinking. Instead of the eldest son automatically becoming king, he believed that the throne should be passed to whichever prince had done the most for his people. But, he had twenty sons, all of whom were excellent and had contributed in their own fields, so he didn't know who should take his place.

Finally, he thought of a solution. He called all the princes to the palace, and announced that the following spring, after New Year, he would pass the throne to the prince that prepared the most precious gift for their ancestors.

Twenty princes went in search of a rare treasure in the hope of becoming king. One of these princes was Lang Lieu. His mother had died when he was an infant, he was of simple character, and he had no one to help him. When he heard his father's announcement, he began to worry. He didn't know how to choose the most precious gift.

One night, Lang Lieu dreamt that an immortal came to see him and said, "There is nothing more precious in this world than glutinous rice. Use it to make round cakes and square cakes. With the square cakes, fill them with a stuffing of meat and mung beans, then wrap them in a leaf. These square cakes symbolize the earth. They're called Banh Chung. Or you can crush the glutinous rice and boil it in water, then shape the soft dough into round cakes. These symbolize the domed sky. They're called Banh Giay."

When Lang Lieu woke up, he did as the fairy said, and made square cakes and round cakes.

Finally, the day of the ritual came. The princes brought rare treasures from all over the world. Lang Lieu brought two simple kinds of cakes. At first, everyone looked down on his gift,

but when the king tasted the cakes, he thought they were special, and asked Lang Lieu about them. Lang Lieu told his father about his dream.

The king was moved by what he heard. “That’s right, ordinary people think of food as heavenly, and want to share good food and drink with their ancestors. This is the most precious gift.” He decided to pass the throne to Lang Lieu. Since then, every Spring Festival holiday, Vietnamese families always make Banh Chung and Banh Giay as offerings to their ancestors and to heaven and earth.

The story on stamps

This story is Vietnam’s creation story, and tells us about history and belief. Although the first half of the story about the dragon god Lac Long Quan and the beautiful Au Co, and the Van Lang kingdom (2879-259 BC) is mythical, the Vietnamese people call themselves Children of the dragon and grandchildren of the immortal.

The legend of Lac Long Quan and Au Co is the pride of the Vietnamese people. In 2000, the Vietnamese Post Office issued a set of stamps titled “The Legend of Lac Long Quan and Au Co”, with six stamps arranged like a comic strip, telling the main story (Fig. 1-1). This set of stamps was painted by Hoang Thuy Lieu.

The eldest son of Lac Long Quan and Au Co was the first generation Hung King of the Van Lang kingdom. Although this ancient country no longer exists, the Vietnamese still venerate the Hung Kings, and every year on the 10th day of the 3rd month of the lunar calendar they hold a special Hung Kings’ Day that includes a variety of traditional ceremonies, with various offerings, incense, and folk performances that have been passed on for many generations. They express their respect for their ancestors, thank the Hung Kings for their service and virtue, and call on the people to maintain national unity.

Banh Chungs are an essential part of the offerings on Hung Kings’ Day. It is also obligatory to eat Banh Chung at Vietnamese New Year. As mentioned in the story, it is because they symbolize the most precious gift offered to the ancestors. Vietnamese Banh Chungs are similar, but different, to the zongzi commonly eaten by people in Taiwan. Banh Chungs are square, and the filling is made of meat and mung beans.

In 2012, the Hung Kings’ Day was recognized by UNESCO as an “Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity”. The Vietnamese Post Office issued a set of three stamps and a souvenir sheet titled “Worship of Hung Kings – Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mankind”. This set of stamps was designed Vo Luong Nhi and Vo Kim Lien. The last stamp shows Banh Chung, Banh Giay, and the Vietnamese people preparing to make offerings to the Hung Kings. (Story of the stamps by Nguyen Thi Mai)



Figure 1-1 “The Legend of Lac Long Quan and Au Co”, Vietnam, 2000. From left: the marriage, Au Co produces 100 eggs that hatch 100 sons, Au Co taking 50 children into the mountains, Lac Long Quan taking 50 children into the sea, Lac Long Quan’s eldest becomes the first Hung King, the Vietnamese peoples are all children of the dragon, grandchildren of the immortal. (Chou Hui-Lin Collection)



Figure 1-2 “Worship of Hung Kings - Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mankind”, Vietnam, 2015. This set comprises a stamp-sheet, and three stamps, of which the third stamp shows people making Banh Chung and Banh Giay, which they will offer to the Hung Kings. (Chou Hui-Lin Collection)

Chapter 2: Lake Toba (Indonesia)

By Sri Handini & Wong Lee-Lan

A fisherman caught a fish. When it turned into gold coins, he was surprised and asked, “What about my dinner?”



A long time ago, on a mountain on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, lived a farmer called Toba. He was hardworking and willing to endure hardship. After laboring in the fields every day, his biggest pleasure was to go fishing in the river. Surprisingly, he always returned with a full catch, so he always had a variety of fish for his dinner, and his life was very comfortable.

One evening, after finishing his work in the fields, Toba went fishing as usual, but this time he waited a long time and still could not catch a single fish. Toba scratched his head and said, "Strange! No luck at all today!"

"Boom!" Suddenly, the sky filled with dark clouds. Seeing that it was about to rain heavily, Toba quickly packed up his fishing gear and prepared to go home. All of a sudden there was a tug at his fishing rod – he had hooked a big fish! It was a beautiful fish with glistening scales. He took the fish home carefully, looking forward to a good meal.

When he got home, Toba put the fish on the kitchen chopping board, and was just about to stoke the fire when he realized he had run out of firewood. He ran outside to fetch some wood, and when he came back the fish had disappeared. There were some gold coins in its place! Toba was worried. He turned the place upside but still could not find the fish.

"That's strange! Fish don't have feet, so where can it have gone?" That evening he had to make do with a simple dinner of plain rice with a little dried fish and some chili pepper. All of a sudden, he found himself staggering forward, and discovered a girl with long flowing hair standing in the kitchen doorway.

"Who... who are you? And what... what are you doing in my kitchen?" Toba stuttered.

The girl smiled and said, "Toba, I'm the fish you caught and brought home today!" Toba was too surprised to speak. The girl continued: "Those gold coins you saw just now were scales from my body."

"What should I call you?" Toba asked cautiously. The girl thought for a moment and said, "You can call me Sita!"

Sita moved into Toba's house, and the two of them lived together very happily. After a while Toba decided to propose to Sita.

"Toba, if you really want to marry me, you must promise me one thing," said Sita.

"What is it? If it's within my capability, I will," Toba said with all sincerity.

"You must promise that you will never mention my past life again," said Sita, "apart from yourself, no one else must ever know that I used to be a fish."

"Yes! I promise," said Toba, patting his chest as he vowed again and again to keep his promise.

Soon after they were married, they had a beautiful baby boy, who they named Samosir. From a very young age he was a willful and lazy little boy, who was difficult to discipline.

One day, Sita told Samosir to take some lunch to Toba, who was working in the fields. Of course, she didn't know that halfway there Samosir stopped to play and missed getting the food to his father on time. Even worse, when Samosir was tired of playing, he ate more than half of his father's lunch.

By this time Toba had been working most of the day and his stomach was groaning. When he saw his son walking casually towards him, he was furious, and scolded the boy: "You lazy good for nothing! But, of course you are, you son of a fish."

Samosir didn't understand, and ran all the way home in tears. "Mum, why did Dad call me a son of a fish?" he sobbed.

Sita put her arms around him. Tears ran down her face. She was felt let down and upset. Toba had broken their agreement.

When Sita had calmed down, she told Samosir to do as she said. "Son, listen to me, I want you to go and climb the tree on that mountain, and stay there. No matter what you see or hear, you are not to come down."

"But, Mum, I'm scared!" Samosir threw himself into his mother's arms again.

Sita held him tight, and gave him a long kiss on his forehead. "Samosir, you're a good boy! I have to go now. Do as I say, and you'll have a good life!"

The sky suddenly darkened and clouded over. There was thunder and lightning. Then the rain came down in torrents. Sita wept, and ran to the river.

"Crash!" A flash of lightning streaked across the sky. In that instant, Sita leapt into the river, wriggled through the water, and turned back into a fish.

The relentless rain fell more and more heavily, and the river rose higher and higher. Very soon, the whole village was flooded. Toba's fields were flooded as well. The small river became a big river, and then spread, making a big lake. This is the lake we now know as Toba Lake. And the mountain where Samosir was safe is an island in the middle of the lake. We call it Samosir's Island.

Nowadays, the local people tell this story from one generation to the next, as a warning: you must be trustworthy and if you make a promise, you must keep it.

The Story on Stamps

Lake Toba (Indonesian: Danau Toba) is the world's largest volcanic lake, located in the northern part of Sumatra Island, Indonesia. It is about 900 meters above sea level, about the same height as Yangming Mountain, and covers an area nearly half the size of Taiwan. In the middle of the lake is Samosir Island.

According to research, Lake Toba was formed over 70,000 years ago, when a massive volcano erupted and then filled with water. It was the most violent volcanic eruption on earth in 250,000 years. However, the Batak people, who live near Lake Toba, believe that the lake was

created when an angry fish spirit summoned a thunderstorm to flood the earth, and left the island in the lake in order to save her son. In 1999 the Indonesian Post Office issued a set of five stamps that tell this story (Fig. 2-1). The last stamp shows the blue sky and clouds reflected in Lake Toba, and at the top of the stamp you can just see Samosir Island.

The special topography of Lake Toba and the island in the middle is one of the wonders of the world. If you stand on the shore of Lake Toba and look out over the vast expanse of water, appreciating the charm of the lake and the mountains, you are sure to feel relaxed.

The weather here is fresh and bright all year round, with an average temperature of about 22 degrees Celsius. The island soil is very fertile, and the islanders have a good life growing rice, planting cacao trees and catching freshwater fish.

The protagonist of this story was a fish. But fish are also part of the cuisine of Indonesia. Almost every year from 2004 to 2012, Indonesia issued a set of cuisine-themed stamps, often featuring fish dishes cooked in a variety of different ways: saltwater fish, satay fish, spice fish, curry fish, spicy sour fish. See, for example, the spicy sour fish curry on the 2012 set of stamps (Fig. 2-2). Spicy sour fish curry is a traditional dish of the indigenous people of Sumatra, and has now spread to Taiwan as well. (Postscript: Wang Lilan, Chou Hui-Lin).



Figure 2-1 In 1999 Indonesia issued four sets of folktale stamps, one of which was the story of Lake Toba, presented as a strip of five consecutive stamps, each stamp showing two scenes from the story. (Chou Hui-Lin Collection).

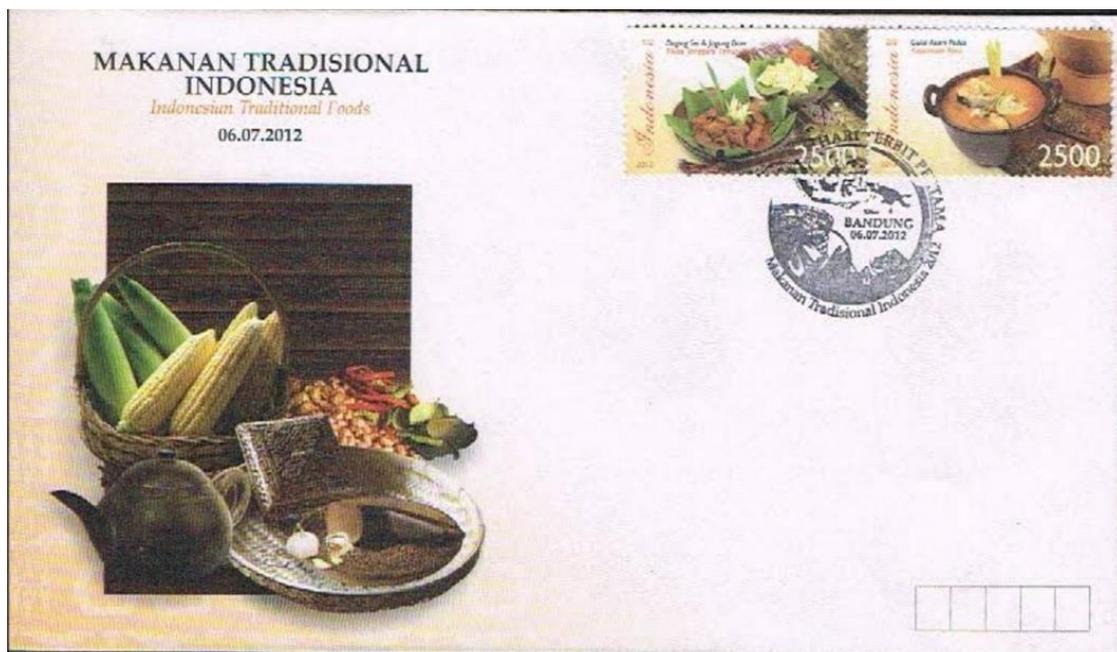


Figure 2-2 The first day cover of the cuisine-themed stamps issued in Indonesia in 2012. The stamp on the right shows spicy sour fish curry. (Chou Hui-Lin Collection).