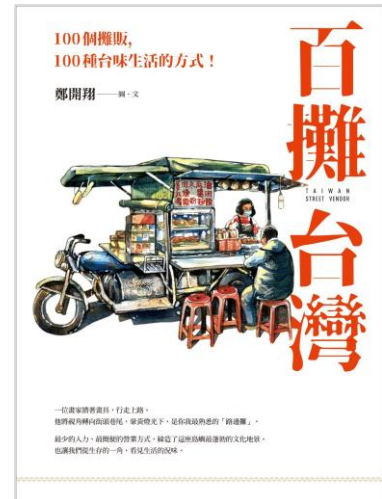


VENDORWORLD: 100 VENDORS, 100 UNIQUE TAKES ON LIFE IN TODAY'S TAIWAN 百攤台灣：100 個攤販， 100 種台味生活的方式！

This richly illustrated, brightly written work leads readers on a lively, enlightening journey through the emotive landscape and compelling stories that define Taiwan's modern street vendor scene.

In *Vendorworld*, celebrated author and artist Cheng Kai-Hsiang constructs an almost ethnographic record of contemporary Taiwan street vendor culture. His keen eye and sharp wit treat each subgenre of vendor culture – from traffic intersection hawkers of white champak “air fresheners” and roadside sellers of barbecue-smoked rolled squid to street market vendors of every stripe – with just the right blend of inquisitiveness and empathy, inviting readers into the experience.

The book is divided into four main sections. “Mobile Underworld” highlights Taiwan’s multitudinous array of mobile vendors, including pushcart sellers of wheel cakes, ladies selling Yakult drinks from bicycle coolers, and much more. “Open for Business” examines vendors that set up shop at fixed locations such as fresh produce sellers at wet markets, sellers of marinated snacks, cold beverage stands, and so on. “Capturing the Essence of Time” looks at game and festival-related vendors offering aquarium-fish catching, water balloon target practice, and other fun activities. The final section, “Metropolis of Collective Vendors” takes on the country’s iconic night markets, traditional markets, and second-hand bazaars. From the smallest of details to big-picture descriptions, this book is your



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multifaceted window into the mechanics, embellishments, and creative, lively soul that, together, define Taiwan's modern vendor culture.

More than exploring the aesthetics and witty innovations used by vendors to draw interest and entice passersby to part with their hard-earned money, this book is a loving tribute, in words and illustrations, to this time-honored reflection of authentic, local Taiwan culture. *Vendorworld* captures in its pages the enticing glow and magic of this world for everyone to enjoy.

Cheng Kai-Hsiang 鄭開翔

Cheng Kai-Hsiang, known as a painter of the urban moment, is the first professional artist to depict Taiwanese townhome and shophouse culture in his works. He has painted the urban architecture of Taiwan and several other East Asian cities, using brushes and vibrant colors to create snapshots of local culture and communities. His first illustrated book has been translated into French, Japanese, and Spanish.

VENDORWORLD: 100 VENDORS, 100 UNIQUE TAKES ON LIFE IN TODAY'S TAIWAN

By Cheng Kai-Hsiang

Translated by Beverly Liu

Introduction: A Gaze into the World of Taiwan Street Vendor

Is there a familiar scent or sound that brings back childhood memories for you?

Point 1: Street Vendors Through My Artistic Vision

The term “street vendor” usually refers to small businesses set up outdoors, on street sides, in plazas or markets, and other public places. The typical street vendor establishment is a mobile stall offering products such as food, cultural/creative items, household goods, and so on. Most of their owners are self-employed entrepreneurs, operating at a small scale with simple equipment and tools, which makes it easy for them to quickly and flexibly adapt to market changes.

Different from street vendors, “stores” typically refer to physical indoor retail locations. These establishments have a fixed location, more comprehensive operations, higher capital requirements, more complex equipment, and a relatively rigid business model. Furthermore, they must operate in compliance with stringent legal and health standards.

Classifying the diverse types of street vendors and the industries they operate in is a complex task. In the early stages of my research for this book, the task of defining, selecting, and classifying street vendors proved to be daunting. However, I have taken a unique approach by adopting the perspective that “street vendors are the smallest unit of labor cost”, which has allowed me to classify street vendors by the complexity of their infrastructure – from bare-bones modest to impressively outfitted. I’ve also focused on selectively chosen vendors to represent the most unique street vendor industries.

In Part I, “Mobile Underworld”, I approached the subject of street vendors from the perspective of mobility – starting with the most simple form – a hawker selling goods on the street, and moving up to those who use pushcarts and tricycles and then on to larger vehicles such as scooters and trucks. I carefully examine the diverse range of transportation methods used by street vendors to actively run their business operations.

In Part II, “Open for Business”, I focus on how street vendors typically gather in specific locations and easily set up shop by laying a piece of canvas tarp on a table. Adding display racks or signage can help establish the business further. Street vendors may also expand their operations by adding tables, chairs, and other equipment as needed.

In Part III, “Capturing the Essence of Time”, I specifically include a section on “game stands” that delves into my childhood memories and expresses my deep personal connection and love for these amusement-themed carts. I also discuss themed street stands that are usually found only during specific times of the year or around certain holidays.

For Part IV, “Metropolis Made up of Collective Vendors”, watercolor sketches of five select markets are curated. The compositions of the market scenes captured in these sketches invite you to step into the shoes of a market patron, seeing both the left and right sides of the different vendors. I hope this uniform perspective helps you feel like you are physically “walking” into the frame. As you observe the differences in overall ambiance, aesthetics, and consumers among these scenes, take a moment to interpret the details I’ve incorporated into the street vendors. Consider the purpose of the market. Your interpretation will provide more profound insights into how people here live.

I’ve set out to document the different types and appearances of street vendors in this book, hoping to provide a great introduction to the diverse types of street vendors in Taiwan. Taiwan’s culture, with its rich and diverse charms, is so captivating that this book can only offer a small glimpse. I urge all readers to embark on their own adventures and explore more of Taiwan’s fascinating places and people.

Point 2: A Closer Look

Street vending is not just a business model but a ubiquitous presence in our everyday lives. They are like colorful paint, sprinkled onto the blank canvases of buildings and roads, adorning every corner of every city. What was once a sterile cityscape is now a vibrant, living canvas thanks to the pervasiveness of street vendors. They have become an essential part of Taiwan’s unique way of life and their influence is felt in every street and alley.

One might ask, “What’s so interesting about these street vendors?” I will tackle this question from three different perspectives: “quirky designs”, “sales content”, and “emotional resonance”.

Quirky Designs

Street vendors may be divided into different business operating systems – cart stalls, street stalls, and table stalls, with a myriad of potential combinations. Based on their approach to their business, business type, and personal aesthetics, the final look of street vendors can be drastically different, even among those that adopt the same kind of business operation. Each street vendor is a unique and independent entity, richly colored and full of creative originality.

Cart vendors are essentially miniature storefronts but with limited capacity and mobility. They must operate with total efficiency and mobility¹ while also appealing to potential patrons.

¹ Translator’s note: Some street vendors must push carts back and forth from their homes to the operating location, so while these carts are designed with maximum storage to carry everything the vendors need to operate, the cart’s weight must be considered so it will not affect its mobility.

Street vendors must be prepared to move quickly, set up and close efficiently, and be able to adapt to any situation. Experienced vendors have standard operating procedures for just about any situation. Every aspect of the stall is carefully planned to ensure maximum efficiency for every task. I love observing these meticulously planned details as they show the owners' effort and dedication to planning and executing their operations.

Many vendors use clever homophonic wordplays in their business names to show their sense of humor. They often post notices² on their stalls – some friendly and some conveying a stricter tone. Without needing to speak to the stall owners, these notices help customers understand the owner's mood and follow the “rules of the stall” to avoid causing undue trouble.

It's common for business equipment to show signs of wear and tear over time, leading to age stains. These marks on the stall's facade represent its endurance over time and reassure customers of the high-quality food being made there. In Taiwan, people often joke that the more “worn out” a vendor stall looks, the better the food must taste.

Sales Content

There was a line from an old advertisement that read, “We sell everything; nothing is too strange for us to sell.” This couldn't be more fitting as a descriptor of what street vendors sell.

From street snacks and clothing to household hardware, street vendors sell things from all walks of life and cater to everything a potential customer might need. Take a closer look into the extensive sales offering of street vendors and you will begin to see the correlation between the evolution of the Taiwanese lifestyle and their habits. For example, in the early mornings on streets in coastal areas, you'll regularly find women selling seafood freshly caught the night before. In rural areas, where shops are not prevalent, you can still find trucks driving down each street hawking household hardware and bringing services directly to consumers. Depending on the time of the year, you will also find seasonally fresh, locally grown and processed farm goods sold on street corners alongside freeway entrances. This is why I love taking friends to visit local traditional markets around Taiwan. These traditional markets are authentic microcosms of local life.

Over the course of my research, I identified a category of street vendors that specializes in selling their skills and crafts. Whether a dough figurine artist, handyman skilled in replacing window screens or zippers, portrait artist, masseuse, or facial threading beautician, each self-employed entrepreneur with unique expertise has their own approach to attracting loyal customers. However, it's a challenge for these skilled craft workers to find the apprentices necessary to preserve and continue their craft. It's a shame that many of these skills may be lost to future generations. Every time I think about the potential loss of these special skills, it makes me truly treasure those vendors still in business.

² Translator's note: For example, a notice might say, “We apologize for not smiling during busy hours” or “Please be patient and wait for us to take your order”.

Emotional Resonance

Street vendors in Taiwan play a crucial role in local culture and society. The budget-friendly pricing and wide variety of foods make it convenient for people to dine out, creating an indisputable connection between seller and buyer. Over time, some customers develop deep and friendly bonds with vendors.

Sometimes you will see street vendor carts converted from small trucks on the road. Their loudspeakers broadcasting music or lively advertisements are part of a familiar scene that never fails to spark my nostalgia for the disappearing street vendor culture. However, with the rise of large-scale supermarkets and chain stores, the once vital functions of these street vendor trucks have significantly diminished. The familiar street cries and lyrical calls of merchants, once a staple of open roads, are now fading from our collective memory.

Life and entertainment were simpler in decades past. Children didn't have easy access to snacks or toys, so having dessert was a special joy that created lasting childhood memories. Certain tastes and smells, like those of a bowl of noodles from a corner store or a simple molasses candy, can bring back memories of a fondly remembered time and place. These simple pleasures from childhood memories can't be replicated by fancy restaurants. When you return home, there are nostalgic spots that you simply have to visit, and you may even take your own children to share your memories with the next generation. The same food stall may evoke different emotions in each person's heart, creating a unique and personal connection to the past.

Point 3: Elements Shared by Taiwanese Street Vendors

While creating drawings and sketches of Taiwanese street vendors, I discovered several unique and common elements. These include the main body of the cart, signage, and components tailored to the needs of stall operators such as sunshade props and lighting systems. These oft-overlooked but significant elements play a vital role in the design of street vendors as they embody the quintessential "Taiwanese" characteristics and have become classic, easily recognized symbols of roadside stalls in Taiwan.

The Vendor Cart

The standard vendor cart features a tabletop on which business is usually conducted. Goods to be sold are generally stored inside the cart, and the wheels are along the bottom and steering handles are located on the side.

The cart design may be customized for business type and scale. For example, some are equipped with custom-installed frying stations, while others have sun-cover canopies installed on top. Most street vendor carts are constructed of stainless steel for durability and functionality. However, there is a growing trend of carts being made from wood, reflecting a prioritization of aesthetic appeal over durability, as wooden carts typically don't move around well over long distances and show wear and tear relatively quickly. The variety in cart materials reflects the diverse needs of different street vendors.

Stand Signage

Signage is usually the first thing a customer sees and so is generally vibrant in color with strong brand recognition. You can immediately tell what a vendor sells by looking at their signage. One great example of this is given by ice cream stands. The striking ice cream-shaped LED signage is designed to quickly catch the attention of children from afar, tempting them to drag their parents over to buy ice cream for them.

Street vendor signage, reflecting an entire world of variety and innovation, departs starkly from that of typical retail stores. Retail store signage, often large and attention-grabbing, is a far cry from smaller, yet equally effective, street vendor signage. Some vendors, drawing on their unique creativity, craft one-of-a-kind handmade signage, while others choose to custom-order specialty-lit signage. The sheer variety and innovation in street vendor signage, when examined closely, is truly intriguing.

Canvas Cart Covers

Many vendors opt to set up canvas cart covers to provide shelter from sun and rain. The cart covers also protect their goods and maintain good hygiene and sanitation. Oversized outdoor umbrellas serve a similar purpose for vendors who do not have canvas cart covers and may be used as needed to shield carts from direct sun exposure.

The metal structure used to support canvas cart covers also provides a functional platform to hang all sorts of goods, such as plastic bags, signage, light fixtures, and the like. These metal beams act as the cart's "bone structure". The various tools hanging on these structures create a unique display, almost like fruits and vines "growing" on the cart, reflecting each street vendor's distinctive aesthetics.

Lighting Fixtures

Lighting fixtures are a crucial aspect of a street vendor's business, as they can make the stand visible from a distance and the merchandise more appealing. Vendors who understand the science of color matching can use this knowledge to their advantage. For instance, a food stall vendor can use natural yellow lights to make their food items look more appetizing, while a mobile phone accessory stall can use bright white lights to highlight their displayed merchandise. Similarly, a stall selling fancy cocktails can use colorful LED lighting to create a more vibrant and inviting atmosphere.

Lighting can create atmospheres and evoke emotions. The ambiance shaped by different lights often forms customers' initial impression of the stalls, yet it is the most easily overlooked factor contributing to the stalls.

Attire of the Vendors

I also paid close attention to the attire of the vendors. Their outfits are adjusted based on the time and location of their business. You can also make educated guesses about the type of business operation based on a vendor's attire. For instance, a vendor who spends a lot of time in the sun

will typically wear a wide-brimmed bamboo leaf hat, a facial scarf, and sleeve covers for protection. The standard attire for a food stall vendor includes a mask, gloves, and an apron. A fanny pack is an essential accessory for a busy night market vendor to keep in one handy place all the items necessary to meet customer needs. High-end hipster stalls focus on fashion and sophisticated details, ensuring that their uniforms complement the merchandise they sell.

Packaging

The most common food packaging used by Taiwanese street vendors has to be the iconic “red and white plastic bag.” This color and pattern combination is deeply ingrained in the Taiwanese psyche. If you see someone carrying such a bag anywhere outside of Taiwan, you can be sure that this person is from Taiwan.

Typically, these red and white plastic bags are conveniently tied to the cart frame for ease of use. Some vendors also use clear plastic bags that come in a roll. In recent years, many vendors have switched to using paper packaging to promote environmental awareness despite the higher cost. As an alternative, some vendors offer discounts to customers who bring their own bags as an incentive to help reduce the use of single-use plastic items.

Corrugated Paper Boxes

Corrugated paper boxes, known for their lightweight yet exceptional durability, are the ideal choice for storing delicate fruits and vegetables. The exterior of the box proudly displays the product’s origin, often in a bold and bright font that proclaims “quality guaranteed”. This assurance, coupled with the striking contrast of the brown box with vibrant prints and labels, is a hallmark of Taiwanese traditional markets.

Plastic Produce Crates

Plastic produce crates are not just convenient and versatile, they are also incredibly durable. Their unique design, with notches on the two sides that function as handles, makes them easy to carry. The top lip of the crate opening allows for easy stacking, which simplifies storage. Once the merchandise is emptied, the sturdy crate can be flipped upside down and lined up to serve as a display tabletop surface, eliminating the need for additional furniture. These great attributes make these crates a convenient multifunctional tool for all street vendors, ensuring their goods are always secure and well-displayed.

Display Containers

Vendors often carry display containers to properly show off goods while keeping the products inside clean. Some are presented in glass bottles and jars, while others opt for display cabinets with storage capacity.

Vendors selling different products select unique methods of display that best showcase their goods. For example, in addition to storing food, the wooden “lu-wei” (Taiwanese braised dishes) cabinet also conveys a nostalgic vibe. Another common way to display is a glass cabinet

where customers can easily see everything being sold. A steam bun stand may opt to just display the buns directly right out of the steamers.

Red Plastic Chairs

The most common furnishing used by street vendors is the four-legged plastic chair. The light weight and stackability of these chairs make them easy to move around and stow away. The round hole in the center of the chair makes it easy to grab hold of and re-distributes the weight of each person that uses it. These chairs come in many different colors, but the most common color remains red because of its contrast with surrounding gray-toned streetscapes. Its vibrant color also contributes to the liveliness of these markets.

13 Hand-Shaken (Shou Yao) Beverages

Today, you can find chain beverage stores almost everywhere, with each offering an extensive drink menu. We often joke about experiencing “decision paralysis” when faced with too many choices while ordering a drink. In a way, it’s a modern “luxury struggle”. In the past, there weren’t as many options, and the concept of customizing your drink didn’t even exist. Kids back then were fortunate to have an icy cold sweet drink at all.

About thirty years ago, when I was still in elementary school, I started seeing hand-shaken beverage street stands everywhere in night markets. Many of those stands would hang massive handwritten signs listing the types of beverages served, like “Tapioca Milk Tea”. Some stands would also hang extravagant lanterns to attract customers. The stands back in the day had long but straightforward “drink menus” listing items by beverage contents such as iced coffee, Ovaltine, pudding milk tea. This method made it easier to tell the types of drinks offered compared to all the fancy complex drink names offered nowadays.

The prominent, transparent containers holding the beverage base are the most iconic feature of hand-shaken beverage stands. Each stand has at least two containers containing prepared black and green tea, distinguished by red and green lids. In the past, most street vendors would make their own beverages at home and prepare various drink types in large, clear-acrylic cylindrical containers. This eye-catching transparent display also helped reassure customers of the purity of the drinks, as they could see it even before they placed their order.

“Foamy black tea”³ was the drink I ordered the most back then. It’s a simple drink made by adding ice cubes, black tea, and high-fructose corn syrup into an “odd-looking silver oval container”. The clerk would then put the lid on the drink shaker and shake it vigorously with intriguing, exaggerated movements. Drinks such as “black tea with ice cream” or “wheat germ milk tea” may seem ordinary today. Still, back then, the idea of adding something as fancy as ice cream to black tea seemed to me like such a luxurious, special delight!

³ Translator’s note: The word “foamy” comes from the foam produced after shaking the drink mixture. Some Taiwanese also call the simple drink “bubble tea”. However, the term “bubble tea” nowadays usually refers to milk tea with pearl tapioca.

25 Sausage Stands

Sausage, a popular street food cherished by Taiwanese, is a common sight around movie theaters, construction sites, and scenic spots across Taiwan. These inexpensive sausages, served on skewer sticks, are a quick and satisfying snack. The “Taiwanese sausage with sticky rice”⁴ is a unique variation on this street food in which the sausage is served in an open-cut sticky rice sausage, offering a novel and intriguing culinary experience.

One of the eye-catching features of these sausage stands has to be the strands of encased uncooked sausages hanging along the front of the stand. The fat drippings of the sausages being cooked on the grill create a sizzling sound as they drip onto the hot coals, as aromatic white smoke fills the air. As you watch the sausages cook, the anticipation of the order is a mouth-watering, full-sensual experience that will leave you eager for more.

As you bite into the hot, juicy sausage, the sweet, umami flavors of the ground pork envelop your taste buds. To top this off, you can also take a bite of raw garlic clove, which creates a thrilling flavor experience with intense heat and spice exploding in your mouth. This winning combination of sausage with raw garlic clove⁵ has been delighting street food lovers for decades.

Most sausage stands are not just places to grab a yummy quick bite but also inclusive social hubs. Almost all the sausage stands are equipped with pinball machines, allowing patrons to engage in a friendly game with the sausage stand owner. This rivalry between the patrons and the sausage stand owner always attracts more people to gather and urge on friendly competition. These pinball games are the origin of the slang term “hitting the sausage”⁶, which simply means going out to buy sausages at a sausage stand.

71 Breakfast Stands

Taiwanese people really value their breakfasts, making the breakfast scene in Taiwan a delightful medley of diverse options, with each region offering unique variations in terms of breakfast ingredients and flavors. Some regions start their day with a comforting bowl of rice topped with rich, fatty braised pork and a steaming bowl of fish soup. Others prefer the crispy delights of Northern Chinese style breakfast dishes such as the classic combination of Chinese fried dough(you-tiao) and clay oven rolls (shao-bing) or soft, pillowy steamed buns (man-tou) served with a cup of fresh soymilk. For those who enjoy a Western-style breakfast, there are many variations of burger/sandwich dishes and omelet pancakes (dang-bing). There are also plenty of trendy “brunch-style” places offering a wide array of more refined breakfast options.

⁴ Translator’s note: In Mandarin, “Taiwanese sausage with sticky rice” literally means “large intestine wrapping small intestine”. The large intestine-encased sticky rice sausage is cut from the center, acting as the “bun” for the actual sausage, similar to a hotdog bun.

⁵ Translator’s note: Unpeeled fresh raw garlic cloves are usually offered as an optional side at all the garlic stands. A unique part of the sausage experience is the interactive element – peeling your garlic and enjoying one bite of sausage followed by one bite of garlic clove.

⁶ Translator’s note: The action verb in Mandarin for playing pinball machines is “to hit”.

Some breakfast shops still operate as food stands under storefront verandas. Most of their customers, rushing to get to work, stop only briefly to grab a quick breakfast to go. That's why there isn't much seating around these breakfast stands. The extra counter space in front of the cart conveniently becomes the only "in-house" dining space for patrons. The gas furnace placed on a folding table serves as the makeshift kitchen. The display cases of the breakfast stand are filled with ready-made breakfast sandwiches, while the commercial steamer on the side is filled with rows of different types of buns. There is usually also glass bottled milk sitting on top of the steamer. Each milk bottle is packaged with an inexpensive toy, making this item a favorite amongst younger breakfast goers.

My favorite breakfast menu item of all time has to be the "omelet pancake" (dan-bing). The egg mixture is poured onto a thin flour crepe and pan-fried to perfection. The pancake is then rolled up, cut into bite-size pieces, and drizzled with a thick soy sauce paste and chili sauce. This seemingly simple dish has become a part of the everyday diet/routine of most Taiwanese and is often taken for granted. Once, I was on a sketching trip abroad for two weeks and only had access to local food. The two things I missed the most were omelet pancakes and milk tea from Taiwanese breakfast stands.