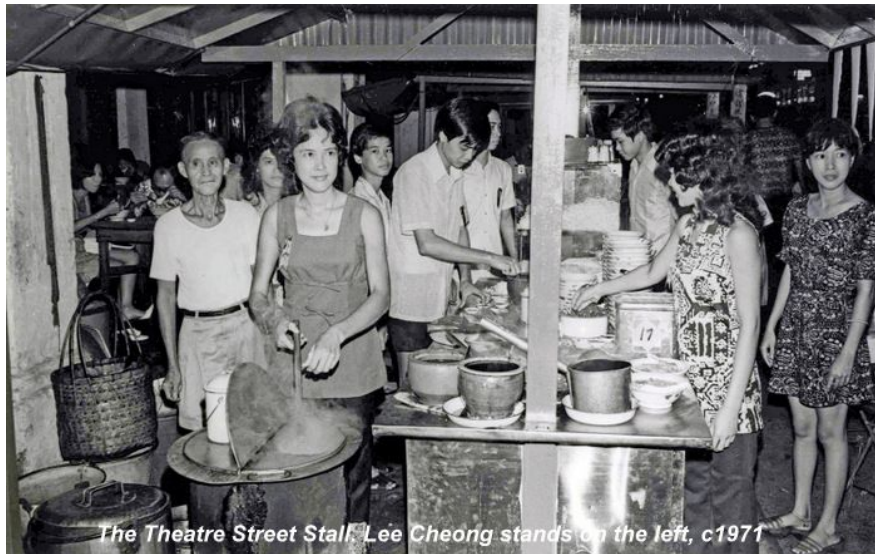


Ipoh's Beef Noodles



The Theatre Street Stall, Lee Cheong stands on the left, c1971

This story starts in 1902 when Lee Cheong was born in Guangdong. Like many Chinese of his time, he left for Malaya when he was 14, in his case, to join his father in Kuala Lumpur. Initially, he helped his father to sell rice from a street stall, but there was just not enough

customers to sustain them both and so he returned home to China. Life in China was full of hardship and so in 1922 he returned to Malaya and found work in a tin mine as a supervisor (kepala).

The world-wide depression of the 1930s hit Malaya hard. Lee Cheong lost his job and faced with returning to China and abject poverty, he decided to move to Ipoh and return to being a hawker. His chosen delicacy was beef noodles in soup. The beef noodles family heritage had begun. A heritage that has lasted 85 years and is still going strong.

There is no doubt that his new profession was a good choice as he successfully created a long-term family business, eventually moving from two baskets to a permanent evening stall in Theatre Street. He also had eight children, all born in Ipoh. The stall in Theatre Street operated nightly for more than 50 years and as each member of the family was old enough they joined their father there in the family business. The boys attended normal school, but the girls did not as it was not the practice in working families to send their girls to school. Nonetheless, the girls were sent to the Ipoh Hawkers' evening classes.

Lee Cheong, entrepreneur, father and family man passed away in Ipoh in 1981. He was 79.



But selling beef noodles according to the founder's recipe is not just opening for business in the evening. The preparation work is critical for success.

First, the beef is bought from the market and prepared. Then the noodles have to be freshly made, as do the beef balls and their own

brand of Chili sauce. Finally, secret ingredients are added to a simmering pot on the stove to make that wonderfully succulent soup. And this is all done, as it always has been, in their family home!

Eventually, they were forced by local Government legislation to move to a central hawkers area, just opposite the old Odeon Theatre, known locally as Rainbow City. They have been there for almost 30 years. The Odeon closed in 1986 and was a nightclub when they moved there. It has had many faces since then, but the Beef Noodle family remain in operation irrespective of what happens to their neighbours. They are still there today.