

Growing Restaurant Portfolio with Brand Diversification



— An Interview with

Ms JoJo Chan

Executive Director, Tai Hing Group Holdings Ltd.

多元化品牌策略

拓展餐飲業版圖

— 專訪 **太興集團** 執行董事 **陳淑芳** 女士

Earlier this year, COVID-19 inflicted a heavy toll on local restaurants as they were required to implement social distancing measures as part of the government's anti-epidemic measures to reduce the risk of cluster infection. Tai Hing Group (HKSE: 6811), however, has remained resilient in the face of COVID-19 this year and last year's social unrest. According to JoJo Chan, the company's executive director, brand diversification strategy and flexible crisis management are among the key success factors that drive exceptional performance in challenging times.

Tai Hing Group was established in 1989 as a Hong Kong-style siu-mei (barbecue) restaurant. Since then it has grown in strength to become a diversified casual dining group with 11 brands and more than 200 branches across Hong Kong, the mainland, Macau and Taiwan. Tai Hing's IPO last year coincided with its 30th anniversary, which marked the company's milestone in Hong Kong's evolving food culture.

As with many other catering and retail companies, Tai Hing was inevitably affected by the social unrest. "The first thing we considered was the safety of our customers and employees. Restaurant managers were given the flexibility to close early and allow employees to leave work early. I feel so blessed that we turned out just fine," says Ms Chan.

In early 2020, COVID-19 began to spread, which took a heavy toll on the already fragile economy. "Earlier last year, Tai Hing established an inter-departmental emergency management task force, pulling together the heads of operations, procurement, human resources and finance departments, to make decisions on daily emergencies. The team is responsible for formulating contingency measures, policies, procedures and codes, etc."

Due to the pandemic, catering operators are required to comply with a series of anti-epidemic control requirements. "In the early months of the outbreak, we purchased necessary supplies like masks, thermometers and card stocks for separating seats in advance of these measures becoming a requirement. Immediately after the announcement of anti-epidemic control requirements, we were able to put our preparation into practice and therefore follow the safety guidelines smoothly. Things were still done in a rush, but the implementation was smooth thanks to our early preparation."

今年上半年，新冠肺炎疫情肆虐香港，防疫措施如限聚令、餐廳限坐四人等，令餐飲業生意大受影響。即便如此，太興集團（股份編號：6811）在疫市中仍保持韌力，旗下餐廳依然有不少忠實擁躉排隊光顧。太興集團執行董事陳淑芳表示，集團的多元化品牌策略和靈活的危機處理機制，是這段時期仍能「疫」流而上的成功要素。

太興集團成立於1989年，初期由一間港式燒味快餐店起家，再不斷拓展業務範疇，發展成時至今日擁有11個品牌，坐擁超過200家分店，足跡遍佈香港、中國內地、澳門及台灣的休閒餐飲集團。集團於去年六月上市，適逢太興成立30週年誌慶，可說別具意義，不僅標誌「太興」品牌植根香港30年，亦表示集團正式進入發展新里程。

去年很多餐飲零售業者跟太興一樣，難免受到社會運動影響。陳女士強調，「我們以顧客和員工安全為首要考慮，部分分店會因應情況而提早關門。我們的分店經理也會因應實際情況讓員工提早下班，感恩在這段時期我們沒有出現太大問題。」

今年年初，恰巧又遇上新型冠狀病毒疫情爆發，令經濟雪上加霜，挑戰重重。陳女士透露，集團早已成立了跨部門危機應變小組，成員包括營運、採購、人力資源和財務部門主管等，就日常突發事件制訂應變措施、政策、程序及守則等。

因應疫情，政府規定餐飲業者須遵從各項抗疫管制要求及加強防疫措施，減少人群聚集。「疫情爆發初期，我們已開始訂購所需用品，如口罩、體溫計、分隔座位用的紙板等，當政府推行防疫管制後，我們立即作出應變，加強旗下品牌分店的清潔及防疫設備，並依足政府的守則去做，雖然比較倉促，但執行起來尚算順利。」



Tai Hing's brand diversification strategy has certainly paid off during these tough times. In 2017, the company introduced the "Men Wah Bing Teng" restaurant brand, which gained popularity for its unique old-Hong Kong fast-food concept. Following its initial success, the company opened the mainland's first Men Wah Bing Teng in Guangzhou in 2019 and now operates over 30 Men Wah Bing Teng restaurants in Hong Kong and the mainland. Men Wah Bing Teng is the group's fastest-growing restaurant brand in terms of store openings with the shortest payback period and the highest seat turnover rate. Other brands that have performed well include casual dining restaurant "TeaWood Taiwanese Cafe & Restaurant", "Phở Lệ" that serves Vietnamese beef noodles, and "Trusty Congee King".



"Tai Hing will continue to adopt a brand diversification strategy comprised of a range of brands, menu choices and Asian cuisines, all at affordable prices. We can do this because we have achieved an economy of scale. We are more cost-effective and efficient in operations. And compared with other fast-food chains, though our prices are slightly higher, we offer more menu choices and our tables have waiter or waitress service. These are the things that differentiate us from others and help us gain a loyal customer base," explains Ms Chan.

Tai Hing adopts the "5S management system" (structure, systematise, sanitise, standardise and self-discipline) in its day-to-day operations in Hong Kong and the mainland. For example, the company purchases ingredients centrally, implements standardised food processing and has deployed automatic food processing systems in kitchens, such as automated woks and milk tea machines. These operational capabilities help improve kitchen efficiency and safety. This safer, more comfortable working environment has the added benefit of improving employee loyalty.

"Although the Hong Kong market accounts for about 80 per cent of the group's revenue, we'll continue to explore opportunities in the mainland and Southeast Asia. With a local management team, we have over 15 years of experience in running multiple restaurant brands in Mainland China that whet the appetite and eating habits of mainland diners."

"Besides Hong Kong and the mainland, Southeast Asia countries have a lot of similarities in food culture, or what we call the 'chopstick food culture'. From time to time we look for partnership opportunities to introduce Southeast Asian restaurant brands to Hong Kong. One of the successful examples is Phở Lệ that we brought from Vietnam. We also operated a Tai Hing restaurant at the Singapore airport and have opened Tai Hing branches in Macau and Taiwan. Once we identify suitable restaurant brands in Southeast Asia, we explore partnership

即使外圍環境困難重重，太興集團的多元品牌策略發展成績仍令人鼓舞。2017年，在香港開設「敏華冰廳」，短短兩年多時間迅速搶佔本地市場，其後更於2019年在廣州開設內地其首間分店，目前在香港及內地已有超過30間，「敏華冰廳」是集團開店數量增長最快、回本期最短及翻座率最高的品牌，成績彪炳。集團其他附屬品牌亦表現亮麗，包括台式休閒餐廳「茶木」、越南牛肉粉專門店「錦麗」，以及「靠得住」粥麵小館等。

「未來發展策略仍然會提供多元化菜式，餐牌選擇多樣化，價錢保持大眾化。由於我們的業務已具備一定規模，相對小店更具成本效益，在採購、食材處理、人手調配等都有優勢。雖然我們的價格相比其他連鎖快餐店稍高一點，但我們的選擇比較多，更提供侍應為客人點餐送餐，定位非常清晰，客源相對穩定。」

太興採用五常（常組織、常整頓、常清潔、常規範及常自律）工作場所管理理念，以提升環境衛生、食物質素及營運效益。除了在香港應用外，亦已在內地分店實施。集團中央化採購及標準化處理食材，並於各餐廳出品部採用各種自動化食品加工機器，例如自動炒鑊及沖奶茶機等，減低廚房員工勞損機會，加快出餐效率，確保菜式質量一致，營造更安全的工作環境，員工的忠誠度也因此有所提升。

「雖然香港市場佔集團約八成的收益，未來我們也會繼續在內地和東南亞謀求發展空間。太興在內地發展已經有超過15年的歷史，建立了本地化團隊，管理經驗豐富，並已在內地發展多個新品牌，迎合內地顧客的口味和飲食習慣，未來將會在大灣區繼續複製成功模式。」

「除了香港和內地，東南亞都是用筷子作為食具的餐飲文化，我們不時會在東南亞物色美食品牌，看看有沒有機會合作引進香港，『錦麗』越南牛肉粉專門店便是成功例子之一。旗艦品牌「太興」也曾進軍新加坡機場，現時在澳門及台灣亦開了分店，非常受歡迎。如發現東

opportunities with their local owners. Meanwhile, we also look for opportunities to introduce our restaurant brands in Southeast Asia markets. We strive to deliver shareholder value through growth.”

During the pandemic, most people would choose to buy takeaways or use delivery services, which gave rise to third-party online food delivery platforms. “We are now partnering with major food delivery platforms in Mainland China and Hong Kong to maximise our restaurants’ online exposure. We have also developed our own takeaway online platform to encourage customers to pick up their orders from restaurants. The system enables the company to analyse customer and sales data to identify market trends and adjust menus and marketing strategies in a timely manner.”

“As a member of society and a corporate citizen, Tai Hing pays more attention to social responsibility and corporate governance. Our volunteer team actively participate in tree-planting and beach cleaning activities, and visit elderly centres from time to time. We have also supported Youth Outreach in developing services for at-risk youths. On sustainability, we have started procuring eco-friendly packaging and catering disposables.”

In May this year, the government provided subsidies to eligible restaurants to keep their staff employed during the COVID-19 downturn. Rents however remain the biggest cashflow pressure. “Some landlords did offer substantial rental concessions, but some were reluctant. Some small businesses, renting only one space in one location, may be left with no option but to shut down. We hope that landlords will see the long-term benefits of helping restaurants survive through this difficult time.”

Chan admitted that after the company’s listing, Board members needed to gain more expertise in corporate governance, compliance, investor relations and social responsibility. By joining The Chamber of Hong Kong Listed Companies as member, Tai Hing has supported and participated in a number of activities organised by the Chamber. “The CHKLC membership allows us to share knowledge and explore partnership opportunities with other listed companies and industry players,” says Ms Chan. **M**

— Jimmy Chow
Journalist



南亞有合適的品牌，我們會考慮跟當地業者合作，或將我們旗下品牌拓展至東南亞各地，長遠為股東們爭取最好回報。」

疫情期間，在保持社交距離的情況下，多數人都選擇買外賣，第三方外賣平台因而大受歡迎。「我們早前已與多個外賣平台攜手合作，藉著連結各品牌之招牌產品提升知名度。另外，集團也開發了自家外賣平台『泛飯生活』，鼓勵顧客外賣自取，有助進一步推動外賣業務，並可收集大數據，藉此迅速確定最新市場趨勢，有利於對菜單作出相關調整及進行營銷活動。」

作為社會的一份子及企業公民，太興集團在追求財務表現的同時，也會肩付起社會企業責任。「我們十分積極參與公益活動，員工組成義工隊，不時會去探訪老友記，也曾參與植樹和清潔海灘活動。此外，我們也有捐助協青社的外展服務，協助邊緣青年重回正軌。在環保方面，我們已著手採購可自然分解的環保外賣餐具和外賣盒，為環保出一分力。」

雖然今年五月，政府從防疫抗疫基金撥款，向持牌食肆發放補貼，用作支援員工薪酬，以解燃眉之急，但租金成本也是飲食業界的一大壓力。「有部分業主在疫情期間為租戶提供租金寬免及援助，有些卻不願意減租。對於一些只有一個鋪位的小商戶來說，在旅客減少和疫情的雙重打擊下，很可能要結業，業界希望業主們都能體諒，一起共渡時艱、同舟共濟。」

陳女士坦言，集團上市後，董事會成員在企業管治、合規、投資者關係、社會責任等方面都需要更多的專業知識。太興集團作為新晉上市公司，加入香港上市公司商會成為會員後，已參了不少商會舉辦的活動，「與不少其他上市公司代表和業界好友見面溝通，互相學習，交流心得，從中促進彼此間的合作機會及可能。」 **M**

— Jimmy Chow
記者