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The Yongkang Street (□□□) commercial district has become a major center for high-quality cuisine and the restaurants with staying power in this hyper-competitive environment usually have something special to offer. Tung Men Dumpling House (□□□□□), which has been doing business in the area for nearly half a century, offering traditional northern Chinese cuisine in an unpretentious family restaurant atmosphere, has outlasted many more swanky setups and continues to pull in punters looking for dependable quality.

Located just a stone's throw from the main outlet of Din Tai Fung (□□□), it manages to hold its own among those looking for quality dumplings, and is a popular stop for Japanese tourists.

Tung Men Dumpling House offers much more than just dumplings, though it has a good variety of these, and of those I have tasted, all have proven good, and some excellent.

Hailing from the north of China, its dumplings are quite different from the Shanghai-inspired cuisine of Din Tai Fung. The wrappings of these dumplings are thicker, and a quality cherished by aficionados is the texture of the dough, which has a firmness that cannot be mistaken for toughness. A number of unusual variations on popular standards can also be found, including vegetarian pot stickers (□□□□, NT$110 for 10). Never a great fan of vegetarian dumplings, I found these pot stickers lacked the usual greasy and flaccid filling that I associate with such dumplings, and it was almost possible to forget that they contained no meat. On the other hand, the beef pot stickers (□□□□, NT$110 for 10) had a meaty heartiness that was really enjoyable. The green onion pancake (□□□), a small disk of fried dough flavored with spring onions, was delightfully crisp and not in the least oily.

A good choice of main dishes is also offered, and the reason I have been an occasional visitor to the establishment over the years is the thinly sliced sheep's tripe in chili oil (□□□□□, NT$220), a wonderfully piquant dish that balances the sharpness of shallots with the heat of Sichuan pepper and chili oil with the texture of the tripe. It is one of those deceptively simple dishes that

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could go wrong all too easily with a preponderance of one flavor or another. As with all the main menu options, the sheep's tripe is available in small, medium and large (prices given are for small dishes suitable for a table of two to three persons).

Many of the dishes are suitable for a simple lunch or a banquet intended to impress.

Although most of the menu items might be described as family favorites, they are prepared with considerable finesse. A dish such as fish pieces with vegetables (□□□□, NT$190), with its deep fried chunks of boneless sea bream in a highly flavored vegetable sauce dotted with beads of pureed spinach, has the visual appeal of something for which you might expect to pay a great deal more.

There is also a selection of noodles and rice dishes, the fried noodles with shredded pork, eggs and fungus (□□□□) being the standout. The choice of a rich, yellow lamian (□□) style noodle of medium thickness for this dish is unusual (the most common choice in northern-style restaurants is a thicker, white noodle) and presents this often heavy dish in a manner that might appeal to calorie-conscious diners. While not my favorite item on the menu, it shows an informed commitment to keeping up with the times.

In its most recent incarnation, Tung Men Dumpling House has a lovely little courtyard with a carp pond and its interior is spacious and comfortable. Service is efficient, though a little inconsistent, but the minor infelicities are easily forgiven for the high quality of the food and the very reasonable prices. The restaurant also has a sophisticated online presence with a strong Web site that provides full menu details and information about its wide range of home delivery services.

□□□ http://taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2012/01/19/2003523564