Grocery Shops 杂货店

The first type of business at the Old Bazaar were the Teochews’ Sundry Shops. These shops sold daily necessities such as basic pantry items, dry goods, toiletries, and services. Kuchingites would buy their groceries at the Old Bazaar back then due to the lack of transportation to go elsewhere. However, such grocery shops have gradually diminished due to the ever-increasing number of shops, minimarts, and supermarkets.

Golden Old Days of the Old Bazaar 杂货店的黄金时代

As the influences of modernization and urbanization increased, the old guard of the Old Bazaar had to adapt to the changing times. Some of the traditional grocery shops have managed to survive by offering a wide range of products, from local spices to imported goods. However, many of these shops have had to face competition from larger supermarkets and minimarts, which have been able to offer a wider selection of products at a lower cost.

Goldsmith Shops 金铺

Many of the old shops in the Old Bazaar are goldsmith shops, with a total of 24 still in existence today. The early proprietors were mainly Cantonese craftsmen. Goldsmithing is a delicate art where skills need to be honed over years of training and practice. Today, most of these goldsmiths still maintain the traditional, simple approach to their craftmanship. Traditionally, people would order a few pieces of jewelry for special occasions such as weddings.

Tinsmith Shops 白铁铺

Back in the day, the entire China Street would resonate with the sound of hammers and tongs from the numerous tinsmith shops that populated the area. Most of these tinsmiths were Hakka, and this was the earliest artisan business found in the Old Bazaar. Today, this trade has become a less common sight (and sound), and the few tinsmiths left have become a crucial part of the Old Bazaar scene.

Traditional Old Trades at the Kuching Old Bazaar 古晋老巴刹老行

The first ever street in Sarawak was Main Bazaar, dating back to the mid-19th century. The Kuching Old Bazaar expanded from there with the formation of Carpenter Street, China Street, Bishopgate Street, Wayang Street, and Ewe Hai Street. A walk through these lanes and streets will reveal stories of historical shops, old signboards, and businesses; all of which celebrate the legacies of traditional craftsmanship and skills.

The watch business is traditional craftsmanship that has been passed down through generations. These skilled craftsmen were predominantly Cantonese, and they dedicated their lives to repairing watches, ensuring that time never stands still. In the 1960s there were seven watch shops on Carpenter Street alone. Today, this number has since been whittled down to just two old shops.

Coffee Shop 咖啡店

Despite the number of restaurants in the Old Bazaar, there are a precious few who still maintain the traditional style. These old-school coffee shops have continued the heritage of the traditional street food sold by hawkers who used to ply their wares carried on bamboo poles, bicycles, and trishaws.

尽管老巴刹有很多餐馆，不过保持传统风格的茶室寥寥无几。这些仅存下来的茶室茶室，保留了过去在老街上的传统小吃，如Bursh Teochew and Sarawakese dishes, which were once common in the area.
Bicycle Shops 脚行

The older generation would say that one should look for the Heng Hua for any travel needs. Indeed, throughout history, the bicycle shops at the Old Bazaar have been and still are run by the Heng Hua people. In the days of trishaws, these shops provided trishaw repair services as well. In the 1950s and 1960s, when taxis were in their heyday, the bicycle shop Siap Guan Hin led the taxi industry with the cars in their possession as well.

Bookshop 书店

There is a long history of the old bookshops in the Old Bazaar. For example, the Star Bookshop and the Tai Tung Bookshop were founded just before and after World War II. These bookshops not only provided valuable knowledge and culture to the Old Bazaar, they were also a meeting place for the cultured youths. Apart from selling quality literature and magazines, they also rented out martial arts novels and comics. Thus, these bookshops were the centre of childhood memories for many people.

Barber Shops 理发店

The only remaining old barber shop in the Old Bazaar is the Nam Hua Barber Shop, which has been a registered business for the past 60 years. The senior Mr Chai, a Hakka, still provides the standard old school shaving, hair cutting, grooming, and ear cleaning services. Step into this shop and you will find yourself caught in a time tunnel where the old tables and chairs, television, cashiers, and traditional washbasins are still in use.

Furniture Shops 家私店

At one time there were many carpenter shops at the Old Bazaar, hence its name. Even though the carpenters and handcrafted furniture shops have since vanished from this street, there are still many furniture shops at the Old Bazaar selling readymade furniture and wood products.

Incense and Candle Shops 香烛铺

Established even before the war, the Tai Moh shop is owned by the Choo Ann and is Kuching’s first incense and candle shop. This shop embodies generations of traditions and cultural practices. Its owner is also a walking cultural encyclopaedia, and can describe any superstition or ritual off the top of his head.

Tailor Shops 洋服/裁缝店

The tailor shops found at the Old Bazaar are more than 100 years old. Before the emergence of ready-to-wear fashion, the tailoring industry was an all-day event with tailor shops where everyone had their clothes made. In that era, there were also many tailoring schools in town and many girls were sent to learn dressmaking skills.

Traditional Medicinal Shops 中药店

The traditional medicinal shops at the Old Bazaar have maintained the original facade of the old medicinal halls. Step in and be brought back to the old days by the whiffs of Chinese herbs, the weathered chest of drawers housing hundreds of herbs, the half century-old herb weighing scales and the traditional slicer, together with pestle and mortar. The classic scene is further enhanced by the sight of the old Chinese doctor diagnosing his patients’ conditions by feeling their pulse, and one of his family members or an old staff packing the herbs based on his prescriptions.

Framing Shop 鏡店

Yock Sung Frame Makers is the only framing shop at the Old Bazaar. This is a generationally run and family business handed down from Au Yong Wai Cho’s Cantones family. Today, he has passed down the exquisite art of framing to his next generation. The heritage tools, hundreds of frames, photo frames and pictures in the shop contain the stories and memories of the Old Bazaar.

Old Bazaar’s Tailor Shop Specializes in Hemming, as many of his customers are male physicians. He specializes in tailoring and dressmaking for both men and women. He has been in this business for over 70 years and is well-known for his high-quality workmanship, having served several prominent doctors and politicians over the years. His reputation is such that patients would travel from all over the country to have their clothing tailored by him.