*Jidan guan bing in Beijing*

On his return to Beijing after two years away, my friend wanted more than anything else to eat *jidan guan bing*. The oily wrap—literally translated as “poured egg pancake”—reminded him of early mornings when he was a student, lining up in front of a street-side stall to scarf down breakfast before lectures.

In the world of Beijing breakfasts, the *bing*, or wheat pancake, abounds. But in three years of living in Beijing, and through countless hours of *bing* consumption, I had never eaten a *jidan guan bing*. In fact, I had never even heard of it.

I asked a few friends where to find *jidan guan bing*. “It’s been a long time since I’ve eaten that,” one friend said. Another, knowing my physical aversion to early mornings, cautioned me that they would only be sold from early morning street carts, likely to disappear by 9:30 a.m.

Undeterred, we walked to a breakfast stall near my apartment. “Nobody around here sells that,” the owner said, and returned to watching television on his phone. The man helming the steamer at the dumpling and bun shop next door was also at a loss. A few blocks away, above a row of *bing* stalls, red menus listed what I thought must be every possible variety of *bing*. Yet *jidan guan bing* was conspicuously absent. Another customer, seeing our disappointment, gently encouraged us to consider other *bings*—perhaps a *shou zhua bing*, or hand-pulled pancake, would be a good alternate choice, she suggested.

My friend was ready to cave. I, however, didn’t want to give up. I had to find the *jidan guan bing*, and I had to eat it.

We called off our search until the next morning. We rolled out of bed and headed to a nearby subway station where breakfast carts lined up to serve hungry commuters. The smell of frying *bing* filled the street. Before I had a chance to investigate more closely, my friend had already realized the inevitable. “They don’t have it,” he said.

Another friend tipped us off to a different subway station, two stops north. It was almost 9:30—this was our last chance. Outside of the least-used subway entrance, tucked in the hedges along the entrance to the highway, a single stall sold magazines, soft drinks, and, for some reason, *jidan guan bing*.

The man running the stall threw two pre-prepared wheat-and-egg wraps onto the grill, and slapped them with the two key sauces omnipresent among Beijing breakfasts: questionable-looking brown sauce (technically, sweet fermented flour paste) and questionable-looking red sauce, which is mild hot sauce. He topped it off with a few clumps of lettuce, some pickled radishes, and a sausage that looked like it had been turning aimlessly on the heater for hours.

The final result was a smaller, slightly softer version of the famous hand-pulled *bing*, with a sausage inside. It was tasty, sure, but I was not impressed. We had scoured an entire neighborhood in search of what was basically a hot dog wrapped in an egg crepe.

But my friend's face lit up in a satisfied smile. It wasn’t the best *jidan guan bing* he’d ever had, but it was close enough. It still had the flavor of his memories of living in Beijing.