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Benthana of Tokyo
MIAMI, FL

Franchise Fee:	\$50,000
Total Investment:	\$1,500,000
Sales/Investment Ratio:	1.32

THIS JAPANESE-STYLE steakhouse has grown modestly since its 1964 founding by Rocky H. Aoki. The 47-unit chain features communal dining around a special Teppan cooking table where patrons watch a "Showman Chef" slice, season, and cook meats, vegetables, and seafood on a steel grill which forms part of the table. The company's newest concept is Benthana Grill, a scaled-down version (3,500-4,000 sq. ft. compared to the chain's typical 8,000-sq.-ft. unit) of the larger steakhouse geared towards moderate-sized markets. Recent Grill franchise openings include Dallas, Houston, Little Rock, and Reno.

23

The Taco Maker
OGDEN, UT

Franchise Fee:	\$19,500
Total Investment:	\$50,000 - \$200,000
Sales/Investment Ratio:	3.10

ALTHOUGH IT CAN'T BEGIN to approach the market dominance of Taco Bell, the Utah-based The Taco Maker, a budget Mexican fast-feeder, currently franchises more than 100 units in six countries and specializes in a combination of low prices and popular Mexican standards like tacos, burritos, and enchiladas, with an added emphasis on kids' meals. The chain did over \$33 million in sales in 1995, operating primarily in food courts, malls, and strip centers, with some free-standing Express units as well. The Taco Maker's franchisee program includes marketing and advertising support from the company.

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Cousins Subs
MENOMINEE FALLS, WI

Franchise Fee:	\$12,500
Total Investment:	\$170,000 - \$235,500
Sales/Investment Ratio:	2.70

Cousins Subs' 60 franchisees can trace their roots back to 1972, when cousins Jim Sheppard and William Specht founded the company in Milwaukee. The cousins began franchising units in 1989, and were named No. 1 sub chain in overall franchisee satisfaction in the 1996 *Income Opportunities* "Franchise Platinum 200." They now are in charge of 110 stores in seven states, with more projected for 1997. Cousins is taking on behemoth competitor Subway by opening franchised units in non-traditional formats (truck stops, convenience stores), co-branding, and offering customers a complete line of breakfast subs.

25

Mark Pi's Express
COLUMBUS, OH

Franchise Fee:	\$15,000
Total Investment:	Varies
Sales/Investment Ratio:	N/A

LOOKING TO REBOUND from a financial reorganization, Mark Pi's Express is fine-tuning its quick-service Chinese food concept, primarily based in malls. Mark Pi's Express offers a limited menu of Chinese standards based on the recipes of Pi himself, a master chef who holds the world record for noodle-making by hand. Mark Pi actually operates four concepts, including Mark Pi's Feast of the Dragon Buffet and Mark Pi's China Gate, both full-service restaurants. However, Mark Pi's Express is the only concept currently franchising, and it was ranked recently among the top 400 largest franchises by *Entrepreneur* magazine.

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Mark Pi, left, and William J. Dolan of Mark Pi International, Hilliard

Mary Circe/W/Dispatch

Mark Pi grows and grows

Institutional interest propels Chinese restaurant into new ventures

By Christopher A. Amatos
Dispatch Assistant Business Editor

As Mark Pi International expands its base of Chinese restaurants throughout Ohio and surrounding states, the company is making some behind-the-scenes moves that promise to add to its growth in a much less visible manner.

The Hilliard-based operator and franchiser of 74 restaurants is teaming up with some of the nation's largest institutional food companies to supply college dorms, corporate cafeterias, supermarkets and discount retailers with Chinese food.

"If you say to me, 'Where do we get 80 percent of our calls?' it's contract feeders," William J. Dolan, Mark Pi's chief operating officer, said about new business inquiries.

Among Mark Pi's new ventures are:

- Opening an employee cafeteria at Federal Express Corp.'s sprawling hub in Memphis, Tenn.;
- Participating in the Supreme Court, ARA Services Inc.'s supermarket food court venture under way in the Midwest;
- Operating the Chinese food restaurants inside

Kmart Corp.'s Super Kmart megastores;
■ Breaking into the college dorm market;
■ Expanding its Columbus commissary for the third time.

Even though the company is growing rapidly on the institutional side, its restaurants still account for the lion's share of revenues. Systemwide sales will be about \$40 million for the restaurants, whereas manufactured product sales will reach about \$7 million this year, Dolan said.

That could change rapidly, however, if all the plans come to fruition.

"Of the top 10 or 15 contract feeders, there is not one who has not visited us or we have not visited them," Dolan said. "I think we will see some big things with these guys."

One of the reasons for the potential is the growing interest nationwide in Chinese food, Dolan said.

Robert O'Brien, vice president of marketing for the Consumer Reports Eating Share Trends, a leading restaurant industry marketing service, said several factors are driving the increased popularity of oriental food.

"I would say it's a combination of three things. There's more available, it's a fairly good value and baby boomers are getting older," he said.

As the population ages, it seeks more variety and greater sophistication in its restaurant fare, O'Brien said.

Dolan said that changes in operations are helping propel Mark Pi's growth. "The impediment for the growth of Chinese has never been its popularity,"

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