

香港 Hong Kong

高中組 中四 (S4) ▶ 中六 (S6)
Senior Secondary

Chan Tsz Yu

G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College

Topic : As Long As The Taste is There, The Memory is There

It has been said that memories make us who we are. But some said we are what we eat. The debate of the body and the soul has continued for centuries. What is most intriguing is how food and drinks and our memories interact. What helps us to retrieve the old memories? What makes us remember them? And how do we lose them? We all know that only those events that marked as meaningful are recorded in our brain. The food and drinks that we consume every day, to many of us, can hardly be regarded as “meaningful” and memorable. I bet you won’t even remember what food and drinks you consumed three days ago. But certain food and drinks have a special ability to bring back, create, and even make us lose memories.

Have you ever experienced this? Your mind travels back to your youth as the nutty aroma of freshly made cookies fills the air, bringing back those pleasant memories. You get a surge of nostalgia with every bite of that crisp deliciousness. Sometimes, food and drinks bring memories back. The flavor, aroma, and texture may be incredibly evocative, conjuring up memories of both the place and time in which it was consumed. A post magazine from the South China Morning Post reveals the dishes of a meal of a charity dinner that brings together seven entrepreneurs from Hong Kong, which are childhood snacks and dishes. The chef served one of her favorite childhood snacks – spring rolls. She remembered that it was made by her mom for the school bake sales when she was in school and it was always sold out. Food brings up memories of not just what you ate, but also where you ate and with whom you ate. Food is like a time machine. It transcends time and brings back those memories, emotions, sensations and nostalgia.

If we can retrieve the old memories through food, can we create new memories through it? Technically, most of the memories are built of scent and taste when they are made. But after reading an online article written by Nilufer Demirkol, I have realised that those memories were not necessarily made from a meal. Rather, they were made from the experiences that we had while consuming the food. The author suggested that memories are made by sharing food to others. Indeed, the happiness and satisfaction by having the food can be spread to others if we share our food. What makes it remarkable is not just the food itself, also the act of sharing and the happiness you received from the people you have shared. Not just by sharing food, cooking food with others may also be a chance for us to create new memories. From a story called Potato Candy Fiasco in the book *Stories Behind the Food*, through the process of making the candy, it creates a lot of scenarios such as putting the wrong proportion of potato and sugar to make the treat and ended up failing it. It is heart-warming, funny and touching experience. I am sure that the act of enjoying the food probably only lasts a few minutes for the characters in the book, but the memory associated with the cooking experience of it can last a lifetime.

Throughout the stories and the articles that I have read about memories of food and drinks, I found that most of the memories related to food are filled with joy and happiness. Celebration of life moments, happiness from family members and remarkable childhood moments are presented by food memories. I begin to wonder if there are memories of food and drink that are related to stress, unhappiness and trouble. Surprisingly, there are some.

From the story “Potato Candy”, the recipe of the candy is passed down by the author’s grandparents who made this treat during the Depression Era. Many people had lost their jobs and run out of savings. They did not have enough expense for food to fulfill their basic needs. Some even suffered from starvation. As the ingredients of making the candy were easy to obtain and inexpensive to purchase at that time, the recipe of the candy became super popular. With such background, I wonder if the grandparents would retrieve memories of starvation, hunger and malnutrition that they had experienced during the time of Depression when they take a bite of the candy now. Will they like the taste of the candy? Or will they simply feel sad as it brings terrible memories from the past? It shows that sometimes, food brings unfavorable or even painful memories to people. Those memories may even affect a person’s present appetite of the food.

To people who are struggled with painful memories, some food and drinks can provide relief to or even make them lose those memories. The best example of it is alcohol. Moderate drinking of alcohol will cause your brain to slow down and give you a sense of relaxation, confidence and increasing happiness. People often drink alcohol to gain enjoyment and cope with stress or unhappiness. However, people often experience blackouts which is a severe memory loss after drinking alcohol. There will be little to no memory of the blackout phase, despite the fact that the person may still appear up and attentive. This is perhaps the most “controllable” effect of drinks to our memories, and that is why some people consume alcohol to help them temporarily lose touch with reality and black out so that they can momentarily escape from certain painful memories.

People usually perceive food and drinks as basic necessities and we need them for survival. Our body needs them for daily functioning. But what makes food and drinks so special is that they often secretly ingrain certain emotions in our mind and at times, in the instance of alcohol consumption, help us “delete” certain experiences from our brain. If there is this great divide between the body and the soul, aren’t food and drinks a marvellous connector between the two?

Comments

- The writer showed the ability to synthesis the knowledge learnt from different reading materials and presented them with his/her own ideas in a coherent way.
- A powerful piece of writing here! It makes the reader have a lot of reflection!

Enya Caitrina Jesse Beer

Po Leung Kuk Vicwood K.T. Chong Sixth Form College

Topic : Everything is connected by food

Food is a kind of element that is closely connected to us biologically, psychologically, spiritually and socially. Food can also connect us with our families and friends.

Biologically, we need food to provide energy for our body functions and physical activities so we can move, act and balance our homeostasis. From the book “Psychology and Health”, it is stated that homeostasis ensures that our cells are in a stable condition that is suitable for the survival and normal functions. For instance, the endocrine tissues in the pancreas produce two protein hormones: insulin and glucagon. They are both from the same tissue but act differently. We need a balanced diet to balance our body as we need different kinds of minerals and vitamins that don’t provide energy but we need them because they are related to our health. We can obtain them from food after digestion and they are transmitted by blood vessels to different organs. Apart from obtaining nutrition from food, the sensation of flavor is our crucial stimulation for food. Food sensation is actually a combination of taste and smell. The reason why we can taste is because of the million taste buds on our tongue. Taste is a sensory of food-derived chemicals that stimulate receptor cells within taste buds and will turn to send messages to our brain. In addition, the reason why we can smell food is because of the numerous cells in our nose which are detected by the receptors on hair-like cilia at the tips of sensory cells in the nose when we are chewing those chemicals. It will then go into the nose and send messages to our brain like one of the chemical esters which can smell sweet and fruity odours. These two messages are what we would perceive as a flavor or taste.

Psychologically, we feel happy if we taste something sweet or yummy. Eating chocolate will stimulate our brain to produce more Endorphins which help us in alleviating depression as they act as sedatives and provide us with a feeling of pleasure and happiness. This can be best illustrated in one of the blogs on seedandbean.co.uk about chocolate which explains that they trigger certain emotions and effectively reduce stress and decrease pain, this is the reason why chocolate is known to be a comfort food. Another book on Health psychology has also debated the relationship between physical health and mental states for generations: this debate is often referred to as the mind-body problem. It relates to our mind and body.

Comments

- With reference to several reading materials, the writer tried to give a lot of information on various kinds of impacts of food on people. He/She wrote slightly about the theme, “Memories of Food and Drink” in the second half of the essay.
- A very organised piece of writing!

Spiritually, everyone has their own religious belief and has different lifestyles, some food is forbidden because people’s religion. Socially, we go out to have meals with friends and families, we go out to dine in different restaurants to try different cuisines. Sometimes we will go out to dine in some traditional restaurants with some older family members to savour some food of their childhood. Everyone tries to build their happiness from their childhood, and it affects us a lot. As time goes by, the physical things will be thrown away or lost, but our memories will never vanish, food can connect the memories of children or even reduce our homesickness if we are in other countries. Moreover, I remember that when I was young I watched a movie ‘Toast’ in a cinema with my family members. It was about a story of a Boy’s hunger and it was an extraordinary tale about food. We sat in the first row so we could watch the movie clearly with a big box of popcorn. After commercial time, the film caught my eye and I still remember clearly the picture now because it was so appealing that it drove me to eagerly find the book. ‘Toast’ is Nigel Slater’s award-winning biography of a child remembering food. As Nigel Slater said in the book “This is not an occasional occurrence. My mother burns the toast as surely as the sun rises each morning.” It recalls the writer’s childhood from a piece of burned toast. When I was in primary school my mum would pick me up from school. She always made some special snacks created by her and she would make them in her way. Sometimes, they would be a bit burnt, which really pissed me off. Now she won’t make any snacks for me again. So I am quite sorry that I felt annoyed at that moment and I even thought that it was a big trouble, just like what Nigel Slater said in ‘Toast’.

Every year my grandparents would come to Hong Kong during my New Year holidays. When I had time I would accompany them to meet their old friend at Luk Yu Tea House and tried the dim sum there. It is a place full of history, and it is kind of nostalgic, but I think the decorations are all very lovely. According to the lovely Planet magazine, “Luk Yu Tea House is arguably Hong Kong’s most beautiful tea house. Today Luk Yu is known for its old-school Cantonese cooking, and everything associated make it the finest example of Asian Art Deco in Hong Kong.” Tea in Cantonese is pronounced as ‘cha’ which has the same meaning as ‘check’. Many years ago, people thought that drinking tea was a way to check their bodies, they would drink as much tea as possible to make themselves healthier. So around 2700 BC, people started to dry the leaves and flowers and put them under hot water which eventually become our “tea” today. After a long period of time, people drink tea with families or friends and sometimes they have tea along with some steamed food. Nowadays, people have meals at tea house which is similar to a restaurant, but dim sum are served as well.

If you want to have some memories of food and drinks, here are some tips for you: spend more time with your families or friends on weekends and eat out with them, try to talk more to them instead of tapping mobile phones. You can also try to explore with your families where they go when they have spare time and listen to their stories. You should also try to visit the places that they have been to when they were young to try to “experience” their memories of food and drinks. Most important of all, you can have more memories with them when you spend time having a meal with them.

香港 Hong Kong

高中組 中四 (S4) ▶ 中六 (S6)
Senior Secondary

Lam Kwun Ming

G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College

Topic : One Dish Feeds Hundreds of Memories

Chicken, white turnip, pork skin, dried bean curd skin, mushrooms... These are just ordinary foods a person could find in any market down a few blocks. However, when these foodstuffs are stacked into a pot, all of a sudden, it becomes an ethnic cultural dish. Shockingly, this dish, *Poonchoi*, once obscure and exotic, has made its way to the centre of the dinner table of Hong Kong people. In recent years, *Poonchoi* and many other types of food have embedded themselves into the collective memory of not only rural settlers but also metropolitans. As for my generation, most young people such as I have already considered *Poonchoi* to be an integral part of a Chinese New Year's feast. With an interest in culture and society, I became interested in how food and people are intertwined after reading *Food and Foodways in Asia: Resource, Tradition and Cooking*. The purpose of this essay is to explore how the memories of certain foods affect society and my thoughts on the memory of food.

First of all, *Poonchoi*, also referred to as *Punchoi* or *Pancai*, is a village cuisine that originated from the indigenous villagers of the New Territories. Traditionally, its ingredients consist of white turnips, dried bean curd skin, dried eel, pig skin, braised pork, squids, chicken and roasted pork stacked from the bottom to top in a large zinc pot. With such a large portion, it could easily fill up eight to ten eaters.

To the villages in the New Territories before the 1980s, *Poonchoi* serves as an enforcer of the status quo. Before entering the collective consciousness, *Poonchoi* was but the memory of a dozen villagers. Served in major events, such as religious ceremonies and weddings among single-surname villages, *Poonchoi* used to only be served to male members of the village on a basis of seniority. Women, of course— were left out of the conversation, customary to age-old beliefs. Regarding the memory of the single-surname villagers, not only was eating *Poonchoi* a memory of cheery festivities and celebrations, but it was also a stark reminder, even a cruel enforcer of the social classes among the villagers. By solidifying the unity between males, it has unfortunately caused a rift between males and females. For a dish that symbolises 'togetherness' and 'unity' nowadays, ironically, originally, it used to be the marking tape which draws the dividing lines within a community.

As for the Hong Kong people undergoing decolonization during the late 1990s, having *Poonchoi* is a memory which elicits feelings of belonging. For more than a century, Hong Kong culture had been largely influenced by the British, forming an identity which seemed to be more British than Chinese, which can be easily seen nowadays with Hong Kong people's preference towards milk tea. *Poonchoi*, a dish promoted by local films and domestic tourism, was a tool that opened a new door of cuisine and culture to Hong Kong's busy urbanites. At this point in time, *Poonchoi* has become a memory of a serene, native, rural life in the eyes of the busy metropolitans, and even a silent link to their Chinese heritage, which has been overlooked for decades.

In different time periods, foods, such as *Poonchoi*, can elicit other memories and feelings in different people. As the Asian Financial Crisis struck Hong Kong a few months after its Handover to China, *Poonchoi* was an affordable alternative offered during Chinese New Year. Moreover, as it is served in only one pot, it significantly saves the time spent on making the dish for home cooks and housewives, making it an appealing dish to family breadwinners who toiled long hours to support their families in the dwindling economy. Other than that, to people who lived during the Asian Financial Crisis, eating *Poonchoi* is a memory of symbolically holding hands together in dire times. *Poonchoi* is the solidarity of Hong Kong people to survive even in the hardest times. It is the food which represents the Lion Rock Spirit: To persevere and unite in the face of danger, to celebrate every chance of being together with the family even in times of financial difficulty.

As for me, a student born after the Asian Financial Crisis, and was too young during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis to fully comprehend the global economic devastation that was going on at that time, my memories of *Poonchoi* were nothing but sweet. They still warm my heart, a string which ties my heart and soul with my family and friends. Peeling a burning tomato sauce-flavoured shrimp messily, almost could I hear the hearty laughter of family members sitting around a table, wooden chopsticks racing towards the steaming pot of *Poonchoi*. When I think of *Poonchoi*, I think of glass cups clinking while guests bode words of blessings, loud chattering rising and falling like the brilliant fireworks in the sky. I feel grounded, as if my heart were suddenly tied with my fellow people, telling me: *This is where I'm supposed to be. Poonchoi*, as with so many local foods in Hong Kong, such as the Yumcha culture, can help young people like myself feel connected to both the land and the people.

In conclusion, foods, with *Poonchoi* as the example drawn in this essay, can bring in memories which further enforce a community's social norms and statuses, and solidify feelings of belonging to a family, a community and even a country. As the years go on, food evolves along with the people, even spreading to other communities, eventually integrating itself into a more dominant culture under certain circumstances, such as times of major insecurity and fear, when people have evolved to carry different needs. Eventually, as this 'foreign' food enters the collective consciousness, like a seed taking root in a foreign land, it becomes a common memory of food to the majority. And finally—the food becomes a shared memory of togetherness and nativeness. Indeed, one dish brings out hundreds of memories, transcending the limitations of distance and time.

Comments

- The essay has a smooth flow from the definition of *Poonchoi*, the rise of its popularity to the writer's personalised feelings and memories of it. Ideas are connected well.
- An interesting thought of Chinese culture!

SHERAZ Safa

HKWMA Chu Shek Lun Secondary School

Topic : Life Experiences are Like Different Flavors of Food

The tastes of everyday life: Food evolves around us in every perspective of our lives. It has been passed down from generation to generation. Not only every country but every home has its own unique way of making food. It is very fascinating that even though each country use the same ingredients but we have different recipes. All of this has a very strong connection with our memories. Even different seasons have their own special food and comfort foods that bring back nostalgia to us. Food is also a way to connect us with people around us such as we form friendships with people who have the same taste as us. Festivals, weddings, tea time and birthday parties are a main source to bring people together. Every festival has its own particular dish that we often remember that festival because of that particular dish. For some people food is their love language to show their affection. Sometimes we remember a person when we see a particular kind of food. My childhood was spent in a rural area where shopping at malls was only for the rich people. I along with my siblings and cousins, we would go to the local shop to buy snacks at evening and this was part of our daily routine. Now after many years when I passed by that shop in my hometown I instantly pictured myself as a child there with my siblings and the sweet relationship we had with shopkeeper. Also, as being from a middle class family when sometime my father would bring a gourmet meal, I would always get this luxurious feeling and I treasured that precious moment. All of this holds a very powerful bond with our memories and linger our senses.

In *Ratatouille*, Anton Ego, a food critic, gets a flashback of his childhood dish which his mother makes for him to lift his spirit from a bicycle accident. Although the dish is simple and a older style recipe and he can't recall it from when he sees it but the taste evokes his memory. Let's also not forget the rat, Remy who has a special skill for combining flavours through taste and smell and using his own imagination. This also tells us that food is art.

America's master chef season 3 winner, Christine Ha, who is blind but can present a beautiful dish is due to her memory with food. Her experience with handling food and using her imagination for presentation of the dish gives us another example that food is art. One of chef Joe Bastianich, states that when he tastes wine he see things and he thinks that these flavours have the same impact on her that when she tastes a dish images might come into her mind and she is able to reinterpret that mental imagery to which she replied that she tastes everything separately and then together. What I learned from this is that food stays in our memory and we don't actually need sight to make it but being able to present it on a plate actually requires a lot of talent and passion.

Marcel Proust's *In search of lost time*: Swaan's way has a very famous scene of the madeleine. One spoonful of the madeleine dipped in the lime-blossom tea it takes him back in his childhood town of Combray. When he is trying to perceive the taste, it reminded me of a chocolate I ate that I couldn't remember that where did I had it before and suddenly it occurred to me that my grandma gave it to me and just like Marcel my village's image came in front of my eyes. All of a sudden after many years from just one madeleine he can remember every single detail of that town. Even though Marcel recognises it but the taste is what evokes his memory. This causes him involuntary memory, memories that are from the past and return when triggered by cues such as sights, smells, taste and sound.

Fannie Flagg's *Fried green tomatoes at the Whistle stop café* tells a mysterious, fascinating and a friendship tale about Iddie and Ruth and how that little place brought so many people of different personalities and backgrounds together. There were scenes that reminded me that food and the place where it is served has a such close relationship with us. For example, when Ninny claims that how she could for some fried green tomatoes that were made at the Whistle Stop Café made by Iddie and Ruth and then Evelyn prepares them for her birthday party. This made me realise that for some people they show their affection or love through food. Sometimes all we need to do to make someone happy is by making them the meal that brings them comfort and nostalgic vibes and fill their heart with pleasure. Another example is when Ruth proclaim Iddie as a "bee charmer" when she procures a fresh honeycomb from a beehive. The title that she gave to Iddie reminded me about the time when my siblings and I would call each other nicknames based on a fruit that matched my sibling's personality and that fruit's characteristics as well. Lastly, when Iddie and Ruth open the café they also serve to African-American patrons and they had workers in the café that were African and that was queer because the novel is set in the 20th century where Africans were still discriminated but what opened the owners heart to them was the love of food. Food brought them together not only in dining together but also in helping each other in difficult times.

Overall, food covers our life comprehensively. I always miss the time when I was a child and I would have lunch with my whole family at my grandma's home with all of my cousin, in winter at a sunny afternoon and sharing a warm meal and all the organic food from my grandpa's farm. Having a meal is such a small thing that some of us even wouldn't consider it a thing but little do we know that it can hold many emotions and memories that we often take them for granted.

Comments

- A lot of relevant books are referred to in the essay. Yet, the technique to consolidate the ideas in a coherent way is missing. More content on the theme, "Memories of Food and Drink" is needed.
- Impressive example of how a blind people connect with food and his life experience.

2023年



4·23 World Book Day 創作比賽
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閱讀好滋味

Tasty Reading

香港 Hong Kong

高中組 中四 (S4) ▶ 中六 (S6)
Senior Secondary

Wong Kai Hang

Shau Kei Wan Government Secondary School
Topic : HK Typical Food

Food — not only provides nutrients, but also gives us a lot of information. They can show the climatic conditions, histories and even the culture of different places. For example, using cactus to make dishes is popular in Mexico because there are many cacti growing on the plateaus in Mexico. Food plays an important role in Hong Kong cultures too. Food like egg tarts, egg waffles and fish balls are part of the collective memories of Hong Kong people. They show how Hong Kongers live, what they enjoy and what have been changed in Hong Kong. They should be protected to pass on the story for our future generations. Here are the stories of Hong Kong's most iconic street food.

Street food's everywhere in Hong Kong, but do you know their origins and histories?

It is believed that hawkers had started to sell food on the street even in the Tang dynasty. According to Tang Zhiyan, a book that describes different anecdotes in the Tang dynasty, those hawkers had sold cold food on the streets to get cooled during the summer. Since then, it changed from time to time to adopt different cultures. In Hong Kong, roadside stalls appeared around the 20th century. The food they had sold was very similar to the present day's, including fish balls, siu mai and three fried stuffed treasures. In the 1950s, the number of street food hawkers had increased very rapidly because of the economic downturn and high unemployment rate in Hong Kong. The political stability and economic development of Hong Kong also attracted immigrants from Mainland China. Thus, many poor people become hawkers to earn a living. This also led to the development of the street food itself. But because of the hygiene issue, the Hong Kong government banned mobile food carts. Since then, there have been fewer hawkers selling street food. Some of those hawkers move into shops and continue selling street food. That's why we can still see them till this day.

Street food is so popular among Hong Kong people because of one common factor — they are very fast to prepare and convenient to eat, making them in favor of Hong Kong people's fast lifestyle. This also showed how good Hong Kong people can adapt to different changes and circumstances. Street food represents the core spirit of Hong Kong culture and most importantly, the memories.

Egg waffles, known as bubble waffles, egg puffs, or 'gai daan jai' in Cantonese, are iconic street snacks of HK. Filling the bubbles are the precious memories and the tastes of Hongkongers.

As the most popular street food other than siu mai and fish balls, egg waffles were the favorites of Hong Kong students, some may even eat it after school every day! However, due to the phasing out of old licenses, the number of street hawkers making egg waffles decreased rapidly in the 1990s. Born in the 21st century, it's harder for me to buy egg waffles and therefore I cherish every time I eat the mouth-watering bubbles. I can recall the first time I ate egg waffles that — my parents and I could hardly join the queue in the crowd and we eventually got the egg waffles after an hour! I didn't know why my parents insisted on buying them and wanted to give up the queue... I couldn't even see the start. Until the moment I tasted the bubbles, my attitude changed. It was so incredible as the inside was soft like cakes while the shell was as crispy as chips, along with the pleasant aromatic eggs!

It is believed that in the 1950s, a grocery shop owner created this tasty snack using broken eggs that couldn't be sold and mixed with other ingredients. I was shocked that the Hongkongers had already had the concept of upcycling way more earlier than the German engineer Reiner Pliz coined this word in 1994!

I have never wondered about the unique appearance of the egg waffles. It turns out that each little puff can also be easily broken apart into individual bubbles.

Apart from street food, there're drinks that represent the memories of Hong Kongers. Some of them can be seen in Hong Kong-style Cafe (cha chaan teng), and they're still being popular nowadays.

What will you think of when it comes to cha chaan teng? One of the most distinctive signature drinks in Hong Kong-style Café is HK milk tea. Originally, milk tea was from Britain. It developed its own style in Hong Kong in around 19th century. People mixed Ceylon black tea with milk and sugar to make milk tea. However, HK-style milk tea used evaporated milk or condensed milk. Also, people like to add more sugar in Hong Kong. For British, they usually use whole milk or low fat milk. Therefore, hk style milk tea may be more slippery and concentrated.

Another popular and representative food in Hong Kong is egg tart. Same as milk tea, it is originally from England. In the 1940s, Hong Kong high-class western restaurants introduced egg tarts. Later in the 1950s, egg tarts began to appear in cha chaan teng. At that time egg tarts were large. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, fewer restaurants made their own egg tarts themselves. Most of them imported egg tarts from bakeries. In addition, some Chinese restaurants offered smaller egg tarts. What's more, in 2014, the Hong Kong government confirmed that egg tarts have been included in the list of intangible cultural heritage.

I have learnt a lot about cha chaan teng when reading. For example, C O T means cold lemon tea and 2 9 means hot fresh milk. This is because in Cantonese, 2 is similar to hot and 'nine' is similar to milk in Cantonese. Maybe some new restaurants no longer used these. They are still memories of some relatively older people. Cha chaan teng is not only a place to eat, but also a memorable place full of human touch.

After reading articles about cha chaan teng, I felt this touch of culture is unique. The next time I go into a cha chaan teng, I think I will have a different feeling.

Comments

- The writer could give an account of the history and information of the street foods that give a lot of memories to Hong Kong people.
- Good description of Hong Kong street food!

作品以原作展示並以獲獎者姓名排序。
Works are displayed in original form and arranged in the order of the winner's name.

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