

**The food changes in Wenchong Village, on the edge of
a city undergoing modern development**

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ABSTRACT

Since China's reform and opening up 40 years ago, the social landscape has changed dramatically. Villages around the edges of major cities have paid the price of rapid development to be in line with the rest of the world, causing some irreversible effects. This research uses a qualitative methodology, autoethnography, to explore the food changes in Wenchong village, near Guangzhou, over the past 40 years. Autoethnography is the integration of personal life experiences into biographical or ethnographic writing, and provides an insider's perspective. A reflective framework was used to analyse my personal experiences through a gastronomic lens. In this research, I share my personal food stories of growing up in Wenchong village, where arable land has been used for factories and warehouses, farmers are now urban residents, and food self-sufficiency is now dependent on external supplies. The changes I explore are in relation to the local food landscape, which now has a wider and novel range of foods, as well as to the village population and land usage, and the globalised supply of goods: food bought from supermarkets instead of local markets, cooking methods and living space changes that have limited traditional food production, and the impacts of change on traditional festivals.

Four significant themes emerged in this research: social connections, taste, culture, and identity. These themes indicate that the inevitable urbanisation is unravelling the village's food culture, traditions, and community, and has greatly weakened the people's connection to the land. These food stories are a reflection of my emotional link to my family, my village, and my sense of cultural belonging. Thus, my research not only contributes to understanding the food changes in my village, but also how I have come to understand the significance of food and food activities in bringing communities together. Through this research, I hope to encourage some reflections on the effects of social development on traditional Chinese food culture and cultural beliefs, as well as provide some possible directions for future gastronomic research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT...	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
LIST OF FIGURES	5
LIST OF TABLES	6
ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP	7
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	8
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction to the food oriented Chinese culture	1
1.2 Introduction to the researcher	3
1.3 Background information.....	5
1.3.1 The reform and opening up of China (改革开放 gaige kaifang)	5
1.3.2 Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, China.....	6
1.3.3 Guangzhou cuisine	8
1.4 Wenchong Village.....	10
1.4.1 The plight of Wenchong.....	11
1.4.2 Wenchong traditional festivals.....	12
1.4.3 Local food features.....	15
1.5 Rationale for the research	16
1.6 Overview of the dissertation	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	18
2.1 Introduction.....	18
2.2 Chinese food culture.....	18
2.2.1 Chinese gastronomy	18
2.2.2 Chinese food and concept of home	20
2.2.3 Cultural identity	21
2.2.4 Traditional festival food	22
2.3 Food in a changing China	24
2.3.1 Food culture – development perspective	24
2.3.2 Globalisation.....	24
2.3.3 Modernisation	25
2.3.4 Urbanisation.....	26
2.4 Chapter summary	28
Chapter 3: Research Methods.....	29
3.1 Introduction.....	29
3.2 Research paradigm	29
3.3 Research methodology	30
3.3.1 Autoethnography.....	30

3.3.2	The purpose and practice of autoethnography	31
3.4	Research methods.....	32
3.4.1	Reflective framework	32
3.4.2	Data collection	34
3.4.3	Data analysis	34
3.5	Ethical considerations.....	35
3.6	Chapter summary	36
Chapter 4: Findings		37
4.1	Introduction.....	37
4.2	The food changes in Wenchong Village over the past 40 years - my food stories.....	37
4.2.1	Changes in food range and availability	37
4.2.2	Changes in cooking methods	43
4.2.3	Changes in the making of traditional food.....	48
4.2.4	Changes in local food landscape	54
4.2.5	Changes in the eating gatherings.....	61
4.3	Analysis of villagers' needs using Maslow's theory	65
4.4	Chapter summary	66
Chapter 5: Conclusion		67
5.1	Introduction.....	67
5.2	Four themes of changes	67
5.3	My recommendations for Wenchong Village	69
5.4	Research limitations and future research directions	70
5.5	Researcher's reflection	71
References		72

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 <i>Twenty-Four Solar Terms</i>	2
Figure 2 <i>Greater Bay Area China Map</i>	6
Figure 3 <i>A View of the European Factories in Canton (Guangzhou Pearl River)</i>	7
Figure 4 <i>Wenchong Village Hundred Year Old Buildings</i>	10
Figure 5 <i>Wenchong Village Before the Urban Reformation</i>	11
Figure 6 <i>Traditional Lion Dances and Dragon Boat Races in Wenchong</i>	13
Figure 7 <i>Wenchong Villagers Watch Dragon Boat Races Under the Lychee Trees by the River</i>	13
Figure 8 <i>Village Banquet in Front of the Old Ancestral Temple</i>	14
Figure 9 <i>The Characteristics of Autoethnography</i>	31
Figure 10 <i>Wen Chong Cun Zhi</i>	34
Figure 11 <i>A State Owned Grocery Store Under the Planned Economy Policy in the 1980s</i>	37
Figure 12 <i>Wenchong Farmers' Market Inside (Left) and Outside (Right)</i>	39
Figure 13 <i>Walmart and KFC in Wenchong Centre</i>	41
Figure 14 <i>Traditional Wood Stove (Left) and Modern Gas Stove (Right)</i>	43
Figure 15 <i>Our Family's Three Storey Village House, Built in 1993 (Left), and New Modern Apartments for the Villagers (Right)</i>	44
Figure 16 <i>Worshipping the Gods of the Stove</i>	45
Figure 17 <i>Traditional and Commercial Rice Dumplings</i>	49
Figure 18 <i>My Friend's Mother, Yuan, Making Rice Dumplings at Home in Hamilton, New Zealand</i>	50
Figure 19 <i>Traditional Steamed Glutinous Rice Balls</i>	51
Figure 20 <i>Traditional Canton Roasted Crispy Suckling Pig</i>	52
Figure 21 <i>Traditional Cantonese Breakfast</i>	55
Figure 22 <i>Different Kinds of Eateries on Wenchong Street</i>	55
Figure 23 <i>The Wide Range of Local and Imported Dairy Products in Walmart</i>	56
Figure 24 <i>A Variety of Grain Products</i>	57
Figure 25 <i>Local Fruits: Lychees, Longans, Oranges, Bananas, and Pineapples</i>	57
Figure 26 <i>The Local Fruit Stands Dominated by Imported Fruits</i>	58
Figure 27 <i>The Village Pond</i>	58
Figure 28 <i>Traceable Seafood in Walmart</i>	59
Figure 29 <i>A Wedding Banquet Held in Front of the Old Ancestral Temples in my Village</i>	62
Figure 30 <i>Traditional Banquets Prepared by Local Villagers at the Ancestral Temple</i>	63
Figure 31 <i>The Application of Food to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs</i>	65

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 <i>Developmental Perspective of Food Culture</i>	24
Table 2 <i>Use and Modification of Gibbs' (1988) Six Stages</i>	33

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: Kexin Lu

Date: 1st December 2021

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the food oriented Chinese culture

China has a long and unbroken cultural history that has continued from ancient times to the present. Lee Kuan Yew, former Prime Minister of Singapore, in a CBS interview in 2009 said, “It (China) is the only country where language has survived 5,000 years. The only country where the present generation shares the same basic thinking as the past, and they’re very proud of it” (Rose, 2009).

Chinese culture is food oriented (Chang, 1977); food and all activities related to food occupy a central place in Chinese life. In ancient China, a bronze tripod was used as a symbol of state and power; a tripod was a vessel used for cooking and serving food, as well as a ceremonial vessel for worshipping gods and ancestors. China used the tripod to indicate national stability and abundant food (Waley-Cohen, 2007). The national emblem of the People’s Republic of China includes two ears of grain, representing the peasant class (Legal Daily, 2019), which also shows the importance of food in China. It can be seen that from ancient times to the present, food is considered by the Chinese as closely related to people’s lives, and an influence on the stability of the country. There is an old poem known to all Chinese, that celebrates the hard work of peasants and the hard-won nature of food. It also reflects the Chinese attitude towards food, appreciating the gift of nature, cherishing and respecting it. All of China’s elaborate food handling, complex food rituals, and unique food customs, are based on cherishing and respect.

The peasants (II)

At noon they hoe up weeds;

Their sweat drips on the soil.

Who knows the rice that feeds

Is the fruit of hard toil!

Li Shen (Tang Dynasty), translated by Xu (2007)

Chinese food has very distinct regional characteristics. It is the result of the combined action of three factors: sky (climate, season, weather), earth (land resources, water resources, animal and plant resources), and people (human efforts). All three factors are

indispensable and difficult to replicate, forming a unique combination that can be called *terroir*. We thank nature for its gifts: we gather, we hunt, we go with nature: we plant, we breed. We cherish and respect what we get, and with gratitude, we turn everything edible into delicacies (Waley-Cohen, 2007). The complexity of Chinese cuisine, the variety of ingredients, and the flexibility of collocation, are all rooted in our simple values: respect nature and follow it. Based on their observation of the laws of nature, the ancient Chinese created the unique 24 solar terms, and used these to guide agricultural activities in relation to when to plant seeds, when to guard against rain, and when to harvest, and to develop corresponding festival or seasonal food customs (Xian & Zhou, 2013). To this day, the Chinese, especially in rural areas, still use the solar terms to guide their lives. The nature, the people (including their agricultural activities and festivals), and the food, form a closely related system.

Figure 1 *Twenty-Four Solar Terms*

二十四节气英文信雅达的翻译

	立春 Spring begins 02月03 ~ 05日	雨水 The rains 02月18 ~ 20日	惊蛰 Insects awaken 03月05 ~ 07日
	春分 Vernal Equinox 03月20 ~ 22日	清明 Clear and bright 04月04 ~ 06日	谷雨 Grain rain 04月19 ~ 21日
	立夏 Summer begins 05月05 ~ 07日	小满 Grain buds 05月20 ~ 22日	芒种 Grain in ear 06月05 ~ 07日
	夏至 Summer solstice 06月21 ~ 22日	小暑 Slight heat 07月06 ~ 08日	大暑 Great heat 07月22 ~ 24日
	立秋 Autumn begins 08月07 ~ 09日	处暑 Stopping the heat 08月22 ~ 24日	白露 White dews 09月07 ~ 09日
	秋分 Autumn equinox 09月22 ~ 24日	寒露 Cold dews 10月08 ~ 09日	霜降 Hoar-frost falls 10月23 ~ 24日
	立冬 Winter begins 11月07 ~ 08日	小雪 Light snow 11月22 ~ 23日	大雪 Heavy snow 12月06 ~ 08日
	冬至 Winter solstice 12月21 ~ 23日	小寒 Slight cold 01月05 ~ 07日	大寒 Great cold 01月20 ~ 21日

Note. Adapted from 2021 *Twenty-Four Solar Terms*, by Daojiao Online, 2021. (<https://daoli.djol.org/2021jieqi.html>). In the public domain.

1.2 Introduction to the researcher

I would like to give a brief introduction to my upbringing, why I came to New Zealand and why I chose the Master of Gastronomy programme.

I was born and grew up in Wenchong Village, Huangpu District, Guangzhou City. The population structure of Huangpu District is very simple, mainly composed of family villages with hundreds of years of history like Wenchong Village, and relatively isolated factory communities. Anyone on Huangpu Street can be identified as coming from a particular village or factory community by his/her family name or the school he/she goes to. Knowing each other's roots gives local residents a sense of security. Growing up in this environment, I have a strong sense of community identity and belonging. This is why, after a large number of migrant workers came to Huangpu in the 1990s, local residents like me felt psychological resistance and insecurity. In particular, they tended to eat very differently to the way we did, and they did not integrate into the community through food. They were not one of us.

In 1999, I left my home-town to attend university in Nanjing in eastern China, 1,132 kilometres away from Guangzhou. Because the climate and food in Nanjing are very different from those in Guangzhou, my mother was worried that I would not acclimate. She gave me a small piece of soil from my home-town and told me to mix it with water and drink it if I could not adjust to the local drinking water and food. This is a traditional practice in my home-town. It is believed that using the soil that we were raised on, as a medium to introduce new water, can help our body adapt quickly to the new environment. My mother called this "switching the water and soil." I consider myself educated and do not usually take such superstitions to heart. However, I had a fever the second day after I arrived in Nanjing, and drank the muddy water, following my mother's folk prescription. I do not know if it was the placebo or the remedy that helped, but I quickly got better and adapted to the local diet. When I left for New Zealand, my mother gave me another piece of soil, but for environmental reasons in New Zealand, I was not permitted to bring the soil across the border. However, I once again experienced the implicit and simple love of Chinese mothers. As an old Chinese saying goes, when children travel far from home, mothers never stop worrying. In 2003, I graduated with a bachelor's degree in history, and returned to Guangzhou to work.

In 2010, I worked as an editor and journalist for an urban lifestyle trends magazine in Guangzhou, where I had the opportunity to interview restaurants and plan food and cuisine themes for magazine articles. Guangzhou is famous for its cuisine in China; the yum cha culture was borne there. There is an expression in China, “eating in Guangzhou” (Xian & Zhou, 2013), which indicates that Guangzhou has world-renowned good food. Because Guangzhou is modern and open with a long tradition of commerce and trade, you can taste local, regional, and international cuisines there. I loved food, but only as a consumer. This job gave me the opportunity to have a close look at a professional kitchen for the first time, and obtain an in-depth understanding of the cultural stories behind food, the importance of ingredients, and the efforts of chefs in presenting delicious dishes to customers; I learned this from interviewing chefs for the magazine articles. I began to develop a strong interest in cooking.

By 2013, I had been working for ten years, and felt it was time to take a break and improve myself. I was also aware that our village had begun urban reformation in 2010, which I was deeply worried about. I worried that the village’s 800-year-old history, culture, traditions, and living pattern might collapse, and this was not something I wanted to witness. I therefore travelled to New Zealand to study culinary art in 2013 and became a chef here. During the years I worked as a chef, I gained a deeper understand about and respect of different food cultures. In March 2020, everything changed because of Covid-19, and after two months of idleness in lockdown, I felt it was time to go back to school. Combining my love of food with my background in history studies, I chose to join the Master of Gastronomy programme at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). This provided me with a new understanding of gastronomy and stimulated a lot of thinking. In the process of writing this dissertation, I had the opportunity to rediscover my feelings for my home-town, and to think about the significance of food and food activities in connecting people with community. I find myself most impressed by the social changes that China’s 40 years of development have brought. Responding to and recognising the insights in this dissertation’s findings, has helped me to better understand myself, my family, my own culture, and my roots.

1.3 Background information

1.3.1 The reform and opening up of China (改革开放 gaige kaifang)

The reform and opening up, was a series of economy oriented reform measures implemented in China after the third plenary session of the 11th Central Committee on 18th December, 1978, and can be summarised as internal reform and external opening-up. Before 1978, China was a planned economy in which the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the government controlled and managed social resources. After the reform and opening up, China adopted a mixed economy model, implementing a household contract responsibility system in agriculture, which allowed for the distribution of land to households, so farmers could decide what to plant, how to plant it, and be responsible for their own profits and losses, liberating rural productivity, and allowing privately owned enterprises and foreign investment. Special subsidy policies applied to Guangdong (also known as Canton) and Fujian, two provinces with large overseas Chinese populations. In 1979, Shenzhen (next to Hong Kong), Zhuhai (next to Macau), Shantou and Xiamen (capital of Fujian province, adjacent to Taiwan) became the first four special economic zones, which were important means for China to use foreign capital, technology, talent, and managerial expertise to develop its own and local economy (Xinhuanet, 2018).

Because of these measures, the manufacturing industry in Guangdong Province grew rapidly. Guangdong province has become something akin to the world's factory, and is the most developed and open province in China. In 2020, Guangdong's GDP (gross domestic product) was around US\$1.61 trillion, and had ranked first in China for 32 consecutive years in terms of its economy (Guo, 2021). If Guangdong were counted as an economy, its GDP would exceed that of 90% of the world's countries, and it would be ranked 13th in the world (World Bank, 2020).

1.3.2 Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, China

Figure 2 *Greater Bay Area China Map*



Note. Adapted from *Great Bay Area China Map*, by China Discovery, n.d. (<https://www.chinadiscovery.com/greater-bay-area-tours/maps/greater-bay-area-china-maps.html>). In the public domain.

Guangzhou is located in the south of mainland China, the south-central part of Guangdong Province, the northern edge of the Pearl River Delta, and close to the mouth of the lower reaches of the Pearl River Basin near the South China Sea. It has been the political, economic, and cultural centre of South China since early times (Guangzhou Yearbook, 2021a). Because of its proximity to the Hong Kong and Macau special Administrative regions¹, it was known as China's southern gate to the world at the beginning of the reform and opening up.

¹ On 23 September, 2018, the high-speed rail between Hong Kong and Guangzhou was officially opened for operation. The travel time is 47 minutes.

Guangzhou's GDP ranks fourth in China, after Shanghai, Beijing, and Shenzhen. It is a city with a traditional heritage and vitality, where tradition and modernity, Eastern and Western cultures, all intermingle.

There are three major languages in Guangdong: Cantonese, Teochew/Chiuchou and Hakka. Since most of the earliest oversea Chinese were from Guangdong and Fujian provinces, many of the terms for Chinese cuisine, such as bok choy, yum cha, and dim sum, are derived from Cantonese pronunciation rather than of the official language of China, Mandarin (Jurafsky, 2014). Cantonese is the main language spoken by Guangzhou people.

Figure 3 *A View of the European Factories in Canton (Guangzhou Pearl River)*



Note. Adapted from *A View of the European Factories at Canton* by William Daniell (1769–1837), by Art UK, n.d. (<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/a-view-of-the-european-factories-at-canton-173390>). CC BY-NC. Photo credit: National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

Unlike Shenzhen and Hong Kong, that grew from small fishing villages to metropolises based on immigrants, Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province, has 2,200 years of documented history, and a deep cultural tradition. Guangzhou was the starting point of the ancient Maritime Silk Road and China's only foreign trade port for a long period in the Qing Dynasty. The tea trade that changed the world, started from Guangzhou (Hong Kong Public Libraries, 2013).

Guangzhou thus became a distribution centre for commodities, bringing together national goods, as well as wealthy merchants and the top chefs of China. Guangzhou's catering industry flourished as a result (Xian & Zhou, 2013). After the opium war (1840), Guangzhou was no longer the only port of foreign trade, but it still flourished, and as foreigners were allowed to live inside Guangzhou city, Western food also gradually developed there. The first Western restaurant in China, Taiping Guan, was established in 1885 in Guangzhou (Xian & Zhou, 2013). Since 1957, the China Import and Export Fair, also known as the Canton Fair, has been held in Guangzhou every spring and autumn (China Import and Export Fair, 2021b). Before the Covid-19 epidemic, each Canton Fair attracted nearly 200,000 purchasing merchants from more than 200 countries (China Import and Export Fair, 2021a). This twice-yearly trade event has led to a highly developed hospitality industry in Guangzhou, with many restaurants offering different cuisines on the market.

The Huangpu port provides a good environment for import and export trade, and preferential policies following the reform and opening up, made Guangzhou a top choice for foreign investors. Guangzhou's manufacturing industry flourished as a result, attracting a large number of immigrants from the inland labour force seeking advancement. These immigrants brought with them, the food culture of their home-towns.

According to the 7th National Population Census Bulletin, in 2020, Guangzhou's urbanisation rate exceeds 85%. The resident population is about 18.68 million, with an average age of 35.4 years. The average population per household in Guangzhou is 2.22 people (*The 7th National Population Census Bulletin*, 2021). Of the total population, nearly 1.6 million are returned overseas Chinese, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwanese dependents (Guangzhou Yearbook, 2021b). These returnees bring back different food habits with them, and introduce new ingredients and foods.

1.3.3 Guangzhou cuisine

“Cuisine is a set of rules or principles for selecting, preparing, flavouring, serving and eating foods, and on some accounts also for producing foods and for relating food and eating to wider value systems” (Klein, 2007, p. 513). When recipes include foreign ingredients, these principles also determine which may be incorporated, and how to

transform them from the unfamiliar to foods that are familiar and non-threatening (Rozin & Rozin, 2005).

Guangzhou is known far and wide for its leading food, gathering Chinese regional and foreign cuisines through the comings and goings of Chinese and foreign merchants, the large population of returned overseas Chinese, and the many inland immigrants that have arrived since the reform and opening up. Guangzhou brings together ingredients from all over China and around the world. There are many large and well-known wholesale markets in the city, selling spices and dry goods and there are dry seafood markets, aquatic markets, Chinese herbal markets, and many more types. Guangzhou cuisine is famous for its combination of Chinese and Western cuisines, superb techniques, and wide selections of ingredients. For instance, the Cantonese yum cha is filled with both traditional Cantonese dim sum such as chicken feet and beef tripe, and one can buy northern China noodles, pastries, and snacks, as well as Western pastries and Southeast Asian desserts such as egg tart and coconut cake (Xian & Zhou, 2013). In addition, Guangzhou has also developed the slow-cooked soup culture, herbal tea culture, and sweet soup culture (a Cantonese dessert), using a large number of dried goods, Chinese herbs and herbal medicines.

Guangzhou cuisine places great importance on seasonality, freshness, and quality of ingredients. A feature of local restaurants in Guangzhou is that they often have a large fish tank, or even a row of fish tanks, with a variety of fresh aquatic products, ready to be ordered. The weather of Guangzhou is hot and humid, so its cuisine is light and mild in taste, unlike northern cuisine, which is heavy on oil and taste, and pursues freshness, tenderness, smoothness, *umami* (savoury taste), and fragrance. It seeks the original or natural flavour of an ingredient, mainly using cooking methods such as steaming, pan-frying, stir-frying and stewing. It makes extensive use of spring onions, ginger, garlic, and common seasonings like soy sauce, oyster sauce, *chu hou* paste, hoisin sauce, satay sauce, rice wine, white pepper, five-spice powder, black bean paste, and bean curd; however, chilli and fresh herbs are seldom used (Anderson, 1988; Klein, 2007; Simoons, 1991). These flavour principles make Guangzhou cuisine distinctive and one of the eight most famous cuisines in China.

1.4 Wenchong Village

Compared to the modernity and openness of Guangzhou, my home town Wenchong Cun (文冲村)² is a relatively closed village that keeps to its traditions. It is located in Huangpu District, the eastern suburb of Guangzhou, about 18 km from the central business district. It is on the main road from Guangzhou to Dongguan and Shenzhen, and in the hinterland of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. Both water and land transport are used in the area.

Figure 4 *Wenchong Village Hundred Year Old Buildings*



Wenchong is half hill and half plains, and land resources and water resources are abundant. Most of the land is fertile and productive plain alluvial from the Pearl River. There are three rivers flowing through Wenchong: the Pearl River (珠江), Wen Chong (文涌), and Wu Chong (乌涌). *Chong* (涌 is the traditional character for 冲) means tributary of the river. In addition to the three rivers, spring water flows between the hills in this area all year round, which make it perfect for fruit planting. Large and small ponds are scattered throughout the village, and provide abundant aquatic resources.

² China's current administrative divisions in Guangdong are divided into five levels: province, city, district, town, and village. *Cun* (村) is the Chinese word for village, or it can be understood as formally village-level divisions in China. It is the last level of administrative divisions, so it exists under the province, city, district and town, and has a administrative relationship. This is different from the village in English. Here, Wenchong Cun is on the edge of Guangzhou, and residents consider they 'belong' to this city, but at the same time that their village is somewhat independent. Although Wenchong Cun has a much larger urbanised population than the more traditional rural Chinese villages, the residents refer to Wenchong as 'their village' and Guangzhou as 'their city'.

Figure 5 *Wenchong Village Before the Urban Reformation*



Note: The photographs were provided by Wenchong Village Residents Committee (2021), and used with permission.

The village has a documented history of nearly 1000 years, and is one of the few well-preserved ancient villages in Guangzhou, and various small families have lived there since the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE). In 1231 (during the Southern Song Dynasty), the first ancestor of the Lu (Simplified Chinese character: 陆, traditional Chinese character: 陸) family moved there from north China to avoid war, and has thrived since then (Wenchong Community Residents Committee, 2017). The village now has a population of about 8,000, most of whom have the family name “Lu,” as I do. There are also some minor surname populations, such as Ye, Liang, and Chen. The Lus are a big family with a blood relationship that has lasted for hundreds of years; a large celebration is held every April, the Qingming Festival (清明节), to worship our common ancestors.

1.4.1 The plight of Wenchong

After the founding of the new China, there was little communication with the world, and since 1978, China has tried to catch up with the Western world of development and change. Science and development became the slogan of the times, and a country with thousands years of farming culture changed into a manufacturing power and the world’s factory. In developed coastal areas with preferential policies and convenient transport, arable lands have become factories, and farmers have become property managers. Arable

lands in the interior were abandoned, as farmers left their homes to become workers in the coastal areas, in search of a better life.

Guangzhou was the earliest and most direct area affected by China's reform and opening up policy, and Huangpu, as a port and industrial zone, was the first place where many changes took place. As a resident there, I felt the change most deeply during my growing up. Our arable lands became warehouses and factories, such as the Guangzhou petrochemical factory put into operation in December 1978, and the Guangzhou shipyard, founded in 1958. Some of the farmers became workers there.

In the early 1990s, Taiwanese and Hong Kong businessmen set up shoe and garment factories in the village, attracting cheap labour from other poor inland provinces, and the local people tore down their low-rise houses and built narrow multi-storied units to rent to the newcomers. They converted agricultural land into warehouses and leased them to logistics companies to store their various goods in. Our village used to produce rice, sugar cane, black olives (*canarium pimela*), white olives (*canarium album*), oranges, and tropical fruits such as lychees and longans. From the mid-1950s, our lychees were exported to the markets of Hong Kong and Macau; the green plums and white olives were pickled and dried and exported to Hong Kong, Macau and Southeast Asia, and pineapples were exported to the Soviet Union and eastern European countries (Wenchong Community Residents Committee, 2017). At that time, fruit production was the main income of the farmers in Wenchong and it the main industry. Gradually, the local people stopped growing fruit, and bought it instead, and some ingredients, such as black olives and white olives, disappeared from our tables. The people were getting richer and richer, but there was less and less land to farm. Most Wenchong villagers, especially the younger generation, could live a good life on rental incomes and no longer needed to farm for a living.

1.4.2 Wenchong traditional festivals

Every solar term and traditional festival, there are different activities and corresponding foods. For example, we eat rice dumplings (zongzi 粽子) at the Dragon Boat Festival, and moon cakes at the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Many festivals are mainly family celebrations. The annual dragon boat race is a grand village-to-village exchange event, during which there are many food activities worth

exploring. This traditional event is during the Chinese Dragon Boat Festival, held on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. In the Pearl River basin, every village with water connected to the Pearl River has the tradition of dragon boat racing. This is an important activity for competition and communication between villages to resolve disputes. The dragon boat race is generally held for nine days before and after the Dragon Boat Festival, during which the dragon boat will visit each village on the Pearl River. This kind of visit is accompanied by a grand eating event, with traditional dragon boat cakes, rice dumplings, and so on. When dragon boats from other villages arrive, the host will hold a grand banquet to entertain the guests. It is a Chinese tradition to increase emotional connections through food activities. The Chinese believe that as long as they have eaten together and drunk together, everyone is friends. For thousands of years of inter-marriage between villages, villages have been linked by blood relationships. The banquet funds are generally raised by the villagers, and the guests must reciprocate; this is a way for the villages to demonstrate their economic strength.

Figure 6 *Traditional Lion Dances and Dragon Boat Races in Wenchong*



Note: The photographs were provided by Wenchong Village Residents Committee (2021), and used with permission.

Figure 7 *Wenchong Villagers Watch Dragon Boat Races Under the Lychee Trees by the River*



Note. Adapted from *Reformation of Urban Village in Huangpu District in 2021-- Wenchong Village (III)*, by Sevenssem.com, 2021.
(<http://www.sevenssem.com/shownews.asp?id=3034>). CC BY-NC. Photo credit: Cen Zhixiong.

Figure 8 *Village Banquet in Front of the Old Ancestral Temple*



Note. Adapted from *Reformation of Urban Village in Huangpu District in 2021-- Wenchong Village (III)*, by Sevenssem.com, 2021.
(<http://www.sevenssem.com/shownews.asp?id=3034>). CC BY-NC. Photo credit: Cen Zhixiong.

1.4.3 Local food features

Rice is the staple food in south China. Wheat is usually used only in dim sum or traditional wonton noodles made from duck eggs and all-purpose flour without water. Rice noodles are more popular, and there is no corn in the traditional diet. Other sources of starch are kumara, taro (usually grown naturally along rivers), cassava, and yam beans. Potatoes are not grown locally, so they arrived later, from overseas. Chinese people enjoy green leafy vegetables, beans, and all kinds of gourds, such as cucumber, bitter gourd, white gourd, hairy gourd, and loofah.

The main protein sources are chicken, duck, goose, pork, and freshwater fish, as well as the plant protein, tofu. Traditionally, in the Guangdong province, goats are raised rather than sheep, but goat meat is considered “hot and dry” and should not be eaten often. The local cattle, buffalo, are used to help with farming, and are so valuable that they are not usually eaten. Yellow cattle come from outside the area, and are more expensive, and eaten only occasionally. Very little dairy is consumed. The village used to be rich in aquatic products, and the local people enjoy freshwater fish, river shrimp, crabs, river snails, and other fresh water products. Seafood only became popular under the influence of Hong Kong after the reform and opening up.

The local produce of Wenchong is abundant and there is plenty of sun, so in the past, when there were no refrigerators, food was preserved with the sun and salt. Hence, there is a variety of pickled and sun-dried ingredients such as dried bok choy, dried lychees, dried longans, salted fish, salty and sour leaf mustard, heading mustard, and so on. These are used to make the soups and various dishes that are characteristic of the local diet. Cooking with fruit is popular, and creates appetising and nutritious dishes such as orange juice ribs, steamed fish with black olive horn, sweet and sour pork with pineapple, and stewed soup with pawpaw in autumn, and pear in winter. The hot weather in Guangzhou means food spoils easily, so for food hygiene reasons, cold dishes and raw meat are seldom eaten. Water is boiled, and food is thoroughly cooked before eating. However, in the hot afternoon of summer, traditional sweet soup chilled in a refrigerator is popular, using ingredients such as red beans, mung beans, peanuts, sesame, tremella, lotus seeds, tapioca, kumara, and taro. The local people believe these soups can relieve the heat in the body, and are healthy to eat.

1.5 Research objective and rationale for the research

Thousands of years of cultural heritage, cannot resist the impact of the wave of development. This situation has led me to set my research objective on identifying the food changes in Wenchong village, on the edge of a city undergoing development, and focusing on the impact of China's economic development over the past 40 years of reform and opening up. I will explore Chinese food, food culture, and food customs, and use my own gastronomic experiences in my home-town as material for my autoethnographic writing. The rationale for this research has several aspects. Firstly, it combines my academic background and work experience to demonstrate my thinking about the changes related to Chinese gastronomy. Secondly, it gives me an opportunity to examine my own culture. And thirdly, from the previous background section, it is clear that my village's long history and cultural traditions, its special geographical location and its forty years of reform and opening-up development make it a valuable object of study.

As a native of Guangzhou, I have enjoyed different cuisines and taken them for granted, without ever thinking about why and how they developed. Guangzhou brings together the world's cuisines, and exploring the reason behind this, helps me understand more about the culture of Guangzhou. Living in Wenchong Village for 40 years, living with traditional food and food customs, I never thought about why we have these foods, and what the meaning of these customs is. After leaving my home-town, I missed the local foods, and realised that that food was much more precious than just something to fill my stomach and provide nutrition. I tried to replicate these foods to ease my nostalgia. As I looked at the variations of these local foods, I discovered the significance of traditional foods and food customs, and the simple importance that the Chinese place on food, reflected in the way it is handled and cherished. I also perceived the importance of food in sustaining community. Because food plays such an important role, the changes in food brought about by rapid economic development have shaken the heritage of local food culture, beliefs, and identity of the people. These ideas have not yet been systematically studied. There is little food literature that addresses the downside of economic development for local food and food culture, especially from an insider's perspective. My personal experience and that of my family vividly illustrates the food changes caused by development and the loss it has brought to the entire community and its residents. These authentic, unpretentious samples of research and sincere reflections will fill in the gaps in the literature and contribute to future research.

1.6 Overview of the dissertation

In Chapter 1, I briefly introduced my research objective and some background information to provide a general overview of the food culture of China, Guangzhou, and my hometown.

Chapter 2, the literature review, presents the current research on the understandings of Chinese food, including the importance of food in Chinese life, Chinese food culture, the basic composition principles of a Chinese meal, and food trends in changing China.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology and research methods: how I view the world, the ontology and epistemology, an overview of autoethnography, and how it was applied in this research.

In Chapter 4, I present the findings and discussions in detail. Five of my food stories are presented in a personal narrative, followed by my responses and recognitions. Combining Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory with my food stories, I reveal the important role of food in my village. These stories are presented from an insider's perspective and stem from my real food life experiences as well as those of my family and friends, restoring to the best of my ability, a true 40-year picture of rural Chinese food.

Chapter 5 presents the conclusion. I conclude with a summary of the research, and offer recommendations for preserving the food traditions of Wenchong Village and sustaining the community through food activities. I present some research limitations and offer future research directions before concluding with my researcher's reflections.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review presents an understanding, comprehensive, critical and accurate as possible, of the current state of knowledge of Chinese food culture and social structural change. It provides literary support for the chapters that follow, and reference material for the discussion.

2.2 Chinese food culture

2.2.1 Chinese gastronomy

Gastronomy is a good entry point for understanding a food-oriented culture like Chinese culture. Gastronomy relates to consumption, not only about what we eat and drink, but in what form: how we eat and drink, where, when, why, and with whom (Santich, 2007). As such, the focus of gastronomy is not on the material components of food and drink, but on our eating and drinking, or what Brillat-Savarin (1825) described as everything that concerns us, insofar as we sustain ourselves (Brillat-Savarin, 1999). Gastronomy is valuable, as the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu observed, “ways of treating food, of serving, presenting and offering it...are infinitely more revelatory than even the nature of the products involved” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 193). This is especially true in China, because gastronomy plays a critical role in defining the communal and collective philosophy food has in a Chinese socio-cultural context. Using a gastronomic lens, it makes sense for Chinese people to sit together and share food from a communal plate with chopsticks, in that it effectively improves people’s relationships when intimacy triumphs over health and other concerns (Wang, 2015). The social function of Chinese food in establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships and expressing the degree of interpersonal relationships has been widely studied (Ma, 2015). The Chinese culture is deeply embedded in the philosophy and traditions of eating and drinking.

An exploration of Chinese gastronomy can begin with an interpretation of the tastes of the Chinese ruling class. The actual ruling class in ancient China - known as the scholar-official class (Elman, 1984) - took on the gastronome’s role. They expressed their opinions and demonstrated their cultivation through literary works, in which one’s lifestyle was an important aspect. Good taste in eating and drinking was considered as a

noble accomplishment, and enabled the authors to obtain a respected social status (Waley-Cohen, 2007). Yuan Mei (1716-1798), a respected Chinese poet and gastronome during the Qing Dynasty, is often compared to the founding father of gastronomy, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826) of the same era, in terms of their understandings of gastronomy and insistence on the importance of dietary knowledge (Chen, 2017). His book, *Sui yuan shi dan (Recipes from the garden of contentment)*, published in 1796, provides a brief account of 326 dishes and their cooking methods from the 14th century to the mid-18th century in China, as well as the popular wines and teas of the time (Yuan, 2019). The book also expresses his strong gastronomic views, such as the pursuit of fresh ingredients, the balance of taste and respect for natural tastes, and even extends to social behaviours and etiquette norms (Yuan, 2019). Stephen Mennell suggested that a gastronome is “a person who not only cultivates his own ‘refined taste for the pleasures of the table’ but also, by writing about it, helps to cultivate other people’s too” (Mennell, 1996, p. 267). Brillat-Savarin argued that a gastronome must have “either the organic delicacy, or the power of concentration” (1999, p. 174). He suggested that there are four disciplines closely associated with gastronomy: finance, medicine, literature, and religion (Brillat-Savarin, 1999). Bourdieu noted that the upper and middle class with their cultural capital, influence the tastes of society, and sell their values and tastes downward, while the working classes follow and imitate them (Bourdieu, 1984). Yuan Mei’s works, as well as those of many gastronomes from the scholar-official class, have influenced Chinese people’s aesthetic appreciation of food.

The uniqueness of Chinese gastronomy lies in the concept of creating good food that is pleasurable and memorable to eat, leaving a cultural imprint on all the senses: smell for aroma, sight for visual stimulation and colour, hearing for auditory stimulation, taste for flavour, and touch for textural sensations (Sucher et al., 2016). The simplicity of cooking food is in the development of flavours that blend together with different textures to create a harmonious dish. Cooking is a skill developed over time, learning to adapt, transform, and revise the important elements to create classic Chinese cuisine (Lin & Lin, 1982). However, the Chinese culture and people are customarily more interested in the texture, flavour, colour and aroma of food (Lin, 2000). The art of Chinese cooking is to capture the flavours, which is achieved by cooking with natural ingredients to create complex lingering flavours and tastes, rather than adding seasonings. These flavours provide a natural depth to a dish, and a sense of originality and authenticity to be savoured and remembered (Lin & Lin, 1982).

The Chinese philosophy when creating a dish is in the combination of flavours and textures in the right order, and the quality of the ingredients, providing an overall taste experience. However, an ingredient can provide a combination of textures, such as tender and crisp, so textures can be combined like flavours in one dish. The Chinese descriptions of different textures include “gelatinous, spongy, resilient, crunchy, gliding, chewy, fibrous and non-fibrous” (Lin & Lin, 1982, p. 67). The culinary development of flavours and textures creates the unique tastes in the heart of all good Chinese food (Kapoor, 2018).

2.2.2 Chinese food and concept of home

The importance of food in Chinese culture also lies in the fact that it is associated with the concept of home. The Chinese character for “home” (家 jiā) is made up of two characters, “roof” (宀 mián) and “pig” (豕 shǐ), indicating that home is shelter and has food in it (Huang & Huang, 2011). Thus, home provides security, of which a very important part is food security. In modern times, this meaning has been extended to denote family and the place where the family lives (Huang & Huang, 2011). In China, the family is one of the most central institutions, and provides a sense of identity and strong support (Cultural Atlas, 2021). Chinese people believe that family relationships can be strengthened in harmony and closeness by eating good food together (Lin, 2000). In China, the heritage of gastronomy is evident where the cuisine is diverse, with each region and ethnic group having a different food, and where “cuisine is the product of foods and the people” (Santich, 2009, p. 130). When people migrate, their memories of home through regional cuisines and ethnic foods follow them. Montanari noted that “our memory of a place lies within the stomach, we are connected to a place by eating the food” (Montanari, 2006, p. 133). One study suggested six themes of food nostalgia “childhood, yearning, substitute, homesickness, special occasions and rediscovery” and nostalgic food consumption relates to positive emotions rather than negative ones (Vignolles & Pichon, 2014, p. 225). When home is thousands of miles away, food that reminds one of home is always a comfort, both mentally and physically, and for the Chinese, food and home are always linked.

To better understand Chinese food, one must first understand the composition of a Chinese meal. Chang creatively summed up the most basic and outstanding feature of the Chinese cuisine: the “fan-cai (饭-菜)” principle, which divides all foods into two groups: fan (饭) and cai (菜) (Chang, 1977). The literal meaning of fan is cooked rice, but it also

means food or a meal, with the fan being the grain base of the meal (Timmons, 2021). *Cai* are the delicacies that add flavour to the meal, like a flexible mix of vegetables, eggs, and meat (Timmons, 2021). How to achieve a perfectly balanced diet through the creative combination of fan and cai becomes an important topic in Chinese cuisine (Waley-Cohen, 2007). The practices must comply the balance of yin and yang, which is a basic guideline for “social, political, medical and dietary usage” in Chinese culture (Lin, 2000, Yin Yang foods section, para. 2). The Chinese believe that food has different attributes that must be balanced to bring the energy in the body to a harmonious and healthy state after eating, thus avoiding conflict and disease (Sucher et al., 2016). However, this balance is not exclusively about nutrition and health, but also related to the enhancement of food enjoyment. Compared to Westerners’ focus on nutrition, the Chinese people are generally more concerned with the texture, flavour, colour, and aroma of food (Lin, 2000), and this varies greatly from region to region. China has 34 provinces and regions, 56 ethnic groups, and “is similar in size and has a diversity of taste and techniques approaching that of the countries of Europe” (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC] Culture, 2021). The flexible fan-cai principle with yin and yang, are guidelines that make the formation of China’s many unique regional cuisines possible.

The importance of staple foods in the Chinese diet is reflected when fan, cooked rice, refers to a meal in concept. In general, grains are the foundation of the Chinese diet, with rice having popularity in southern China, and wheat being popular in northern China (Anderson, 1988). In 1978, China had less than 20% of its population living in urban areas (Ning, 2021). A field report from 1937 that surveyed 38, 256 farm families in China between 1929 and 1933, noted that 83% of calories were provided by grains, and only two to three percent came from animal products (Maynard & Swen, 1937). Thus in the past, farmers, who made up the majority of China’s population, had a diet based on staple foods supplemented by vegetables, with very little meat. Staple food has become closely linked to Chinese culinary culture and identity (Klein, 2020).

2.2.3 Cultural identity

The way an ethnic group eats is one of the most powerful ways to express and preserve its cultural identity. It has been suggested that “the way any given human group eats helps it assert its diversity, hierarchy and organization, and at the same time, both its oneness and the otherness of whoever eats differently” (Fischler, 1988, p. 275). The food-related

behaviours that contribute to identity of individuals and groups are called “foodways.” Foodways “connect people to a geographic region, a climate, a period of time, an ethnic or religious group, and a family” (Darnton, 2012, para. 3). They include the “customs of food production... [and the] uses of food products,” not only in terms of nutrition and culinary aspects, but more importantly, in terms of their social functions (Darnton, 2012, para. 2). Culture shapes foodways, with “a culture standardizes behaviour of its members in relation to food, with the result that the group develops a common pattern of eating” (Lowenberg et al., 1968, p. 85). Food and the way food is consumed becomes a person’s identity, and can provide useful information about who are “we,” who are “us,” and who are “them.” The aphorism of Brillat-Savarin from 1825, of “tell me what you eat: I will tell you what you are” (1999, p. 22), is still quoted today. However, in terms of Chinese gastronomy, this idea is more complicated. Swislocki suggested that regional foodways, rather than national foodways, are “a core component of cultural identity in China” (Swislocki, 2009, p. 2), with no single food or cuisine representing the Chinese nation (Chen, 2017). There are, of course, flavour principles that are used to typify the foods of ethnic groups worldwide, and Chinese food is linked with the use of soy sauce, rice wine, and root ginger (Sucher et al., 2016). By combining the fan-cai principle and flavour principle, one can begin to understand Chinese cuisine, though in practice, it varies enormously.

2.2.4 Traditional festival food

The difference in cultural identity between Chinese regions is even more apparent in festival food. Chinese traditional festivals are closely related to seasonal changes in nature, being the product of agricultural civilisation, through sacrifices; presenting food and rituals, people pray for their god’s protection and good weather, and celebrate when there is a good harvest (Moey, 2017). Festival food is first enjoyed by the gods and ancestors, in the form of smoke and aromas that waft to the sky, as the food is cooked over fire (Fernández-Armesto, 2002), and then its material form shared within the family or community, so it is the best the prayer can offer, produced with dedication and sincerity, and with heart. A study of a rural community in northern China noted that in times of food scarcity, people ate meat only on festival times, and mainly pork, because unlike cattle and sheep, which cost grain to feed, pigs are domestic animals that can be raised on people’s leftovers (Gamble, 1954). This makes “the food served on these occasions ... a combination of symbols and sumptuous flavours, a spiritual celebration and an earthly

pleasure” (Moey, 2017, p. 10). The original function of the festival, to pray for the success of local agriculture, limited the ingredients and forms of festive food to only those foods that could be sourced locally (Moey, 2017). This has led to debates based on regional preference. In southern China, to celebrate the winter solstice, family reunions should eat round *tangyuan* (a dessert made of glutinous rice flour) instead of flat dumplings (made of wheat flour), which are eaten in the northern China (Chen, 2017). For new immigrants, such regional differences can form barriers of entry, while internally “through the communal and ritualized ingestion of food, we reinforce social bonds and express at the most fundamental level the unity of nature and culture” (van den Berghe, 1984, p. 392). People who share the same food practices build bonds, establish a group identity, and establish a sense of belonging. Thus they are connected “through a sense of shared tradition,” and through this identity and belonging become “us”; conversely, people with different traditions become “them” (Oxfeld, 2017, p. 186).

China has some of the most ancient traditions in the world. Eating habits become traditions when culture makes them respected (Santich, 2009). “Tradition is made up of knowledge, technology, values, which are handed down to us” from generation to generation (Montanari, 2006, p. 7). An eating habit cannot hold its status as a tradition if the culture no longer values it, and considers it unworthy of passing down to the next generation.

Traditional food production is gradually being replaced by industrial food production. Food is being cut off from the land with which it has long been associated, and from tradition. Barthes (1961) wrote that

...the traditionally festive function of food is apt to disappear gradually, and society will arrange the signifying system of its food around two major focal points: on the one hand, activity (no longer work), and on the other hand, leisure (no longer celebration). (Barthes, 2012, p. 26)

Petrini worried that once tradition is relegated to folk custom, it no longer belongs to people, and is no longer in people’s daily life (2007).

2.3 Food in a changing China

2.3.1 Food culture – development perspective

Chinese food culture from a gastronomic perspective, can be defined as the attitudes, beliefs and practices that encompass the production and consumption of food and drink (Sucher et al., 2016). Chinese food culture incorporates ethnicity, cultural heritage, and communication, through food preparation, cooking and eating at home, and the celebration of festivals (Wang, 2015). Culture is learned, not inherited, and it is not rigid but changes over time in response to external dynamics. It has been noted that structural changes in society can alter the way consumers access food, as well as the type and variety of food available (Sobal, 1999). Structural changes in society are reflected in the trends of food and eating, and cultural beliefs, values, and behaviours that are modified in response to the changes (Sucher et al., 2016). Examples of structural changes and the associated food changes are presented in Table 1. In these changes, modernisation leads to commoditisation, globalisation leads to consumerisation, and urbanisation leads to delocalisation. The introduction of novel foods leads to their acceptance into the majority cuisine, with a period of transition during the acculturation to a new culture with different foods and eating locations (Sucher et al., 2016).

Table 1 *Developmental Perspective of Food Culture*

Structural Change	Food Culture Change
Globalisation: local to global organisations	Consumerisation: indigenous and locally produced foods to mass-produced foods
Modernisation: muscle power to fuelled power	Commoditisation: home made to manufactured foods
Urbanisation: rural to urban residence	Delocalisation: producers to consumers only
Migration: original to new settings	Acculturation: traditional to adopted foods

Note. Adapted from *Food and Culture*, by Sucher, K. P., Kittler, P. G., & Nelms, M. N. , 2016, Cengage Learning. Copyright 2017, 2012 Cengage Learning.

2.3.2 Globalisation

Globalisation has freed our access to food from local restrictions. Over the past 40 years, the Chinese diet has changed dramatically, with a large decline in the intake of staple foods, and a significant increase in the intake of animal products. The intake of livestock and poultry meat by the Chinese increased nearly 2.5 times from 1982 to 2015, the intake

of aquatic products doubled, and egg consumption tripled (Chinese Nutrition Society, 2021). Pingali observed “a dramatic shift of Asian diets away from staples and increasingly towards livestock and dairy products, vegetables and fruit, and fats and oils” (2007, p. 281). In particular, he noted a decline in rice consumption, increased consumption of wheat and wheat based products, high-protein and energy-dense diets, temperate products, and convenience food and beverage (Pingali, 2007). This trend is reinforced by the rapidly expanding global supermarket and fast food chains.

The consumption of dairy products in China is an example of this change. For a long time, dairy products were rarely included in the general diet in China, except in areas with well-developed animal husbandry traditions, such as in Inner Mongolia, Qinghai, Xinjiang, and Tibet, due to the common lactose intolerance of the Chinese population (Sucher et al., 2016). Another influence on this was because the main breeds of cattle in China are yellow cattle and buffalo, and it was only in the 1950s that a systematic selection and breeding of dairy cattle occurred (Zhang & Sun, 2021). At the time of writing, the dairy intake of China’s urban population in 2015 is 42 grams per capita per day, compared to 15 grams for the rural population (Chinese Nutrition Society, 2021). The number of imported dairy products in China has increased dramatically, with China now accounting for about a third of New Zealand’s dairy exports, “with its spending on dairy growing from \$13.5 million in 1990 to more than \$5.5b in 2020” (Hancock, 2021, para. 6).

2.3.3 Modernisation

Modernisation has led to the commoditisation of food, which in turn has developed industrial agriculture. Traditional agriculture conforms to the weather and the growth laws of crops. It is sustainable and ecological, but also time consuming, labour intensive, and highly uncertain. Industrial agriculture pursues yield and efficiency, and minimises uncertainty. Its development leads to the simplification and homogenisation of nature, and endangers biodiversity (Deb, 2004). Carlo Petrini, the founder of the slow food movement, offers many thought-provoking reflections on industrial agriculture. His concerns include, but are not limited to: biological diversity in threat, the loss of traditional farming skills, the abandonment of ancient traditions and knowledge, the loss of the agricultural population, the loss of dietary knowledge and kitchen skills, and the disappearance of proper use of agricultural resources (Petrini, 2007). He laments that while industrial agriculture may have been designed to feed large numbers of people, it

led to the neglect of both food and agriculture. The same is true in China, which feeds 22% of the world's population on 7% of the world's arable land (CCTV, 2017). In China, food production has moved away from traditional production areas and into previously unexplored areas to enable national management. China's mega projects have made growing rice in seawater, vegetables in plateau and wasteland, and seafood farming possible (CCTV, 2017).

The once self-sufficient local food system, in which farmers grew sustainable, authentic food for locals and farmers' markets, has been damaged as a result. The four functions of local food systems are: growing food, food and agriculture education, community building, and engagement (Diekmann et al., 2020). Farmers play an important role, because "buying from producers themselves links us with the land and gives our purchases a seal of authenticity" (Santich, 2009, p. 72). The exchanges at farmers' markets are "embedded in social ties, based on proximity, familiarity, and mutual appreciation" (Hinrichs, 2000, p. 298), as they are "often social spaces that bring people together and represent a venue where the strong bonds of community can be formed and performed" (Obach & Tobin, 2014, Civic agriculture section, para. 5). That is, "they strengthen the feeling of belonging to a community, build up a group's sense of identity, and facilitate communication across different classes, ethnicities, generations, and social statuses" (Zhong et al., 2020, p. 181). Thus, the farmers' markets provided fellowship, belonging, education, communication, tradition, and a gastronomic heritage for the community. The diminishing farm land and the disappearance of farmers' markets has gradually stripped the food system of its ties to local farmers. Food produced outside an area is no longer connected to the local human terroir and is naturally alienated from local traditions, so food systems are difficult to maintain.

2.3.4 Urbanisation

Industrial agriculture overcomes climatic, geographic, and seasonal constraints, providing cheap, year round produce. This change from traditional agriculture, liberates the labour force, with the most immediate consequence being that farmers leave their home-lands and cease to engage in agricultural activities. The decrease of China's rural population is evident, as is the increase of China's urbanisation rate. In 1978, less than 20% of the population lived in urban areas (Ning, 2021). In 2020, the population living in cities and towns was 902 million, or 64% of the total, whereas the population living in

the country was 510 million, or 36% (Ning, 2021). World Bank data forecasts that China's urban population is expected to reach one billion by 2030, and the urbanisation rate will be close to 70% (Li et al., 2014). Agricultural knowledge and traditional food knowledge have no place in the highly commercial and industrial food systems of a city.

With the rapid urbanisation of China, there have been many changes in food eaten, ways of purchasing food, and places where food is eaten. Some of this has been driven by changes in household incomes. China's middle-income group exceeded 300 million people in 2018³ (Niu, 2018). As Chinese household incomes rise, food security is assured, and there is an alteration in food consumption patterns. A study of dietary changes in Liaoning Province, northeast China, noted the existence of a more varied diet, primarily because supermarkets offer a greater variety of choice. Secondly, the Chinese middle class is now showing a greater willingness to try new and different foods (Leppman, 2005). "They have reached the level in the hierarchy where they can use food for self-expression and be creative with a wider variety of foods, including foods that are not traditional to China" (Leppman, 2005, p. 157). McDonald's officially entered the mainland China market in 1990; the number of McDonald's restaurants in mainland China had exceeded 4,000 by the end of June 2021 (McDonald's China, 2021). Another popular fast food option, KFC, entered China in 1987; the number of KFC restaurants exceeded 7,100 by the end of 2020 (KFC China, 2021). These data indicate the Westernisation of foods that the Chinese urban residents consume. Pollan argued that the so-called Western diet is actually lots of processed foods, meat, added fat, sugars, and refined grains, but not real foods (2008).

In addition to the changes in types of food eaten, Chinese agriculture is not able to provide these new, non-traditional foods on the arable land available (Weller, 2017). Chinese traditions are built on growing the food that people eat, not the food that cattle eat, so animal proteins, heavy in meat but with little fruit, vegetables or whole grains, are characteristic of the Western diet (Pollan, 2008). Festivals are held to celebrate the harvest and to pray or thank the gods and ancestors for their blessings to ensure food security for another year. The Chinese people believe that "the consumption of these foods can determine and re-establish the relationship between man and God, and between people"

³ The World Bank's criterion for middle income is that adults earn US\$10 to US\$100 per day, or US\$3650 to US\$36,500 per year (Niu, 2018).

(Ma, 2015, p. 196). For example, there is a common traditional festival for some ethnic minorities in China called the New Rice Festival, held when the rice paddy is mature and people celebrate the harvest, and family members return home to taste the new rice together (Yunnan Adventure Travel, 2021). This festival tradition would disappear if the paddies that grow rice for human consumption are changed to growing grains for feeding cattle, because families will not gather to celebrate the harvest of cattle fodder, and nor will they eat it. This change away from the traditional Chinese diet and traditions associated with growing traditional foods, will upset the Chinese culture that ties home and family and food together. With the disappearance of traditional foods, the cultural value of home will also be upset.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter illustrates the significance of food to Chinese culture, Chinese beliefs, and family values. By exploring Chinese food culture, social structure changes, what the Chinese cherish, what the Chinese regard food as, and the roles food plays in Chinese life, the challenges the Chinese people facing were revealed. It provides a theoretical foundation for the following chapter of Findings and Discussion. The significance of food in sustaining family intergenerational relationships, as well as community, and the impact of structural development on food culture will contribute to the response and recognition aspects of my food stories.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodology and methods I used in this research, why and how I applied them, and how they helped me to justify my findings, develop a strong perspective, and ultimately provided strong evidential support for me to present my reflections, discussion, and conclusions.

3.2 Research paradigm

To conduct research, a research paradigm must be established, that is, which approach to take through the research. A research paradigm encompasses the ontology, epistemology, and methodology and forms are a coherent set.

My research focused on the food changes in Wenchong village on the edge of a city undergoing modern development. My research focused on my personal narratives, and my family's first-hand experiences of changes in our village from a gastronomic perspective. Therefore, a qualitative rather than quantitative approach was used, because the research was based on words or behaviours that could be observed, and not on numbers that could be measured. As "qualitative research can be used to understand how an individual subjectively perceives and gives meaning to their social reality" (McLeod, 2019, Qualitative Research section, para. 1), there is more than one reality in which the formation process is subjective or constructed.

Ontology answers the question, what is reality? Bryman defined *ontology* as "a theory of the nature of social entities." (Bryman, 2008, p. 696). The ontology asks whether "the social world is regarded as something external to social actors, or as something that people are in the process of fashioning". (Bryman, 2008m p. 696). This indicates the two main types of ontology, realism and relativism. According to realism, there is one true reality that is unchanging and factual, whereas relativists believe there are multiple realities that are not permanent, but can change within and between people and time (Gray, 2014).

Epistemology is concerned with what and how one can know reality, and what knowledge can be trusted. In Huczynski and Buchanan's view, the epistemology relates to the questions "what does it mean to know something and by what means are we able to have

knowledge” (2010, p. 153). The three major types of epistemology are objectivism, subjectivism, and constructivism. Objectivism considers knowledge as “being” that can be discovered, and subjectivism, and constructivism consider that knowledge is “becoming.” Subjectivists believe the meaning is imposed on the object, while constructivists believe meaning is created through interaction between the object and subject. (Denicolo et al., 2016)

In this research, reality was not considered immune to external influences, and not as unchanging. This was especially evident when I focused on change over time in a village. It is a constant fact that change does happen, but everyone has their own perceptions and understandings. My findings were primarily based on my personal experience rather than constructed from interactions with others and the researcher’s interpretation and reflection is critical. Therefore my ontology is relativist, and my epistemology, subjectivist.

3.3 Research methodology

The methodology is “to do with the abstract theoretical assumptions and principles that underpin a particular research approach” (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p. 12). It guides how research should proceed and what methods to use. With this understanding of the nature of reality and knowledge, I needed to determine what procedure to use to acquire legitimate knowledge. As I wanted to provide my stories of food changes in Wenchong Village from an insider’s perspective, autoethnography was the methodology that suited my research.

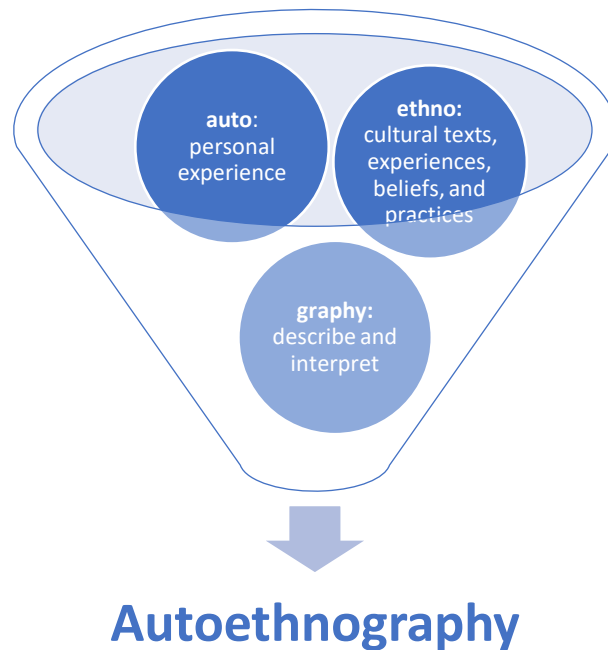
3.3.1 Autoethnography

Hayano defined *autoethnography* as anthropologists’ studies of their own people (Hayano, 2008). Through socialisation or other intimate relationships with the group, an autoethnographic researcher is able to gain an insider’s perspective; autoethnographers have a permanent identity with and full internal membership of the group they are studying. (Hayano, 2008)

Denzin argued that autoethnographic data come from a hybrid ethnographic and autobiographical text in which the author does not adopt the traditional ethnographic convention of being an objective observer. (Denzin, 1989) Autoethnography is the

integration of personal life experiences into biographical or ethnographic writing. It synthesises the strengths of autobiography and ethnography, because “autoethnography should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation” (Adams et al., 2017, p. 48). The characteristics of autoethnography are presented in Figure 9.

Figure 9 *The Characteristics of Autoethnography*



Note: This model is based on Adams et al.’s (2017) definition of autoethnography

3.3.2 The purpose and practice of autoethnography

Adams et al. (2017) suggested that autoethnography provides alternative, supplementary, and insider knowledge to the dominant, irresponsible, and fixed notions of outsiders about a particular culture. While outsiders make seemingly objective academic assertions based on distant, time-bound observations, insiders live in close proximity to the research community over time, and can bring another perspective to the story and the way it is told to the audience (Adams et al., 2017).

Autoethnography is usually written in the first person, from an insider’s point of view, incorporating the author’s personal experience into the writing of an ethnography or autobiography (Adams et al., 2017). Researchers can use narrative to construct texts, and

also use the process of narrative making, to improve their understanding of self or others, their inner world, or outer environment. The creation of texts is a process of interpretation, and an important topic in narrative research (Rodrigues et al., 2017).

It is important to note that, autoethnographers differ from fiction writers in that they must limit their writing to what they remember actually happened, or at least not to include what they know to be incorrect (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Through writing, the researcher is constantly thinking, clarifying questions, discovering problems and trying to solve them, as well as examining him or herself, noticing his or her own changes, and leaving footprints along the way in the writing. In the course of this research, I realised that I have missed many opportunities in the past as a villager to express myself, but let external policy makers decide how we should live our lives. However, this is not how it should be; we, as the closest stakeholders living on the land, should have the right to decide to reconfigure our own relationship with it, and the declaration and articulation of this right can begin by means of autoethnography. The best person to tell the story of my experiences in my village is myself, therefore, autoethnography is the appropriate relevant methodology for this research.

3.4 Research methods

Having established the methodology, I now introduce my research methods. First, I provide a description of the framework underpinning this research.

3.4.1 Reflective framework

A reflective framework based on a reflection of learning model was utilised. Learning through reflection is a critical skill for one's ongoing personal and professional learning. The "use of reflective practices within...higher education" (Wain, 2017, p. 662) is not uncommon. The importance of reflection in providing a structure "in which to make sense of learning, so that concepts and theories become embedded in practice, and constant thought and innovation are simultaneously fostered" (Helyer, 2015, p. 15) is also noted.

One of the favoured reflection of learning models, Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle, identifies six stages of exploring an experience: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis,

conclusion, and action plan. I present my modifications of Gibbs' (1988) model in Table 2.

Table 2 *Use and Modification of Gibbs' (1988) Six Stages*

Stage	Modification	Practical Application
Description	Identify or describe	First I identified the changes in food and related aspects that had occurred in Wenchong village in the last 40 years, using my personal experiences and stories in the context of the village's development history.
Feelings	Reflect	I reflected on these stories.
Evaluation and analysis	Analyse using the recognition and response approach	I analysed the meanings and the consequences of the changes on the community from a gastronomic perspective, using a recognition and response approach. For each food story, the recognition question, "what does this mean in the context of gastronomy?" is considered, as well as the response question, "what do I now understand about myself, my food culture and my family?" From a needs perspective, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory was used to analyse the changes for villagers.
Conclusion	Conclude	I came to conclusions about the changes in Wenchong village and the gastronomic significance of food and food activities for our community and villagers.
Action plan	Propose	Finally, I proposed recommendations for future research and actions for the village.

This five step reflective framework provided a clear, coherent, and logical research process to guide my work.

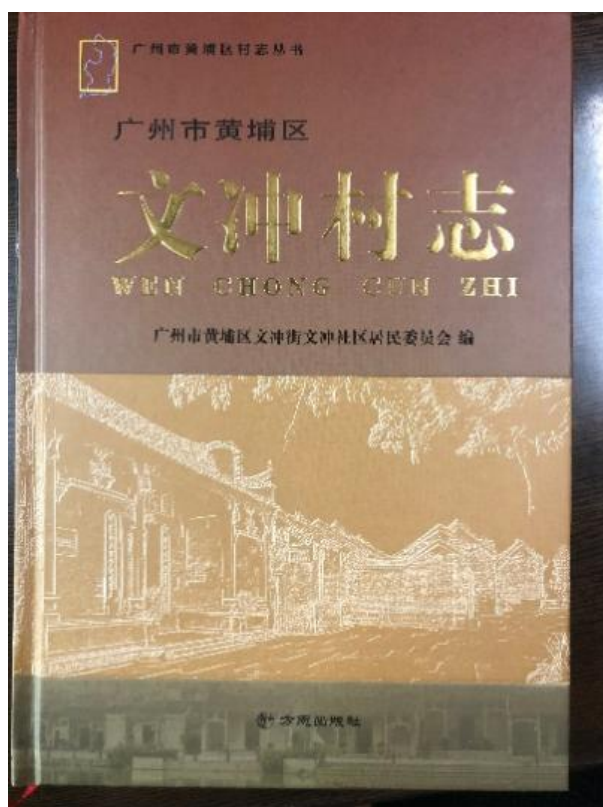
As "reflection is one way of using experiential knowledge to enable professional and personal development to demonstrate continuous, life-long learning" (Wain, 2017, p. 665), using this framework enabled me to demonstrate my ability to achieve continuous learning and self-growth by reflecting on my experiences. Furthermore, definitions of autoethnography indicate that a focus on personal experience is the most striking feature

of autoethnography, which makes this reflective framework particularly appropriate for my autoethnographic method.

3.4.2 Data collection

The data of personal narratives mainly come from my own and my family's experiences and memories of living in Wenchong Village. Family members' texts and photographs were collected through enquiries on Wechat, a commonly used social networking application in China. I credit their contributions clearly in the text. Some of the specific data, such as the years and numbers, refer to *Wen Chong cun zhi* (Wen Chong village local records)⁴ as explained in Figure 10. These records are published as a book detailing the historical record of Wenchong village, compiled by the Wenchong Community Residents committee, and provided accurate and reliable information.

Figure 10 *Wen Chong Cun Zhi*



Note: The photograph was taken by the author's sister (2021) and used with permission.

⁴ *Zhi* is a type of historical writing in China, which records the historical facts and current situation of a place. It can be translated as "local record."

3.4.3 Data analysis

My food stories detailed the village history from my own and my family's viewpoints seen through a gastronomic and food lens. I analysed the data in two main steps: 1) recognising: what does this mean in the context of gastronomy? and 2) responding: what do I now understand about myself, my food culture and my family? The data were also analysed using the Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed the hierarchy of needs in *A Theory of Human Motivation* published in 1943. Human needs determine motivation, and motivation then guides behaviour. Conversely, motivated behaviour can fulfil needs. As Maslow puts "Any motivated behaviour, either preparatory or consummatory, must be understood to be a channel through which many basic needs may be simultaneously expressed or satisfied." (Maslow, 1943) Maslow's theory divides needs into five categories: Physiological Needs, Safety Needs (which are related to the survival of the individual), Love and Belonging Needs, Esteem Needs, and Self-actualization Needs (which are not necessary for survival, but the satisfaction of these leads to health, longevity, and vigour). The five needs are the most basic, innate, constitute different levels or hierarchies, and become the forces that motivate and guide individual behaviour.

It is important to note that what needs a food or food activity satisfies varies from person to person. As Maslow said "A desire for an ice cream cone might actually be an indirect expression of a desire for love. " Or "the ice cream is simply something to cool the mouth with, or a casual appetitive reaction". (Maslow, 1943) Therefore, the analysis of food and food activities using Maslow's theory should be carried out in the context of the individual's most sincere needs. With Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, I deconstructed the story, applying inductive reasoning and interpretation to form gastronomic themes, and then moving to responding from a gastronomic standpoint to a conclusion and proposal.

3.5 Ethical considerations

This research used autoethnography as the research methodology, and the food stories were derived from my personal experiences and those of my family living in Wenchong Village. The photos presented in this dissertation were mostly taken and provided by

myself, my family and friends, and were all used with their permission. Some were obtained from the internet, and are also credited.

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter overviewed the methodology and methods used in this research. I explained my choice of research paradigm in consideration of my research question, and my reflective framework and practices. The next chapter presents the application of these methods as findings.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

Applying a reflective framework, this chapter presents my food stories as a villager of Wenchong village, an 800-year-old village on the edge of the modern city of Guangzhou. The chapter focuses on the changes in food I witnessed in China over the past 40 years of reform and opening up. This is followed by my reflections and analysis in the response and recognise sections: responding with what I now understand about myself, my food culture and my family, and recognising what this means in the context of gastronomy. Finally, the stories are analysed using Maslow's (1943) theory of needs.

The young Chinese people of today are pushed forward by the tides of development, and cannot see the full picture of what is going on. Now that I have left China, looking back at these fragments of information brings me a new appreciation for many of the things I missed before. There is an old Chinese saying, if you only know the **hows** but not the **whys** (知其然而不知其所以然), your knowledges are just shallow knowledges. The process of writing my food memories has become my journey from knowing hows to knowing whys, and I would like to share it with you here.

4.2 The food changes in Wenchong Village over the past 40 years - my food stories

4.2.1 Changes in food range and availability

My food story 1:

Figure 11 *A State Owned Grocery Store Under the Planned Economy Policy in the 1980s*



Note. Adapted from *Real photos of rural supply and marketing cooperatives in 1980s*, by kknews, 2017. (<https://kknews.cc/zh-sg/agriculture/k3b8nqp.html>). In the public domain.

When I was a child, China was still a planned economy⁵, supplemented by market regulation, and most of the production and circulation of products were planned by the Government. At that time, the grain store in most Chinese villages only supplied basic foodstuffs such as rice, rice flour, flour, and oil, which needed to be purchased with food stamps⁶. The grocery store sold salt, sugar, vinegar, soy sauce, salted fish, pickles, beans, peanuts, and eggs etc., but the supply was very limited.

From a letter my grandmother Ying wrote in November 1981, I learned that when I was 10 months old, my family had to ask my uncle Wei to ship milk powder to us from Hong Kong, because it was not available locally. At that time, milk powder was sold in special import stores and could only be purchased with a foreign exchange certificate,⁷ so it was difficult to buy if the family had no overseas relatives. Although local dairy farms were established in the 1960s, they mainly supplied the milk companies in Guangzhou city (Wenchong Community Residents committee, 2017). Only a small amount of fresh milk was sold locally, so the price was high. Therefore, according to my father, local people generally had no consumption patterns or knowledge of using fresh milk. Most families would use rice paste instead of milk. To make rice paste, the rice must be soaked for at least two hours, then a small amount of water added to grind it into rice milk, and then mixed in a pot with more water and simmered slowly until it is thick. The rice paste ingredients were locally sourced, easy to make, and easy to digest, making it a substitute for milk at that time; it was also cheap.

⁵ New China has been implementing a planned economy since its founding. It was not until 1992 that it proposed to establish a socialist market economic system to further liberate and develop productive forces (Wang, 2008).

⁶ During the 40 years from autumn 1953 to 15th February, 1993, China had a policy of universal purchasing and marketing of grain, which was based on the population of each household. All grains had to be purchased with food certificates or food stamps. Even if you had money, you could not eat without food stamps.

⁷ In the late 1970s, China's trade with overseas countries increased. As foreign currency cannot be circulated in China's domestic market, foreigners needed to exchange foreign currency into foreign exchange certificates for use in hotels, restaurants, and shops that received foreign guests. The certificates were in circulation from 1st April, 1980, to 31st December 1994.

Figure 12 *Wenchong Farmers' Market Inside (Left) and Outside (Right)*



Note. Adapted from Next stop, Wenchong!, by Eat, drink and have fun IN Guangzhou, 2019. (https://www.sohu.com/a/291820252_555774). In the public domain.

After China opened up its market economy, many food products could be traded freely, and as a result, farmers' markets started to come alive. The local farmers' markets were mainly run by villagers, selling products grown by the farmers themselves. They usually got up at 4 or 5 am to harvest vegetables from the farm and then took them to sell in the market early in the morning. In the past, most villagers did not have a refrigerator; it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that refrigerators were widely used in Chinese domestic kitchens (Zhong et al., 2020). My family bought the first refrigerator in 1988⁸, so until then, we would go to the market every day, and consume the food on the same day. Market stalls were fixed contracts where sellers operated in the same place every day, and familiar customers could easily find them (see Figure 12, left). Temporary stalls (Figure 12, right) were usually set up on small roads in the village, as some villagers occasionally harvested more than expected and their families could not eat it all, so they would sell the surplus. If relatives or friends passed by, they would give them fresh vegetables enthusiastically. Our family often received vegetables from relatives and neighbours, and we gave back the fruits we grew. The exchange of food is a common practice among the people of the village.

The market is equivalent to the community centre of a village, where villagers meet every day and exchange trivia about their lives: who was sick and needed food for nutrition, or who had bought a lot of meat for a family treat, could all be discovered from a trip to the market. If new ingredients were encountered, the seller would enthusiastically provide

⁸ According to the National Bureau of Statistics, by the end of 1988, Chinese urban residents owned an average of 28 refrigerators per 100 households. At that time, the income of farmers was not as high as that of urban residents, and the ownership rate of refrigerators was even lower in rural areas (ATV Financial Network, 2018).

recipes and cooking methods. I often relied on this help, which enabled me to be brave enough to try new dishes.

The market was usually bustling in the early morning and after the end of the working day, and few people went there at other times. My impression of the market is that the ground was always wet and slippery, which is probably why it is also called a “wet market” (Zhong et al., 2020). It was not a place for active children, although I have many memories of going to the market on the back of my parents’ bicycles. The environment was very noisy, filled with the sounds of animals barking and people talking animatedly. The air was mixed with the smell of various animals, raw meats, and cooked food. There were no chillers, and vegetables and meat were placed on the bench openly at room temperature. Meat from domestic animals was butchered in the early hours of the day; each meat stall sold just one pig or one lamb, in limited quantities, while supplies lasted, and the meat was not kept overnight. Poultry and freshwater aquatic products were usually alive and well, which is why there was water everywhere on the ground next to the aquatic stalls, and the vendor would handle the products on the spot according to the customer’s request. Cantonese people like to see the freshness with their own eyes (Zhong et al., 2020). If a Chinese restaurant in New Zealand has a large fish tank and live aquatic products at the entrance, it is very likely a Cantonese restaurant. Looking back, it seems that there was a concern about hygiene. Of course, there were no production or expiry dates on the products; the decision to buy was based on the customer’s knowledge of the food, and on the long-term trust established between the customer and the seller.

Nowadays, young people rarely go to local markets. First, they do not work in the fields near their homes as did the villagers before. They often have to take public transport to work, which sometimes takes an hour, so when they come home, the market is closed. Local markets generally close at 5 or 6 pm, and some stalls close even earlier, once the goods of the day are sold out. Second, because refrigerators are very common now, food can be kept fresh for longer time, so there is no need to shop every day. Third, young people do not usually establish a trusting relationship with the sellers, and their concerns about sanitary conditions affect their desire to buy food in the market.

Figure 13 *Walmart and KFC in Wenchong Centre*



Note. Adapted from Next stop, Wenchong!, by Eat, drink and have fun IN Guangzhou, 2019. (https://www.sohu.com/a/291820252_555774). In the public domain.

The clean and tidy supermarket chain stores that are open for extended hours, have become very popular with young people. In 2001, Huangpu District's first Taiwan-owned supermarket chain, Trust-Mart, opened in the centre of Wenchong. Trust-Mart was bought by America's Walmart in 2007, and changed to a Walmart supermarket in 2013. It provides goods from all over China and the world. Compared with the humble, noisy, and poor sanitary conditions of local markets, young wealthy villagers prefer these kinds of clean, bright, international supermarket chains, that offer numerous and safe food choices.

Response

When the supermarket chain opened in our village, I cheered and felt that our life had finally become as modern as the big cities on the television. From that day on, I lingered in the supermarkets and never went to the farmers' markets. When the food on the table no longer tasted the same as before, I just lamented that the quality of the food was not as good as before, but never thought about why. Now I understand that the way to recapture the good taste I remember is to support local agriculture and visit farmers' markets. Shortening the distance from production to the table is the only way to maintain the original taste of food. It is such a simple truth, but it took me so long to find it.

Recognise and discuss

In the past, food went from the land to the buyer's basket and then to the table in a matter of hours, still wet with dew, and with its natural aroma. Because they did not need to be transported long distances, food was picked and consumed in the most perfect condition, certainly without the need for ripening agents or preservatives, much less packaging and labels to indicate its freshness. Flavours and tastes are connected to aroma and smells, and associated with specific settings, people, cuisine, or ingredients. The tastes associated with Chinese cooking from soy sauce, rice wine, and ginger, describe a cultural flavour benchmark, a pleasure, and a form of satisfaction. When recognising good and bad tastes in ingredients, it is necessary to learn how to balance and moderate flavours. Flavour and taste are integral part of the eating experience and can come to mean contentment and comfort; over time, they become nostalgic memories of the past. This fresh food created authentic eating experiences, as Chinese people value the texture, aroma, taste, and flavour of foods (Lin, 2000). The unique and individual tastes of foods are dependent on the local terroir and geography and differ from place to place, instead of the current situation in which Guangzhou and Beijing are thousands of miles apart, and the food is of the same variety, the same shape, and the same taste.

Everything is now very modern and international, but at the supermarket, local people can no longer find the foods they are familiar with from their childhood, impacting on the local food culture, the transmission of food identity, and food memories. Food and the behaviours associated with it, form an important part of culture, especially as “the selection and procurement of food lies at the heart of a group's cultural beliefs and traditions” (Leppman, 2005, p. 4).

Farmers' markets used to act as intermediaries, linking villagers to the land and taking on the role of facilitating communication between villagers, so they were not strangers to the land, or to each other. Buying from producers gives products a seal of authenticity (Santich, 2009). The villagers used to be farmers, were self-sufficient and ate locally produced food with limited choices but natural tastes. Now, they shop in the bright and tidy supermarkets, but the people behind the counter no longer know their customers, and do not provide recipes or food advice. This is in contrast to exchanges at farmers' markets, where the producers and the purchasers are proximate, familiar, and appreciative of each other (Hinrichs, 2000).

As the landscape changes with development, local farmers lose their sense of identity, farms, and agriculture, along with their food knowledge and gastronomic heritage passed down over hundreds of years. Farmers' markets and local food systems provide much more than just food to Chinese rural communities and villages, especially in Wenchong. Studies have focused on the social benefits of farmers' markets and indigenous food systems and identified that "reconnecting consumers with food production and restoring knowledge about food and agricultural traditions" is a way to overcome the alienation of food production systems and local knowledge associated with the global food system (Diekmann et al., 2020, p. 9). Positive-actions to protect what little connection and knowledge we have with the land needs to be recognised and protected before it is too late.

4.2.2 Changes in cooking methods

My food story 2:

Figure 14 *Traditional Wood Stove (Left) and Modern Gas Stove (Right)*



Note: The photographs were taken by the author and author's father (2019 & 2021) and used with permission.

In the past, Chinese villagers used traditional wood-burning stoves for cooking because of the abundant wood resources. These stoves usually have two burners, one for a large wok no less than half a meter in diameter, and the other, for a large pot for boiling and steaming. The stoves matched the cooking needs of the previously large households. Cooking on these requires at least two people to work together, one to make the fire and add wood to keep the fire going, and the other to cook the food. We had a traditional wood-burning stove in our ancestral home, which belonged to my grandparents, and

where I lived until I was 12 years old. When my parents cooked, I would help add wood and watch the fire to make sure it was stable.

Cooking requires water in addition to a fire. People in the village used to carry buckets to fetch river water and store it for use at home. Our family had a well in the yard that my father dug when he was young, but we still needed a bucket to fetch the water, and for safety reasons, children were not allowed to operate the well alone. Because the petrochemical factory polluted our river, it installed a piped water system for every household in our village in 1980 (Wenchong Community Residents committee, 2017), so we could have safe access to water. In 1985, as compensation for the expropriation of the village land, my father was offered a job as a temporary worker at the petrochemical factory, so he was able to buy bottled liquefied gas, which required a special coupon at that time, which was not available to every family. We no longer used wood-burning stoves but gas stoves.

With piped water and a gas stove, cooking became easy and could be undertaken by one person. The normal size cookware used for the gas stove instead of the half metre wok, also made it easy to operate. When I was 11 years old, I learned how to cook from my mother. The dishes I learned were simple, such as fried eggs, steamed eggs with dried shrimp or scallop, pork and winter melon soup, blanched bok choy, and rice, and my parents could come home from farm work and eat dinner I had prepared straight away, instead of having to cook on a hungry stomach.

Figure 15 *Our Family's Three Storey Village House, Built in 1993 (Left), and New Modern Apartments for the Villagers (Right)*



Note: The photographs were taken by the author and author's father (2021 & 2018) and used with permission.

In 1993 we moved to a larger house (Figure 15, left), but no more wood-burning stoves were built in the kitchen. Many remote rural families still operate wood-burning stoves to this day (see Figure 14, left), such as my friend's family, who use theirs when entertaining guests from afar. Because we had a yard, when we needed to have a traditional food event or a family barbecue, we would build a makeshift brick stove and burn wood or charcoal.

Figure 16 *Worshipping the Gods of the Stove*



Note. Adapted from *Traditional folk custom of offering and sending the Gods of the Stove on the 23rd day of the 12th lunar month*, by Daojiao Online, 2021. (<https://m.djol.org/show-47-14185-1.html>). In the public domain.

In the past, people would post pictures in the kitchen of the Gods of Stove, or Mr and Mrs Stove, as they are called in my home-town. We believed that cooking is not an easy task, requiring natural resources and the blessing of the gods, in addition to our own skills. Posting the picture of Mr and Mrs Stove meant they lived with us, providing blessings. They also watched over us, so they knew each household. A clean, uncluttered home, and the daily aroma of food wafting from the kitchen, would satisfy them, and they would reward us with good luck for the coming year. Every year on the 23rd December on the lunar calendar, it was customary to worship them, because this was the day Mr and Mrs Stove returned to heaven's court to report on whether the family had done good or evil, and was lazy or diligent. Heaven's court would decide whether to bestow blessings or punishments on the family for the following year based on this report (Moey, 2017). On that day, my mother would offer the best dishes in front of the picture, light incense, and pray sincerely for them to speak good words for us. The old picture was torn off after the

worship and replaced with a new one on new year's eve. It is a custom in Wenchong Village, that after the family reunion dinner on new year's eve, each child would go to the street to "sell laziness." The children would take a boiled egg in one hand and a lit incense stick in the other and walk around the street a few times, shouting, "sell laziness, sell laziness, sell until the night of new year's eve." This meant that the children could shake off their laziness and become diligent in the coming year, and was also a promise of diligence to Mr and Mrs Stove, who had spoken good words for us and returned to the family from heaven's court on this day.

In 2007, we moved to a commercial apartment in the village, just behind Trust-Mart. We had access to more convenient piped gas, a microwave, and rice cookers. We always had frozen dumplings and microwaveable food in the refrigerator, so even my two sisters, who rarely cooked, did not starve. Chinese kitchens generally do not have ovens, but many young people now buy small ovens to bake their own cakes and biscuits etc. There are also food processors, electric pressure cookers, soy milk makers and even stir fryers available, and which are becoming easier and easier to operate, with the machines doing all the work for us. This enables people to buy processed ingredient packages from the supermarkets, cut them open, press the microwave button, and have a meal to eat. Increasing numbers of restaurants are opening on the streets and the take-out food industry is well developed. Eating is no longer a problem, and people no longer even need to cook. The convenience of cooking methods has not made people love cooking, as it did when I was a child. Probably piped gas, microwaves, and electricity, are not as visible as a pile of wood, and do not inspire people to cook. The refrigerator is now more full of snacks and drinks, and there are so many different food options on the street. Instead of bringing my mother's homemade lunch boxes to work as I used to, my little sister eats out every day, and even dinner is often a gathering with friends away from home.

Response

I miss the old days when families worked together to cook and sat at the table to eat, and when the taste of food was something special, and that modern technology cannot replicate. My mother learned to cook from my grandmother, and I learned to cook from my mother. This knowledge of food passed down from generation to generation is not necessarily scientific and lacks a system, but it gathers the understanding of food generated by generations of people based on local terroir. Cooking cannot be learned from books alone, it must be practised by hand, but the cooking skills and food knowledge of

previous generations, like my parents, seem to have become useless. They now feel lost and as unnecessary as the forgotten Mr and Mrs Stove. But in fact, this knowledge is far more useful than the preparation directions on the instant food packets and the instructions on the cooking utensils, because it provides a taste that cannot be replicated by modern technology, the taste of tradition, the taste of family, which is what satisfies even God, and sends down blessings.

Our beliefs have also changed. We do not need blessings from nature or God to survive, just as we do not need cooking skills. We feel that modern technology can solve everything, so we no longer need God in our home. We are also no longer afraid of attracting bad luck for being lazy and not cooking. My family no longer post pictures of Mr and Mrs Stove in our apartment because it does not fit in with the modern style of living. My mother no longer worships them. My niece still sells laziness on New Year's Eve, but she just thinks it is funny and does not know what the belief behind it is any more.

Recognise and discuss

Previously, cooking was not an easy task, as there was much preliminary work, such as getting food through collection, hunting, planting, and farming, etc., making a fire, including cutting wood to make the fire, and fetching water, including drilling wells to reach the water. In rural areas, cooking is far more troublesome than in cities that enjoy various modern resources. The traditional use of wood-burning stoves required numerous people to work together and provide food for family and friend groups. Fernández-Armesto (2002) proposed the idea of the “social cohesion of fire”; when people learn to control fire, it binds them together, because it takes a collective effort to make and protect fire, and makes eating a shared activity at a fixed time. Over the food produced from these wood-burning stoves, there was communication, ties were born, and groups formed. This is in line with the collective philosophy of food within the socio-cultural context of China (Wang, 2015). Families and communities are sustained through fire-related eating activities. When the fire disappears from the kitchen, so does that social cohesion.

From mastering these cooking methods, the previous generation will pass on their knowledge of food to the next generation. This is a necessary skill for survival: how to identify good and bad ingredients, the best way to cook, the time and heat of cooking, and the balance of seasoning. Chinese people are concerned with the texture, taste, colour, and aroma of food (Lin, 2000). The people who cook will adjust the dishes according to

the preferences and health condition of the family members, balancing ingredients, taste, textures, and combinations. Therefore, every family will have a different taste that cannot be replicated, the taste of home. Home is an important concept to Chinese people (Huang & Huang, 2011), and the taste of home evokes a nostalgic element; homesickness is one of six themes of food nostalgia, along with childhood, yearning, substitution, special occasions, and rediscovery (Vignolles & Pichon, 2014). Montanari (2006) observed that the memory of a place resides within the stomach, and those who move away are always connected to a place by the food they ate there.

Now, all three elements – the ingredients, fire, and water - have become easy to acquire. Cooking is also no longer difficult, and may be undertaken with the touch of a button. No one would respect or particularly appreciate the push of a button if cooking were just a matter of putting microwavable food in the microwave. Respect for food involves those who have grown the food, where it was grown, and the effort in producing it (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2020). The next generation can survive using these modern methods, no longer needing the knowledge of food to be passed on, while the tastes and flavours from a traditional Chinese home kitchen have disappeared, along with the taste nuances of home.

The conviviality created in a home kitchen and commensality around the table are integral components for maintaining the traditions and cultural beliefs in a Chinese household. The introduction of modern foods and home environments has led to changes in beliefs and worship, such as the worship of Mr and Mrs Stove, which also indicate a change in cultural beliefs. This finding is consistent with the work of Sucher et al. (2016), who asserted that structural changes in society are reflected in the trends of food and eating, and cultural beliefs are modified in response to these changes.

4.2.3 Changes in the making of traditional food

My food story 3:

Because of its long agricultural tradition, China has many traditional festivals and rituals for worshipping gods and ancestors to ensure a good harvest. These festivals and rituals require products that are closely related to local agriculture, so many traditional festival foods have emerged, such as roast pigs eaten during the Qingming Festival in Guangdong, and rice dumplings eaten during the Dragon Boat Festival.

Figure 17 *Traditional and Commercial Rice Dumplings*



Note: The left dumpling on top is a traditional Wenchong dumpling. The two on the right are commercially produced.

The preparation of traditional food is time-consuming and labour intensive, and once involved all members of the family. For example, on the eve of the Dragon Boat Festival, my relatives liked to gather together to make rice dumplings when we lived in the village house, and could have a lot of food activities in the front and back yards. There are many steps for preparation. The whole process needs at least four to five hours, and the soaking of ingredients such as glutinous rice and beans should be prepared a day in advance. My mother and aunties did not see this as a heavy workload, but as an activity in which they could communicate, exchange information, and maintain their relationships.

Our local rice dumplings are generous in weight and are more cylindrical than the common commercial triangular or pyramid rice dumplings on the market (see Figure 17). We have salty rice dumplings and sweet rice dumplings. The salty ones are made with glutinous rice and hulled mung beans, with fatty pork marinated in five-spice powder in the centre. Although everyone avoids fatty pork now, it used to be a delicacy that was only eaten during festivals. The sweet dumplings are lye glutinous rice dumplings. To make these, we would wrap the stuffing with banana leaves or *zhong* (粽) leaves, and tie them with aquatic plants; the ties are made of cotton thread now. Then we boiled them in water in a large pot for at least three hours, until the fragrant dumplings were cooked. The aroma of the leaves, the sticky glutinous rice, the sweetness of the green beans and the fat of the pork mix perfectly, and made our mouths water. To eat them the next day, we would cut them into slices and pan fry them; the combination of the crispy surface and the soft interior was another treat.

These kinds of eating activities can be carried out only in houses with enough open space, because my father generally had to build a temporary stove with bricks and stones, and then burn wood to cook. We usually made 20 to 30 pieces at a time, and then shared them with relatives and friends. The wood-fired stove was large and deep, and conducted heat quickly and evenly. Although the burning temperature of firewood is lower than that of natural gas, which makes cooking on a wood-fired stove slower than on a gas stove, it helps to retain the nutrients and flavour of the food. The rice dumplings cooked on a wood stove tasted better, and even smelt better, because of the aroma of the firewood. However, limited by space and safety issues, it is generally difficult for people who move to an apartment to continue this activity. Now people tend to buy ready made rice dumplings instead of making them themselves. Our family has also stopped making our own rice dumplings for some time. Commercial rice dumplings usually come from other parts of the country, and their shapes, ingredients, taste, and sizes are different from those of the local rice dumplings. Therefore, the idea and taste of rice dumplings will be slightly different for the next generation of Wenchong because what they grow up with will be rice dumplings from thousands of miles away from their home-town. They will bear the same name, but have different cultural connotations. The rice dumplings from foreign lands have gradually replaced our own, so our own traditions are unknowingly lost.

Figure 18 *My Friend's Mother, Yuan, Making Rice Dumplings at Home in Hamilton, New Zealand*



Note: The photographs were taken by the author's friend (2020), and used with permission.

Interestingly, overseas Chinese are very committed to preserving their food traditions. My friend's family in Hamilton, New Zealand, is from another Canton city, Taishan, so the shape, the leaves and the ingredients, are different from those we use. They use bamboo leaves to wrap the dumplings into a triangular shape, and the fillings are glutinous rice, shiitake mushroom, chestnut, dry scallop, salted pork, and red beans, instead of green beans. Only one of their unique local ingredients, red olives, is missing. The selection of ingredients strongly reflects the fact that Taishan is a coastal city with the taste of sea food. Chinese children born in New Zealand who have never been to their parents' home-town, can still enjoy the authentic tastes of their mother and grandmother's home-town. Without the impact of commerce, the traditions of their home-town are thus preserved.

Figure 19 *Traditional Steamed Glutinous Rice Balls*



In our family, traditional food making has not completely disappeared. My mother, Hua, makes steamed glutinous rice balls on traditional festivals or the birthdays of family members. Usually the older women in the family are responsible for making this kind of food, because it requires a lot of patience and skill. This delicacy uses local ingredients such as glutinous rice flour, banana leaves, peanuts, sugar, black eye peas, etc. It is simple and delicious. This is my favourite home-town food and I always proudly brought it to my friends and colleagues to taste. My mother and aunt made these for me every time I went back to China. This combination of ingredients is closely related to local products, and to date I have not seen the same food anywhere else. Because of this, it is unique and very important to local villagers. It is also possible that this food tradition has been preserved because there is no alternative product on the market.

Figure 20 *Traditional Canton Roasted Crispy Suckling Pig*



It is interesting to note that another traditional food, the roast pig, is being perpetuated in its commercial form. It must be noted, however, that such food has always been sold in specialised delicatessens or restaurants, and families do not make it themselves. The main reason for this is that few Chinese families have ovens, and the previous economic conditions and food rationing did not allow the average family to purchase a whole piglet by themselves. Every year after the Qingming Festival ancestral worship event, Wenchong Village would set up a stall and divide roast pigs and other food into portions and distribute them to each family, to show that the ancestors had received our sacrifice, and we all received their blessings. My three uncles have been away from Wenchong for 40 years and they still receive the same share every year. It reminds them that their hometown is always where their roots are, and that they will always belong there. That is how we have kept our families together for 800 years, not just by blood, but by food and a shared belief in our ancestors and family.

Response

I have a greater sense of gratitude now, for the simple food that I ate in the past that took so much of someone's time and labour to produce. The traditional food in our village uses locally produced ingredients, ingredients that are visible on a daily basis, and neither expensive nor rare, but if I had to choose between lobster, and my mother's steamed glutinous rice balls, made from glutinous rice flour and ingredients such as eyebrow beans and peanuts, and I would definitely choose my mother's traditional food.

Recognise and discuss

In the past, Chinese farmers arranged their work and life according to the Chinese lunar calendar, and there were busy and slack times in their year. During the slack periods, they had time to prepare meals and preserve foods from the harvested agricultural products, and were willing to spend the time to respect the products they grew, and not take shortcuts. This respect brought out the best in the flavour of the food. However, the majority of Chinese live in urban centres today, and have busy modern lifestyles (Ning, 2021). Living in an urban area they may not have access to the right ingredients for these traditional dishes, as the ingredients in the supermarkets are neither local, nor from local farms (Weller, 2017).

This is a sign that the industrial food system and commercial products are gradually replacing traditional handmade products (Petrini, 2007), and has meant a loss in cultural significance and the use of traditional foods. Manufacturers now make mooncakes in increasingly luxurious varieties, to use as snacks and networking presents for business colleagues (Beijing Review, 2006). This is consistent line with Barthes' (2012) observation that the traditional festive function of food is gradually disappearing and needs to be rearranged for meaning. In replacing traditional foods with those produced commercially, the original and authentic taste is also lost. Eating is a treat for hard work. Tastes that enhance the enjoyment of food are of great interest to the Chinese, as are the textures, flavours, colours, and aromas, which are all prioritised over nutritional aspects (Lin, 2000). As Sanitch (2009, p. 43) wrote, "flavour is a distinct but integral part of the eating experience." She further explained that this was "not just any flavour, but authentic flavour, the flavour of things tasting as they should - or as I remember" (p. 41).

The meaning of traditional food lies not only in the food itself, but also in the time and labour invested in its production process. The producer is willing to invest much for the sake of a healthy diet and the happiness of family and friends, typifying the generous nature of people who love food and care about eating and drinking (Santich, 2009). Food provides nourishment for the body, but cooking for others can provide nourishment for the soul (Struble, 2019), as it fulfils the human need for love and belonging (Maslow, 1943). Sincerity brings out the best in food, and those who taste it can feel this in just one bite (Frances, 2014). The sweat shed by the kitchen stove is the best elixir to enhance the flavour, and the cooking spoon that is constantly stirring is the magic wand that makes food taste good.

4.2.4 Changes in local food landscape

My food story 4:

When I was young, Wenchong had a simple population composition, of families who have lived there for hundreds of years and those who had married in from nearby villages. There were almost no migrants.

Then the Wenchong shipyard and Guangzhou petrochemical factory and others expropriated our land to build factories and establish living quarters for workers. Later, the migrant workers who arrived in coastal areas from inland provinces after the reform and opening up mostly rented the houses of local villagers and lived with us in the village. According to records, in 2002, there were 8,000 rental houses and a migrant population of 20,217 people. There were only 2,714 households with 6,739 local residents in the entire village (Wenchong Community Residents committee, 2017), so the migrant population was three times that of the local population. In addition, the number of petrochemical workers was 7,598 in 2002 (Wenchong Community Residents committee, 2017). These migrants living in the Wenchong community had a relatively large impact on the local diet. When I was growing up, during commuting hours there were many cheap food stalls lining the narrow lanes in front of the village factories. They sold hot and sour foods, such as sour beans, sour bamboo shoots, noodles, etc., because most of the workers in the village came from the southwest region of China, where people are accustomed to spicy food.

One report pointed out that as of August 2021, on DaZhongDianPing, an independent third-party consumer review website, there are 58,236 Sichuan and Hunan cuisine restaurants in Guangdong, accounting for six percent of the province's catering market. This means that there is one Sichuan and Hunan restaurant for every 2,000 Cantonese. By comparison, there is about one McDonald's restaurant for every 120,000 Cantonese (Ying, 2021). Over the last 30 years I witnessed more and more spicy food on the streets and more and more seasonings on the supermarket shelves. My mother considered these food stalls to be unsanitary and I was not allowed to eat food from them, but they have now grown into a series of popular Sichuan and Hunan restaurants. While my parents still do not eat spicy food, our three sisters' tastes have become different, and late night spicy barbecues have become our summer favourites.

Due to rising labour and operating costs, Hong Kong and Taiwanese owned factories gradually moved away from Wenchong to inland areas where the labour was cheaper and from where most of the workers originated. Workers also moved away in search of other jobs or moved back to their home-towns, but the gaps they left were quickly filled by middle class migrants, most of whom were university educated and came to bustling Guangzhou from all over China, in search of better job opportunities. Because commercial real estate projects were also developing in our village, the rising middle class families were attracted to move in. As a result, there are now more and more different delicacies on Wenchong Street.

Figure 21 *Traditional Cantonese Breakfast*



The traditional Cantonese breakfast is usually based on rice, such as wonton noodles (which are an exception), fish ball rice noodles, porridge, steamed rice rolls, and beef brisket rice noodles. However, now many families have bread, cereal, milk and even Western fast food such as KFC in the morning, because children prefer Western tastes, and the parents think the food is nutritious.

Figure 22 *Different Kinds of Eateries on Wenchong Street*



Note. Adapted from Next stop, Wenchong!, by Eat, drink and have fun IN Guangzhou, 2019. (https://www.sohu.com/a/291820252_555774). In the public domain.

Now there is a wide variety of restaurants on Wenchong Street, offering food from all over the country, from spicy Sichuan and Hunan cuisines, to Lanzhou noodles, lamb hot pot, Fujian snacks, northeastern dumplings, and so on. In November 2002, KFC opened

in Wenchong (Wenchong Community Residents committee, 2017) and became very popular among children in the village, which influenced the diet of the next generation. Children's taste preferences have a big impact on a family's diet. Parents began buying more Western foods, red meat, seafood, fried foods, dairy products, breads and so on. There are now six Western style bakeries in our community alone. Instead of eating red dyed eggs or homemade steamed egg cake on birthdays as I did when I was young, children now eat Western style cakes full of cream, or go to KFC to have birthday parties with friends. These same changes are happening in many developed coastal cities.

Dairy products

Figure 23 *The Wide Range of Local and Imported Dairy Products in Walmart*



Note: The photographs were taken by the author's sister (2021), and used with permission.

As I mentioned in the first food story, it used to be difficult for locals to obtain dairy products, and we were not in the habit of consuming dairy products; now, however, it is common. In 1996, my parents started ordering bottled milk for us that was delivered fresh to our door each day. Because they accepted Western nutritional advice, they felt that milk would provide rich nutrients for their children's growth and development. At that time, local milk companies in Guangzhou started to become popular and opened many stores selling fresh milk, yogurt, milk desserts, etc. Some schools even ordered fresh milk for students at their recess meal. Later, milk products from other parts of China also entered the Guangzhou market. To this day, not only domestic products, but also milk powder and dairy products imported from abroad are easily bought in the supermarket close to our home. Now my parents are older, we buy adult nutritional formula for them as well. The older generation's ideas have progressed with the times, and young people who have embraced the Western diet have made the consumption of cream, butter, and cheese, an everyday occurrence.

Grains

Figure 24 *A Variety of Grain Products*



Note: The photograph was taken by the author's sister (2021), and used with permission.

In our village, rice was the staple food, and we also ate glutinous rice, but we did not consume many other grains. However, with the increase of migrant populations, supermarkets now sell more grains, such as brown rice, millet, barley, quinoa, oats, buckwheat, black rice, etc. People who follow the nutritional advice to consume whole grains now prefer to buy a variety of mixed grains and cook them into a porridge, instead of having fine rice as their staple food.

Fruits

Figure 25 *Local Fruits: Lychees, Longans, Oranges, Bananas, and Pineapples*



Note: The photographs were taken by family and friends (2020), and used with permission.

Our family have been diligent and self-reliant farmers for generations. We grow most of our own food, and exchange some with neighbours, or buy from the village farmer's market. In the past, we were a self-sufficient village that was especially rich in fruit, so there was no need to buy fruit from outside. I remember that we used to have a lot of

home-grown produce at home: big piles of oranges, longans, lychees, lots of black olives, peanuts, kumara, bok choi and so on. During the school holidays, my sister and I even helped to sell our home-grown products in the local market. My earliest exposure to exotic fruits was to domestic temperate climate fruits such as peaches, apples, pears, grapes, watermelons, and cantaloupes. Later it was cherries for decorating cakes – candied, not fresh - then strawberries, apricots, plums, etc., all of which I suspect came from North America. China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, and the rate of fruit tariff was reduced from 52% in 1992 to 21%, and was further reduced to 16% in 2010 (Kowalski & Nordås, 2012). More and more fruits are now imported. The local market has long been occupied by foreign fruits such as dragon fruit, mango, durian, avocado, etc. (see Figure 26). However, there is increasingly less local arable land. Local villagers, such as my family, still grow fruits such as lychees and longans on small allotments, but their annual production is only enough for family and friends. Farm work has become a form of leisure, and not a means of earning a living.

Figure 26 *The Local Fruit Stands Dominated by Imported Fruits*



Note: The photographs were taken by the author's sister (2021), and used with permission.

Aquatic Products

Figure 27 *The Village Pond*



Figure 28 *Traceable Seafood in Walmart*



Note: The photograph was taken by the author's sister (2021), and used with permission.

Our village was dotted with fish ponds and had three river surges flowing through it, which used to provide us with abundant freshwater fish such as fresh water bream, bighead carp, grass carp, dace, and carp, and aquatic products such as river crabs, river shrimps, and river snails. The seafood I remember was dried and salted, such as dried shrimp, salted fish, dried scallops, dried oysters, dried squid, and so on. Later on, our living conditions gradually improved and we started to consume fresh seafood under the influence of Hong Kong. I remember when my cousin's family who lived next door to us, started selling salt water fish instead of fresh water fish in the early 90's, and soon made so much money that they bought a motorcycle, much to our envy.

Because of the growing population in the village over the last four decades, more land was needed. Wenchong Village had filled up the ponds so villagers could build houses, and for rental warehouses and parking lots. As the area of the ponds decreased year by year, the quantity of local fish on the market also decreased. With the reformation of the village that started in 2010, the remaining fish ponds officially lost their breeding function, and are now only used as landscape beautification. We now eat fish from other regions and countries, both freshwater fish and seafood, including many kinds we have never seen before but that are now becoming common, such as lobster, salmon, and different kinds of shellfish. My mother likes to buy frozen Japanese saury at the supermarket, which is cheap, and easy to cook. It has a firm flesh, and a sweet after taste, even simply pan fried.

In New Zealand I often buy this fish and cook it the same way. Although it is not our product, it reminds me of the taste of home.

Response

My sisters and I accepted foreign food easily; I now eat dumplings and noodles more often than rice. I eat spicy food more often than light Cantonese food, and enjoy a variety of Asian foods, but with my parents, we only eat Cantonese food or have yum cha. My mother, who has been cooking for over 40 years, now complains that she does not know what to cook because it feels to her as if we do not like her food any more. There are many more ingredients available in the market than there were 40 years ago, but she feels she does not know what to buy because she does not know how to cook the new foods. My parents' situation is representative of the older generation in China, who have become lost in their own home-towns. Because more and more of Wenchong's food is now inconsistent with the culture they are familiar with, it has led them to question their knowledge of traditional food, and their identity.

Recognise and discuss

As in Wenchong, many families in China now have a middle class income (Leppman, 2005), and in Wenchong there are now food products to match these new incomes, such as expensive foreign fruits, imported seafood, Australian beef and lamb, and New Zealand dairy products. These are not part of the traditional food categories, but they are representative of the needs of China's rising middle class after the reform and opening up, which brought a taste for life that is in line with the Western world. The newly affluent middle class are more willing to try new and different foods (Leppman, 2005). The changing food landscape of Wenchong also presents a diversity of cuisines and diets that are consistent with the current demographic composition of the Wenchong community, contributing to the feelings of "us" and "them." The way any group eats asserts the oneness or otherness of those who eat differently (Fischler, 1988). The villagers have gone from a light diet with rice as the staple food and vegetables as a supplement, to a diverse diet that includes fried, spicy, Western, and all kinds of regional foods. There used to be a big difference in cuisines between regions in China (BBC Culture, 2021). Now, the differences still exist but there are also more food differences between generations in the same region. The older generation and the next generation have diverged in their dietary preferences, which makes eating together difficult. For example, children now

like pizza, burgers, and fried chicken, while their grandparents prefer to eat their familiar traditional foods; grandparents like to get up early for yum cha, but their grandchildren do not like Cantonese dim sum any more. This leads to fewer opportunities for the generations to eat together at home and in restaurants, impacting on the connections between these generations. People who share the same food practices build bonds, and establish identity and a sense of belonging (Oxfeld, 2017). This diversity in food is challenging the collective philosophy of food within the socio-cultural context of China (Wang, 2015).

For the traditional Chinese, a harmonious family is of paramount importance (Cultural Atlas, 2021). Young people in the village easily accepted new and foreign foods, while older people were overwhelmed. They did not have the knowledge and skills to handle and cook these exotic ingredients. In the past, it was common for Chinese people to share meals and maintain relationships by sharing the same food. Instead of being conducive to family relationships, food has now become a hindrance. This strikes a blow at the belief of Chinese people, that by eating together, family relationships can be strengthened in harmony and closeness (Lin, 2000).

4.2.5 Changes in the eating gatherings

My food story 5:

We used to hold a barbecue party in our backyard every Chinese new year, when we lived in our village house. My uncle, Han, would buy and prepare the ingredients himself. He really enjoyed doing this because it was an opportunity for him, who had lived in Hong Kong most of the time, to get closer to us children. He would often get up very early in the morning to buy the ingredients and marinate them, bringing my little sister along as a little helper. The food tended to be plentiful and meat-based, with steaks, pork ribs, meatballs, sausages, eggplants, kumara, bread, marshmallows, and more. The most popular was his curried chicken wings, using curry powder that he brought back from Hong Kong, where there were many Indian immigrants. At that time, our local barbecue used just barbecue sauce and honey as seasoning, while other places in China would use cumin and chilli powder. Therefore curry powder, an exotic flavour not available locally, was highly prized by the children.

There were often 20-30 people at these barbecue gatherings, and most of my father's immediate family attended. The gatherings could last for a day, or even several days. This was the best time for us as a family to connect; as some family members moved away to different cities such as Shenzhen, and Hong Kong, we only got together once a year.

After moving to the apartment, we had only a quarter of the space we had had before, and no yard. Now we no longer had family-wide barbecue parties, but just small barbecues and hotpot events within our small family. The meaning of the gatherings changed from connecting and bonding to the spicing up of daily meals.

Figure 29 *A Wedding Banquet Held in Front of the Old Ancestral Temples in my Village*



We did our best to keep the village's 800-year-old traditions alive with food activities. The making and sharing of traditional food at traditional festivals such as Spring Festival, Qingming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, and Mid-Autumn Festival, as well as the holding of traditional banquets featuring full moon feasts, wedding feasts, and birthday feasts, all united the community and strengthened the bonds between us.

In addition to small family eating gatherings, village banquets were also common; relatives, neighbours, and friends from the village were usually invited. The most important of these were the full moon banquets for new-borns, wedding banquets, and birthday banquets for the elderly. These cover the three important moments in life: birth, marriage, and ageing. These banquets can now be held in restaurants, but in the past they were usually held in the villages' ancestral temples. I have lost count of the number of times I have attended such banquets. The menus are often the same, so when I was a child, I often began to secretly wonder whether I could eat the dish I liked. This kind of banquet was generally held by local villagers. The host family only needed to pay for food materials, drinks, decorations, and certain expenses. Women in the family also came to

help set the table, serve the food, and clean up, etc. My mother would often go to help out as well. The cost of a banquet was not too high, but now it is commercialised, and families hire a catering team to do the work. The host just sets the menu and the team takes care of the shopping, cooking, serving, cleaning and other services, saving the host a lot of effort. Although the cost increases, it is still cheaper than holding a banquet at a hotel.

Figure 30 *Traditional Banquets Prepared by Local Villagers at the Ancestral Temple*



Note. Adapted from There is a show of wealth, called the Guangzhou people banquet, by kknews, 2019. (<https://kknews.cc/zh-sg/food/azayeaj.html>). In the public domain.

For traditional banquets, such as for weddings, a table is usually of ten people sharing nine dishes and a soup. Because the word for “nine” in Chinese has the same pronunciation as the word for “long,” nine means a long lasting marriage; similarly, ten stands for completeness and perfection. Depending on the size of the venue and the banquet budget, usually 10 to 50 tables of guests will be set up. In my memory, the most common dishes at wedding banquets in our village were boiled chicken slices, roasted duck, steamed fish, steamed prawn, blanched lettuce and shiitake mushrooms with oyster sauce, stir-fried diced vegetables and cashew nuts, braised pork belly with taro, stir-fried snow peas and fish balls, fried wonton, and dried bok choy and pork bones soup. My favourite was fried wonton, because fried food was still a luxury for us at that time, and usually only available at banquets and the Spring Festival. Its crunchy texture and the sweet and sour sauce that goes with it are also well suited to the tastes of children. It is a pity that children now have more choices, and they do not like the fatty pork in it; this dish is largely ignored. Also, in the colder months, there was braised pork belly with taro, which traditionally uses the fattest part of pork. In the past, fat was a luxury in our poor diet, but in these health conscious times, it has become a food to avoid.

Response

I really like traditional banquets, even if I have the same dishes every time. Every time I attend such banquets, I meet my relatives from the village and talk about homely topics, and I feel especially happy. At banquets we neither dance nor sing, but just eat and socialise. We get together not for entertainment, but to celebrate and share the joy of the host. Here, we put our own enjoyment - eating different foods, dancing and singing - in second place, and celebrating for others in first place. It is through this emotional affirmation that we become a closer family/group. Through the traditional banquet, I became more aware of the Chinese culture that puts family and collective happiness ahead of individual happiness.

Recognise and discuss

The traditional banquet is an event that allows people to continually deepen and clarify the concept of family. These banquets celebrate important moments for specific groups of people, eating the same food, and even helping with the preparation, all in ways that deepen the connection to each other. The social function of Chinese food, to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships and to express the closeness of those relationships, is fully demonstrated at eating gatherings (Ma, 2015), and the ritualised ingestion of food is seen to strengthen social bonds (van den Berghe, 1984). Food plays a key role in these traditional events, for it is both a symbol and a sumptuous flavour, a double pleasure of spiritual and earthly pleasures (Moey, 2017).

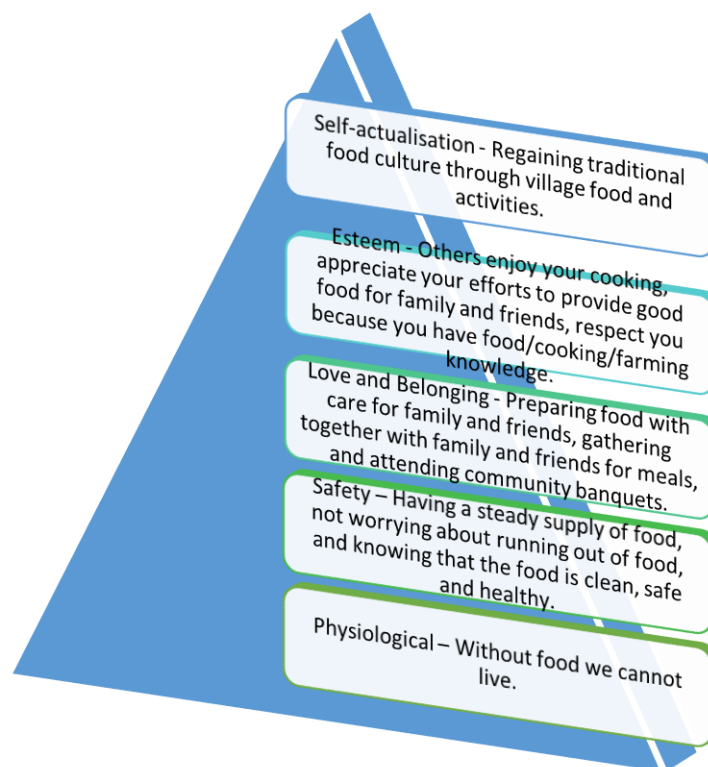
These social interactions also define and construct people's social identities. Participating in a festival as a social gathering can mean contributing to shared values, social identity, and self-esteem (Chiang et al., 2017). What mattered to villagers was whether or not someone was invited, which showed whether they were accepted or excluded from a group. Social boundaries are created by participation in a meal (Crowther, 2018). People who share the same food practices build bonds, establish a group identity, and establish a sense of belonging and shared traditions (Oxfeld, 2017).

Across China, these traditional banquets now seem less attractive (Beijing Review, 2006). With urbanisation, people have further to travel for such events, and the cultural element of the festivals and banquets is declining with the reduced links to agriculture and village life (Beijing Review, 2006). The heart of Chinese culture is being impacted by these changes.

4.3 Analysis of villagers' needs using Maslow's theory

With an understanding of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (presented in Chaper 3), I can see a more profound role for food and food-related activities in fulfilling people's needs. First, food ensures our survival. Second, food satisfies our need for safety, eliminating fear and anxiety when we know we have our next meal and that the food is safe and healthy to consume. Through food and food activities, we confirm love and recognize what group we belong to. On top of that we build confidence and dignity. And finally, if we are lucky, we achieve self-actualization as Maslow believed that not everyone can do so. (Maslow, 1943)

Figure 31 *The Application of Food to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*



Note: This model is based on Maslow's (Maslow, 1943) Hierarchy of Needs Theory

The meeting of each of these needs is evident in my food stories. When food supplies were limited, my grandmother used milk powder as a substitute for freshmilk, and other families used rice paste to ensure their children's survival. The market economy ensures that food is available; my parents grow their own fruit and we purchase food from trusted sellers at farmers' markets or from supermarket chains, all of which contribute to the

fulfilment of safety needs. The soil from my home-town that my mother prepared for me, cannot satisfy my physiological need by filling my stomach when I could not adapt to a new diet, but it did satisfy my need for love and belonging. Our traditional Qingming roast suckling pig, too, does not satisfy my uncles who are far away in Hong Kong, but it does reminds them that their roots are in Wenchong. My mother and my friend's mother making traditional food for their families, my uncle preparing food for a family barbecue party, and Wenchong Village hosting banquets, are all food activities that meet people's need for love and belonging. In contrast, commercially produced food and food purchased outside the home only fulfil survival needs, and not the need for love and belonging. My father lost his confidence, because he felt that his agricultural skills and traditional food knowledge were no longer needed for modern life, and my mother felt lost when she was no longer cooking for her family, which met her needs for self-esteem. Finally, the need for self-actualisation, realising one's potential, through the regaining of traditional food culture, can be achieved through food and food activities in a village community.

4.4 Chapter summary

My stories document the significant changes that occurred in food and food activities in Wenchong Village during the past 40 years. From a gastronomic perspective, four themes emerged: 1) changes in the social connections and belonging of villagers and their connection to the land; 2) changes in taste; 3) changes in food and Chinese culture; and 4) changes in identity and self-esteem. Revisiting these changes has given me a deeper understanding of myself, my family, and my culture. I now know the whys, and not just the hows.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present a conclusion based on the themes of my findings and discussion chapter. Then, I present my recommendations for the preservation and development of Wenchong Village through food and food activities, the limitations of this research, and finally, my researcher's reflection.

5.2 Four themes of changes

In just one generation, a village with 800 years of farming tradition has lost its knowledge, changed its identity, and been cut off from the land on which it lives. We are no longer growing food or raising fish in the village ponds. We are eating food that has been shipped in from all over the world, ingredients that were not part of our grandparents' eating, and rejecting our native traditional ingredients, replacing them with cheap industrialised agricultural products. A supermarket has replaced the local farmers' market, and fast food chains have defeated the local yum cha restaurants. Villagers have moved into high-rise apartments and use different cooking methods, and traditional festivals are mostly held in restaurants. Looking at these changes in food and food activities through a gastronomic lens, shows that four themes emerge.

The first theme is in the social connections of family and community. There was a loss of conviviality in home kitchens when people spent less time cooking and preparing meals with family members, and the group preparation of traditional foods became a rare occurrence. Commensality around the table, eating out and at festivals, became difficult due to the different preferences of older and younger generations. When ingredients and foods were bought from supermarkets that sourced their products from far away, there was less communal interaction at the farmers market. Food was no longer grown locally, reducing the connection of villagers to their land. With the loss of social connection, there was no longer an emphasised sense of oneness through our food and traditional festivals.

The second theme relates to taste. Chinese food is closely tied to family, and each family's taste is unique. Consuming food with a familiar authentic taste brings back memories, a sense of home, nostalgia, and sense of belonging and love. However, the taste of industrial agricultural products and commercial food is standard and uniform, and when the love of

home cooking and local terroir disappears from the food, it also fails to bring memories, a sense of home, nostalgia, and a sense of belonging, leaving only the physiological function of filling the stomach.

The third theme is in the culture. There has been a deep food culture and knowledge in China for generations, however, the farming, food preparation, and celebrations, were no longer being passed on to the next generation. Changes in homes and the use of modern technology brought convenience, but there was a loss in cultural beliefs. The food rituals, festivals, traditional foods, and culinary traditions that used to be associated with praying for God's blessings and good harvests, are now seen as unnecessary, ignored, and forgotten.

Finally, there is a theme of identity. With the loss of attending traditional festivals and banquets, community and group identities were broken apart, as when food, food traditions and food activities were changed, and not shared within the group, the identity of the group also became confused and failed to become whole, with no sense of oneness. Cooking for family and friends, eating together and attending community banquets can satisfy the need for love and belonging. Individual self-esteem is also realised through shared traditional activities and the preparation of traditional foods. Decreased self-esteem of farmers through urbanisation and loss of land can occur, as well as for those who no longer prepare food for others in their home kitchen or for traditional festivals.

In conclusion, these themes indicate that the inevitable urbanisation of Wenchong, a modern village on the edge of a big city, is unravelling the village food culture, traditions, and community, and has greatly weakened the villagers' connection to the land.

Because food plays such an important role, the changes in food brought about by rapid economic development have shaken the heritage of local food culture, beliefs, and identity of the village community. My personal experience and that of my family vividly illustrates the food changes caused by development and the loss it has brought to the entire community and its residents, and adds to the academic literature that addresses the downside of economic development for local food and food culture.

5.3 My recommendations for Wenchong Village

These are my recommendations for reversing the crisis of a community falling apart under the weight of change, and needing to reunite to regain its culture through food and food activities.

1. Establish a museum in the village to display agricultural tools and written, photographic, and visual materials of past agricultural activities, so that our next generation will have an understanding of the traditional culture of farming that once took place on this land, and to provide a place for the older generation to pass on their cultural knowledge.
2. Launch a vegetable garden and set up a planting course in the village elementary school so that children can learn about food and planting, and not forget their ancestors' identities as farmers. This learning will also help enliven the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, so that the older generation regains the respect of the children.
3. Protect the remaining arable land in the village and give it to the villagers' association for sustainable farming. The harvest can be sold in the village store, providing the villagers with quality, clean, and fair food. This also allows the older generation of farmers to use their skills and knowledges, and regain their confidence and self-esteem.
4. Establish a food group purchase pathway whereby villagers subscribe to purchase ingredients, and then work in a joint venture with a quality farm, to raise high quality chicken, pork, fish, cattle, sheep, and other meat for the villagers, according to their specifications. This helps other farmers, and provides villagers with local food and a link to the land, as well as safe, reliable, and traceable food.
5. Organise traditional food making activities at the community centre based on traditional festivals, such as wrapping rice dumplings, making moon cakes, making Chinese new year food, etc. This will bring the community back together through food activities and pass on traditional knowledge and customs.
6. Hold a farmers' market every weekend in the square next to the village's ancestral hall, allowing villagers to sell their own produce and homemade traditional foods. This will help villagers to maintain their food preparation skills and increase their incomes. The rest of the villagers will then be able to taste authentic food instead of commercial products, and the market will enhance communication between villagers

and reconnect them to their land. This will also attract people from nearby communities to visit our village and add to the vibrancy of the community.

5.4 Research limitations and future research directions

The findings of the research are based on my own and my family members' experiences of living in Wenchong Village, and do not represent the views of all Wenchong villagers. The food changes that occurred in our village are also not representative of all villages on the urban fringe of China. I am also aware that the changes in the villages in the centre of Guangzhou are also very different from those we experienced.

In my food stories, I tried to record my recollections as objectively as possible, along with those of my parents, without exaggeration. For some of the specific numbers and years, I referred to the Wenchong Village local records compiled by the Wenchong Community Residents committee. Inevitably, of course, I brought in my personal views in my analysis. Autoethnography is the description and interpretation of cultural texts through personal experience; the interpretation of individuals who are insiders of a particular culture is important.

This research represents a selection of the changes that I am most concerned about; this does not suggest they are the only changes, or that other changes are not important, but space limitations make it necessary to make some selections. My food story takes place over a period of 40 years in the village where I was born and raised, a period that almost overlaps with the reform and opening up of China. Indeed, many of the changes occurred before that and are continuing. I have not compared our changes horizontally with those of other villages, nor have I provided an outsider's perspective, so the research naturally has some limitations.

For future research, I suggest a more in-depth study of food and food based activities based on Wenchong Village and other villages in China facing the same dilemmas of modernisation. Research could also draw on the successful experiences of those who have used traditional foods to achieve village revitalisation in China, to achieve a balance and harmony between development and tradition.

5.5 Researcher's reflection

As a food culture researcher I am very glad to have had the opportunity to document the changes in food and culture in my home-town. I find this poem by Su Shi, Chinese littérateur and politician of the Song Dynasty, helpful, as I reflect on what I have discovered in this research.

Of Mountain Lu we cannot make out the true face,

For we are lost in the heart of the very place.

(Su Shi, translated by Xu Yuanchong, 2007)

If we are too subjective, our opinions will be one-sided and we cannot see things as they really are. In the past I was pessimistic about some changes; I resisted passively, and did not think, let alone offer my thoughts to others. Leaving the village gave me a wider perspective, so I could see the changes. Now I have reviewed and examined these changes comprehensively, I realise that I should play my part as a member of Wenchong Village. I use this poem to remind myself to look wide, to stand tall, and see the big picture.

A famous Chinese politician of the Tang dynasty advised the emperor to “take history as a mirror to know the rise and fall (以史为鉴可以知兴替)”. Through this research, I want to shed light on the dilemmas encountered in traditional food culture and beliefs under China's rapid development, especially in the small villages on the edge of cities that can hardly avoid urbanisation. I hope this reflection is not too late, and that young people will recognise the valuable aspects of traditional food culture and beliefs instead of being obsessed with development. The knowledge of the old generation is worthy of respect. Chinese food culture and beliefs, which have been passed down for thousands of years, can be revitalised and continue to be passed down in the new era, because we believe that food, and the people who make it for us, make an empty house into a home.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: Kexin Lu



Date: 1st April 2022