Chapter Five

Bodily Memory and Sensibility:
Eating habits, culinary preferences, and national consciousness

The embodiment of nationhood may exist not only in textual forms like food memoirs but also in bodily practices. Chapter Four analyzes the changing identification of “home” by examining food memoirs, whilst this chapter extends its focus to the wider population and their “bodily memories,” examining how consumers conceive of the notion of Taiwanese cuisine and the relationship between their national consciousness and culinary preference. This chapter will explore the diverse meanings of Taiwanese cuisine defined by consumers and consumers’ different culinary preferences for Taiwanese and Chinese cuisine. Also, it will scrutinize how consumers’ culinary preferences and different definitions of Taiwanese cuisine are related to their national consciousness, exploring to what extent and by what means food consumption can embody national consciousness.

1. NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND BODILY MEMORY

1.1 National consciousness and social experience

It has been argued that national identity, that is, being Taiwanese or Chinese, has been a fundamental social cleavage in Taiwan, particularly since the late 1980s.1 Empirical studies on Taiwanese identity show that Taiwanese society has witnessed a rise in Taiwanese identity and a decline in Chinese identity since the 1990s, while the percentage of the population having a dual identity—regarding themselves as “both Taiwanese and Chinese”—has remained stable.2 Why did Taiwanese identity become significant during the 1990s? The dominant perspective ascribes the

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1 See, for example, Shyu, 1996; Wu, 1993; Chang, 2003.
2 According to a long-term survey from 1992 to 2008, the percentage of Taiwanese citizens who perceive themselves as Taiwanese increased from 17.3% in June 1992 to 50.8% in Dec. 2008; the number in 2008 is greater than the number of Taiwanese citizens who regard themselves as both Taiwanese and Chinese (40.8% in Dec. 2008 and 45.4% in June 1992), while the number of Taiwanese citizens who identify themselves only as Chinese has dropped dramatically from 26.2% to 4.2% during the same period. See Core Political Attitudes Trend Chart conducted by the Election Study Center of National Cheng-chi University. (http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/newchinese/data/TaiwanChineseID.htm, retrieved 6/17/2009). The analysis by Ho and Liu indicates that the rise of “Taiwanese identity” exhibits no difference in relation to ethnic background, education, age, gender, and partisanship. See Ho & Liu, 2002.
significance to the rise of democratization and ethnic politics since the late 1980s. Researchers argue that democratization opened a space for political expression and competition, strengthening Taiwan’s demand for self-determination and the quest by many Taiwanese for an international identity separate from Chinese identity. Taiwanese consciousness, which had been suppressed under the authoritarian regime, was thus justified during the 1990s. Furthermore, different ethnic consciousnesses, such as the Hakka and Aboriginal identities, emerged and crystallized during a process of political liberalization, paving the way for an emerging Taiwanese “national identity.” Whilst ethnic consciousness gained prominence and strength within the democratic regime during the 1990s, the two factors of democratization and ethnic politics were intertwined and were associated with domestic political struggles. Wachman (1994) thus concludes that both the Nationalist government and its opposition exploited the national-identity issue as a way of attracting popular support among given constituencies (p. 261).

However, although a wealth of research has examined the origins of Taiwanese identity from a historical perspective and analyzed Taiwanese identity’s emergence within changing domestic and international structures, two issues in this research merit further consideration.

First, many empirical studies on Taiwanese national identity are grounded mainly on surveys of Taiwanese or Chinese identity, and the surveys’ respondents themselves defined “Taiwanese or Chinese identity” when answering whether they were Taiwanese or Chinese. In other words, what is revealed in these surveys is a performed or exhibited identity. A hidden assumption behind such surveys is that the respondents or interviewees understand well their own “national identity” and can draw a thoughtful conclusion regarding whether they are Taiwanese or Chinese. This assumption may not be true. Brown’s (2003) research shows that individuals’ choice of identity is influenced by individuals’ perceptions of power and social relations, but respondents or interviewees might be unconscious of such an influence (p. 62).

Second, the performed identities in surveys might be strategic choices that vary according to the context of the survey. This “strategic choices” reason can explain the findings of Ho and Liu (2002) that the results of identity-themed surveys are politically charged and obviously influenced by political events (p. 70). I am not arguing that surveys are incapable of shedding light on national identity; however, it should be made clear that the performed identity revealed in surveys is neither necessarily nor fully representative of the respondents’ national consciousness.

The examination of social experience and practices is another important way to explore the national consciousness of individuals. Craib (1998) poses the concept of

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3 See for example, Chang, 2003; Chu, 2004; Chu & Lin, 2001; Gold, 1994; Wachman, 1994; Wang, 2003; Wu, 1997. Also see Chapter Three.
“experiencing identity” to explain that identity is not only “one element or process within a self” but also the way people experience the world (p. 1). He identifies experience as “a wide range of affects which has both physical and ideational components, both of which may be conscious or unconscious or some combination of both” (Craib, 1998, p. 10). In the dynamic process of experience, external and internal stimuli constantly interact with each other (Craib, 1998, p. 168). Therefore, he interprets individuals’ identity choices as “closing down” the psychic space around one or another social identity, while “opening up” another psychic space to explore oneself and one’s relationships. The closing and the opening can be conscious or unconscious processes (Craib, 1998, pp. 170-177).

Craib suggests that identity has unconscious and social dimensions, whilst Brown (2004) further highlights the bi-directional relationship between social experience and perception in her anthropological research on ethnic groups in Taiwan and China. Focusing on identity changes in ethnic groups ranging from the aborigines to the Han, she argues that identity is essentially experiential, and that both individual and group identities stem from negotiated everyday social experience. On one hand, individuals live and create their own social experiences, but on the other, they understand these experiences “in terms of the cultural meanings of the specific society in which they live” (Brown, 2004, p. 13). Although their perceptions of the social-power hierarchy and of cultural meanings may not accurately reflect actual social power relations, these cultural meanings of social power relations can still “guide and constrain individuals’ interpretations of actual events and possible future actions” (Brown, 2004, p. 220). In other words, social experience and perception mutually influence each other and constitute the grounds where individuals understand the living world and make decisions in social interactions. However, social experience consists not only of events, conversations, and narratives but also of bodily practices. Therefore, research attempting to explore national consciousness through social experience should account for bodily practice.

Preference for a specific food or cuisine can be congenital or can be learned through eating experiences. The preference for Taiwanese or Chinese cuisine involves both the cuisines and the bodily practices of eating. To explore both the formation of preferences for Taiwanese cuisine or Chinese cuisine and the preferences’ relationship with national consciousness, this research adopts the concept “bodily memory” to theorize the concept “culinary preference.”

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4 Both Connerton (1989) and Lee (2000) have used the term “bodily memory” in their writings. I am inspired by their conceptualization of bodily memory but expand its meanings in the context of this study. I will explain their conceptualization of this concept when presenting their ideas in this chapter.
1.2 Bodily memory relative to culinary preference and identification

The body is often viewed as a site of cultural codes. For example, Douglas (2003 [1970]) argues that the body is an important symbolic system that can reveal the cultural structure of a society (pp. 65-81). Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of “habitus” also highlights the body as a bearer of value and marker of social positions, positing that body is “the most indisputable materialization of class taste” (p. 190). Butler (1993) suggests that repeated practice is a crucial way of embedding cultural and social norms in the body. She argues that, through repeated physical practices and performances in daily life, the body memorizes the proper way to act in specific social and cultural contexts; and conversely, these ways of acting can be generated by specific social cues. In this sense, daily practice and performance are shaped and conditioned by historical and social contexts, and bodily behavior is thus culturally appropriated and socially constructed. As Connerton (1989) states in his influential book, bodily practices enact the past and thus serve to embody cultural memory (p. 72).

However, body and social contexts mutually influence each other. Researchers who focus on the body and society particularly underline the subjectivity of the body. Shilling (1993) argues that the body is an unfinished entity that is imprinted by social life and that shapes it (p. 114). The body not only reflects culturally and socially informed memories but also creates the sensual ground that brings meaning to people’s consciousness. The subjective aspect of the body is evident in studies on traumatic experiences and memory (cf. Becker, Beyene, & Ken, 2000; Kleinman & Kleinman, 1994). Experiences attributable to victims of violence and to refugees can evolve into embodied memories that recreate social meanings, and the traumatic experiences of “sociosomatics” manifest themselves in physical responses such as sleeplessness, fatigue, and dizziness. In sum, the interactions between body and memory are better understood as a bi-directional process. The body is a bearer of social values and communal experiences, and practices imprint these experiences on the body over time. The body can also function to generate meanings.

Drawing on the bi-directional process that underlies the relationships between body and memory, this research uses the term “bodily memory” to encompass these two meanings of body. On one hand, bodily memory is the sense or memory inscribed in bodies. Specific social contexts can evoke a sense or a memory. The memory as well as the process of inscription is affected by one’s social position and cultural disposition. On the other hand, bodily memory is the sensory experience by which individuals consider and make sense of objects or events, conferring cultural
such significance on them. Such “bodily memory” has the three following crucial characteristics.

(1) Individual memory and particularity

Bodily memory is created or accumulated by physical experiences, which become meaningful only within one’s life history. Bodily memory is thus individual and not collective. It is particularly significant when an event is related to physical labor or a physical sense. As emotions, feelings, and senses vary by individual, so the memories of events differ. In other words, bodily memory reveals the particularity of individuals.

However, this is not to say that bodily memory cannot be transformed into social memory. Connerton (1989) reminds us that the incorporation of the human body and social memory is an important way through which societies remember. 5 Although bodily memory is grounded in individual experiences, it is also the basis on which individuals situate themselves and connect with others. Lee (2000) also points out that bodily memory and social memory are intertwined experiences. She suggests that bodily memory is often a response “to changing social contexts,” and the response is closely related to the social position and network of the individual. In other words, bodily memory is also an important “source of social memory” (Lee, 2000, p. 219).

In this sense, although bodily memory is an individual memory, it serves as the linkage between an individual and shared collective memories. When a public event occurs, it is through individuals’ emotions and feelings toward this event that the event is memorized. Drawing on a study by Kleinman and Kleinman linking physical experience with cognitive processes and expressions of suffering, Lee (2000) argues that

… past experiences are sedimented in the body and reconfigured into a source of meaning-making in which bodily signs and experiences are understood within a personal history framed by sociopolitical events.

The body serves as a template of social experience, which is then articulated into stories of collective history. (p. 207)

While serving as a way in which individuals participate in collective memory, bodily memory can serve as an analytical tool for examining how human bodies conceive of and react to collective social memories. Individuals deal with experiences according

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5 Connerton points out three ways by which a society remember, in addition to the “body,” the other two ways include inscriptions onto cultural texts such as myths and monuments, and commemorative rituals that engage people in participatory rationality and social action.
to their own reference structure, which varies from person to person. An examination of bodily memory can thus shed light on the process of personal engagement with social memory.

(2) Emotional bond

Memory is highly selective so that not all events or behaviors are remembered. What is memorized is essentially related to certain forms of emotion: suffering, pleasure, pride, or pain, and these emotions are often the subject of research on bodily memory. For example, Becker, Beyene, and Ken (2000) explore the bodily distress of Cambodian refugees, pointing out that fear and mistrust resulting from physical and emotional pain can evolve into embodied memories and can further influence these refugees’ relationships with others and with the world (Becker, et al., 2000). In this sense, emotion is better understood as a relational process that informs social interaction and is thus socially efficacious (Lee, 2000, p. 207). Emotional bonds are another medium by which the linkage between individuals and the collective are made.

(3) The unconscious

Memories that are encoded in bodies are derived from sensory experiences, even though people are not necessarily conscious of the derivation. As Bourdieu’s concept “habitus” underlines, bodily memory works in the unconscious. Lee (2000) explains that “although bodily acts are ... products of conscious learning over time, these behaviors settle into the unconscio nness, becoming ‘obscure in the eyes of their own producers’” (p. 205). Through the “habit memory” that is sedimented in the body, certain habits and behaviors become natural (Connerton, 1989, pp. 34-35). The characteristic of unconsciousness is particularly significant in food habits. Sutton (2001) argues that the power of food lies in the ability to mask class issues under the guise of “taste and personal preference” (p. 4). The taken-for-granted-ness of eating habits and culinary preferences prevents a deeper consideration of how social class, ethnicity, and national consciousness may influence culinary preferences.

On the basis of these characteristics, “bodily memory” is adopted in this research as an analytical concept to theorize culinary preference. Individual preferences for specific foods and the senses of taste are subjective feelings that vary from individual to individual, which is why there is no standard definition of taste, such as a delicious taste, a sweet taste, or a sour taste. However, the response to taste and the
preference for food is not entirely impromptu or arbitrary. Instead, preferences for
cuisine are often cultivated in daily life over a long time and are closely associated
with one’s memory of food. The feeling of something being “delicious” is a bodily
response to food, with the response generated by individual criteria of taste, criteria
that are shaped and cultivated over a long time. In other words, food preference is a
form of bodily memory.

According to this conceptualization, culinary preference is a sort of bodily
memory in two senses. First, the bodily response to food is shaped by social values
and communal experiences over time. For example, shark fin is “haute cuisine” in
China, and the impression of “deliciousness” when eating shark fin dishes can
derive from their high monetary and social value. Second, the subjective bodily
response to food can produce new meanings and change the value of food. Using the
same example of shark fin, when some consumers find the real flavor of sharks to be
distasteful, they may start to dislike the dish and stop eating it.

Furthermore, in my references to culinary preference as a form of “bodily
memory,” the three aforementioned characteristics of bodily memory (particularity,
emotional bond, and the unconscious) are also features of culinary preferences. First,
culinary preference is apparently individual, but is also collective. Researches on the
formation of “food taste” have shown that groups whose members are of the same
ethnicity, generation, class, or region exhibit some commonalities in their culinary
preferences. Second, food preference is often an emotional choice and not
necessarily rational. One’s preference for a specific flavor is often influenced by
repeated exposure to a given food and by experiences shared in families or in other
social contexts. Thus, food can often remind us of memories of childhood, family,
friends, or festivals. However, although able to recognize their preferences for a
specific food, people are not necessarily conscious of the reason for their own
preferences. Individuals are not always conscious of the feelings that are inscribed in
their bodies.

In sum, culinary preference is a sensory choice generated by bodily practices
and eating experiences; it is an individual choice but formed in social networks and
thus is constitutive of the grounds of social interaction; it is associated with like and
dislike—that is, with the emotional experience of individuals—even though
individuals are often not conscious of how a preference is formed. This chapter will
employ the concept of bodily memory to analyze how culinary preferences are
formed in a wider social context and how individuals make sense of their culinary
preferences. “Culinary preference” in this chapter refers to the preference for either
Taiwanese cuisine or Chinese cuisine.

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6 See, for example, the researches collected in Korsmeyer (ed.), 2005.
In-depth interviews were conducted with 24 informants, comprising 15 females and 9 males. Focusing on how they conceived of the notion of “Taiwanese cuisine,” I have explored not only their definitions and understandings of Taiwanese cuisine but also their food-centered life history to better understand the process of taste-cultivation. In addition to their claimed food preferences, I observed their daily food practices such as cooking methods, eating-out choices, and the food stocked in their refrigerators. Most of the interviews were conducted at the homes of the informants to obtain non-verbal information about their eating habits, their cultural dispositions, and the total repertoire of their social practices.

Of the 24 informants, 13 had no clear definition of Taiwanese cuisine; however, this finding does not mean that they knew nothing about the matter. To five of the informants, Taiwanese cuisine was not a meaningful category and they had alternative classifications, such as Bensheng (inner province) vs. Waisheng (other provinces) and Western vs. Chinese. Two of the informants referred to specific dishes as Taiwanese cuisine, despite having no clear definition of “Taiwanese cuisine.”

The 11 informants who demonstrated a clear awareness of the features of Taiwanese cuisine differed from one another regarding their corresponding definitions. Four considered it to be distinctive of Taiwanese national culture and expressed pride in it; two informants defined “Taiwanese cuisine” by referencing their hometown’s local dishes; one informant understood Taiwanese cuisine from the perspective of ethnic politics; and the other four informants regarded Taiwanese cuisine as Chinese regional cuisine. Table 5.1 presents an overview of their “Taiwanese cuisine” definitions, and the Appendix presents more information about the informants’ background. In the following, I select certain cases for each category to explore the corresponding informants’ conception of Taiwanese cuisine, culinary preferences, and national consciousness. The selection is dependent on the significance of the informants’ culinary preference and the depth of the interviews; however, both typical cases and special cases in each category are discussed.
Table 5.1 Overview of the informants’ definitions of “Taiwanese cuisine”

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Perspective relative to locality and gender</th>
<th>F11, F15 (Mrs. King)</th>
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<td>Perspective relative to Chinese cuisine</td>
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<tr>
<th>No clear definition</th>
<th>No idea at all</th>
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<td>Referring to family dishes</td>
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<td>F5 (Mrs. Shi), F13 (Ms. Ming), M7, F7 (Mr. &amp; Mrs. Xu, couple), M9 (Mr. Li)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* F: female, M: male

2. **Informants who had clear definitions of “Taiwanese cuisine”**

The 11 informants who had clear definitions of “Taiwanese cuisine” displayed different considerations in their perceptions. The following section analyzes how consumers made sense of Taiwanese cuisine and further discusses the relationship between their culinary preferences and their national consciousness.

2.1 Perspectives relative to locality and gender

Mrs. King⁷ was an informant possessing a clear impression of Taiwanese cuisine. Viewing it as the traditional wisdom of Taiwanese women, she defined “Taiwanese cuisine” by explaining three representative Taiwanese cuisines: pork sauce (or Bah-sin-a in Hokkien, 肉漬/肉燥), milkfish (Chanos chanos), and sautéed fish wuliuzhi (五柳枝, literally, “five willow branches”).

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⁷ Mrs. King was born in 1932 in Tainan County. She started to promote “the art of living” and to teach cooking in 2001. She is known for her rich understanding of Tainan food, and I knew her through a friend living in Tainan. We visited her home/office twice, spending one morning and one evening there.
Mrs. King’s perspective on pork sauce stemmed from her childhood experiences in a rural region of Tainan in south Taiwan. Born in 1932 in a peasant’s family, Mrs. King grew up under Japanese colonial rule and had a heavy workload on a farm. The lack of material resources and dignity made childhood a painful period for her.

“The colonized people were very poor,” Mrs. King said with slight anger. Her memory of childhood was haunted by the hardships she suffered and witnessed before the end of the Second World War. She remembered that when the Japanese army drafted an older neighborhood boy to take part in the war, his whole family cried loudly. When studying at elementary school, she was often called “Qing slave” (qingguonu) by the Japanese children and she was even assigned the task of collecting bones from human corpses during the Second World War. These experiences left a deep impression on her and gave her a clear idea that being ruled by colonists was a tragedy. She suggested that the experiences also influenced the tastes of local people. For example, during the Japanese colonial era, Tainan was an important place for the planting and processing of sugar cane (He, 2007, pp. 162-191). However, local Taiwanese were not allowed to eat the cane that they had planted on their own farms; instead, the harvest had to be sold to Japanese sugar enterprises at a fixed price, which was quite low. To explain the situation, Mrs. King cited a popular Taiwanese saying during the colonial period among cane farmers: “The most stupid thing is to plant cane for Japanese companies to weigh.”8 She noted that sometimes she and her friends would find a piece of cane that had fallen from a cane-train and would share it, enjoying the sweet taste. Nevertheless, after eating it, they had to carefully dry the residue of the cane on the roof and then burn it or there would be serious punishment if the Japanese police found any residue of it. Mrs. King argued that the lack of sugar in the colonial era explains the current Tainan inhabitants’ preference for sugar.

Tainan dishes are famous for their sweet taste now because people here tend to add more sugar than in all the other regions of Taiwan. You see, people did not have sugar in the past, even though Tainan was where sugar was produced; therefore, people there felt happy that they could finally enjoy it. That is why people cannot help but add sugar when cooking.9

In addition to sugar, pork was rare during her childhood. As shown in Chapter One, although most households in rural areas had pigs during the colonial era, these pigs were raised for sale and not for daily consumption at home. Only during the Chinese

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8 The proverb is uttered in Hokkien and written as “天下第一戇，種甘蔗乎會社磅.”
9 Interview: Mrs. King (7/22/2008, Tainan).
New Year and important festivals could rural people eat pork. Mrs. King emphasized that feeding a pig took much time and food, making it an expensive undertaking for her family and many other people at that time. In this context, “pork sauce” was a good way of making economical use of a pig. The sauce consisted of stewed pork with dried shrimps, dried mushrooms, rice wine, and various seasonings, and “only one spoon of it could make you finish a bowl of rice,” said Mrs. King. Pork sauce is a basic sauce in many Taiwanese local dishes, such as peddler’s noodles (擔仔麵), rice bowls (米糕) and soy ground pork on rice (滷肉飯), which are still popular today. As an important delicacy forty years ago, pork sauce represents days of suffering and hard work, and Mrs. King regarded it as a symbol of the Taiwanese people who always worked hard in a tough environment.

![Figure 5.1 Peddler’s noodles](image1.png) ![Figure 5.2 Rice bowl with pork sauce on top](image2.png)

Source: Author, taken in restaurants in Tainan (2007)

While pork sauce is a common food that people can acquire around Taiwan, Mrs. King’s emphasis on milkfish was further bound to her hometown Tainan. Tainan was the first developed city in Taiwan and was the capital of Taiwan Province during the Qing Dynasty. Milkfish had been an important product of aquaculture in Tainan since the late 17th century. Historian Lian Heng notes that milkfish was a local specialty of Tainan and that no milkfish aquaculture existed north of Jiayi (Lian, 1962 [1918], pp. 714, 718).
Being a native inhabitant of Tainan, Mrs. King argued that milkfish should be a culinary symbol of Taiwan:

Jia-nan Plain is the homeland of milkfish, … we should pass down the taste of milkfish generation to generation because it is a taste Taiwanese people should not forget … a bowl of unseasoned milkfish soup not only is a delicious soup, but marks the history of the struggle of the Taiwanese, as well.10

By embedding milkfish in Taiwanese history, Mrs. King expanded the meaning of milkfish from a local product to a symbol of the Taiwanese people, further making the connections among food, nation, and people. These connections between local food and a national symbol present the character of material culture as having the potential to serve as a medium for identity. Local food comprises not only “placed cultural artifacts” but also “dis-placed materials and practices” that can yield new meanings (Cook & Crang, 1996). At first, milkfish was a local specialty linked to the geographical conditions and local knowledge in Tainan. However, by referring to Taiwan as the “nation” to which the people of Tainan belong, Mrs. King could also articulate milkfish as a national symbol of Taiwan.

In addition to connecting local food with the nation, Mrs. King’s consciousness about Taiwanese cultural traditions related to her nearly 50-year-long role as a housewife, which was significant in her interpretation of sautéed fish, wuliuzhi. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the mothers of Lin Hai-yin and Lin Wen-yue, who came from Taiwan, cooked the sautéed fish wuliuzhi for special guests or during festivals, even when living abroad. Thus, wuliuzhi became a component of the “tastes of home”

for Lin Hai-yin and Lin Wen-yue owing to its connection with pleasant family life. Mrs. King’s interpretation of *wuliuzhi* derived, in large measure, from her position as a housewife. Mrs. King’s husband owned a private clinic in Tainan, so she worked at home to manage the clinic and take care of five children. In 2001, she started to promote household management and took it up as a serious profession. She gave lectures in communities and published books to promote her idea of “kitchen management,” teaching the correct way to use a refrigerator and effectively prepare meals. Arguing that a housewife should be considered a professional worker whose responsibilities require considerable knowledge and creativity, she claimed that the dish *wuliuzhi* reveals the wisdom of housewives well. Mrs. King explained that when Taiwanese housewives would serve this dish, they would reserve the whole fish for their husband and children and would, themselves, eat only the five vegetables on top. As the five vegetables had diverse nutritional elements and were delicious as prepared in the dish, housewives—even in the absence of fish—could enjoy the dish with their families. In addition, Mrs. King stated that many normal dishes can be transformed into delicious dishes after cooking them with these five ingredients. As such, according to Mrs. King, *wuliuzhi* is not only a cooking method perfectly embodying the wisdom of Taiwanese women, but also a symbol of Taiwanese families.

Although this dish was popular haute cuisine during the early period of the Japanese colonial era and can be found in the menus of famous restaurants, the origin of this dish and the meaning of the term *wuliuzhi* remain uncertain. *Wuliu* is the alternative name of the famous Chinese poet Tao Yuan-ming (365-427 A.D.); however, it is still uncertain why this name was adopted as the name of a dish. Lin Wen-yue, a Chinese literature scholar (see Chapter Four) who can cook this dish also notes that the origin of this dish is unknown (Lin, 1999, p. 142). In other words, Mrs. King’s interpretation is perhaps her own invention based on her lived experiences. Since the original meaning of this dish is unknown, consumers can change or expand a related meaning by conferring on the dish their own understanding of it.

In sum, Mrs. King’s identification of Taiwanese cuisine was rooted in a specific local perspective (a Tainan perspective) and a specific gender perspective (woman and mother). Her preferences for pork sauce, milkfish, and sautéed fish were apparently rooted in her social position and lived experiences: a child growing up in a rural Taiwanese region, an inhabitant of the important fishing region of Tainan, and a housewife. These personal experiences influenced not only her culinary preferences but also her understanding of Taiwanese cuisine. In her interpretation, pork sauce has symbolized the difficult life of the majority of Taiwanese people; the history of

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11 This dish can be found in Shinju, 1903, p. 76; “Oishi Taiwan ryōri [Delicious Taiwanese cuisine],” *TNSP*, 10/16/1934(6).
milkfish has represented the importance of Tainan, which is the ancient capital of Taiwan; and the sautéed fish wulizhi has revealed the wisdom of Taiwanese women. Shared by many Taiwanese people, these dishes represent typical Taiwanese life and should be remembered.

2.2 Perspectives relative to ethnicity

As a Hakka born in Xinzhu County, Mr. Tan\textsuperscript{12} was enthusiastic about introducing Hakka culinary culture to me and displayed his sensitivity to Hakka-ness. However, Mr. Tan’s consciousness of “being a Hakka” became prominent only after he left his Hakka village for Taipei at the age of 13. When he moved to Tonghua Street, one of the developing regions of Taipei City during the 1960s, where many migrants gathered, he found out about various Mainland and Haklo snacks and dishes for the first time. These new dining experiences highlighted ethnic differences in food and reminded him of his childhood memories of Hakka food.

This region had just started developing when I moved there, and most inhabitants there were migrants from other counties or areas just outside of Taipei. Many migrants sold food to make a living, and Hakka people tended to sell traditional Hakka snacks or dishes. It was quite easy to recognize Hakka people from what they sold … pickled vegetables, rice cake (粄), mochi cake (麻糬), and so on..., when you found someone selling these snacks, you knew they were Hakka. [Laughing] you did not even have to ask them whether they were Hakka!\textsuperscript{13}

Hakka migrants originally sold Hakka food to make a living, but these dishes or snacks evolved into a distinctive mark of Hakka ethnicity. Mr. Tan explained with confidence that the differences between Hakka food and other ethnic foods are significant. For example, he mentioned that qicengta (Ocimum basilicum) is a popular herb used by Hakka families. When I argued that Haklo families also used qicengta in cooking, Tan responded:

\textsuperscript{12} Mr. Tan was born in 1951 in Xinzhu County. At the time of the interviews, he was living in Taipei, selling vegetables in a market, and shouldering most of the responsibility in raising three children. His son had been my tutee for three years (between 1998 and 2001); therefore, I was familiar with his family and dining habits because of my weekly visits to his home over the course of three years. I conducted interviews with Mr. Tan twice in 2008 (for two hours on each occasion), and I interviewed his son twice.

\textsuperscript{13} Interview: Mr. Tan (3/8/2008, Taipei).
The Haklo might eat qicengta several times a week, but we Hakka eat qicengta in almost three meals everyday! We have had various ways of cooking it … When I lived in Xinzhu, I could smell the aroma of qicengta when I approached our house; its flavor was really special and strong. But now, the smell of qicengta is not so good. I do not know why, but its smell is different from what it used to be.14

Sensory perception is an important means by which cultural and historical memories are encoded in food (Seremetakis, 1994). The smell of qicengta reminded Mr. Tan of his childhood in a Hakka village and, therefore, served as a medium through which he could recall his childhood and old home. Also, qicengta was an indicator of sameness and difference to him: it was a way of bonding the Hakka together and separating them from other ethnic groups.

While the smell of qicengta constituted part of Mr. Tan’s memory of food and childhood, qicengta itself influenced the body of the Hakka people in his experience. When his first son was born, the hospital did a special inspection of his son’s liver after finding out that Mr. Tan was a Hakka. The doctor explained that this was because there was a higher percentage of Hakka who had a specific kind of liver disease, and “eating too much qicengta” was regarded as a possible reason for this liver disease at that time.15

These experiences constituted Mr. Tan’s bodily memory of qicengta and established a connection between the bodily memory and Hakka-ness. To Mr. Tan, food consumption has deeply embedded qicengta in the daily life and in the body of the Hakka people. He also associated Hakka food practices with the environment where the Hakka lived. He explained that the Hakka ate lots of qicengta not because qicengta was delicious but because it can grow in poor soil. Most Hakka were still quite poor during the 1950s, so it was common to eat qicengta as a daily vegetable. It was at this point that the smell of qicengta was connected to the tough environment where he grew up. Mr. Tan’s father had been a soldier usually absent from home, so Mr. Tan, as a child, had had to help his mother with various jobs to earn a tiny income. He recalled those hard days when he lived in the Hakka village:

My mother had to gather excrement for use as fertilizer, and this job was just one of many. She had to do so many kinds of work just to feed us…. I was very little at that time, and I always followed her around,

14 Interview: Mr. Tan.
15 However, there is no sufficient medical literature supporting the association between qicengta and liver diseases yet.
suffocating from the disgusting smell of toilets and counting the number of houses—that way, I knew when the job would be over.\textsuperscript{16}

In such a tough environment, Mr. Tan emphasized that they got food from nature, not from the market. Another Hakka dish that developed in this tough environment was “rice-wine crab” (嗆螃蟹). Mr. Tan claimed that

All senior Hakka have to be thoroughly familiar with this dish: catching small crabs from the river, bathing them in bottles with salt and rice wine, and then eating them without cooking them over heat. Few Haklo ate crab in this way. It is really, really delicious, very tasty.\textsuperscript{17}

Mr. Tan’s memory of childhood was linked to various smells or tastes from his lived experiences, and he made sense of these sensual experiences from a Hakka perspective. Even though my questions initially focused on his impression of Taiwanese cuisine, he immediately started to talk about Hakka food. As de Certeau, Giard, and Mayol (1998) argue, everyday food-consumption practices make “concrete one of the specific modes of relation between a person and the world, thus forming one of the fundamental landmarks in space-time” (p. 183). Mr. Tan conceived his eating as a Hakka foodway, and such a perspective as well as daily practice reversely confirms and strengthens the way he made sense of the world. Ethnicity served as an important means by which Mr. Tan understood the relationship between people in Taiwanese society.

The “four main ethnic groups” concept was an effective categorization for Mr. Tan, and the differences among ethnic groups were significant in his point of view. His wife came from a Haklo family, and they first met each other through an introduction provided by a matchmaker. Mrs. Tan worked in a company owned by her brother, and she invested most of her time and energy in her job. To take care of both his mother and children, Mr. Tan resigned from his job at the Taipei City Government’s Water Resource Agency in 1983, and subsequently helped his mother to plant and sell vegetables in the market near his home. Therefore, Mr. Tan did most of the housework, including cooking and child rearing.\textsuperscript{18} His marriage to a Haklo influenced his consciousness about ethnic groups in daily life. His understanding of Haklo people resulted mainly from his interactions with his wife and

\textsuperscript{16} Interview: Mr. Tan.
\textsuperscript{17} Interview: Mr. Tan.
\textsuperscript{18} The absence of the mother was also pointed out by Mr. Tan’s son, who even described his mother as “selfish” and “not taking care of the family” in a later interview (5/24/2008, Taipei).
her relatives. He used to compare the Hakka with the Haklo regarding food, customs, and ways of thinking. While married life had not met his expectations, Mr. Tan tended to attribute his wife’s disadvantages to her Haklo background. For example, he regarded the Haklo as clever calculators who concentrated more on business than family and who were not as painstaking as the Hakka when undertaking tasks, to such an extent that he even expressed regret at not having married a Hakka woman.

He again reflected this negative impression of the Haklo in his opinion regarding Taiwanese politicians who ignore the culture and importance of the Hakka. Although many DPP politicians claim the power of determination on behalf of “all Taiwanese,” Mr. Tan complained that these politicians actually privilege Haklo power and that their ignorance of the Hakka is obvious in their language use. Many politicians tend to speak Hokkien on public occasions, including in parliament and during election campaigns. Some politicians suggest that Hokkien should be the second national language after Mandarin. Mr. Tan criticized this suggestion, arguing that it completely neglects the Hakka language and that the “Taiwanese language” (Taiyu) should not exclusively refer to the language of the Haklo. Despite the establishment of the Council for Hakka Affairs, he stated, “I do not think that those politicians really care about Hakka affairs. Yes they care, but only during the election campaigns.” Therefore, he showed little interest in political issues and nation-building activities, such as the campaign for rectifying the official name of Taiwan and the political marches expressing the wish that Taiwan enter the United Nations. These activities aim to change the official name of Taiwan from the “Republic of China” to “Taiwan” and to equate a U.N. seat with international recognition of Taiwan’s national status, separate from China. Mr. Tan agreed that Taiwan was a distinctive nation composed of different ethnic groups, but he further emphasized that these ethnic groups should enjoy equal status. Therefore, he exhibited great enthusiasm for exploring the history of the Hakka and the migration of his family. For example, he had carefully preserved his family archives for his children. Furthermore, he had studied on his own the historical development of Taipei, particularly the region where he was living at the time of the interviews. He felt considerable pride in his historical knowledge and his research undertakings. However, his enthusiasm for the history of the Hakka and Taipei was not aroused by policies or politicians: he felt annoyed with many of them who “just make use of Hakka culture but do not understand it at all.” Mr. Tan’s words. He felt a sense of belonging to Taiwan as a nation, but further argued that the nation does not belong exclusively to Mainlanders or the Haklo people.

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19 Mr. Tan’s words.
In Mr. Tan’s case, he showed an obvious preference for Hakka food, understanding Taiwanese cuisine from an ethnicity perspective. His consciousness about ethnicity and nation echoed the “four major ethnic groups” concept. And both his memories of Hakka dishes and his interaction with other ethnic groups influenced the formation of his related perspectives.

2.3 Taiwanese cuisine as a national cuisine

Of the 11 informants who expressed clear definitions of Taiwanese cuisine, four argued that Taiwanese cuisine has been a national cuisine and is a crucial part of Taiwanese national culture. Of these four informants, A-de exemplifies an emphasis on the subjectivity and the nationhood of Taiwan. Born in Taizhong in 1949, A-de dropped out of high school at the age of 16 and started to learn photography. He had been working for newspapers and magazines as a professional photographer since 1974. As a professional photographer, A-de had taken thousands of photos of people, scenery, and folk activities across Taiwan. With the emergence in the late 1970s of social movements demanding more liberalization, A-de had many opportunities to contact activists and to participate in their political demonstrations. He agreed that Taiwan has been an independent nation and that Taiwanese people should have more power of determination. Furthermore, he and his friends who advocated political reforms preferred to dine in some “Taiwanese restaurants” that had become important sites where political dissidents assembled during the 1980s.

In my interviews with him, he stated that “Taiwanese cuisine” naturally refers to local dishes eaten by the majority of Taiwanese everyday. He placed emphasis on local snacks in particular, such as pork-sauce rice and spareribs soup. He argued that these local snacks are prepared in places where Taiwanese people grow up and, thus, the snacks are a crucial part of Taiwanese peoples’ lived experiences. Just as his photos of temples, ancient monuments, and elderly people would bring him a sense of “being rooted in this soil,” so too did local snacks. This is why he would feel comfortable when enjoying local snacks with which he was familiar. In contrast, he regarded beef noodles as a foreign dish that had been articulated by some Taiwanese politicians in recent years. He argued that beef noodles were “foreign” because this dish had not been widely enjoyed by the majority of local people until recent years, particularly not by people in rural areas. It is not what he had used to eat and not a taste rooted in his memory.

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20 A-de was born in 1949, I knew him through a friend who is also a photographer.
21 For example, A-du’s Taiwanese restaurant established in 1977 was known as a site where political rebels assembled before martial law was lifted, about A-du, also see Chapter Two.
Interestingly, while A-de regarded beef-noodles as a foreign dish, some other informants considered it a “national dish” representative of Taiwan. In line with Lu Yao-dong’s explanation of beef noodles’ historical origins (see Chapter Four), Jay believed that beef noodles had been an invention of modern Taiwan. He argued that this dish is a hybrid of the food eaten by Mainlanders and the food eaten by Taiwanese and is a symbol of newly shaped Taiwanese culinary culture. Born in 1969, Jay grew up during the period of political liberalization, accepting that Taiwan is a distinctive nation. Although he displayed no interest in advocating the independence of Taiwan during our interviews, his enthusiasm about Taiwanese food was obvious. Living in Kaohsiung for almost forty years, he had a list of “the best snacks, dishes, and specialties in Taiwan.” Jay felt highly proud of Taiwanese food and admired it as the best food in the world. When his friends visited Kaohsiung from other cities or countries, he would often take these friends on a “gourmet trip” in the city or even throughout Taiwan. Most of the dishes that he recommended were not haute cuisine in restaurants. Rather, he most strongly admired local snacks and regarded them as the “authentic Taiwanese taste.” These snacks included bowl cakes made of rice (碗粿), deep-fried meat dumplings (炸肉圓), and seafood sold by the seaside in Kaohsiung. Moreover, the snacks were cheap, substantial, and delicious, and Jay argued that these features are the decisive advantages of Taiwanese cuisine. Jay also took a positive attitude toward the emergence of state-banquet dishes. He agreed that local snacks should be adopted as state-banquet dishes because the adoption would attract more attention to local snacks and raise their social status.

Jay’s father ran a Chinese medical clinic located in a market in Kaohsiung City. When younger, Jay used to eat local dishes everyday and became acquainted with the owners of these stalls. Although he did not engage in political or social movements as A-de did, Jay voiced a sense of pride about Taiwanese cuisine, and this pride was similar to that voiced by A-de and the other two informants who regarded Taiwanese cuisine as a national cuisine. They agreed that Taiwan is a distinctive nation and expressed enthusiasm about Taiwanese cuisine, viewing it as a genuine and distinctive property of Taiwan.

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22 Jay was born in 1969 and worked in Kaohsiung at the time of the interview. I knew him through a friend before my fieldwork got underway in Kaohsiung in 2006. Jay introduced diverse local Kaohsiung snacks to me and introduced me to some owners of food stalls for interview purposes.
2.4 Perspectives relative to Chinese cuisine

While some informants defined Taiwanese cuisine as a national cuisine, others considered it a Chinese regional cuisine. The four informants taking this latter perspective exhibited a much stronger interest in Chinese cuisine than Taiwanese cuisine, with three of them being the descendants of Mainlanders.

Mrs. Hsieh’s family migrated from Mainland China to Taiwan in 1955 when the US navy helped the Nationalist government ship its supporters from Dachen Island to Taiwan. This military action was known as the “Dachen evacuation” during the civil war between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party. These evacuees constituted a migration that took place much later than the migration of other Mainlanders who moved to Taiwan between 1945 and 1949. Viewing Taiwan as a base for preventing the expansion of the Communist camp at that time, the US government was involved in the civil war and moved about 18,000 civilians and 15,000 troops from Dachen to Taiwan (Chen, 1987, p. 122). These people from Dachen were admired as “Dachen patriots” (Dachen yibao) by the Nationalist government. After the military evacuation, the government built 35 “New Dachen Villages” in 12 counties for the refugees and provided them with food for one year (Chen, 1987, pp. 118-119). In contrast to the “villages for military dependents” (see Chapter Two), these Dachen Villages were not administrated by the Ministry of National Defense; their organization was not as systematic as that of other military villages (Chen, 1987, p. 256).

Many of the Dachen people had been born not on Dachen Island but in Zhejiang, a coastal province near Dachen. This was the case with Mrs. Hsieh. Born in 1946 in Huangyan in Zhejiang, she moved to Dachen Island in 1947. Her father successfully ran a fishing boat business on Dachen and led a good life when she was very little. They had servants and cooks at home, and she even had her own nursing mother. Their financial condition worsened after her family’s move to Taiwan in 1955, when they started living in a New Village in Xinzhu County. The father’s fishing boat business could not survive the move. Mrs. Hsieh’s parents, instead, prepared dried eels (鰻魚乾) for a living, and at the age of 15, Mrs. Hsieh worked as an embroiderer, as did her four sisters.

Seafood is an essential food resource of Dachen people because Dachen Island is located near an important fishing ground, with most inhabitants engaged in the

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23 Mrs. Hsieh was born in 1951 in Zhejiang Province and lived in Taipei at the time of the interviews. Having worked in the Taipei City Government, she retired in 2006. Her son was my college classmate between 1995 and 1999, so I had information about their eating and dining habits before the interviews, which I conducted with Mrs. Hsieh on two separate occasions in 2008: the first interview lasted three hours, and the other lasted one hour. I got additional information from her son by means of informal interviews with him.
fishery industry (Chen, 1987, pp. 14-15; Chen, 1982, p. 10). Among other products, eel was popular and important as a festival food on the island. Every family on Dachen made dried eels before the Chinese New Year, with dried eels thus becoming a “taste of home” for many older Taiwanese who had lived on Dachen for many years. Even after leaving Dachen for Xinzhu, many of these people made dried eels for food or business in the Taiwan-based villages where former Dachen people now resided. In the interviews, Mrs. Hsieh remembered the various methods of cooking eel:

We cut eels from the back and dried them naturally, using the strong wind. We had a very large square for drying them in our village…. Dried eel is really delicious; it has a very appealing flavor. We would just slice it, and beer goes well with the taste of dried eel, the flavor is really great. Furthermore, you can cook it with rice cakes or stir-fried noodles…. As for the eel head and tail, they are wonderful to stew with meat.24

Mrs. Hsieh noted, as well, that dried shrimp and “fish noodles” (魚麵) are representative Dachen specialties. Made with fish and sweet-potato starch, fish noodles are actually a kind of seasoning that can be added to any dish. “It can create a very special flavor for all dishes,”25 Mrs. Hsieh claimed.

Migration-food studies and Chapter Four of the current study both show that many migrants have maintained their original eating habits, viewing food as a connection between themselves and their home countries. As Kunow (2003) argues, food is essentially a representation used to support constructions of an “imaginary homeland” (Rushdie, 1991), and food thus becomes a negotiation between “here” and “there” (p. 158). This phenomenon is also true in Mrs. Hsieh’s case. She was excited about depicting the details of the specialties from her hometown, complaining that her sons were not interested in these dishes so she seldom would cook them anymore. However, she would still prepare this “taste of home” during the Chinese New Year and other festivals, not because these dishes were popular in her family but because she was emotionally attached to the community and to the land of her origin. For Mrs. Hsieh, cooking and eating Dachen food was a way of enacting the past and embodying cultural memory. Through preparing and sharing one’s traditional hometown foods on special communal occasions, like Chinese New Year, a common sense of belonging can establish itself and resurrect itself regularly.

25 Mrs. Hsieh presented me with a detailed explanation of each step in the preparation of fish noodles. She mentioned that she had made fish noodles when she missed its flavor, but that now she would seldom make them because her family had no interest in the seasoning.
Figures 5.4 & 5.5 Festive foods from Dachen Island

I conducted my interviews with Mrs. Hsieh just after the Chinese New Year, so she gladly showed me the Dachen foods she had prepared for the festival. Figure 5.4 (left) shows Dachen rice cakes (in red bags) (大陳年糕) and fruit rice cakes (百果鬆糕) (a snack from Zhejiang Province), which are available in only a few shops established by the Dachen people. Figure 5.5 (right) is a kind of fish cake made by one of Mrs. Hsieh’s sisters.

What needs to be highlighted is that Mrs. Hsieh’s preference for Dachen food displays not only a nostalgic emotion but also a sense of pride and distinction, and the sense of pride is closely associated with an image of a Dachen patriot. Mrs. Hsieh reminded me of the difference between New Dachen Villages and military dependent’s villages, emphasizing that Dachen people differ from other Mainlanders because the Dachen people are established patriots. To Mrs. Hsieh, Dachen people shared an experience of extraordinary suffering during the war and, under great duress, retreated from their tiny island because of orders issued by the Nationalist government. Although forced to leave home during military action, most Dachen people felt relieved to move to Taiwan under the leadership of Chiang Ching-kuo, the son of Chiang Kai-shek. Before the evacuation, the younger Chiang had visited Dachen Island several times, even during bombardments. Chiang’s visits were viewed as a sign of the government’s deep respect for the Dachen; the order to evacuate was

26 This assertion was suggested by Mrs. Hsieh in the interview, with Ke’s research on the Dachen people offering a similar observation. Dachen people respected Chiang Ching-kuo and thanked him for his visits during the war; their trust in him was an important reason for the evacuation’s smooth execution. See Ke, 2002, pp. 45-49.
also regarded as an immediate way to avoid the endless bombing. It is in this context that many Dachen people expressed gratitude to the Nationalist government, particularly to Chiang’s family. In addition to the military action that took them to a safer place, the government provided them with practical financial and educational support. For example, in 1955 Madam Chiang established Guang Hua Children’s Home, which comprised both a kindergarten and an elementary school, to care for 201 children from Dachen Island and for orphans of soldiers.27 The school expanded gradually into a junior high school (1958) and, then, into a senior high school (1969), and all the students enjoyed both the facilities and meals free of charge.

The Dachen who received such care from the government trusted and relied extensively on the Nationalist leaders. Mrs. Hsieh herself graduated from the elementary school established by Madam Chiang, and Mrs. Hsieh’s two brothers received their senior high school degrees from the same school. She expressed gratitude for the educational opportunity because it gave her and others an opportunity to get good jobs. Her gratitude toward the Chiang family and the Nationalist government was apparent in my interviews with her. For example, when she described the re-establishment of Dachen Villages, she could not remember exactly who had formulated the policy, but she soon attributed it to Chiang Ching-kuo, saying “he is the only person who was really concerned about us.”

Mrs. Hsieh’s food narratives about her hometown were intertwined with her memory of the forced migration; in turn, the migration is closely associated with the “nation,” which directly and in large measure refers to the Nationalist government and particularly to the Chiang family. In other words, Mrs. Hsieh’s past experience of migration constituted the grounding for both her memory of food and her political identification with the nation.

3. Without a clear definition of “Taiwanese cuisine”

It is not the case that all Taiwanese consumers of food have a clear image of what Taiwanese cuisine is. Six informants in this research had no idea about Taiwanese cuisine at all and knew of no difference between Taiwanese cuisine and Chinese regional cuisines. Two informants referred to some family dishes as Taiwanese cuisine, such as stewed pork and boiled chicken; and five informants raised an alternative categorization of dishes, in which Taiwanese cuisine was a meaningless category.

27 It was renamed Hua Xin Children’s Home in 1956.
Most of the six consumers who had no conception at all of Taiwanese cuisine did not live in Taipei (i.e., Mrs. Yang from Tainan, Mrs. Peng from Taidong, Mrs. Ye from Taoyuan, and Mr. and Mrs. Guo from Penghu). In addition, all six consumers were housewives except for Mr. Guo and Mrs. Huang, who was a retired junior high school teacher. They had been cooking for their families most of their lives and seldom ate out; therefore, they had no idea about the classification of certain cuisines and restaurants. Their impressions of Taiwanese cuisine came from advertisements and the media, a situation that explains why they were well aware of some famous “Taiwanese restaurants.” Even so, they had little interest in dining in these restaurants out of financial considerations. Both Mrs. Peng and Mrs. Ye argued that the dishes served in “Taiwanese restaurants” are easily cooked at home and that there was, thus, no sound reason to spend lots of money in restaurants for these normal dishes. In the opinion of these two housewives, eating out would mean “to eat something one cannot make at home,” and the monetary value of dishes was their most important consideration governing whether or not to eat out.

Such an attitude toward eating out can be traced back to their tough lives during childhood. Born in villages in remote counties in Taiwan, Mrs. Cheng, Mr. Guo, and Mrs. Peng had led self-sufficient lives, as shown in Chapter One, and even as children had had to work hard for their families. Before the 1970s, they would eat chiefly dried sweet potato and pickled vegetables, and would add a little meat to their diets only during the Chinese New Year or for religious festivals in their villages. Interestingly, although the festival dishes they remembered are listed as authentic Taiwanese cuisine in cookbooks, media, and Taiwanese restaurant menus nowadays, these consumer-informants did not acknowledge these dishes as “Taiwanese cuisine” during my interviews.

Five informants raised an alternative categorization for the cuisines in question. Mrs. Shi, of Aboriginal ethnicity, simply categorized dishes as Aboriginal cuisine or Han cuisine, and there was no difference between Taiwanese cuisine and Chinese cuisine in her mind. For Mr. and Mrs. Xu, a couple living on Penghu Island for almost 80 years, Taiwanese cuisine referred to all dishes from Taiwan Island, as Penghu has its own specific food culture that is influenced by poor soil, windy weather, and the fisheries industry. Another informant, Mr. Li, was a special case. Growing up in an extraordinarily rich family emphasizing Western education, he started to enjoy steak, apple pie, and English afternoon tea during the 1950s and 1960s. Hence, he adopted the categorization of Chinese and Western cuisine; in contrast, Taiwanese cuisine was a meaningless category to him.

This current section will focus on the alternative categorizations given by Ms. Ming and explore the gap between her culinary preferences and national
consciousness, which will help further clarify the complicated relationship between the two factors.

Ms. Ming\textsuperscript{28} worked in a company which had been owned by the Nationalist Party, and most of her colleagues were descendants of Mainlanders who had migrated to Taiwan after 1945. She said that when they would ask an office worker where he or she was from, the answer should be a province of China, not somewhere in Taiwan. For example, Ms. Ming’s parents were from Shanghai, so she was Shanghainese. Furthermore, having received a degree in Chinese literature, she admitted that she favored Chinese culture and was inclined to support Taiwan’s future unification with the Mainland. In short, Ms. Ming expressed “Chinese identity” in both cultural and political domains. In contrast, her food preferences were various, starting with a specific Chinese regional cuisine (Zhejiang cuisine) and extending to various Chinese foods, Thai foods, and Western foods; at the time of the interviews, her favorite was Hakka cuisine.

Ms. Ming’s parents moved from Shanghai to Taiwan after the Second World War; thus, her mother would prepare many Shanghai dishes. As her mother prohibited her children from eating out, the young Ms. Ming had few chances to eat local snacks from food stalls and even had no experience of eating Chinese dumplings (\textit{jiaozi}), a typical food from northern China. According to her self-description, her food map expanded for the first time in junior high school, where she shared a lunch box with her best friend whose mother hailed from Hunan Province. Hunan cuisine is famous for its spicy taste, and Ms. Ming described to me the food in her friend’s lunch box as having a “very heavy-taste, using lots of peppers, vinegar, and garlic; anyway, it was very spicy.” In contrast to the sour and spicy taste of Hunan dishes, Ms. Ming described the taste of Shanghai cuisine as the “taste of soy sauce and sugar.” In other words, she would distinguish these regional cuisines by her sensual memory of its taste; she had no interest in acquiring more information about the history or the recipes of these cuisines.

Ms. Ming’s taste map expanded again after she met her partner, who was born in a Hokkien-speaking peasant family, where she “found many surprises on the dining table.” This is where she first developed an understanding of “local food in Taiwan.”

My boyfriend is an authentic \textit{Benshengren}, and I am an authentic \textit{Waishengren}\textsuperscript{29}; therefore, we have found many differences between us.

\textsuperscript{28} Born in 1967 in Taipei, Ms. Ming was working in a Taipei-based media position at the time of my interview. I knew her through a friend who was Ms. Ming’s colleague. I conducted my three-hour interview with her in 5/24/2008.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Benshengren} and \textit{Waishengren}, literally “inner province people” and “people from other provinces,” are terms used in Taiwan to distinguish local people from “Mainlanders” who moved from the Mainland to Taiwan after the Second World War mainly during 1945-1949.
when eating. For example, I have never eaten “pickled cucumber with pork” (瓜仔肉) and “fried eggs with dried radish” (菜脯蛋), but they are authentic “Taiwanese cuisine,” aren’t they? And my boyfriend had never eaten yellow bean sprouts until he knew me, but the ingredient is quite normal in the meals of my family.30

Aware of the food-related differences between her and her partner, she concluded that these differences were rooted in the different life styles of the Bensheng and Waisheng families:

I found there was a radical difference between our families: my mother took two hours to prepare a meal, so she made dishes in a complicated, slow way, but my boyfriend’s mother had to cook quickly for a big family, basically within 30 minutes. Well…his mother also had to work on the farm, but my mother was a housewife. As a result, our dishes were different. For example, my mother prepared sparerib soup every day, and the soup would need to be stewed for two hours, but he [Ms. Ming’s boyfriend] did not know anything about the dish during his childhood.31

Ms. Ming’s comparison revealed her awareness of differences between Bensheng and Waisheng, implying that Bensheng and Waisheng was a normal method of categorization, a naturalized reference structure that would guide her comparisons. She would put this reference structure into practice when attempting to identify differences in daily-life food. She could distinguish the dishes of her boyfriend’s peasant family from those of her own urban family, pointing out their features and ascribing the culinary differences to differences in modes of labor. Ms. Ming did not regard the culinary differences as regional differences or as rural-urban differences; instead, she labeled them as Bensheng and Waisheng differences. Ms. Ming could not explain to me how she had come by the classification of Bensheng and Waisheng, and this inability likely stemmed from her unconscious adoption of this classification.

What should be underlined here is that although Ms. Ming continued to use the Bensheng and Waisheng classification consciously and could list different dishes in both categories, she did not consider “Bensheng cuisine” to be “Taiwanese cuisine.” Ms. Ming admitted to me that she seems “to have no idea at all of what Taiwanese cuisine is.” While Ms. Ming acquired her conception of Bensheng and Waisheng by repeating her family’s dining practices and then by comparing those practices with the practices of her partner and of his family. Throughout this complex

31 Interview: Ms. Ming.
back-and-forth process, the notion of Taiwanese cuisine remained absent in her perceptions of tastes.

Nevertheless, Ms. Ming’s map of tastes expanded as she acquired more experiences, and she claimed to me that her tastes had grown quite different from the tastes of her original family, and that her current preference was for Hakka cuisine. She liked Hakka dishes because of their rich and salty flavors; in contrast, dishes associated with Shanghai and Bensheng were too sweet for her. However, although she liked Hakka dishes and wanted to travel around the countryside to experience other authentic Hakka dishes, she had little interest in either the history of the Hakka people or the stories behind these dishes. When she enjoyed food in Hakka restaurants, she did not think of the features of Hakka people that are often embedded in Hakka cuisine and that include the people’s historical hardships and the people’s frugal way of life. Rather, she just enjoyed the tastes of the foods and gave other matters “not much thought.”

Her case shows the disconnections among her culinary preferences, her memories, and her identity. She emphasized that although she had some preferred foods, there were actually few foods that she did not accept. While some consumers believe that food can carry ethical, cultural, or historical meanings, she seldom associated food with a specific culture. Although she knew about certain differences among regional dishes, she did not link them to culture, ethnicity, or nationalism. In other words, in contrast to the informants whose culinary preferences exhibited these informants’ stronger identification with a nation or nationalism, in the case of Ms. Ming, food and national or cultural identity were disconnected. In short, she did not treat food as a bearer of culture, and thus, she rather easily crossed the boundaries separating cuisines. People who detach food from culture, as did Ms. Ming, may show interest in food and cooking but do not value it as the heritage of an ethnic group or a nation.

4. What makes food “Taiwanese” to the respondents?

4.1 Social position and social experience

The comparison of the above cases shows that “Taiwanese cuisine” is not meaningful to all consumers. People who regard Taiwanese cuisine as a meaningful concept understand it from diverse perspectives. Consumers’ social positions and social experiences are influential in shaping these diverse perspectives through bodily memories of specific flavors and dining contexts. In concrete terms, the consumers’ understandings of Taiwanese cuisine are established on two grounds. The
first ground comprises a set of eating behaviors concerning food preparation (planting and cooking), eating, and sharing. By repeating these food practices in daily life, consumers develop their own food memories and habits, such as milkfish for Mrs. King and qicengta for Mr. Tan. Second, these memories and habits gain different meanings through their specific social positions that relate to gender, ethnicity, and social class. The social position of an individual is often multi-faceted, as is the identity of an individual. The weight of different facets of identity varies among individuals and heavily depends on their social positions and lived experiences.

In addition to different definitions of “ Taiwanese cuisine,” the correlation between culinary preferences and national consciousness differs from consumer to consumer. While some consumers—such as Mrs. King, Mr. Tan, A-de, and Mrs. Hsieh—exhibit coherent tendencies in culinary preference and in national consciousness, the connections are not so obvious in other cases. Chaney’s concept of “ sensibility” is a useful reference for clarifying how culinary preferences are linked to one’s perception of nation. Chaney defines “ sensibility” as

…a way of responding to events, or actions or phenomena that has a certain pattern or coherence, to the extent that identifying a sensibility provides a way of explaining or predicting responses to new situations…these responses and choices are imbued by those concerned with ethical and aesthetic significance—ways of living that are fundamental to a sense of identity. (Chaney, 1996, p. 8)

In other words, sensibility is a framework inscribed in an individual, serving as principles guiding one’s behavior and one’s reactions to varying social conditions. Imbued with ethical and aesthetic concerns, the framework is a reference structure that people employ to make sense of their experiences.

Adopting the concept of “ sensibility” and Bourdieu’s concept of “ habitus,” Tivadar and Luthar (2005) show that there has been a significant association of Slovenian consumers’ food practices with the consumers’ worldviews and cultural consumption. The researchers argue that sensibility is “ a selection and configuration of interests and practices and a particular valuation of them,” which can produce a distinct way of life where variables in the field of culture or politics are consistent with variables in the fields of food (p. 216). In this sense, food-consumption preferences and impressions are better understood as articulations of ethical, political, and cultural choices that “ together form a predictable homology, which results in an identifiable sensibility,” and the homology comes from a specific inherent logic within the framework (Ibid.). Therefore, Tivadar and Luthar argue that food practices and attitudes should be considered in relation to cultural, ethical, and political
attributes and not only to socio-demographic factors such as class, education, and gender.

The concept of “sensibility” provides a possible explanation for the association between culinary preference and national consciousness. Sensibility rests on certain unifying principles that can influence the total repertoire of an individual’s practices, including speech patterns, cultural consumption, and food practices. These unifying principles influence individuals’ behaviors and social actions, as well as their food consumption. For example, Mrs. King’s preference for Taiwanese cuisine and Mrs. Hsieh’s preference for Chinese cuisine represent their coherent political and cultural dispositions by which individuals situate themselves in the world. Their perceptions of Taiwanese cuisine and their food-consumption behaviors are guided by the same sensibility that serves as the basis on which an individual makes sense of the world. It is on the same basis that culinary preference and national consciousness can be linked. When consumers do not have such common ground that can produce coherent attitudes in political, ethnic, and aesthetic spheres, or when the common ground is not solid, then there will be either no or weak coherence between national consciousness and food preferences.

Bodily memory is influential in the formation of such common grounds. When individuals have explicit bodily memories about food and nation (though they may not be conscious of it), the sensibility is more obvious. For example, Mrs. King’s memory of the painful life under colonial rule and of pork, Mr. Tan’s memory of poor Hakka people and of the smell of qicengta, and Mrs. Hsieh’s memory of migration and of various fish on Dachen Island. These explicit linkages between nationhood or ethnicity and food can further strengthen people’s sensibilities. In contrast, although Ms. Ming expressed a clear national identity and Mrs. Cheng as well as Mrs. Peng had many experiences of suffering and deprivation in their childhood, there was relatively little interaction between their understanding of nation and their experience of food. Thus, the correlation between their culinary preferences and national consciousness was weak.

4.2 Need for inclusion and exclusion

The examples introduced in this chapter show that food can help to define “me” and “us,” and can thus serve as part of our physical surroundings. Bell and Valentine (1997) argue that food “articulates notions of inclusion and exclusion, of national pride and xenophobia” (p. 168). This chapter demonstrates that the meaning of food and its function of inclusion and of exclusion operate only when the individual or the collective conceives of the meaning or even actively constructs the meaning that is assigned to foods. These meanings, despite emerging in repeated daily-life practices,
do not self-evidently act as a boundary-marker, and the imbedding effect of “nation” is not the same across all consumers. One’s continual awareness regarding one’s own identity and repeated practices that are manifest in dining habits translates national identity into “a language that people can understand and experience, even if unconsciously” (Palmer, 1998, p. 195). For some consumers such as A-de and Jay, body can act as a critical site for the performance of identity; however, for consumers who do not confer cultural values on food, “national cuisine” is less meaningful.

Furthermore, the examples in this chapter illustrate that consumers can play an active role in defining the meaning of Taiwanese cuisine. Mrs. King interpreted the dish *wuliuzhi* in her own way and promoted it in her household-management class. Through teaching in communities and publishing, her ideas were being disseminated to a wider population. Consumers who neither teach nor publish have their own interpretations of Taiwanese cuisine. Despite those who love to eat Taiwanese cuisine, state banquets can still be meaningless. Even in cases where consumer behavior echoes the idea of nation-building, these behaviors are not necessarily the product of political ideology or politicians. For example, Mrs. King and Mr. Tan exhibited a strong “Taiwanese consciousness” or “Hakka consciousness”; however, this consciousness resulted not so much from political movements and propaganda as from these individuals’ own experiences and understanding, which had accumulated over the course of daily life. In other words, consumer support of national cuisine cannot be explained only by the influence of government and politicians. Government and politicians may reversely seek support by articulating discourses that echo consumers’ experiences and understanding, such as the promotion of Hakka cuisine.

Food is often viewed as a boundary marker in anthropological research. Sutton (2001) suggested that there is a broad consensus that food is about “identity creation and maintenance” (p. 5). However, this chapter’s examination of consumers reveals the restricted boundary-marker roles that food can play. In the case of Taiwanese cuisine, consumers have different understandings and interpretations of Taiwanese cuisine. Although in some cases, consumers prefer to assemble in a Taiwanese restaurant and although they exhibit obvious Taiwanese national consciousness, their preference for Taiwanese cuisine cannot be explained only by their identification with Taiwanese nationhood. In other words, the preference for Taiwanese cuisine cannot be interpreted as a pure expression of Taiwanese identity. The correlation between culinary preference and national consciousness would appear to result from common grounds of sensibility. Social positions, the social experiences of consumers, and their need for inclusion and exclusion all influence consumer perceptions of “Taiwanese cuisine.”