

The Sacrifice Of The Beef Noodle Soup

“Oh! This restaurant has beef noodle soup!” Standing in front of Taiwan Café, a small restaurant hiding in the corner of Forbes Avenue, I shouted at my friends excitedly. That occurred exactly one week after I arrived in America. To be honest, I was crazy about American fast food in China, like McDonald’s and pizzas, and I would even go to eat them every week. If I did not do so, I would feel at a loss. However, during my first week in America, I ate McDonald’s and pizzas nearly each meal, and I became kind of bored by eating those fast foods. I began to miss food with less oil, more vegetables and more ways of cooking--food that I did not pay much attention to before coming to America--the Chinese food. I found I began to miss beef noodle soup unexpectedly, the kind of quotidian food which I would never think of at home. But now, the soup evoked a feeling of longing for the women in my life who sacrificed themselves for me.

Walking downstairs into Taiwan Café, I had a strong feeling of belonging, maybe because of its small scale, the yellow and dim light, like a small restaurant which I always went to after class near my high school and the familiar smell, not the smell of fried chicken and potatoes but the smell of soy sauce and vinegar. Reading the menu written in Chinese and describing the familiar food made me feel at ease. But as I relaxed in the Café, I recalled a main problem that I encountered in an American eatery which is that I could not understand what the menu says; I could not figure out from the name of food and I could not recognize the taste of sauce just literally. Even when I selected a drink, I waited and waited as the last one to order so as to imitate what my friends had ordered because I could not understand the complex names of drinks. You can never imagine that kind of

embarrassment when I asked the waiter to repeat the choices again and again, but I did not understand even a word!

After reading the whole Chinese menu, I still decided to order the beef noodle soup instead of other more delicious dishes. Suddenly, the word “beef noodle soup” reminded me of my past days in China when I saw it.

I entered an elementary school attached to the university my grandparents worked in. They have an apartment near my elementary school so that I would go to their home during the lunch break. My grandmother can cook various kinds of dishes. When I was little, I always sat around the big, round and wooden table, waiting for the delicious lunch made by her. She always tried different kinds of dishes everyday so that I would feel curious and content about the new food. But there was a tradition in my family: every Wednesday, she always made beef noodle soup for me. Always she put some greens into the beef noodle soup to pursue the beauty of dishes. She always told me:” The beef is dark red and noodles are white. If we put some greens into the soup, not only will we have a balanced diet, but also will have a beautiful dish.” Gradually, my cousins arrived at the age of elementary school students and they entered the same elementary school as I did. Five people joined the table: my grandparents, my two cousins and I. Because my cousins and I were in a growth spurt, we always ate a lot. Even though my grandmother prepared enough noodles for us, we still ate very fast to get another bowl of beef noodle soup, playing a kind of like a competing game. My grandmother always looked at us doing this with a gracious smile. That becomes an image presenting home in my brain for ever: my grandfather ate his own noodles silently, my cousins and I ate fast and noisily, slurping our noodles to compete, and

my grandmother sat at the other side of table, looking at us and smiling peacefully.

After being admitted into the middle school, I began to eat at my own home, for my grandparents' home is far away from my middle school. My mother sacrificed her position in a chemistry factory and became a housewife in order to take care of me. At first, she couldn't cook as well as my grandmother so that I always complained about the taste to my mother. One day, after sitting on the couch, my mother told me with excitement that she would give a surprise to me. Then I found a bowl of beef noodle soup on the table, exactly the kind that my grandmother made. I picked up the chopsticks on the table and had a bite of that and I found that the taste was the same, too! My mother told me that she went to visit my grandmother especially for learning how to cook my dishes. I burst into tears owing to my mother's patience and love. From then, every time when I eat beef noodle soup, I can always come up with an image that my mother learned from my grandmother how to put ingredients into the soup with patience and concentration just like a child learns how to walk.

After coming to America, I recalled something that I had ignored in China: I became aware that every single thing related to food, no matter the name of food, the ingredients put into food or the way of cooking, could become an association of home; although now I study far away from my hometown, just a bowl of beef noodle soup could elicit connections with my home and my family who love me deeply for me, which makes me feel that I just eat in my home and I didn't go abroad; I became aware that I could find an connection between my mother, my home and Pittsburgh through a bowl of beef noodle soup and that relieved my homesickness. The reason why I only became aware of that in America and not

home in China is because when I was at home, I could have access to the food from my home and my mother's deep love every day so that I was too accustomed to being around the food and my mother's love to realize how deeply I love the food of my home, and my family's love represented by it actually. Thanks to leaving the familiar environment, I began to realize those important things -- the love for my family, my hometown and the food in China -- in my life, which I failed to pay attention to before. More importantly, it reminded me of the sacrifice from my grandmother and my mother.

My grandmother shows her sacrifice for me by trying to overcome the physical problems to cook for me. My grandmother is already 80 years old and she has a kind of difficulty in walking now. But she always cooks my favorite food for me on her own whenever I visit her. In the summer, the hot kitchen made her t-shirt soaked by sweat. And owing to her difficulty in walking, she stumbled to the kitchen. The reason why she insisted to cook by herself was simple but moving because she wanted to cook for her granddaughter when she still had the physical ability of cooking. I spent almost all the time doing my schoolwork so that I had little time to visit grandmother. Each visit resembled a holiday that excited and delighted her a lot.

While my grandmother exerted her frail body to do the labor of cooking, my mother jeopardized her social and psychological well-being to care for me. After quitting her job, she became a housewife, which means that she has to face the boredom of domestic life and the lack of intellectual and social stimulation to make sure that food would nourish me properly so that I had energy for my studies. She had to stay in our home alone for the whole day except the short lunch break when my father and I would come back and enjoy

the meal. I am afraid of imagining her lonely and tedious day, for I think I would become crazy if I spent my days like she does: get up early in the morning to wake up my father and I and prepare for the breakfast; go out to buy fresh meats and vegetables for the lunch and dinner; listen to the monotonous noise from chopping and heating the oil; sit alone in front of the window to see the car in which my father drove me home after school and parked in the garage; and prepare the dinner in the same way as she did in the morning. But she was happy and satisfied at that time because she thought that she did something useful for me and I could accompany her at night when my father had work to finish. She has repeated her boring and unbearable days for about 8 years and she will continue more boring days without my company.

However, my grandmother and mother would hardly have chance to experience this satisfaction from sacrifice, for now I study in America, a country where I need to take a plane to arrive after 13 hours. A bowl of beef noodle soup which I had at a restaurant in America recalled the days in elementary school when I ate with my family and the day that my mother showed her achievement after learning from my grandmother, and more generally, their sacrifices for me. The long distance made me begin to realize that in the past, I was the center of my mother's life: what she did in her life was almost all about me. It's easy but painful for me to imagine my mother's life without me: she cannot sit in front of the window to wait for me coming back home and enjoying her food; she will face the lonely night alone. And owing to the conservative sense among the older generation which dictates that parents in the family should only work hard to support the whole family, my mother doesn't develop her own interests, which is the main reason why being a house wife has damaged

her intellectual and psychological well-being. From my point of view, people will be driven crazy easily if they do not have any social life or no interest to maintain the connections between individuals and society. Owing to be isolated from the society, people lose their ability of socializing easily and become afraid of getting along with and working with lots of various people again, which is the reason why my mother did not go back to work when I left home for university. I think my mother's situation is a common tragedy of time. Because it is so usual that the older generation in China focused only on earning money in order to support the whole family. As a result, they ignored their mental developments, for example, they were too engaged in working to find something that they were really interested in or to develop some interests. Also, in the 1970's and 1980's, people in China did not have accesses to knowledge and various interesting things as many as it does today. People did not have sufficient resources to gain information and also people in that period could not afford to buy books or equipment owing to the undeveloped technology. Consequently, jobs became the main part of their life and only if they lose this main part, they would become aimless and hopeless. In addition, an old sense rooted deeply in the older generation in China that women should sacrifice themselves if there are some needs of taking care of the whole family, for example, to sacrifice their social connections to become a housewife like what my mother did. I think that that sense is the reason why my mother would sacrifice what she owned, like her job, her intellectual stimulus and her social life to become a lonely housewife. That sense also made women think that they should do so because of the sense of responsibility. Owing to the inadequate objective condition and the old values, in my opinion, home becomes a "prison" for millions of women, forcing them to sacrifice their

own jobs, interests or dreams, just for the purpose of taking care of the whole family.

Yet I will never do what my mother did, because the time when I was born and grew up is totally different, and the new and different time, a time with more open values, has broken this kind of sense. However, I really appreciated my mother owing to her courage, her sacrifice, her deep love and the sense of responsibility for the whole family. At the same time, I know clearly that millions of women of my mother's generation or even the younger generation (because of the lack of education and the traditional values which has already rooted in their minds) in China, even around the world, still suffer the pain that my mother has experienced.

"It's your beef noodle soup." The waitress served my noodles and her words interrupted me from thinking. I took off my glasses, in case of the moisture, picked up the chopsticks on the table and began to eat fast like what I did at home. The bowl of beef noodle soup made me feel familiar and have a sense of going back home but meanwhile made me feel guilty, worried and fretted owing to the sacrifice of my mother, the sacrifice of women like my mother and the unfair opinion which the sacrifice represents women's duty.