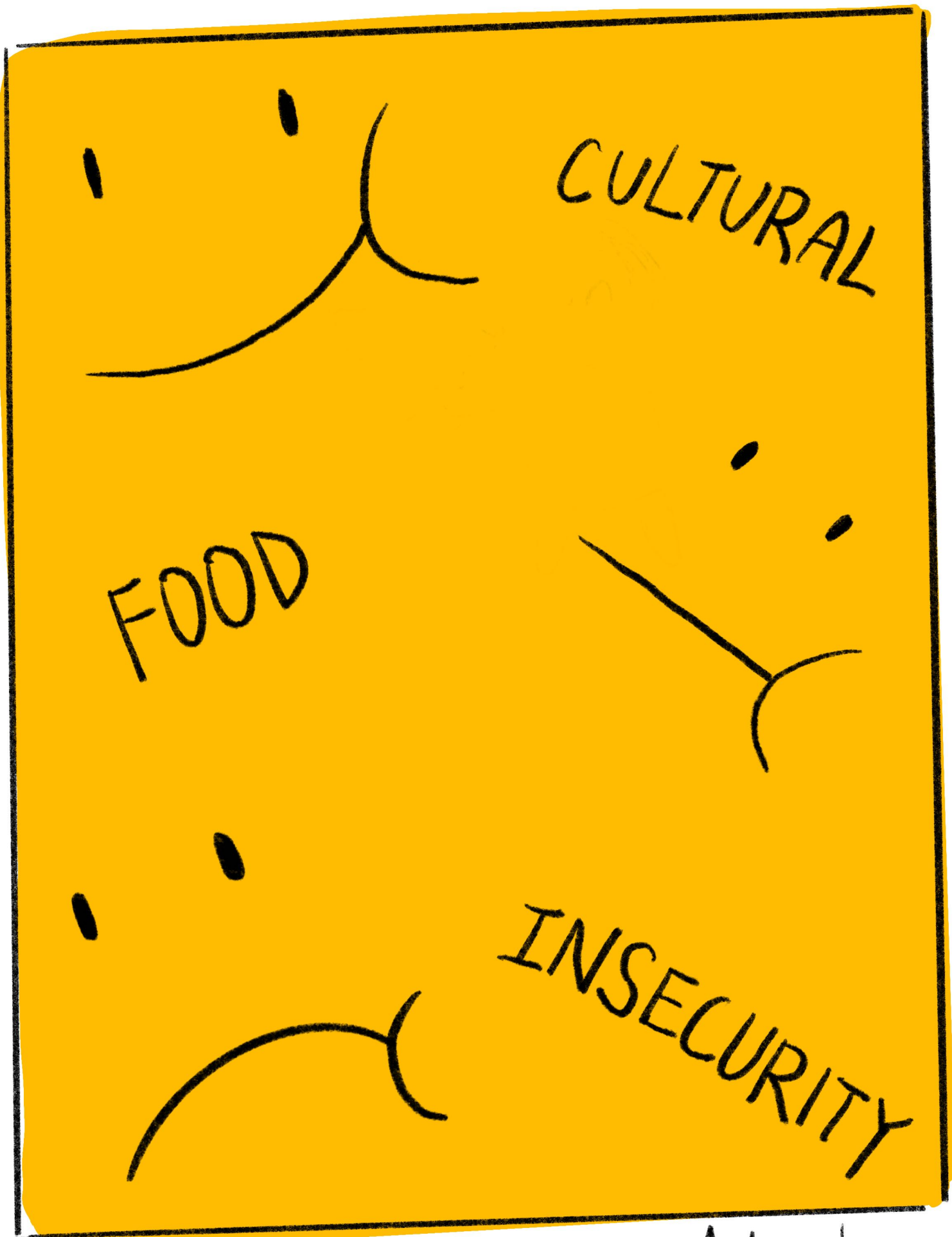


A Comic about a HK migrant's food accessibility in UBC Canada



18th April 2024

第一章：糖

chapter 1 : sugar



③ 到加拿大一個月後... 1 month in Canada...



點解我一次過有四隻牙蛀左!?

我有睇住飲食嘢...

How tf do I have 4 cavities all at once!?

I tried hard in watching what I eat...



4

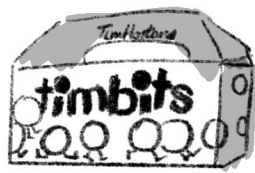
Breakfast @ dining hall



muffins and sweet pasteries...

In many Uni events and functions...

Have a tim bit!



Emotional stresses due to migration = stress eating on sweet?



Canada's food culture has a frightening obsession with sugary stuff... I am highly exposed to its availability compare to HK...

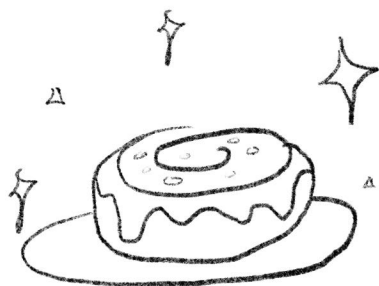


加拿大的飲食文化好多糖同甜野... 比起香港,我喺加拿大簡直比糖包圍住...

5

Due to trauma sometimes I have a visceral reaction when I lay my eyes on sweets

因為之前的心理創傷我見到甜野可以誇張到有D反胃...



get away from me!



To be continued...

Common staple foods in VBC's dining hall

VBC 飯堂常見的主食

①



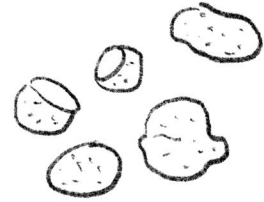
Pasta 通粉

②



Bread 麵包

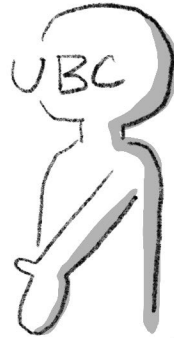
③



Potato 薯仔



我是南方人，
要食飯的！
I am from the south
I need to eat rice!



Oh yes of course!
We have rice ~

Types of rice in VBC's dining hall

VBC 飯堂的飯種

①



印度香米 Basmati rice

②



棕米 Brown rice

③



(涼)白飯 (for 拌飯)

(cooled) white rice (for smth like poké bowls)



What is it?



XX老母!
最簡單的熱白飯
唔識做呀?!
VBC人口咁多亞洲人
想餓死我哋呀?!
DLLM!
You can't even make simple
hot white rice?!
VBC's population has a lot
of Asians, wanna starve
us!?



Well, you can just buy take out or eat out!
Go grocery shopping and cook for yourself!

In first year housing, you require us to have the meal plan, that's already goddamn expensive, and you feed us unsuitable food!
Spending additional money on my own food when I already paid for food seems redundant ah!
How is that logical to spend more money due to your incompetence?

當我有了我第一個電飯煲...
When I had my first rice cooker...

飯香味~ The sweet scent of rice~
Ahh—I am in heaven!

moved out of the dorm
搬出去住後...

I already spent too much in your stupid tuition fee and immigrating here...

lack of rice → not a meal
I don't psychologically feel like I have eaten,
I am pretty sure I slimmed down a lot from that...



When I had dinner with relatives...
同親戚食飯時...

係熱乎的白飯...
It's hot white rice...

學校無餵飽你咩?
Did the school not feed you?

NO...

咁食多啲啦...
Then eat more here...

萬分感謝...
Thank you so much...

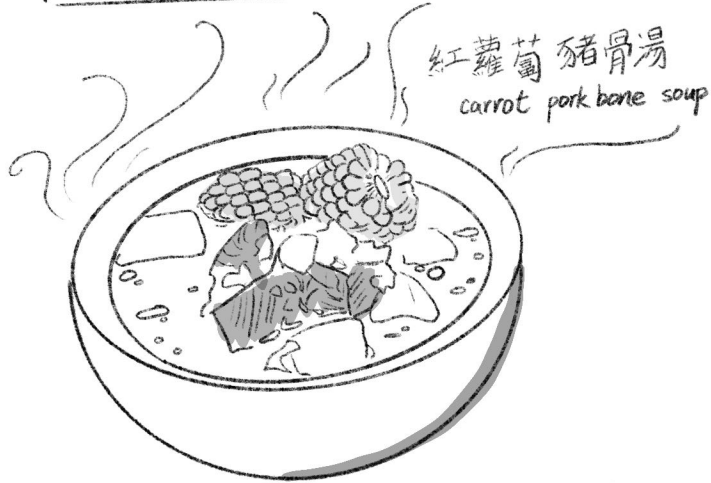


然後打包了剩飯返去...
Then packed up the remaining rice to bring back home~

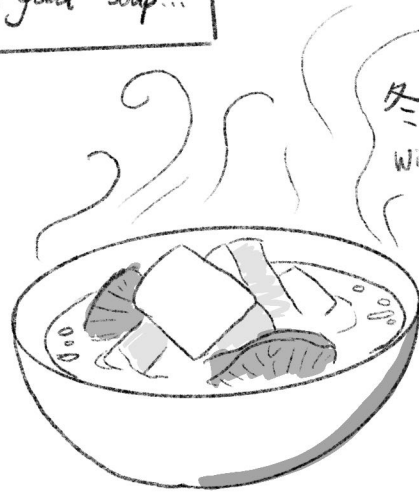


to be continued...

一餐家常菜，一定有靚湯飲...
A homecooked meal must include some good soup...



紅蘿蔔豬骨湯
carrot pork bone soup



冬瓜湯
winter melon soup

← 夏天飲，可消暑
drunken in summer
good for cooling off

and many more...

中式的湯又養生又清淡

湯是家裏煲的，按照季節

和家人的身體狀況去煲

不同款式的湯...

湯代表家的團結和照顧。



Chinese style soup is light & nourishing

Soup is home made, and according

to the seasons and

individual health, different kinds

of soups are made...

Soup symbolises the domestic,

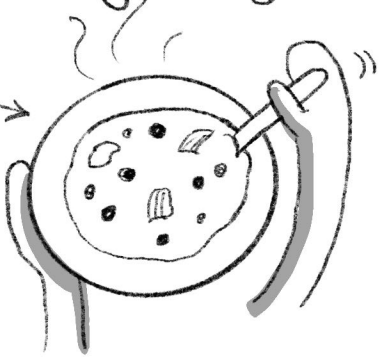
the family unit and its care.*

*(Cheng, 1997)

In Canada, the soups in the dining hall are all salty, oily and creamy ... and I don't know who made this soup!

It had no origin and made by invisible hands

some chowder soup



The lack of good light soup reminds me that I am far from family, the family unit is in diaspora ...



So when my aunties sent me soup packets, I truly felt that I am loved...



Thank you Aunty!
AA 謝謝 姑婆!



To be Continued ...

In the UBC dining hall...
在 UBC 的飯堂...



Day 1: cold salad
涼沙拉



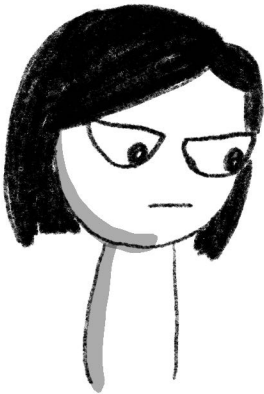
Day 2: caesar salad
(x croutons)
凱薩沙拉



Day ∞: also salad
又是沙拉

全都是涼的...
All cold...

Other hot and cooked veggie options
其他熱的菜



half cooked (thus hard)
and very salty roasted squash
半熟又鹹到死的烤瓜

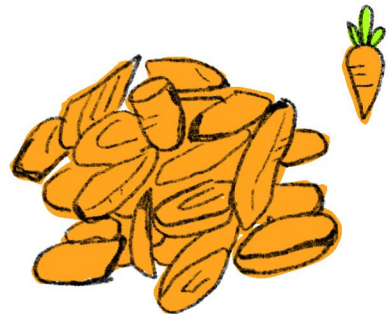


very salty and
roasted to a crisp roasted broccoli
又鹹又焗到爛的烤西蘭花

I understand that
locally sourced veggies
are good and all...



bitter and salty
roasted brussels sprouts
又苦又鹹的烤球芽甘藍



half cooked and very salty
roasted carrots
半熟又鹹到死的烤蘿蔔



Why are they all half cooked and
salty? They are inedible! You are even wasting
energy and resources!



How TF do you mess up 白菜?
It's bitter and bland, the ginger
is cooked to a crisp and who puts
dried garlic in 白菜!?

You should cook it like this! ↓



It preserves the freshness of the
veggies, yet takes away its grassy taste
and 驅寒!
(dispel cold)

The matrix of vegetable consumption in UBC's dining hall

① GOAL: maintain healthy body → ② Approach: balanced diet w/ consumption of vegetables



Trying to stay healthy in Canada is hard...
在加拿大保持身體健康都幾難...

conclusion:
Despite it is not culturally suitable,
I just stuff myself with the cold salad because I need to maintain my health.

Method 1:

- Pros:
- easily accessible
 - paid already
 - constant
- eat local 'western' style vegetables through the dining hall

challenges:

- culturally unsuitable: cold salads, ??? not hot and cooked
- inedible with its cooking method, seasoning and type of veggies

Method 2:

- choose to eat chinese style veggies

Pro:

- culturally appropriate
- heat and cooked

challenge:

- Not cooked right → x eat such that it tastes bitter
- need to be imported (?)
- Not often available

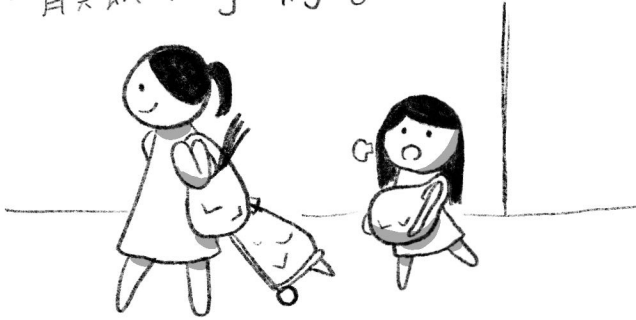
To be continued...

屋企 at home

VS

在大學飯堂 at university dining hall

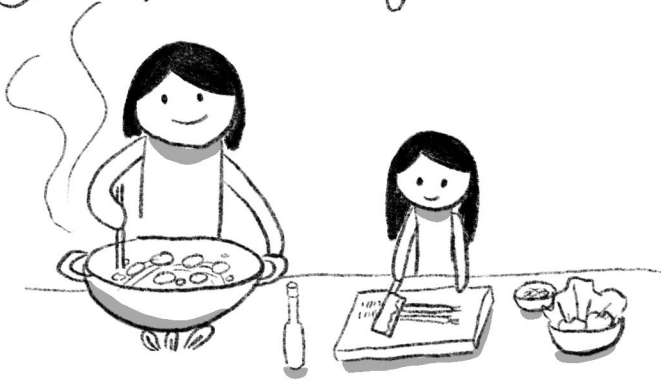
① 一齊買餸 Grocery shopping together



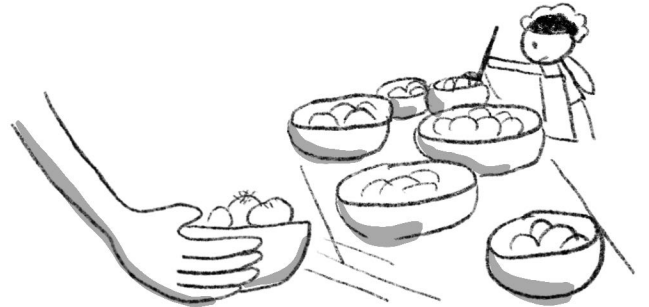
① 掃卡入去 swipe student card to get in



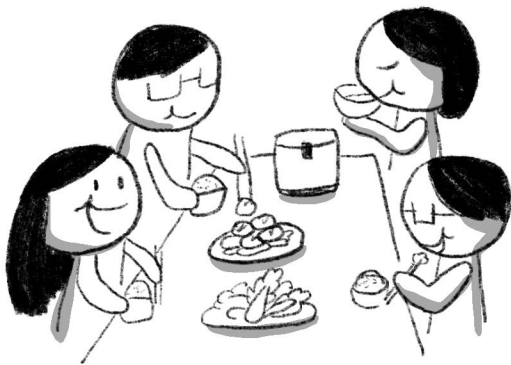
② 一齊煮 cook together



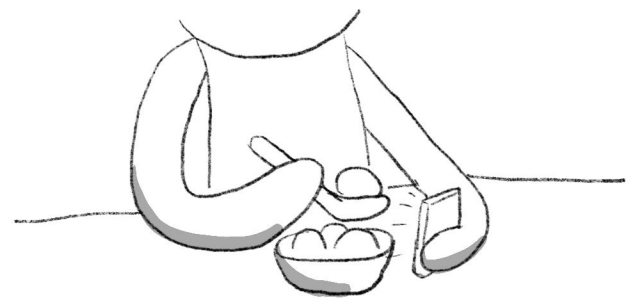
② 攞嘢食 grab food



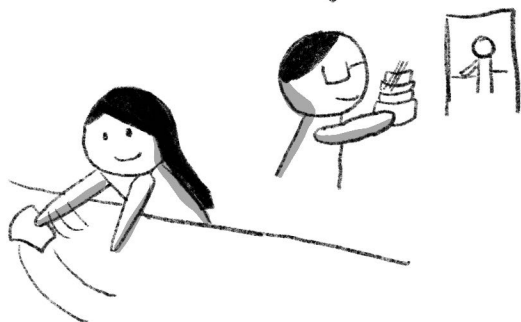
③ 一齊食 Eating together



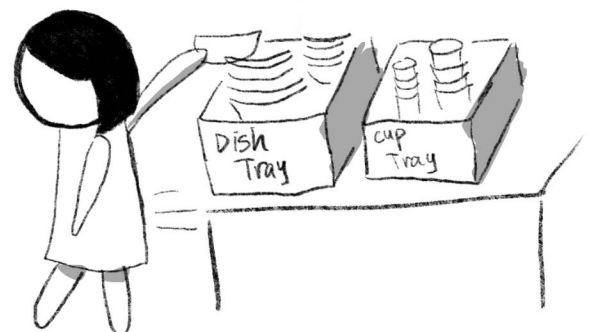
③ 食 Eat



④ 一齊執枱 cleaning up together



④ 走 Leave



As I live in diaspora with my family far away,
foodways changed and the social relationships become distant
due to the lack of commensality,
the family unit has not been enforced for a long time.*



My anger and distant relationship with the food I consume
is not only due to its cooking method or seasoning,
but compounded by the reminder that those same foods
do not contribute to any social function.
They were just nutritional intakes,** which frustrates me.



But ..

perhaps food can play a crucial role again
in the new social relationships I built here ...

My found community
and my people.



← shawarma

終
The
End

Artist Statement

This comic is based on my true personal experience as an international student from Hong Kong who arrived in Canada only 2 years ago. I mainly access food through UBC's first-year housing dining hall during the winter sessions (being a first-year resident and then a Resident Advisor in first-year housing), and the food there is not necessarily of good quality and culturally suitable, such that cultural food insecurity's impact on my mental and physical health is a lived experience. As I researched academic literature for this project, I found that my experience is rather widespread, this phenomenon is a prevalent (but not necessarily unique) experience to immigrants in host countries. Using Power's (2008) concept of "cultural food insecurity" among Indigenous people in Canada, studies have applied that to diverse immigrant contexts and experiences (Moffat et. al., 2017; Tarraf et. al., 2017; Wright et. al., 2021).

According to Tarraf et. al. (2017), various immigrants have different dietary transition trajectories when they settle in Canada. The "healthy immigrant effect", the phenomenon where immigrants have a healthier condition compared to the national average before coming to the host country, then experience a decline in health status similar to or less than the national average, is explained by the mechanism of the dietary acculturation process. It consists of four models: assimilation (fully adapting the Canadian diet as survival due to lack of knowledge of the host country context), adaptation (attempts to reproduce the home-country diet), then resulting in either enculturation (retaining the home country diet and despising Canadian culture diet) or acculturation (fully adapt Canadian diet and abandon home-country diet) or integration (combination of home country and Canadian diet patterns). These processes reflect the vulnerability of immigrants to cultural food insecurity, especially when ability and circumstances hinder culturally appropriate practices and consumption, like employment status and appropriate ingredients. This further impacts the micronutrient intakes of immigrants and thus more prone to chronic illnesses. Traditional knowledge and practice of food could conflict with Canadian foodways, where fresh food is much preferred and is skeptical of cheaper alternatives such as canned or frozen food, such that "[f]ood security may be also jeopardized by the inability to appropriately use food in the Canadian context" (Moffat et. al., 2017, p. 23). More relevant to my personal context, Wright et. al. (2021) emphasised cultural food security in international students and second-generation Americans within the college context, concluding the importance of cultural food security as it enhances their overall well-being by "facilitating their cultural/ethnic identity maintenance, connection, and expression" (p. 636), contrastingly its insecurity reduces their cultural anchors, adding mental and physical strain and stressors to the already anxiety-filled college experience. In another context of Georgian refugees receiving humanitarian food aid, the availability of food could mean nothing to its consumers, as it does not reflect the Georgian traditional practice of food acquisition and consumption, the food was empty-hearted and only used for nutritional intake (Dunn, 2017), echoing phenomena of food consumption for people in diaspora, where food is consumed as survival than enjoyment.

I resonate strongly with the experiences these studies have documented and analysed. My narratives concerning Chinese-style soup and the practice of eating together as a family reflect my nostalgia for family-orientated cultural values and my maintenance of cultural identity within the Canadian context. Although my hypothetical interaction with a personified version of UBC might just be comedic and entertaining on the surface, my anger and frustration with dining hall food directly highlight cultural food insecurity experienced in dormitories, and its strain on mental and physical health. I was more willing to skip meals as their food is “bad” and “inedible” anyway, and even if I did eat there I was stuffing food into my body as nutritional intake instead of something that includes cultural and social connotations. I needed to stuff myself to physically recover from COVID (I got it on the first week of university in my first year), which was brutal to my body already, compounded by other immigrant stressors and abnormally having cavities, the dining hall food failed me both mentally and physically. However, this trained me to be more adaptive in my food consumption, allowing myself to purchase cultural foods despite already paying for the dining hall food and exploring Canadian food scenes by taking restaurant recommendations from relatives and friends who have lived here for many years. I am highly thankful to my relatives here for providing traditional, homecooked food for me when I meet them, it nurtures my soul by satisfying my cravings for culturally appropriate food. Thus, I formed new social relationships to compensate for the reduced interaction with my immediate family in the diaspora (I am in Vancouver, both parents are in Hong Kong, and my elder brother is in Winsor, Ontario).

In terms of artistic style, I imitated a similar style to 路邊攤 (*Lobintan*), a Hong Kong comic illustrator that I have obsessively read since I was a kid, she creates comedic humour to reflect life stories, which is useful in portraying and reflecting painful experiences in cultural food insecurity, allowing me to let out my frustration in a funny way. I use bilingual languages (Cantonese and English) to tell my story: when it relates to my traditional foodways and need to express a certain strong emotion, Cantonese is used; when conversing with the personified UBC, I use solely English, as it is a Canadian context and I respond accordingly, reflecting my linguistic use in code-switching. I mainly use black and white to illustrate my story as its simple design and pencil texture imitate an innocent and childish picture book, its lack of seriousness reflects how often cultural perspectives in the discourse of food insecurity are treated as an afterthought, in which it could fundamentally impact vulnerable populations like migrants that rely on social services like community houses and food banks.

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