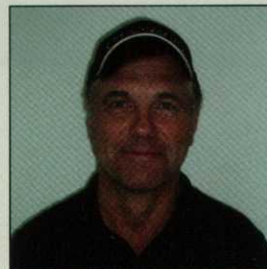


An Adventure in Life

Food: One Constant Ingredient For Human Survival

By Randy Witt, CGCS
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Food. One constant ingredient for human survival worldwide is food. For some people, food is strictly a necessity for survival. For Americans, food is many times a social event and means to relaxation. In some cases food is used as a therapy to release tension or overcome anxiety. Food and its consumption often are used as means for conducting business. Food serves a variety of uses besides being a necessity for human survival.

When I was contemplating the move to a new culture, and the Chinese culture in particular, food never really was a major consideration as an obstacle. As most Americans do, I enjoy food, and wide varieties and tastes of food. I trace my flexibility and acceptance to all foods to my farm community upbringing. During my youth, most all farm families raised tremendous amounts of foods, a large part being fruits and vegetables. Meat consisted of beef, pork, chicken and a turkey for Thanksgiving. In my family, as with most farm families, being choosy about foods was not a real option. What was prepared for a meal was what you were expected to eat. To this day, my mom's words of "this is not a restaurant" still ring in my ears. Being picky or

choosy was not an option. One learned to try and, if necessary, tolerate all foods. For me this laid a foundation of appreciating and enjoying most all foods, especially fruits and vegetables. As a youngster, (a long time ago), I always looked forward going to my grandparent's home on Saturday. Saturday was my grandmother's baking day. What a treat to be greeted at the door with a variety of sweet fragrances of the many breads, cakes, sweet rolls and pies that my grandmother was in the process of baking. Being able to lick the spoon of the last morsels of chocolate frosting was a treat in itself. Freshly baked, warm bread with large amounts of fresh butter spread on top was comparable to any feast of kings. Unfortunately, as the years have gone by, the ability to partake of a lot of sweets and carbohydrates has lessened not totally by choice but by necessity. As a practitioner of the Atkins philosophy, the ability to enjoy sweets and carbohydrates has lessened considerably.

Upon moving to Hong Kong I found that Chinese people readily enjoy foods in much the same manner as Americans. For the younger generation, American fast foods have become very popular. Pizza Hut, Krispy Kreme, McDonalds, Starbucks, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Burger King have become almost a way of life for many young Chinese. As in America, a major concern in Hong Kong is the obesity problem with the young people. 38% of school age Chinese in Hong Kong are now considered obese. The abundance of fast foods along with physical inactivity due to the computer age has created a weight problem within the Chinese childrens population. While this is a problem with school age children, this has not become a problem with adults. Upon arriving in Hong Kong, one major difference compared to the United States I quickly realized, is that the common, working lower and middle income class of the Chinese people have very little variety in their diet. Also, the diet is rather mild, definitely not spicy. A wide variety of vegetables along with a lot different fruits makes up a large part of the daily diet. Meats consumed are mostly chicken, pork, duck and a wide variety of fresh fish. Turkey is seldom eaten along with little in the way of red meats. A major reason for the lack of red meat is that most red meat is imported from New Zealand and Australia, making beef somewhat costly. Of course the major component of the diet is rice, which is very inexpensive and very filling. Rice is served and eaten at every meal, and in large quantities. The normal, daily routine in the Chinese culture is for a family member to stop at the fresh market or local food market to pick up fresh food for the evening meal. This daily shopping is due to a number of factors. The Chinese prefer fresh foods; most families have very small refrigerators, no freezers and little dry foods storage space. Also, buying small quantities on a daily basis seems to help stretch the food budget. Shen Shui, the village close to The Hong Kong Golf Club, has both a fresh meat market and a fresh vegetables and fruits market. I personally shop at a regular food

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Food-

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market or Western style grocery store.

The American concept of going to the grocery store once a week and stocking up is not a reality in the Chinese culture. When I go to the grocery store, being American, I buy enough food for at least a week and sometimes two weeks. As I get in line at the check out counter, it is as if I have the Plague! No one rushes to get in line



behind me when they only have a few items to checkout, and I have a cart full.

A popular breakfast food is congee, a type of thick rice soup or pudding. Another popular breakfast food item is comparable to the American Coney Island hot dog and bun less the onions, etc. Not especially my idea of a good breakfast. The American staple of bacon, eggs, hash browns and toast is not in the Chinese food fare. To partake of this type of meal a person needs to go to a Western eating establishment. The poorer Chinese, due to the cost, seldom consumes alcohol. When alcohol is consumed, wine is usually the alcohol of choice. The most popular beverage is, of course, a wide variety of teas. Here again, tea is served at every meal. I have found that very few people drink coffee. To the Chinese, coffee is much too strong. A couple of my Assistants will occasionally drink coffee, but is usually mixed with a large amount of condensed milk and white sugar. A popular meal for the financially secure Chinese people is called Dim Sum. This meal is served in the morning and into the mid-afternoon. This meal consists of a lot of different prepared foods, but in very small quantities and with lots of tea. Shark's fin soup, wonton soup, congee, egg drop soup, fried rice, lo

mein, different kinds of seafood wrapped in rice noodles, bao (rolls that are stuffed with sweetened pork or veggies and then are baked or steamed), roast pork, roast duck, various deserts, pot stickers, chicken feet, pigs ears, pigs knuckles, marinated squid and a vast assortment of fresh vegetables and fruits. The other very popular meal is called high or afternoon tea. This consists of a meal that is made up of a variety of teas and small portions of a large assortment of sweets and deserts. Both meals are enjoyed at a very slow pace where food and conversation are enjoyed to the fullest. A Chinese meal consists of small portions of a variety of different foods except for large quantities of rice. Unlike in America where each person orders a specific meal when dining out, in the Chinese culture one person orders for everyone. A multitude of different foods is ordered, and everyone shares and samples a variety of foods served. I have attended social dinner functions where at least twelve different courses or dishes have been served for a table of four people. You usually are not always able to identify each dish, but the food is usually very good and can be quite interesting. Sometimes it maybe beneficial to not know what each entrée is.

Personally, this type of dining has proven to be very enjoyable. I have really enjoyed expanding my horizons and tastes for eating different foods. One of my favorite new foods is squid. I now eat squid at least once a week on average. When I'm back in the States, initially it is strange to just order one entrée or meal when dining out.

Shen Shui, where I live is, is located about 15 miles from the Red China border, so the population and culture is Chinese. Traveling into Hong Kong, world variety abounds. Just about every world culture and nationality abounds in Hong Kong the city and Hong Kong the island. For me, it is a lot of fun and very interesting to sample the dining establishments of various countries and cultures. Even though the variety is fun, refreshing and pleasing, good American type food still is a staple of my diet. My thanks go out to the



American entrepreneurs who have come to Hong Kong and opened up American dining establishments. I am able to remain Americanized thanks to Morton's, Ruth Chris's, Dan Ryan's, Starbucks, Tony Romas and Hard Rock Café for a touch of home.

