Tasting Matcha in Hong Kong: Cultural Dynamics behind a New Global Food Fashion

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Earlier in May last year (2015), a renowned Japanese teahouse with more than 100 years of history opened its first overseas branch outside Uji, Kyoto in Hong Kong. This teahouse named *Nakamura Tokichi* (中村藤吉) is widely known among Hong Kong people owing to the outstanding quality of their tea products, matcha desserts in particular (with matcha jelly as their signature product). Mass media began reporting about this famous Japanese tea brand weeks before the opening of their Hong Kong branch. When Nakamura Tokichi finally started their business in May, a big matcha hit took place and many young ladies in town were incredibly excited to try the matcha desserts that had been geographically limited to Japan. In a weekday morning in July, I joined the lengthy queue in the Tsim Sha Tsui mall, i.e. where the teahouse is located, foolishly thinking that it would not take too long before getting a seat since it had been two months after its grand opening. However, it turned out that I spent more than two and a half hours in the queue. While waiting, I overheard two teenage girls behind me chit-chatting, "I don't really know why I am here waiting to get a matcha jelly. You know, I am not a fan of matcha, not at all." Another girl responded, "because it is popular, and everybody's having matcha." Their conversation was revelatory of the recent matcha craze in Hong Kong – indeed, why have so many people become matcha fanatics overnight? Is it just a passing fad or a long-lasting trend? Most of the time it is not easy to examine how a certain taste is liked, but when a considerable portion in a society becomes passionate about something at the same time, we may try to analyze such seemingly usual norms by looking into the hidden socio-cultural symbols within these trends.

In fact, the matcha craze in Hong Kong started long before the arrival of Nakamura Tokichi. In the last decade, it is not exceptional to see matcha-flavoured food in the city. Matcha appears almost everywhere, from chain bakeries like Arome, supermarkets in department stores, to dessert buffet in five-star hotels. International brands, Nestlé for instance, are now benefited from increasing sales volume of matcha products like Uji matcha Kit-Kats. More and more matcha-themed restaurants opened in the busiest districts such as Mong Kok, Yau Ma Tei, Tsim Sha Tsui, and Causeway Bay, while some are also found in less populated areas, for example, Sheung Wan, and Tai Po. These restaurants and stores do not just provide green tea leaves or matcha powder. Instead, they offer a wide range of matcha products, including matcha chocolate, matcha ice-cream, matcha parfait, matcha latte, matcha waffles,

and many more. These matcha products of various kinds are widely welcomed by female in town. While most of the matcha consumers in Hong Kong are teenage girls, young ladies have also begun to join the vogue. Similarly, middle-aged women from middle-upper class have also became major consumers, although they account for a much smaller percentage. The introduction of matcha in Hong Kong is not entirely fresh since there have been hybridized products a few years ago. Nonetheless, the trend has soared in current two to three years, especially in 2015, with several traditional Japanese tea labels setting up overseas business in Hong Kong. More importantly, the recent food fashion boom does not only imply people's love for matcha but also narrates the driving forces behind it, such as the changes in social and cultural conditions of the city.

Prior to matcha, Japanese foods such as ramen and sushi have already won the hearts of Hong Kong people back in 1980s. About three decades ago, various foreign catering chains like Domon and Ajisen introduced ramen through the launching of ten branches in districts all over Hong Kong. The ramen fever was favoured by Japanese popular culture back then – during 1980s and 1990s Hong Kong audience were fond of Japanese dramas and thus were attracted to elements in daily lives of ordinary Japanese people. Scenes of leading characters dating in ramen-yas (ramen restaurants) in drama series such as Long Vacation also played a role in boosting the ramen fever. (Ng 2006) By that time sushi was too brought to Hong Kong by kaiten sushi caterers. Later sushi became further popularized when they were offered at an affordable price in supermarkets inside Japanese department stores such as Yaohan, Jusco, and Seiyu. (Nakano 2015) Today even in non-Japanese local supermarkets like ParkNshop, low-priced sushi is made available. The broad availability of Japanese food in Hong Kong was enabled by the affluence accumulated from post-war economic growth through industrialization, as well as the juncture of contemporary globalization. Hong Kong was one of the very few places that did not officially ban imports of Japanese goods as a means of economic sanction after WWII. (Mingpao 2015) The free flow of Japanese goods into Hong Kong allowed Japanese food and its culture to enter the city, therefore generating an affection for Japanese-ness that has lasted until. For more than thirty years Hong Kong people's fondness for Japanese things, be it food, styling, video games, or electrical appliances, has continued to prevail. This liking is

particularly fascinating in a sense that consuming Japanese-ness simultaneously connotes consumption of different cultural symbols.

This paper seeks to investigate the recent matcha boom around the globe – from Japan to Hong Kong, and further to North America and Europe. Although matcha is now being appreciated in these locales, the reasons behind people's love for matcha vary according to socio-cultural settings. Therefore, in addition to the global pattern of this new food fashion, this paper also accounts for underlying regional differences. Among numerous cities where matcha is taking over, Hong Kong is particularly spectacular in a way that a lot of Japanese tea brands have picked it as the location for the start of their business expansion overseas. Thus, in this paper, Hong Kong will be the major site of study. This paper will also delve into how the consumption of matcha appears to be a result of anti-Chinese-ness among younger generations of Hong Kong. A comparative approach is adopted to study the perception of matcha among different generations in Hong Kong in order to measure the degree of Japanese culture influence regarding historical backgrounds. Concerning methods of data collection, this research has included first-hand information acquired from semi-structured interviews with 31 informants – 22 of them locally born and raised in Hong Kong, ranging from seventeen to seventy-two years old. Among all of the informants from Hong Kong, fifteen of them are female while the rest are male. Other informants who are not from Hong Kong come from several countries, namely Japan, Sweden, the United States, Taiwan, and Canada. The purpose of having such distribution of informants is to acquire comparatively up-to-date news about matcha in their own localities, so as to learn about how local dwellers view this new trend. The majority of informants are my classmates from secondary school and university while some are customers at different matcha restaurants, whom I invited to be interviewed when conducting on-site participant observation. Most interviews conducted were face-to-face while some were on Skype, through phone calls, or text messages owing to territorial restrictions. On top of semi-structured interviews, ethnographic work was done during May 2015 to January 2016 in four separate locations, notably Nakamura Tokichi in Tsim Sha Tsui, the teahouse mentioned at the very beginning of this paper; two branches of Gum Jeng (御前上茶), one in Mong Kok and another in Causeway Bay; and Sinmei Tea (川善茶居), a relatively high-class private teahouse situated in a commercial block in Sheung Wan.

The data collected during my visits to traditional tea houses in Kyoto in December 2015 and brief conversation with the owners are also included. Details about the informants and chosen venues for ethnographic work will be further explained when quoted. Although the gender of my informants are not equal in number, the analytical results will not be affected as age plays a more vital role. Materials from the Internet, namely interviews with matcha store owners, official web sites of green tea brands, media reports on matcha trend around the world, and so forth, are collected as well for content analysis.

Remaking matcha:
From ancient ritual to commonplace national drink in 21st century

The word 'matcha' has never been so widely known as it is today. It was not until the last few years that people around the world became familiar with this word as a result of the ongoing matcha craze. Most of the time this Japanese word is spelled 'm-a-t-c-h-a' and sometimes interpreted as 'matcha tea' or 'matcha green tea'. In fact, in Japanese it is prounounced as 'まっちゃ' (maccha) yet later transliterated to 'matcha' in English. Moreover, matcha is only one of the many kinds under the label of green tea according to Japanese understanding and categorization of tea. To put it in the simplest way, matcha is defined as powdered green tea, an edible substance which is often used to make thick tea. Of course, now matcha is also a popular ingredient for green tea desserts and drinks. The simple definition of 'powdered green tea', however, might be a little misleading since there are more than one type of powdered tea in Japanese tea culture – '粉末緑茶 (funmatsuryokucha), literally meaning 'powdered green tea' in Japanese, is often mistaken as matcha. Nevertheless, *funmatsuryokucha* is made from '煎茶' (sencha) and requires less effort to produce; while *matcha* is made from '碾茶' (tencha/ hikicha) and has to go through more complicated production process. This explains why matcha costs more than most of other tea products.

Discover Japan is a promotion agent that works in cooperation with official bodies of the Japanese government, including the National Tourism Organization. In early 2016, Discover Japan launched a series of 'Oishii to the world' advertisement

on YouTube in order to promote Japanese food to online viewers and to attract potential visitors overseas and boost tourism revenue. One of the advertisement videos featuring an English-speaking host introduces in detail the history of matcha and the transformation of this traditional beverage into a number of fusion food. The advertisement also tries to depict matcha as an archaic icon of Japan through scenes of a woman in kimono kneeling on tatami mats, slowly pouring boiling tea into elegant ceramic cups at a tea ceremony. Nonetheless, in Japanese history, tea ceremony in the first place was not something that could be practiced by women – at least not women from middle or lower class. Back to the time when matcha was first brought to Japan from China by the monk Eisai in late 12th century, a prominent figure in Zen Buddhism in Japan, this kind of tea was only consumed at monasteries and was not known by many. After that the development of chadō (茶道), alternatively *chanoyu* (茶の湯), was facilitated by the prosperous growth of the country's economy as well as the establishment of various ancient art such as kadō (華道) such as flower arrangement and poetry writing. Up till the Meiji Restoration, matcha had been limited to the privileged and had functioned as a state tool. In feudal Japan, merely the royal family, military generals, and other upper class members were able to taste matcha in tea ceremonies as a form of art appreciation. Tea houses, in the meantime, acted as venues for poetry creation, exchange of artwork, celebration of military victories, and more importantly – a site of networking opportunities within the ruling class. While warriors and state officials were sipping their cup of matcha, political agreement and information flow took place simultaneously. Ordinary people from middle and lower class rarely had the chance to enter tea houses as they were designated for the elite ruling class in ancient Japan. Not to mention that tea ceremony usually implies strict and complicated rules regarding kimono style and choice of chadō utensils, which most of the Japanese society never learned about. Yet, having undergone enormous changes under the Restoration, the whole of Japan has been altered greatly in terms of social structure. The role of matcha was then turned into a nation-building tool. (Surak 2011: 188-204) For the sake of nationalism, especially when industrialized Japan was involved in world wars, matcha became a national symbol that was meant to unite Japanese people. By the notion of heritage, matcha and green tea was remade into a representation of Japanese-ness in order to eliminate regional differences within the nation and to construct one-ness against foreign

powers. In post-industrialist Japan, many housewives are able to make matcha for themselves at home, while the tea ceremony has also been taken by female practitioners instead of male monks. Now matcha and green tea both became commonplace that you would not have difficulty getting a bottle of *gyokuro* at a Jusco department store or a pack of matcha cookies at Family Mart. In contemporary times, Matcha remains a political instrument, refined as an exquisite nationalist tool. (Surak 2010: 23-28) Today almost all Japanese companies selling matcha emphasize that their product 'is the spirit of Japan'. Okada, the owner of Seifukudo (清福堂) in Kyoto, assured the sales volume of green tea in Japan 'never dropped'. The 60-year-old man explained, 'matcha is the drink of Japan, though the younger ones might not like it as much as I do, they still drink it from time to time,' in an honoured tone. In fact, despite of the fact that matcha is less liked among younger generations, the 'national drink' still earns much appreciation. Miwa Yamauchi and Akiko Hobana, two girls from Osaka, both in their late twenties, prefer coffee and beer over matcha or other green tea, 'but yea, we like it cause matcha represents Kyoto, and Kyoto represents the best of Japan.'

As in the 'Oishii to the world' advertisement and many other publications, matcha and tea ceremony subtly connote the sophistication in Japanese tradition. Meanwhile, the impression of Japan being an old country in the east is closely associated with its extensive expansion in global market. In the late 1980s the very first waves of global craze for Japanese-ness were generated though the export of Japanese products, from electrical appliances, idol dramas, to comics to the rest of the world. Followed by terms like 'cool Japan', the brand nationalism of Japan throughout the years has gained the nation international prestige in terms of its cultural-political image. The effects of worldwide Japanization persists today. The spread of Japanese pop culture, as some suggest, has somewhat re-centered the globalization pattern – Western domination – not only because Japan extend its cultural influence to the west but also because the country is re-activating its territorial affiliation with the rest of Asia and gathering power in the east. (Iwabuchi 2002: 47-50) At the same time when we see the success of 'cool Japan', it is crucial to note that on top of innovative technologies, the display of traditional Japan plays an equally significant role in likings for Japanese-ness – consider the tourists in kimonos taking selfies around Kyoto's Gion area with centuries-old temples as backdrop.

Likewise, tea houses at the present day, in Japan and in other parts of the world, have evolved to offer another productive site for expansion of soft power. The sense of heritage and antiquity, on one hand, broadens the historical imagination of consumers; on the other hand, it enhances the aura of aesthetic sophistication connoted in this ancient national beverage. In the times of an economic downturn, such as the one Japan is currently experiencing, the incentives for people to recall and revive old fashion may grow even stronger. As Yamauchi puts it, 'very likely it [overseas matcha boom] is because Japanese people wish to promote the good side of it [Japan] instead of just letting foreigners perceive our country as a predator.' Summing up, matcha has long been a political instrument ever since it was first introduced to Japan. The way we view matcha is integrated with its political function from nation-building within its own territory to interests of soft power on a global scale.

Matcha boom: a global trend

I spotted a post on Facebook one day with pictures of Russian models cosplaying sexy characters in Japanese manga. It came as a surprise to me as I had believed Japanese popular culture to not be as prevalent in Western countries. Nonetheless, these kind of posts and pictures are no longer unique since ACG – anime, comics, and games – have become increasingly influential not only in Asia but also in other regions around the world, including Russia, the United States, Sweden, and many more. As a matter of fact, the global spread of Japanese culture takes place in various aspects – from the love for Harajuku fashion, fanaticism of idols such as AKB48 (a young girl group), to the liking of *haiku* (short poems; in Japanese: 俳句), and more importantly – the rising trend of Japanese food going global. On top of sushi bars and ramen-yas, the number of matcha teahouses in different countries, too, is on the rise. Yet it is important to note that matcha is more popular in some regions than others, and the liking for this traditional Japanese beverage is based on a wide range of factors according to the socio-cultural setting of each regional market. A few years ago the great hit of sushi restaurants in the United States as well as in Europe was featured in a number of media outlets, which captured scenes of Western consumers being amazed by the taste of uncooked meat. Today, another Japanese food icon – matcha – has become the new food fashion on the busiest streets in New York, in Nordic neighborhoods, in weekend food markets in Sydney, and in a lot of

places just like how sushi and ramen did. The reasons behind this current craze, however, seem to be different from its previous waves.

Starting from 2013, the matcha boom in major cities along eastern and western coasts of North America has been widely reported through media outlets, including mainstream television broadcast, online blog posts, and so forth. (CBS News 2015b; Armario 2015b; Morihara 2015) Furthermore, the boom is also discussed on social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr and Pinterest. Whenever you input 'matcha' or 'green tea' as keywords on any search engines, hundreds of thousands of recipes and cooking videos will pop up in your search. Three years ago in 2013, Ippodo (一保堂), a three-century-old quality green tea production company in Japan, set up its first overseas branch in the central area of Manhattan. (Mowery 2013) It did not take too long for this Japanese tea brand to win attention from consumers in this metropolis, while at the same time there was soon springing of Japanese style tea houses in New York as well as other parts of the United States in response to this fashionable business opportunity. Beverages served at these tea houses and restaurants are not merely matcha itself. Instead, most of them provide a variety of choices, for instance, koicha (thick matcha), matcha soy latte, matcha milkshake, matcha cookies, and matcha cheesecake. Not only can one find matcha food and beverages in premium outlets like Ippodo, one may also get a taste of matcha at an ordinary street corner in their neighborhood. Irene Kwan, a Canadian Chinese who lives in Montreal, described how she was surprised to spot several grocery stores selling matcha products: "I was in San Francisco for a business trip last month and stayed at my aunt's place, which is a little far from the downtown area. […] just two or three blocks away [from my aunt's place] I caught sight of a poster of a *geisha* (芸者) at a store's entrance so I decided to have a look in the store, and out of my expectations there were quite a lot of matcha tea there, like green tea powder and *gyokuro* (玉露) leaves. The Japanese old lady (i.e. owner of the store) also holds tea ceremony for its customers." In fact, stores of this kind are not geographically limited to central business districts but may also be located within residential blocks. Owners of matcha business outside Japan, in the meantime, are not only Japanese immigrants – recently there are locally born and raised Americans attracted to Japanese culture who runs a matcha business in their hometowns, either because they have travelled in Japan and become fascinated by the beverage, or because of the

power of viral matcha-related information on mass media. For instance, the Fortgang brothers, founders of Matcha Bar, one of the top rated matcha cafés in New York, decided to set up their own matcha profession to earn a living as well as to further develop their enthusiasm in this 'coffee alternative'. The brothers were named 'matcha ambassadors in the States' since they were one of the very first local Americans who brought in matcha and promoted it to the rest of the country. (MatchaBar 2016; Swerdloff 2016) Other than big cities like New York and Los Angeles, the total number of matcha bars, cafés, restaurants, and tea houses in the United States have been on the rise in different regions. Winky Chan, a university student from Hong Kong who is now an exchange student at the University of Texas, says 'around Austin campus you can easily find Japanese food, including matcha of course, and most of my school mates here like it.' Apart from the availability of matcha in Texas, she noted that it was the same case for Florida, and added that 'matcha is perhaps now available on more than 50% of American soil and most of America's younger generation have probably tried it.' On the other edge of the Atlantic Ocean, matcha fever has also been brought to Europe, particularly in more well-off regions such as the United Kingdom and in the Nordic countries. Very much alike, the waves of matcha enthusiasm in Europe can be explained with advertisement by the local media. Column writers and magazine editors have been initiating the trend by urging their readers employing phrases like 'in the spotlight', 'the antioxidant superfood' and 'get in on this trend'. (Dann 2014; Satherley 2014) Pierrau, a 24-year-old Swedish graphic designer currently based in Kyoto, returned to Rönninge for Christmas celebration in December 2015. Before taking the flight back to her home city in Sweden, Pierrau got requests from friends and families 'asking me [her] to bring them matcha sweets as souvenirs.' On the other hand, Kajikawa, a 28-year-old ceramic artist in Nara, was astonished to see 'so many stores selling matcha while I [he] was in Denmark visiting his friend earlier in summer (2015).' He, as a Japanese, 'never knew matcha has already reached so far.' The extensive matcha boom across American and European continents may well mark a great success of heart-winning Japanese-ness, yet it is not enough to merely look at its national image – we should not overlook how the physiological features of matcha have contributed to its popularity. Among hundreds of mass media coverage on matcha, headlines like 'Green matcha is the new black coffee in NYC', 'What is matcha green tea? Healthy

benefits and recipes explained', and 'Why matcha is the new coffee' are extremely common. (O'neil Bellomo 2015; Moss 2016; Cutter 2015) Fans of matcha in North America and in European countries tend to focus on healthy benefits of matcha – high level of antioxidant content, more long-lasting caffeine than coffee, plus its capability to cure hangover headache (though it might not work for all). Some even suggests that matcha has positive effects on human dietary system and thus is good for those going on diet. In other words, matcha in the Occident in brief can be described as a healthy anti-ageing drink that gives you mental energy.

While consumers in different corners of the world are busy catching up with the new food fashion, global manufacturers are too, paying much effort to make sure that their goods are not out of date. In general, the bloom of matcha food, handy snacks in particular, work in two interactive ways demonstrating large degree of hybridity – non-Japanese companies launching cross-over products in matcha flavor and Japanese companies trying to extend their products to Western-styles. For the former, transnationals such as Starbucks has been offering green tea latte and green tea Frappuccino at their chain stores for more than five years; Häagen-Dazs has introduced its new green tea and cookies flavours, and crispy matcha ice-cream sandwich, which are available in almost every supermarket; megacorporations like McDonald's has also brought green tea-flavoured sundae to their array. For the latter, Pablo, a Japanese cheesecake specialty, launched their well-received Uji matcha cheese tart a couple of years ago; Pocky the emblematic snack manufacturer of Japan has too been inventing a wide variety of matcha-flavoured biscuit sticks; now Ito En (伊藤園), the largest green tea distributor in Japan, is trying to expand its international market share by establishing an online shopping site particularly for North America. Unlike quality brands such as Ippodo and Nakamura Tokichi, these multinational corporations do not only aim at high-end customers but also target wider groups of consumers from different class backgrounds who are looking for less pricey daily goods. Considering the large scale of entrepreneurship, it is reasonable to forecast further expansion of the current matcha boom signalized through the moves of these global business.

In search of sophistication:

What matcha means to young consumers in Hong Kong

Earlier works on consumption has revealed the significance between consumers' behavior and identity shaping. Veblen, in his eminent publication *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), argued that people consume more than necessary in order to display their economic ability, and through conspicuous consumption one's social status could be maintained or heightened. A class identity is then constructed. The idea of consumption is advanced through later studies such as Bourdieu (1987)'s, suggesting that consumption, especially that of middle class in modern age, is a form of pretension; and all decisions regarding taste are to be considered with differences in class. While consumption is often analyzed in accordance with class categorization, it is also an issue of ethnicity, and, more critically, the representation of self in a mass. In more lately academic discussions relating to globalization, consumption in the contemporary world has become a more approachable idea for all since it is no longer restricted as physical goods in the information age when access to intangible ideas is made conveniently available. Referring to more recent studies, consumption has been re-defined as "the process through which some goods, information, and ideas, are selected from among many others to be made a part of oneself and symbolically utilized". (Mathews 2001: 288-289) In other words, consumption nowadays means consuming symbolic meanings – and this interpretation of consumption would best suit the analysis of matcha the new food fashion in Hong Kong in this paper, for the consumption of matcha is far more than a biological satisfaction.

The idea of identity is very much associated, or predominated with established categories, for example, class, ethnicity, and gender. In this case, identity appears to be a matter of a certain group of people. However, in the post-modern world that we live today, identity carries far more complicated meanings – for people also care about being outstanding as an individual instead of merely identifying their existence with a common group. In other words, people nowadays consume to stand out from the nameless crowd. As early as in Simmel's chapter *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (2002: 11-13), the human desire to be unparalleled is seen as one of the most complex issues in modern life. Aspirations for an individual and independent self imply that one should consume something unprecedented. In the case of Hong Kong, the current

matcha boom reflects the intention to consume for "self" and "others" of younger generations at the same time. The emergence of matcha in Hong Kong in recent years has introduced locals to a new cultural icon – a symbol of traditional Japanese-ness which is "fresher" and "more elegant" than ramen and sushi.

Being praised as Asia's food paradise repeatedly for years, Hong Kong without a doubt is a place where cuisines from all over the globe, ranging from Thai, Indian, French, Korean, to Italian meals, can be effortlessly spotted in almost every neighborhood. Yet the wide variety of global foods has not reduced Hong Kong people's enthusiasm when new fancy foods arrive in town. Back in the seventies the entry of McDonald's the world famous American fast food chain in Hong Kong created a big hit even though hamburgers and fries had already been introduced to locals in 1950s by Russian immigrants. The exclusively foreign middle-class image of McDonald's was thought to be one of the reasons behind its success. (Watson 2006: 79-83) Likewise the liking for matcha did not escalate to such an unprecedented level until recent years, while the "debut" of green tea products can be traced back to ten years ago. According to Ng, Japanese green tea had been made widely available in the local beverage market by Chinese and Taiwanese manufacturers like Chef Kang (康師傅) and Taoti since 2000s. (2006: 305-306) However, the interesting point is, matcha had never gained as much attention as it does today when it becomes a trendy enough food to feed growing appetites of picky Hong Kong people – for "trendy" it means that matcha, and matcha desserts, convey a sense of cosmopolitan sophistication. For sure the middle-upper class delicate aesthetics in chadō (茶道) is another multiplier leading to the tremendous matcha craze. Just to give an illustration, there are specific counters selling high-quality and high-priced matcha at most branches of c!ty'super, a high-end supermarket which target customers are middle-upper class consumers; while you seldom see green tea or matcha products in a designated corner in other local supermarkets such as ParkNshop and Wellcome. This phenomenon explains how matcha became popular owing to its luxurious and exquisite nature. To add on to its aesthetic aspects, matcha also acts as a higher-class symbol since in most occasions it is served as desserts. Unlike staple food which is a biological necessity, desserts are extras – an additional food that only people with more than enough money could afford. In other words, people who have to strive hard to make a living would not be part of the line outside Nakamura Tokichi. In the past,

Japanese food had already created several waves of craze, for instance, the mushrooming of ramen restaurants in late 1980s and the popularization of kaiten sushi later in 2000s. Yet most of these Japanese foods which have gone mainstream are main courses instead of desserts. We may also think about the reason why it was not *natto* (納豆 in Japanese, a kind of sticky soy beans commonly eaten as breakfast food in Japan) or Nissin cup noodles that gained so much attention and allured hundreds of people to spend hours queueing for – the feeling of being exceptional when consuming something that is not, or not yet, widely available at an inexpensive price. Among all the informants in Hong Kong, more than half agreed that matcha desserts are 'Kong-nui food', for the term *kong nui* (港女 in Cantonese, literally meaning Hong Kong girls) labels young girls in the city who pursue social status and idolize everything from abroad, English-speaking world and wealthy countries in particular. some informants compared matcha food to classy British afternoon tea (those with plates arranged on an iron rack in an elegant manner) since both signify a superior status, while an informant also pointed out that long hours of queueing is another factor bringing consumption of matcha to an even higher level of superiority because one has to be able to spare a considerable amount of time for a meal. This is why many posted pictures of themselves eating matcha soba or matcha ice-cream with captions like 'finally got to try it' (終於試到) and 'it's worth all the waiting' (等咁耐都抵). Such phenomenon to a certain extent echoes with earlier fads in town in a way that lining up means not only waiting but a sense of nobility. In late 1990s, crowds in Hong Kong went crazy about collecting Snoopy dolls in different national costumes promoted by McDonald's along with its 'Extra Value Meal'. People were willing to line up for hours outside the branches in order to buy and collect a whole set of dolls. Research suggests that the fad could be rationalized with consumers' desire for social distinction through display of positive characters, for instance, consistency and reliability. (Bosco 2001:273) Similarly the recent matcha boom in Hong Kong can be explained with one's exhibition of his or her persistence in queueing as well as the indifference regarding the time loss, which marks a contrast between Yoshinoya (a Japanese beef don fastfood chain) and Nakamura Tokichi. Lydia Chiu, a 22-year-old food blogger, conceived matcha as an elegant symbol which is incomparable with other Japanese food:

> *You won't expect to see somebody posting a Yoshinoya (吉野家) beef bowl and caption it with a "food porn" hashtag, right? That's certainly not attractive. I think matcha is very different from most Japanese food we have in Hong Kong, like ramen or yaki balls […] matcha is more decent […] you have to sit down in a nice restaurant, instead of standing on the street eating fishballs or having burger at McDonald's. Even for Japanese people it (matcha) is not daily and they probably eat matcha stuff only on important occasions.*

Another girl from Hong Kong, Heidi Ngan, also pointed out that matcha has a distinctive sense of sophistication:

> *I run an online business with two other friends. We have an Ig shop* (posting pictures of products on Instagram and dealing through text messages) *that sells handmade cookies and other pastries. Compared to chocolate and coffee, matcha-flavoured cookies are far more popular – the sales volume of matcha [cookies] is way larger than the sum of any other [flavours]. […] I believe it is because matcha is rather new, and it feels more high-class since people always think of tea ceremony when it comes to matcha.*

Despite earlier Japanese boom such as ramen and sushi in the eighties, consumers in Hong Kong are not (or not yet) tired of Japanese-ness, nonetheless they are now demanding more than just commonplace Japanese foods. On one hand, this is because rooms for cultural imagination in many Japanese foods have already been crammed. On the other hand, matcha emerged at a particular point in time when the "hipster" fashion is flourishing. In 2010s many teenagers in Hong Kong as well as in Taiwan and mainland China are looking for a *mantsing* (文青) character. The term *mantsing* originally referred to educated intellectual youths who were fond of various forms of arts, for example, literature, movie, and music. *Mantsing* today however has evolved into a professedly anti-mainstream representation, or a sub-cultural identity.

These “cultured youths” who identify themselves as *mantsing* are considered hipsters dressed in “fresh” (小清新) styles, i.e. clothes in pastel colors or vintage pieces; they are also supposed to stand against mainstream values. (Tan 2012; 100 Most 2013; Wong 2015) In fact, on top of outfit styles, the term *mantsing* is adopted in several realms, from photography, design, to cuisine. As a daily essential, food plays a significant role in the construction of *mantsing* identity. Before the arrival of matcha, coffee was one of the items which *mantsings* cultivated sense of elegance and delicacy from. Details ranging from types of coffee beans, their places of origin, distillation, to brewing techniques, are all important features for *mantsings* as they care a lot about not just prices but the quality of everything. At one point in time, being a *mantsing* equates to being a coffee expert. The love for matcha, especially among this group of picky young people, grows in a similar manner – on Ito En’s official global web site, a specific sub-age is dedicated to explain explicitly the production process of green tea in every detail, starting from the very first step of seedling, management of yea bushes, annual tea leaves-picking done by hands, to careful selection of best-quality leaves in the factories. (Ito En Ltd. 2016) With pictures of old ladies wearing sunscreen hats rigorously choosing fine leaves in the field, the enormous degree of care committed to the whole manufacturing procedures is further amplified. While such marketing strategies embellish the company’s image, they are also appealing to consumers in a way that matcha stands out of other food and beverages owing to its sophisticated nature. In this case, features of matcha coincidently meet the demands of *mantsing* that it is concurrently “fresh” and “different from the majority of the society” just like coffee. As in Sinmei Tea, a high-class teahouse in Sheung Wan, the interior is organized with antiques and second-hand furniture, setting up a refined and fashionable atmosphere, which is a marked contrast with ordinary Japanese restaurants. Likewise, Nakamura Tokichi, located in a Tsim Sha Tsui mall filled with international luxury brands, is on the eighteenth floor where diners could have an extensive view of the commercial area and overlook the views of Victoria Harbour. What’s more, the entire restaurant employs a traditional Japanese style, just as how it looks like in their Uji main store. Wooden tables and chairs are neatly arranged, adorned with pieces of knit and crochet art (the kind of decoration you would see on the walls of onsen ryokans i.e. hotspring guest houses in Japan that charge a lot). Apart from Sinmei Tea and Nakamura Tokichi, Gum Jeng

(咁正, literally meaning "so good" in Cantonese), a new matcha restaurant opened by a local fashion brand Gum Gum Gum in cooperation with a dessert house from Kaohsiung, Taiwan, also promotes their products with marketing strategies focusing on young people. For instance, Gum Jeng stresses their originality whenever they launch new items – last month (November 2015) a new series of matcha pastries including matcha pineapple buns (菠蘿油 in Cantonese, a vernacular snack in Hong Kong) was introduced. The online promotion flyer stressed the crossover between "genuine" Japanese-ness and locality. Sara Tang, another informant in her early twenties, said:

> *The buns are nice […] nicer than those we have in chachaanteng (茶餐廳). Local ones are rather vernacular but these special, at least I haven't seen other restaurants mixing matcha with pineapple buns. […] Though it is a little expensive I'd still be willing to try.*

Despite the attractiveness within matcha itself, without facilitators on the Internet it would not have been such a far-reaching food fashion in Hong Kong since there are many more trendy foods. Contemporary life is unquestionably tied to the Internet, and the spread of matcha likings depended greatly on online agents – from mass media outlets, food bloggers (or "foodies"), to individual accounts posting photos taken at matcha restaurants. One of the biggest variation between previous Japanese food crazes and the recent matcha boom is that, the act of consuming matcha is often encouraged and displayed online, social networking sites in particular. In late May two matcha-themed restaurants, Nakamura Tokichi and Gum Jeng started their business. Before that, local media, including newspapers, magazines, online commentators, and most importantly young food bloggers widely reported in long passages how likeable the foods are. (Apple Daily 2015; Weekend Weekly 2015; Unwire HK 2015; AM730 2015) Later on lists of "matcha collection", "must-have matcha items around Hong Kong", and "all for matcha fanatics" bloomed on social media such as Facebook and Instagram. (U Lifestyle HK 2015; Elle Hong Kong 2015) On the day I spent hours at the queue outside Nakamura Tokichi, a young lady was talking on the phone in an excited tone, telling her friend that she "finally got to try

Nakamura desserts" and "will definitely upload photos of their signature matcha parfait". What this lady planned to do is not exceptional – fifteen out of all twenty-two informants from Hong Kong told me that they would take pictures when they try new fashionable foods like matcha, and would upload them to social networking platforms. At this point of time we should not overlook the limitless power of the Internet – and social networking sites. Other than its function as a promotion platform, online social network plays another crucial role of enabling 'show-off' among friends. Even though the consumption of matcha does not necessarily mean superiority as fine dining in five-star hotel does, the fact that 'I got to try this new fashionable food' and 'I have a lot of time to wait in the queue just for an ice-cream cone' do convey a sense of status. The act of consuming for others has once again demonstrated by overwhelming online posts of matcha foods. Since contemporary life is increasingly intertwined with the Internet, consumption is not only a way to express one's individual self but has also become more and more of a social essential.

Not just politics – considering physiology of taste

Throughout interviews and ethnographic work at different sites, much attention of the whole research is drawn to the social, cultural, and political aspects of matcha. Biology of human bodies, however, may be a significant factor in leading consumers to matcha as well. Standing on the shoulders of Kroeber (1923:1), one of the most prominent figures in the field who believed anthropology is 'being both a biological science and a social science', this research has attempted to examine the matcha craze in a thorough manner by digger deeper into the physiology of taste which also plays a part in fueling the trend. In Prescott's *Taste Matters*, he suggested that we like particular foods not only because of the cultural dynamics that lie within but because humans incline to give hedonic responses to certain tastes, such as sweetness and umami. (Prescott 2012: 29-32) In fact, the combination of tea with sweetness is a critical reason why matcha is so popular today in Hong Kong. Let us think about the trendy foods these few year – cheese cake, handmade gelato, tarts, popcorn, etc – most of these food fashion come with sugar. In other words, sweetness, as an (almost) universally liked taste, has largely helped transform matcha from a beverage to a wide array of faddy foods of unprecedented popularity. Pierrau, the Swedish girl who is now based in Kyoto, once hosted her friends from Sweden and brought them to a

renowned tea house in Uji. Thinking her friends would appreciate the tea ceremony since they were all fans of matcha, Pierrau felt 'a little disappointed when they say the authentic one tasted like grass with a yuck face' and preferred sweetened matcha mocha instead. The other informant who owns an online bakery, shared a similar point of view – 'I have visited several historical tea houses in Uji and the rest of Kansai area some time ago and found the tea served in tea ceremonies rather bitter so I did not expect it to go so viral. But then it is not that unreasonable as for now matcha is turned into desserts, who doesn't like sweets? Our customers like the matcha cookies a lot.' On top of these anecdotes, four other informants told me that they do not usually drink green tea since it is slightly bitter, but they are willing to give matcha desserts a try. One of them still finds the bitter taste of matcha unacceptable after trying matcha parfait at Nakamura Tokichi yet she does 'not dislike the parfait cause it is kind of balanced with sweetness in the icecream.' In this case, we may conclude that the success of matcha is not just because of intelligent marketing strategies but also blessed by a taste that human beings are born to like. As Dorothy Chow, a 22-year-old who claimed herself as an exception from her matcha fanatic fans put it, 'I don't like it but after all I don't hate it. If I were to pick either one, I would definitely choose matcha over stinky tofu.' Nonetheless, in spite of the intuitional preference for sweetness, some are sensitive to specific collaboration of food and their appearances. SY Wong, a middle-aged primary school teacher, does not like matcha food as she is 'not used to such color (light green or pastel green),' and 'tea should not be sweetened.' As a matter of fact there are people who find it unacceptable to eat matcha with food, especially for elder people who associate such sharp colors as artificial and bizarre. Michelle Chan, another middle-aged working woman like Wong says no to matcha because 'green tea is green tea. I never mix tea with desserts because it tastes really strange.' Sweetened tea 'haters' like Wong and Chan, however, remain insignificant in numbers, so the matcha craze still continues to expand in the mainstream with its likeable features.

Consuming matcha as a minor genre of resistance

As discussed earlier, on the other side of the globe, matcha has crossed the Pacific Ocean from Japan and is receiving much attention in the United States. (CBS News 2015a; Armario 2015a) Now matcha is becoming mainstream and some

Americans are predicting that it may possibly replace coffee in a few years, for it is believed to be doing more good and less harm to human body. (Avella 2015) Matcha is described as the new white girls' craze because western girls are fond of the healthy benefits in this new beverage. The fact that matcha contains caffeine, antioxidant and detox substances gives a reason for its popularity in Euro-American cities as these characteristics fulfill the daily needs of urban dwellers – the quest for refreshment and concentration. While the healthy benefits of matcha seem to take over discussions about it in the western world, we shall not overlook the cultural implications behind this Asian drink – that it conveys a traditional image of Japan. Viewing from the angle of cultural anthropology, matcha can also be regarded as an oriental symbol in the eyes of Euro-Americans. The image of Japan being an exotic nation is entailed in matcha, and relates a high-quality lifestyle. In Hong Kong, most consumers do not view matcha as a health product the way Americans do, even though there is indeed a small portion of middle-aged women who prefer matcha over other drinks for its rich caffeine and antioxidant substance. Quoting from research data, Mok, a 58-year-old administrator at a local university, also the one and only informant who is aware of the health benefits of matcha, says she switched to matcha from Big Red Robe (a kind of Chinese dark tea) because it is 'good for my [her] skin. So now I drink a couple of it every morning.'

The motivation behind drinking or eating matcha seems to be very different between the East and the West at this point of time, but in the meantime, the way western consumers perceive matcha has given us some insights into the correlation between matcha and its country of origin. Although orientalism has minimal effect on matcha consumption in Hong Kong, the role of Japan as a non-Chinese state does work in its favor. Being non-Chinese, or even anti-Chinese to some extent, is welcomed by Hong Kong society in general owing to current tensions between the Beijing administration and locals' resistance against Chinese influence. Thus, on top of being a combined success of marketing strategies and soft power, the consumption of matcha in Hong Kong can also be defined as a subtle manifestation of the city's local identity.

A few years ago, heated waves of anti-Japan protests took place in China's major cities in reaction to the dispute over sovereignty of Diaoyu Islands. In Shenzhen, a protester was spotted among the crowds for his self-contradictory behavior – the

man was wearing a t-shirt with a slogan “boycott Japanese goods” on his back, yet at that time he was also filming with a camera manufactured by Canon, one of the world’s most prominent imaging equipment companies from Japan. (Demick 2012) Soon after reports about this man had been delivered by media outlets, pictures of him went viral on social media. Everybody then began mocking this “patriotic” man, saying that he “captured every critical moment of superpower China with Canon cameras”. In fact, this Chinese man exemplifies the never-ending dilemma between states and market. In his publication on global cultures and identities, Mathews introduced the concept of cultural supermarket – a virtual place where people could consumer every piece of information and identity available on the shelves. (2000:4) Even though ruling powers try their best to mold the state with ‘a shared way of life’ and concepts like heritage and traditions, markets offer opportunities to consumers and let them pick whatever they find meaningful to their lives. Market is therefore a threatening factor for state authorities because it enables diversified identities and discourses, and therefore erodes the ‘common citizenry’ of a nation, which is a major source of legitimacy and authority for governance. In Canon man’s case, the state’s propaganda was to promote patriotism and to foster negation emotions against its historical enemy Japan by adopting a ‘way of Chinese life’ with no Japanese goods. Nevertheless, the Canon man “betrayed” China his country by following beliefs of free economy and then allowing opponents of the state, such as Japan, to destroy the common lifestyle of fellow Chinese. His “betrayal”, again, has to be contextualized in the contemporary socio-cultural background – the unavoidable emergence of market forces, plus free flow of goods and information under globalization. As a result, our identities are no longer limited to national boundaries. Consumng the cultural supermarket is an act in response to power of states.

Take Hong Kong as an example: referring to previous discussions, younger generations consume matcha because it is a symbol of Japanese elegance and an outstanding food which has not been popularized before. This pick from the cultural supermarket shapes identities of young people as unique individuals on one hand; and imply anti-Chinese-ness amongst new generations as well as the public. The tension between Hong Kong civilians and China has intensified in recent years, culminating in the Umbrella Movement in 2015. The movement aimed to resist Beijing’s interference in political institutions of Hong Kong, specifically the chief executive election system.

Prior to the movement several other issues had surfaced, including the controversial Moral and National Education curriculum in 2012, oppression of Cantonese through offering subsidies to schools teaching Chinese Language in Mandarin, disturbance in neighborhoods caused by grey goods traders, and so forth. Localism is therefore on the rise as Hong Kong people refuse to be assimilated as "just another Chinese city". All these political issues may sound irrelevant in the first place, but the fact is, consuming matcha does reflect a local identity of Hong Kong derived from the market, one that is not "nationally Chinese". Notably such availability of commodities in the cultural supermarket, just like Canon cameras, breaks the national discourses of China asserting that Hong Kong is part of the nation because 'we all share the 5000 years of civilization'. Now a local Hong Kong girl can regard herself simply as a Japanese dessert lover and not a Chinese, though at the same time she might also be unconsciously manipulated by discourses of foreign soft powers which approached her through the market.

In the course of my interviews I noticed that most of my informants tend to reject Chinese food when necessary. The tendency towards non-Chinese food does not only represent their love for Japanese or Thai food, but also symbolizes their antagonism towards China. Talking about the informants involved in this research, most of them were rational consumers, which means they would not be blindly engulfed in anything with a 'made in Japan' tag. Although there are minor cases of extreme Japanese-ness fanatics like Benny Ko, a local Hong Kong boy who emphasized he 'would only pet Japanese breeds like *akita inu* and *shiba inu*' (both terms pronounced in Japanese instead of *chau-tin* 秋田 or *chaai-huen* 柴犬, the Chinese translation for the dogs' name) for he asserted 'Japanese is the best race on earth.' Still, many have clearly distinguished between the liking for matcha and the love for Japan as a nation. Some informants are not fond of matcha or matcha sweets, yet they have very positive comments towards its country of origin; on the contrary some denied Japanese-ness to be an explanation for their love for matcha. In other words, 'liking for matcha' and 'love for Japanese-ness' do not necessarily correlate with each other. Nonetheless, there is one key factor in all the latest food crazes that we should note even though the national food does not count substantially for matcha. If somebody wants to promote a certain item and popularize it, the product is presumably from Japan, Korea, Britain, the Philippines, or even South Africa – but

never China. At the beginning of every interview, I have included a 'five most trendy foods you can think of at the moment' quiz. Just as expected, we got answers like Korean fried chicken, Hokkaido milk cheese pudding, kimchi rice cakes, and of course, matcha-everything, while none of the informants gave a thought about Chinese food. In fact, reviewing the closest decades there is rarely any food trends associated with Chinese-ness. Private kitchens (私房菜) operated by Cantonese chefs created a minor hit among supporters of Chinese cuisines in regional styles, for example, Hakka village dishes and Chiuchow da-laang (打冷). These kitchens also offer fusion dishes to attract new customers. (Cheung 2005) Nevertheless people interested in these local Chinese cuisines are mostly middle age whose family came from corresponding regions, though we cannot refute that there might be young fans. Here a generational pattern emerges – people in their fifties or elder tend to show a more inclusive attitude when it comes to Chinese cuisines while at the same time they are relatively hesitant in tasting matcha food. The generational variation regarding perception of matcha, as we have noticed, subtly coincide on political stance of different age groups in Hong Kong – in general the eldest ones tend to be more conservative and pro-China; and the blooming young generations, also the major group that accounts for greatest percentage of matcha lovers, loathe to retain any relation with China and fight hard to establish a new Hong Kong identity (some even advocate for the independence of the city). Chan, a 72-year-old who has experienced the Sino-Japanese wars in her childhood, declined to try the matcha chocolate I offered even though she is a sweet tooth. Relating Japanese-ness to her nightmarish memories, Chan said she 'hate[s] *lo-baak-tao* (蘿蔔頭 in Chinese, a common term in China that carries negative impression of Japanese) and refused any Japanese products. Despite having grown up in a different historical background (without military rivalries with Japan, and experiences of the very first waves of Japanese popular culture arriving in Hong Kong during their twenties and thirties), Mak and Cheung, both born in post-war baby boom during 1950s, learned from words of parents' mouth about the 'evil doings' of Japanese in the wars and therefore 'do not want to admit that Japanese goods are of high quality'. – They agreed that Japanese products are more competitive but they were unwilling to concede due to patriotism. The two locally-born and raised Hong Kong men both said they 'prefer Chinese food over other cuisines.'

Today Chinese food is still welcomed, yet is rarely considered fashionable. Young people seldom pay a visit to *jaulau* (酒樓, most common type of Chinese restaurant in Hong Kong) unless when they have to meet their elder families members in traditional Chinese festivals, for example, during Lunar New Year or Mid-autumn Festival.

Although most of the informants are not rigid about "made in Japan" labels in matcha desserts, they may feel less enthusiastic once they realize the food they are having are from China. The following are feedback from several informants concerning comparisons between Chinese and non-Chinese food:

> *The only thing (fashionable Chinese food) I think of is 8-colour Shanghai dumplings at Paradise Dynasty (樂天皇朝). There are 8 flavours, some of them are not entirely Chinese cause the restaurant have added ingredients like cheese, foie gras, and perigord truffles. Yea… this is the only fashionable (finger quotes) Chinese food as far as I remember.*
>
> - Yammi Chow, 21

> *Nowadays almost everything is made in China, and the food we have cannot be excluded from this superpower. So it's okay to try green tea desserts made from ingredients produced in mainland. It's just that I would not be willing to pay as much money as for Nakamura Tokichi.*
>
> - Maggie Wong, 20

> *Um… I've never thought about the principles of posting on social media seriously, […] but if I were to choose between a photo taken at Taoheung (稻香, a local Chinese restaurant chain) and a photo taken at a new, decent café, like Sinmei Tea, I would definitely upload the latter to my (Facebook) timeline. […] My sister has a foodie* (an alternative for food blogger) *Instagram account and I seldom see her posting Chinese food.*
>
> - Sonia Cheng, 17

Speaking of teahouses in Hong Kong, I learned through one of my friends that there is a Chinese-style high-end teahouse named Nan Lian Garden (松茶榭), sited in Chi Lin Nunnery in Diamond Hill. The Garden is only ten-minute walk from the closest MTR station yet the number of visitors is totally incomparable to that of any other matcha restaurants in town – on OpenRice.com, there are less than ten reviews for Nan Lian Garden while more than 130 and 300 people have given comments regarding customer services and food quality at Nakamura Tokichi and Via Tokyo (another popular matcha dessert house) respectively. This sharp contrast again demonstrates how objects that contain Chinese-ness are not appreciated by consumers in Hong Kong.

'To me my love for Japanese culture stemmed from the disappointment towards China. I mean, I don't hate China – not the cultural China but I am totally disgusted by the Communist Party.' Carmen Chow, a 28-year-old who works as an editor at a political commentary publishing company, said it is the 'loss of confidence for a nation that I'm supposed to belong' that makes her an addict of Japanese culture. Chow added, 'I was in Kansai last month and the architecture is simply impressive. We used to have exquisite things in China, but now you cannot find any of well-protected Tang dynasty's architecture in mainland China. Well… it is the cultural China not the political one that I like.' While Japan and China share a lot of similarities, especially in ancient cultures, in the eyes of consumers they are still two contrasting countries. 'You would never expect a lady sitting there being polite to you and offer matcha to you in mainland. […] It is just impossible to see such elegance and respect in China.' Keith Hui, a university student who claims that he 'would love to be Japanese and would rather be born in Japan than in Hong Kong or China', argued that China is 'not even ten per cent of Japan'. This young Hong Kong man dressed in typical Japanese schoolboy outfit further stressed that he feels more attached to Japan because it is not like Chinese's bad taste for everything, though he did not give much details on 'bad taste'.

In Mintz's chapter *Tasting food, Tasting Freedom*, he explained that food consumption could be an instrument of social resistance. People in the Caribbean region who were forced to slavery by colonial rulers created their own style of cooking

and thus acquired a sense of freedom from other manipulated parts of daily life. (1996: 33-49) Likewise, the current matcha boom in Hong Kong can been seen as a minor genre of resistance against powers of the state, i.e. China, through making self-defining decisions in the cultural supermarket, i.e. choosing a non-Chinese food over a Chinese one. With ascending dissatisfaction towards both Beijing and SAR governments, consuming a food which is not from China is another way of showing unwillingness to capitulate to state governance and to defy China's domination in different local institutions, other than more potent forms of resistance such as rallies and occupation.

Concluding remark & Notes of thanks

Matcha began as monastery ritual in Japan eleven centuries ago but later evolved into an aesthetic appreciation for social elites during the most prosperous ancient period of the country. As time passes, changes in socio-political settings recreated matcha from an aristocratic luxury to a national heritage for the purpose of nation-state building in the early 20th century in Japan as it underwent critical stages of modernization. Today matcha is not only served in traditional tea ceremonies but also available in convenient stores, supermarkets, fast food chains, and a lot more daily occasions. In the meantime, situated in the middle of a globalized context, matcha has further transformed into an instrument of soft power that advertises Japan in front of global audience. Starting from 2010s, waves of matcha craze have been recoded across American and Eurasian continents, and are still on the rise. People in different corners of the world like matcha for a number of reasons – some are fond of it for its healthy benefits, such as rich caffeine and antioxidant content; some are lured into this new trendy item because of its cultural image, which constructs sense of superiority and distinctiveness; while the sheer love for matcha for some people simply grows from its collaboration with sweetness in desserts. The ongoing matcha boom has given us insights into fluid patterns of global soft powers. More importantly, the extraordinary popularity of matcha in Hong Kong has narrated subtly the city's biggest worries in response to increasing influence from China, particularly concerning political tensions. Other than merely a part of contemporary consumption, the liking for matcha in Hong Kong signifies people's resistance against China and the desire for a new cultural identity, rather than being just another Chinese city. This paper, with data drawn from

my final year project, an anthropological study of food, has sought to analyze how social, political, and cultural forces have driven such an extensive boom. By doing so, I hope to contribute to Hong Kong's anthropological records although the research is only a tiny segment in the whole society; to document the struggles of this world city, and of course, the greatest concerns of young generations, from the angle of popular culture.

This research would not have been completed without support from all informants, who have kindly offered me their time in sharing personal experiences, making my analysis much more comprehensive. Several of them were not in Hong Kong during the time of my field work so interviews were conducted via phone or Skype. I sincerely apologize for the inconvenience that came along with long distance interviews. A special thank-you note is to be delivered to Mr. Okada and his staff in Kyoto, who spent two and a half hours answering my clumsy questions about the tea industry in Japan; and my Japanese friends who helped a lot with translating. If any of the diners were shocked by me approaching and inviting them to an interview happen to come across with this paper, please accept my heartfelt thanks for assisting a stranger with her academic research. Last, but not least, I would also like to express my gratitude for Professor Gordon Mathews since he has given so much guidance throughout the whole process, from the very beginning when the research framework was nothing but a mess, to every consultation filled with questionings. The advice given were truly valuable, especially regarding the nuances in our day-to-day life that many of us neglect yet are profoundly crucial in anthropological studies.

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