

The Myths of Mangos And other Tales of the City
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-A 4 Minute Eternity

Two weeks into my time in Hong Kong I found myself waiting for the MTR from Wanchai to Admiralty. I moved over three boarding spots to the right of the tunnel that led to the train—assuring that once stopped at Admiralty I could run directly across the station floor to catch the next train to TST (Tsim Sha Tsui). Catching the earliest possible train was all about positioning I had discovered—pace and timing were too inconsistent, but you could always control your positioning. And so I waited just to the right of where the metro doors would open in anticipation of the exiting crowd, adhering the ever repeated request of the MTR “please stand clear of the door. Let passengers exit first”, before it was even uttered. With rush hour past, the urgent pace of the MTR station seemed to ebb. I watched the end of the ‘Break and Burn’ Slimming Solution commercial on the screen across the track, for the hundredth time, before looking up to the digital information sign.

¡4 MINUTES! Ahya!

“The train to Sheung Wan will be arriving in 4 MINUTES!” I said to myself in a tone of indignant disbelief. The absurdity of it all actually moved me to take my eyeglasses out of my bag and check again. 4 minutes was an eternity! You never wait 4 minutes for the MTR—1 minute, 2 minutes—I had heard tales of a 3 minute wait but had never experienced it myself. But 4 minutes in the world of the Hong Kong MTR system seemed like getting a busy signal when calling 911. The very thought threw into question certain infallible truths upon which the universe of the MTR and by extension the city of Hong Kong and my summer world seemed to rest.

And what a beautiful world it has been: where you don’t eat or drink in the paid area of the station—although both are an intricate part of Hong Kong culture, it is simply known that you take the MTR to dim sum, not the other way around. Where those who are simply moving **with** the flow of human traffic stand to the right on escalators—thus allowing those moving **through** the traffic to run with urgency on the left hand side. Where your Octopus card is always on hand to swipe, beep and move through—and those disappointing-traffic-cloggers who stand fumbling, hand frantically searching their bag and person, are usually the same tourists who stand dumbfounded at the exit signs that run from A to F.

And so I stop for a minute to ask them what they are looking for because I still have the distant echo of myself, only two weeks earlier, standing in that same place. I marvel at the pace and rhythms of this city. I marvel at the way Hong Kong opens itself and in two and half short months has enveloped me—incorporating me into its workings, its flows, its pulsing life force. In such a huge, frenetic, ever lit, ever moving city, the extraordinary experience has been to be reciprocally incorporated—not lost.

The dim sum woman outside the Lung Moo restaurant knows when I am running late in the morning, not because I have ever bought dim sum from her, but because I smile and either calmly wait of the green walk sign or recklessly run into the street narrowly slipping passed

paused Trams and eager red taxis. The four staff and old cook of the restaurant to the left of my apartment building playfully chastise me in Cantonese when I miss my ritual return-from-the-gym-11:30pm-choi sum-take out-dinner. It doesn't really matter to them or me that I don't speak beyond a word or two of Cantonese—because we understand each other anyway. After spotting each other at four separate films around Hong Kong, the always silent film-buff with the shaved head, immaculate white collared shirt and yellow pad, unexpectedly informs me that I missed a brilliant Brazilian film on Thursday. He suggests I see its second and last showing on Sunday afternoon. And then he wanders off to who knows where.

Beyond morning commutes and meetings with internship supervisors and project completion—these are the ways Hong Kong has become my home. These are the ways I have carved out my space in this vibrant city, and more significantly, these are the ways Hong Kong has welcomed me with open arms. The only question now is, when do I get to come back home?

-The Myth of Mangos

Forget what you think you know about satiety. succulence. sweetness. texture. delight. Forget what you think you know about love. Forget what you think you know about...Produce.

The first thing I bought in Hong Kong was a fruit knife—a remarkable object that can barely pierce through an instant coffee package, but slices perfectly into the true treasure of the Hong Kong wet markets...mangos. After a small game of 'creative communication charades', I held my sheathed fruit knife close and went in search of dinner and what can only be described as orange ecstasy.

What began as a dinner ritual, quickly blossomed into a culinary obsession. Soon, three small mangos the size of my fist were not enough. And as my desire grew, there were the Wanchai markets to feed my habit. Before I knew it I was purchasing HK \$15, \ mangos that were just slightly smaller than my head. And then I started packing my gear off to the office—stowing my knife and giant mango away till lunch, when I could indulge yet again. It was this mango madness that created the gateway into the initial and now lifetime connection between me and the extraordinary people who I've spent my summer working with and coming to love.

“Ahya, La! Mango again? You eat so many mango!”

Mimi, Viki, Ruby, Yuki and Rita were initially just amused by my odd eating habits. It became predictable to find me in the little kitchen, 15 minutes after everyone else would start their rice boxes, poised over the sink and methodically slicing up my luscious lunch. And they were curious. “Was a mango really enough?” “How was it possible to eat so much of just one thing?” They laughed at me and figured I would soon grow weary of my mangos.

Lunch after lunch I would emerge from the kitchen with a plate piled high with diced mango and soon they realized that this was much more than a fleeting affair—it was a mango mystery of sorts. Ever so gradually I would find myself in the kitchen with someone else.

Someone waiting to wash out a bowl or mug. Someone trying to just quickly grab their lunch out of the microwave. And gradually, while performing my lunch ritual, conversations turned to things outside of work, or how I was enjoying Hong Kong or my excessive consumption of mangos. Mangos seemed to lead to discussions of India—the first Asian country in which I discovered the joy of a ripe, non-fibrous mango. India led to talk of my family, which led to discussion about their families. My questions about the South Asian community here in Hong Kong created the opportunity for them to ask me little bits about Indian customs, culture and community. As the peeling became less methodical, almost second nature—the discussion too became easier, more genuine, they became more personal and meaningful.

These stolen ten minute discussions allowed me to know those around me as more than basic work associates. These pre-lunch pauses gave me access to a world of Hong Kong and Chinese culture, family and curiosity that enriched my summer, but much more than that, enriched my life. In the process of peeling and slicing and dicing I have shared my life, hopes, dreams, fear and beliefs with people who are now much more than colleagues, but friends. And likewise they have shared of themselves—shared of their lives and experiences.

There still exists a general concern and amusement regarding my love of mangos. The only real problem that arose was the minor infestation of ants I caused, when I improperly disposed of my juicy mango peels. From that day on I carefully peel my mango over the sink—dropping the skins into a plastic bag that I then tie off and take out with me when we leave the office in the evening. My fruit knife is most certainly returning home with me—although certainly not in my carry-on bag.

Mimi is convinced that my mid-summer acne breakout was caused by my excess intake of mangos—however I'm fairly certain that it was more directly linked to the sweltering heat, constant sweating and application of sun block.

As I finish my last mango of the summer and bid farewell to this office container that has opened up this world of Hong Kong to me—I will rush in to Mimi to consult on one final question...

Approximately 50.

I'll let you guess the question.

Byebye La...and thank you for everything.