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Mission – to incite hunger: the contemporary Singaporean food memoir

Abstract:

While Singaporean foodways have attracted significant and interesting scholarship, Singapore food writing, like much of the country's popular culture, has attracted less notice. Yet, the food memoir is a growing, and highly visible and successful, sub-genre of Singaporean food writing. This paper will profile such Singaporean food memoir, comparing examples by expatriate Singaporeans such as Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan's *A Tiger in the Kitchen: A Memoir of Food and Family* (2011) with such locally produced texts as television chef and food writer Terry Tan's *Stir-fried and Not Shaken: A Nostalgic Trip Down Singapore's Memory Lane* (2009) and those of a number of less well known local authors. Common concerns and tropes will be identified, as well as the role these texts play in Singaporean food culture, both for local consumers and visitors. An interesting aspect of these works is that, in a country that imports almost all of its food and beverages, a number of these narratives are State-sponsored attempts to incite a desire for, and a hunger-inspired appreciation of, Singaporean food.

Brief biography

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The kitchen was the centre of our lives ... In many ways, people were nicer and the food was tastier then (Sanmugam 2011: 14).

Introduction

While Singaporean foodways have attracted significant scholarship (see, for instance, Hutton 1989; Huat & Rajah 2001; Duruz 2006, 2007, 2011; Bishop 2011; Leong-Salobir 2011; Tarulevicz 2013), and these studies often mention Singapore food writing (and especially cookbooks), this subject – in common with many other examples of Singaporean popular culture – has not attracted significant in-depth notice (for and exception, on the link between food writing and politics in Singapore, see Duffy and Yang 2012; see also Brien 2014a). In the below, as in common parlance and scholarly understanding, food writing is taken to be that writing in cookbooks, magazines and newspapers that is principally about food – which can be recipe based, or not – as well as that in longer-length works such as culinary memoirs or gastronomic tourism narratives and in online food-based websites and in blogs. Despite this neglect in scholarship, food writing is an increasingly visible component of the cultural production of, and about, Singapore, and performs a range of functions for local consumers, as well as tourists to that country and other readers outside Singapore (Brien 2014b).

The below introduces and profiles the published book-length Singaporean food memoir. It will identify common concerns and tropes, as well as the role these texts play in Singaporean food culture, both for local consumers and others. Memoir-based magazine or newspaper food-based article (print or online) and memoir-based blogs are another significant component of this phenomenon, but will not be investigated here. Although many languages are used in Singapore, English is the national language (Alsagoff 2010) and this study refers to the food memoir (and food writing, more generally) in English.

Background: memoir and the Singapore food memoir

It is often remarked that contemporary readers have an insatiable appetite for memoir and other life writing. Memoirs are narratives based on the personal knowledge and memories of the author and, in the contemporary publishing environment, these memoirs are

increasingly, but not always, written autobiographically – that is, the author is the main subject of the memoir. Memoir, however, differs from works of autobiography in presenting an aspect or part of a life rather than an entire life account (Brien 2004). Feather and Woodbridge have asserted that the popularity of the form with readers reflects an “undiminished human curiosity about other peoples lives” (2007, p. 218), with Hamilton, like many others, arguing that this output “has enjoyed an extraordinary renaissance in recent years” (2007, p. 1), although others have questioned the rate of growth (Currie and Brien 2008). Reader popularity (growing or not) has led to an increasing fracturing of genres and sub-genres of memoir to meet this demand (Brien 2011) with Smith and Watson’s foundational study, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010), listing sixty genres of life writing, many of which are types of memoir. Contemporary food memoir is most often defined as usually autobiographically-focused narrative that is based around food and other culinary-related content.

Two major recent critical historical studies have used food writing, and memoir, in investigating Singapore’s food culture. Cecelia Leong-Salobir’s social history of the food culture of colonial Singapore, uses a selection of long neglected primary sources including cookbooks and household management manuals, alongside diaries, and travel and other memoirs in order to explore British expatriates in India, Singapore and Malaysia and how they interacted with food. Working from these sources, Leong-Salobir is able to make the original finding that colonial food tastes and culinary habits were shaped by the reliance of these British expatriates on the local servants who both prepared their meals and also determined what would be served – dishes which commonly included hybrid combinations of British and local dishes. About these sources, Leong-Salobir writes that these were valuable as they contain records of the “day-to-day routine chores and tasks colonials engaged in ... [and] provide important insights into the daily activities of colonial life” (2011, p. 3) finding these personal narratives valuable “mines of information on colonial food practices” (p. 4). Nicole Tarulevicz has written a food inflected cultural history of Singapore post-1965, which also maps how food has been used as metaphor and national symbol, and mobilised in building a sense of national identity (2013). While both of these groundbreaking studies draw on, and discuss the

significant role that food memories (personal, popular and national) and food nostalgia plays in connecting Singaporeans to the past and, in Tarulevicz's case, to nation building, neither discuss contemporary Singaporean food memoirs in depth or explore their range and contribution to these, and other, debates and discussions. The below, therefore, focuses on the contemporary Singaporean food memoir, defined here as those published during the past decade.

Expatriate Singaporean food memoir

A number of memoirs by expatriate Singaporeans have attracted considerable international success and attention. Lucy Lum's *The Thorn of Lion City* (2007) was published in New York by Public Affairs, a member of the Perseus Book Group, which was named Publisher of the Year in 2007 by *Publishers Weekly* magazine as "the most important independent publishing company in the nation" with its focus on producing "serious nonfiction" texts (Milot 2007). It was simultaneously released in London by Fourth Estate, the prestigious imprint of Harper Collins publishers. Born in 1933, Lum grew up in Singapore before moving to England in 1970, and this memoir focuses on her childhood, and describes how her Chinese immigrant family was dominated by her cruel and superstitious grandmother, who thought raising girls was a waste of food. This powerful memoir deserved all the positive reviews it received, including by the *Library Journal*, who recommended the book in a starred review as "essential for all large libraries, this will enrich multicultural and memoir collections of all sizes" (Library Journal 2007).

While Lum relates many scenes where she was treated cruelly, including being beaten, food takes a central place in the narrative, with the volume including many beautifully written scenes of food being prepared and eaten and, sometimes, withheld. Each of these descriptions, however, works in the narrative to support or underscore an important historical issue, family relationship or other point relating to life in Singapore. By retelling her beloved father's memories, for instance, Lum can not only reflect on his hopes for a better life in Singapore in the 1920s, but also describe what Singapore was like before she was born. In Lum's narrative, Singapore in the 1920s and 1940s is replete with street food vendors (usually referred to collectively as 'hawkers'), including "Indian

tea-sellers, who carried copper urns heated by charcoal fires on bamboo poles and sold ginger tea or Ceylon tea; some carried rattan baskets full of delicious *roti*” (flaky flat bread) (p. 9). Describing her birth, Lum situates this among the street food of Singapore:

I slipped out of my mother in the blink of an eye at the maternity hospital close to Serangoon Road where the air was thick with spices from the shops where they were milled, and people queued on the pavement, clutching their previous bags of turmeric, cardamom and cumin, grown on their plots of land and brought to the shops for grinding. ... Along the road, tucked away, tiny restaurants served curries, sweetmeats and yogurt on banana leaves cut into squares (p. 23).

The presence and then removal of these hawkers from the streets of Singapore is a reoccurring theme of the Singapore food memoir, as is the physical change that has occurred from high-rise development, land reclamation and other urban refurbishment. These changes are often acknowledged with a mixture of recognition of a need for development and nostalgia for the lost physical past.

Life before the high-rise flats that are now home to most Singapore residents was lived in both urban housing and village *kampungs*, many with, or near to, home gardens. Lum describes tapioca and sugar cane (p. 1), papaya, banana, cherry and jackfruit trees (p. 4), and curry being made from the tip of flower spike of a banana tree (p. 139). Lum describes how these home gardens saved lives during the hunger of the Japanese occupation during the second world war. Lum’s father was employed as a translator and her family had food in return for this labour, but many others had access to much less: “By the middle of 1943, many were surviving on tapioca and sweet potato. Limbs swelled with beriberi” (p. 135). The privations and rupture of social and cultural life during the occupation is another theme of many Singapore food memoirs. Even if the memoirist is too young to remember this period, it is mentioned through the memories of older relatives or as a general marker of previous hardship and food insecurity.

In common with other memoirists, Lum relates how food plays an important part in Singaporean religious life, whether as offerings for Chinese spirits in her own home (see, for example, p. 6) or in Malay ceremonies such as circumcisions, weddings and funeral vigils, and describes the lengthy, and usually communal, preparations undertaken.

The preparations for a [Malay] wedding feast could last for several days, with

everyone chipping in to help with the cooking and decorations under a huge tarpaulin that protected them from sudden downpours. Women sat on grass mats cutting up baskets of vegetables, peeling shallots, garlic and ginger, slicing lemon grass, grating coconut and grinding fresh spices on large stone slabs with granite rolling pins, while the men butchered animals, cutting up goat and chicken for curry (p. 117).

She also describes the Muslim Ramadan fasting and the difficulty her young friend had with the directive “not to eat or drink”, noting the vivid detail that her friend was “not even allowed to swallow her saliva and would have to spit endlessly” (p. 119). Food can also be the basis of superstition and even magic, as in the case of a family friend feeding puppy meat to her husband in an attempt to break a spell she believed his mistress had cast on him (p. 159).

Although many troubles and trials – both public and private – are related throughout the memoir, there are some great pleasures too. In common with children worldwide, this pleasure is often found in sweet treats and Lum describes her favourite childhood delicacies, “*ice-kachang* ... red beans and agar-agar, piled high with ice-shavings and streaked with the delicious multi-coloured syrup that always dripped down our chins” (p. 69) and “*chendol*, coconut milk served with teardrop-shaped green bean flour noodles and *gula melaka*, brown sugar that came in tube-shaped blocks” (p. 69). She also relates enjoying eating the sweet rice left over after brewing rice wine (p. 127). Her school ‘tuck shop’ was a collection of food stalls selling “home-made cakes, vermicelli, fried noodles, mixed nuts in paper cones made out of the pages of an exercise book” (p. 54), although most of all she liked “chocolate milk from England, which I loved to buy even though it cost half my tiffin [a colonial Anglo-Indian term for a light meal] allowance” (p. 54).

Considerable culinary information is relayed through these food memories. Papaya, for example, readers learn, was eaten as a fruit, and its leaves were also used in the preparation of a stew of pig’s stomach, mustard greens and tofu, flavoured with garlic and dark soy sauce – the papaya leaves being used to scrub out the stomach’s slimy lining (p. 44). Lum uses the description of this economical dish to reveal another recurrent trope of Singapore food memoirs – that of the different ethnic groups living peaceably together

in Singapore, and how that difference can be expressed in food preferences. She describes, for instance, how her grandmother, in searching for the most inexpensive meat, had “discovered that Europeans, Malays and Indians did not eat pigs’ stomachs, which could be bought for next to nothing” (p. 44) alongside many instances of members of the various ethnic communities coming together over food.

Although no recipes are included, there are many descriptive passages of ingredients and cooking techniques. Thus, in the 1940s, when her grandmother holds special Sunday lunches to attract a husband for her aunt, Lum describes the “always tasty bowls of thin noodle soup, flavoured with herbs, steamed fish, pork or chicken and sometimes snake, bought live from a stall in Chinatown ... clay-pot chicken ... chicken, tofu, pork, sea cucumber, Tientsen cabbage, ginger, bean sauce and black vinegar” (p. 32). The use of “always tasty” here is very revealing. Elsewhere, I have outlined how contemporary Singapore food writing “contribute[s] to an overall impression of the taste of Singapore food that is highly consistent and extremely persuasive. This food writing narrates that Singapore has a delicious as well as distinctive and interesting food culture that plays a significant role in Singaporean life both currently and historically” (Brien 2014a). Words such as ‘tasty’, ‘delicious’, ‘mouthwatering’ and ‘flavourful’ recur across passages and memoirs as the prominent marker of the food memories recounted.

Culinary medicines are also described, as Lum’s mother says, “Food is medicine and medicine is food” (p. 111). The idea of making soup from flying foxes [bats] – a medicinal preparation enhanced with restorative herbs (p. 15), and the special foods for the weeks after childbirth, “ginger roots, dark brown sugar and black Chinese vinegar were heated, then left to mature in great earthenware pots; later pigs trotters were added to the mixture, cooked, and served to Mother at every mealtime for four weeks” (p. 21). Not only who eats these dishes is important – who cooks in these memoirs is also revealing. Lum, for instance, describes how, as her family becomes more prosperous, her grandmother hires a cook. There was a hierarchy of servants in these Singapore homes: this cook, for instance, “knew her own value: she stated at her interview that she would do no housework and would shop where she pleased” (Lum 2007, p. 47), but the girl servants, who were purchased, were treated little better than slaves.

Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan’s first book, *A Tiger in the Kitchen: A Memoir of Food and*

Family (2011), is another memoir written by an expatriate writer and produced by a major American publisher, Hyperion in New York. While most Singapore food memoirists write at length about the dishes they remember from their childhoods, and how they miss these and/or have tried to recreate these flavours, Tan's memoir narrates her rediscovery of foods that she did not previously appreciate. Set decades after Lum's narrative, Tan writes of growing up in Singapore with no real interest in her family's cookery until, when aged 18, she leaves against her family's wishes to study journalism overseas. The memoir then focuses on how, more than a decade later, Tan undertook a yearlong quest to learn how to cook her grandmother's recipes. This was not only, however, only a journey of gastronomic recovery for, during this year, she also discovers a number of her family's secrets. Travelling back and forth between her home in the USA to Singapore, she not only gains the skills and techniques necessary to prepare these foods, but also considerable insight into her family's history. The memoir thus has a dual focus: the quality of Singapore traditional cookery (and the memoir includes ten recipes) and how such food can express, cement and even rejuvenate family relationships. This link between family and traditional cookery is a common trope in the food memoir both in Singapore and internationally (see, Waxman 2008).

A sense of tension is included in this narrative as Tan feels estranged from her family due to her choice to live overseas and this stress is manifest in her awareness that she lacks her family's food knowledge. This feeling is heightened when she attempts to resolve this estrangement by travelling back to Singapore to learn these family recipes, but is not wholeheartedly welcomed into her family's kitchens. Following, however, the triumphal redemptive narrative arc of many contemporary memoirs (Robertson 2012), Tan finishes the year successful in her mission, having gained the requisite culinary skills to enable her to cook traditional recipes such as salted vegetable and duck soup, mooncakes and her late grandmother's pineapple tarts. These and other recipes occur through many Singaporean memoirs, including *belacan* (a salty fermented shrimp paste), *achar* (mixed vegetable pickle), *mie siam* (spicy rice noodles), *kueh* (cakes) and other well-known dishes.

Although this was her first book-length publication, Tan came to the task of writing her memoir with significant professional experience, having written for the *Baltimore*

Sun, *In Style* magazine and the *Wall Street Journal* and with articles in such major publications as *The New York Times*, *Marie Claire* and *The Washington Post*. Despite residing in the USA and with all her work being published outside Singapore, Tan is recognized by her home country as a local Singaporean author – she was awarded major grants in support of her work in 2011 and 2012 by the National Arts Council of Singapore and has spoken on memoir and food writing at the Singapore Writers Festival.

Another expatriate, Sharon Wee (who has lived some two decades in the USA) published her cookbook memoir in 2012, although this volume was produced in Singapore by major local publisher, Martin Cavendish. *Growing up in a Nyonya Kitchen* describes how Wee's mother, a Peranakan [Straights] Chinese, learned to cook from her husband's grandmother, and relates a series of personal stories behind the food that the family consumed. Like Tan, Wee wrote that, as a girl, she was more interested in studying instead of learning how to cook but, in her case, by the time she was interested in learning, her mother had died. Wee has stated that her memoir began as a recipe collection but in order to test these recipes, she had to consult with members of her family to obtain the personal skills to create them as her mother did: "I experimented with [my mother's] recipes, and then I interviewed all my great aunts and my sisters" (qtd. in Figge 2013). This issue of the authenticity of dishes produced within the family is another common feature of these memoirs. The dishes may be common, but their execution is individual. Food blogger Jocelyn Shu adds nostalgia to this mix in the title of her memoir, *Nostalgia is the Most Powerful Seasoning*, recognising that the overlay of memory and sentiment adds flavour to cherished foods from the past (2011, p. 50).

Expatriate, but always identified as Singaporean, television chef and food writer Terry Tan's *Stir-fried and Not Shaken: A Nostalgic Trip Down Singapore's Memory Lane* (2008), was published by Singaporean press, Monsoon Books. Born in 1942, Tan's memoir charts Singapore's culinary culture from the 1940s to 1970s, including the Japanese occupation and recollections of his grandmother's flying fox curries – he remembers her "sousing them [the bats] with spices and coconut milk" (p. 99), a wide range of now disappeared street food from hawkers "who were of a genre now consigned to history" (p. 115) and the similarly defunct *pasar malam* (night markets) with their food stalls (p. 183). The phenomenon of what Tan calls "vanishing foods" (p. 202) recurs

through his memoir, including delicious-sounding snacks such as crab apples pickled in salt and chili, pieces of deep fried tapioca coated in powdered sugar, bean curd stuffed with stewed duck, and various rice flour and coconut cakes. After one such lengthy description, Tan writes, “I know, I go on about food, but is it not the most important element in life?” (p. 202). Tan relates how he always loved food, when he gained first in his class in his primary school report card, he chose the reward of a month of his favourite hawker stall *kway teow* soup over a coveted Mickey Mouse watch: “The prospect (even to this day) of enjoying my favourite dish for a whole month was too delicious to turn down” (p. 37). He also writes of craving hawker stall satay and *kai choke* (chicken porridge) (p. 38), but writes far less positively about the meat his father and his assistant-cum-chauffeur would bring home to be prepared and eaten – iguanas, deer, wild ducks, snakes and a dog, which Tan describes as “unspeakable degustation” (p. 48).

This focus continues in his final section, on the 1970s, when he writes of the various food venues then available, and how these reflected the growing affluence of Singapore – coffee houses, ice cream parlours and hawker centres (p. 235), those street hawkers having been gathered together into permanent locations. He also notes other changes such as, “In the mid-1970s, posh hotels and supermarket chains suddenly began to spring up” (p. 236) and Singaporeans began to seek out the best what where then identified as iconic dishes – the best “*an pan* (red bean paste puffs), *chiffon pandan* [a distinctively flavoured leaf] cakes, *kueh lapis* [rice flour cakes], *nasi padang* [a rice dish], Hokkien noodle soup with pig’s tail, fish head curry” (p. 236). He then describes a range of now famed or much-missed branded products and convenience foods. This is in direct contrast to his childhood in the 1940s, which was marked by such bucolic scenes as his family’s “personal milkman”, a Punjabi cowherd who would milk his cow at Tan’s doorstep (p. 27), although his mother would then boil this milk “for hygiene reasons” (p. 27), and it was eventually replaced with tinned condensed milk.

Author of more than twenty cookbooks and former editor-in-chief of premiere Singaporean epicurean magazine, *Wine & Dine*, Tan has also been a teacher, chef, broadcaster, journalist, copywriter and food consultant. Interestingly, for an author so beloved in Singapore, Tan (as he describes) left Singapore for London in 1983 and has

only returned for visits since, although his work – including this memoir – is still very much identified as that of a local writer.

Local Singaporean food memoirs

Memoirs written by authors living in Singapore present narratives and stories of Singaporean cuisine that largely repeat the themes, tropes and emotions, as well as the range of recipes, that drive those by writers living outside Singapore. While underscoring the historical and cultural value of the foods they describe, these memoirs commonly describe the unique flavours of Singaporean cuisine and its deliciousness, and display a deep nostalgia about past Singaporean foodways. A contemporary subset of these memoirs have been produced under the banner of the Singapore Memories Gastronomic Literary Series which has been published with government support from the National Heritage Board of Singapore under its Industry Incentive Program. This series includes Devagi Sanmugam's *Tricks & Treats: Childhood and Other Tales* (2011). Sanmugam, who is known as the 'Spice Queen' of Singapore, has written almost 20 cookbooks and is also a celebrity chef who has worked for the Singapore government, so she came to this task of memoir with a high profile. Joycelyn Shu, author of *Nostalgia is the Most Powerful Seasoning* (2011) (cited above) also has a public profile, but in her case for her food blog, *Kuidaore* (a Japanese word referring to gluttonous excess) and cooking classes. Another memoir in this series is Aziza Ali's *Sambal Days, Kampong Cuisine* (2013). Ali, a chef, is widely credited with introducing fine Malay dining to the Singaporean public with the high end Malay restaurant she established in Singapore and ran for 24 years, and had also written a cookbook before this memoir. Her memoir is filled with heritage Malay dishes, as well as stories of not only her family cooking and how she learnt from them, but also a large number of communal cooking events. She also includes a number of discursive descriptions of sometimes complex but achievable recipes.

It is interesting to consider these memoirs in terms of the fact that they are government sponsored, and this sponsorship was provided, moreover, under a heritage program. The volumes certainly profile a wide range of traditional Singaporean foods, and also present, in detail, how the ingredients are prepared and these dishes cooked and

served. These recipes and descriptions of dishes read, moreover, universally as delicious. These memoirs also describe a harmonious society inhabited by recognisably discrete ethnic groups – Sanmugam is Indian, Shu Chinese and Ali Malaysian – yet, all are Singaporean. The series also includes *Rebel with a Course* (2012) by self-professed ‘rebel’ chef Damian D’Silva, an ex-aeronautical engineer, who traces his culinary development back to when, during the 1950s and 1960s, he learnt how to cook what he identifies as traditional Eurasian favourite dishes in his family kitchen. After training at culinary schools and working in kitchens in Europe, he then returned to Singapore to set up a series of eateries. At these outlets, he specialised in creating forgotten dishes like *aberjaw*, a Eurasian dish made from pork bones, turmeric, *tau cheo* (fermented soyabeans) and garlic. D’Silva’s restaurant ‘Immigrants’, for instance, currently serves a number of Eurasian dishes served in small plate style such as Corned Beef Cutlets, deep fried fritters made of “mashed potatoes, corned beef, onions, chillies, salt and nutmeg coated with crackers” (Immigrants 2014) and including those D’Silva describes as “close to extinction”, as in the case of *She Bak* “Pork and venerated parts of the pig, like the ear, intestine, stomach and heart ... slow braised for 4 hours with soya sauce and spices. Served with fried *tau kwa* (beancurd) and chilli sauce” (Immigrants 2014).

Annette Tan’s *Savour Chinatown: Stories, Memories & Recipes* (2012) is produced by the same publisher as the Singapore Memories series. This book includes Tan’s autobiographical reflections around a series of memoirs she writes of Chinatown food personalities. During three years of research, Tan interviewed hawkers, chefs and restaurant owners, working from these cooks’ estimates to formalise the recipes that are also presented throughout the book. The volume builds a food history of Chinatown culinary locations and how these have evolved, based on the oral histories of these cooks. In the section featuring Telok Ayer, for instance, Tan explains how a number of the early immigrants to this area went on to develop food businesses that ultimately grew into some of the major culinary brand names in the area. While many of these are narratives of success, Tan also includes some darker stories involving gangsters and violence. Beautifully illustrated and designed, the director of the company that produced the book stated that aesthetics were very important in this volume reaching its target audience of those willing to collect items of Singaporean significance: “it’s not just a history book ...

[it] stands up as a work of art – a work of design in its own right” (Aun Koh, qtd. in Deshun 2012).

Conclusion

Each of these food memoirs narrates more than culinary memories. All, for instance, include a rich variety of social and cultural attitudes and information. This includes examples of changes to the social and physical environment of Singapore through time, but while lost foods and landscapes might be mourned in these works, the onward pressure of development is never criticised. Another Singaporean-born memoirist, Audra Ang, who left in 1990 to worked for Associated Press for 15 years, is an exception – her *To the People, Food is Heaven* (2012) uses food as a way to critically discuss serious issues like urban migration and human rights, but this is in relation to China, not Singapore. The locations where cooking and eating occurs in such memoirs is also notable, both in terms of the historical context and how this reflects shifts in food habits in Singapore. While all these memoirs largely narrate family meals prepared at home including such small-scale family events such as picnics or feasts prepared on the beach, and larger community events such as weddings as funerals, they comment on changes to attitudes to, and practices of, home cookery. This reflects current demographic research indicating that many Singaporeans now eat out for many of their meals. While twenty-five years ago it was reported that eating out was very common among more affluent Singaporean families, with almost a quarter of affluent households eating less than 50 percent of meals at home (Gourley et al. 1988), this has risen significantly to where the Health Promotion Board’s *Report of the National Nutrition Survey 2010* reported that over 60 percent of all Singaporean residents usually ate lunch and/or dinner outside the home (2013, p. 12).

While there are many other such issues that could be discussed, this preliminary survey of Singaporean food memoirs reveals that they have much to offer readers in terms of cultural, social and historical information as well as the personal stories of their authors. This is not to deny that these food memoirs are also a rich source of culinary material, including recipes and traditional cookery techniques, and it is hoped that further research will follow this initial study in order to assess their potential contribution to

knowledge in a wide range of areas.

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