

gua 包 bao on roadside stands in the neighborhood, savoring once more in the unparalleled, delectable joy of a Taiwanese childhood, of stewed pork belly and sugared peanut dust and chopped cilantro stuffed into a warm, steaming bun.

I lick my lips. It is said that the Chinese script, which dates back three thousand years to oracle bones in the Shang Dynasty, offers us a window into how our ancestors perceived their worlds. At night, tracing these olden words in my grandparents' condominium, I learn: the character "tongue" 舌 shows the image of a tongue 千 rising out of an open mouth 口.



After my mother leaves, I start cooking in earnest. I follow her Post-it instructions through the alleyways of my childhood, past molding concrete blocks, rusting mopeds, and new parking garages. I begin again in the traditional market my grandmother used to frequent. Here, mornings are a rainbow of colors, painted with the medley of tropical fruits in baskets and striated ribs and pork bellies hanging, brilliantly pink, from metal hooks. *Obaasan* shoppers crowd in front of a stand with featherless chickens boiled to a glistening perfection, gossiping with the chef who calls himself Big Brother Chicken. The narrow lane smells of freshly caught fish, their crystal scales shimmering on ice, the light like rivers cascading through our forested mountains. The fishmonger shouts, her voice a deep rumble, the hard-coin sounds of Taiwanese and Mandarin, "*Hoa jia oh! Hoa jia!* Delicious! Fresh fish today and every day!"

My shopping bag fills up: saltwater chicken leg, fresh halibut, and Buddha's head fruit. Taiwan, after all, is a tropical island that rose out of the ocean and has always served as a refuge for people in need of a bite to eat. For more than six thousand years, various Austronesian speaking peoples have nourished their stomachs on the lush, delectable abundances of this island's volcanic soil, waterways, and ample rain. Fishermen in the Ming Dynasty came to use Taiwan's southern shores as a seasonal base. When the earth began