



當馬友與牙或 走在一起的日子 In the Days of Salted Fishes

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在德輔道西海味街走上一圈，便置身於風情萬種的海味世界，當中有一種味道有別於一眾海味，那便是鹹魚——香港人的經典美食。鹹魚行業在西營盤有過輝煌的歷史。今天的海味街曾經叫做「鹹魚欄」，上世紀五十年代雲集了各類鹹魚欄商，成行成市，非常熱鬧。由於以前的冷藏技術有限，為了讓新鮮捕獲的魚能夠長期食用，人們唯有通過醃鹹的方法將其製成鹹魚，以便貯存。

西營盤憑藉鄰近港口的優勢，當之無愧成為鹹魚業的中心。在物質相對貧乏的年代，香味十足的鹹魚是普通百姓飯桌上最常見的菜餚，既可下飯，又省食材。鹹魚不僅僅是平實的美味，它更包涵了香港人對舊時社會的記憶。一塊鹹魚、兩滴醬油、一碗米飯，便能吃懷舊的香港情懷。

A strange fragrance of saltiness fills Des Voeux Road West, and the aroma of salted fish seems to be the boldest of all - yes, it is the legendary food of Hong Kong

Salted fish industry had once been remarkable in Sai Ying Pun. The Dried Seafood Street today was once well known as the "Salted Fish Hood", where salted fish sellers gathered and huckstered in 1950s. Salt was the only alternative to keep fresh fish before refrigerators became common. Fish were usually preserved in salt to keep and transport.

Sai Yung Pun was a seaside neighbourhood that became the trade centre of salted fish. In the less well-off years, salted fish was a popular savoury to serve with rice for most people. This unpretentious delicacy revives your memories of the old days - a piece of salted fish, two drops of soy sauce and a bowl of rice conjure the "old Hong Kong taste".

舌尖上的鹹魚

Salted
fish on
taste
buds



Salted fish now seen in shops around Hong Kong are usually packed in plastic bags, the heads being wrapped in paper. They come in all sizes and species. How do we pick the right fish? Normally, salted fish is categorized into “firm” or “tangy” only regardless of their species. Fermentation makes the difference. When fishes are caught in the fair weather of autumn and winter, they are put into ice right away to keep fresh and to

目前香港市面上售賣的鹹魚一般裝在透明膠袋裡，有些頭部包著白紙，大小不一、形態各樣，該如何分辨？一般來說，鹹魚分為「實肉」和「霉香」兩種口味，其區別主要在於有無發酵。實肉鹹魚在風和日麗的秋冬季節製作，魚一捕撈上來就加入冰塊，一來令魚無法發酵，二來還能使魚肉保鮮。加鹽醃製，兩、三天之後曬乾，肉感結實，口味清香但鹹味更重。相反，「霉香」鹹魚在醃製前不需要冷藏，經過充分發酵後再加入鹽醃製，曬乾後肉質鬆化，散發出濃厚的香味。德輔道西元成行黃老闆解釋，魚只要接觸到冰便不能再發酵，哪怕只是碰到一小部份。外行光靠眼睛並不足夠分辨「實肉」和「霉香」，還要用手輕輕捏一捏魚肉，肉質結實的是實肉，鬆軟的是霉香。



prevent any fermentation. They are then buried in salt for 2 to 3 days before drying under the sun. The flesh of these salted fishes is “firm” and has a light salty flavour. In contrast, “tangy” salted fish is not chilled but pickled by salt directly, so the fish can be fully fermented and is nicely piquant. Mr. Wong, owner of Yuen Shing Hong on Des Voeux Road West, explained, “The fish could not be fermented if any part of the fish touches the ice.” How can a layman tell which is which? The secret lies in your finger tip. Pinch the fish softly - “firm” is firm while “tangy” feels squashy.

「蒸」是與鹹魚最為相襯的烹飪方式，能充分帶出鹹魚的香味和保持鹹魚口感鮮嫩。鹹魚與肉餅是最佳搭檔，簡單地配上少量薑絲、蔥花，便可蒸出一道美味的菜餚。除了「蒸」之外，鹹魚還能「煮」和「煎」。紅魚頭通常用來煮湯，而鹹魚煎出來又是另一種風味。黃老闆分享煎鹹魚的心得，即是先蒸後煎，蒸出來的水倒掉，這樣一來魚沒那麼鹹，二來魚肉不會硬。黃老闆提示，「與其它鹹魚與薑絲搭配不一樣，曹白要用蒜蓉才能最大地發揮出它的香味。」值得一提的是，除了鹹魚之外，德輔道西的兩間鹹魚專營店還售賣本地出產的蝦醬、蝦膏等海產副產品。



各種鹹魚的製作方法中，以水上人的密肚鹹魚最為講究。他們用鐵鉤穿過魚鰓伸入魚肚，無須剖開魚肚便可將魚的內臟掏出，然後把鹽灌入魚肚，魚皮也裹上一層。靜候一日一夜，去鱗，洗淨，用白紙將魚頭包好，便可拿去曬乾。水上人巧妙地運用他們長期在船上生活的習性，把鹹魚也拿到船上去曬。一來躲避蒼蠅，二來利用了海上溫度較為恆定、有海風的優勢，使得鹹魚更加快乾，而且帶上海洋味道，肉感亦相當不錯。只可惜隨著現代經濟的發展，越來越多水上人上岸工作，不再從事這一行業。

Steaming is the best way to sublime the aroma and tenderness of salted fish to the full. Salted fish and minced pork patty always make the best crossover - you may steam-cook them together with some shredded ginger and scallion. Boiling and pan-frying salted fish are also common household dishes. Red Snapper's head is a common ingredient for simmering soup. Pan-fried salted fish gives a pungent aroma. Mr. Wong's tip of pan-frying salted fish: steam-cook it first. Get rid of the excessive juice so that the fish will be tender and less salty. Another tip, "White herring is good for pan-fry as it has more fat, and minced garlic can bring out its taste better than ginger shreds." The two remaining salted fish shops on Des Voeux Road West also sell locally produced shrimp pastes (in jars or solid blocks).

In terms of salted fish production, the boat people's "unblemished fish" is the most exquisite. An iron hook is inserted into the fish belly via the gill to pull out the gut and intestines without cutting open the belly. Salt is then filled into the belly and spread all over the fish skin. After the fish is salt-treated for a full day, it will be scaled, washed thoroughly, and its head is wrapped in paper before it is laid under direct sunlight. Boat people sun-dry their salted fishes on the boat to keep flies away and make full use of the more constant temperature on the sea and sea breeze. Such fishes have an amazing "oceanic" flavour and better meat texture. It is a pity that more and more boatmen have opted for more promising jobs ashore and leave the old industry behind.



當年之勇
英雄不復
Sunset
tradition

經濟變遷席捲香港社會，不僅是密肚鹹魚受到影響，整個鹹魚行業亦發生天翻地覆的變化。最大的轉變在於鹹魚的貨源和生產。如今香港本地已經甚少生產鹹魚，絕大部份來自孟加拉、越南和泰國。產地出現變化，隨之而來便是鹹魚種類的轉變。以牙或舉例，據元成行黃老闆說，以前比較少見。改革開放之後，大陸越來越少向香港提供鹹魚，於是香港轉向南亞開發新的產地。到孟加拉以後發現當地盛產牙或，而且質量好，於是大量入口牙或。相比之下，馬友則是向來都供應充足。近年來，香港鹹魚的種類比以前少了許多，目前主要有馬友、牙或、白花、黃鰭鯧和紅魚。對比攝影師 Hedda Morrison 在四十年代末期拍下的鹹魚欄，大量鹹魚掛滿在店門口，品種非常豐富。元成行黃老闆感慨，「現在品種少，以前很多，連雜魚也拿來做鹹魚。今時今日很多鹹魚都沒人會做了，例如香味紅魚、鯧魚等等。」



Source: HEDDA MORRISON's HONG KONG:
Photographs & impressions 1946-47

Economic changes altered the whole salted fish industry, especially the source of supply and production. Local production is minimal nowadays. Today most salted fish found in Hong Kong are from Bangladesh, Vietnam and Thailand. The species used for salted fishes is hence not the same. Chinese herrings, cited Mr. Wong, were rare a few decades ago. The economic reform in China in early 1980s gradually boosted domestic market, and less salted fishes were supplied to Hong Kong, forcing Hong Kong to look for new production bases in South Asia. Salted fish makers found that Bangladesh is teemed with quality Chinese herrings, thus began to import Chinese herrings from Bangladesh massively. At the same time, the supply of Threadfins remained stable. The variety of salted fish species has become smaller. Now we mainly have Threadfins, Chinese herring, White Pomfret, Silver Mooney and Malabar Red Snapper. In Hedda Morrison's photograph of a salted fish shop in 1940s, there were a large variety of salted fish displayed in the storefront. "You could buy many more types of salted fish long time ago - any fish could be salted - but not for now. Salted Red Snappers and Pomfrets are not found anymore." Mr. Wong sighed.

上世紀五十年代至七十年代是鹹魚業最興旺的時期，當時從梅芳街、東邊街一直延伸到德輔道西，街道兩邊基本上都是鹹魚店，因此這裡得名「鹹魚欄」。合利鹹魚店老店員回憶起舊時的盛況，言語間洋洋得意。「以前前面就是海，漁民捕到魚後直接就在那裡曬！」當然，舊時西營盤一帶的鹹魚店也包括加工，樓頂建有曬篷用來醃製和曬鹹魚。不過現代城市規劃下的樓宇設計並不適合從事這項工作，而且本地漁獲逐漸減少，加之年輕人嫌棄這一行業，使得鹹魚業已是江河日下，英雄不復當年勇了。現時德輔道西只剩兩間大規模的鹹魚批發商，和一些零散的零售商。一位零售商感嘆，「租貴，開一間少一間。」取而代之的是蒸蒸日上的海味行業。二零零零年，在「香港中藥聯商會」的倡議、「香港旅遊發展局」的支持下，德輔道西被冠以「海味街」的名稱，「鹹魚欄」從此退出舞台。



The heyday of salted fish industry was in 1950-70s. From Mui Fong Street, Eastern Street to Des Voeux Road West, there were salted fish shops on both sides of the streets. So this area became "Salted Fish Hood". The seasoned staff at Hop Lee salted fish shop are immensely proud to recall the best of the time. "The sea was right in front of the shop," he pointed outside. "Fishermen basked the fish right there once they were pulled out of the water." Of course, the old buildings in Sai Ying Pun have a special layout for salted fish shops, with a processing workshop and a rooftop for curing and drying fish. Town planning today obviously do not cater for such purpose. Together with declining local catch and lack of new blood, the salted fish industry is dwindling fast. Today on Des Voeux Road West there are only a couple of wholesalers with a few scattered retailers. "The rent is too high. When one shop opens, another shuts down," a retailer grieved. It is now the thriving dried seafood trade that takes the leading role on Des Voeux Road West. Initiated by Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Merchants Association and supported by Hong Kong Tourism Board, Des Voeux Road West was officially crowned "Dried Seafood Street" in 2000. From then on, the folk name of "Salted Fish Hood" disappeared.



回溯半個世紀以來的鹹魚業，經歷了風雲變幻，有徹底的現代轉變，也有對傳統習慣的執著堅持。正如馬友與牙或，今天它們在社會因素的影響之下游到了一起，但無人知曉它們日後將流向何處。但無論如何，鹹魚味經過歲月的醞釀已經深深滲透在人們身體裡面，成為香港人社會記憶中不可缺少的一部分。❄



鹹魚的供應和銷售方面，國內市場和香港市場都相繼萎縮。改革開放以後，國民經濟收入增加，內需逐漸擴大，國內的漁獲主要供應給內陸居民。隨著生活條件的改善，人們越發追求新鮮的海產品，鹹魚的生產量因此減少。元成行黃老闆回憶，「以前我們需要向大陸訂魚，由五豐行做代理商上去拿貨，回來開盤分給我們賣。一九八十年代以後我們和大陸的交易就慢慢沒有了。」對於香港而言，漁獲的減少、港人經濟條件的改善、城市空間設計以及口味的轉變都使得鹹魚業逐漸式微。然而鹹魚價格卻沒有下降，更逐年上升，今年過年期間白花的價格已經超過二百港元一斤。究其原因，主要是生產成本增加。黃老闆透露，在孟加拉，不僅漁獲減少抬高了魚的價格，鹹魚生產鏈中的其它成本也有所增加，例如鹽、紙箱等。另外，當地勞工法例的修改和投資者之間對勞力的爭搶，也使得香港鹹魚商在聘請勞動力的時候付出更高代價。然而，香港鹹魚業面臨的最大的問題在於本地的傳承。目前鹹魚行業上下兩代青黃不接，老一輩們紛紛歎息「沒人入行」，他們只好請香港師傅到孟加拉和越南等地培訓當地人製作鹹魚。

The supplies and sales in both mainland China and Hong Kong markets are actually shrinking. National income has increased since the economic reform, and fish harvest along China's coastline goes to domestic consumption. Higher living standard leads to a growing demand for fresh seafood and less salted fish are craved. Mr. Wong of Yuen Shing Hong knew it well. "In the past we ordered the salted fish from China. Ng Fung Hong was our agent to import salted fish, which were then auctioned to us. After 1980s our trade with the mainland gradually died out." In Hong Kong, decreasing catch, wealthier life, urban space design and changing diet are killing the industry. Ironically, the price of salted fish has not let down, but increases over the years. During the last Chinese New Year, White Pomfret was sold at over HKD\$200 per catty. It is mainly due to raising production cost. Mr. Wong tells what it is like in Bangladesh: fish is pricier because of worse catch, and more expensive items in the production chain, such as salt and paper boxes. With revision of Bangladesh's labour laws and labour competitions among investors, Hong Kong salted fish makers have to pay more for manpower. Yet the biggest crisis faced by the Hong Kong salted fish industry is discontinuity. Experienced salted fish makers have to train workers in Bangladesh and Vietnam to make salted fish instead.

Salted fish industry in the last 50 years has seen both abrupt changes and passing down of traditions. Just like the threadfins and the Chinese herring - they are brought together in the same salted fish shop by social and economic changes, but to which direction they flow is unknown. No matter what, the years of salted fish will forever leave a lasting flavour for people in Hong Kong. ✨