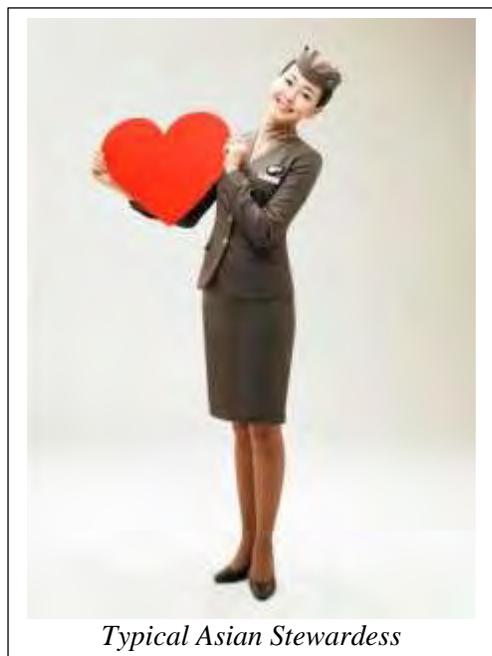


My Reverse Culture Shock Experience

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Typical Asian Stewardess

Earlier this week I went through severe reverse culture shock.

A few days, I got back from South Korea. I went there to help my family with some life changes they decided to make. Although I spent a short time there, the impression it left on me has left me feeling kind of dazed and I think will stay with me for a long time.

If you've ever been to an oriental country, you will be surprised by how different things are. Many oriental countries have strong Buddhist or Confucian roots and also have traditions that span back thousands of years. For example, in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, the family name is stated first and the given name last. It would be strange for me to introduce myself to someone as Hentrich Michael, but this is normal in the East. This is to emphasize the honoring of one's roots and ancestry and to acknowledge the individual as being a part of a greater community or clan foremost before being solely recognized as an individual. Also, in many Asian

cultures there are different degrees of formality used to speak to one's elders and parents, something which doesn't really exist in English.

I've always recognized that the traditional Asian diet is vastly different from our diet here in the United States, but as an older and wiser person, I never really saw how different it was until this most recent visit. In truth, you really have to go to Asia or to live in an Asian household to experience traditional Asian cuisine. Going to a Chinese Buffet or a Sushi Restaurant is not going to cut it.

One of my favorite memories of visiting my grandparents in Japan was having fresh clam soup. It was just a soup with plain clams in a simple broth, but I just remember loving it. My grandmother would buy the clams fresh (alive) from the nearby market and wheel them home on her bicycle. Then, as she cooked the clams, they would slowly open. Mmm... makes my mouth water just thinking about it.

In reality, much of the traditional Asian diet revolves around what could be grown, raised, or caught locally. This came down to a mix of seafood, vegetables, roots, grains, mushrooms, seaweed, and occasionally bits of meat or dairy products. Unfortunately, a lot of the traditionally Asian diet has changed a lot over the years due to Western influence. For example, polished (white) rice was introduced in Japan sometime in the mid-1800s. However, the traditional foods are still favored and widely available there.



Bone Marrow Soup

I noticed that it was similar in Korea. Even though you could find modern food, such as McDonalds and Starbucks, It was equally easy to get the traditional Korean meals for the equivalent of \$4 to \$6. (Neat fact: you don't pay any tax or give tips at Korean restaurants). One of my favorite meals is called Bibimbap. Bibimbap is plain rice that is topped with an assortment of vegetables, mushrooms, egg, and sometimes a bit of meat. Traditionally, you would mix it all together with a spicy, fermented red pepper paste called Gochujang. I also enjoyed a bone marrow soup, something that I had been reading about recently. There are many primitive cultures

who would utilize all parts of the animal, especially the organs of the animal. This is in stark contrast to us in the western world, where we eat the muscle and throw out the rest of the animal. Here is an excellent excerpt from Dr. Weston Price's Nutrition and Physical Degeneration, where he talks about the eating habits of the Native Americans living in Northern Canada.

I found the Indians putting great emphasis upon the eating of the organs of the animals, including the wall of parts of the digestive tract. Much of the muscle meat of the animals was fed to the dogs. It is important that skeletons are rarely found where large game animals have been slaughtered by the Indians of the North. The skeletal remains are found as piles of finely broken bone chips or splinters that have been cracked up to obtain as much as possible of the marrow and

nutritive qualities of the bones. These Indians obtain their fat-soluble vitamins and also most of their minerals from the organs of the animals. An important part of the nutrition of the children consisted in various preparations of bone marrow, both as a substitute for milk and as a special dietary ration.

After having read this about a month before, I was surprised to find myself sitting at the dining table in Korea, with bone marrow soup in front of me. Several years ago, I would have looked at this strange-looking soup filled with cut up bones and other unknown ingredients and been repulsed. Gross! Fortunately, it was a wiser and smarter “me” sitting at the table that day, and I tell you what, I had seconds that day. I felt an inner happiness knowing that I was eating the same traditional foods that sustained the natives all those years ago.



Photo I took at Incheon airport in Korea

As I was sitting at the airport in Korea, getting ready for my return flight, I watched the many people walking by. People seemed generally very happy, even though it was 5 o'clock in the morning. I noticed that just about the only people who were obese or sickly looking were the foreigners. The seats at the gate were comfortable and there were no arm rests, so it was easy for me to lie down if I wanted to. Wi-Fi was freely provided as well as laptop computers if I needed them. I felt like someone had predicted my needs ahead of me and provided them. There was a playground in the terminal, and the employees, as well as the stewardesses were courteous and kind with big smiles on their faces. I was surprised to find that

the terminal was full of a variety of live plants and even arrangements of beautiful orchids. I remember travelling through the same airport as a child, sometimes we would be there overnight on our way to Japan, and they would give us meal vouchers simply because we had a long stay. I could go on and on...

The real culture shock came though when I returned to America. It was the opposite! I was appalled at the impatience shown by the employees, like they were just trying to get me through the line. There were no smiles to be seen. Even though this was the country I grew up in, I felt like I didn't belong here. With few exceptions, almost everyone was overweight.

Of course, diet is not the only factor. There are many factors affecting health, like stress and overall sense of happiness, heredity. Also, I am aware that simply being slim does not mean that you will not have health problems, but I think we also have to look at what other countries are doing better than us, or even what past (perhaps even primitive) societies have done and learn from them. Believe it or not, interest in eating things like seaweed and fermented foods is gaining popularity quickly, even though these foods have been the traditional diet of cultures for thousands of years. This might be a good time to jump on the bandwagon.

Thanks for reading.