HAPTIC HERITAGE AND THE PARADOX OF PROVENANCE WITHIN SINGAPORE'S COTTAGE FOOD BUSINESSES

Abstract

This paper offers a "more-than-representational" understanding of how heritage value is reproduced by cottage food businesses in Singapore. It advances the notion of haptic heritage to highlight the importance of touch and feel in inculcating food with a sense of heritage value. Haptic heritage is reproduced through the physical handling of ingredients in ways that contribute to more "authentic" products. However, it also foregrounds food production processes that are more tactile, time-consuming and thus unscalable than their automated counterparts. Accordingly, the reproduction of haptic heritage is becoming increasingly unviable in Singapore's competitive economic landscape. These ideas are explored through a supply-side analysis of interviews conducted with owners of cottage food businesses in Singapore. We highlight the importance of provenance in passing on haptic knowledges over multiple generations of business owners, the affective value and inefficiency of haptic knowledges, and the present-day politics of provenance. To conclude, we call for research to continue to explore the ways in which sensory forms of heritage are understood and (under)valued in the contemporary world.

Keywords

Haptic heritage, culinary heritage, provenance, cottage businesses, Singapore.

Introduction

On 25th May 2019, *The Business Times* reported that heritage food businesses in Singapore are struggling to respond to the demands of operating within the country's increasingly competitive economic landscape. Various factors contribute to this struggle. Provenance plays an important role in shaping the operating practices of such businesses, as they "tend to be handed down to family members over generations" meaning there is a "strong desire to keep recipes close to the original form" (*The Business Times* 25.05.19). As a result, value is created through the reproduction of the past, which can obstruct the need to adapt and respond to the demands of the present. Moreover, these businesses tend to be labor intensive, meaning labor can be understood to be an important determinant of what can qualify as an "authentic", and thus valuable, culinary product (Weiss 2011). The fourth-generation owner of Hock Lam Beef, for example, was quoted as saying that "almost every step in the process of producing the bowl of beef noodles – from slicing the beef to peeling garlic – is done by hand", the rationale being that "if you cut corners [use machines], I don't do justice to my customers as their taste buds will know the difference" (*The Business Times* 25.05.19). These ideas provide insight into how culinary heritage is reproduced in Singapore, and how "the reading of a food's story reveals… a much bigger story – a cultural geography – of particular times and places" (Freidberg 2003, 4; see also Low 2015, 2017; Timothy 2016; Low and Ho 2017). This paper expands the story by exploring how Singapore's cottage food businesses[1] are embroiled in a paradox of provenance that involves the need to reconcile the production processes of the past with remaining commercially viable in the present.

[1] We use the term "cottage food businesses" instead of "heritage food businesses" for two reasons. One, we prefer to use "heritage" in a specific sense, and in relation to the "haptic" processes that contribute to the production of heritage value; two, food has traditionally been

Our argument is that culinary value is based on the fashioning of a visceral epistemology that is rooted in touch as much as it is taste. Whilst local flavors are one aspect of value, so too are the physical production processes that go into creating authentic culinary products. As a result, a visceral epistemology is one that is inculcated slowly over time, and which becomes manifest through the tactile, and often time-consuming, practices of individual food producers. In these respects, it is an epistemology that contrasts with the logics of efficiency and scale that define Singapore's contemporary economic landscape. By making this argument, we draw attention to some of the politics and poetics that emerge from the fact that culinary heritage is an outcome of "dis-placed materials and practices, inhabiting many times and spaces which, far from being neatly bounded, bleed into and mutually constitute each other" (Cook and Crang 1996, 132-133). Specifically, we bring these spatio-temporal displacements into conversation with recent developments in heritage studies, which have criticized the "dominant – and somewhat obdurate – notion that heritage can somehow be captured and understood as a *thing* to be seen and gazed upon" (Waterton 2014, 825, original emphasis). In response, we develop an understanding of "haptic heritage" to explain how the reproduction of heritage value in and through food is, to a large extent, dependent on a sense of touch and feel that is inculcated over time. Haptic heritage depends, in other words, on how the physical handling of ingredients can reproduce a *feeling* of quality, authenticity and value. By developing this understanding, we consider how the provenance of food heritage foregrounds an "indeterminate, situated

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treated as separate from (or an informal part of) public heritage discourses in Singapore (Sullivan 1993).

politics of '*feeling* food'" (Goodman 2015, 257, emphasis added) that is played out in the present, but which draws meaning and value from the past.

With these ideas in mind, the contributions of this paper are threefold. One, it responds to Waterton's (2014, 823; after Thrift 2008) recent call for "more-than-representational" understandings of heritage that "conceptualis[e] heritage in terms of the body, practice and performativity, together with an insistence that our engagements with it occur through a range of embodied dispositions and interactions". Our understanding of haptic heritage aligns with this shift, as it heralds the primacy of touch and feel in the reproduction of heritage value (Davidson and Milligan 2004; Low 2012; Timothy 2016). Two, by situating haptic heritage within the context of food *production*, we offer a supply-side perspective that looks beyond the role of technology in automating production processes. Instead, we consider how the productive labors of the body are used to "engineer affective responses and affective relations" (Waterton 2014, 829) between the producers and consumers of food, and the reproduction of heritage value therein. Three, by contextualizing the embodied practices of the owners of cottage food businesses within the broader heritage landscape of Singapore, we contribute to the ongoing expansion and problematization of heritage as a discursive construct deployed by different actors in different ways. In particular, by considering how authenticity can be reproduced through the tactile practices – passed down over generations of family members – of making food, we explore how haptic heritage can contribute to the emergent theorization of sensory food cultures in Asia (Harvey 2015; Low 2019). Indeed, whilst these practices reflect the importance of provenance in shaping Singapore's cottage food businesses, so too can they "valoriz[e]… origins, hierarchies, and certitudes" and thus reflect an understanding of authenticity that is somewhat "fixed in time, space, and form" (Weiss 2011, 74, 76). As much as provenance is a source of value for Singapore's cottage food businesses, so too, then, can it be one of constraint.

This paper comprises three sections. The first reviews recent developments in the theorization of intangible heritage, and advances the concept of haptic heritage as a new epistemology of value. The second introduces the empirical context of Singapore, and draws on qualitative data to explore the paradox of provenance that both creates and undermines the heritage value of food businesses in Singapore. We explore this paradox by considering the affective value and inefficiency of haptic knowledge, and the present-day poetics and politics of provenance. The third concludes by identifying avenues for further research.

New understandings of intangible culinary heritage

Heritage is an ambiguous construct. As a form of categorization, it involves attributing present-day value to artefacts associated with the past. In many respects, these attributions are often "rendered more complex by [the] medley of material and intangible forms" (Graham 2002, 1003), meaning any clear-cut distinction between what heritage *is*, and what it *is not*, can be problematic. In light of this, recent decades have witnessed scholarship taking stock of the different forms of heritage that are found around the world – and different attributions of value therein – thus expanding the discourse in new and innovative directions (Harvey 2001, 2015; Gentry and Smith 2019; Lähdesmäki et al. 2019). With such expansion comes the ongoing need to identify and explore "different possibilities for knowing and doing heritage" (Waterton 2014, 823), with discourses of intangible heritage in particular being lauded for the embrace of ideas concerning embodiment and affect. In this vein, Harvey (2015, 577; see also Harrison 2013; Waterton and Watson 2013; Low 2012, 2019) observes how heritage "seems to have undergone an ontological expansion to assume numerous more guises than it seemingly once had, with a formal recognition of 'intangible heritage' being seen alongside academic concerns of 'affective registers' of heritage".

Specifically, Waterton (2014) identifies three inter-related shifts that underpin her conceptualization of a "more-than-representational" understanding of heritage. They are: one, the shift towards the "practice" of heritage, and, with it, a focus on engagement, experience and performance. Two, the phenomenological turn in heritage studies, and the associated focus on the ways in which heritage can be a "complex and embodied process of meaning- and sense-making" (Waterton 2014, 824). Three, recent explorations of the "more-than-human" have focused attention on how the spatialities of heritage – including the spaces in and through which heritage is produced and consumed – play an important role in the reproduction of authenticity and value.

The two subsections that follow engage with, and build on, these shifts. The first is general, and explores the ways in which encounters with the past *within* the present can foreground the formation of affective (heritage) value. The second is specific, and suggests that touch and feeling can lead to new understandings of what we term "haptic heritage". Combined, these two subsections provide a theoretical framework for the section on culinary heritage in Singapore that follows.

The affective value of bringing the past into the present

Heritage is never a fixed category of understanding. Rather, it is deployed in specific ways to serve a specific purpose. Whilst the intersecting axes of time and value can be seen to provide an approximate framework for defining heritage, the fact remains that there are "many heritages, the contents and meanings of which change through time and across space" (Graham 2002, 1004; after Lowenthal 1996). Attributions of heritage value often involve enfolding the past into the present in a meaningful way. In this view, heritage can be understood as an evolving – sometimes even an instrumental – form of categorization,

meaning it "may later be discarded as the demands of the present societies change" (Graham 2002, 1004). Despite its mutability, heritage value can be seen to be relatively more enduring when understood as an affective, and therefore embodied, encounter with the past. This understanding is based on two, inter-related observations. The first refers to the simultaneity of experience, which is encapsulated in the view that "spaces of heritage – each heritage place, landscape, site or experience – are simultaneously *two*: past and present, elsewhere and elsewhen" (Waterton 2014, 828, original emphasis; after Anderson 2014). The second is that to ensure such simultaneity, there is a need to convey "an idea of unbroken narratives that embody what are perceived as timeless values" (Graham 2002, 1008). Whilst Graham's use of "embody" here is not literal, it can, in light of subsequent theoretical developments, be interpreted as such. It is through the body that we can give meaning to the past in the present, as our embodied experiences of the past cannot be changed, nor can they be denied. The body provides, in other words, a point of connection that brings the experiences of the past into conversation with the interpretations of the present.

In many respects, the body is a repository of experience that can be triggered in various ways and in response to various stimuli. As repository, it contains memories, prompts, reminders and nostalgia that, when integrated, provide a sense of interpretive value and meaning to the present. Anderson (2014, 82) describes this conjoining of the past into the present in terms of "affective encounter", stating that "[s]omething of the past persists in any encounter, any encounter contains references to past encounters, and encounters are made through accumulated relations, dispositions and habits". Clough (2010, 224) echoes this sentiment, albeit in a slightly different way, when she states that the emotional dimensions of heritage experiences can be defined by the "empiricism of sensation". Combined, these ideas encapsulate the direction envisioned by Waterton's (2014, 826) call for a more-than-representational understanding of heritage; this is an understanding that

"draws attention to the corporeality of bodies and probes at the multi-sensuous places in which we find ourselves". Indeed, the importance of bodies stems from their ability to affect, and to be affected, with a more-than-representational understanding of heritage thus pushing discourse to go *beyond* mindful consciousness. Doing so will help bring a sense of embodied reasoning, and of the economically *ir*rational, to the discourse, and will thus further expand it in a way that helps us to better understand the sense of complexity, contradiction and paradox embedded within contemporary heritage landscapes around the world. These are landscapes that might be inflexible, inefficient and resistant to change. In the same vein, however, it might also be these qualities that prove to be integral to the perceived reproduction of authenticity. Building on these ideas, we now consider how, through the conditioning of embodied practices, a haptic sense of heritage value can be reproduced over time.

Haptic heritage: a new epistemology of value

Whilst the haptic is most commonly equated with the sense of touch, it goes beyond the sensations of the skin. Rather, touch – and, more materially, skin itself – can be thought of as an interface that connects the outside world of objects, movements and sensations to the embodied world of feelings, interpretations and memories. In this vein, the haptic goes beyond the physical contacts made by the skin, and includes the internal sensations and feeling of the body as well (Paterson 2009). The haptic can be seen to connect the viscera to the outside world, drawing affective value from the "sensations, moods and ways of being that emerge from our sensory engagement with the material and discursive environments in which we live" (Goodman 2015, 258). It is through the viscera, then, that we start to engage the world in more relational ways; ways that are implicitly more unstructured, emotive and potentially irrational than those determined by cognitive processes alone (Hayes-Conroy

and Hayes-Conroy 2008). As such, the haptic can not only evoke the affective experience of the past through touch, but so too can it recreate the past through embodied actions and movements. To recreate the past is to fuse together various practices and senses in order to generate a *feeling* of continuity with the present (Paterson 2006). Fusions like these are, however, imbued with politics of taste, authenticity and preservation. In 2014, these politics became a point of public debate in Penang, Malaysia when the Chief Minister banned foreigners from working as the main cooks of hawker food in order to preserve the sanctity of "local" taste and flavor profiles (Khoo 2017). The implication here is that foreigners do not have the haptic knowledges needed to be able to create authentic Penang cuisine. Altogether, this suggests that the reproduction of heritage value occurs when the creat*or* becomes intimately entwined with the creat*ed*, thus causing the value of the outputs being indexed to the extent to which the creators' skills have been honed over time.

Haptic heritages are therefore dependent on the honing and mastery of skills and techniques of creation. Robertson (2016) refers to such practices as "taskscapes", whilst Zhu (2015, 597; after Nash 2000) calls this a "performative approach" to reproducing authenticity, wherein "meanings and feelings are embodied through the ongoing interaction between individual agency and the external world". These interactions manifest as "living spaces, manners, gestures, talk, daily experiences and habits of the people" (Herzfeld 2004, 11), and, when reproduced over time, coalesce in the reproduction of intangible heritage value in and through the practices of the body. Illustrating the idea that the haptic preparation of food enables individuals to "reconstruct the past in order to create the present and the future"

(Janowski 2012, 178), Choo (2004, 210, original emphasis) writes about following his mother's recipe, processes and techniques when making the Peranakan[2] dish, *satay babi*[3]:

> Its production and performance, [is] an improvisation within certain bounds… it is adjusted to my tastes, my anticipation of the tastes of those who will eat it, my recollections of previous memorable *satays*, a remembrance of previous people, places and occasions where I have enjoyed it before… Its production is an intensely personal as well as cultural process.

In this case, the past is enfolded into the present through the feelings of "anticipation", "recollection" and "remembrance". Not only do these processes imbue the food with value, but so too are they anchored in its haptic preparation. The haptic element herein relates to the embodied processes of cooking; processes that draw on the skills, experiences and techniques that are learnt over a lifetime of practice to recreate the sensations and memories of the past in the present. The preparation of food, then, "provides connections within an intricate and personal web of memories, stories, objects, tastes, processes, people and places that bridge time and space, and it offers a means of "regaining touch" through sensory (re)location" (Choo 2004, 212). As Choo suggests here, haptic heritage can, in many respects,

[2] "Peranakan" is a Malay word that has come to be understood to mean locally born people that are *not* indigenous. Most commonly, it refers to the Chinese Peranakan communities located throughout the Malay Archipelago.

[3] *Satay babi* are skewers of pork that are marinated, barbecued and served with a peanut sauce.

be seen to emphasize the intimate, sensory-driven techniques of food production as much as it does the finished product.

That said, whilst the reproduction of haptic heritage can be observed in culinary traditions around the world, it is being eroded by the speed, convenience and efficiency of food production technologies. Nyonya cuisine – of which *satay babi* is one example – reflects the unique cultural identity of Peranakans, and is renowned for its lengthy, and often painstaking, preparation time. Indeed, the "primitive and inconvenient" (Ng and Karim 2016, 103) techniques inherent to Nyonya cuisine – techniques that privilege labor, time and the tactile handling of ingredients – are being replaced by more efficient preparation methods. For example, the use of the *batu lesong* (pestle and mortar) to extract the essence of herbs and spices through techniques of crushing, pounding and grinding has since been replaced with electric blending. Despite its efficiency, blending has been shown to insufficiently extract the juices of ingredients, in turn altering the taste, consistency and, therefore, authenticity of the end product (Ng and Karim 2016). Our point in this regard is twofold. One, the convenience associated with food production technologies can be seen to *de*-emphasize the role of manual labor in reproducing authenticity; which, two, can cause the haptic to play a less prominent, but also an arguably more *valuable*, role in the reconstruction of the past. We explore this dialectic further in the empirical section below, when we consider the role of haptic heritage in recreating culinary traditions in Singapore. Before that, we provide a brief introduction to the place of food in Singapore's heritage landscape.

Reproducing intangible culinary heritage in Singapore

Whilst it is only relatively recently that Singapore has started to recognize the heritage value of its tangible and intangible cultural assets (Sullivan 1993; Lee 1996; Chang 1999; Kong 1999; Saunders 2004; Yuen 2006; Low 2017), culinary heritage does, however, provide an exception to the rule. It is exceptional in that "eating is agreed to be a national passion in Singapore", and hawker culture in particular is believed to be "intrinsic to the Singaporean way of life" (Henderson 2014, 908; see also Kong 2007; Kong and Sinha 2015). Hawker centers in Singapore are open-air complexes housing a variety of family-run stalls selling relatively cheap, yet resoundingly popular, meals. Accordingly, hawkers – and the food they sell – have been "hailed as symbols of local identity and difference" (Henderson et al. 2012, 850), to the extent that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced in 2018 that Singapore's hawker culture was to be nominated for a Unesco listing as an example of intangible cultural heritage (*The Straits Times* 20.08.18). Other government-led initiatives, which are discussed below, are also underway to reinvent hawker centers and promote hawker culture in Singapore. Yet, despite the deep-rooted cultural embeddedness of food in Singapore, in many respects these initiatives reflect the severity of the challenges facing Singapore's cottage food businesses to remain commercially viable in the face of "socio-economic change and rapid development" (Henderson 2012, 849). These challenges translate into the difficulty of keeping food prices low whilst rents increase, and the problem of attracting a new generation of hawkers to take over well-established family businesses. Henderson (2014, 912) explains these difficulties in more detail:

> Singapore's traditional cuisines… are being undermined by time-saving techniques and inferior ingredients. Skills are lost when older practitioners, both individuals and employees, die without passing on their expertise… There are no definitive versions of several dishes and hawkers can be reluctant to disclose their recipes which are in danger of becoming forgotten.

We can begin to see both the importance of embodied knowledges, skills and expertise in creating "traditional cuisines", and the importance of inter-generational knowledge transfers to "pass on their expertise". This provides a preliminary indication of the extent to which the place of food in Singapore's heritage landscape is actually "more-than-food", and encompasses instead the "multitudinous, shifting and contingent ontological, epistemological and methodological ways this hyphenated convention suggests" (Goodman 2015, 258; see also Low 2015). In this vein, we develop below a "more-than-food" understanding of food heritage by offering our own empirical exploration of Singapore's cottage food businesses, the aim being to illustrate the role of haptic heritage and the paradox of provenance in its reproduction.

The empirical data presented below draw on qualitative research conducted in 2018. The research was part of a wide-ranging project into Singapore's cottage industries, of which cottage food businesses constituted one subgroup. In total, 44 in-depth interviews were conducted with business owners in Singapore; 13 of which were with representatives of food businesses. These businesses ranged from independent hawkers; to bread, biscuit and *kueh*[4] makers and vendors; to more established restaurants. Whilst differing in their operations, the spaces of these businesses reflected a number of overlaps and interconnections. For example, *kueh* could be made in an industrial facility, but then sold in a hawker center; similarly, whilst many hawkers operate single stalls, some have become franchises that operate throughout multiple hawker centers and other premises; also, some more established restaurants might have originated as hawker stalls, and might still be

[4] *Kueh* are bite-sized snacks and desserts that are typically made from glutinous rice.

located within, or adjacent to, hawker centers. The point is that the threads that tie these businesses together are just as important as the characteristics that distinguish them from each other. Similarly, whilst these businesses reflect various operating models, cost structures and risk/resilience profiles, our sample was united in that all struggled with the challenges of adapting to the present (and future), whilst maintaining a sense of connection and fidelity to the past. In this respect, our sample is distinct from the new breed of "hawkerpreneurs" (see below), who are generally more innovative and future-oriented in their contributions to Singapore's evolving culinary landscape. For some businesses, two people were interviewed, representing the perspectives of two different generations from the same family and highlighting the inter-generational politics that can discourage innovation.

The three subsections that follow draw on these interviews to explore, in turn, the poetics of provenance in recreating heritage over time, the affective value and inefficiencies of haptic knowledge, and the politics of provenance in the present-day. Importantly, the analysis mostly offers a supply-side perspective, as our aim is to explore and understand the methods and challenges associated with inculcating food with a sense of heritage value. The demand-side is considered to a lesser extent, and is mainly used in the third subsection to help contextualize our understanding of how and why Singapore's cottage food businesses respond to the demands of customers in the present-day.

The poetics of provenance

Despite representing a range of business types, sizes and products, the one commonality amongst nearly all our interviewees was that their businesses were family-run and spanned multiple generations. Provenance, then, plays an integral, yet sometimes problematic, role in

the reproduction of culinary heritage. Provenance instils a sense of loyalty to the family, and to developing and maintaining the skills and knowledge needed to continue the business. For one *tau sar piah*[5] maker, originally from Malaysia, provenance was what caused him to migrate to Singapore in the first place. He recalled how, in 1974, "my father said, 'you are wasted *lah*[6], my brother is in Singapore, you must go there and learn, must pass on the skill, if not it will be lost'". Here we can see the value attributed to culinary skills, and how not passing them on would be "wasted". We can also begin to see how intimate and personal such skills are, being acquired and honed over years (and generations) of daily contact and learning. In turn, these skills become imbued with a deep sense of meaning. A third-generation maker of *popiah* and *kueh pie tee*[7] recalled how "when I was a little kid, maybe like eight or nine years old, I was playing upstairs… downstairs was actually people making all the *popiah* and *pie tee*". He went on to explain how close physical proximity, and constant exposure, to those responsible for making the *popiah* and *pie tee* meant that the value of such labor was "seared" into him over time:

> When I am in my twenties… sometimes I went out to party, and then I come back at 2 a.m., 3 a.m., then I see my uncles are there doing [making] the skin. This type of thing, the images really sears into you… when I am doing this, it reminds me of

[5] *Tau sar piah* are pastry biscuits that traditionally have either a sweet or salty mung bean filling.

[6] Suffixes like *lah* are commonly used in Singapore to add emphasis to speech.

[7] In Singapore, *popiah* and *kueh pie tee* are examples of Nyonya cuisine, and, respectively, are vegetables and prawns rolled in a thin pancake (the *popiah* "skin"), and pastry shells filled with sweet and spicy vegetables, and prawns.

> them… if, somehow, today or tomorrow, I go and do something else, this link is lost. But if I am doing this everyday, if I encounter some hardship… then I will think of them. I think of my grandfather, I think of my uncles.

This excerpt clearly encapsulates the poetics of provenance – how his work not only provides a "link" to the past, but also how it honors the hard work that his ancestors put into establishing and growing the business. Continuing the business is a way of honoring the past, which in turn enables him to deal with any "hardships" in the present. The provenance of these "foodways" can be seen to take on a symbolic role in a person's life (Janowski 2012; Kong and Sinha 2015); they provide compelling reasons to not only continue the family business into the present (and future) generations, but also to avoid closing it. Indeed, in recognizing the heritage (and other) value of Singapore's hawker culture, along with the aging of the hawker population, the Singapore government has recently sought to attract a new generation of young hawker entrepreneurs, or "hawkerpreneurs". In doing so, it has sought to reinvent the public image of hawkers as successful entrepreneurs at the cutting edge of Singapore's culinary evolution, and as potential reinventors of tradition (Tarulevicz 2018). Whilst our interviewees shared some characteristics with hawkerpreneurs – most notably the significant change in career path – a point of distinction is that they did so out of a sense of duty to the family, more than the pursuit of entrepreneurial ambition. A *soon kueh*[8] seller recalled how she wanted to close her shop and retire because all her children "had their own jobs, in the bank, [but] every weekend they'll come and help me". Eventually, however, her second son promised her that "when I turn 40, I will take over this

[8] *Soon kueh* are a mixture of shredded bamboo shoots, turnip and dried shrimp; they are steamed and wrapped in a skin made of rice flour.

business and sell *soon kueh*", which he subsequently did. In a similar vein, the owner of a *ba zhang*[9] business shared how her husband left an engineering job in order to continue the family trade. When asked why he did so, she explained that:

> These skills were passed down from generations… He had this dream to always open a stall selling *ba zhang*… Since young, he always helped out at home by washing the pandan leaves, or wrapping the dumplings, and occasionally to ease his father's burden, he would help to cook the meat. The different steps of making *ba zhang* were all exposed to him, and thus, he managed to learn the skill.

Not only does this excerpt reveal the extent to which the sense of provenance has a hold over her husband, but so too does it show the inculcating of various culinary skills from a young age. However, as much as kinship provides a "model of the relationship between the past and present, alliance and descent, inheritance and appropriation" (Graburn 2013, 69), so too can the provenance that comes with it be infused with politics. Provenance can be a key source of value, but so too can it be restrictive and limiting. The resulting paradox is one that defines Singapore's cottage food businesses, and can be seen to both explain their ability to endure over time and generations, but can also hinder their ability to respond to the needs of the present. Thus, whilst hawkerpreneurs can be seen to be the change agents needed to reinvent hawking into a fashionable, and potentially lucrative, career choice or switch, they tend to be removed from the paradox of provenance that our interviewees shared with us (Tarulevicz 2018). As the examples of the *soon kueh* seller's son, and the *ba zhang* seller who

[9] *Ba zhang* are triangular-shaped bundles of glutinous rice that are stuffed with various fillings, wrapped in bamboo leaves, and steamed.

left his engineering job suggest, provenance can provide both the motivation to reengage with, and continue, the family business, but so too can it limit the potential for innovation. Arguably, then, the challenges facing cottage food businesses come from the family – from provenance – as much as they do the increasingly competitive economic landscape of Singapore. The next two subsections explore both sides of the paradox in detail. First, we examine the role of provenance in developing haptic knowledges – and affective value – over time, then we explore the politics of negotiating this value in present-day Singapore.

The affective value and inefficiency of haptic knowledge

As we have seen with the example of the *ba zhang* maker, the poetics of provenance means that the culinary skills and knowledges needed to continue the business are often developed over a person's lifetime, and across multiple generations of the same family. Training was an ongoing form of culinary practice that was passed down from older to younger generations on a daily basis. The *popiah* and *kueh pie tee* maker, introduced above, recalled how "I was trained by my father and uncles *lah*, there is a kind of process to learning all these things… It's not surgery or anything like that, but it requires time to learn". He went on to explain how his father and uncles taught him how to make the skin of the *popiah* first: "I started off peeling the skin, then to learn what is the quality of a good *popiah* skin and all that. Then slowly I will hold the dough, I will learn how to swirl the dough". What is interesting to note here is the importance of touch – of "hold[ing] the dough" – in order to gauge quality and consistency. Through touch, we can begin to see the formulation of haptic knowledges, and the ability to *feel* the difference between good and bad dough. Importantly, this feeling is not acquired through taste, but touch. Developing this sort of haptic knowledge was based on repetition over time; the maker equated it with bowling, as "it's just one movement, but you've got to practice it very, very well… it gets very monotonous".

The repetitive process of building up a sense of haptic memory was shared by other interviewees as well. A *tau sar piah* maker recalled the importance of this haptic memory, telling us how "my *shifu* [master] didn't write down the recipe for me, he just said it out… Last time, no weighing machine, just use your hands to measure". This intimate way of handling ingredients on a daily basis would help to overcome the separation between maker and ingredients – between subject and object – and foregrounded the development of haptic knowledges. He went on to explain that "I use my hand to mix; if it's okay, I'll put it in the oven", meaning that if the dough *felt* right, he would proceed to cook it in the oven. Through the development of such haptic knowledges, the process of preparing and cooking food would be imbued with the affective value of provenance, passed down from generation to generation (after Jackson 1999). This value became most apparent when makers had to choose between retaining their traditional, haptic, techniques, or automate parts of the production process with machines. The *soon kueh* maker, introduced above, spoke about how the process of hand-making the skin resulted in tastier, and therefore more valuable, products:

> These skins still must be handmade. If they're not handmade, then not nice. Now we use the machine to stir in the hot water, but we still need to knead it with our hands… If everything is done by a machine, [it is] also not tasty.

The use of machines is done selectively, and in a way that will make the production process more efficient, but will not compromise the quality of the finished product. This insight also reveals the inefficiencies that are embedded within haptic knowledges, as the time and effort needed to make the product is great, yet the finished product can be eaten "in four

mouthfuls". The *popiah* and *kueh pie tee* maker elaborated this sentiment, explaining how haptic knowledge could translate into the reproduction of culinary value:

> The machine, the mixer is brute strength… it is not aware of [stressing the dough] … These are things that are knowledge that are passed on that if you recognize you must do all these right… you need the human touch… Every time I make a skin, I twirl the dough five times, I'm acutely sensitive and aware of the quality of the dough. In a way that's a good thing, because you feel it, you know. So, any point in time that something is wrong, you know it at that moment… Everything is all by feeling, by experience. It's by the touch of the dough.

The contrast between the insensitivity of the "brute strength" of the mixer and the "acutely sensitive" nature of "human touch" reveals both the centrality and value of haptic knowledges, but also the unscalable nature of such embodied epistemologies. The problem, then, is that the knowledge is located within the body of one maker, and is therefore difficult to share with others. The body cannot be scaled-up, or sped-up, meaning the individual maker will always impart their own limitations on the productive capacity of the business. Machines can help to increase the productive value of the business, but cannot contribute to the reproduction of *affective* value that stems from "the touch of the dough". The *ba zhang* seller explained that "machineries do not have the capabilities to replace the need for people… humans are required to make an accurate judgement, and robots can never replace that aspect". The *kueh* seller added to this sentiment, stating that "in the future, no-one would want to do it anymore… you have to wake up in the middle of the night to do it… you need to be working the entire day". She went on to highlight the enduring tension between scale and quality, stating first that "the factory one, one shot can do [make] a lot. But for us, we have to make every *kueh* by hand" before going on to explain that "the factory

one is soft, not nice to eat, it's different". The tensions of which she speaks reveals some of the politics of provenance, which are rooted in the need for Singapore's cottage food business to remain competitive in the present-day.

The present-day politics of provenance

Politics of provenance refers to the problems that arise from cottage food businesses being so intimately implicated in family ties that span multiple generations, and the haptic knowledges that are reproduced therein. Politics typically emerge from the sense of loyalty – and the reproduction of heritage value – that makes provenance such a defining feature of cottage food businesses in the first place. Sometimes, the expectation of business continuity could be seen to limit the opportunities of younger generations of family members to pursue their own interests. A traditional bread maker, for example, recalled how "I did not encourage him [his son] to take over… I know this line of work is very tiring, a lot of work. Especially when it comes to hand-made food, you need to have an interest [in it]". Arguably more problematic, however, were the restrictions associated with provenance. The son of the *soon kueh* seller, introduced above, shared that:

> Ironically, the biggest challenge is my mum… I thought it's probably the NEA [National Environment Agency] licensing, I thought maybe it's the accounting side, you know, there's a lot of things involved there… But after I start work, I realized that the biggest challenge is working with my mother… Whatever my mum says is always right… My biggest goal is trying to make her redundant.

This insight reflects how provenance provides a restrictive framework for both making the products to be sold, and also for running the business. Arguably, then, provenance can also

serve to restrict the potential for innovation that comes with generational succession. Restrictions imposed a degree of inflexibility on the business, as adherence to tradition could easily be at the expense of adapting to the needs and demands of the marketplace. This leads to the continuation of production processes that might increasingly be economically unviable, but still valued for their perceived authenticity. With provenance, then, we can see that "what is really transmitted is knowledge of and/or rights over those material things and, equally important, rights over non-material things such as memories, names, associations, stories, privileges, family traditions, memberships, and so on" (Graburn 2013, 69). These "rights" were, for the older generation of business owners, sometimes difficult to surrender, with the mother referenced above stating that "even if someone wants to help me, I'm quite unwilling [to let them]". This unwillingness can be interpreted as both a desire to maintain the quality of the finished products, but also of inflexibility. The mother went on to justify her stubbornness, claiming that "if you pull [the skin] too tightly, the [filling] will all spill out… when I do it myself… none of it will fall". The problem, then, is that the reproduction of heritage value "makes necessary the consideration of inter-generational cultural continuity" (Graburn 2013, 68) in ways that effectively reconcile the idiosyncrasies of supply with the changing demands of the marketplace in which they operate.

Politics of provenance are acutely felt when businesses must change or adapt to the variable demands of the marketplace. Tastes, and the attribution of value therein, change over space and time, and while heritage businesses may rely on realizing the value of the past in the present, the ways in which such value is realized is constantly evolving. It is in this sense that heritage value can be "deconstructed as mere moment in an ongoing process of incorporation, reworking and redefinition" (Bell and Valentine 1997, 192). Illustrating this

point, the *popiah* and *kueh pie tee* maker recalled the tension that ensued from having to negotiate the value of the past with the demands of the present:

> Ours is an 80-year old heritage business, so the traditions hold dear to me… I have a lot of people coming [and saying] '*eh*, you should recognize this, you should recognize that, improve you brand' and all that… I value the traditional way of doing things, [I believe] that certain things need to do it this way and that way, and I think that my customers also want it that way. Because they have been eating *popiah* for so long already, passed down from their grandmother… They have certain demands and certain ways of how to eat their *popiah* or what they want their *popiah* to be. So, it's important that I do the same.

What the *popiah* and *kueh pie tee* maker highlights here is the tension between the demands of the younger generation of consumers, and the older generation (*his* generation) of consumers. Whilst the younger generation encourage him to "recognize" the need to adapt his techniques and practices to suit the demands of the present-day, the older generation also "have certain demands and certain ways of how to eat their *popiah* or what they want their *popiah* to be". He aligns what he produces with what his older generation of customers' demands, meaning his business can be seen to create *intra*-generational heritage value, but not necessarily *inter*-generational value. His inflexibility is revealed in the admission that "I think my customers also want it that way", which demonstrates how he justifies not changing anything because he is meeting the demands of the older generation that, like him, "value the traditional way of doing things". Indeed, he went on to reveal how such a pattern of thought and justification is forged over time, as "some customers… you will see them coming every year, on the same day, because they have this habit of eating *popiah*". His production practices interlock with the consumption practices of his customers, meaning

each strengthens the other over time. This contrasted with other businesses, that recognized the need to adapt. One example of such adaptation is the maker of traditional bread and cakes, who did not inherit his business but started it himself over 45 years ago, who explained how:

> There have been changes that we have made since the time we learnt how to make it, to suit the preferences of the people today… We still preserve the tradition, it's just that it's adjusted to the preferences of the people of this generation… If you give what your *ah gong*, *ah ma*[10] ate in the past to the younger generation, they won't like it. You must adapt… Don't be like the olden times… This era has passed.

This counterpoint reveals the need to align the reproduction of haptic heritage with the evolving demands of the present generation of consumers. The fact that he is a first-generation owner of the businesses diminishes the paradox of provenance that other cottage food businesses must endure, and reveals the flexibility with which he navigates the contemporary marketplace. Broadly speaking, the challenge of achieving such alignment between the reproduction of heritage and the demands of the market can be interpreted as one of the (self-)limiting factors that can undermine cottage food businesses in Singapore. It is the challenge of maintaining a sense of loyalty to the past – and in deploying haptic knowledges in a way that recreate contemporary forms of value – with the demands of the present. The past provides value and a perceived sense of authenticity, but, in order to prevent the challenges of the present from becoming limiting, there is a need for Singapore's cottage food businesses to more explicitly recognize the fact that "tradition… without

[10] *Ah gong* and *ah ma* are Chinese terms for grandfather and grandmother respectively.

possibility of change is mere stereotype" (Weiss 2011, 77). Provenance, and the fact that multiple generations of the same family often remain involved in the running of these businesses, plays an important role in the reproduction of authenticity. Paradoxically, however, it also stands in the way of change. In these instances, the politics of provenance can become limiting. Reconciling these distinctions is thus needed if the reproduction of culinary heritage is to remain relevant to the tastes and operational demands of the present.

Conclusions

By advancing the notion of haptic heritage, this paper has contributed to the development of a new approach to understanding culinary heritage, and the geographies of food. In the first instance, it contributes to the "more-than-representational" shift in heritage studies (Waterton 2014) by exploring the role of embodied memory and haptic knowledges in reproducing culinary value. These memories and knowledges contribute to the development of intangible value in the production of food, but so too do they limit the viability of food businesses in the present-day. In the second instance, it contributes to the shift towards "visceral food geographies" by providing a production-focused counterpoint to normative, and "'eater-oriented' approach[es] to food geographies" (Goodman 2015, 260). Over time, handling ingredients enables food producers to build up a *feeling* for the food they make, which is at once what instils it with intangible value, but also what can cause it to be rooted in the tastes profiles and practices of the past, rather than the present. Combined, these contributions provide new insight into the paradox of provenance that defines culinary heritage in Singapore; a paradox that is rooted in the negotiations that arise from maintaining a sense of connection and fidelity to the past, whilst also remaining relevant and competitive in the present. At the heart of these negotiations lies the unwillingness to compromise taste and flavor profiles that have been forged over

generations with those of the present, and the unwillingness to prioritize production efficiency (and thus profit) over the value of time-consuming labor. In many respects, this paradox reveals the extent to which taste is "both a physical practice and sensation, and as a social statement, taste has histories… worthy of closer attention" (Freidberg 2003, 5). Taste can therefore be seen to foreground a politics of authenticity on the one hand, and of value on the other.

Understanding the socio-cultural value of food and foodways – especially those that link past to present, and present to future – provides a rich area of study that can help to further develop the ideas raised in this paper. Most notably, this involves building on Waterton's (2014) "more-than-representational" understanding of heritage to explore the full range of opportunities for the reproduction of affective value that exist at the intersection of heritage studies and visceral geographies. These involve going beyond the haptic, and exploring how other sensory triggers can enhance old and create new forms of value. They also involve going beyond food, and considering how the senses intersect with the experiences of memory, nostalgia and trauma. Beyond these theoretical developments, however, there is more applied value to understanding how sensory forms of heritage are understood, (under)valued and reproduced in places like Singapore, where "value" remains a largely economic construct. Indeed, it is this construct – which has traditionally been imparted by the government, but is now reproduced at an everyday level through socio-cultural norms – that underpins the precarious situation that many cottage food businesses in Singapore now find themselves in. With the outcome of Singapore's bid for hawker culture to be listed with Unesco in the balance, questions remain around whether being listed would help to recognize the haptic knowledges and provenance that define its cottage food business – and the value embedded therein – or whether it would simply boost the marketability of Singapore's culinary heritage on the global stage. More conceptually, these questions can be

used to fuel broader debates concerning the power embedded within heritage value, and how it is defined, experienced and exploited throughout the contemporary world.

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