

Early fall is chile season. Every year, my mom and I drive an hour down to Santa Fe to pick out a pound or two of Hatch green chiles for roasting. She gets them mild or medium, no matter how much I argue for the really hot ones.

We watch as the chiles are loaded into the roaster, all crosshatched metal, and as they tumble around and blacken. My mom pats my hand and smiles at me while we wait.

When we get home, she spends hours cleaning them, clearing away the charred skin and seeds. She seals them into plastic Ziploc bags and pops them into the freezer to preserve them through the winter.

For dinner that night, my mom stews the chiles with soy sauce and sugar. We eat them over white rice. Perhaps this is shocking and sacrilegious to Hatch enthusiasts, but in our household, it is tradition in its own way.

My parents immigrated to New Mexico from China in the late 90's; we have no deep roots in this place. We have no extended family, no tribal affiliation, no lineage that can be traced back generations. It's just me, my parents, my brother, and a boatload of green chile that we never learned how to cook the right way.

I like it, though. The chiles are flavorful, spicy and a little sweet all at once. They're tender enough to fall apart under the gentle pull of our chopsticks. My brother complains about the heat, and I make fun of him for it. These are *mild*, I say.

Life here, I think, is an amalgam of influence. From across the sea, we bring centuries' worth of tradition of our own, and we combine them with the carefully cultivated flavors of this native soil. I was born like a cup of tea steeped twice, once in the northern homeland of my ancestors and once among the aspen trees in the red New Mexico caldera. And like a cup of tea that becomes more concentrated as more leaves are added, this double influence is a strength, not a weakness. There is a beauty in adoption without assimilation. There is a certain love for a country felt by those who are new to it.

I have seen the scorched earth of the Cerro Grande and the busy night markets in Jilin, and I have loved both. I pay tribute to both, for they are the topographies that have shaped me. If I leave my house right now and walk a mile down Los Pueblos Street, the houses fall away and I am left with open canyon. Here, the rock is ringed with layers of ochre and burnt sienna, and the sky is as blue as designs painted on fine china. Here, if I press a hand to the ground and close my eyes, I hear the heartbeat of the land like it's my own. It rings out like a *tanggu* drum.

I am always amazed at the things we share. How we see ourselves reflected back in the land around us, even if we think of ourselves as foreigners.

I am New Mexican. I've seen colorful hot air balloons launch into the air in Albuquerque. I've watched the Rio Grande rise and shrink with snowmelt. When I heard that Colorado was trying to grow green chile of its own, I laughed.

I am New Mexican, and while it is not all I am - and while it is not all you are - it is something to carry with us and to be proud of for the rest of our lives.

I sit down to my meal of chile and rice, and I am thankful to the dual heritages that allow me to do so... Even it's still not the right way to eat them.