What are the Sound, Shape, Colour, and Taste of Healthiness?

Inspecting 'light meals' in Beijing (a "healthy" food)

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Abstract

Definitions of health constantly change and thus can be explored to inspire new health-realising strategies. This study contrasts two 'healthy' dietary choices in their local contexts: light meals (qingshi) in Beijing against smoothies in Oxford. Interviews and ethnography revealed 'greenness' to be a key contributor of the healthiness that these foods can achieve. Therefore, the multi-sensory (synaesthetic) and interdisciplinary meanings of 'greenness' are discussed using ethnographic details, to understand relevant health ideologies.

Research Questions:

- Why and how are 'light meals' and smoothies healthy?
- What does 'greenness', the word brought up so frequently by healthy eaters in both sites, mean?
- What can the two healthy diets tell us about the contemporary definitions of healthiness in Beijing and Oxford?

What are them and what about them?

'Light meals' (轻食) in Beijing:

Meals light in flavours and portions. Name directly translated from its Chinese name: 轻 (light) and 食 (meal). A fashion diet popular in urban China (i.e. Beijing and Shanghai) since the 2010s. According to my demographic questionnaire, light meals are eaten mostly by young adults aged 20-30.

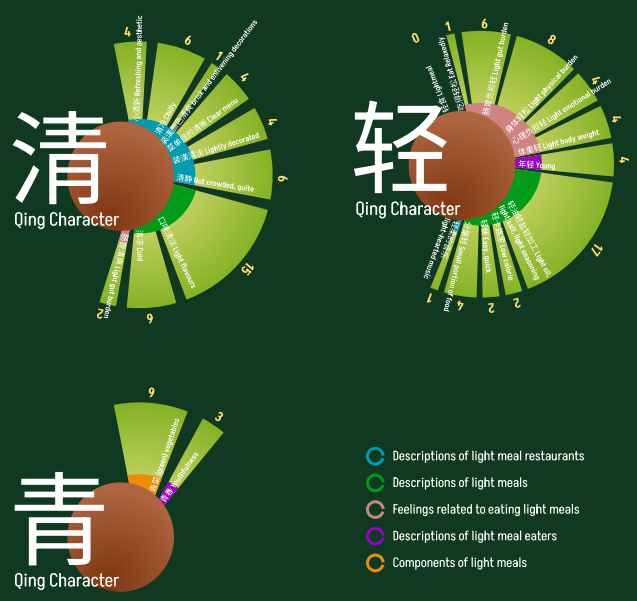
Smoothies in Oxford:

Drinks made by pureeing (raw) fruits, vegetables, and sometimes herbs. The concept has been recognised for a long time, and it remains popular and 'trendy' in British urban areas nowadays. Similar to light meals, smoothies are also drank mostly by young adults.

Interestingly, in conversations with both light meal eaters and smoothie drinkers whom I encountered, 'greenness' was brought up the most frequently to explain why the foods/drinks are healthy

Methods:

- Questionnaires
- 1-on-1 interviews
- Mind maps
- Online Ethnography
- Auto-ethnography



Conclusion:

The healthiness achieved by 'light meals' and smoothies is a multi-sensory experience, collectively shaped and shared by light meal eaters and smoothie drinkers.

The multi-sensory experience forms a cultural synaesthesia: specific sociocultural contexts shape the healthy visceral feelings that connect different senses (sound, shape, colour, and taste...) to enable the very healthiness of 'greenness', which is not just a colour.