

Sweet & sour

Angela Hui grew up in her family's Chinese takeaway – a rich source of material and recipes for her new book...

Book of the Week: Takeaway

Monday–Friday 9.45pm (FM), 12.30am **Radio 4**

SHE MAY BE sitting in the heart of the metropolis – in the offices of London's *Time Out* website, in fact, where she's finishing a stint as an editor – but Angela Hui's mind is in the Welsh Valleys. And it was there, in the old mining town of Beddau, that her parents first set up Lucky Star, the Chinese takeaway that inspired her memoir-cookbook, which is serialised this week on Radio 4.

Beddau got its name from the Welsh word for “graves”, because the town was once a place where criminals were hanged and buried beside the road. Later, it became the site of the Cwm Colliery, a huge pit that shut in 1986, leaving swathes of the population unemployed. “I sum it up as ‘beautifully bleak,’” laughs Hui, describing her hometown. “Amazing rolling hills in the distance dotted with sheep, and then you’ve got grey pebbledash houses everywhere you look.”

Despite recognising Beddau's minus points (in the book, she calls it “a place where all good things go to die”), she’s proudly Welsh: now living in the UK capital, she misses the countryside across the Severn, as well as the kindness of strangers. Her parents, on the other hand, came over from China in the 80s and speak limited English. Their hearts belong thousands of miles away. Indeed, there’s a chapter in *Takeaway* when the Huis return to her dad’s homeland of Hong Kong for a holiday and he mutates into a different person, suddenly carefree and calm.

The cultural divide between parents and daughter caused a perennial tension in the takeaway where Hui worked most nights and

LUCKY STAR
CHINESE & ENGLISH HOT MEALS



FAMILY BUSINESS
Angela Hui with her parents at their former takeaway in Beddau

weekends alongside Mum, Dad and her two older brothers. The book brilliantly conveys the dysfunctional relationships – between her mother and her angry, frustrated father; between the family and racist or abusive customers; and, most notably, between the Huis and the takeaway itself. It defined their lives. “It was almost like our sixth family member,” Hui explains. “It always came first, before our own needs even, because it was our livelihood.”

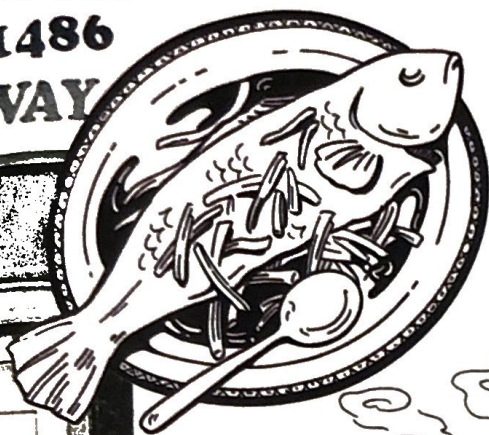
With her mother ill and her father approaching retirement, the shop was finally sold in 2018 and the whole family was drawn into a period of reflection. “There was time to think about the good and bad memories and figure out what life is now, after the takeaway.” For Hui, it led to a book deal. “I’ve always had the idea that I wanted to do a cookbook with my mum,” she says. “She was always very much like, ‘If I die, all

the recipes go with me.’ I know, it’s very morbid – but the pressure was on! I’ve never met a woman so obsessed with food. As soon as she wakes up, it’s ‘OK, what are we eating today?’”

It must be in the genes. Not only is cooking a defining tenet of love in Hui’s book, but she also moved house to be near her favourite restaurant. “Singburi is a little family-run Thai restaurant in east London and it reminds me so much of home. The chef, Sirichai, is incredible. Front of house is his mum, Auntie Thelma, who reminds me of my mum. She’s notorious and strict.”

‘Mum said, “If I die, all the recipes go with me”’

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RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Angela Hui's Takeaway features evocative illustrations of the dishes passed on to her by her mother



Her other favourite restaurant is documented in *Takeaway* – an old-fashioned Chinese banqueting hall in Cardiff, named Happy Gathering. Her extended family (some of whom also own takeaways in the neighbouring villages of the Valleys) have been coming for decades. "It's a nostalgic thing," she says. "The staff there have watched me and my brothers grow up. It's a massive, two-storey place and every Sunday they do really great dim sum: *har gau*, *siu mai*; lobster noodles and roast duck as well. It's almost like a time capsule – nothing's really changed since they opened in the 1980s."

HUI HAS A gift for conjuring smell and taste through the memories in her book: when she talks of her mum lovingly adorning fish with "matchstick aromatics" or her parents cooking together in "a culinary ballet", she creates a mouth-watering nostalgia that leaves readers desperate for their own Chinese take-away fix. Luckily, each chapter includes a recipe that enables them to cook up their own.

And, as for the recipes, there's plenty of them. Readers into this revealing (and sometimes shocking) tale of growing up in the local takeaway, "A lot of people say it's got the makings of a 'chick lit' novel. It's a coming-of-age story with some uniquely British setting, so it's got all the elements there," says Hui.

It's also got plenty of tears, arguments – and lying to her parents. Have they read it? "They don't read or write English but understand the book's gist. I don't know how they'll receive it," she says. "Maybe I'll try to read it to them. We'll see." **AMANDA HYDE**



GROWING UP

Angela Hui's childhood in Cardiff is the subject of her new book

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ANGELA HUI TAKEAWAY

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