

## Letter to Grandma, about Asian Cuisine in 2050 by Bao Su

Dear Nanna,

How are you doing? I hope you are doing well back home.

Nanna, I am sorry I could not make it back home for the traditional holiday. I had to catch a flight back to Bangkok to train as a chef, like I told you a while ago. Nanna, the people here are really kind and helpful. The head chef declared me one of his favorite pupils, as I have been traveling with him throughout Asia. Nanna, whatever food you make back home, please save some for your miserable grandson. Anyhow, before heading to the big cities, the head chef took me along with a couple of others to the night market back in Krabi. Krabi is on the far west side of southern Thailand, a beautiful place with exotic food. Nanna, I know that you have tired of watching so many food blogs online, but trust me, this is something else.

Nanna, have you heard of anyone in our hometown having bugs on a regular basis? Of course not! As I was strolling around the night market, there were several stalls that offered crispy grilled grasshoppers with homemade sauce – as listed on the sign. There was a huge section of the market dedicated to insect-related restaurants too! The place was packed with housewives looking for the finest ingredients to make a decent meal for their families; a little bit down the line, I spotted a couple of wholesale places that provided a large quantity of pre-packaged insects. The variety was extensive. There were dehydrated insects as well as vacuum-sealed insects (later, I found out that these are for soups and broth!).

Tired of walking, one of my colleagues complained that we should find somewhere to sit down and have a proper meal. The boss was starving also, so, as the head chef recommended, we found our way back to the grill stall. Nanna, the people here are admirably hardworking. Upon entering the restaurant, I could see the owner working vigorously, his hands moving nimbly, rotating each skewer full of crickets. Accompanying him was a young woman, sitting on a ground stool and picking out the tiny legs from the poor creatures, eventually positioning the bodies around wooden sticks to be stacked on food containers, waiting to be used. Scrolling through the menus, there were a few selections of pork and steak. But there were plenty of meals made of insects. Nanna, restaurants – including stalls in Thailand – need to have a food certificate for safety in order to operate their business, so don't worry about the food here being dirty.

The head chef was curious, and he asked the owner about plenty of things. He asked the owner if he had hamburgers for one of the American students. The owner told us that the pork and the

steak here is relatively expensive since there are so many people here in Thailand buying out farming lands for real estate. What fascinates me the most is that I have learned it takes way more resources to raise cows and pigs rather than insects! After doing a little bit of research, I have figured out that it would take approximately two liters of water to harvest 2.65 kilograms of crickets compared to 112 liters to collect 12.51 kilograms of beef. The owner also informed us about how difficult it was for small businesses to own a farm nowadays. The price of land skyrocketed, along with other problems related to raising pigs and cows. It would take plenty of land to properly breed those. The problem is that there is not much land for farmers. To make more farmland, deforestation is needed. But the governments of Thailand and several other Southeast Asian countries have signed an agreement with the supervision of the Rainforest Alliance on reducing the number of trees being cut down per year, which slows down related industries. The owner carried on telling us about hard situations for farmers. The Ministry of Agriculture aided him with installing models of Smart Farming, basically a program that helps with stabilizing food prices by farming suitable plants, adapting to current situations. But it would not help him much since the profit margin was low. He was thinking about raising insects to help save the cost. Nanna, did you know that insects could be extremely nutritious? Insects could provide a greater amount of protein per serving than cows, pigs, or even chicken! Extremely nutritious. Anyhow, the owner was also aware of the fact that not a lot of young customers would enjoy food made of nasty insects.

The owner, started to sit down by our tiny plastic table, flowing along with his long story: “Young man, it is fortunate for me to have luck. Even if you have the best knife holding skill in the world, you would not go far without luck. People were doing protesting on environmental issues a decade ago; it was the last straw. Gasoline prices were going up, which affected undeveloped neighborhoods, along with the increasing heat that reduced the harvest of fish near Phra Nang. But these issues keep my business going, free advertisement of sorts.”

Nanna, I did not know what to say back then; I felt ashamed. Big countries like us just keep waddling within our bubble of political nonsense while there are people struggling to find food for each meal. Then, he told us that it was when the occurrence of flood was increasing the people started to take things seriously. The Thai government was aware of how things could turn for the worst. In a panic, the government hired advanced farming techs from China and engineers from Germany to solve the issue. People were looking for a way to get good food with a more affordable price, he said. He knew that insects were delicious, easy to make, and cheap to farm. A couple of years ago, a government worker came to his house and asked for measurements of the Green House Gas Emission numbers. The government worker was pleased to inform the owner about how there were almost zero emissions coming out of his cricket farm. He said that the government helped him with installing AI inspection equipment to sort out the good and the bad insects also. The quality control really helps with securing quality during high demand seasons. He did not explain further since technology is not one of his strengths.

While the owner was busy chitchatting with some new customers, his daughter took over the cooking. While the father was comfortably sitting down, the daughter was running back and forth like a machine, but her movements were elegant and she held no grudge. After a while, the food was served (with a smile), and each of us took a bite after the owner's encouragement. We chose hot and spicy crickets, the owner's recommendation. It tasted awesome; it was crunchy, and there was a hint of nut in it. Nanna, I was thinking of making a business like this. This should be more popular in the West. We could have solved so many problems (like how you were complaining about pork prices going up). Anyhow, with ten billion people as of today, this would be a wonderful way of resolving food issues! The food was beyond our expectations, as you can tell, and our bellies were happy. I kept having dreams about how my innovative restaurant would be in the future, Nanna. I could not get it out of my mind. I told the head chef, and the only thing I have received is a pat on the head telling me to work and learn more about the world.

Hey Nanna, my back sure is starting to hurt as I write this letter for you; I can tell that old age is kicking in right now. Thanks for listening to this super long story. I know it sounds very complicated, but I am sure that you are capable of understanding. It was a bizarre one, wasn't it?

Love,

Your grandson

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