

Trying classic Chinese candies: a nostalgic sweet tooth

Alexander Bushroe

Memories often are their strongest when they are linked with sensory perceptions. A memory from our past that is tied to a particular song, aroma or taste can heighten the sense of nostalgia we feel when reminiscing about a pleasant experience from our past.

This is particularly true when thinking back on our favorite childhood treats. The candies, snacks and sweets

we enjoyed as kids often hold a special place in our hearts, even if they've long since ceased production and left the market. Even those sweet treats that are still around, for me, I likely wouldn't even enjoy if I were to indulge in them now. I don't really eat sweets anymore, and the junk I ate as a kid was so jam-packed with sugar that now, I'd probably wince the second it touched my tongue.

Even so, memories of the ice cream

truck and snow cones and other treats of yore really bring me back right into a specific moment in time, evoking vivid memories of my life back then.

I've always found it intriguing to learn about what snacks my local friends and peers had during their youth that elicit similar feelings of nostalgia. Let's discuss some of the more widespread nostalgic candies in China. The first one that comes to the forefront is both well-known and fitting for the present time.



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White Rabbit (*dabaitu* 大白兔)

These have been floating around a bit more than usual over the last few months, because of the Year of the Rabbit.

This renowned chewy treat was born in Shanghai and first hit the market in 1959, and it has been a classic for generations since. It's even been featured in music and films in China as a staple, A-lister of a candy.

As for the product itself,

it's a simple, milk/cream flavored candy that, while soft, does have a certain degree of toughness to it and needs to linger in the mouth and heat up a bit before it can be easily chewed. It's sweet but not overly so, which is a common feature of not only candies but also cakes, cookies and other various dessert items in China.

This, in my view, is good for a number of reasons.

The first is health-related — as we know, consuming excess sugar can have a variety of deleterious health effects ranging from weight gain to diabetes, tooth decay and many others. The White Rabbit, though, is more modestly sweetened and thus only has 20 calories per piece.

Also, growing up in the United States, the concept of something being "too sweet" was an unfamiliar

idea. Sweets, be they candies, cakes, pies or anything else, were all ten out of ten on the sweetness scale. Either something was sweet, or it wasn't, with essentially no gray area in between.

Now, I quite prefer the nuance of a sweetness gradient, and savoring a *dabaitu*, whether of the original cream flavor or one of the plethora of other flavors available these days, can hit that perfect spot.

