What Changed on the Journey? How Chinese Food Carries Culture and its Adaptation to the American Market.

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore food culture, culture identity, cultural adaption, and modern innovation through the lens of Chinese cultural evolution. With the creation and evolution of American Chinese cuisine, we can view the adoption of cultural products, practices and perceptive.

Research Questions

1. Why and how did earlier immigrants adapt Chinese food to cater to the American community?

2. What is the current development of Chinese cuisine in the United States and how does this change reflect cultural development?

Methodology

For the methodology, two main qualitative and exploratory methods we used:

- 35 Questionnaires/survey answered by American College Students
- 8 Interviews of Chinese Exchange Students
- Visit to the Chinese American Museum of Chicago to view firsthand the experiences of Chinese Americans within the US

Museum Reference

Chinese American Museum of Chicago. (7/12/2023) “Chinese Cuisine in America: Stories, Struggles and Successes. Chicago, Illinois.

Contact

Any further questions on this research?

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Brief History of Chinese Food in US

1849
The four Chinese eateries in San Francisco served Cantonese dishes: chow-chow, curries, like steaks, mutton chops and boiled potatoes.
-Chinese American Museum of Chicago

American Experience, PBS. "Chinese Immigrants and the Gold Rush." *American Experience | PBS*, October 10, 2017. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goldrush-chinese-immigrants/.

1865
Food eaten while Chinese worked on the transcontinental railroad: oysters, cuttlefish, fish, abalone, red meat, fruits, pork, poultry, bamboo shoots, seaweed, mushrooms and drank boiled water
-Chinese American Museum of Chicago

"Geography of Chinese Workers Building the Transcontinental Railroad," n.d. https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/virtual/.

1882
Rising hostilities towards Chinese immigrants due to job security concerns led to the **Chinese Exclusion Act**
-Chinese American Museum of Chicago

1905
Creation of Chop Suey led to the dramatic increase in the number of. Chinese restaurants. Chicago had forty Chinese restaurants. Only five were in Chinatown.
-Chinese American Museum of Chicago

Corn, Casey. "'Forgotten Chinatown' Tour Explores Neighborhood History - Chinatown - Chicago - DNAinfo." *DNAinfo Chicago*, n.d. https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20130806/chinatown/forgotten-chinatown-tour-explores-neighborhood-history/.

1915
Chicago had 118 Chinese restaurants, and only six or seven were in Chinatown.
-Chinese American Museum of Chicago

1943
US passed the Magnuson Act, which ended the Chinese exclusion Act and allowed 105 immigrants to come a year.
-Chinese American Museum of Chicago

1945
After US WWII victory, people had a taste for “exotic” food, so restaurants served Cantonese food with Polynesian touches.
-Chinese American Museum of Chicago

Kelly. "Better-than-Takeout Sweet and Sour Chicken (With Video)." Foodtasia, May 11, 2024. https://foodtasia.com/sweet-and-sour-chicken/.

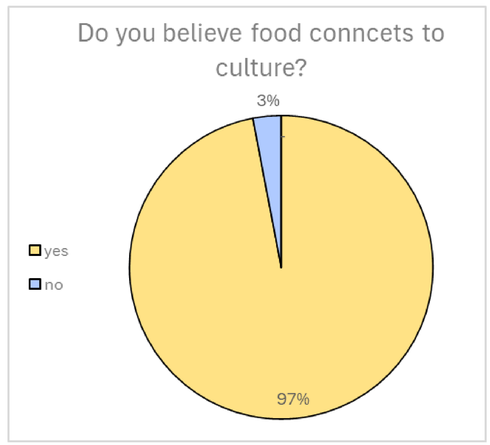
2016
Chinese restaurants totaling over 45,000, outnumbering the 5 major fast-food chains combined.
-Chinese American Museum of Chicago

Findings

Importance of Food Culture

The importance of how food connects to culture, and how this is passed along from person to person and generation to generation points at how it can carry culture, even when changes are made to the original recipes.

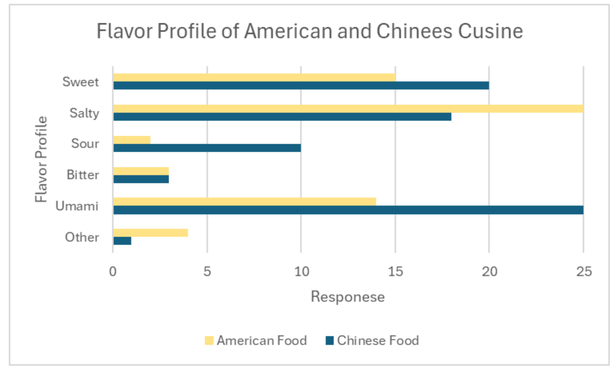
- “People grow up making, eating, and sharing foods from their families which automatically ties them to their personal culture and ethnicity.”
- “All food connects to the culture from which it is from because it is based off tradition, identity, background, and experience.”



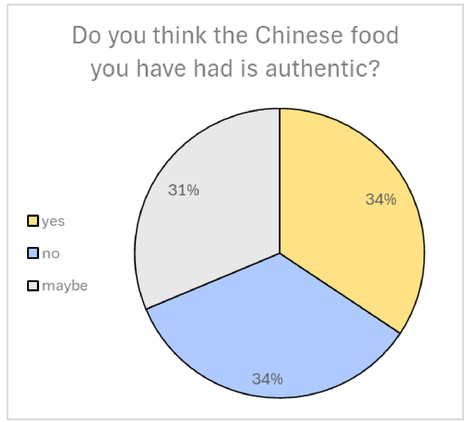
Cultural adaptation

Chinese food from China is noted to verity in flavor depending on where in the country it came from.

- “Chinese cuisine has a long history and a wide variety. Chinese cuisine places great emphasis on color, aroma, and taste. They are sweet, sour, bitter, spicy, and salty. The ingredients are selected according to the season and region.”
- “All food connects to the culture from which it is from because it is based off tradition, identity, background, and experience.”



Suggestions



Future research should further explore:

- Cultural adaptation and markets related to its cultural products, practices, and perspectives, should focus on understanding how these markets interact.
- The cultural impacts of the host country on the culture and how the culture had impacted and changed the host country.
- Exploring the definition of authenticity while looking into the perspectives of the forging exchange students, including more input with less variation in questions will gather a more parallel comparison into cultural understanding.

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