

Dining in Diversity:  
An Exploration of Variances in Chinese Cuisine

by  
Rebekah White

Honors Thesis  
Appalachian State University

Submitted to the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

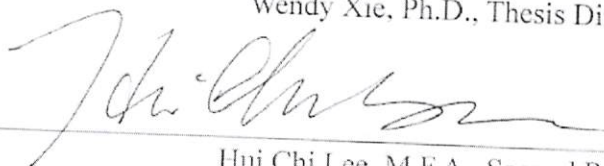
Bachelor of Arts

May, 2020



---

Wendy Xie, Ph.D., Thesis Director



---

Hui Chi Lee, M.F.A., Second Reader



---

Jean-François Fournier, Ph.D., Departmental Honors Director

### **Abstract**

Food in China is often misconstrued as homogeneous, lacking in diversity. However, a closer look can expose an entire realm of unique cuisines. These foods represent the different peoples and cultures that reside in the vast expanse of land known as Greater China. This paper will look at five distinct cuisines: Shandong, Jiangsu, Szechuan, Cantonese, and Taiwanese cuisine. Through exploring the similarities and differences of cuisine in these areas, culture emerges along with a variety in food that the Western world would not expect.

## Introduction

Food has been a driving force around the globe for longer than history has been recorded and continues to be extremely culturally relevant in the present. What food people eat, and how they go about eating it, intertwines with how people socialize, their socioeconomic class, their geographic location, and many other aspects of daily life. I argue studying cuisine is the best way to understand a culture and studying the differences in cuisine across cultures can return diverse results.

When thinking of food diversity, Asia likely would not be most Westerners' first thought since Asian food tends to get lumped together into a single category of "Chinese". However, Asian food is highly diverse: Thai food varies greatly from Japanese food, which varies from Korean food or Indian food. Beyond all the distinct cultures "Asian cuisine" entails, Greater China itself is such an enormous region that there is an amazing amount of food diversity without the necessity of branching out to any other Asian countries. This research will focus on Shandong, Jiangsu, Szechuan, Cantonese, and Taiwanese cuisine in order to define and study how Chinese food varies due to geographical locations, social norms, and historical events. Through a deep study of these five regional cuisines, I will also evidence how, beyond regional differences, Chinese food has been heavily affected by outside sources to become what it is in present times, as well as how it interacts with culture.

## Shandong Cuisine

A classic understanding of the Chinese diet would assume the basic diet anywhere in Greater China comprises of noodles and rice. Though wrong, this generalization can be at least greatly improved by modifying the phrase 'noodles *and* rice' to be 'noodles *or* rice'.

This simple change in conjunction is far more accurate and opens the discussion of when and where noodles are used instead of rice and why this is so. A slight alteration in perspective happens when we can view Chinese cuisine as diverse and realize that even when it comes down to the bare bones of food—noodles and rice—even those are not the single definitive characteristic of a culture.

Geographical location is one of the most important aspects to consider when examining variances in cuisine. There is an understanding in mainland China that food is salty in the north, spicy in the east, sweet in the south, and sour in the west. According to Liang Chen (梁晨), it is not difficult to see that the geomorphology and ecosystem of an area have directly affected people's living habits in that area.<sup>1</sup> This is firstly evident in the dynamics of rice-growing. From a geographical standpoint, the northern region of mainland China is far less suited to growing rice than the southeastern region, and therefore has little or no access to rice without importing it from the South. Noodle-based cuisine from the north is referred to as Shandong cuisine, and rice-based dishes from the southeast are known as Jiangsu cuisine. Dr. Xiaofei Tu, who grew up in Shanxi Province (山西省), a northern region, and is currently a professor at Appalachian State University, recalls eating millet, a grain more easily grown in the north. This was meant as a replacement for rice, and even now Dr. Tu has said that he finds rice to be dry and not as enjoyable as noodles. Further, since Shanxi Province is slightly more to the northwest of Greater China, vinegar is also often used in foods in this area.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Wendy Xie, also a professor at Appalachian State

---

<sup>1</sup> 梁晨, “中国美食类纪录片空间叙事研究—以《舌尖上的中国》为视角” [“The Space Narrative Research of Chinese Food Documentary—E.G. A Bite of China”], Master's thesis, 天津师范大学/Tianjin Normal University, 2015, pg. 21。

<sup>2</sup> Xiaofei Tu, Interview by author, Written notes. Boone, February 4, 2020.

University and a Hebei Province (河北省) native, remembers growing up without rice as well, instead focusing on noodles and other wheat-based products since wheat was a much more accessible product. According to Dr. Xie, the city Dr. Tu is from, Taiyuan (太原), is known for noodle dishes.<sup>3</sup>

Another regional difference in Shandong and Jiangsu cuisine directly relates to the climate. Because of its long and cold winters, the northern regions generally had less access to resources during the winter months than the southern regions have. This had led to more pickling and preservation of vegetables as well as much more use of salt and spices to give flavor to bland foods. A specific example given by Dr. Xie is a tradition in her home city, Chengde (承德), of preserving large barrels of cabbage for use over the long winter months.<sup>4</sup>

From a more historical perspective, when asked what event she thought had a large impact on Shandong cuisine, Dr. Xie felt that the Qing dynasty had the greatest influence. Since Beijing, the capital city of 3000 years, is located in the north, the northern regions of mainland China tended to follow the traditional palace food. In the case of Chengde specifically, this region was previously the hunting grounds for the Qing Dynasty. Because hunting opportunity, recreational or commercial, are still available in that area, it is not difficult to find a local restaurant that has deer or pheasant dishes on its menu.<sup>5</sup>

An example of a recipe that has survived through the ages and is still largely popular is Peking Roast Duck. Described as a “living fossil” of the history of Beijing’s capital, this roast duck is considered iconic to Beijing food culture. Most particularly, it should be cut

---

<sup>3</sup> Wendy Xie, Interview by author, Written notes. Boone, January 28, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Wendy Xie.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

into 108 slices as per tradition.<sup>6</sup> By this given evidence, it can be seen that old food traditions often carry far into the future. Liang Chen mentions this, saying that food reflects the unique power of the structure of Chinese society for thousands of years.<sup>7</sup>

Shanxi Province was not a hunting ground of the former Qing empire, and subsisted more on a diet of domesticated animals such as lamb and chicken.<sup>8</sup> Despite the slight differences in cuisine, like the use of vinegar or wild game, the Shanxi and Hebei Provinces have quite similar food that can be used in tangent to represent the general diet encompassed in Shandong cuisine. For instance, the use of salt and spices is quite common in northern regions whereas southeastern regions prefer sweet things. The use of pickled and preserved items is also a common theme in the North and is not nearly as necessary in the South.

Another factor in the growth of Shandong cuisine is socioeconomic status. While social class and wealth of people varies across Greater China, especially in current society, the northern regions were generally less economically developed while the southeastern regions saw greater economic development. The lower economic class of those in the northern regions as well as an inability to grow rice gave the Shandong cuisine a reputation for foods with a straightforward taste that were enhanced by salt and spices. Though the north has access to rice and other, more luxurious food items in the present, Dr. Xie and Dr. Tu have detailed childhoods without the availability of these things, indicating that this is a recent economic development. Moving onto Jiangsu cuisine in the southeastern regions of Greater China, the picture will be much different.

---

<sup>6</sup> 庄克明, “美食坐标北京” [“Food Coordinates Beijing”], *现代商业银行* (2018): 102.

<sup>7</sup> 梁晨, “中国美食类纪录片空间叙事研究—以《舌尖上的中国》为视角” [“The Space Narrative Research of Chinese Food Documentary—E.G. A Bite of China”], Master’s thesis, 天津师范大学/Tianjin Normal University, 2015, pg. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Xiaofei Tu, Interview by author, Written notes. Boone, February 4, 2020.

## Jiangsu Cuisine

Opposite of the northern regions, southeastern mainland China is known for its rice and sweet cuisine. In general, the southeast has a much better environment for rice-growing and therefore subsists more heavily on rice than on noodles as seen in the north. The long summers in the southeast also mean that pickling things for the winter is not particularly necessary; this marks another locational difference between Shandong and Jiangsu cuisine, since the preservation of food naturally affects its flavor. The lack of necessity to preserve foods leads into socioeconomic disparities between the two locations.

Without the worry of having no food over the winter, in addition to southeastern Chinese regions being generally more economically developed, the southern people had no need to focus on giving flavor to preserved foods. Instead, they made foods sugared and exquisite because they had the means to. Their socioeconomic status changes how they interact with and perceive food; when there is no scarcity of food or no inability to afford it, food becomes more of a commodity than a necessity.

Representative of Jiangsu foods, Shanghai is an excellent city to study in continuation of a comparison between Shandong and Jiangsu cuisine. There are records of Shanghai's food all the way back through the Song Dynasty, but it was during the Qing Dynasty when a port opened in Shanghai that the city truly prospered. Shanghai became known for a mix of Western and Chinese cuisine, with their food being heavily sugared and colorful.<sup>9</sup> This information shows that once Shanghai began to boom economically, their city became

---

<sup>9</sup> 张雅玮, “上海市美食旅游开发现状及对策研究” [“Research on the Status Quo and Countermeasures of Food Tourism Development in Shanghai”], *旅游研究* 4, no. 3 (2012): 85.

known for sweet foods as is typical in Jiangsu cuisine. Because of a much richer socioeconomic status, citizens could afford to spend money on luxury, sugared food items that the northern regions could not.

It is interesting to note here that while the change in Shanghai cuisine to sweeter, extravagant foods demonstrates how wealth affects Chinese food, it also marks a huge historical change in mainland China. The forcible opening of a port that turned Shanghai into a wealthy, westernized city came after the end of the Opium War in 1843. Without events such as this, Shanghai's food would have developed entirely differently, showing how important historical events are when it comes to cuisine.

### **Szechuan Cuisine**

Sichuan Province (四川) poses its own unique type of food and is the origin of what is known as Szechuan cuisine. Located towards the southwest of mainland China, this province does not adhere to the generalization that food in the west is sourer, while food in the east is spicier. Szechuan foods are specifically known for being spicy, and this is partially because the Sichuan pepper grows there. Considering this particular pepper is native to the province, it only seems natural that Sichuan would be inclined to a cuisine that would include these peppers. Combined with the popularity of the chili pepper for true spice and the Sichuan pepper for numbness, Szechuan cuisine became known for its hot dishes. Spiciness is not all there is to Szechuan foods, however. According to Yang, Sichuan cuisine is known for its spicy flavor, however it doesn't use spiciness to suppress other flavors, instead



attaching great importance to flavor changes.<sup>10</sup> While sweet, sour, and other flavors are certainly incorporated in Sichuan cuisine, the spiciness takes on a big role in the food's flavor.

Perhaps because it takes on flavor so well, tofu is the star of many Szechuan dishes. The capital of Sichuan, Chengdu, is known for its many restaurants that present tofu dishes to customers in a culturally rich manner. However, according to Du Bois, et al., "'Rich people have rich meals while poor people have tofu meals' has been a popular saying among the common people since ancient times. However delicious tofu was, its consumption implied poverty."<sup>11</sup> Chengdu's rich presentation of tofu, therefore, leads to speculation over whether or not tofu is still a poor man's dish no matter how luxuriously it is presented.

Socioeconomic status and history are at play in this situation, reflecting tofu's previous use as a cheap meal and Sichuan Province's past poverty. Despite this, the dish that is commonly said to represent Szechuan cuisine is a tofu dish—Mapo Tofu. "The origin of mapo tofu can be traced to 1862 in the Qing Dynasty (1616 – 1911)...[i]ts flavor, cheap price, and pairing with rice made mapo tofu a Chinese food staple, spreading all over the country."<sup>12</sup> This article demonstrates the historical significance of mapo tofu, as well as highlighting the fact that it was a cheap food, distributed throughout Greater China because of its affordability.

The reference to rice being used in mapo tofu also brings around a point that the Sichuan Province is located in the southwestern region of Greater China where rice was easily accessible.

---

<sup>10</sup> 杨柳, "试论四川饮食文化与成都美食之都的构建" ["On Sichuan Food Culture and the Construction of Chengdu Food Capital"], *四川教育学院学报* 27, no. 4 (2010): 43.

<sup>11</sup> Jianhua Mao, "Tofu Feasts in Sichuan Cuisine," in *The World of Soy*, trans. Ying Liu and Xiaolu Wang, eds. Christine M. Du Bois, Chee Beng Tan, and Sidney Wilfred Mintz (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 136.

<sup>12</sup> Sun Jiahui, "A Classic Dish: Mapo Tofu," *The World of Chinese*, 2015, <https://www.theworldofchinese.com/2015/09/mapo-tofu/>.

Chengdu's current status as a tourist destination has affected the food as well. In some ways it has become slightly more westernized, but the largest change happened in the way food is presented. To attract the attention of outside customers, restaurants moved to a more experiential presentation of food. According to Pu et al.,

...there are restaurants that pair the food with local cultural art to enhance the consumption experience of the food with a snippet of the culture. This can help shape a holistic experience by enhancing intellectual and sensory food experiences. Namely the significance of cuisine serves as the window into the destination and culture.<sup>13</sup>

This kind of tourism brings wealth to the city and the province, but where there is tourism there is always the question of losing authenticity. Chengdu struggles with this just as any tourist-laden city does.

Another important aspect to Szechuan cuisine that is rarely mentioned is the cultural significance of wine and tea. Yang comments, Sichuan is the earliest region in Greater China to be known for drinking tea, planting tea, and emerging tea markets. It also has rich cultural heritage in Sichuan food culture.<sup>14</sup> In a touristic view of Szechuan cuisine as simply 'spicy food', this historically significant tea culture gets lost as background noise to all the other marketed Szechuan foods. This can go back to the discussion about lack of cuisine authenticity in areas heavily populated with tourists, demonstrating how outside sources can affect culture and, therefore, food.

## Cantonese Cuisine

---

<sup>13</sup> Bo Pu, Min Teah, and Ian Phau, "Hot Chili Peppers, Tears and Sweat: How Experiencing Sichuan Cuisine will Influence Intention to Visit City of Origin," *Sustainability* 11 (2019): 11.

<sup>14</sup> 杨柳, "试论四川饮食文化与成都美食之都的构建" ["On Sichuan Food Culture and the Construction of Chengdu Food Capital"], *四川教育学院学报* 27, no. 4 (2010): 43.

When discussing Cantonese cuisine, Hong Kong is the city that instantly comes to mind. Though there are other Cantonese-speaking regions in Greater China, Hong Kong will be the focus for the purposes of this essay. Due to Hong Kong's history, this city's cuisine varies significantly from what could be expected from other nearby regions of Greater China. Located in the south of Greater China, Hong Kong is not known for the sweet foods that are associated with Jiangsu cuisine. Instead, soups and preserved meats are extremely common in *yuecai* (粤菜, Cantonese cuisine). Further, it is said that the Cantonese people will eat anything with legs.<sup>15</sup>

The reason for this disparity lies in Hong Kong's history of turmoil. During the first Opium War, in 1841, Great Britain occupied Hong Kong until it was ceded to them in the Treaty of Nanking. Hong Kong remained a British territory until 1997, and this occupation of over a century gave Hong Kong a new language, new culture, and new cuisine. It is uncertain if Hong Kong's cuisine would have reflected more of Jiangsu cuisine had it been left alone, but it is clear that its current food is a result of hybridization of British and Chinese culture.

The Chinese basis of *yuecai* retains elements of food from far back in Chinese history. According to Xue Wei, *yuecai* was formed during the Qin and Han dynasties. It was based on the local food culture. It collects the essence of domestic cuisines such as Beijing, Shandong, Jiangsu, Szechuan, and western cuisines.<sup>16</sup> In this way, Hong Kong has kept elements of ancient China and traditional Chinese cuisine. Another way in which *yuecai* is more traditional is their reasoning behind eating hot soups in a tropical climate. According to

---

<sup>15</sup> Xiaofei Tu, Interview by author, Written notes. Boone, February 4, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> 薛薇, “粤菜: 营养美食与文化习俗的完美统一——现代营养健康要求与中国餐饮业的创新之路系列报道之二” [“Cantonese Cuisine: The Perfect Unification of Nutritious Cuisine and Cultural Practices—Part 2 of a series of reports on the requirements of modern nutrition and health and the innovation of Chinese catering”], *Healthy China*, December 2005, 17.

Dr. Xie, it is believed that hot soup expels humidity from the body.<sup>17</sup> From a more geographical standpoint, since Hong Kong is an island there is a greater focus on seafood than in other parts of China.

Hong Kong's true food transformation did not begin until the 1960s, when foreign travel became much more prominent along with a growing sense of identity. This influx of western tourists along with immigrants from nearby Asian countries influenced *yuecai* to be more of a mixture of cuisine than it had been before. Increasing wealth on the island gave rise to what Sidney H. Cheung calls *nouvelle* Cantonese cuisine.

This style of cuisine was characterized by the use of exotic ingredients (peacock, crocodile and kangaroo, etc.), new recipes (stewed in western red wine), adventurous cooking techniques, excellent catering services (individual portions rather than family-style shared dishes and changing dishes for each course of the meal) and outstanding décor and ambience. *Nouvelle* Cantonese cuisine was a taste for deliberately created for, and pursued by, the 'new rich'.<sup>18</sup>

*Nouvelle* Cantonese cuisine is what we experience in Hong Kong today. Known for exotic meats and street food, these things came about with a surplus of foreign visitors and the boost of wealth these visitors brought. This unique type of cuisine can also be explained as Hong Kong finding its own identity amidst new socioeconomic status. Cheung continues, "So, what do people get from mixing up different kinds ethnic food? It might just be curiosity, or

---

<sup>17</sup> Wendy Xie, Interview by author, Written notes. Boone, February 4, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Sidney C. H. Cheung, "Food and Cuisine in a Changing Society: Hong Kong," in *The Globalization of Chinese Food*, eds. David Y. H. Wu and Sidney C. H. Cheung (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002) 106.

it could also be explained as a representation of Hong Kong identity which includes anything from the East and West, traditional and modern, local and foreign for its own sake.”<sup>19</sup>

While this new form of *yuecai* is now a way of life, there will be a loss of traditional dishes and ideas in the mix. K. S. Chan discusses an indigenous Hong Kong dish, *poonchoi*, and how it has evolved in urban Hong Kong.

*Poonchoi* is a traditional dish of the indigenous villagers in rural Hong Kong...[and] its ingredients are local, inexpensive and ordinary...[A]fter the 1980s *poonchoi* has become a fashionable or trendy food due to changing social and economic positions in Hong Kong. Various commercial or hybrid forms of *poonchoi*, which contain a spectrum of international and expensive foods with an indiscriminating combination of traditional ingredients, have been introduced and marketed by commercial caterers.<sup>20</sup>

In this way, culture has been lost through the commercialization of an ethnic dish. Though it has traditional roots, in many cases *poonchoi* is unrecognizable from the original dish, which is sometimes the cost of urbanization. However, this does not mean commercialization is a terrible thing. By urban Hong Kong changing the production of *poonchoi*, it made the dish its own and representative of the city. This is not a change that must be viewed negatively, but instead a positive one that reflects the needs of Hong Kong’s urban residents. As Chan put it, “[T]he popularity of both authentic and commercial *poonchoi* signifies a parallel development of the continuity of a local cultural tradition and the emergence of a new culinary tradition that blends cosmopolitan and hybrid cultures together.”<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Sidney C. H. Cheung, 110.

<sup>20</sup> Kwok Shing Chan, “Traditionality and Hybridity: A Village Cuisine in Metropolitan Hong Kong,” *Visual Anthropology* 24 (2011): 172.

<sup>21</sup> Kwok Shing Chan, 186.

Previous examples of Shandong, Jiangsu, and Szechuan cuisine have clearly shown all the factors that go into the making of food culture, but Hong Kong's *yuecai* most clearly demonstrates how drastically foreign influence can change food.

### **Taiwanese Cuisine**

The island of Taiwan poses a similar situation to Hong Kong in that many outside cultures have had an influence on the food. Though their actual cuisines are entirely different from each other, they share a history of foreign impact on how they prepare food.

My personal experience travelling to Taiwan and mainland China barely gave me a glimpse of what both places have to offer in the way of food, but an observation I did make is that the Taiwanese use much more tropical fruit in their dishes than their mainland Chinese counterparts do. This is due to Taiwan's southern, humid location, where fruits like pineapples and mangos grow freely. Geographical location, as always, has an enormous effect on what people eat. When asked how she thought Chinese and Taiwanese food are different, Dr. Hui Lee, natively from Tainan, Taiwan and a professor at Appalachian State University, mentioned that mainland Chinese food is heavily spiced and seasoned. In Taiwan, the food is less heavy and there is a focus on the natural taste of the food.<sup>22</sup>

As with previous examples of cuisines in mainland China and Hong Kong, foreign influence has changed Taiwanese food in some fascinating ways. Han Chinese people had been immigrating to Taiwan since the late 1600s, bringing with them Chinese cuisine until the Japanese occupation of Taiwan from 1895-1945. During this time, there was little to no immigration from the mainland—only Japanese rule. This expectedly changed food in

---

<sup>22</sup> Hui Chi Lee, Interview by author, Typed notes. Boone, March 25, 2020.

Taiwan to reflect Japanese cuisine. Dr. Lee detailed that Japanese influence, recalling that her mom always made sushi and cooked miso soup multiple times a week. If they ever went out to eat, it was usually at a Japanese restaurant.<sup>23</sup> The 50 years of Japanese occupation brought a cuisine to the island that used to be foreign, but gradually became an integral part of its culinary culture and will likely remain culturally significant for much time to come.

Nationalist Han Chinese defecting to Taiwan after the Chinese Civil War in 1949 continued to diversify Taiwanese cuisine. In much more recent times, Taiwan saw an influx of immigrants from South Asian countries—such as Thailand, Vietnam, etc. It is only natural that immigrants bring their cuisine with them to other countries.<sup>24</sup> This has led to a higher prevalence of “Asian fusion” foods, and Taiwanese cuisine has become a hybrid of many Asian foods, including aboriginal Taiwanese, Han Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, and many others.

To take the hybridity further, western cuisine has been incorporated into Taiwanese dishes as well. According to Dr. Lee, her school lunches were mostly American food, which always included a milk-based candy bar. Many people disliked the candy bar because drinking milk was not common in Taiwan.<sup>25</sup> The incorporation of American food into Taiwanese school lunches gives a sense of internationality to Taiwanese food in an unexpected place. It is worth noting that that Taiwanese are not just mindlessly copying international cuisines. Dr. Lee commented that there is a saying in Taiwan that food came to Taiwan and they made it taste better. Taiwanese chefs would go to other countries, learn the

---

<sup>23</sup> Hui Chi Lee, Interview by author, Typed notes. Boone, March 25, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Hui Chi Lee.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

craft, and bring it back to Taiwan.<sup>26</sup> Drawing culinary inspiration from other cultures gives Taiwan a rich food culture that is unique from anywhere else in the world.

Though Taiwanese food has been discussed in general, it is notable that Taiwanese cuisine is not the same across all of Taiwan. Taipei (lit. northern Taiwan) is far more commercialized than other cities, presenting much more westernized foods, whereas Tainan (lit. southern Taiwan) tends to have some more aboriginal food. This is reflected in language as well; in Taipei only Mandarin Chinese is spoken, while in Tainan they learn Mandarin at school but speak their own dialect of Taiwanese outside of school.<sup>27</sup> It is easy to imagine that these kinds of disparities are present in other cities as well. Cuisine and culture are fluid, and though for this short study generalizations are necessary, it is important to keep in mind that not only does food change from country to country, it also changes from town to town and city to city.

Returning to the idea of Taipei as a hub for more commercialized food, an interesting facet to follow is the amount of media surrounding food in Taiwan. Media encourages the commoditization of food, and the many food television shows broadcasted in Taiwan can be representative of this. Li Hui, however, treats such commercialized shows in a positive light, saying that they are not weapons of cultural conflict, but instead express a pattern of diversified cultural development.<sup>28</sup> Tourism and commercialization of food in this way also brought about a popularity for street markets, similar to those in Hong Kong. These street markets are also representative of how Taiwanese people view food. According to Dr. Lee, street markets are popular in Taiwan because they give variety. Rather than having three big

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Hui Chi Lee, Interview by author, Typed notes. Boone, March 25, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> 李慧, “以《食尚玩家》为例探析台湾美食节目的本土化特色” [“An Analysis of the Localization Characteristics of Taiwan Food Shows like ‘Super Taste’”], *四川文理学院文学与传播学院* (2018) 83.



meals a day, which can get boring, people can go to a street market and enjoy a diverse array of small, inexpensive snacks. The variety of snacks provides the same sustenance as a large meal, but with more interest and enjoyment.<sup>29</sup>

Despite all the diversity and mixture of cuisines in Taiwan, Dr. Lee talks about how there is a recent movement to focus on traditional cuisines. They want to concentrate on making cuisine that is authentic to Taiwan and bring the spirit back to the food.<sup>30</sup> This new attitude stems from the highly hybridized and commercialized nature of Taiwanese food today. Though there are many positives to this kind of cuisine, there comes with it a desire to return to the roots of the local food and make something that may be more representative of Taiwan.

### **Conclusion**

By examining such a range of places, it is clear that Chinese food is hardly as homogenous as it is sometimes presented. By geographical factor alone it is easy to see how vastly cuisine can vary. From cold to warm climates, the presence of hunting grounds, and particular foods (such as the Sichuan pepper in Sichuan, seafood in Hong Kong, and tropical fruit in Taiwan), all of these differences play their part.

However, food goes much deeper than just geographical location, giving a glimpse of how culture and cuisine are intertwined. Historical influence of Chinese food, particularly from circumstances of war, lead to unique, hybridized cuisines that would not have existed otherwise. This is best reflected in Hong Kong, where much of their food is the result of the

---

<sup>29</sup> Hui Chi Lee.

<sup>30</sup> Hui Chi Lee, Interview by author, Typed notes. Boone, March 25, 2020.

British occupation after the first Opium War. A parallel can be seen in Taiwan, first with the immigration of Han Chinese and then with Japan's 50-year colonization of the island.

Differences in Shandong versus Jiangsu cuisine demonstrated how socioeconomic status changes cuisine; the less economically developed north focused on making inexpensive foods taste good while the more economically developed southeast had the ability to use expensive ingredients to make cuisine luxurious and sweet. Despite current, more equalized wealth in mainland China, most of the culinary styles established in its history remains intact. Hong Kong possibly provides the best example of socioeconomic impact on local cuisine. Once tourism began to bring wealth to the city, their food evolved to become sugared and colorful—luxuries once afforded only to the rich.

Recent tourism and globalization have brought about what is likely the most intense changes to cuisine. Taiwan is the perfect example, where aboriginal, Chinese, and Japanese food were already prevalent. The rise of tourism and immigration brought all kinds of south Asian foods to Taiwan, as well as European and American methods of cooking. Mainland China has seen this surge of western influence as well, largely in Shanghai which sees a huge amount of western tourism.

All these elements together represent a diversity that is impossible to observe on the surface. There are so many influencers of what people eat, and all those things come together to create a culture surrounding food.

No matter what food someone grows up with, it becomes part of their identity and reflects the place they came from. When speaking of her home cuisine, Dr. Lee expressed how she did not appreciate food as part of her cultural heritage when she was younger. Now that she is older and separated from it, she realized how significant food is and how it is the

thing she misses most from her country.<sup>31</sup> Many go about their lives mindlessly eating, unaware of the impact and importance that food has. Food is an open door into appreciating culture; all you must do is walk through it.

---

<sup>31</sup> Hui Chi Lee, Interview by author, Typed notes. Boone, March 25, 2020.

APPENDIX

Interview Notes with Wendy Xie, Ph.D.

What city and province are you from in China?

Chengde, Hebei; mountainous area, hunting grounds, commonly ate pheasant and venison

How do you feel that the food in your city is similar/different from elsewhere in China?

Salty food in hometown – Shandong cuisine is not very spicy; Shanghai’s cuisine is more sweet—sweet food in the south; hometown is far from the coast, ate pork & veggies, ate sour cabbage in the winter (in the past it was too cold for fresh veggies); the south has longer seasons, so more access to veggies in the winter

Have you been to Hong Kong? If yes, how do you feel the food is similar/different?

Hong Kong food is too bland. Favorite food from Hong Kong is dim sum; street vendor style, things with eggs, seafood emphasis, not too many spices; lots of soups (hot soup will expel humidity)

How do you feel the food in your city is similar/different from where Dr. Tu is from?

His cuisine = noodle-based; Her cuisine = wheat-based (steamed buns, etc.); millet/flour is used in the north, rice is used in the south

What is your favorite Chinese food & why?

Peking roast duck is what she misses most about home; the selection of the ducks is very specific (not too old, not too young); roasted with fire or in oven; every bite must have skin

What historical event do you think impacted Chinese cuisine the most & why?

In her home area, the Qing Dynasty (court cuisine, Manchu); not famous for any specific dish; pork is Manchu tradition

Is there anything you would like to add that you think is relevant to this topic?

Southern food is more artsy/exquisite (sweet desserts); Northern is more for the working class (saltier and satisfying)

Interview Notes with Xiaofei Tu, Ph.D.

What city and province in China are you from?

Taiyuan, Shanxi

How do you feel that the food in your city is similar/different from elsewhere in China?

North = salty; South = sweet; East = spicy; West = sour; Sour food in hometown (lots of vinegar); Lots of noodles and no rice because rice doesn't grow in the north; mostly ate lamb and chicken; considers himself biased against 'experimental' Southern eating

How do you feel that the food is similar/different from Dr. Xie's city?

Very similar; only difference is Dr. Xie's city is from the previous emperor's hunting ground so they eat wild game; simple diet in Taiyuan, less advanced crop growing

Have you been to Hong Kong? If yes, how do you feel Cantonese cuisine is different from mainland Chinese cuisine?

Doesn't like Cantonese food; they'll eat everything with legs; some of it is bland; eat a lot of preserved meats; strange foods

What is your favorite Chinese food & why?

Noodles

What historical event do you think impacted Chinese cuisine the most & why?

There's a story that after the Mongols invaded, the Chinese people hid messages in moon cakes

Is there anything else you would like to share with me that you think would be relevant to this topic?

North = no rice; South = lots of rice; because he didn't grow up with rice, he has never been able to like rice cakes

Interview Notes with Hui Chi Lee, Ph.D.

1. What city in Taiwan are you from?

Tainan – south of Taiwan (lit. meaning)

2. What was the food like where you grew up? Do you think your home cuisine is different from other parts of Taiwan? If yes, explain.

More variety now. Food resources were scarce when she was younger. Society grew busier and variety of food grew. International food. Things came to Taiwan, they made it taste better. Taiwanese chefs went to other countries and learned the craft, brought it back to Taiwan. Richer taste buds.

Significant memory – loved school lunch, U.S. cuisine (milk, candy bar). Other classmates not used to the taste of milk. Loved the milk bar from U.S.

Common dishes throughout Taiwan, but each city has its own specialty. Taipei vs. Tainan. Tainan has “more Taiwanese/aboriginal” food. Tainan speak Taiwanese and Mandarin (not native). Taipei speaks Mandarin primarily. Tainan = more local culture. Taipei comes mostly from mainland China = more mainland cuisine.

3. How do you feel the food in Taiwan is different from the food in China?

Main difference = Taiwanese food is mostly more plain, less heavy, emphasize natural taste of food/China puts heavy spices, lots of flavor, loses original taste, emphasis on cooking method.

These days, lots of variety in Taiwan, there is an in between where spices have influenced.

4. What is your favorite Taiwanese food and why?

Street food, not big meal, small portions for small prices. Tainan is famous for snack food.

Do not really like regular meals. Like to have small snack meals with more variety. 3 meals a day is too plain. Your stomach is more filled.

5. Do you think Japan's presence in Taiwan influenced Taiwanese cuisine? If yes, how so?

In her family, yes. Her father's generation was fluent in Japanese because of the occupation. Japanese food is heavily featured in her household. Her mom always made sushi. When they went out, it was to a Japanese restaurant. Her mom made miso soup a few times a week. Her parents' favorite food.

6. What historical event do you think most affected the development of Taiwanese cuisine?

Guo ming dan, moving from China, huge cultural displacement. Mixture of Han Chinese, plus previous Japanese colonization altered cuisine.

Hiring lots of workers from Thailand, Vietnam, and other neighboring Southeast Asian countries. They bring their cuisine with them.

7. Is there anything else you would like to add that's relevant to this topic?

Sometimes she didn't think talking about food was so important in daily life when she was younger. When you're a child, you don't think it's significant. Growing up, she realized that it was important to her cultural heritage. The thing you miss most when you leave your



country is the food. Some people think food is so shallow, you never really realize how significant it is in a person's memories.

Even though there's so much variety in the U.S., it doesn't feel authentic. It changes too much to suit American tastes.

Food to her, the older she gets, the more important it gets. Taiwanese people now are focused on authenticity and want to catch the spirit of the food back.

## References

- Chan, Kwok Shing. "Traditionality and Hybridity: A Village Cuisine in Metropolitan Hong Kong." *Visual Anthropology* 24 (2011): 171-188.
- Cheung, Sidney C. H. "Food and Cuisine in a Changing Society: Hong Kong." in *The Globalization of Chinese Food*, eds. David Y. H. Wu and Sidney C. H. Cheung (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002) 100-112.
- Jiahui, Sun. "A Classic Dish: Mapo Tofu." *The World of Chinese*. 2015, <https://www.theworldofchinese.com/2015/09/mapo-tofu/>.
- Lee, Hui Chi. Interview by author. Typed notes. Boone, March 25, 2020.
- 李慧, "以《食尚玩家》为例探析台湾美食节目的本土化特色" ["An Analysis of the Localization Characteristics of Taiwan Food Shows like 'Super Taste'"]. *四川文理学院文学与传播学院* (2018) 82-83.
- 梁晨, "中国美食类纪录片空间叙事研究—以《舌尖上的中国》为视角" ["The Space Narrative Research of Chinese Food Documentary—E.G. A Bite of China"]. Master's thesis. 天津师范大学/Tianjin Normal University. 2015, pg. 21.
- Mao, Jianhua, "Tofu Feasts in Sichuan Cuisine," in *The World of Soy*, trans. Ying Liu and Xiaolu Wang, eds. Christine M. Du Bois, Chee Beng Tan, and Sidney Wilfred Mintz. Singapore: NUS Press, 2008.
- Pu, Bo, Min Teah, and Ian Phau. "Hot Chili Peppers, Tears and Sweat: How Experiencing Sichuan Cuisine will Influence Intention to Visit City of Origin." *Sustainability* 11 (2019): 1-16.

Tu, Xiaofei. Interview by author. Written notes. Boone, February 4, 2020.

Xie, Wendy. Interview by author. Written notes. Boone, January 28, 2020.

薛薇。“粤菜：营养美食与文化习俗的完美统一——现代营养健康要求与中国餐饮业的创新之路系列报道之二” [“Cantonese Cuisine: The Perfect Unification of Nutritious Cuisine and Cultural Practices—Part 2 of a series of reports on the requirements of modern nutrition and health and the innovation of Chinese catering”]. *Healthy China*, December 2005, 17-22.

杨柳。“试论四川饮食文化与成都美食之都的构建” [“On Sichuan Food Culture and the Construction of Chengdu Food Capital”]. *四川教育学院学报* 27, no. 4 (2010): 42-45.

张雅玮。“上海市美食旅游开发现状及对策研究” [“Research on the Status Quo and Countermeasures of Food Tourism Development in Shanghai”]. *旅游研究* 4, no. 3 (2012): 85-89.

庄克明。“美食坐标北京” [“Food Coordinates Beijing”]. *现代商业银行* (2018): 102.