

## What Am I? Chopped Suey: Belonging and the Ambivalent Taste of American Exceptionalism

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper analyzes the stories of movement and displacement told through iconic Chinese and Jewish “ethnic” immigrant foods that have become part of American cuisine. Jewish and Chinese immigrant groups exemplify the American “model minority” myth. The ways in which some immigrant foods have been embraced or adapted into Anglo-dominant American culture reflects complex histories of their creators’ migration and assimilation. Immigrant foods complicate efforts to define a common American cuisine. When, if ever, do “ethnic” foods become “American”? Yet trying to identify “American cuisine” smacks of “American exceptionalism”—the superiority-tinged idea that the United States differs from all other nations and is intrinsic to how we have defined our national cuisine and differentiated it from its global influences. There is an inherent dissonance celebrating hyphenated American foods without acknowledging America’s history of Asian exclusion, Native American removal, colonial conquest and exploitation, and the transatlantic slave trade. Though we share a national identity and the cultural facets that come with that, ethnic-inflected American foods and tastes remind us of the diverse histories of people becoming American.

We, the Jewish-American authors of this paper, find affinities between our food stories and those of Chinese Americans, which embody the displacement, nostalgia, and loss that come with our so-called “model minority” status. To illustrate the complexity of histories and identities in creative American ethnic fusion foods, we focus on a couple of foods from Chinese American and Jewish American immigrant cuisines: sweet-and-sour batter-fried dishes like slippery shrimp, and chocolate babka and rugelach.

What is American food but the food of migration and adaptation? This paper analyzes the stories of movement and displacement told through iconic Chinese and Jewish “ethnic” immigrant foods. We chose these two immigrant groups because they exemplify the American “model minority” myth. *New York Times* journalist William Pettersen—in the immediate aftermath of the 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration Act—coined the term to describe Japanese Americans’ rapid reintegration to American society following WWII and internment; Heller explicitly referred to Jewish and Chinese communities as ethnic minorities that set a precedent for the trend.<sup>1</sup> The ways in which some immigrant foods have been embraced or adapted into Anglo-dominant American

culture reflects complex histories of their creators’ migration and assimilation; as Paul Freedman notes, immigrant foods complicate efforts to define a common “American cuisine.”<sup>2</sup> This begs the question how to identify the moments when “ethnic” foods become “American.” We, the Jewish American authors of this paper, find affinities between our food stories and those of Chinese Americans, which embody the displacement, nostalgia, and loss that come with our so-called “model minority” status. Jews and Asian Americans lived beside each other through decades of exclusive housing covenants; you can taste that history from the Kosher-Chinese restaurant Chop Chop in New York City to the nova salmon at the Asian-owned Fish King market in Los Angeles.

Trying to identify “American cuisine” smacks of “American exceptionalism”—the superiority-tinged idea that the United States differs from all other nations and is intrinsic to how we have defined our national cuisine and differentiated it from its global influences. In *People of Plenty*, David Potter names the defining characteristic of American culture as “abundance.”<sup>3</sup> The stories we tell about the immigrant roots of our cuisine are rooted in the idea of infinite access to opportunities and materials, intertwined with the cultural “melting pot” myth—that Americans have always embraced our country for its multicultural identity.<sup>4</sup> Some foods lose their ethnic ties and become homogeneously American; others persist as reminders of immigrant cultures in the landscape of American cuisine. Often, foods persisting as “ethnic” were inspired or created by immigrant and racial groups historically restricted from white citizenship. Though we focus on immigrant cuisine, Native American, Tejano/Californio, and African American foods also fall into this category of ethnic-inflected American cuisine. There is an inherent dissonance celebrating hyphenated -American foods without acknowledging America’s history of Asian exclusion, Native American removal, colonial conquest and exploitation, and the transatlantic slave trade. Though we share a national identity and the cultural facets that come with that, ethnic-inflected American foods and tastes remind us of the diverse histories of people becoming American.

Americans negotiate their cultural identities through creative fusion of old and new foods. They use materials available to create uniquely American cuisines, borrowing from neighbors, adapting in times of scarcity, and relishing in ingredients of abundance.<sup>5</sup> Chop Suey joints incorporated Chinese seasonings and methods into familiar ingredients for the Anglo-American palate, from San Francisco Chinatown to small towns across America. On St.

Patrick's Day, Boston is flooded by green beer and corned beef and cabbage specials as expressions of Irish American identity. Rhode Island—"the Calamari Comeback State"—prides itself in a favorite Italian seafood.<sup>6</sup> America celebrates its nation of immigrants' story in the New England colonial Thanksgiving myth with its cornucopia of Native American foods: pumpkin, turkey, cranberries. For many immigrants, Thanksgiving reimagined the Biblical Exodus as an escape from the tyranny of the Old World to the Promised Land of the New World. Yet this myth elides the stories of those who were forced or grudgingly allowed to move here as well as the Native Americans who were and are still violently displaced as the new Promised Land's "Canaanites."<sup>7</sup> When we tell the stories of our or others' foods, we must not only designate them as immigrant or native foods but also acknowledge the displacements making them American *immigrant* adaptations.

To illustrate the complexity of histories and identities in creative American ethnic fusion foods, we two draw from our different areas of research and focus on a couple of foods from Chinese American and Jewish American immigrant cuisines: sweet-and-sour batter-fried dishes like Slippery Shrimp, and chocolate babka and rugelach.<sup>8</sup> Noteworthy are these examples' sweet flavor profiles and their New World ingredients abundantly available through modern technological innovations in transportation and refrigeration. Resourcefulness and easily affordable access across the land enabled immigrants and their descendants to create new American foods.

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### Chinese American Fusion Food

The server placed a towering platter of "Slippery Shrimp" in the center of the table. A glossy reddish sauce clung to crispy, bite-sized morsels of meat, unrecognizable as shrimp in its cornstarch coating. As each additional dish came to the table, I felt the annoyance building. This is not Chinese food. Why would someone recommend this place to me? I felt betrayed. It wasn't that the food was *bad*. Perhaps I felt slighted that this simulation of Chinese food for white Americans was catering to the tastes of people like me.<sup>9</sup> Much as I might consider myself a bit of a gourmand, I still find sweet, crispy Chinese American food irresistible. I am a white Jewish American from the East Coast; the elders of my family were the original borscht belt diners to whom dishes like General Tso's chicken were marketed.<sup>10</sup> I still dip my schnitzel in duck sauce—a quintessentially American invention of East Coast Chinese restaurants—to make a lazy sweet and sour chicken.<sup>11</sup> Having been raised Kosher, I had never eaten shrimp until my mid-20s. How was I to know from good Chinese seafood?

My search for authenticity had subverted my appreciation for restaurants like Yang Chow (1977), emblematic of hybrid Chinese American cultures indigenous to the United States. For the Chinese American chefs, home cooks, and restaurant owners who adapted

their cuisines to American ingredients and taste preferences, a dish like "Slippery Shrimp" *is* authentic—authentically resourceful, creative, and American. The restaurant, opened by the five Yun brothers in 1977, is one of the oldest continuously operating restaurant businesses in L.A.'s Chinatown.<sup>12</sup> It is on the first floor of an understated pagoda-style strip mall building beneath the former Bing Wong Hotel, a few blocks down from the historic New Chinatown Center Central Plaza (1938). Though the hotel is long closed, the sign remains above Yang Chow's. The interior of the restaurant is simple and classic, combining stereotypical Chinese restaurant decoration like paper lamps with the retro fixtures of the diner formerly occupying the space. Photographs of celebrities who patronized Yang Chow—many of them Jewish entertainers—line the walls and entryway of the restaurant. While Yang Chow brands their cuisine as "Mandarin and Szechuan," Los Angeleans know that you go there for Chinese American classics—the types of dishes you might get at Panda Express but were invented in old school eateries in Chinatowns.<sup>13</sup>

Yang Chow did not fit my expectations of what a Chinese restaurant in a major metropolis's Chinatown should be, but it is a quintessentially Los Angelean space fitting perfectly in Chinatown, given the neighborhood's unique history. When they first moved to the U.S., the Yun brothers opened a restaurant called Lotus Flower to bring Szechuan cuisine to Los Angeles's Chinatown. The venture failed; local patrons were not interested in traditional dishes like drunken chicken and pigs' ears.<sup>14</sup> When they reopened the restaurant as Yang Chow—an Anglicized spelling of Yangzhou that, ironically, evoked an aura of exotic authenticity—they changed the menu to cater to American preferences for sweetness and soft textures. Their crispy sweet and sour dishes like "Slippery Shrimp" felt modern and innovative relative to the Cantonese-American fusion Chop Suey joints of the Exclusion Era. Those dishes combined American ingredients like canned pineapple and ketchup with Chinese methods of flash cooking on superheated woks and velveting meats in starches.

Nowadays, these elements of Chinese American cuisine evoke an outdated, "inauthentic" Chinese food. Yet the fact that Yang Chow still brings a hefty crowd is a testament to the owners' savvy business sense. The kitschy decor, celebrity appeal, and consistent Chinese American fusion food have kept the restaurant alive through the trials of gentrification and a global pandemic. Though the Yun family came to the U.S. in the postwar wave of Mandarin-speaking Chinese immigrants able to emigrate following the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, their adaptability and business-savvy branding and hybrid Chinese American identity resonates with the story of Los Angeles's New Chinatown Center—a shopping plaza built in 1938 with a history rooted in 19th-century Cantonese immigrants and Chinese Exclusion.

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The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 shaped Chinese American life in the United States in the late 19th -mid 20th century. It excluded most immigration from China to the U.S. and prohibited Chinese immigrants living in the U.S. from becoming naturalized citizens.<sup>15</sup> The anti-Chinese sentiment motivating legislators to pass Chinese Exclusion influenced other formal and informal restrictions on where Chinese Americans could live and work, intentionally ghettoizing communities and restricting resources. Necessity drove development of these Chinese American communities in the United States; those who found success in the face of adversity were skilled at compromise. The characteristic pagoda style of Chinatowns and Chinese restaurants originated as part of a movement to rejuvenate Chinese American neighborhoods and frame them as tourist attractions to white patrons.

Chinese restaurants in Chinatowns took a similar approach to their food as to their architecture. They created hybrid cuisines from affordable ingredients that catered to white American tastes.<sup>16</sup> Thus Chinese American chefs began to develop dishes like Chop Suey, a mix of cut up meats and vegetables readily available in America, cooked in the fashion of a Cantonese stir fry.<sup>17</sup> They then incorporated their signature foods into the architecture, signage, and decor of their restaurants to create a complete “exotic” experience. Chinese restaurants were key sites for the aesthetic and cultural transformation of American Chinatowns. A major reason for this was that restaurant ownership and domestic work were among the few professional opportunities available to Chinese Americans, yet Chinese cooks could have easily made straight Anglo cuisine or pursued other avenues of food production and still circumvented Chinese Exclusion.<sup>18</sup> In fact, many did. Chinese immigrant Lew Hing accumulated the riches to fund San Francisco’s new Chinatown through his cannery business, the Pacific Canning Company, where he developed innovative methods of food preservation.<sup>19</sup> But designing Chinese restaurants—from the architecture to menu designs to the food itself—viscerally changed public perception of Chinese Americans. Stereotypes that Chinese immigrants were unclean intertwined with the idea that Chinese foods were somehow unsanitary, unclean, or too “stinky” from garlic.<sup>20</sup> A “clean” Chinese restaurant serving food not too dissimilar from American fare reflected a more approachable image of Chinese Americans. Like Chinatown architectures, Chinese American foods played on the idea of the foreign to enhance something essentially familiar to white patrons. Menu items like deli meats and roasted chicken are accompanied by the poetry of Li Po and intricate illustrations of figures in traditional Chinese dress.<sup>21</sup> Like the neon signs alerting tourists to the Chop Suey within, the hybrid food in restaurants across San Francisco’s Chinatown in the early 20th century was quintessentially American.<sup>22</sup>

If San Francisco’s Chinatown was an experiment to market a neighborhood as a tourist attraction, Los Angeles’s

New Chinatown Center brought that experiment to the extreme. The 1938 “New Chinatown” was essentially an outdoor shopping mall with extravagant architecture inspired by Hollywood films. There were residential areas in the architectural plan, but New Chinatown Center was above all a commercial center for Chinese American business owners; most of those businesses were restaurants, bars, and bakeries. Even when the center first opened in 1938, the majority of the restaurant businesses’ clientele were not Chinese.<sup>23</sup> New Chinatown Center offered opulent banquet halls with tiki-inspired cocktails and live entertainment. Standard Cantonese-inspired Chinese American fare satisfied the mostly-white clientele who flocked to the neighborhood for something that hinted at the exotic. The Golden Pagoda, Forbidden Palace, Joy Yuen Low, and Grandview Gardens were among the iconic restaurants lining the central pedestrian zone of the plaza in the neighborhood’s heyday.<sup>24</sup> The businesses that persisted learned to adapt with the times; Phoenix Bakery, the only original food business still in operation, has become famous over the years for its American-style birthday cakes.<sup>25</sup> As the world changed, the Chinese restaurants in Chinatown had to adapt to survive.

World War II and the 1943 reversal of Chinese Exclusion radically changed how Chinese Americans across the United States interacted with their environments, and so their flavors and foodways. Newcomers to the United States in the postwar era found that there was not a market for “authentic” regional Chinese cuisine in the tourist-oriented Chinatown.<sup>26</sup> But “Chop Suey” also seemed a remnant of an outdated past. Moreover, immigrants coming from Hunan and Szechuan were unused to cooking or eating the Cantonese cuisine that influenced early 20th century Chinese American food. They drew from their own regional cuisine and Americanized Cantonese style to create sweet and sour, slightly spicy iterations of Chinese American foods. Coating crispy foods in sweet and sour sauce is unique to this era of Chinese American cuisines but was probably inspired by velveting, a tenderizing method of coating meat in starches, and more traditional sweet dipping sauces like plum sauce. Restaurants like Hop Louie—the renamed Golden Pagoda—adapted pseudo-Polynesian fare from tiki bars of the 1950s-70s, including crab rangoon and pineapple fried rice, and mixed tropical cocktails on their menus. Unlike Chop Suey, which was mostly a food of economy and survival, dishes using refined sugar, tropical fruits, and expensive meats like beef reflected a postwar Chinese American cuisine of abundance. They incorporated luxury products like crab and fatty cream cheese in crab rangoon, the lox and cream cheese of Chinese American restaurants.

But why do we consider something like lox and cream cheese “authentic” Ashkenazi Jewish cuisine when it is as much a “new world” food as Slippery Shrimp? Perhaps because of a bias against harmoniously integrated indigeneity and foreignness. Something recognizably



American cannot be authentically Chinese. But “authentic” Szechuan foods like mala (hot and tingling) fish are as new to Chinese cuisine as General Tso. Capsicums—*fanjiao* or “barbarian pepper”—were likely introduced to East Asian cuisine by Portuguese traders in the late 16th century during the Ming dynasty.<sup>27</sup> Chinese American food is undeniably American, but recognizing how those foods became part of the American culinary canon forces Americans to contend with unsavory parts of our pasts: Chinese Exclusion, segregation, and persistent waves of xenophobia that conceptualize Chinese Americans as perpetually “foreign.” Both non-Chinese and Chinese Americans must grapple with this discomfort in considering the place of Chinese American food in our cultural history. The initial disdain I had for that Slippery Shrimp, its glossy exterior, reminded me that I am both an American and “a stranger in a strange land”<sup>28</sup> in the Golden State, in Chinatowns, in the worlds I constantly seek to know.

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### Jewish American Fusion Foods

Around Chanukah and Christmas, I do some serious baking of babkas and rugelach. My custom is like many other Americans baking Christmas cookies for family and friends. That said, using cream cheese in rugelach or milk and butter for babkas, fits within a Jewish tradition of cooking dairy products for Chanukah to commemorate the hero Judith. Judith is a Jewish widow said to have lulled the enemy general Holofernes to sleep with cheese and wine and cut off his head.<sup>29</sup> The tradition of eating dairy foods in honor of Judith is hardly well known.

More people know rugelach and babka from their ubiquitous presence in bakeries or grocery stores as recognizably Jewish American foods. Babka is mentioned among *Tablet Magazine’s* “The 100 Most Jewish Foods: A Highly Debatable List,”<sup>30</sup> and according to Gil Marks, was popularized by the 1990s sitcom *Seinfeld*.<sup>31</sup> And while *Tablet’s* list does not include rugelach, it does include cream cheese.<sup>32</sup> For rugelach, like the New York-style cheesecake, “cream cheese was...the catalyst for [the] key Jewish-American innovations.”<sup>33</sup>

These recognizably Jewish foods were not brought over from Eastern Europe unchanged. Babka and rugelach have some roots in the “Old World” of Eastern Europe, as both their Yiddish names and the pastry types they are akin to attest. Babka is a diminutive related to the Yiddish and Slavic words *bubbe* or *baba*, i.e., “little grandmother,” connoting the grandmothers remembered to have baked them.<sup>34</sup> And babka is also the name for Polish and Ukrainian round kugelhupf-like cakes with no particular Jewish association.<sup>35</sup>

Gil Marks says that Jewish babka originated in 19th century Poland, when Jewish “housewives” made extra challah dough and rolled it around cinnamon or jam. They baked it as a snack for children on Friday afternoon, or a Sabbath dessert treat. Since Ashkenazic Jews typically

celebrate the Sabbath with meat meals, they made their challah doughs *pareve* - dairy-less, except sometimes for the holiday of Shavuot, when dairy foods are customary.<sup>36</sup> Thus American babka has roots in Eastern and Central European cuisine but was not necessarily known as a *Jewish* dish nor by the name “babka,” nor did it always even look or taste like the chocolate babka the *Seinfeld* episode made famous.

Similarly, rugelach’s name comes from either the Yiddish word *rog* (corner) or Slavic *rog* (horn), with the diminutive Yiddish plural ending *-lach*. In Central Europe, similar crescent-shaped pastries were known as *kipfel*, but were baked with a yeast dough, and in their Jewish versions, were usually pareve, like babkas from Eastern Europe, so they could be desserts eaten in festive meat meals.<sup>37</sup>

Babka and rugelach’s Yiddish names “brand” them as “Old Country” foods, but they changed when they “moved” to America. Both have gone from their pareve Eastern and Central European predecessors to dairy American versions. One important factor was the waning interest and observance of the kosher dietary rules among American Jews that keeps milk and meat foods separate.<sup>38</sup> But richer babkas and rugelach also reflect an American Jewish immigrant celebration of the abundance of their new home, “where the streets are paved with cheese,” at least according to the Jewish immigrant mice in Spielberg’s *An American Tail*.<sup>39</sup>

Omitted from these sweet Jewish pastry tales however is why so many Jews left Eastern and Central Europe for America in the first place. Tsarist persecution, violent antisemitism like the pogroms in Kishinev in 1903 and 1905, and severe economic hardships drove around 1.4 million Jews to immigrate to the US between 1880-1910. This continued until anti-immigrant sentiment in the wake of WWI cut immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe to a trickle with the 1921 Quota Act, followed by the racially defined 1924 Johnson-Reed “National Origins Act,” specifically targeting Asians, but affecting Jewish immigrants as well.<sup>40</sup> Continued American restrictive immigration policies condemned to death many European Jews seeking to flee Hitler’s persecution, but exceptions were made after the war between 1945-48 for 35,000-40,000 mostly Jewish Displaced Persons who survived, and later more, thanks to the Displaced Persons Act in 1948.<sup>41</sup>

With the 2006 publication of the handwritten cookbook compiled by some of the female inmates of the Terezin ghetto/concentration camp, American Jews have begun to connect their Eastern and Central European influenced delicacies explicitly with the trauma of the murder of our forebears who made them.<sup>42</sup> There is precedent in Jewish tradition to use tasty foods to evoke the bittersweet memories of trauma and loss. For example, *hamantaschen*, literally “Haman’s pockets,” are eaten on Purim to recall the escape from Haman’s plot to kill the Jews. The “Hillel Sandwich” of the Passover Seder remembers the bitterness of enslavement and the sweetness of liberation.<sup>43</sup>

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Chocolate babkas and cream cheese rugelach embody sweetness and abundance with a Jewish character. Their relative acceptance as “American” foods signals the acceptance of Jews as Americans. The pastries’ ingredients also reflect an ambivalence about kashrut: an indifference to the milk-meat separation rules *and* a sensibility that kashrut brands foods as Jewishly “authentic.”<sup>44</sup> Babka and rugelach amplify the American misconception that Jews in America are “from Europe,” even though that does not accurately represent the demography of all American Jews. With adoption and conversion, and Jews from Sephardic and Middle East backgrounds, one third of American Jews do not identify as Ashkenazic.<sup>45</sup> And yet, Ashkenazic foods also connote the lands where Jews have come closest to collective annihilation, and that too shapes American Jewish identity, regardless of our actual ethnic origins.<sup>46</sup>

Looking back to express Jewish identity through immigrant food exemplifies what Rachel Gross calls “Jewish nostalgia as religious practice.”<sup>47</sup> Gross broadens the definition of religious practice to include everyday behaviors that are profoundly meaningful to their practitioners as *Jewish* behaviors, but not necessarily sanctioned by traditional sacred Jewish texts, rabbis, and other official institutional Jewish gatekeepers of what is and isn’t Judaism.<sup>48</sup> Nostalgia comes from the two Greek words, *nostos* (“return home”) and *algos* (“pain”); it implies a dislocation from one’s home, usually creatively imagined, and pain that is bittersweet, since it is not an entirely unpleasant experience.<sup>49</sup> The cultivation of bittersweetness as a flavor and nostalgia as a feeling, bridges pain with pleasure. Even fully sweet foods can be seasoned with nostalgia, including the painful parts of the memories evoked. This is probably the case with babka and rugelach, Jewish sweets evoking memories of Eastern and Central Europe. As Ashkenazi sweets, they hint at the trauma of Eastern European pogroms or the Holocaust perpetrated by Germans. And if we acknowledge it, the ingredients of chocolate and cane sugar evoke our complicity in violent Euro-American colonialism: the slave trade and genocide of native populations that is part of the history of how these products came to be American staples. And Israeli-flavored contributions to babka and rugelach evoke the increasingly ambivalent relationship of American Jews, especially younger ones, to the State of Israel and the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. As nostalgic foods, babka and rugelach celebrate the richness and abundance of America *in contrast* to the hardships of where Jews lived before. When the mice in *An American Tail* sing, “There are no cats in America, where the streets are paved with cheese,”<sup>50</sup> they enshrine the melting pot myth through highly stereotypical accents and melodies, equating Russian (Jewish), Italian, and Irish American immigrant experiences. By rarely making Fievel’s family explicitly Jewish, just as *Seinfeld* has often been criticized for, it models an American immigrant identity that is assimilated, but still Jew-ish.<sup>51</sup>

Have immigrant foods helped Jews and Chinese Americans achieve the kind of “Americanness” for which they, sometimes ambivalently, hunger since they and their ancestors first arrived? Maybe with chocolate babka and cream cheese rugelach, some Jewish foods did. And similarly, so may have Chinese American immigrant foods, especially dishes like Slippery Shrimp, Crab Rangoon, General Tso’s Chicken, and Chop Suey. Chinese and Jewish immigrants may have gained many privileges by Americanizing their foodways, but at the cost of oversweetening the bitterness of what they’ve had to forget, ignore, and give up in order to enjoy hybrid identities.

The notion of American Exceptionalism is fraught: the majority of Americans no longer enjoy Potter’s theory that abundance is the defining characteristic of American identity. Old-style Chinese restaurants that opened in San Francisco in 1907, like the beloved Jewish delis,<sup>52</sup> cannot survive a takeout-only business in this moment of stagflation, labor shortages, and austerity. Recent alarming rise in violence targeting Chinese and other Asian Americans, and Jewish Americans, does not exactly confirm that the acceptance, adaptation and integration of our Chinese and Jewish foods into American cuisine means that we unequivocally belong.

And yet, every year, on Christmas, as two American Jews, we gather with our families to eat American Chinese food: the histories of two distinct immigrant communities intertwining for a particular space and time and meal. The food we eat contains the bittersweet histories of who our peoples have been and the dreams of who we might become. Munching on rangoons and fried rice, anticipating the gooiest babka for dessert, we experience the paradox of pain and promise that is the American melting pot.

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## Notes

1. William Pettersen, “Success Story, Japanese-American Style” in the *New York Times* (Jan. 9, 1966).
  2. Paul Freedman, *American Cuisine: And How It Got This Way*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Liveright, 2019), 7-8.
  3. David Potter. *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954.
  4. Freedman, 8.
  5. See Yong Chen, *Chop Suey USA: The Story of Chinese Food in America* (Columbia University Press, 2014); James Syhabout, *Hawker Fare: Stories and Recipes from a Refugee Chef’s Isan Thai & Lao Roots* (New York: Ecco, 2018).
  6. RIM Staff, “The Story Behind the Calamari Comeback State,” *Rhode Island Monthly*, April 14, 2021, <https://www.rimonthly.com/the-story-behind-the-calamari-comeback-state>.
  7. Robert Allen Warrior, “A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” *Voices from the Margin*, 1991, 287-95.
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8. Hence, the “Ts” of the Chinese American and Jewish American food sections are different: the former, Zoya Brumberg, the latter, Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus.
9. Freedman, 256.
10. Jacob R. Levin, “Chinese Restaurants and Jewish American Culture,” in *American Chinese Restaurants: Society Culture, and Consumption*, ed. Jenny Banh and Haiming Liu (London: Routledge, 2019) 176.
11. Laura Kiniry, “What Exactly Is Duck Sauce?,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, February 5, 2015, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/what-is-duck-sauce-180953993/>.
12. Yang Chow Restaurant, “History—Yang Chow Restaurant,” Yang Chow Mandarin & Szechuan Cuisine, 2021 1977, <https://www.yangchow.com/history/>.
13. From Yang Chow’s web page entitled “Yang Chow Mandarin & Szechuan Cuisine.”
14. Yang Chow, “Notes From the East: The History of Slippery Shrimp,” *Notes From the East* (blog), February 26, 2008, <http://yangchow819.blogspot.com/2008/02/history-of-slippery-shrimp.html>.
15. Philip P. Choy, *San Francisco Chinatown: A Guide to Its History and Architecture* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Publishers, 2012) 38.
16. Freedman, 255-81, discusses this specifically as a phenomenon in American “ethnic restaurants,” whose immigrant proprietors had a particular interest in offering “safe exoticism [over] authenticity” to cater to “generic Americans” who have over the past 150 years have sought out this sort of “inexpensive culinary novelty,” 256.
17. Chen, 143-44.
18. Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing, and the Transformation of Urban California* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
19. Jean Moon Liu, *Lew Hing: A Family Portrait* (Oakland: Janus Book Publishers, 1987).
20. Robert Ji-Song Ku, *Dubious Gastronomy: The Cultural Politics of Eating Asian in the USA* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014).
21. Menu of Li Po Restaurant, 1938. Los Angeles Chinatown 1938, Y.C. Hong collection, Hong Family Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.
22. Chen, 142.
23. Irvin Lai interviewed by Eugene Moy, 1992. “Historic Building/Site Report: Grandview Gardens Restaurant,” September 25, 1995.
24. Blueprint of Los Angeles New Chinatown Center. Peter SooHoo, Sr. papers, 1883-2007, Pacific Rim Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.
25. Liz Ohanesian, “How Phoenix Bakery (And Its Famous Strawberry Cake) Survived 80-Plus Years in Chinatown,” *LAist*, August 24, 2018, <https://laist.com/news/la-history/phoenix-bakery-80th-anniversary-strawberry-cake>.
26. Belinda Leong interview with Cecilia Chiang. Originally published in *Eater* July, 2018. <https://www.eater.com/2018/7/20/17419118/cecilia-chiang-interview-profile-belinda-leong>
27. Fuschia Dunlop, *The Food of Sichuan* (W.W. Norton & Co, 2018), 12
28. The expression goes back to the Bible, Exodus 2:23, when Moses named his first son Gershom, after having to flee Egypt: “Because I was a stranger in a strange land” (King James translation).
29. Though the Greek Book of Judith from the Apocrypha sets this tale long before the Chanukah story of the Maccabees overcoming the Syrian Greeks in the 2nd c. BCE, a much later medieval Hebrew version of the story provides the details of the dairy foods upon which this tradition is based. See Sarah Zielinski, “A Hidden Hanukkah Tale of a Woman, an Army and Some Killer Cheese,” *NPR*, December 4, 2012, sec. Holiday Recipes, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2012/12/04/166486095/a-hidden-hanukkah-tale-of-a-woman-an-army-and-some-killer-cheese> and Susan Weingarten, “6. Food, Sex, and Redemption in Megillat Yehudit (the ‘Scroll of Judith’),” in *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, by Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann, OBP Collection (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2013), 97–125, <http://books.openedition.org/obp/1045>.
30. Alana Newhouse and Tablet, *The 100 Most Jewish Foods: A Highly Debatable List* (New York: Artisan, 2019). It originally appeared as a feature of Tablet’s on-line publication Tablet Magazine, “Tablet Magazine’s 100 Most Jewish Foods,” Tablet Magazine’s 100 Most Jewish Foods List, accessed January 31, 2022, <https://100jewishfoods.tabletmag.com>.
31. “Babka” in Gil Marks, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2010) 33. The Jewishness of Seinfeld is often noted. The story that NBC president Brandon Tartikoff criticized the pilot episode of Seinfeld as “too New York, too Jewish,” is often repeated in retrospective discussion of this sitcom. For the general American cultural significance of Seinfeld, and its particular representation and ambivalence toward Jewishness, see Paul Arras, *Seinfeld: A Cultural History* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), e.g., 105, where he quotes Tartikoff.
32. Gabriella Gershenson, “Tablet Magazine’s 100 Most Jewish Foods List: Cream Cheese,” Tablet Magazine’s 100 Most Jewish Foods List, accessed January 31, 2022, <https://100jewishfoods.tabletmag.com/cream-cheese/>: “It’s the vital ingredient in rugelach dough... a natural mate for lox, the ultimate Ashkenazi delicacy. When slathered on a bagel, it’s what much of the world, for better or worse, thinks of as Jewish food. Though cream cheese is an American invention, it was put to best culinary use by Jewish immigrants, who, according to the food historian Gil Marks, swapped in



- the thick, tangy dairy product for pot cheese in traditional Eastern European recipes. But since Breakstone and Philadelphia were *not* the curd cheese of the old country, cream cheese was also the catalyst for some key Jewish-American innovations, most notably the New York-style cheesecake.” And of course, American style *rugelach*.
33. Ibid.
  34. Marks, 32.
  35. Prinz, 2019. In an e-mail (November 8, 2021), Susanne Belovari, a scholar of Central European pastries and their Jewish connections, told me babka-like pastries were quite common where she grew up in Austria but were not called babkas, nor were they particularly associated with Jewish baking.
  36. Marks, 32.
  37. Marks, 509.
  38. Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, *Gastronomic Judaism as Culinary Midrash* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield, 2019) 122-24. Lest I overstate the case, American Jewish kosher bakeries still produce pareve babkas and rugelach prolifically, as Rabbi Deborah Prinz’s report (2017) on the best chocolate babkas in her New York City “babkathon” attests, e.g., from Oneg Heimishe, Moische’s, and Green’s bakeries (who make the babkas sold by Trader Joes’).
  39. Movieclips, *An American Tail (1986) - There Are No Cats In America Scene (2/10)* | Movieclips, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQMtp2WxEA4>.
  40. “United States Immigration and Refugee Law, 1921-1980,” accessed March 7, 2022, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/united-states-immigration-and-refugee-law-1921-1980>.
  41. Ibid. See also Aaron J. Hahn Tapper, *Judaisms: A Twenty-First-Century Introduction to Jews and Jewish Identities*, 2016, 210, for a softening of American popular antisemitic attitudes that “Jews were a menace to America” (even in 1944), after the war when the Nazis’ destruction of European Jewry became widely known.
  42. Cara De Silva, ed., *In Memory’s Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezin*, trans. Bianca Steiner Brown, 2nd edition (Lanham, Md.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 2006).
  43. See below.
  44. Laurence Roth, “Toward a Kashrut Nation in American Jewish Cookbooks, 1990-2000,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 28, no. 2 (2010): 65–9; Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, “Bread From Heaven, Bread From The Earth’: Recent Trends In Jewish Food History,” in *Writing Food History: A Global Perspective*, ed. Kyri W Claflin and Peter Scholliers (London ; New York: Berg, 2012) 131-32; Brumberg-Kraus, 2019, 128.
  45. “Race, Ethnicity, Heritage and Immigration among U.S. Jews’ in Jewish Americans in 2020,” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, May 11, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/05/11/race-ethnicity-heritage-and-immigration-among-u-s-jews/>.
  46. Tapper, 211, who suggests the “horrors of the Shoah have played a role in making the Jewish genocide part of a non-Jewish American consciousness.” The fact that the *Diary of Anne Frank*, Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, and Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* are assigned readings in public schools, not to mention the Jewish contribution to America’s iconic Smithsonian Institute is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Tapper says that reinforces the Jewish American story that the Jews have “made it” in America. Given the current backlash about reading *Maus* in public schools, this assessment might be overly optimistic.
  47. Rachel B. Gross, *Beyond the Synagogue: Jewish Nostalgia as Religious Practice* (New York: NYU Press, 2021).
  48. Gross, 2021, 27; Brumberg-Kraus, 2019, 4-5ff.
  49. Brumberg-Kraus, 2019, 78-79.
  50. Movieclips, *An American Tail (1986)*.
  51. Jarrod Tanny, “Decoding Seinfeld’s Jewishness,” in *A Club of Their Own*, ed. Eli Lederhandler and Gabriel N. Finder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) 54, terms this “implicit Jewishness.”
  52. David Sax, *Save the Deli: In Search of Perfect Pastrami, Crusty Rye, and the Heart of Jewish Delicatessen*, Mariner Books, 2010) is a cry for help, and Ben Katchor, *The Dairy Restaurant*, illustrated edition (New York: Schocken, 2020) is basically an elegy for Jewish dairy restaurants that no longer exist.