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CHOP SUEY HABITS: THE AMERICAN CHINESE RESTAURANT DURING COVID
TIMES

REBECCA MA

86 Pages

With the outbreak of COVID-19 in Spring 2020, the yellow peril has come back from its clandestine hiding spot with attention directed towards East and Southeast Asian citizens. In the ongoing debate of cleanliness and sanitization during a pandemic, the yellow peril scare has once again targeted American Chinese restaurants. American Chinese restaurants found themselves to be the target of online abuse and loss of patronage in these uncertain times. While over half of American Chinese restaurants took the loss and shut down in March/April 2020, they still reopened to partial to full capacity sometime in 2020. American Chinese restaurant owners knew that there were many vocal anti-Chinese sentiments, yet they still made the choice to reopen in spite of the abusive attitudes. I argue that American Chinese restaurant owners made the choice to reopen because of financial reasons and the communities that they serve. I also argue that non-American Chinese people have used American Chinese food as an avenue for racist attitudes directed towards American Chinese people that has been exacerbated by the onset of COVID-19.

KEYWORDS: Asian American Studies, Chinese Restaurants, Restaurants, American Studies, COVID, Food Studies, Chinese American Studies, Racism,

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Sociology and Anthropology

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2023

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CHOP SUEY HABITS: THE AMERICAN CHINESE RESTAURANT DURING COVID
TIMES

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgements to my committee, especially Dr. Adachi for their unwavering support and feedback. Thank you to Mr. Zhao at the Golden Lion and his friend Mr. Huang for giving me insight into a post COVID American Chinese restaurant scene. Thank you to Dr. Poon and Dr. Luna for perspectives on American Chinese food. Thank you to my parents, Guan Wu and Wen Jie Ma, for giving me information and experience with American Chinese restaurants. Thank you to my cohort and friends for unconditional support. Thank you to Dr. Pei-Lin Yu, without you, I would not have been able to be here. Thank you to Dr. T and Angie for keeping me sane and focused. Thank you to Adderall and Abilify for keeping me level.

R.M.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

It is hard to describe into words the collective trauma that was the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. At worst it describes a time where cooperation was scattered and low and at best it describes a time where things have changed significantly and the world itself is no longer a world we know intimately. During this shift and change in culture in the US, it has shown that cultural trends and thoughts are progressing, but we seem stuck in a cycle. As a country, we behaved exactly to be expected in retrospect. We completely freaked out and in that part we all were on our worst behavior. In that messy behavior, clandestine feelings and behaviors have become more mainstream that stem from historical events, policies, and attitudes. It shows that these have never went away.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront the revitalized concept of the “Yellow Peril,” aimed at American Chinese people. Because of emboldened and blatantly racist acts generally being shamed upon, the frustrations and anger of the pandemic were directed towards American Chinese restaurants and food. During a time where cleanliness is more than godliness, the long held stereotypes of American Chinese food as a “dirty” product have become accepted and fashionable in the mainstream thought. COVID-19 was a time where people started to become defensive in regards to their cleanliness because this is where they were most vulnerable during a pandemic. Restaurants in particular seemed to perform their sanitization routines. It was often visible to the customer the sanitization of the tables, chairs, and booths. The server was usually equipped with the appropriate PPE (personal protective equipment) and it was often a show when the PPE was replaced with brand new and sanitary ones. Restaurants would put plastic barriers between booths or between the register and the customer. It became a game to show how clean a restaurant was so they could host customers again amidst lockdown.

People would applaud restaurants for the lengths they went to show the public how clean they were. It was often above and beyond what they needed to show the local health department that they were compliant with local health ordinances. This was because health standards were much higher and there was the fear that the health department would shut them down at any given notice.

American Chinese restaurants were not given the same amount of praise for their handling of the pandemic given the knowledge at the time. Majority of restaurants closed down and when they reopened they mostly reopened to limited capacity i.e. take out only. My parent's restaurant closed down for six weeks and opened back to takeout only for almost the rest of the year. This was met with frustration for the small town we live in. My parents self-reported only receiving a quarter of the business they had once before because of the conservative nature of the town. We had been accused of being dirty before and during this time, people were avoiding us. It became apparent that we were considered dirty and impure when my parents and I contracted COVID-19 the end of 2020. A woman had messaged us on Facebook accusing us of being dirty and threatening to sue us for giving her husband the flu even though they had eaten at the restaurant two weeks prior.

Racism towards American Chinese people using food and restaurants as a proxy are not a new concept in the Western thought. Posts on the internet often make a priority to point out that Chinese restaurants are dirty, unsavory, and cut corners even though normalized Western style restaurants also do what Chinese restaurants are accused of. Though it is considered charming when a white owned restaurant cuts corners and is dirty to some capacity. The high double standards that Americans have for American Chinese restaurants have always been in place. In

online reviews of American Chinese owned businesses, they are often described with the word, “dirty,” or any other synonym equating to dirtiness or griminess.

It was acceptable to attack food and business during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic because attacking the individual person on the basis of ethnicity would have been controversial. To attack the general idea of the populace and their business and how they ran it was more acceptable because it was not just the person themselves but what they had accomplished that could have been separated from their ethnicity. It was an entity, not an individual on the first glance. However I argue that it is an attack on their ethnicity and ethnic stereotypes but shrouded with a critique on the business in the context of capitalistic intentions.

In this thesis, I seek to explain how historically and currently anti-Chinese sentiments are projected using food and restaurants as a proxy for racism. I want to explain the difficult choice of reopening a restaurant during a global pandemic in the midst of heightened anti-Chinese sentiments. I interview an American Chinese restaurant in the heart of Chinatown Chicago for their experiences during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also interview two experts on American Chinese restaurants and American Chinese food on what really is American Chinese food and racism against American Chinese restaurants. I also conducted a survey of perceptions of American Chinese restaurants and food in Bloomington/Normal, Illinois. In this study, I sought to understand how and why racism against the American Chinese populace has thrived since Chinese people started coming to America and where do notions of impure and unhealthy foods come from. I study the labor history of Chinese immigrants in the US and the concept of “ethnic succession.” All of this is within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of the new Yellow Peril.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

When discussing the topic of take-out and restaurants, it is difficult to disassociate the American Chinese restaurant. The American Chinese restaurant has a history that goes back to the 1800s when they started arriving to the US to seek their fortune. It had started as a place of comfort for Chinese immigrants. They were opened as a response to the status of being overseas Chinese and away from home. It provided a comfort in the form of a hot meal for the Chinese diaspora in America and has grown exponentially into present times. As the Chinese restaurant has grown in the US, it has become a staple in American cuisine and has become a permanent fixture in American culture. Despite the Chinese restaurant being such a prominent figure in the American restaurant industry, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on them. During the uncertainty of the pandemic, many shut down indefinitely with no opening date in sight. As things are still ambiguous officially and culturally two years on, the effects of the pandemic on Chinese restaurants remains to be seen. While the world has moved on, things have been brought to the surface. Underlying thoughts and perceptions of Chinese food have been amplified since March 2020. Some Chinese restaurants have closed down altogether, and some have reopened but with a difference. I will investigate why American Chinese restaurants have made the decision to reopen and how the greater culture has viewed American Chinese food during a pandemic. I will also investigate contextual histories of American Chinese food, restaurants and people and their predetermined place in America.

I. HISTORY OF CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WHITE AMERICANS AND AMERICAN CHINESE RESTAURANTS

The American Chinese restaurant started because of the diaspora experienced by Chinese people in the US. Food is an integral part of a migrant community and dining is a social activity

that helps people bond and strengthen interpersonal relationships. Chinese culture is no exception, and the ethnic Chinese restaurant became an important part of Chinese culture in the United States. It is a place for gathering while sharing a meal. It is a place of mutual choosing for meetings such as reunions, business, weddings, and funerals. It is a place unanimously agreed upon by the participants to drink tea, have food, and to congregate. Chinese restaurants in the US was meant to create food fit for individuals to eat comforting food that could remind them of their home to quell their homesickness. Due to the heavy movement from China to the US throughout history, the US imposed multiple Chinese Exclusion Acts that policed which people were allowed to come into the country, where they could live, and do business. In an article by Gabriel Chin and John Ormonde about the legal and social war on Chinese restaurants in America, they offer a legal perspective to the changes local governments made to the Chinese Exclusion acts. They write about how the Chinese were treated at the time. They detail an incident where the local fire department came to a Chinatown and started hosing down the buildings in Chinatown. They state that it was because they thought that their local Chinatown was “dirty.” They see this as it was highly racialized act by the local fire department who were acting on the perception of Chinese people at the time. Chin and Ormonde point out that the Chinese were considered dirty and impure compared to their white counterparts.

When more Chinese restaurants started to open up, it started to appeal to Americans. After a fashion, Americans started to show up to these restaurants to patronize them and eat Cantonese cuisine. The indicator of catering to Americans started when milk started showing up on the menu. This was significant because many Chinese people are lactose intolerant and cow milk is not historically or culturally relevant as it is in America or European countries. An old habit that many Americans still practice today is drinking a glass of milk with their dinner (Chin

and Ormonde 2018). This move was to market an appeal to white Americans welcoming and gesturing for them to come. This was their move towards globalizing their food, transitioning to becoming Chinese American restaurants, and increasing their profits by appealing to white Americans.

As a response to this, local governments cast laws on these restaurants that made it more difficult to operate. Chin and Ormonde argue that white American men feared white women were succumbing to the dangers of Chinese men. They explain that the stereotype at the time was that all Chinese people were opium addicted troublemakers looking to steal jobs and women away from white Americans. As white women were starting to patronize Chinese American restaurants, this made white men paranoid that they would cease interest in them in favor of Chinese men. They called women who started to patronize Chinese restaurants as having a “chop suey habit,” (2018, 702) and eventually fall into using opium and falling under the “fatal lure of the Chinese.”(705) This led to local ordinances banning unsupervised women at a certain age from going to Chinese restaurants without the presence of a man. Some laws banned all women from entering a restaurant as a customer altogether. Chin and Ormonde pointed out that to be “fair” the language in the law prohibited all women from eating at these restaurants at a certain time or altogether. They make the point that in order to be “fair,” this also meant Chinese women even if they were married (2018, 710).

Chin and Ormonde write about the event that had sparked an initiative to protect white women from Chinese men. A 19-year-old woman who was in a relationship with an American Chinese restaurant worker, was murdered by her boyfriend who hid her body in his apartment. This sparked outrage in the white community as it appeared to state that white women will be

killed if they associate with Chinese men. White women were told to be afraid of Chinese men as they were perceived as a danger to them (684)

Chin and Ormonde write more into the perceived dangers of Chinese restaurants to white Americans. They mention that the restaurants used to be structured with private booths. This is to explain why locals thought that this was suspicious. They thought that the closed concept of the restaurant allowed for sex work and drug abuse. This led to tighter restrictions for Chinese restaurants. They state that the people who were most threatened by the arrival of Chinese workers were white American unions and other businesses. They noted that local governments never made official complaints about the presence of Chinese restaurants in their town. The complaints came from private citizens airing their grievances (2018, 718)

II. NOTIONS OF CLEANLINESS, CHINESE RESTAURANT SYNDROME, AND DIRTINESS

Even though people claim that we are more progressive than ever, xenophobia against Chinese people and American Chinese restaurants is still alive and well. It is just repackaged as something different. In the New England Medical Journal (NEJM), an extremely prestigious and highly revered medical journal, a letter was published from “Dr. Ho Man Kwok.” He reported to have noticed people being very sick after eating American Chinese food and suggesting that it had something to do with MSG. (Ku 2014) MSG is a naturally occurring ingredient. It is naturally found in soy sauce and tomatoes and is the 5th flavor called “umami.” While it is naturally occurring, the concentrated, crystalized version of it was invented by early 20th century Japanese chemist, Dr. Kikunae Ikeda (1908). The largest distributor of crystalized MSG in the world is Ajinomoto. This led to a huge scare that MSG was making people deathly ill. In an article published by Colgate University’s Colgate Magazine, it was revealed to be a hoax and the

letter was written by a white man as a bet to see if he could get published in the NEJM. The name of the fake doctor was a play on words meaning, “human cock.” According to the article, they tried to get it retracted but the Journal decided not to because of their history publishing gag letters as an inside joke (The Strange Case of Dr. Ho Man Kwok 2019). That has not gained traction though. People still believe that MSG makes people deathly sick and that it is unhealthy despite it being just like salt. Dr. Ku explained that it would take about a cup of MSG to cause brain damage which is the same amount of salt it would take to kill someone (Ku 2014) The xenophobia of “dangerous Chinese men” has been replaced with “dangers” of MSG and is a reason that many people choose not to eat American Chinese restaurants still to this day. As of 2023, the New England Medical Journal has not retracted the letter or issued an apology or any articles explaining how the letter was a xenophobic hoax. MSG has been attributed to American Chinese food being labeled, “dirty,” despite many popular fast-food restaurants and chip companies using copious amounts of MSG as well as it is occurring naturally in tomatoes. The hoax was so successful that MSG is labeled as “flavor enhancer” instead of MSG.

This is not the only instance of American Chinese food being labeled “dirty.” The New York Times ran an article about a health coach and influencer named Arielle Haspel in 2019. She was opening a new American Chinese restaurant citing it to be “clean” food. She said that American Chinese food made people often feel “bloated and icky,” and that the food was “too oily.” She instantly got backlash on social media for her comments but proceeded with opening the restaurant. She explained that she was “complimenting” Chinese cuisine, but her language suggested it was not even complimenting in a backhanded way. Critics called her “tone deaf.” She posted an image with the words stating, “I was just telling my husband last night, I wish there was a place to get healthy Chinese food!” to announce her opening of an American Chinese

restaurant (Otterman 2019). Arielle Haspel considers herself a champion of “clean eating,” a wave of eating habits that categorize different foods and methods of preparing food as “clean” and not explicitly “dirty.” While this is just an instance of a white woman whose xenophobia and categorization of pure and impure foods were made vocal and in ignorance, this is part of the larger problem of American Chinese food being labeled dirty. During the 1800s Chinese restaurants in Chinatown were hosed down because they were called “dirty,” They were labeled “dirty” because it was popular at the time to consider non-white people dirty compared to whiteness (2018, 725). Now that it is unfashionable to express outwardly those thoughts, it is directed towards food as a proxy for their thoughts. Haspel’s restaurant did not last a year with Yelp reviews calling her food “bland and tasteless.” (Yelp 2019).

III. IMMIGRATION

The Chinese Exclusion Act has been the foundation and informed how immigration to the United States is today. There are more hoops to jump through because judging if someone is of “good moral character,” is harder to determine legally without bias. Immigrationhelp.org reports with confidence that it takes “18-24 months” to be granted citizenship in the US (Petts 2022). This includes all the paperwork, interviews, and the test required to be granted naturalization. All of this must be done in English unless the person is over 50 years of age and has resided in the US for 20 years. Then, the interview can be done in their native language. That being said, the “18-24 months” stated by immigrationhelp.org has been self reported to not be the same for people immigrating from non-white countries. In my search for how long it takes to immigrate to the US from a non-white and western country, a more accurate estimate to naturalization was clandestine. I distinctly remember an article about the real length of time it takes to obtain a green card and that article seems to have vanished. Srinivas (2015) stated that

90% of Asian immigrants are accepted.” This seems like a lot but it does not account for how many people are denied precursory entry into the United States on any visa. This article was from The Guardian, a British publication, and it does not detail the reality of coming into the United States. Asian immigrants sometimes have family in the states that allow them to come in on family visas. They do not detail the lengthy process it takes to even get to the United States like waiting in line for a visa or the process of sponsorship including letters of invitation. It does not also detail how many times a person will try to obtain a visa. Charts typically depict Asian Americans as top earners in the United States but fail to account for how only wealthy Asians have an easier time to get into the United States because of immigration’s foundation of the Chinese Exclusion Acts.

In “Technologizing Orientalism: An Introduction,” Roh et. Al (2015) explains the stereotypes of Chinese people, their bodies for labor, and how that translates to speculative fiction. When the Chinese were forced as coolies to come to the United States to work, they were described as harder workers than white Americans. Roh et. Al. explained the stereotypes at the time being “the Chinese body simply did not require the conditions of safety, sustenance and shelter that bodies of European descendants required.” (2015, 11) They used this as reasoning for not paying them as much as white Americans were being paid for their work. This is a stereotype that has persisted today with discourse around immigrants. While people say that immigrants are coming to the United States to take all the government benefits and be lazy, there are people that push back and say that immigrants are hard workers. Both are bad stereotypes. On one side, it calls immigrants leeches, on the other side it calls them hard workers in an act to say they are of “good moral character” but pigeonholes them into laborious jobs.

NPR reported that there was a boom of American Chinese restaurants in the mid to late 20th century leading to the numerous amounts of them scattered throughout the US. In the film “The Search for General Tso,” they explain that Chinese were only given two avenues of work, laundry, and restaurant work if they wanted to come to the US (2014, 18:09). In the legal article, it was referenced that many Chinese immigrants that had been allowed to come to the United States for work and only some type of work. There were other issues with immigration like with miscegenation laws and the Chinese Exclusion Acts, but labor was a reason that was highlighted in the laws to allow people in. NPR wrote that business owners could get a merchant license to come to the States and bring workers with them. “In 1915, a federal court added restaurants to the list” (Godoy 2016). This was a legal stipulation that allowed many American Chinese restaurants to bloom throughout the US and for more Chinese people to migrate to the US in search of another life.

In the article, “Roots and Changing Identity of the Chinese in the United States,” describes that between 1949 and 1972, thousands of highly skilled workers were sent to the United States to help with labor issues. Among those, five thousand of them were skilled grad students. Wang says that many of them found loopholes to allow them to stay in the states and the others who chose not to go back remained undocumented workers. Even getting the thousands of skilled laborers to come to the United States required various refugee acts, loopholes, and stipulations to allow them to come to the states as workers or students since China was closed off at the time. Given the context of the cold war and the red scare, the Maoist model that China had implemented was reason enough to give incoming Chinese immigrants refugee status. At the time, immigration policies were modified and changed to allow families to enter the United States because of family reunification policies and to increase the skilled labor force.

This has opened the relationship between the US and incoming Chinese undergrad and grad students who wish to receive an American education with the possibility of staying in the states more permanently (1991, 189).

IV. RACIALIZATION OF LABOR AND ETHNIC SUCCESSION

The reason why Chinese migrant workers seem to go for jobs in the garment and food industry is because of being boxed in during the early 1900s by trade and craft unions. It was entirely possible that Chinese migrant workers could have expanded to other avenues of work but were forced into garment and food trades by jealous unions. Chinese skilled laborers entering the United States do so under the premise of starting a restaurant or working in the garment industry because that is their stereotype of specialization. In this, their labor has been racialized. Food businesses are garment industries are seen as somewhat undesirable and hardworking jobs that have been stereotyped to fit the Chinese state of mind and body and are reserved for them even though it was not chosen for them. Like Filipinos being stereotyped as nurses, Chinese people have boundaries to what they can do. It rings true today with many sweatshops being in Asian countries, especially China, and the only Chinese migrants allowed in to start restaurants. There have been slight changes and modifications since then, but Chinese migrant workers have remained boxed in by stereotypes. The stereotypes have since expanded to tech industries but the more laborious side of tech.

The stereotypes dictate what a Chinese person can do in America. They are deep enough that they are highly internalized and not representative of the work people in Mainland China do. There is the stereotype of the hardworking Chinese salary man or OL (office lady) who works every day without complaint to provide for their family. There are stereotypes about the Chinese doctor, lawyer, or businessperson. The stereotypes are so deep that when an American Chinese

kid chooses a career that is not in one of those boxed in categories, they are often questioned for their choices with no regard to their personhood. This criticism comes from the internalized stereotypes brought on by the parents and the external scrutiny from non-Asian Americans. Chinese people highly value the arts, but Chinese people are nonexistent in any of the arts in America because that is not how the American stereotype wishes to see them. Art in America is seen as something fluid, highly emotional, and a sign of personhood and humanness. Chinese people are seen as emotionless robots, so the stereotype of artistic Chinese people is not understood.

In terms of restaurants, Chinese people may choose to have an Asian fusion restaurant that is granted with the little wiggle room given by the racialized labor. In “The Resentful Foreigner: Racializing Chinese Workers in Asian Fusion Restaurants,” Wu (2019) investigates Asian fusion restaurants and the racialization of the bitter labor. They investigate birthday celebrations by the restaurants. There is often a spectacle associated with having a birthday celebration at a hibachi restaurant or a general Asian fusion restaurant. Wu argues that all these elements such as a funny squirt bottle, onion volcano, and exaggerated accents are a result of being branded “the other.” Birthday celebrations usually consist of something someone does as a treat that they do not do regularly. To go to a hibachi restaurant to see the spectacle of the “mystical oriental” doing kung fu tricks with knives and spatulas is a special birthday spectacle. Wu claims that these are a product of Chinese people forever being the “other.” Wu further argues that designating Asian men to do what is considered “women’s work,” such as laundry and cooking, “subvert workers’ masculinity by requiring them to perform for the entertainment of others.” Wu makes the point that these performances “reifies differences.” (2019, 69) The boxing in of Chinese people into American Chinese and Asian fusion restaurants segregates them by

forcing them into certain industries. Wu says that this is not cause for celebration of culture or difference but instead normalizes the “racialized other.” (2019, 69)

In the United States, different ethnicities and countries of nativity are often characterized by the job most popular with their ethnicity. 7/11 convenience stores are stereotyped by having South Asian store owners. Vietnamese people are characterized for running and working at nail salons. When I brought this up to an architect friend from Mexico he said, “you’re talking to a brown person in construction.” In the context of American Chinese restaurants and immigration, typically Chinese immigrants can come to the United States if they work in food or the garment industry, tech, or if they are students. The Chinese student pigeonhole came out of the 80s when China opened, and the United States allowed for the best and brightest Chinese students to come to the United States. Krishnendu Ray defines this as “ethnic succession,” in their article, “Ethnic Succession and the New American Restaurant Cuisine,” where people from one ethnicity are kind of stuck working in their stereotyped job because of the rigid standards of ethnicity and work in the United States. “It is kept afloat by a labor force that is segmented by ethnicity,” acknowledges Ray (2007, 97). In the article, it is written in the context of waves of restaurant workers over time and why there are so many different types of food like Italian, German, Chinese, etc. In the context of Chinese people and American Chinese restaurants, there was a huge boom of American Chinese restaurants in the mid to late 1900s due to multiple events. There was WWII, addition of restauranteur to merchant visas, the Second Sino-Japanese War, Chinese Civil War, the Cultural Revolution, The Great Famine, the transition into a communist based government system, and Nixon in China.

Many came from Taiwan as students but then secured their residency in the United States as restaurant owners. They came to the United States and stayed because of their status of being

exiled or displaced from Mainland China during the cultural revolution (Wu 2020). The American Chinese restaurant was not so much an institution, but it was becoming something significant. The American Chinese restaurant was one of the very few ways a Chinese person could be allowed to enter the United States with the lingering Chinese Exclusion Act as a foundation for immigration into the US. Chinese migrants were essentially trapped into being certain professions with little to no option for anything else. The roles for them are proscribed socially and deviating is considered strange and unusual. The roles set out for them have become so official that it has become internalized within the Chinese community. The restaurant owner kids must enter in stereotyped professions like taking over the restaurant, becoming a doctor, engineer, businessperson, lawyer, or anything in the tech field. Going beyond that and doing other things is not acceptable and challenges what is thought of them.

V. COMMUNITY AND ASSIMILATION

Hu Ping Ling writes about the concept of cultural community in St. Louis regarding the American Chinese population in her article, “Reconceptualizing Chinese American Community in St. Louis” From Chinatown to Cultural Community.” She argues that “ethnic solidarity” (2005, 67) that has occurred and grown in the American Chinese community. She refers to this as a “cultural community” (2005, 67) instead of a Chinatown like most cities designate American Chinese neighborhoods. She writes that this a cultural community could be the new way of understanding American Chinese communities and people. Chinese cultural communities in metropolitan areas are typically significant enough to create that ethnic solidarity that Ling explains. The cultural community model is a more ideal model because in metropolitan areas that have designated a still standing Chinatown, it still considers the American Chinese people living in the area and the ethnic solidarity. With the Chinese cultural communities, there needs to be a

physical component. It is a social gathering space for people to congregate. It is a sort of safe space from forced assimilation and the ethnocentrism of the mainstream white American culture that heavily imposes their culture upon others. While Chinatown in Chicago is firmly asserted due to the segregation of Chicago's ethnic neighborhoods, it is not just the physically allotted space and population that makes it "Chinese," but instead it's the cultural and social aspect of it that makes it a cultural community.

There is often an accusation of being "unassimilable" regarding Chinese people who move to the United States and the American Chinese community. There is usually a bitterness from the white American community when Chinese people stick with their cultural community. It is even present in white feminist groups when given reason for why they exclude Chinese people. While they outwardly express a confusion when a Chinese community does not want to be a part of the white American community, they segregate them and brand them as the "other." There are broader issues with children of Chinese immigrants choosing a social and emotional life of whiteness as an attempt to not be "the other," but white American communities still categorize them as something else, something that is perpetually foreign and exotic. White Americans often accuse American Chinese people of only wanting to associate with themselves and not understanding the massive cultural differences as well not understanding their own racism and exclusive attitudes. Historian Gunther Barth made a claim that Chinese people only immigrated to the United States to make money and leave which only further others Chinese people and communities in America. (2005, 71) There are mountains of stereotypes and prejudices against Chinese people aggressed by white Americans to distance themselves and to accuse them of nefarious activities. Even if several Chinese people were and are sojourners, there is nothing ethically and morally wrong with going to another country to make money with no

intention to stay. Barth's comment was laced with a xenophobia expressed by many Americans towards Chinese people but not directed towards other white ethnicities coming to the states with only the intention to make money and eventually returning home. That sentiment is part of the accusations of being unable to fully assimilate into white American life and what drives Chinese immigrants and

American Chinese people to stay within the boundaries of their social communities.

Brought up in the ghettos, despised and oppressed by the dominant society, but exposed to American values through the public schools, American-born Chinese were forced to choose between being Chinese and being American. Most opted for assimilation, or Americanization, rejecting their cultural heritage in favor of acceptance by white society. (Wang 1991, 188)

Historically, American born Chinese people were forced to make that choice rather than forging a new American Chinese identity. While they may be involved with their local cultural community, it is hard to maintain a Chinese identity when systemically forced to be American. "Chinese people have been seen as parasites," notes Wang (1991, 193).

Transnational migrants from China typically still have a connection to China through familial channels. It is normal for Chinese immigrants to send money back to their relatives in China. With the emergence of somewhat accessible and affordable home DNA tests, it has become a type of game to see what type of immigrant blend a person is. There are cultural communities among white Americans where they attempt to connect to their heritage such as highland games, food, and cultural stereotypes that they use to explain their behavior. A common sentiment I see among some first- and second-generation American families is that they assimilate to American culture. Ling explains that European immigrants often get lumped into white American culture and accepted wholly (2005, 69). The immigrants who adopt the

American lifestyle fully instead of retaining a semblance of their mother culture usually do so in response to discrimination as an attempt to not be as discriminated against for their culture. As time and generations go by when it becomes more acceptable to use heritage as an explanation or a weapon, there seems to be a jealousy expressed towards fresher generations of Americans who were not told to shy away from their parent's or mother culture. There is a comforting, validating, and affirming part of being part of an ethnic community in a country like the United States. For Chinese communities being tied to the greater American Chinese community promotes understanding amongst themselves and keeps up traditions and customs in a unique American Chinese way. Engaging in the greater American Chinese community in any aspect keeps a sense of identity tied to their heritage and ethnicity. For white Americans who are broadly a mixture of western Europeans, white America is extremely varied at times to the point that there is not much ethnic solidarity. They turn to DNA percentages to find some sort of community and belonging to attempt to make them seem more interesting and exotic. There is typically an overcompensation of culture for people who have been Americanized with a yearning to connect to what they feel to be some sort of diasporic communitas.

Despite all this community, the communities are very much American Chinese rather than Chinese Chinese. This comes as a form of survival techniques to continue living in the United States without much trouble. There is some assimilation and adoption of American culture that takes place, but this is based on what resources are available to them. In turn American culture changes slightly based on significant communities. Chinese marts might start popping up with Chinese vegetables grown in California and Chinese foodstuff imported from China. It is a popular hack among Americans to shop at Chinese marts because their groceries are significantly cheaper than larger supermarkets. American culture hesitantly starts to take on

aspects of the American Chinese community that have managed to survive in these conditions. There are frozen “Chinese” meals at grocery store. General Tso’s chicken and orange chicken vary restaurant to restaurant but are popular dishes invented in America. Chop Suey is uniquely American Chinese as it was a response to the Chinese diaspora during the Chinese Exclusion era. Eric Liu in his book “Accidental Asian: Notes on a Native Speaker,” describes cultural customs by the Chinese community in America as being more American Chinese rather than Chinese itself.

VI. AMERICAN CHINESE RESTAURANTS AS AN AMERICAN INSTITUTION AND COMMODITY

Even though American Chinese restaurants are classified as the “other” in terms of restaurant classification as compared to traditionally American restaurants, there is something that is inherently American about it. It is often characterized as a small, mom and pop type restaurant that a family owns and runs. American Chinese restaurants are also portrayed as being cheap and budget food. It still has been unable to be revered the same way that Italian and French food have been categorized as “haute cuisine.” There have been attempts over the years in Chicago, San Francisco, and New York but largely put in the box of cheap food. P.F. Chang’s was created by a white American man who wanted to create a high-end version of American Chinese food (Liu 2020). This also was more palatable to white Americans than mom and pop American Chinese restaurants. It created a sense of worldliness to white Americans that Applebees could never give them. While it gave American Chinese cuisine the possibility of being “haute cuisine,” it was largely inaccessible by home grown American Chinese restaurants. P.F. Chang’s had the resources to be able to be as big as they are while having support from people who were afraid to eat at their local Chinese joint. It was Chinese enough for them but

familiar and welcoming to their Americanness that they did not perceive as hostile. It was the official marker of American Chinese restaurants as a real institution in America.

The space that an American Chinese restaurant inhabits is indicative of what they want to portray and their “Chineseness.” At the Toy family restaurant in Milwaukee, at first it started as a extra super Chinese spot with imported traditional furniture and structured as a traditional Chinese restaurant. As the years have gone by, the design and architecture of the restaurant have changed. It has become Americanized in a sense with intentional elements like lucky cats, goldfish tanks, and fake ingots. It utilized American furniture and American architecture in favor of Chinese architecture. (Yang 2020). This is the case for many American Chinese restaurants. Part of it is due to high import fees and taxes that make it too expensive to import traditional Chinese furniture and decorations. Because of this, American Chinese restaurant owners usually make use of what is available to them on the American market. Another part of it is that it has somewhat fallen out of style. A typical American Chinese restaurant no longer feels the same urgency to perform their Chineseness through decoration of their business. Simple elements are more intentional and mean the world in terms of what they convey. As they give in to the Americanization of their spaces, they become American in a sense. The only issue is American culture pushing them away as the other.

Chop Suey the dish was invented in America by Chinese immigrants. It was an invention that was a response to the diaspora. Chinese vegetables and spices were not readily available so Chop Suey was what was made as a result to create Chinese like flavors with American produce. This is the case for the American Chinese restaurant. It was and somewhat still is a symbol of the Chinese spirit surviving in America despite all the adversity and discrimination. It symbolizes Chinese culture still being alive in the hearts of the American Chinese. P.F. Chang’s has turned it

into a commodity without culture. Haiming Liu has suggested that P.F. Chang's is without substance. Culture is engrained in American Chinese food from mom-and-pop restaurants. It is very American Chinese and a celebration of being American Chinese. P.F. Chang's has changed that trajectory and turned the home grown American Chinese food indicative of homesickness and diaspora into commercialized commodity. It has spoken the language of America by having something with the essence of Chinese and a Chinese mask but, a white American face and body. "When food becomes a commodity, it is no longer an inherited culture and does not necessarily belong to those who originated it" (2020, 165). The bastardization of American Chinese food has made it confusing for non-Chinese Americans who cannot tell the difference between the two and readily accept the option that was designed for the American eye and mouth.

As a commodity, American Chinese restaurants are hollow and devoid of the diasporic feelings poured into the food. The consideration of what goes on the menu and what style to cook in are lost. As an institution, it is omnipresent in America. It is everywhere all at once to varying degrees. American Chinese food is an essence of Chinese food. Depending on where it is procured from, it is full of heart in response to the diaspora. Depending on the restaurant, it is unimaginative and a pathetic attempt at potential. As a commodity it is a suggestion of what it could be and only vaguely similar in image.

VII. COVID-19

March 2020 marked the official start of the pandemic for the US. When states had their first COVID cases, they were reported on the news and people panicked. There were shortages of toilet paper, sanitation products, and masks. Grocery stores were emptied from people panic buying food. It's generally agreed upon that this was a crazy time of our lives. Former president Trump made the decision to leave closures and handling of the pandemic up to the local

governments. Majority of states had imposed mask mandates, stay at home orders, and closure of non-essential businesses. For most office jobs, people were granted the ability to work from home. Restaurants were largely closed for dine in, but some remained open for takeout and delivery. In an article for Restaurant Business, Peter Romeo reports specifically on American Chinese restaurants in April 2020. A credit card company reported about 51% of their customers that were American Chinese restaurants had completely shut down their credit card machines indicating full closure. Romeo reports that restaurant consumption went down 61% in April 2020 (2020). This article was written during uncertain times in the pandemic. It was written when the belief was to stay home for 3-6 weeks, and it would all go away.

Everyone was still in shock, and no one knew what was going on. It was a time of uncertainty but there were xenophobic reactions. The art director of Lululemon posted a picture of a shirt that said, “bat fried rice.” (Deese 2020) Then president Donald Trump, called it the “China Flu.” Furthermore Trump – as well as mass media, starting using terms like “Kung Flu,” “Wuhan Virus,” “China Virus,” etc. because the most information we had at this point was that it could have come from someone ingesting a bat purchased from a wet market in Wuhan. There were messages on social media pushing back against the anti-Chinese posts. A photographer in New York, Grace Young, had started a hashtag on social media, “#saveChineserestaurants in response to the closures of American Chinese restaurants in New York and the subsequent loss of business that had happened. In March 2021, a man had gone to several massage parlors to shoot and kill Asian women in Atlanta. These shootings are known as the “Atlanta spa shootings.” When his lawyers gave a reason for his intentions to the judge and press, they stated that he had a “sexual addiction,” and wanted to remove his “temptations” (Wong 2021). This sparked another hashtag, #stopaapihate.

Tessler et. Al describes the fear during the uncertain times. In an article written Spring 2020 and published Summer 2020 in the middle of the uncertain times, they wrote about the rise of anti-Asian hate crimes and the rise in reporting. It is strange to read this now almost three years into the future because of how uncertain and surreal everything was then. They reported the anti-Asian hate crimes as being an uptick of hate crimes. They explain that there are cycles to the scapegoating and how this is a historical repeat (2020, 638) What they do not explain, or mention is the open knowledge in the Asian American community that this violence and discrimination has been happening for a long time, but Asian Americans are told not to report it. They do describe statistics on how many people made the direct choice to avoid Asian businesses during these uncertain times and the anxiety among the Asian American community at the time. Despite the plain milquetoast article that treated anti-Asian hate crimes like an occasional anomaly and not the ongoing battle that it has been, it was an accurate impression of just how uncertain things were at the time, especially for Asian Americans. The article describes events where minorities are forced to perform extra American for other Americans to see their allegiance. They write that Andrew Yang told Asian Americans to wear patriotic colors to show people how American they were despite the discrimination to express assimilation (2020, 641)

This harkens back to the Japanese American internment and how afterwards, Japanese Americans somewhat assimilated to American culture by being extra American. This was to show people that they were not a threat and to show that their loyalty was to the US despite the war crimes committed by Japan in WWII. As a result, it could be said that any attempts of reconnecting with Japanese culture is more of an overcompensation for the culture lost as a result to the government mandated racism and the trauma that came with it. Tessler et. Al makes a mention that after 9/11 Punjabi Sikhs and other Muslims started wearing patriotic colors and

flying the American flag to openly express their American allegiance and loyalty (641). It was also to separate themselves from extremists. These are all responses to tragedies that have occurred. With the upset that was COVID-19, it became a matter of scapegoating and putting all blame on one group.

It became socially acceptable to openly express negative thoughts towards Chinese people and to be critical of their cleanliness. In 2020, standard protocol was that everyone had to remain six feet away from each other, wear face masks, and always be sanitized. Businesses were constantly sanitizing all surfaces. Some businesses required that people clean their hands with hand sanitizer the moment that they walked into the business before touching anything. It was crucial that food businesses become extra clean and show that they were going beyond sanitization protocols set by the CDC to reinforce trust between them and their customers. This was also so they could open the minute they could and maximize their profit. Restaurants would spray their seating areas with sanitizer in between customers to show that they were keeping with protocol. They would have plastic barriers separating everyone and keeping everyone distant with one another. Servers would wear gloves, masks, and sometimes face shields to protect themselves and the customers who insisted that they must eat out during quarantine. Not every restaurant followed this protocol, but it did not matter to the diners. American Chinese restaurants had a different standard though. American Chinese restaurants have a reputation for being “dirty” that they cannot shake no matter what. In a time where cleanliness was upheld greater than godliness, the stereotypes of American Chinese food and restaurants being dirty were exacerbated.

In this current post pandemic life and current political climate, anti-Chinese sentiments are no longer met with shock and horror but with indifference or agreement. Anti-Chinese

sentiments due to the pandemic have largely left people bored during the post pandemic period. American Chinese restaurants have opened back up to somewhat varying degrees of openness and they have not done anything new, and people try to settle back into normalcy. The yellow peril is still underlying though. Nobuko Adachi's article "*Yellow Peril Redux: Vitalizing Pre-Existing Racial Conditions with a New Symbol,*" supports my posit that racism against Asian Americans has always been happening and reporting racist incidents does not yield productive results from authorities.

CHAPTER III: METHODS AND INTRODUCTION TO INFORMANTS

For this thesis, I utilized three methods for gathering Data. I used semi structured interviews for my informants as well as observation. I also utilized a survey that I distributed on Facebook.

When I was picking restaurants, I wanted a Cantonese owned restaurant because of communication reasons. It was easier for me to communicate in Cantonese thus easier for me to gain the trust and rapport that would be needed for this thesis. It would be easier for my subject to empathize with me and vice versa if we could speak the same language. I originally thought about picking a popular Dim Sum restaurant in Chinatown. In December 2021, when I was scouting for places to study and profile, I asked one of the managers how business was. He said that business had never been better and left it at that. They seemed closed off to anymore questions I had and extremely busy, so I left it at that. I was wandering through Chinatown with my ice cream summer 2022 when I stopped in to buy a roast duck. I had asked the person at the front if they had closed, and they had. I asked them if they would be open to an interview down the road and he said, “we’ll see.” It was not until November 2022 when I started to chase the restaurant for an interview. I picked Golden Lion for a multitude of reasons. They were Cantonese, they closed and reopened during the pandemic, and they were empty every time I went in. This was unusual to me because they were in such a central location but were empty a lot of the time. I had eaten there a few times and the food was decent by my standards, so I decided to pursue them. It was serendipitous that I chose them because the owner, who I will call Mr. Zhao, took me in immediately. Mr. Zhao is an incredibly friendly man who seems to thrive on the interpersonal connections he makes with the community at large. Given my posit that

there were financial reasons why he would remain open, I had to know if that was the reason why he reopened.

In this thesis, a historian and a biologist will also be interviewed. I picked them for a variety of reasons. They are both Chinese and they are experts on the topics of American Chinese and Chinese food and/or American Chinese restaurants. I chose the biologist because of his work teaching people how to cook Chinese food in a wok and his YouTube channel teaching Chinese methods of cooking. I chose him because he was socialized in Hong Kong and because he had a scientific breakdown and view of Chinese food and could potentially explain what is it that makes American Chinese food categorized as unhealthy and Chinese food as healthy. I chose the historian because of her extensive work chronicling the history of American Chinese restaurants. She teaches a class about American Chinese restaurants and has contributed literature about American Chinese restaurants and the Chinese diaspora in relation to food from a historical context.

With the historian, I conducted the interview over Zoom due to the location difference. I recorded the interview as a video and audio. I then used an AI to transcribe the interview. The interview was conducted in English. With the biologist and Mr. Zhao, I conducted interviews in person and used a small voice recorder to record the conversations. I conducted these interviews in Cantonese. I translated and transcribed the interviews by hand due to my illiteracy.

CHAPTER IV: DATA AND ANALYSIS

I. FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH THE GOLDEN LION AND MR. ZHAO

I had made my friends meet me at the Golden Lion restaurant on Saturday. I was late to dinner because of Chicagoland Saturday traffic, and I told them to order before me. After battling with parking, I made my way to the restaurant. When I got to the restaurant, I ordered flat rice noodles with beef and no veggies. My friends had ordered the flat rice noodles with beef and veggies and a plate of fried rice. The food was served on clear glass pie pans. While I was eating, I flagged down one of the workers and asked if he was the owner. He had pointed to a lady and a man talking to each other at the other end of the restaurant and told me she was the owner. I walked over there and started my spiel about what I was doing the research for and she was thoroughly confused.

The man she was with is from Chicago and spoke to me in English. He told me that if I wanted to talk, I had to come on Tuesday evening. I said I would come and went back to my friends.

I had class on Tuesday until about 5 PM but left immediately after to go to Chicago. I brought consent forms and my voice recorder for the interview. When I got to the restaurant, I found the man who I will refer to as Mr. Huang. Mr. Huang was very drunk when I saw him. He was having dinner with other men. He immediately took another man with him, and we sat at one of the tables. The man was the owner who I will refer to as Mr. Zhao. Mr. Zhao seemed a bit reluctant to be there. Mr. Huang explained that I needed him to graduate, and he needed to give me a short interview so I could graduate. I didn't say anything. I gave them the consent form and it was signed. I started the interview there.

I asked Mr. Zhao how long he had been closed for COVID in Spring of 2020, he said 2 months, totally about 60 days. When he reopened, he didn't restrict himself to take out but reopened completely. He did report that when he reopened, it was very slow. When asked about if the customers came back, his friend said "Slow, slow come back." I inquired about what it was like now and Mr. Huang said that it was the same thing, and things were ok.

Mr. Zhao explained that he had Golden Lion for twelve years. I inquired if he bought the restaurant and he said he didn't, he rents out the restaurant for business. I wanted to know when he came to America, and he said 1988. (He said 19 dragon dragon year but that is 1988.)

I inquired about discrimination during COVID times and Mr. Huang said that it was black people that had been discriminating against Chinese people. I asked if there had been any attacks against Chinese people in Chicago, but apparently there had not been that they had heard of.

I queried about reopening laws in Chicago, and they just said that everyone needed to wear a face mask. The only stopped when the news told them they didn't need to. I asked about customer demographics, and they said that it was mixed, "all kind, mixed, mixed." I inquired about if times were harder now and Mr. Huang said, "same thing, same, same, same," he said that things were better before COVID and asked me if I knew what happened. This led me to ask if anything bad happened to the restaurants and they just said that there were a lot of restaurants in Chinatown.

I wanted to know when the busiest day was, and they said that they never know. The next question was if they ever use Facebook and WeChat and Mr. Huang explained to me that they do not know how to use WeChat.

I queried if they felt like Americans like Chinese food and Mr. Zhao simply said, "They like Chinese food." I asked if he had to correct/change his food for American tastebuds and he just said, "tastebuds better yeah." I asked if newspapers ever talked about them and they said no. I wanted to know if they did dim sum and he said yes, in the morning. I asked how they did dim sum referring to the method of filling out a sheet of paper or having someone push a cart around and Mr. Zhao said that they have a dim sum master.

I had to know why he decided to reopen, and he said that he needed to pay rent. "If I don't pay rent, pay rent, how will it work?" I inquired if he had a son and he said he had one. He did not want to take over the restaurant and instead do something else. I told him that my parents own a restaurant and my older sister, and I have chosen not to take over the restaurant ultimately.

Mr. Zhao told me that he has lived in Chicago for approximately 16 years. He thinks it's fine. He likes it enough. Mr. Zhao is from Guangxi, the other Cantonese speaking province of Mainland China. I told him that my parents are from Toisan, a city where many overseas Chinese come from. I asked if they were open Labor Day, and it was revealed to me that they remain open every day of the year with no breaks. Mr. Huang explained it those Chinese traditions were different. I asked if he ever rests, and he just shook his head. I asked what he did before he came to America and he said there he was a chef, and he opened a restaurant by himself. He is 50 years old himself. He came to America to run a restaurant. They said it was like my parents. Mr. Huang explained that it was the easiest work for them to do because they don't know English and this line of work didn't require any English understanding. Mr. Zhao himself doesn't know any English. I clarified to Mr. Zhao that I understand more Cantonese than I can speak so he could speak freely to me as I tried to dispel the awkwardness of the conversation.

Mr. Zhao does not speak with other American Chinese restaurants in Chinatown.

I asked about the restaurant's most famous/popular dish, and he said that it was all good and popular. They do entirely Chinese food, with no American dishes to speak of. I asked if they were even open during Lunar new year, and he confirmed that they were all throughout the the new year holiday season. During this time, usually Chinese people patronize the restaurant, and it was self-reported to be a busy time.

I asked what he did during quarantine, and he said he didn't do anything but rest. He said the resting and not working part was good. He, himself, has never gotten COVID and nor have his friends. He says that he usually always wears a mask. We ended the interview when he asked me if I had eaten yet and he offered to cook rice noodles with beef for me.

After the interview, Mr. Zhao asked if I had eaten anything. I said no and he asked me what I wanted. I ordered a rice noodle dish with beef. He went to the kitchen and started cooking immediately. After a short while, he came back with my dinner packaged in a plastic take out container. I thanked him for his time and left from there.

a. Post COVID Reopenings, Ownership, and Stereotypes surrounding Chinese Immigration at the Golden Lion

One of the most surprising things in the interview to come out was that he was renting the Golden Lion. He was renting the business itself and its legacy. The restaurant was not his in name, he was merely a tenant. He was what made the restaurant work for the last sixteen years and seemed content in just running the restaurant instead of owning it. It made sense because he was renting the restaurant's legacy. He did not have to start from the ground up in that he did not have to buy or rent a space and build a reputation and rapport off nothing, but he got the restaurant's legacy and only had to build rapport off himself and his cooking.

Mr. Zhao told me that he couldn't understand English at all even though he has been here since the late 80s. It's more than likely that his family and friends helped him with translations. Being in Chinatown Chicago for the last 16 years, it's also more than likely that he does not need English to get by. During my observation, I noted that he was ordering meat and produce for the restaurant. When he was ordering, he was ordering in Chinese meaning that his suppliers are more than likely Chinese owned, or the salespeople were Chinese who catered to Chinese restaurant owners in Chicago.

During this interview, his friend, Mr. Huang, did majority of the talking. Mr. Huang seems to know Mr. Zhao very well. I later found out that they're best friends. Mr. Zhao trusts Mr. Huang and Mr. Huang knows all the ins and outs of the Golden Lion. Mr. Huang did most of the talking because he most likely wanted me out as soon as possible. It wasn't until I spoke with Mr. Zhao alone and visited on my own time that he began to feel more comfortable with me. I suspect that he did not take me seriously at the beginning but when I continued showing up, he took me a bit more seriously.

Mr. Zhao's answer supports my hypothesis that there were financial reasons for reopening. He had to pay rent for the restaurant and to do that, he had to continue to pay rent. It would have been easier to just give up and pass the restaurant down to someone else. What struck me was that he did not see any other option than to go on. Roh et. Al writes that when Chinese people were brought as indentured servants to build the railroads and other labor, they were often stereotyped as hard workers who did not need the comfort and rest that a white laborer needed. They were stereotyped as being able to work hard no matter the circumstances and work longer for less pay than their white counterparts. It implied that science fiction writings of Asian people as robots in the future stem from this and the stereotypes of being hardened,

emotionless workers. This stereotype persists today with any immigrant from a nonwestern, nonwhite country. When Trump had made comments about Mexican workers being lazy, Anthony Bourdain retorted that Mexican workers were the hardest working people he had ever met. People always say that Chinese workers who come to the United States as skilled laborers are hard workers to reason to other people why they deserve to stay in the United States. Going back to the era of bitter labor, if the Chinese indentured laborers faltered even a little bit, there was the possibility that they would be deported back to China early. I think this still rings true today. When here on a work visa, one must continue to work or else they must return to their country. They must work extra hard with no breaks to prove that they deserve to stay here. Looking at current events with Twitter and the Chinese programmers that have stayed, Elon Musk is holding their work visas hostage and so they must work to his insane demands to stay in the United States or else they must return to China. It is entirely possible that the reason why many American Chinese restaurants remain open is because their residency in the United States is threatened if they do not work. Like my father, Mr. Zhao came here as a skilled laborer. He was allowed entry into the United States for his labor potential. NPR published an article about a loophole that allowed many Chinese people entry into the United States. Under the promise that they would open a restaurant and stimulate the economy, they are allowed entry and they do just that. The article does not explain what happens if they do not open a restaurant or try to scam the system, but it is assumed that they will be immediately deported. While I don't know if Mr. Zhao is concerned about his legality in the United States, it must be at the back of his mind. Mr. Zhao has worked just about every day for most of his life aside from quarantine, but he still feels compelled to do it all over again every day.

I originally gave into the stereotypes of the hard-working migrant who lives to work and works to live. I thought that Chinese people had a weird thing for hard work because of work culture in China and how hard my parents worked me and how no matter how hard I worked, it wasn't enough for them. I am an American born Chinese. I have an American passport that I did not have to fight for. Even though the American government can revoke anyone's citizenship at any time, I do not fear that that will happen. My parents are naturalized citizens. They went through the entire citizenship process starting with work and spousal visas, going to green cards, and eventually citizenship. Mr. Zhao was implied to have come here on a work visa. His citizenship is unknown but the fear that he may be deported at any time is likely still there.

The stereotypes are exacerbated by the stereotypes of work culture in China. While China values hard work and pushing people to the absolute limits so they become hardened, it is a stereotype that paints Chinese people as the perfect laborers. Going back to the implications of Roh et. Al the term robot comes from the Czech word, to work. Chinese people are often hailed as workaholics who do not stop until they complete a task and then do it all over again. In Marx's theory of the "race to the bottom," companies are looking towards cheaper labor to manufacture and produce their goods hence why they outsource it to Asian countries. The stereotype of workaholic Asian people who live to work with little to no extracurricular pleasures in life is furthered by Western media and sociocultural sentiments.

For American Chinese people, working hard is internalized. Even though an American Chinese person may have a green card, naturalized citizenship, or birthright citizenship, America's history does not provide comfort for the permanence of their stay in the United States. America so easily took away the citizenship of Japanese American citizens during WWII that in this current cold war against China, it is very shaky and unstable. To have internalized the "work

hard,” attitude could make someone feel like they earned their place in the United States and comforts them in their reason to stay. Mr. Zhao does not take breaks. While he would like to take a break and go on vacation, he works every day. He has worked just about every day for the last sixteen years only taking a break during quarantine 2020. From his interview, he seemed like the 60 days were nice to rest but was anxious about coming back because of rent and income. Mr. Zhao came in the late 80s during a mass migration from China as it opened again to the US in search of a better life and with the intentions of opening a restaurant. He came in on the stipulation that he work so his purpose in the states is to work. To not work, to shut down completely and retire seems counterintuitive to his purpose of being the states.

To shut down the restaurant can put the entire staff at risk too. If they managed to come to the states on work visas, then shutting down the restaurant puts that at stake.

This further goes into why American Chinese food is viewed as “dirty and cheap.” The stereotypes from the coolies have extended into now where they view Chinese labor and products as cheap in some way, shape, or form. There is sometimes a push to stop buying items that were made in China. Products made in China are often deemed unsafe to some capacity, and cheaply made with cheap material and cheap labor. Cosmetics that are made in China and not some Western country are instantly sworn off as cheaply made and private labeled. Years ago, I was at Costco with my sister and the lady in front of us had opened a pack of spaghetti sauce and did not want it anymore. She said it was Costco’s fault that they didn’t properly label that it was made by “the dogs.” Chinese labor is always viewed as cheap and worth pennies as compared to the white person’s labor.

This does not seem to be just an issue of racism coming from the general populace but a greater institutional racism that is happening at entry into the United States with laws that have a

foundation in the Chinese Exclusion Act. It's an immigration and residency issue. Mr. Zhao most likely came here under a work visa through the restaurant loophole, or he came here during a push for more immigration into the United States in the late 80s.

Looking at my original posit of financial issues, Mr. Huang said that lots of Chinese people come to work at American Chinese restaurants because it is the easiest job for them. Learning another language takes an inordinate amount of time and energy that someone may not have. To work in a place where they do not need to be fluent in English and with the security of staying in the states is very attractive. This is a way to earn a steady stream of income. When restaurants had to close for 60 days to quarantine, this was a blow to income. The unemployment filing website in Idaho was very confusing and didn't guarantee everyone would be able to collect unemployment. The stimulus checks were not enough for people in the working class. There is stigma with collecting unemployment, they were probably eager to come back. I was told by Mr. Huang that they had gotten the federal loans offered to restaurants at the time. These loans had forgiveness plans attached to them that promised loan forgiveness after a certain amount of time and payments. There was money but it was extremely limited.

One thing that struck me was Mr. Huang simply saying that Mr. Zhao came her to do restaurant work like my father. Mr. Zhao came here under the deal that he would work and stimulate the economy in exchange for residency in the United States. His purpose in the United States is to work. This points to my posit that because his purpose of coming into the states was to work, he feels like he must continue to work or there is not much point to being here. I think that this is true for other transnational migrants from China to the United States. It was a sort of deal that in exchange for an indefinite stay, they would work. When restaurants closed due to

quarantine, some restaurants closed for good as a result of the hit to income. Mr. Zhao persisted and opened the minute he could after 60 days.

There seemed to be an acceptance of sorts among Chinese Americans, especially Mr. Zhao and company. While the rest of the country was battling “the new normal,” and talking about going back to “normal,” Chinese people tended to accept it as it was. It possibly comes from the culture itself as it is more readily accepting of tragedies and trauma as a part of life with attitude that commands that we must move on. Given that it is a culture that stems from intergenerational trauma and has had a lot of recent, contemporary tragedies and hardships. Going back to Chinese Americans, many immigrants from China have gone through the hard part of the Chinese Civil War or at least the aftermath of it. Many have also been children during the Great Famine. He’s from the Guangxi province so his family most likely were paid in ration cards and about a dollar a month. Poverty is extremely traumatizing. China has been through many great traumas in its total history, many are recent. When Chinese people greet each other on the phone, they always ask if they’ve eaten already. Chinese culture is heavy on food and recognizes that it is a community-based activity that bonds people together and is effective on preventing defectors in a group. It’s more important given the history of famines in China. This standard greeting of “Did you eat dinner yet?” is a move that shows that someone’s cares about another’s wellbeing.

Mr. Zhao always asked if I had eaten yet and despite my answer, he would always give me food or the one time he bought me a Filet O Fish from McDonalds. When I asked my mother to speak to him about what I was doing during an observation, I heard him say, “of course I’ve been making her dinner,” indicating to my mother that he had been making me food every time I’ve come to visit him.

My professor made the assumption that the American Chinese restaurants were all in constant communication with each other. I found this to be true and untrue. Some may communicate with other restaurants but largely, they don't. While some in one small Midwest town may communicate with each other over WeChat, the Chinatown restaurants in Chicago don't have the connection. They may be friendly with each other but having deep connections isn't a common thing. People tend to expect American Chinese restaurants to always be in constant contact with each other, but American businesses do not exactly do that. Non-American Chinese restaurants are not on each other's speed dial. While everyone in the uptown area where I work are friendly with each other and sometimes we trade food, it's not a deep connection. It's more of a feeling of solidarity of being in the same area and dealing with drunk college students. Despite the distant friendliness, typically American Chinese restaurants will support one another when one needs help like if the walk in were to break and they need to store the meat somewhere. Otherwise, it is a distant and respectful friendliness. Mr. Zhao made his friends with the community of Chinatown Chicago. Mr. Zhao's relationships most likely started as patrons of the restaurant and his friendly nature has turned it into a close interpersonal relationship. Mr. Zhao's friends live in Chinatown. The older man I met who is one of his friends, lives across the street from Mr. Zhao's restaurant. Mr. Zhao's best friend has been a Chinatown native his entire life. I can safely assume that their relationship is a proximity thing.

b. Further Encounters with Mr. Zhao and the Golden Lion

I had gone to Golden Lion with intentions to ask a few questions. When I came in, the worker immediately asked me what I wanted. I said I wanted to talk to the boss and he got him. When Mr. Zhao came out, he told me to sit down and to have dinner with him. I sat down next to a lady peeling vegetable and a man with white hair and few teeth. The man with white hair, who

will be called Mr. Wu, directed me to sit at the table next to him. They suggested that they would be having dinner at the round table in the middle of the dining room. I watched them clean it up and set the table with a plate, a napkin, a teacup, and plastic chopsticks. I sat down there when Mr. Zhao came out with a plate of stir-fried meat and zucchini. They then moved it to an adjacent table on the side and Mr. Wu directed me to move to that table. He started bringing out more food, a steamed fish, and some fried pork belly. Mr. Zhao then directed a worker to bring me a bowl of rice. There was going to be 4 of us eating dinner together. The lady who had been peeling vegetables, Mr. Wu, Mr. Zhao, then me. Mr. Zhao came with a box and took out a bottle of cognac. It was a \$60 bottle of Hennessy. He then took three cognac glasses and started pouring the cognac. He paused when he got to my glass because it was chipped and directed the lady to get me a new glass. She brought back two, one for me and one for her. She didn't talk to me the entire dinner but would refer to me. I took a little bit of cognac.

He asked me if I wanted some and I knew I needed to protect my reputation and build a rapport with him. I accepted a little bit. It came out to less than one shot. We clinked glasses and I took a sip. It was hot and sent shudders down my body. We started to eat. The food was miles better than the food for general sale at the restaurant. It was made for the owner and his friends, so it wasn't formulaic but represented what he was feeling that day. I didn't get very many words in this dinner. I was a bit shy that night. I wasn't in control of the situation so I couldn't control what was happening. I took a total of 4 sips before he ended up having me pour the rest of the cognac into his glass for him to drink. The entire dinner he asked me how the food was. The food was very good and tiers above the offerings of the restaurant on the menu. He asked me to eat more. I ate a little bit of everything. I mostly ate the zucchini because it was the one closest to me and not as fussy as getting fish meat. He spooned fish sauce onto my rice. I mixed it together and

ate it. He asked how long I traveled to get there. I told them that I had to drive two hours to get there. They seemed amazed that I would drive two hours to talk to him. I did assure him that I was also there to go salsa dancing with friends afterwards. He asked one of the workers to bring out the dishwasher. He came out. He was tall and only spoke Spanish. I asked his name, and he will be known in this paper as Artur. I asked him his name in broken Spanish then said, "I don't speak Spanish, I'm Sorry," also in broken Spanish. He smiled. Mr. Zhao poured some cognac for him and motioned to clink glasses. Mr. Zhao didn't speak any English, but my first impression was that they had gotten along despite not being able to communicate with each other. Mr. Zhao remarked that my face was very red. Mr. Wu remarked that I was very drunk. I was not but I was stuttering because of nerves. The lady scolded them for giving me alcohol when I had to drive 2 hours back to Normal. After a little bit, I had to take my leave. I told Mr. Zhao that I would be back every Saturday at least until the end of the year. He seemed receptive of it and told me that he would make me dinner again.

One thing I noticed is that he would clink his glass with Mr. Wu several times before drinking. My dad called it "cheers." He explained to me that people "pong bui" to say cheers for every drink. Mr. Zhao didn't do it after every new drink but almost after every sip. He was an enthusiastic drinker it seemed. It brought back memories of "pong bui" in the few times I've been to dinner with my parent's friends. I remember clinking my orange sunkist can with their glasses of liquor. I would always be drinking can of orange soda and my parents would grab my hand with the soda and direct it up to clink glasses. This time was interesting. I hadn't done a cheers in a while, even during my mother's dinner parties. My family didn't clink glasses during any party, so I had forgotten about it until Mr. Zhao did a cheers. He was busy with his friends. He seemed to love to be social. He would invite people to dinner with him and liked to make new friends. I

wondered if I was a new friend for him. He was so closed off when I first started talking to him but this time he immediately embraced me and invited me to dinner. One thing that I've come to understand about Chinese culture that was made apparent to me was the food culture.

Eating food was an event. Sharing food was expected. I didn't realize how big it was until a series of dinner parties I had. I started doing things that were very Chinese. I would take control of all of the cooking and make enough food for everyone to take home. My parents had told me that when a Chinese person has a party, if there is not enough food to take home, then there wasn't enough food. I cooked to this same principle. When having parties, my parents often invite other people to the dinner. Americans were often shocked by this and wouldn't show up because this was foreign to them. I shocked my friends when I went to a complete stranger's house for thanksgiving because she saw me at the supermarket and invited me at random.

Sharing food is a bonding experience. Food has a history of being a condition of the Chinese diaspora. It is a way to stay together and to retain a part of the culture that has become a wound. For my parent's food is a festering wound. My Dad grew up during the Great Famine. As a result, he is much shorter than his brothers and my grandpa. He is much smaller than them and has food related trauma. When I was growing up, after dinner, my father would press on my stomach to make sure I had eaten. Hunger is the ultimate pain for him. Because of this, he has made sure that me and my sister have always had food. While there is evidence that proves that food has always been a huge part of Chinese culture, I would posit that it's been amplified by the great famine. Food has become more cherished and peasant dishes are more celebrate. Chinese food isn't particularly expensive to make aside from some dishes like abalone. Generally, stir fry is vegetables, a little bit of meat, a little bit of oil, and some broth, maybe spices. Many dishes

aren't particularly expensive to make. That being said, in the US, American Chinese food has a reputation for being "dirty" and "cheap."

c. Observations at The Golden Lion

When I arrived at Golden Lion, their Dim sum service was about to stop for the day. I had arrived late because my alarm didn't go off and I was exhausted from working late the night before. When arrived, it was early afternoon and there were two tables. When I got there, they were finishing up their meals and about to box up their leftovers to eat at a later day. It was mostly empty despite being in the central Chinatown area. I met with Mr. Zhao, and he told me that the rest of the day would look like the restaurant that I walked into. He didn't seem to understand why I wanted to stay at the restaurant and watch the business the entire day. I sat at the table closest to the kitchen and the POS system where the workers would sit and put their stuff. When I came in, a man I had met a previous day, who was a friend of Mr. Zhao, beckoned me to sit next to him. He immediately took an empty teacup and poured me a cup of pu'er tea. I put my hands around it to warm up and chatted with him. He had come to eat lunch with Mr. Zhao. Mr. Zhao asked me if I wanted anything to eat, I said I already ate breakfast and they laughed that it was lunch time then. The man eventually left, and I moved to the other side so I could see the entire restaurant. At this point the two tables had left and I was staring at nothing. The restaurant was empty for about an hour until a family of 5 came in. They sat at one of the bigger tables. The man asked if there was Egg Foo Young and the waiter said yes but at a distance. The man was offended by this and told his family to pack up and leave. He said that the waiter needed to learn customer service and left. I don't think there was anything inherently wrong with the interaction. The waiter was not American born and English was not his first language. I think that if that family had stayed for food, there would have been other issues that

the man would have brought up. The waiter didn't seem fazed by the interaction. After the family left, it was empty for a long time. There were some people that came and got take-out orders, paid in cash. There was a level of recognition with the customers that did come. They all spoke Cantonese during this time and the servers seemed to know them enough to know their order and have a friendly conversation with them. There weren't more than ten orders that afternoon. As the day went on, I wondered how they were able to afford a central Chinatown restaurant with little business. Mr. Zhao was out running errands, buying groceries for the restaurant. He did come back briefly to make sure I got Siu Mai and a Filet o Fish from McDonalds. It was a very nice gesture for him to specifically go to McDonalds to get me a fish sandwich because I looked hungry.

Mr. Zhao left the restaurant to buy groceries and supplies and I waited. As the day went on, people would bring foam freezer boxes of stuff to the restaurant. I thought that he was ordering specialty meats. I thought that these were supplies for the restaurant. As the evening came, a table came. A few older people came with bottles of wine and situated themselves at a round table on the left of me. They thought for a moment and asked for a menu and started laughing. The waiter asked them how long it had been since they had even looked at the menu and handed them one. Mr. Zhao came back, and they started arranging things. They were talking about who was sitting where. There was a dark bottle of sorghum at one table. They were placing bowls on the glass lazy susans where I guessed that people had reserved tables. They were discussing who was going to sit where. Mr. Zhao said that this group was going to come around seven, but they were most likely going to stay until past 10. He seemed to know the people with reservations personally.

When the tables started to come in, they came individually and in twos and threes to eventually fill up the 10-12 people tables. They were talking and visiting with Mr. Zhao. He came in and out of the kitchen. As the food started coming out, I realized what the raw meats were for. While there was a menu, Mr. Zhao was accommodating of specialty off menu dishes. The people just had to reserve dishes and a table beforehand. I didn't get to ask how far in advance someone had to place their order. They were clearly prepared for these special requests. They had clay pots for clay pot rice ready despite it not being on the menu. The very front table took a while to come together but they eventually had everyone plus more come to the table. They had a few bottles of red wine and glasses provided by the restaurant.

As per Chinese tradition, one person would pay for the entire table's meal. Traditionally whoever invites everyone out to eat is the one that pays but not without some flexing and play fighting. As per Chinese tradition, when one person paid, some people in the group fight for the bill. The person who invited everyone usually holds strong and insists on paying the bill. Usually, they are successful and pay the bill. Sometimes a person in the party will try to give the payer money for the meal indicating that they want to contribute somehow. I observed from this day and from past personal experiences that they will do stuff like stuffing money into someone's pocket or putting it in their hands. These are all attempts though. From what I've seen personally, it's futile. I asked my father about this, and he said that people will fight for the bill because it's also a way of showing that someone has money. They will say stuff like "who are you to say that I can't afford dinner, I have money!" My father clarified that this was a chance for people to display their wealth and to show that they can support themselves and are doing fine. In Chinese culture, to ask to borrow money is one of the deepest social shames that one can go through. In Chinese culture, one must always project that they're doing fine. Chinese people believe in

speaking things into existence and to outwardly talk about money troubles is seen as pathetic and bad fortune. Because of this people only talk about the positives. Even though complaining is part of communication, it's never with ill will or with negative energy. It's moreover just to vent. From what I saw that day, one of the men who came to pay had some people in his table follow him. He was drunk but he brushed them off immediately. He told them to go away and let him pay. It became a show of some sorts when a random person from another table came up to object when he came to pay, and he brushed them off too but with laughter. There's theatrics when it comes to paying a bill.

I noticed with Mr. Zhao that he seems to charge whatever he feels is correct. If it's menu items, then he'll charge by the menu item. If it's a special item, then he determines himself how much things cost. He charged one of the smaller tables sixty-five dollars for their entire meal after asked by his staff on how much to charge them. For the bigger tables with the special orders, it seems like the price was predetermined by Mr. Zhao when they made the reservation. I do not know if they had to pick out and buy the specialty meat items themselves, but I can infer that they at least paid for the specialty items and the labor. Price is also determined on relationship. It's polite to pay for your meal and support the business and their livelihood. To ask for free food is not good manners. To be offered free food is acceptable and should be taken.

Despite there only being three large tables and one smaller table occupied, the sound of the people was thunderous. When Chinese people are talking to each other, they typically talk at a louder volume. Sometimes because of the alcohol, usually because they need to be heard. Even on the phone, Chinese people talk at a louder volume. When they converse, it's usually perceived as arguing or yelling or speaking with anger however it's usually not that. In this moment, it was "yeet lau." "Yeet Lau" is a Cantonese specific word talking about the liveliness of a situation and

the overwhelming positive feelings and excitement that comes with it. Usually, it comes with the volume of people in a time and space. It also comes with the general sound volume during this gathering of people. The restaurant was very yeet lau that day. It seems like that is the general goal of a Cantonese restaurant. Yeet Lau is also when a restaurant has good business and everyone is talking all at once. It's a feeling of fullness and community. Despite the restaurant not being full, I would describe it as yeet lau.

Mr. Zhao seemed to make a lot of specialty and custom dishes for his customers. A man in an argyle sweater came up while I was chatting with him and asked for a dish. There was no name for the dish, he asked for something a little spicy, savory, good. Mr. Zhao recommended a dish then went into the kitchen to make it for him. It was interesting to me that he could take cravings and recommend a dish for it that he could make with his current ingredients.

Towards the end of my time there, the man in the argyle sweater started yelling when the table was leaving to go take a smoke outside. He stood up with his cigarette in one hand and starting yelling something that I couldn't even understand due to the slur of his words. It was confirmed after his friends made him go home and Mr. Zhao came out that he had had too much to drink and was being belligerent. Mr. Zhao was ready to diffuse the situation, but the man's friends diffused it and sent him home before he could yell for any longer. Now, I decided that my observation was to be ended. Mr. Zhao made me some food and I went home after.

d. A Postmortem Discussion of an Observation at Golden Lion

One of my original arguments was that the communities that the American Chinese restaurants served was a reason why they decided to reopen. This observation proved it to be true in that Mr. Zhao's clientele were eager to give him business. The loud table full of men were celebrating a birthday. They even shared the birthday durian crepe cake with all the workers in

the restaurant. They expressed a sort of familiarity with the workers as the workers would help them open bottles of wine. They were also eager to share the cake with everyone including me. They were probably eager to eat at that restaurant for the birthday. Another table remarked that they hadn't asked for a menu in years and that the menu was foreign to them. Because of Mr. Zhao's connection to his customers and the Chinese people of Chinatown Chicago, he was probably eager to return.

One man I saw several times was a white-haired man who also did not speak English and lived across the street. He seemed to come and go as he pleased and sometimes stop by for dinner or breakfast and a chat with Mr. Zhao. Mr. Zhao has profound friendships with everyone that comes into the restaurant. I noticed this when he immediately asked me to sit and eat dinner with him. It was further cemented when he poured me a glass of cognac. I would say that it is safe to say that he missed the community factor of the restaurant deeply. During the observation, he floated around the tables and would sit and have a drink with each table. He created these bonds and friendship network most likely because he likes it but also because it creates regulars. He created an emotional stake in his restaurant, and it keeps people coming back. The food is arguably good but what keeps them coming back is Mr. Zhao.

My main takeaways from my observation and interview is that the business is not the same post COVID. Mr. Zhao stated it himself that business has not been the same and has not come back since pre COVID. When I was waiting at the restaurant for anything to happen and anyone to come in, I wondered how he was able to afford the rent of a restaurant in Chinatown. Another time I stopped by not to do fieldwork but to say hello, the people coming towards me on the sidewalk looked inside and loudly observed that it was empty inside. Online reviews displayed a type of mediocrity centered around their service that could explain the emptiness.

When I had their food and talked to them, that was not the feeling I got. While I may be more empathetic towards American Chinese restaurants and they may have treated me differently because I'm also Cantonese, I found my experience to be fine. With my non-Chinese friends, they also found no issue with the restaurant. In the grand scheme of things, they do not really matter because the American Chinese restaurant owner is not fussed by this. They are not terribly concerned because these are people are not the regulars that they care about. Restaurants aren't powered just by incidents of tourists and first-time eaters but by their regulars. In this observation it was more apparent that Golden Lion was indifferent towards the general American public. They had a very Chinese attitude towards it that was more like "mo ban fat" or it is what it is. Golden Lion was not making their money and reputation based on yelp reviews and they were not beholden to tourists, they made their money on their regulars, namely Cantonese people. By doing this, they had regulars that had minimal complaints and would support them monetarily and willingly. There were personal and emotional stakes in it. It seems to be the case here at Golden Lion, but Mr. Zhao put more social stake in it. He sat with every table that came in that night except for two tables. One table consisted of two white men. The other table had a mix of people but mainly Northern Chinese and Latino people. Those were the only two tables that ordered from the menu instead of requesting special items. The big mix table did make a special request for oysters but otherwise was mostly on menu.

I was chatting with Mr. Zhao while he was on a break from cooking and from socializing when a man in an argyle sweater came up to him. He was with the birthday party group, and he wanted food since he came late, and everyone had already eaten. He said he wanted something spicy but not too spicy and flavorful. Mr. Zhao immediately suggested a type of noodle and got up to make it immediately. This tells me that in the style of Cantonese cooking, while there are

certain dishes with names, there was a formula. With Dr. Poon, he told me that with a wok and a wok shovel, you can cook anything. The formula is typically a vegetable, a meat, and flavoring in spices or sauces. This has led to almost infinite food and flavor combinations that make up the distinct Cantonese flavor. Usually there is a grain paired with it whether it be rice or stir fried with noodles. The customizability and flexibility that comes with Cantonese cooking is suited for the taste where feelings and flavors are wanted, not particular dishes. Cantonese cuisine can be complicated when it wants to but for convenience and the sanity of all Cantonese people, it is uncomplicated in structure but complex in taste.

American Chinese restaurant owners may care about gaining new customers, but they do so on a basis of trust and appreciation. All the tables I observed that night had a trustful bond with Mr. Zhao. While there were less than 10 tables that night, they trusted Mr. Zhao to cook them a good and wholesome meal. They trusted him enough that they invited him to drink with them. He sat with a few of the tables to chat with them and drink with them. It is known that Mr. Zhao has a high tolerance for alcohol and partakes in the Cantonese tradition of liquor with dinner. Mr. Zhao's relationship with his customers was close. He knew them enough to strategically place their tables based on when he thought they were going to leave and noted that the birthday table would not leave until later in the night, potentially overstaying their welcome. There is a lot of social, emotional, and personal investment in relationships. For restaurateurs, there is a monetary stake in these relationships. For Mr. Zhao, while these people knew him personally and loved to support his business, this was still a transaction. This was still a business relationship. There is an expectation with relationships in Chinese culture that when someone needs help, their friends and family will help them on the basis that they are friends. That is not without reciprocity though. There is an expectation that the helper will be helped when needed.

It's a cycle of reciprocity that creates a strong tie and lasting relationships. Mr. Zhao has cultivated a community and a steady stream of paying customers that love his food and company. Mr. Zhao does not let the opinions of one-time customers affect his livelihood and invests in regulars with the hope that they will support him going forward.

Mr. Zhao mainly caters to Cantonese people. The staff does act differently towards non-Chinese Americans. They are livelier and casually converse with the Cantonese customers. With non-Chinese speaking customers, there is a distance with them. They know enough English to take orders and have some conversation but use it out of obligation of being in America.

Dr. Ku writes about how an American from Wisconsin created a media ruckus and made a public call to boycott American Chinese restaurants after finding out that American Chinese restaurants had a Chinese menu and an American menu where the dishes didn't come with a bowl or rice and charged a dollar less for what he thought was the same dish. Then Mayor Giuliani joined in on the boycott calling it discriminatory and thus forced the restaurant to adjust prices and make a public apology (Ku). When Chinese people started opening restaurants and Chinatowns, they did so to cater to the Chinese diaspora. Americans just started eating there and eventually American Chinese restaurants started to cater to them. It started with offering milk with dinner because at the time, Americans would have a glass of milk with their meal. Chinese people can't drink milk due to an overwhelming majority of Chinese people being lactose intolerant. Adding cow milk was the surefire sign of Western influence.

II. DINNER PARTY AND A BIOLOGY LESSON FROM DR. POON

I had heard about Dr. Poon in a newsletter about his work. He is a retired biology professor from a Midwest University who had been making YouTube videos in his retired life. He has been making videos consistently for the last few years about cooking with a wok. His idea was that the wok and Chinese cooking styles were the solution to the obesity epidemic in

the US. He posited that Americans were reliant on fast and processed food which led to an obesity problem. While Chinese people remain small, the fast and processed food was going to cause problems eventually. He has a system centered around using the wok and wok shovel as a device to cook. It is a fast system that cooks quickly and efficiently. It includes prep, adding of flavors, and a Chinese stir fry formula of meat, veggies, and seasonings. It was Dr. Poon's belief that this a fast and easy method of cooking that could be the solution to America's obesity issues. When I arrived at his farm, I had to go deep into midwestern country. I went North and got off at an exit. I had to go down a few country roads, then a dirt one to get to his house. When I arrived, he had come out to greet me. The house was two stories and open concept. The living room and the kitchen were one big room. There were windows surrounding the living room. The couch had a blanket over it with the buildings at his former employment woven into it. The color palate was beige and wood with some accents of fur. I immediately changed out the bandage on my finger from the broken nail. After that I began chatting. I started chatting in Cantonese, but his American wife was present, so I switched to English. I immediately found out that they had 7 cats. The cat that came towards me was Peaches. She sniffed by hand but then promptly went to his wife's side where she petted her until she eventually left. I chatted with them for a while. We talked about things like an American Chinese restaurant delivery person who had been shot by a customer that had been harassing a restaurant for months. We talked about my maternal grandpa and how he was doing after he had been hit by a car two months prior. He showed me his fridge full of plastic containers of prepped food. In his kitchen was also a cart with the gas stove and one of his woks. We were chatting casually when it suddenly shifted to the interview. I forgot my consent form, so I had to go upstairs and print it out. His office was in a little space upstairs. I never got to see the entire house but from outside and inside, it looked massive.

After I printed out the consent form, he looked it over and signed it. I took out my voice recorder and was fiddling with it to turn it on. He then asked me why I didn't use my phone. I told him that I didn't want things to get lost on my phone and I wanted to separate my work from my phone which is why I brought a digital camera and a voice recorder. We then began the interview. The interview came to a pause the first time when his wife came with his phone. Someone had been calling him and he missed it. He decided to call them back later. We talked a little bit longer until three of his friends had arrived. We decided to stop there.

We all chatted for a little bit. Dr. Poon told us we were going to the riverbank. He put on boots then walked out of the backdoor of his house. We all followed suit. As we were going down the steep drop off, we all watched his movements to determine how to get down. He had told us to avoid the gravel as we would slip. I slipped a little bit as I tried to move around the gravel. We moved in a peculiar way that was important for our safety as we made our descent to the river. I made small steps and felt the ground with my foot for security. I was wearing all terrain boots, but I still managed to slip a little bit. Despite my little slip, I never fell, and I maintained my balance. We all managed to make it to the bank. The rocks were flat chips due to millions of years of erosion. The water was clear and serene as it rushed downstream. I took some photos of the river and the riverbank. Dr. Poon began to give us a history and biology lesson of the river. He had told us that there were multiple species of mussels in these waters, and we could find shells leftover from raccoons. He talked about the biodiversity of the river. Due to his wife, his family owned both sides of the bank. The flaky rocks at the banks, he told us that that was the type of rock that people would frack. He made it clear in that statement that he would never sell the banks to fracking companies. I think his point was for us to learn about nature and to learn about the biodiversity of the world. This would later inspire one of my

questions during the interview. There was one other man in our little group and Dr. Poon challenged him to throw a rock across the river. At this point we tried skipping rocks. I could never skip rocks like my dad could despite my efforts. The one man in the group threw with all his might and eventually made it to the other bank. Dr. Poon took photos, the older woman took photos, and so did I. At this point, Dr. Poon decided it was time to eat. Going back up the bank to the house was a much easier feat than going down. It was also much quicker. I felt like I had run up two steps at a time when I went back up. We went past the tall grass then to the picnic table outside.

The cats were outside playing. They were curious about us, the strangers, but did not come near us. There was an orange fluffy cat that looked like Peaches. This cat looked identical to peaches but was more haggard than her. He had scars and scabs and his hair was matted in some places. Dr. Poon explained to us to not go near him because that was Evil Peaches. Evil Peaches was Peaches 'brother and had a habit of getting into fights. One fight was so bad he disappeared for days before eventually coming back with injuries. I kept my distance. There were many kittens romping around the yard. They were playing with each other and watching us closely. They seemed curious but wanted to keep a healthy distance. The picnic table was set up with plates and silverware and cups. Dr. Poon's cooking setup was on a cart which they brought out of the house. He had a small gas stove with a small bottle of propane attached to it. The cart was like a lab cart but filled with ingredients already cut up and portioned in small plastic containers. The wok was a normal sized cast iron wok. It was personal home cooking sized, not the giant restaurant sized ones. There was an assortment of bottles of water and oil. He also had some spices to add to it. He had his camera on a tripod set up looking down on the wok and invited each of us to stir fry a dish. The first one was called egg scramlet. It was tomatoes,

shrimp, and scrambled eggs. The next dish was rice with eggs and vegetables. The third dish was asparagus and bell peppers. The fourth dish was chicken broccoli and cauliflower. The last dish was the one I made. It was bok choy, lap cheung (Chinese sausage), carrots, and zucchini. He told me that he gave me the last dish because of my experience working in kitchens. After we had finished making all of the food, we all sat down and ate our meal with iced tea and water. It was a filling meal for all of us. It was enough food to feed all of us with leftovers. The leftovers were given to the cats to eat. We then had homemade vanilla ice cream and triple berry pie.

III. A BIOLOGICAL AND BICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF AMERICAN CHINESE FOOD

The questions I asked were based on a clinical analysis of American Chinese food and Chinese food at large. I asked Dr. Poon these certain questions because I wanted to know the sterile version of events with American Chinese food and what is American Chinese food when taking feelings away. He gave me the bicultural perspective of American Chinese food. He talked about Americans wanting more meat in their food, less vegetables, and fried foods. He was coming at this from the perspective of a someone who grew up with a Chinese cooking system and wanting to impart that system on a culture that relies on overly processed food.

This is a unique perspective because while the stereotype is that Chinese food is dirty, cheap, and a matter of preference, he posits that American food has lot of problems that has impacted people's health. He explains that Americans value convenience over everything. He talked about a woman that would eat frozen pizza everyday out of convenience. He used her as an example of how much Americans want convenience in their food. Frozen pizza is both convenient, extremely accessible, and tasty. He also used her as an example to show an etic perspective of the situation with American food and cooking.

He developed a template system of cooking to show Americans that cooking is more accessible than it looks. He explained that the American system of slow cooking food was not sustainable and stir-frying food had everything that the average American wanted, convenience, flavor, and nutrition. His mission was to show a close up of Chinese food and how to cook it showing every detail in HD. Dr. Poon was, in a way, trying to bridge the cultural gap in between cooking and showing that Chinese food is more wholesome and nutritious than its reputation.

The way that he explained American food was an incredibly etic perspective that exposed its fallacies and weaknesses. It explained what was not working for American food and showing an alternative, Chinese food, which could lead to more satisfaction in food. Dr. Poon has a mission, and his goal is to change how we eat.

While Dr. Poon's goal is to change how Americans eat, he also does a fair amount of work dispelling myths and creating familiarity with ingredients formerly deemed exotic. He creates intimate portraits of his ingredients showing the American public that demystifies Chinese food, creates curiosity, and his goal of putting distance between them and American food. Chinese food gets a bad rap of being made of unsavory ingredients deemed inedible or too exotic. It also has a bad reputation with being deemed unhealthy as compared to a cobb salad. Dr. Poon said that it also had to do with MSG and the fake letter that started the MSG aversion. He takes on MSG through a scientific lens wanting to explain that it is naturally occurring and is added in most American fast food and snacks. In an encounter with Ajinomoto, the world's largest MSG producer and inventor of a salt form of MSG, there was a significant push from the company to dispel myths and talk about the xenophobia associated with MSG. The xenophobia is so strong that people still report sickness after eating Chinese food and not Doritos. Dr. Poon points out that it created an association with dirtiness and griminess.

He also explained that in China, vegetables are always cooked before eaten. Salads are not a thing in China because human feces are used as fertilizer for vegetables which is deemed unclean. He spoke about being served salad when he first came to America and could not believe that people ate something so unclean. He points to those two as the two probable causes for American Chinese food being labeled as dirty.

This is an incredibly clinical way of looking at American Chinese food. It takes away the mystique of Chinese cooking and boils it down to a template for cooking. With this I found that Chinese cooking itself is very no frills but instead very practical. Given China has gone through hard times in the last century, it is very practical and wholesome. With this, it dispels myths around Chinese cooking as something that is inherently unhealthy. It gives an emic perspective of Chinese cooking that is much needed in the current discourse of Chinese food as a “healthier” option. Dr. Poon breaks down the elements of cooking and simplifies it heavily. Dr. Poon gives a biological, scientific perspective about his cooking because he wants to add a degree of officiality to it, like saying his cooking is peer reviewed in a sense. He needed to give credence to Chinese cooking methods, and he seems to have been successful in doing that.

In terms of American perceptions of American Chinese food, Dr. Poon sought out to change that with his cooking method. His method leaned heavily onto food that was fast and easy to prepare and full of nutritional value. He used language in his interview about health and the health effects of food. This gives credence that the American perception of American Chinese food is bad. All the while dispelling rumors and stereotypes that American Chinese food is bad for the body, he takes on American food as an institution. Dr. Poon said himself that Americans need to have more meat, less vegetables, and the meat needs to be fried for it to be edible to an average American. However, his understanding of American Chinese food was more

Cantonese based than American Chinese based. There is also the stereotype that “authentic” Chinese food is extremely healthy. In the show, “90 Day Fiancé: Before the 90 Days,” a woman in Idaho with a boyfriend in China asks that her boyfriend cook for her and bring her medicinal herbs when he moves to Idaho to help her lose weight. She stereotyped Chinese food as being extremely healthy showing that Americans do not also have high opinions of their own food as well. It could be that because of their low opinion of their own cuisine, Americans view American Chinese food as unhealthy because it has been tainted with the American need for extra sugars and more processed food.

His perspective of food comes from his upbringing in Hong Kong and having an Ah Yee (auntie/housekeeper) who he describes as being an excellent cook. He had a role model for his cooking and what it could be. His perspective of food also came from working in an American Chinese restaurant during his PhD studies in Wisconsin as well as his current project of teaching people in the community how to cook with a wok. He has an intimate relationship with food and wants to dispel the myths that Chinese food is unhealthy and hard to make. Wholesome eating in the style of Chinese cooking is his soapbox. He uses his education in biology as a guide for his cooking channel because he wants to provide a formulaic and scientific method of cooking. It was clinical and methodological but easy to follow.

The last question I queried was where the best place in North America was to get Chinese food. Dr. Poon did not hesitate to tell me that he felt it was in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He did not elaborate on what made Chinese food in Toronto the best in all North America, but it aligned with other opinions on the best Chinese food in North America. My own Father said that Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada was the best place to get Chinese food in North America. I support his claims because of a recent trip to Vancouver for the Richmond night market. There

seems to be a dislike and contempt for American Chinese food by Chinese people but if it comes from Canada then it is the most authentic.

From this interview, it was easy to see that perspectives towards American Chinese food and Chinese food are rigid perceived as inaccessible. American Chinese food is characterized by fried foods and accused of being too oily, greasy, and full of questionable ingredients. Even Dr. Poon agrees that American Chinese food is very meat and fried food heavy but that is a result of catering to American tastes and not a fault of its core. Chinese food is characterized as being healthy to a degree. Dr. Poon makes up recipes as he goes because of his template but he does traditional cooking techniques. He wanted to convey that Chinese food and Chinese style of cooking are more accessible than previously thought. It is a real question of whether his food is American Chinese or Chinese. He uses traditional cooking techniques but uses a combination of American and Chinese ingredients. He shops at a German American supermarket as well as East Asian marts for specialty items. He is using what he has available to him and the results are delicious.

IV. A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON AMERICAN CHINESE RESTAURANTS DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES AND POST COVID

I came across Dr. Sophie Luna when I was looking for papers to write my literature review and to strengthen my thesis. I found that she had written an article on COVID and Chinese restaurants which was tangential to what I set out to do. I immediately emailed her and set up an interview. She had written about the immediate effects of the anti-Chinese sentiments that were going around during uncertain times. Dr. Luna is a history professor at a public university in the South. She teaches a class about American Chinese restaurant history and has her students do a personal history of local American Chinese restaurants in the area. She has written extensively about American Chinese food history, the Taiwanese TV Chef, Fu Pei Mei,

and about the effects of the pandemic on American Chinese restaurants. She is also a second-generation American Chinese person who grew up in a rural area of the United States and teaches in small town.

When interviewing Dr. Luna, I wondered if she felt that American Chinese food was more American or Chinese. She told me that that is something that people think about a lot and that it was a “subset of Chinese food.” She also remarked that it was “kind of like an American homegrown product.” She further says that while people will say that that’s not how people in China eat, the roots cannot be disassociated from China itself. She remarks that Chinese food has adapted wherever it’s set up shop around the world. Chinese restaurants in South Africa has tailored their food to South African tastes. Chinese restaurants in Turkey have tailored their tastes to Turkish tastes and so on. American Chinese food is distinct in that it is for American tastes. It is an adaption of food for the general populace of the majority. She also states that even within the US, American Chinese food is different from restaurant to restaurant and from area to area.

I inquired if these adaptations were more out of survival or evolution, and she said that they were more out of survival. She said, “they don’t necessarily do it out of choice or out of love,” rather more of needing less language skill to run a restaurant in a foreign land. She added that there will always be a demand for Chinese restaurants because local people like the food enough to keep them in business. She said that that was the case for first generation migrants but for second generation they are more focused on the evolution of the product in the way. As she described it, a “2.0 version,” of the Chinese restaurant. She makes a point that a lot of younger Chinese Americans have grown up with the food and have a “cultural literacy,” of the US and

their parent's culture. They are then able to market it to another demographic. In that they become, "Chinese American restaurants version 2.0."

I asked about anti-Asian sentiments and if American Chinese restaurants have been treated differently since the uncertain times or are the opposition just a bit more vocal. She said that it was not a new sentiment that erupted overnight after COVID-19 patient zero but more of a sentiment that's been ongoing since at least Asian or Chinese people have come to the states. She said that she thinks there's a new inflection of it since COVID hit the states. She said that in all her life she has never felt more afraid than she has right now. She currently lives in a predominantly white area of the states, and she grew up in a predominantly white area of the states. She felt afraid for her parents as they are older and attacks in the bay area have been targeting the older Asian population. She continues that this is a continuation of the animosity that has been existing in the United States. It's just a renewed feeling, like adding more kindling and wood to a low flame.

I went on about how American Chinese food and Chinese food is often described as dirty by Americans and referenced a legal article I read about it. She said that a lot of it comes from the early reporting on the wet markets and people pointing fingers to that. She says that she does not know herself and the scientific community still has not clarified anything. She says that a lot of the accusations of "dirty" food comes from early reporting implying that Chinese eating habits are "nasty," or "dirty."

I queried if there has always been this animosity in the states since the Chinese Exclusion Acts and she said that there have been. She referenced the Vincent Chin beating to support her answer that there has always been some sort of animosity occurring in American culture. She said that during the pandemic, it has "multiplied in magnitudes."

She expressed that she used to never feel afraid walking alone in New York but that has since changed. She worries for her friends who look East Asian but could not tell if it was only because of media reports or if it was reality. She talked about the stop AAPI hate website and how the statistics on the website are damning. She said that there could possibly be a copycat effect in place. One person targeted an East Asian looking person and then others followed suit. She theorized that the media reports on attacks inspire such attacks as it helps the crime reach a wider audience.

I pressed her if she thought that people were taking Asian Americans more seriously now. I told her about how when I was a kid, I was sent to the counselor's office for reporting racism and called crazy. I also told her about how people sent me checking in texts after the spa shooting and acted like this level of racism was out of nowhere. She said that people have always thought that Asian Americans are somehow "immune from racism." This could be because of their economic status but ignores that their high economic status is because of the Chinese Exclusion Act only allowing the more successful Chinese into the states. She talks a bit about the model minority myth and then talks a little bit about her own experiences. She talked about her father and how people told him that he would never get promoted because his English was not good enough. She noted that she was heartened by the number of Asian Americans that were starting to speak up for themselves. She mentioned that there was training for Asian Americans experiencing racism. She further elaborated that it was targeted towards Asian American women. She said it was terrible that that had to be a reality, but it was good that it was there because it means that people care enough. She remarked that she had hoped there would be less gaslighting because the training entailed processing it and whatever response was fine. She then went on to

say that the current response to someone accusing another of racism in school is “Let’s talk about this and let’s talk this out.”

She mentioned the law that was passed in Illinois that mandated Asian American history must be taught in schools. She recognized that there has been “concrete” movement and recognition on the official level that racism against Asian Americans is bad and needs to be addressed. She looked at the positive of Asian American creators coming out with creative projects like films and television shows that showcase the Asian American experience. I brought up a question about food as a political statement. When Chick Fil A came out with a homophobic stance, conservatives rushed to Chick Fil A to support them and their homophobic stance. She explained that people have different motivations for supporting a food business. It could have been a stance to support Chinese people during this time. It could have also been a stance that says that they support immigration or migrants. It could have also been a stance against xenophobia.

I wanted to know if she thought that pride in cooking was somewhat an extension of nationalism. To her “Chinese identity is not nationally based.” She identifies as a Chinese American because her parents were born in China but moved to Taiwan then the US in the 60s, but she did not feel her identity was based in the People’s Republic of China. “It’s not a PRC thing to me and so to me Chinese identities is already not nationalistic in, in how I perceive it.” She was speaking personally at this point. To her being Chinese did not come with an expected nationalism that Americans expect with American born people. To her it is more of a cultural identity and a “culinary cultural pride.” “And it’s interesting too, because in thinking about this book, like, I don’t even think of myself as Taiwanese, I feel that that’s kind of evolving.” She said this in reference to a book about Taiwanese TV chef, Fu Pei Mei. Even though her parents

are from Taiwan, she reports that she's always thought of herself as Chinese or Chinese Taiwanese. It's not so much a nationalist thing but more of a "shared larger story about Chinese culture."

I asked if she felt that Chinese culture was a food culture and she said, "oh yeah, absolutely, no brainer." We then talked about how China has no national dish because of how diverse and vast the country and culture is. She then notes that there is a sense of "national pride in cuisine and that is nationalism."

I mentioned to Dr. Luna about experiences I have had with customers treating me differently than white waitresses. I told her about how I had to handle a full restaurant myself when I was a teenager and people said horrible things to me whereas the white waitresses who had to handle full restaurants by themselves were given nothing but praise. I told her that when I tried to point that out to a white coworker, I was called crazy for that. She remarked that it was gaslighting. She then went on to explain the training mentioned earlier. She said that there was a part two to the training which stipulated that the aggressor was not crazy at all and that they had indeed experienced that aggression.

I then asked if she had come across anything about MSG or Chinese restaurant syndrome. She said that it was more popular to believe that years ago but not so much now. She brought up that MSG is used in a lot of foods and people aren't aware of it. She talked about a Netflix show, "Ugly Delicious," where the chef, David Chang, had everyone do a Dorito's taste test and then revealed that it was packed full of MSG. It wasn't a Chinese food issue but more of a xenophobic reaction.

She talked about how Chinese cuisine itself is so vast that if someone says that they do not like Chinese food, there is an ignorance to it. "No food culture stays still," she said.

I told her about my partner at the time who said he probably would not like Chinese food because he did not know what he was eating. She responded, “expand your world and expand your palate.” She imparted this wisdom onto her kids and that they should try something at least seven times and the seven more times.

I started talking about the eight big cuisines in China that the government was trying to push to be considered for UNESCO intangible heritage. She clarified that the eight cuisines are more of a recent development and “almost touristic.” She remarked that Americans might have a general idea of different cuisines like dim sum or some of the spicier cuisines and dumplings of the north. She talked about how people have no clue about Shanghainese food and Fujianese food. She teaches a class about Chinese food history and talked about how her students are always surprised by the vastness and depth of Chinese cuisine.

I discussed Lunar New Year in reference to an article she wrote about Lunar New Year. I asked if Lunar New Year food is for the masses. She explained that some people might be receptive to different dishes because New Year’s food is more banquet food. She said that if someone does not associate Lunar New Year with a holiday and does not see it as a time for family and specific foods then it does not mean anything. In a sense “people will always be receptive to things that taste good.”

I closed the interview asking where the best place was to get Chinese food in North America. She said that it was a huge debate, but a chef told her the most creative Chinese foods is in Toronto Canada. She did not discern between Chinese restaurants. She lives in a small town currently and felt that decent Chinese food could be found in any major city. Again, this supports Dr. Poon and my father’s statement that Canada is the place to get the best Chinese food in North America as well and me and my sister’s experience going on a food trip to Vancouver.

V. A HISTORICAL AND BICULTURAL VIEW OF AMERICAN CHINESE FOOD AND RESTAURANTS

Dr. Luna states that even in the US, Chinese food is vastly different and has catered to the local tastes of the area. It is interesting that so many Americans expect all American Chinese restaurants to be the same even when McDonald's varies by region. This could come from the perspective of Chinese people from non-Chinese Americans that largely dismisses and misunderstands them as being a homogenous, monolithic culture. The vast difference of American Chinese restaurants is usually a shock to unaware Americans who have a singular dimensional view of the world outside of them.

When she discusses second generation American Chinese people starting their own restaurants and evolving the cuisine, it reminds me of Momofuku and David Chang. David Chang did not grow up in a restaurant like many other Asian American children did but he went to culinary school. He is doing what Dr. Luna said second generation Asian Americans were doing and that is making Asian food 2.0. What she meant by that was a different version of Asian food that is Asian at the root but with new techniques, ingredients, and cooks. He is famous for his version of "bao," his roots with East Asian cuisine, and revamping it to fit Asian American and American tastes. It is somewhat polarizing because the recipes and dishes are bastions of tradition but with second generation Asian Americans, they take these and make modifications to them empathetically.

Dr. Luna said that Chinese people have adapted to any situation that they are in when it comes to restaurants. While American Chinese is the more prominent Chinese diasporic food item, diasporic Chinese food has adapted itself to the cultures it has nestled in and tailored their foods to whatever tastebuds are dominant. Like I mentioned before and mentioned by Dr. Luna,

this is a survival technique. It is not so much an evolution but more like a river delta. Chinese transnational migrants typically manage to enter the United States on merchant visas with the intention on opening an American Chinese restaurant. American Chinese restaurants have managed to become a part of American culture but started out to serve the local Chinese community. This has since expanded as an immigration reason. Dr. Luna's explanation of diasporic food ties in with Eric Liu's explanation that it is an act that is uniquely American Chinese rather than Chinese Chinese.

The pandemic is often linked to wet markets and a lot of the language around the time was how disgusting wet markets are. Again, this is an instance of deep cultural misunderstandings where ethnocentrism comes out full force and there are willful misunderstandings of Chinese culture and thought. The eating habits of Chinese people are often under scrutiny. The pandemic was a time where cleanliness was a driving factor. People have and still carry hand sanitizer with them everywhere post COVID. They started wiping surfaces before they touched them. They started wearing gloves along with face masks. There was a real cleanliness and purity push going on during the pandemic. This led to the exacerbation of the stereotypes of "clean," and "dirty," food and calling American Chinese food dirty. This is strange coming from a culture who believes that swimming is equal to bathing and do not believe in washing their legs in the shower.

A strong Chinese identity not being nationalistic at all. It gives commentary on nationalism and identity in that identity and nationalism and identity are not absolute facts of each other. She makes that point and it made me realize how ride or die countries expect their citizens to be. When getting an American passport, one must take a vow of unconditional allegiance to the US. If this was a romantic relationship, it would have been called toxic for a

multitude of reasons. My parents told me that if you are an expat from China, there is a level of shame involved where the expat would be considered almost on the level of a traitor. That aside, the cultural pride in food is never taken as a sign of nationalism in any way. It seems given for the overseas Chinese that they would know and love Chinese food. With that comes my claim that food is a way of dealing with diasporic feelings. Food is a comfort for people with diasporic feelings. It is a way of bonding and feeling the closest to home. My personal definition of the Chinese diaspora comes from my dad's feeling on homesickness. It's a longing for a space and place to call home but it does not quite exist because I can never be fully established and integrated into the country I was born in and the culture where I'm from. It is a feeling of being alone and far away from something but never finding out what because it doesn't exist. Food is a way to deal with these feelings of longing. Since Chinese culture is such a food culture, food is a way to keep people together and is one of the most concrete things in the US where an overseas Chinese person can feel most comfortable. Having that pride in the food without any nationalism is entirely possible and probably felt by most American Chinese.

She felt that the racism against Asian Americans have been more vocal since the beginnings of the pandemic. Reportedly Asian hate crimes have risen up significantly since the beginning of COVID, but I think that they've always been occurring. Like I mentioned before. Asian Americans are often told not to report incidents of racism because the repercussions are worse. The microaggressions that are committed on the daily are so normalized that when an Asian American person reports it, it is not taken seriously and sometimes laughed at. It is also very hard to report microaggressions when the aggressors are the people with authority such as teachers and bosses. When the attacks reported seem to be coming from strangers on the street, there is less at stake since it was a random attack that was racially motivated. A racist act

committed by someone close or with authority over an Asian American person could be more dangerous because of proximity and the potential for more damage done. It is also an issue if the official verdict is that the microaggression wasn't racist then the person reporting the aggression is considered crazy and too sensitive.

Dr. Luna made a mention of a training program for racial violence against Asian American women and the way she described it was more of a validation training rather than finding solutions and dealing with it. It validates the experience that the woman had experienced and reaffirms that they're not crazy. While it seemed a bit pathetic at first glance that this is the best they could come up with, it makes sense because there is not a lot an Asian American woman can do when an aggressor goes after them. As seen by the spa shootings, an Asian American woman would have to die in a horrific manner to receive any sympathy. Cathy Park Hong writes about this on her essay about Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Cha was horrifically raped and murdered by a serial rapist in New York City on her way to eat dinner with her friends. After she was murdered, people still didn't take violence against Asian American women seriously (Hong 2020). After the spa shootings, the women killed were defined by the act of violence against them and his lawyer's reasoning that he had a fetish for Asian American women. Judging by the reactions of people on the internet and in my personal life, non-Asian people did not think any of this was that serious prior but still do not see issue with the treatment of Asian Americans.

What I found in Dr. Luna's interview was that the negative attitudes have been present for a long time, but it has been underlying. When the uncertain times happened and no one knew who to blame, it was immediately put on American Chinese people. Even though there were reports of attacks and aggressions, it was and is not acceptable to take it out on people, so food was a proxy. It was only natural that they would attack American Chinese food because it was

suspected to have come from ingesting exotic meats. Therefore, American Chinese food was an acceptable proxy for overtly and purposefully negative attitudes. “Most Chinese were willing to tolerate discrimination and abuse because they considered their suffering temporary,” asserts Wang. Their attitude of temporary suffering has led them to be silent about abuses and discrimination faced from non-Asian Americans and thus led to a low statistic of racial incidents. Dr. Luna explained the training targeted to Asian American women that pointed towards what seems like lukewarm response to abuses but is the most appropriate now. It is appropriate because calling out abuses and discrimination often gets pushed back. Chinese people rarely talk about instances of discrimination because of fear of consequences. It is a frustration among people in the American Chinese community when calling out racism and microaggression only to be invalidated and not taken seriously. The attitude of sojourners that they would just eventually return home is reflected in American Chinese restaurant owners where the suffering is temporary. They came to America to work and when their work is done, they are free to return home. Wang also makes a mention that most Chinese immigrants “yearn,” to return home to their villages and retire there. Chinese people often call their parent’s village their hometown even if born in an American town or city. American Chinese restaurants are subject to abuse from the public and their attitude of ignoring it until they eventually get tired, and leave has not been as effective as previously thought. It is not effective because the abuses have since been integrated and woven into the rhetoric surrounding Chinese and American Chinese people’s existence.

The restaurant itself is an abuser of American Chinese and Chinese restaurant owners. It is not an easy task to come to another country, get a bank loan, open a restaurant, or buy an existing restaurant, import workers, and do most of everything themselves. It is extremely hard on the body and a person’s mental state. It is back breaking work that consists of daily late nights

that should be more appropriately called early mornings. Like Wang said, Chinese people believe that this suffering is temporary and their reward of retirement in their hometown dangles in front of their face like a carrot. The American attitude compels a restaurant owner to exhaust all their resources and quit when they are tired. The Chinese attitude has been exacerbated by stereotypes of being extremely hard workers and that has led them to continue suffering with the promise that it is only temporary.

Dr. Luna is a second generation with Chinese immigrant parents like me. I found that in my interview with her, I asked her things that I assumed she would automatically understand based on our vaguely similar background and life trajectories. I found she did understand it and answered in ways that are like my understanding. I asked her questions based on the both of us being members of the greater American Chinese community. While there were things I wanted to find out from the perspective of a historian, I asked her a lot of “insider” questions. To explain that I asked her questions that I knew she could answer in a certain way because of both of our contexts.

Anti-Asian racism was confirmed by her to have been something that has been going on for a long time but never addressed. This is due in part of the Asian attitude of not reporting anything bad happening because Asian Americans are not taken seriously. When it comes to restaurants, shrill reviews, abusive customers, and post COVID anti-Chinese attitudes have no remedy. If an American Chinese restaurant owner makes a claim of racism, typically no one will take it seriously. White Americans are very aware of this and use this to try to take advantage or hurt American Chinese restaurants.

VI. RAW DATA FROM A COMMUNITY SURVEY

I distributed a survey on the Bloomington Normal Facebook group asking about everyone’s opinions on American Chinese restaurants. I asked if they ate at their local American

Chinese restaurant from 2020-2022 and none of my respondents said that they didn't eat or get takeout from an American Chinese restaurant. 16% said that they went once or twice. 33% said they went somewhat regularly. 16% said less than usual and 33% said less than usual. When I asked if anyone posted their opinions about American Chinese restaurants on social media in 2020, an overwhelming majority said that they didn't while a minority said that they did. That minority self-reported that they posted a few times on social media about American Chinese restaurants. A majority reported that they rarely saw posts suggesting going to support their local American Chinese restaurants while some people reported that they saw more than a few posts on social media. An overwhelming majority reported to have never seen posts suggesting to NOT support local American Chinese restaurants in 2020 but some have reported to have seen some at least rarely, at most more than a few. Most people reported that they personally told someone to eat at their local American Chinese restaurant while a few said that they didn't do that in 2020. Absolutely no one told anyone not to eat at their local American Chinese restaurant. An overwhelming majority of my participants have positive or somewhat positive feelings towards their local American Chinese restaurant while a minority had neutral feelings about their local American Chinese restaurant. The participants reported varying accounts of the state of their local American Chinese restaurant in 2020. It was closed, it was partially closed, meaning takeout only, and it never closed. The question was vague and intentionally vague, but the accounts were varying. This could be because of the nature of the question. I never specified when in 2020. The next question specifies and asks about spring/summer of 2020. It was overwhelming, positively, and assuredly reported that they were open for takeout only. It was split whether their local American Chinese restaurant changed their hours. Half reported that they reduced their hours and the other half reported that hours stayed the same. No one

personally knows the owners of their local American Chinese restaurant. They didn't really know them at best and not at all at worst. There was some concern from my participants for their local American Chinese restaurants. Majority felt a little bit of concern and the rest "pretty much" felt concern for their local American Chinese restaurant. For the rest of the survey, I left it open for them to type what they wanted to express in response to my questions. I asked if they had any special thoughts or feelings about Chinese people in general. Some standout ones were "love Chinese culture," "They make the best Chinese food," "I think they are amazing," and "no." There were only a handful of responses. One person said, "wish them the best as I do any restaurant," "no," and "I only like China Star." I asked if there were any special feelings to be had about Chinese food. It was overwhelmingly positive. "Love it," "Love Chinese food," "The food is amazing as always," "Love it. One of my favorites," and "It is delicious."

Looking at my survey, it seems like in central Illinois, there is a general positive attitude towards American Chinese restaurants. People think positively of American Chinese food and think positively of American Chinese people and restaurants in general. While this may be edited behavior, they reported that they at least had a little bit of concern for their local American Chinese restaurant. It could be Midwest politeness showing but it seems like there is some concern. I would also say that it could come from the fact that Bloomington Normal is a small town. While there are two universities and a decent chunk of people among the cornfields, it's still a very small town with a small-town attitude and culture.

I think it can be said that there is a bias to my survey participants. I asked the local Facebook group of Bloomington Normal and of course the only people who were willing to agree to consent and take the survey after my huge consent statement were people who had strong positive feelings towards American Chinese restaurants. Like most Facebook groups,

there are rules such as no bullying, positivity only, and no bigotry. If I had posted this survey on Nextdoor, I think I would have yield much different results. In a space reserved for positivity and leaning towards cooperation and reciprocal altruism, posting on another app forum would have been different. Nextdoor is known for being conservative and sometimes described as “unhinged.” My experience on Nextdoor is that it is an extremely conservative as there was a huge post on my Nextdoor memorializing Rush Limbaugh and many other posts asking why a stranger was on the sidewalk outside of their house. I’m not sure how many responses I would have been able to get but I think it would have skewed right.

I also think that if I had my survey in a Chicago Facebook group, there might have been different responses. Given how people were treating Mr. Zhao’s restaurant in real life, there may have been more angry people. The sample size would have been much much bigger and possibly more negative.

VII. DATA ANALYSIS OF SURVEY

From the results of the survey, the Midwest Illinois American attitude towards American Chinese food, American Chinese people, and American Chinese restaurants is positive. There is self-reported concern for American Chinese restaurants in Bloomington Normal. None of my respondents reported any type of relationship with the owners. It leads me to ask if many people had even met the owners of any of the American Chinese restaurants. One of the restaurants in town has been open for 100 years and kept in the family until the pandemic when they decided to sell the restaurant. The restaurant still serves American Chinese food but in addition sells Filipino food as the new owner is a Filipino couple. At some restaurants, the owner or the manager will personally ask each customer how they’re doing to create a better impression of how hands on they are. Mr. Zhao’s style of running a restaurant is getting to know the people if they are regulars and making relationships with that. It could be that one would need to be a

regular to get to a point where the owner would need to acknowledge them. It could also be that the owners don't really see a need to befriend their customers or form a connection. It could also be because most American Chinese people in Bloomington Normal are Northern Chinese rather than Southern Chinese like Mr. Zhao. It could be a totally different attitude towards customers. There is the possibility that COVID procedures and the transition to becoming takeout only has turned the owners more distant towards the non-Chinese of Bloomington Normal. I heard from a former Chinese student that the owners were somewhat connected through WeChat to the Chinese of Bloomington Normal. It opens the possibility that they are selective of who they decided to know.

In comparison to Mr. Zhao, it supported what I witnessed on paper but in a different way. Mr. Zhao seems to have the unconditional support of the local American Chinese community in Chicago Chinatown. The workers at his restaurant seemed more concerned with the local Chinese community as customers than non-Chinese customers. Mr. Zhao handled his customers with more thought and care than his non-Chinese customers. He knew the groups so well that he placed them in specific parts of the restaurant based on when he expected them to leave.

If we took the survey as a basis for how the general American feels, then it shows sympathy and attempted empathy towards American Chinese restaurants. It shows that they care enough to harbor concern but not enough to support their local American Chinese restaurant regularly monetarily. This could be because of stay-at-home orders and the people who took the survey could have been cautious people. Even after stay-at-home orders were lifted, people still reported that they ate less or somewhat regularly. The answers were open to interpretation so somewhat regularly could mean anything. That aside, American Chinese food wasn't their first pick all of the time. Of course, there are many reasons why someone would not eat at an

American Chinese restaurant that often. The obvious reason is economic reasons. It's expensive to eat out regularly so eating out several times a week is a hit to the wallet. Someone might prefer homecooked meals. Someone might be too busy to get takeout. Someone might not just prefer American Chinese food all the time. There are many reasons why someone will not make an American Chinese restaurant their first pick if they decide to eat out that day, but the survey does show that it is not often their first pick for eating out.

If anything, the survey shows that people do have sympathy for American Chinese restaurants and American Chinese people. Social media posts about not supporting American Chinese restaurants seem to be few and far between. They could have culled their social media of people who would post something against American Chinese restaurants or there could have just been so few posts on social media. It's entirely possible that any backlash against American Chinese restaurants was by such a small vocal minority and the sentiment was not shared by the American populace. However, I think that those negative feelings were harbored by some American people. I don't think that the negative feelings are a new thing like everyone acted like it was during the uncertain times. That negativity has been going on for a long time. The xenophobic feelings towards American Chinese people have been long living in the minds of many American people. People were vocal about it but in creative ways. They would find creative ways to express these feelings without directly saying anything negative. Complaints against American Chinese restaurants are often shrill and nitpicky. They nitpick things that they would never nitpick an Olive Garden or an upscale White owned restaurant in Chicago over. One day when I stopped by to visit Mr. Zhao, I overheard a non-Chinese American group of women who peered inside as they were walking past. They loudly exclaimed, "It's empty inside!" My friend that I was with remarked at how rude they were. It's a strange thing to remark about a

business that they weren't going to patronize anyways. I don't really think anyone would drive by a chain restaurant in the middle of the day with few cars outside and remark at their lack of patronage. In "Dubious Gastronomy," Ku suggests that Americans are meaner towards American Chinese restaurants than other restaurants. I posit that non-Chinese Americans use the American Chinese restaurants as a proxy for their feelings because verbally or physically assaulting an American Chinese person is not popular right now. However, it is acceptable to attack someone's income flow and business.

The Midwest small town culture of Bloomington Normal is important for the interpretation of the results. The fact that I posted it on a Facebook group is also important as well. It's important because that is the context behind the answers. Being in Illinois is a vastly different experience than being in my home state of Idaho.

It could be said that people were somewhat "performing" for the survey. What I mean by that is that since they knew it was going to be for a master's thesis their answers were shaped for what they thought I wanted and what they thought would make them look the best. Since it was something that had some level of officiality to it, the answers could have been fudged so they would give a better impression of Bloomington Normal. It's possible that people who could have answered negatively avoided the survey because of how official it was and because they are self-conscious of how unpopular their views may be. I think that the people who responded to my survey are somewhat representative of the attitude of Bloomington Normal.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

In my original argument, I stated that with racism projected towards American Chinese people was directed towards food as a proxy. This has not stopped American Chinese restaurants from reopening but showed a more complicated relationship between American Chinese people and the US. Current immigration laws where someone from China could potentially use to get into the states stipulates that someone must come as a skilled laborer and joins the workforce. Mr. Zhao came in 2006 to start his restaurant. These laws have not changed much since the early days of the Chinese Exclusion Act. In a sense, their entire purpose of being in the United States is to have their restaurant. Mr. Zhao gave an answer that seemed defeated when I asked why he decided to reopen during COVID.

I would wager that the main reason why American Chinese restaurants reopened during the pandemic and did not choose to retire is because of that promise they came to the United States for. Given what happened to Japanese Americans during WWII, it's entirely possible they could take away citizenship at any time. Mr. Zhao does not know English, so his citizenship status is unknown. He was exactly 50 years old when I spoke with him. Despite being in the United States for about 17 years now, he still does not qualify for the 50/20 rule which grants him a citizenship interview in his native language. NPR published an article explaining why so many Chinese immigrants choose to open a restaurant when they come to the United States. They stated that it was because of a loophole in immigration law that has not much changed since the Chinese Exclusion Act. Keeping the restaurant going, even after retirement age, is concrete proof and reason for someone to stay in the United States. Their purpose in the United States is to work. Mr. Huang said himself that Mr. Zhao was only in the states to work. They

have internalized that drive to work to the point where they overwork themselves and somewhat give into the stereotypes of the hard worker Chinese man.

Of course, there are financial reasons. Health insurance is very expensive and the copays for the medication and doctor's visits add up. Restaurants have lots of expenses and are very expensive to run. Children are also extremely expensive and so is their schooling. It's not unusual why someone would want to keep going for financial reasons. Some of the older population stays employed with part time jobs like school bus driving and passing out samples at Costco because of health insurance and some extra cash. Some people just cannot afford not to work. This is not an unusual incentive to reopen and a harsh reality of living in the United States where one must be extremely wealthy with a great pension to be able to retire.

I also stated that there were community reasons why American Chinese restaurants did not shutter their doors permanently. Mr. Zhao's social circle is made up of his customers. His friends are customers, and his customers are friends. He is an incredibly friendly, welcoming man who seems extremely extraverted and like he always wants to make a friend. He makes it a point to personally cater to his customers to build that rapport and foster that special community that he has built centered around his restaurant.

As for the attitudes, the attitude in Midwest Illinois seems positive with a little sympathy. There is some acceptance of American Chinese people with the asterisk of distance added to it. The people of Bloomington Normal seems distant from their local American Chinese restaurants in that they don't know much about them, nor do they patronize them enough to have much of an opinion. According to the survey, they seemed neutral positive towards American Chinese restaurants with a little bit of concern because of the pandemic. They seem like they have more

left leaning attitudes in that they do not blame them for the pandemic, but they do not have enough emotional stake in them to care deeply.

I originally argued that their opinion was low before the pandemic and has only gotten lower since the pandemic in post COVID times. I was wrong in my argument that their opinion was low and had gotten lower. The opinion was favorable and sympathetic. It was much more sympathetic than what I was expecting going into this study. It seems like people in my area want the best for American Chinese restaurants and have claimed to have no bias towards them. One answer claimed to have treated them the same as any other restaurant in town. When I first came to Bloomington Normal, I was told that Bloomington Normal has the highest number of restaurants per capita in the United States. I can attest that there are many restaurants here given the population of the twin cities.

With the example given of Lucky Lee's, the "clean Chinese food" restaurant, there still is a persisting attitude that American Chinese food is "dirty." The persisting attitude is dominated by the imaginary threat of MSG and the culture shock of the perceived non picky nature of Chinese eating. It is also dominated by the xenophobia of people that are the "other."

I was wrong and right in my assertion. There was a real community aspect to running a restaurant that could have contributed to American Chinese restaurants reopening during COVID. Mr. Zhao had a network of people who were willing to have a relationship that blurs the lines of monetization and friendship. It was a friendship where people were happy to support their friendly neighborhood restaurant. With the people of Bloomington Normal, there was not stake in the restaurants like there was with Golden Lion. There was an understanding with Mr. Zhao and his customers that for the friendship to continue, they would have to continue

patronizing the restaurant and supporting Golden Lion. That understanding was accepted as a condition of adult friendships.

Another community issue was the workers he had underneath him. They probably also got into the US on work visas. If he were to stop renting the restaurant and the new tenant decided that they didn't need the old staff, the old staff might be in trouble. If they're still on work visas, then they need a new sponsor. If they managed to get green cards or naturalization, they would not be as worried, but they would still need to find a job. Mr. Zhao signs their paychecks and employs them. If he were to leave, then the inner community of Golden Lion would fall apart as it stands now.

There was also a financial aspect to reopening. One can only remain idle for so long before one needs to go back to work. Mr. Zhao took out PPE loans offered by the government at the time. This was not an unpopular move as the funds set aside for PPE loans was immediately depleted once applications opened. Mr. Huang reported that every American Chinese restaurant in Chinatown took out loans. The PPE loans helped with restaurant rent and wages for his workers, but they are loans. While they will be forgiven over time if payments are on time, they still require payments until then. American Chinese restaurants had to reopen because it was not financially feasible for them to remain closed any longer.

However, those were intertwined with the final reasoning I found where it was an immigration issue. Mr. Zhao managed to come to the United States with the promise that he would work in or start an American Chinese restaurant. He has worked just about every day of his life without a break. There is an unknown to what happens if he stops working. He most likely would be able to stay in the states even if he retires but there's an obligation to continue working because that was the entire purpose of coming to the country. It can be easily dismissed

as having a “sense of duty,” but it comes from the historical context of indentured laborers being forced to come to America to work for almost nothing.

Like other Chinese immigrants, they are faced with stereotypes of being extra hard workers that they’ve internalized. They look down on other people for not working as hard as they do and complain about no one working for them. They exacerbated that stereotype to show that they are above Americans to some capacity but play into the system’s hands of giving extra work for less pay. To say that Chinese culture is a workaholic culture is not taking in account the history of indentured servants and the stereotypes at the time to further treat coolies not even the bare minimum.

In respect to the issue of immigration, Chinese labor has been racialized in a way that has pigeonholed them into being part of the restaurant industry with very little wiggle room. The only way they can come to the United States is if they conform to the racial stereotypes and work racialized labor that has been designed to be for them. Their labor has been reserved for them and further perpetuates the stereotype of the “other,” by segregating them from other avenues of work and forcing them to perform racialized spectacles that reify stereotypes.

I was right in that the negative sentiments have always been there, but it just became more popular and fashionable to be aggressive towards Chinese people. It also became more noticed that people were being aggressive towards Chinese people. I mentioned the spa shootings in Atlanta and how I got texts from people “checking in” and surprised that racism against Asians was truly that terrible. Dr. Luna confirmed that there was nothing really anyone could do because of how embedded it was in society. Cathy Park Hong writes that Asian Americans who speak out against racial aggressions are deemed “difficult.”

Attitudes towards American Chinese food is a proxy for abuses towards American Chinese and Chinese people. Even if that is where the attention is currently averted, there are still negative and racist views towards people of Chinese descent because they will always be the “other.” The survey pointed out that there was a positive attitude towards American Chinese food in central Illinois with some mild concern sprinkled in. The American people love American Chinese food but there is a lack of familiarity with the people who run the restaurant. It is unknown if they have purposefully segregated themselves from the people of Bloomington Normal or if the people of Bloomington Normal have not bothered to get to know the owners. It probably has something to do with the lower number of Chinese people in Bloomington Normal. Mr. Zhao’s customers have emotional stake in him that is entangled with the monetization of their relationship. The Chinese opinion of American Chinese and Chinese food is high and positive. The non-Chinese American opinion of Chinese food is positive but mildly so.

In this post COVID world that we inhabit, we carry a collective trauma from having experienced a pandemic together. While we pick up the pieces of our lives that withered during uncertain times and questionable acceptance of the “new normal,” it is easy to blame one group for all of the troubles so there is an outlet for the anger that comes with trauma. American Chinese restaurants have suffered due to the pandemic and the full impact of the pandemic may not be seen until a little bit later in time. In the racism that came with COVID and the eventual boredom after so much hatred was spewed, it is hard to undo the damage that was done. While it highlighted the normalized racism Asian Americans face daily, the concern did not stick, and Asian Americans are still willfully and criminally misunderstood in this Western society. The only people who still cared were Asian Americans as this was their reality but only to be invalidated immediately by people ranging anywhere on the political spectrum. While part of it

has to do with assimilating or attempts to escape the unassimilable branding at the “other,” the yellow peril still exists as an omnipresent sentiment.

It is unknown if Asian Americans, specifically Chinese Americans, will be able to bounce back from this if there was anything to bounce back to. American Chinese restaurants may not be able to recover fully, I worry about my parent’s restaurant and if it can recover from the pandemic. The drive to work hard and work long hours has been internalized to the point where safety is not a priority and the bodies become more and more broken due to the hard manual labor. The imposing of the stereotypes to exploit Chinese workers and milk them out of everything presents a stark future that is endless work. American Chinese restaurants could shut down for their own wellbeing instead of reopening during uncertain times. They had the option to quit but that was not an option they accepted. Bills need to be paid, it would create a hole in the community, and their purpose of being the states get challenged. The stigma of not working as a Chinese person is humiliating and bears consequences of shame.

Perhaps the doldrums of being forced to stay at home for two months revitalized their love and purpose of staying with the restaurant until the bitter end. The moment of financial instability and isolation of not working and being out in the community due to COVID might have also renewed their sense of purpose. Mr. Zhao and my father were similar in that they started working the moment restrictions were lifted. Mr. Zhao and my father do not know a life without work coming from a country going through its industrial age as well as coming to America with the promise to work indefinitely. Chinese people are pigeonholed into working for unequal wages with their livelihood and personhood on the line. They are constantly exploited for their labor and work ethics to the point where they must find a sense of purpose in working as much as they do or else there would be nothing.

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