

Digest

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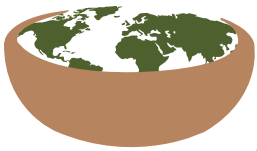
Negotiating Chinese Culinary Traditions in Newfoundland

By: Mu Li

What is “Chinese food”? Here I explore this complicated question in the context of St. John’s, the capital of Newfoundland and Labrador. Although the Chinese represent Newfoundland and Labrador’s largest non-indigenous “visible minority” with a single ethnic origin, they comprise only 0.26 percent of the province’s total population (Statistics Canada 2006). There is no Chinatown and the small number of Chinese Newfoundlanders means that their culture remains largely invisible except for a few large public cultural displays such as annual Chinese New Year celebrations, an annual flower service in August, and sometimes, a moon festival dinner. In this context the twenty-five plus Chinese restaurants and four Chinese groceries stores located in St John’s become important markers of local Chinese culture and locations for both Chinese and non-Chinese to define, negotiate and re-define what “Chinese” means to them. Drawing on interviews I conducted with 40 individuals of Chinese descent as part of my PhD thesis research on the Chinese community in Newfoundland, and my observations as a part-time waiter at Magic Wok Eatery, a popular Chinese restaurant in the city, I investigate three related and overlapping Chinese culinary traditions in Newfoundland: domestic foodways of Chinese residents, or the food they eat at home; North American style Chinese food served in the majority of local Chinese restaurants; and “traditional” dishes more recently featured on the menus of some Chinese restaurants. In considering how Chinese individuals draw on and interpret these specific forms of Chinese foodways, I also reflect on how they negotiate different, and sometimes competing, opinions of culinary authenticity. In this article, “authenticity” is conceptualized as something or a status which is believed or accepted as genuine or real (Taylor 1991:17) and closely associated with their perceptions of ethnicity.

Food and Identity

The importance of food (as well as other aspects of foodways) as a marker of identity is well documented. According to Claude Fischler, foodways are central to identity because an individual “eats, so to speak, within a culture, and this culture orders the world in a way that is specific to itself.” Therefore, “cooking helps to give food and its eaters a place in the world, a meaning” (1988:281-86). Charles Camp also notes



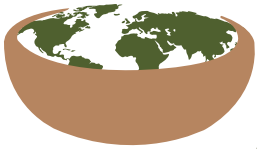
Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

that “food is one of the most, if not the single most, visible badges of identity.” (1989:29). In this article I build on work by folklorists, anthropologists and others that examines how cultural identities, especially ethnicities, are expressed individually or collectively, negotiated through intra-or inter-group communication, and sometimes recreated in new social and cultural circumstances through foodways (e.g., Brown and Mussel 1984, Fischler 1988, Gabbacia 1998, Georges 1984, Humphrey and Humphrey 1991 [1988], Kaplan 1984, 1986; Li Li 2002, Lockwood and Lockwood 2000, Shortridge and Shortridge 1998, Sutton 2001, Van den Berghe 1984, Van Esterik 1982).

Foodways can be central to immigrants’ immigration experiences and the social construction of their identities. Anne Kaplan suggests in the introduction of *The Minnesota Ethnic Food Book* that traditional foodways are often used by a particular group in self-reflection, interaction with members of other groups and for cosmological purposes (connecting to the natural world and a deity) (Kaplan 1986). In the same vein, Donna Gabaccia discovered that “immigrants sought to maintain their familiar foodways because food initiated and maintained traditional relationships, expressed the extent of social distance between people, demonstrated status and prestige, rewarded and punished children’s behavior, and treated illness” (Gabaccia 1998:51). Drawing on his own experience, Robert Georges reflects on how his ethnicity as a Greek descendant is often emphasized through food at family gatherings (Georges 1984).

Researchers have investigated food’s role in the construction of immigrants’ identities during the processes of immigration, acculturation and cultural promotion. Foodways may connect or reconnect members of the same imagined group, serve as a bridge for inter-group communication in a multicultural society, and/or be seen as a cultural divider to separate “us” and “others.” (e.g. Brown and Mussell 1984 and Gabaccia 1998). For example, David E. Sutton explored the relationship between food and memory in individuals’ diasporic experience (Sutton 2001), discovering that the experience/re-experience of traditional food evokes emotional and cultural recollections (Sutton 2001). In the introduction to their influential book *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity*, editors Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell write that, “foodways bind individuals together, define the limits of the group’s outreach and identity, distinguish in-group from out-group, serve as a medium of inter-group communication, celebrate cultural cohesion, and provide a context for performance of group rituals” (1984:5). Roger Abrahams explores food’s connections to esoteric and exoteric factors when he classifies food stereotypes as being “deep stereotypes” which contain the substantial characteristics of a group as perceived by others (1984).

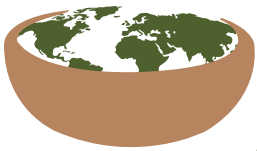


Digest

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Sometimes, an ethnic group may adopt the foodways belonging to another cultural group in order to create a new tradition. For example, some Jewish people in large American cities (New York in particular) define eating Chinese food on Christmas Day as their own holiday tradition. A response to Christmas festivities, it differentiates their ethnic and religious identity from other American, notably Christian, groups (Gaye Tuchman and Harry G. Levine 1993, Mu Li 2011). This example not only highlights how the role of foodways as an ethnic or cultural marker is often situational and sometimes appropriated, but also underscores the fact that cultural identities are not fixed; they are fluid and socially constructed and reconstructed within various social circumstances. Articles in *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life*, compiled by Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicala, consider the negotiation of ethnic experience and identity as a dynamic personal process (Stern and Cieala 1991). For example, studies by Yvonne R. Lockwood and William G. Lockwood's on pasties in Michigan, and Janet Theophano on Italian wedding cake, demonstrate how an individual's ethnicity reflects personal choices and strategies in different social situations, confirming Larry Danielson's statement that "Ethnicity ... includes a sense of personal survival in the historical continuity of the group" (Danielson 1991:200).

My research on foodways in St John's takes up this folkloristic interest in the personal choices individuals make in terms of self-identifying with ethnicities. Concepts such as full-time and part-time ethnicity (Fleras and Elliott 1996) and new ethnicity (Nahachewsky 2002) that emerged out of the rubric of Ronald Cohen's (1978) "situational identity" theory to describe an individual's own perception and subjective choices concerning their ethnicity that are influenced by various social conditions have informed my work. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Michael Owen Jones encouraged more folklorists to conduct individual-centered studies. As he claims, "while many researchers are concerned with group practices, collective identity and cultural institutions, I prefer to examine tradition as symbolic construction in the activities and lifestyle of an individual who intentionally selects elements of what he or she conceives to be a tradition in order to fashion an identity articulated through various media." (Jones 2000a:120). Foodways provides an important avenue for folklorists interested in studying complicated and everchanging constructions of ethnic identity that are both individual and situational. In shedding light on aspects of a particular Chinese immigration experience, and on traditions as they have developed within one Chinese diaspora community, an analysis of Chinese foodways in Newfoundland raises questions about what it means to a Chinese Newfoundlander and about understandings of authenticity more generally.



Digest

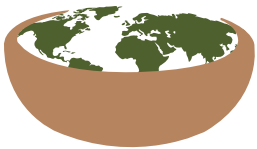
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The Chinese in St John's

The history of the Chinese community in St. John's dates back to at least the last decade of the nineteenth century. According to the memoir of the owner of the last Chinese laundry, William Ping, who came to Newfoundland in 1931, the first two Chinese to come to Newfoundland were Fong Choy and Szeto Hing (William Ping 1995). Originally from a small village in Hoi Ping (Kai Ping) county of Canton (Guangdong) Province in southern China, they arrived in Newfoundland via the United States in Mid-August of 1895. Reportedly, they were looking to escape the racist treatment many Chinese experienced in the States. Many of the first Chinese arrivals found life in the British colony difficult, however, and they faced institutional discrimination, economic restrictions and social isolation in a time period when characteristics other than ethnicity were often ignored by members of mainstream society, who simply divided people in Newfoundland as Chinese and whites. Members of the early Chinese community were forced to rely on each other for financial and emotional support that in turn strengthened their sense of what it meant to be "Chinese."

From the first arrival of Chinese immigrants in 1890s to the implementation of a more inclusive Canadian immigration policy in 1967 (Canada, Manpower and Immigration 1966), the majority of Chinese immigrants who came to Newfoundland were from the same socioeconomic class; they were uneducated labors. They also shared very similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds as the majority were rural Cantonese speakers (Cheng 1978, Hong et. al. 1975, Yu 1986). Even after Newfoundland joined the rest of Canada, the repeal of the discriminatory law *The Act Respecting the Immigration of Chinese Persons* (introduced in 1906) Chinese immigration under the family reunion program did not change the homogeneity of the Chinese demographic presence in Newfoundland.

More diversity came in 1967 with the adoption of a new immigration policy by the Canadian government that mean applicants were accepted according to certain educational and economic criteria instead of traditional racial- and ethnic-based standards (Canada, Manpower and Immigration 1966). Many qualified Chinese professionals from all over the world, including Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, settled in Newfoundland and established families. In late 1970s, immigrants from mainland China started to come to Newfoundland (Simon Tam 2012 and E. T. Tjan 2012) and in the last two decades, they have become the major source of Chinese immigration to Newfoundland. Finally, the Chinese population has become even more diverse with the growth of Memorial University since the 1990s and the influx of large numbers of



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

Chinese students. The previously homogeneous Chinese society in St John's has been transformed by these recent waves of immigration. Instead of comprising a monocultural group, today Chinese residents of the province differ in terms of religion, political opinions, professional domains, regions of origin and dates of immigration. Although all my informants claim their ethnicity as Chinese, or at least acknowledge their Chinese roots, they sometimes have very different perceptions of what it means to be Chinese.

Eating at Home

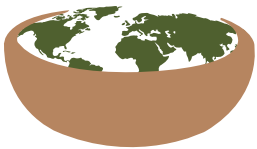
The earliest Chinese immigrants brought foodways with them. For example, a preference for rice, which is a staple of Chinese foodways, was described in a 1906 article titled "Demand for Rice" that appeared in *Trade Review*, a local journal:

There is one article of domestic supply that the St. John's grocery man finds it had to keep stocked now-a-days. That article is rice, and its increase in consumption is entirely due to the gentleman from China, who has lately come amongst us. Our Oriental visitor endeavors to conform to Western ways in many particulars. He frequently cuts off his pigtails; he has discarded the picturesque blouse of his ancestors, and has substituted the Western coat therefor [sic], and he encases his feet in Caucasian shoes. But, in the privacy of his home, he still sticks to rice as his principal article of diet, hence the big demand for that class of goods here at present (Anonymous1906).

The exoticizing tone of the article notwithstanding, this reference suggests that from their first arrival, Chinese immigrants attempted to maintain their traditional foodways. Reflecting on his immigration to St. John's in 1950, Kim Hong, a retired medical practitioner, recalls that members of the Chinese community consumed traditional Chinese in their homes on a daily basis:

At the time when I came to St. John's in 1950, I stayed with my grandfather [who came to Newfoundland in 1910] at the John Lee Laundry on Gower Street and they cooked rice in every meal. To go with the rice, they would cook some Chinese food which was often ordered from Montreal like salt fish, some dried vegetables, and other things that Chinese would normally eat. They also used local meat and vegetables like cabbage and potato. They cooked them in their way obviously (Kim Hong 2013).

Kim Hong continues, "When Cosmas Ho, [a family doctor, practitioner of Chinese



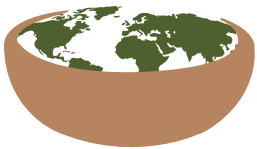
Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

medicine, and successful businessman], came to Newfoundland in 1962, there was not many restaurants serving Chinese food and apparently, you could not get Chinese food in local grocery stores. I therefore brought him to my grandfather's laundry. He was so delighted to get genuine Chinese food. The Chinese food cooked by my grandfather in the laundry was very similar to what I had in China" (Kim Hong 2013). Finally, Francis Tam comments, "My grandparents and parents always tried to cook as traditional as possible if groceries were available. Sometimes, my grandfather would do traditional dishes like ma po tofu" (Francis Tam 2013). In Tam's case, dishes like ma po tofu were only cooked for special and important occasions like Chinese New Year or family reunions.

As these recollections of Kim Hong and Francis Tam reveal, in the early days many Chinese groceries were not available locally. When I asked my interviewees what their biggest challenge was at the beginning of their adjustment to life in Newfoundland, I expected a variety of answers. However, most Chinese immigrants to Newfoundland I spoke to reported confronting a very similar difficulty: a lack of "Chinese food." For example, E.T. Tjan, originally from a Chinese community in Indonesia, came to St John's in 1966 to work as an ENT doctor. He recalls, "The biggest challenge we had was food. There was no Chinese food in Newfoundland" (E.T. Tjan 2012). Tjan and other Chinese immigrants were not looking for fancy or exotic Chinese delicacies, but common Chinese groceries such as soya sauce, garlic, ginger and green onion for everyday home cooking. These are the ingredients (spices, sauces and vegetables) that form the basis of Chinese foodways throughout Chinese centers (mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) and overseas Chinese communities (e.g. Southeast Asian countries and North America). A few decades later, when Stephen Feng came to Newfoundland as a graduate student from Guangdong Province of China, the situation had improved. However, he still encountered limitations: "When I arrived in St. John's in 2007, it was still hard to get some Chinese groceries, such as choy sum, Chinese broccoli and bitter melon, which were so common in my hometown" (Stephen Feng 2012). In some cases, this lack of Chinese groceries represented the most difficult adjustment; the disappointing weather conditions and dull social life were tolerable but not being able to eat the food that you grew up with was a real hardship. As Alick Tsui, a Hong Kong native, says, "I came in the winter of 1986, but I was not actively looking for Chinese families to enjoy my pastime during the storms. All I wanted at the time were Chinese groceries. Only if I can get Chinese groceries, I would be okay" (Alick Tsui 2012).

Chinese provisions, such as soy sauce, dried seafood, and other widely used Chinese ingredients, such as green onion and ginger root, were sometimes brought along by immigrant laborers or imported directly from China to North America (Coe 2009, Roberts



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

2002). However, the lack of a local supply of Chinese groceries forced Chinese families to adopt local groceries and adapt to local foodways. For example, Wendy Long, wife of John Shieh, a professor of Computer Science at Memorial University from mainland China, says, “I had to force the whole family to adapt to local life.” (John Shieh and Wendy Long 2012). The process of culinary acculturation is harder for some than others. Shinn Jia Hwang, a retired researcher in Ocean Science originally from Taiwan, recounts,

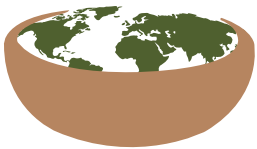
I came to Newfoundland in 1968. Before my wife immigrated to Newfoundland, I stayed at the on-campus residence. For convenience reasons, I took the meal plan at the university’s dining hall, which mainly served traditional Newfoundland food. Some [meals] were delicious but some others really turned me down, say kidney pie. Every time, when my Chinese friends and I showed up at the door of dining hall and detected the strong smell, “Oh my, kidney pie!” we would run away immediately (Shinn Jia Hwang and Ching Hsiang Lin 2012).

Ching Hsiang Lin, Shinn Jia Hwang’s wife, continues to tell the story of kidney pie, “On the days of kidney pie, they would cook some noodle soups with groceries such as Chinese vermicelli and Chinese hot pickled tuber mustard that we sent in from Taiwan. He once said, the person who invented the hot pickled tuber mustard should be awarded a Nobel Prize” (Shinn Jia Hwang and Ching Hsiang Lin 2012). Hwang’s story reveals that even though they were open to local foodways, some Chinese immigrants ultimately preferred their own culinary traditions and opted to maintain them despite the challenges they faced.

Some second generation Chinese Newfoundlanders also opted to stick with Chinese flavors, having been introduced to them as children by their parents. Lewis Yang, whose family was from Northern China, comments,

Regarding my own dietary habits, yes, I eat Chinese [food] a lot. I grow up learning how to cook from my dad so I cook all the time. I say at least 4 of 7 days a week. I ate Chinese food that I cooked, and if I order out, sometime I order Chinese too. It is what I used to, and so eating that is more satisfying than some of the other types of food that may or may not agree with my stomach (Lewis Yang 2013).

Scholars have pointed out that Chinese culture is food-centered and traditional dishes contain various social and cultural meanings so that Chinese individuals often try to maintain the foodways of their home communities to connect to their cultural roots (e.g. Simoons 1991 and Wu and Cheung 2002). This was true in St John’s as well, as is reflected



Digest

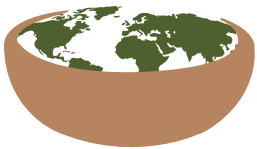
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in Ching Hsiang Lin's comments: "We make traditional food for almost every important festival. We make zongzi for Dragon Boat Festival, we make moon cakes for moon festival and on Chinese New Year's Eve, we have hot pot party with family and friends. Every time when I mentioned the Dragon Boat Festival, the first response of my children would be, 'Oh, the festival that we can get zongzi'" (Shinn Jia Hwang and Ching Hsiang Lin 2012). Lin's remarks suggest that the availability of Chinese groceries is important not only to daily foodways but is key to the maintenance of festive and cultural life.

When Chinese groceries were difficult to get locally, Chinese residents of Newfoundland had to be resourceful. Some people would drop by Chinatowns in bigger Canadian cities during their vacation or business trips. For example, E.T. Tjan recalls, "On our trips to the bigger cities, we would bring back a lot of groceries, especially sauces, for the rest of the year" (E. T. Tjan 2012). Others would rely on their parents or relatives in their home countries or in bigger Canadian cities to send them Chinese groceries by mail. Chin Tan, a family physician of Chinese descent, recounts, "My mom used to send me Chinese groceries such as mushrooms and soya sauce from Malaysia" (Chin Tan 2012). In regards to international shipments, Ching Hsiang Lin shares a humorous story: "I complained a lot about the lack of Chinese groceries in Newfoundland to my sister in Taiwan. One day, I got a parcel from Taiwan and it was so smelly. I could tell from the face of the postman. When I opened it, it was a whole package of peeled garlic. They were all moldy after a long journey" (Shinn Jia Hwang and Ching Hsiang Lin 2012). Even yet, Chinese Newfoundlanders sometimes depend on people living outside of the province to send them groceries. Bill Ping, a second generation Chinese who works as senior marine engineer, claims, "My brother still sends me Chinese ingredients from Toronto and sometimes I don't even need to ask" (Bill Ping 2012).

In the past, Chinese people commonly placed orders with wholesale Chinese grocery stores in Vancouver or Montreal. Kim Hong remembers, "Chinese food was normally sent in from either Montreal or Vancouver and delivered by COD [Cash on Delivery]. At that time, you had to order by mail. That was how you got oyster sauce, soy sauce, salt fish, and lotus roots. We probably sent in letters two or three times a year" (Kim Hong 2013). During the summer months, Chinese Newfoundlanders also grew their own vegetables. Kim Hong recalls, "In the summer, we grew some vegetables, like bok choy, Chinese broccoli, snow peas in the backyard of our laundry" (Kim Hong 2013).

As the local demand for Chinese foodstuff grew, a few stores started to carry Asian groceries. Mary Jane's, a health food store in downtown St. John's which opened in 1968,



Digest

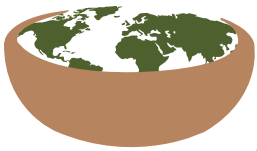
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was the first and most popular local store that sold a limited selection of Chinese groceries (Kim Hong 2013). Many Chinese Newfoundlanders still credit Mary Jane's with changing their culinary life. Ching Hsiang Lin remembers, "We were so excited to see that Mary Jane's started to sell ginger roots in 1973" (Shinn Jia Hwang and Ching Hsiang Lin 2012). In recent years Chinese groceries have become more accessible in Newfoundland and there are now four Chinese grocery stores in St. John's including the Magic Wok Grocery and Asian Variety downtown, the Oriental Snow Store at the Memorial University's student center, and the new-opened Just Goody Mart near the university. Some chain supermarkets like Costco, Sobeys and Dominion also carry a variety of Chinese goods. Dominion, in particular, offers a large variety and each location has a specific "Chinese food" section. Not surprisingly, these changes are welcomed by Chinese residents of Newfoundland. Wendy Long comments, "I am so glad that I can get bok choy at Costco. It makes my life much easier now" (John Shieh and Wendy Long 2012). Although Chinese Newfoundlanders still must demonstrate flexibility and adaptation, the increased availability of Chinese groceries allows especially those living in the St. John's area to more easily reproduce their own culinary traditions.

Chinese Restaurants in Newfoundland and the Emergence of North American Style Chinese Food

Scholars attribute the global spread of Chinese food to trade between Chinese and the west, as well as to the migration of Chinese persons to overseas countries (e.g. Coe 2009, Jung 2010, Lee 2008; Roberts 2002, Wu and Cheung 2002). According to Andrew Coe (2009), elegant and elite Chinese food, such as Shark fin soup and bird's nest soup, was first brought by Chinese wealthy merchants to their Western business partners as a show of generosity and display of wealth as early as the 18th Century. After 1784 when the American first met the Chinese in Guangzhou (or Canton City, the capital city of Guangdong or Canton Province), and especially after signing of the Treaty of Wang Xia in 1845, international trade between China and the United States flourished. Grand Chinese restaurants were built in major cities along the Pacific coast to serve wealthy Chinese businessmen residing in America along with their families, friends and clients.

The Canton Restaurant, which was established in 1849 in San Francisco, is believed to be the first Chinese restaurant in America (Liu and Lin 2009:136). At the time, upper-class Chinese cuisine was not attractive to a white clientele. Coe writes, "In the 1860s, the white elites of San Francisco had no taste for Chinese food. Once or



Digest

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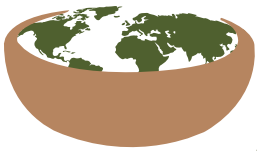
twice a year, they attended ceremonial banquets ... mainly to promote the business interests they shared with the Chinese merchants” (Coe 2009:107). In general, Chinese food remained unknown to ordinary North Americans who had no opportunity to access this kind of “luxury” food. Any experience of Chinese foodways they gained would have come through interactions with Chinese immigrants (Coe 2009:63).

Chinese restaurants were not widely established in Newfoundland until the mid 1950s, approximately 100 years after San Francisco’s Canton Restaurant. As Coe reports was the case in the United States, in St. John’s, eating food privately prepared by Chinese Newfoundlanders was the only option during the first decades of Chinese settlement in Newfoundland. Charlie Snook, a retired local businessman of English descent, recalls tasting Chinese food for the first time:

My sister Marjorie and Fronie Mathews were good friends. We were all relatives in Grand Bank. Fronie married Charlie (Hing) Hong [who came to Newfoundland in 1931] in St. John’s in 1943 or 1944. Fronie’s father, Uncle Jacob Matthews, he was living with Fronie and the family, of course, in St. John’s at the Avalon Bar and Grill. And Uncle Jacob died, so they brought his remains back to Grand Bank for burial. And while I was there, Charlie cooked up big feed of Chinese food for us. That was the first time I met a Chinese person and the first time I ate Chinese food. As I remember, it was a big, huge boiler because that was a big crowd. It was a big boiler and there were a lot of tomatoes. I don’t know the name of the dinner, but I know it was damn good. It was only one dish. It was almost like a chow mein, those kinds of dishes. It was so colorful so that is why I remember. There was no meat in that dish and it was all vegetables. Definitely all vegetables. And there was rice on the side. They brought the rice with them because there was no rice in Grand Bank. That was the first time I encounter with Chinese people (Charlie Snook 2014).

The first record of any Chinese involvement in the food industry dates from 1906 on Bell Island, a community close to St. John’s where an iron ore mine employed a considerable number of Chinese labors among its workforce (*Evening Herald* May 22, 1906, *Evening Telegram* May 22, 1906). The food was sold by an anonymous vendor who was not trained as a cook and did not own a restaurant. A few years later, the first known chef, Nam How Tong, also known as Tom Cook, came to Newfoundland in around 1915 (William Ping 1995:12-20, Chinese Association of Newfoundland and Labrador 1995:7).

In 1918 (1919 in Ping’s memoir), Charlie Fong (Fong Moo Sic) who was related to the



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

Fong family, the oldest Chinese family in Newfoundland, opened the first Chinese-owned restaurant, the King Cafe on Water Street (William Ping 1995:4, Chinese Association of Newfoundland and Labrador 1995:7, Yu 1986:19-20). This was followed four years later by the province's second Chinese-owned restaurant, the Dominion Café, established in 1922 in St. John's by Au Kim Lee. The opening of these restaurants indicates that with the growing Chinese population, some immigrants sought occupational opportunities outside of laundry business. In the relative absence of inter-ethnic conflict in Newfoundland, the number of Chinese owned- restaurants increased and working in the restaurant business became a career for many Chinese immigrants. Up to 1940s, there were more than 20 Chinese-owned restaurants including snack bars and fish and chips shop in downtown St. John's (William Ping 1995).

The early Chinese-owned restaurants served a western menu that included steak, pork chops, and fish and chips, rather than Chinese food (William Ping 1995:11-13). Billy Hong, the former owner of the Hong's Takeout on Torbay Road in St. John's, reports that "things were not changed until late 1950s." During his first 13 years (1953-1966) working experience as a cook in Newfoundland, he did not prepare any Chinese food professionally; he only made Chinese dishes outside of work for himself and his Chinese friends:

When I came to Newfoundland in 1953, there was no Chinese food on this island. I was first working in a Chinese-owned restaurant called Station Grill. This restaurant served western food like fish and chips, small steak, pork chop and something else. A few months later, another Chinese-owned restaurant called Sam Restaurant in Bell Island offered me a higher salary, so I went to work for them. The food they served was also similar to that of Station Grill. In 1954, I opened my own restaurant called Sun Café on Bell Island. I followed those restaurants that I used to work, to serve fish and chips and other popular local food (Billy Hong and Lam Hong 2013).

The adoption of western foodways was an economic strategy of many early Chinese-owned restaurateurs in cities and towns throughout North America that did not have a sizable Chinese clientele to draw on. In St John's prior to the 1960s, patrons were almost all local Caucasians who likely had little interest in tasting unfamiliar cuisines. Therefore, Kim Hong says, "Those restaurants were owned by Chinese but they didn't serve any Chinese food. So I wouldn't call them Chinese restaurants" (Kim Hong 2013). His comment reflects the assessment of Laurie Turgeon and Madelene Pastinelli. In their study of ethnic restaurants in Quebec City, the authors ask: "What makes a restaurant



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

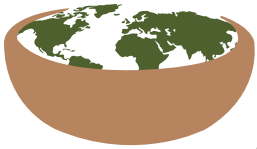
ethnic?” (Turgeon and Pastinelli 2002:252). Their answer--“a restaurant whose signboard or publicity clearly promises the national or regional cuisine of another land” (Turgeon and Pastinelli 2002:252)--would exclude Newfoundland’s early Chinese-owned restaurants. The Imperial Restaurant, United Nation Café, Silver Ball Café, Good View Restaurant, White Lily Restaurant, London Café, Western Café, People Café, St. John’s Café and West End Café (William Ping 1995) had no Chinese signs and featured western cuisine. Neither would scholars who conceptualize authenticity as something or a status which is believed or accepted as genuine or real (Taylor 1991:17) and authentic cuisine as “using the same ingredients and processes as found in the homeland of the ethnic, national, or regional group” (Lu and Fine 1995:538), consider these restaurants as being “Chinese.”

Although many people of Chinese descent in Newfoundland consider a Chinese restaurant as a place that serves Chinese food instead of non-Chinese cuisine, defining what “authentic” Chinese food remains problematic. The first restaurant in Newfoundland to serve Chinese food is believed to be the Deluxe Café that was located on Water Street in downtown St. John’s (Billy Hong and Lam Hong 2013, Kim Hong 2013). Kim Hong recounts:

The Chinese-owned restaurants started to serve Chinese food in around 1954 to 1955. At that time, there was a small café called Deluxe Café on Water Street. The Deluxe Café was first owned by Charlie Ding Au. He had a son Wing Ding Au who came to Newfoundland in 1946. Wing Ding went to local high school to learn some English and got his head tax back [\$300]. After Confederation, he went to Toronto with some others to work at a famous Chinese restaurant called Litchi Garden as a waiter. In 1953 or 1954, Wing Ding came back from Toronto and took over the business. He must have learnt how to cook Chinese food from the working experience in Toronto and when he came back, he started to serve Chinese food (Kim Hong 2013).

Instead of the upper-class delicacies offered at some of earliest Chinese restaurants in North America, like the Canton in San Francisco, or the everyday meals prepared in Chinese households in St. John’s, the food served at the Deluxe Café could be labelled as “North American style Chinese food.”

The label, “North American Chinese food,” differentiates a type of restaurant food served in North American Chinese restaurants from the foodways of Chinese populated centers such as mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, as well as other overseas communities with a large Chinese population (see: Coe 2009, Jung 2010, Lee 2008, Roberts 2002, Wu and Cheung 2002). In the minds of an earlier generation of Chinese Newfoundlanders, the term has a fixed meaning. In describing what it means in St. John’s, Kim Hong lists familiar dishes that found on menus of Chinese



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

restaurants throughout North America: “I think when people talk about North American Chinese food, they refer to some ten items like eggrolls, wonton, chop suey, guy ding, sweet and sour chicken and so on” (Kim Hong 2013). Significantly Hong mentions “chop suey,” the Cantonese term for odds and ends, that is perhaps the dish most synonymous with this style of restaurant food (Coe 2009, Jung 2010 and Lee 2008).

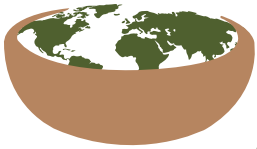
Many of the current Chinese restaurant owners and chefs in Newfoundland do not consider the North American Chinese food they prepare for largely non-Chinese customers as “real” Chinese food. Rather, they see it is an American creation. For example, Wallace Hong, one of the previous partners of the Kenmount Restaurant in St. John’s, says, “When my wife and other female relatives first came to Newfoundland, they knew nothing about the food we served here, so some of them asked ‘what is this?’ ‘Chinese food,’ I told them. They were surprised to ‘discover’ a new type of Chinese food. I had to tell them that we ‘cheated’ customers. That is what you can say about it” (Wallace Hong 2013).

North Americanized Chinese food was the result of a culinary negotiation between Chinese immigrants working in the restaurant sector and their non-Chinese customers but initially it was not widely accepted in Newfoundland. Kim Hong recalls how it first attracted mostly members of the local Jewish community who had encountered it elsewhere:

Wing told me, at that time, it [Deluxe Café] was full with Jewish people. Jewish people were mostly business people and they went everywhere, here or there. They were all exposed to Chinese food so that they liked Chinese....Local Newfoundland people then were not so well exposed to Chinese food and they tended to order roast beef, pork chop, fish and chips, hot turkey sandwich and others. A lot of Chinese-owned restaurants did serve these types of food (Kim Hong 2013).

In time, this new type of Chinese food became popular in Chinese restaurants across Newfoundland just as it did in other parts of the continent. Francis Tam, a second generation Chinese born in Newfoundland, remembers, “In my grandfather’s restaurant, he adapted to local taste and he had regular chicken balls, fried rice, chow mein” (Francis Tam 2013). Kim Hong also recalls,

Wing did quite well, and after a number of years, in about 1960, he opened Bamboo Garden restaurant on Harvey Road [the current location of the Benevolent Irish Society]. Bamboo Garden had four woks. You must be doing well to keep four woks. And after his success at Bamboo Garden, he sold the place to Gene Hong [who changed the name to House of Hong’s] and moved to open Skyline Motel on Kenmount Road (Kim Hong 2013).



Digest

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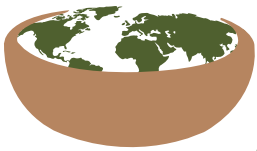
Today, North American style Chinese food dominates the menus of Chinese restaurants in Newfoundland. Wallace Hong claims, “In the Kenmount, we serve Chinese Canadian food, like chop suey, guy ding, beef and broccoli, different kinds of meat with mixed vegetable, chicken ball, and sweet and sour spare ribs” (Wallace Hong 2013).

According to Kim Hong, “80% percent of the sales of many Chinese restaurants in Newfoundland come from those dishes what we call North American Chinese food” (Kim Hong 2013).

Joseph Mo compared this style of restaurant food to what he grew up with in China: “The North American Chinese food here is different from what I had in Guangdong (Canton). People cook it differently so the taste is different. Sweet and sour sauce is widely used in various dishes here, but traditionally, Cantonese dishes are delicate and less saucy” (Joseph Mo 2013). Wallace Hong elaborated on the differences he has noticed:

One of the biggest differences between North American Chinese Food and traditional Chinese food is that traditional Chinese food doesn’t really mix everything together. We don’t do mixed vegetables. When we do beef and broccoli in China, we don’t mix them with carrots baby corns and so on as what we do here. We do that here because we try to accommodate the local taste. Also, when we know that local people are more concerned about their health, we add more vegetables when we cook chicken guy ding. But normally, when Chinese do guy ding, they would put more chicken than vegetables, which are only used for decoration, or say, adding colours. Another example is chop suey. When we do chop suey in China, in addition to chicken, we use primarily bean sprouts instead of other veggies. But in Newfoundland, you may get everything in your chop suey. I guess that this kind of chop suey was probably first cooked in US and we just copy it. However, the tastes are about the same. Let me tell you more. Sweet and sour pork is the Chinese way to do deep-fried stuff. Traditionally, we dip meat into a mixture of egg white, a little bit flour and starch, and then deep fry, but we don’t really use batter. So in this sense, chicken ball, almond soo guy or lemon chicken with heavy batter are not traditionally Chinese style (Wallace Hong 2013).

In addition to adding more ingredients to some dishes, some North American style Chinese dishes are simplified versions of their counterparts in China. Wallace Hong continues, “At the beginning, in the Kenmount, we used ingredients like bean sprouts and celeries and sometimes we mixed chicken or BBQ pork with veggies in our eggrolls



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

but afterwards we just tried to make it as simple as possible” (Wallace Hong 2013).

Many of the Chinese cooks I interviewed look at the North American style Chinese food they prepare for customers as both a part of their own culinary tradition and a reflection of how their life in Newfoundland is an intermingling of Chinese and non-Chinese cultures. Because of the popularity of North American Chinese food, some Chinese Newfoundlanders, especially those of an earlier generation, actually consider it a “Chinese” culinary tradition in Newfoundland. Billy Hong says, “I love chicken balls and I think they are tasty if you are doing right. I don’t see why it is not Chinese. They are made by Chinese so they are Chinese. That is my understanding” (Billy Hong 2013). In some cases, Chinese chefs consciously use North American style Chinese food as an expression of Chineseness for a non-Chinese audience. For example, Kim Hong comments “In the Chinese New Year celebrations, we served our guests eggrolls, guy ding, fried rice, sweet and sour chicken and honey garlic ribs. I don’t see there is any problem to serve them in this kind of events. I think the food is prepared in Chinese way and they are actually much better than what I had in the countryside of China” (Kim Hong 2013).

The Private and the Public: Home Cooking and Restaurant Style

My participant observation and interviews with Chinese individuals in St John’s today highlight differences between the North American style Chinese food served in restaurants and domestic foodways. Wallace Hong, whose previous restaurants mainly served North American style Chinese food, says, “We knew how to make dim sums but we didn’t really serve them in the restaurant because [it was] too much trouble. A lot of people are needed to make and serve [dim sums]. My wife and I only make them at home for our own use. My wife also makes zongzi [a Chinese sticky rice cake wrapped with lotus leaves] which was normally made in China once a year but we make it here all year round” (Wallace Hong 2013).

These experiences of dualism—eating one thing at home and preparing another type of food for public consumption—reflects an adaptive approach to life in North America that Alison Marshall terms “the way of the bachelor” (Marshall 2011). Marshall defines “the way of the bachelor” as a life pattern followed by many Chinese immigrants who came to Canada before the adoption of the new Canadian immigration guidelines in 1967. According to Marshall, most Chinese immigrants generally behaved like other Canadians in public but in private followed their Chinese traditions which might be seen as strange or “unacceptable” by non-Chinese Canadians (2011). On



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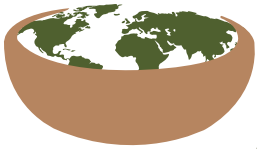
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Sunday they might attend a local Christian church service but in the privacy of their home they continued to engage in non-Christian, vernacular religious practices.

Applying Marshall's insights to foodways, I understand the differences between private and public Chinese foodways in Newfoundland as a form of "culinary ambivalence." The emergence of culinary ambivalence is often attributed to non-Chinese residents' fears of unclean or "contaminated" materials in traditional Chinese cooking and unfamiliar dining customs. An example of an uneasiness about Chinese food is reflected in an 1914 article. Titled "Canton, China" and written by George Fitch, the author of *At Good Old Siwash*, it appeared in the Evening Telegram, St John's major local newspaper, on March 4th. Fitch writes with tongue in cheek: "Canton people are very hospitable when approached properly and offer the visitor such delicacies as fried dog, stewed cat, boiled owls, pickled rats, smoked boa-constrictor and birds nest soup. On account of this hospitality, Americans do not much visit much in Canton." Although Fitch's intent is undoubtedly humorous, he reflects reservations that were widespread in North America at the time. Fear of being served "inedible" "Chinese" food not only stopped Americans from traveling to China, particularly to the Canton province, but also prevented them from tasting traditional Chinese food (Coe 2009, Lee 2008).

George Fitch's story is not an isolated example, but links to a whole urban legend cycle with many variants. Some of these have been well investigated by folklorists (e.g. Buchan 2000, Hobbs 1966, Klintberg 1981, Shorrocks 1975, 1980, Smith 1986, de Vos 1996). As a result of widely-circulating urban legends, Chinese food falls into the category of "disgust" according to Michael Owen Jones (2000b). Although many legends have been proven untrue, at times particular Chinese restaurant businesses have been seriously affected. In this context, arguably Americanized Chinese food arose as part of an economic strategy on the part of Chinese restaurant owners, especially those in areas where the local white population made up their customer base. They chose to modify their dishes to meet the tastes of their customers. They adjusted their culinary tradition "to make the unfamiliar seem sufficiently comfortable, thus making the exotic qualities of the food pleasurable" (Lu and Fine 1995:541).

Lack of Chinese clientele for local restaurants might have been a contributing factor to the dominance of North American style Chinese food on St John's menus. Before the late 1960s and early 1970s, the majority of Chinese living in Newfoundland were involved in the restaurant business and many of the Chinese restaurants they owned or worked at were open seven days a week (Billy Hong and Lam Hong 2013, Chan Chau



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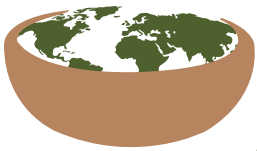
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Tam 2012). If early restaurant owners and employees visited other Chinese eating establishments, it was more likely for social reasons rather than the pursuit of culinary treats. Not surprising then, it was not until the 1970s when the group of Chinese professionals and students emerged, that Chinese restaurants in Newfoundland started to offer choices beyond the North Americanized selections. In order to accommodate the requests of customers for non-North American style Chinese food, the Kenmount Restaurant was the first in St John's to provide some alternatives. Wallace Hong recalls,

We didn't have too many traditional Chinese options in the menu and we only had Cantonese chow mein and some hot noodle soups, which were more Chinese than other dishes. In the noodle soup, we put some crab meat, vegetable and egg white for Chinese customers. We sold a lot of this kind of soup. Sometimes, customers could also order BBQ duck, but they had to order one or two days in advance. At that time, we had some students from Taiwan who often came to the restaurant to ask for traditional Chinese food. They didn't normally order from our menu because they said that the dishes in the menu were too Canadian. In those cases, we just followed their orders and cooked what they wanted (Wallace Hong 2013).

In recent years, the growing Chinese population, including new immigrants and students, the increased social interaction between Chinese and non-Chinese residents of the city, and the exposure of the general public to more international cuisines through various sources from travel to cookbooks and online information, has led to a demand for Chinese food beyond the North Americanized standards on restaurant menus. As Francis Tam observes, "Nowadays, Newfoundlander's knowledge of Asian culture has grown and many people know Asian foods. Hence, a variety of food is able to be eaten in Newfoundland. Certain restaurants in Newfoundland provide different dishes although it is still less variety than in bigger cities in the mainland [Canada]" (Francis Tam 2013). Westerners' visits to Chinese restaurants fall under the rubric of culinary tourism as defined by Lucy M. Long:

Culinary tourism is about food as a subject and medium, destination and vehicle, for tourism. It is about individuals exploring foods new to them as well as using food to explore new cultures and ways of being. It is about groups using food to 'sell' their histories and to construct marketable and publicly attractive identities, and it is about individuals satisfying curiosity. Finally, it is about the experiencing of food in a mode that is out of the ordinary, that steps outside the normal routine to notice difference and



Digest

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the power of food to represent and negotiate that difference (2003:20).

Motz continues, “Unlike tourists in the traditional sense, culinary tourists can explore the exotic without leaving their own neighborhood. Ethnic restaurants are one of an increasing number of arenas in which people can engage in touristic practices within their own culture and as part of their everyday life” (Motz 2003:53-54). According to these definitions, “culinary tourism” localizes ethnic tourism (Graburn 1983:25). When customers decide to dine in a restaurant outside of their own cultural group, they transform themselves into culinary tourists even if they live in the neighborhood.

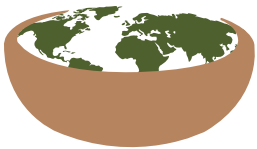
Some local Chinese restaurants have diversified beyond North American style Chinese food. Chan Chau Tam, the previous owner of the China House Restaurant in St. John’s, says proudly, “I was the first one who introduced Singapore-style vermicelli, hot and sour soup and some other Szechuan dishes to the customers in St. John’s” (Chan Chau Tam 2012). Francis Tam also comments,

My father went to Grand Falls to open up his own restaurant in around 1989. In this restaurant, the food was similar to what my grandfather’s restaurant had but my dad expended a little bit. He wanted to add some Cantonese or Szechuan dishes on his menu. He wanted to do those hot plate dishes like Mongolian beef and Sa Cha beef or chicken, and he also wanted to do Cantonese chow mein and Singapore noodles. At that time, they wanted to show locals that there were more in Chinese food than the normal Canadian Chinese version. They wanted to show the culture (Francis Tam 2013).

Several well-trained Chinese chefs were recruited to work in local restaurants, such as the Jade Garden Restaurant in St. John’s (May Soo 2013). New dishes in Szechuan and Cantonese styles such as Hong Kong shrimp balls, spicy Szechuan chicken and seafood in bird’s nest were introduced on the menus of local Chinese restaurants. Previously prepared only in the private sphere or embodied as memories in the minds of immigrants, they emerged into the public space of restaurants where they made a place for themselves on city menus beside the North American style Chinese food.

Negotiating Culinary Traditions: The Emergence of “Traditional Dishes”

Many of the younger Chinese cooks and new immigrants I spoke consider North American style Chinese food to be inauthentic. They feel that the popularity of dishes such as chop



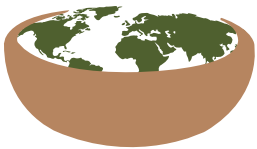
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a journal of foodways & culture

suey and sweet and sour chicken balls has contributed to a misconception of Chinese food and Chineseness among non-Chinese patrons. They are attempting to rebuild the image of Chinese culinary tradition in North America by promoting what they understand as “real” Chinese food, which is different from the North American style Chinese food and people’s home cooking. These dishes are advertised as “traditional” because some traditional names of dishes popular in China are adopted and some newly-imported sauces are used in the cooking. The previously mentioned local adaptations of Cantonese or Szechuan cooking styles are examples of this current movement. In some popular restaurants like the Magic Wok, these dishes are separately listed in the menu. Different sections exist for “North American style Chinese food” and “Traditional Chinese food.” The Magic Wok Eatery also offers customers traditional full course Cantonese style banquets for events such as weddings, graduations, birthdays and other special occasions.

Despite the general attitude of cooperation that exists among the Chinese restaurant operators in the province (many of whom are connected by kinship and/or region of birth), some operators and chefs argue that many of the so-called traditional dishes are not that traditional; they are different from how they are prepared in China. For example, Joseph Mo, a chef working at Magic Wok Eatery, reports, “I think some of those new so-called traditional Chinese dishes are still in North American style because there are remarkable differences from the food in China. These new dishes are still modified to cater to locals, although they might look more like the food in China than traditional North American Chinese food. Some of them even adopt the names of traditional Chinese dishes like Kung Pao chicken and Peking duck. However, they are still very non-Chinese in terms of ingredients, presentation and taste” (Joseph Mo 2013). In commenting on a local Chinese restaurant whose chefs introduced some Szechuan dishes to their menu, Mo says, “These chefs were not really trained how to do Szechuan dishes. How could they serve this type of dishes?” (Joseph Mo 2013). On the basis of my fieldwork, the majority of chefs (I would say more than ninety percent) employed at local Chinese restaurants are from Hong Kong or surrounding areas like Canton (Guangdong) or Macau in the Chinese southern coastal part, which is thousands of miles away from Szechuan and Beijing. In addition, many of them were trained as dim sum chefs or regular cooks rather than Peking duck artists. That is to say, in preparing these “traditional” dishes, chefs are claiming authority over a culinary tradition that is not their own.

This example raises the issue of “cultural appropriation” that “occurs across the boundaries of cultures” (Young 2008:5). James O. Young explains, “Members of one culture (I will call them outsiders) take for their own or for their own use, items produced by a



Digest

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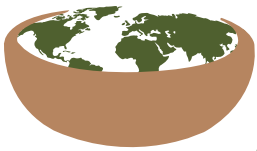
member or members of another culture (call them insiders)” (Young 2008:5). In the case of Peking Duck, Cantonese chefs appropriate the dish from a Northern culinary system and present it for commercial purposes. The appropriation itself, although it might not involve any tangible objects such as ingredients, tools and the like, does borrow the cultural knowledge and therefore falls into the rubric of “appropriation of traditional knowledge” (Bannister, Solomon and Brunk 2009). Michael Brown defines “the complexity and moral ambiguity of the kinds of borrowing and imitation” as “interculture play” (2003:251). Because of the lack of insider’s knowledge, culinary authenticity is brought into question.

Chien Ming Yeh, owner of the Formosa Tea House in St. John’s and an active Chinese cultural promoter, criticizes some of the local Chinese restaurateurs for misleading their customers. He does not see “traditional” Chinese food as any more authentic than North American Chinese food:

I feel that many Chinese restaurants do not intend to introduce our real culture to local people. The only goal of them would be making money instead of promoting our tradition. I think we have the responsibility to educate local people about our culture. In nowadays, things that we present to non-Chinese people, such as Chinese food or broadly speaking, Chinese traditional art, are only physical forms of our culture instead of the core of the tradition. In my understanding, the core of the culture is more spiritual. Confucius thoughts and other philosophical principles represent the core of Chineseness. In terms of cooking, I think we should follow our ‘real’ tradition to prepare meals for our customers. For example, we should show local people what the traditional Chinese fried rice supposes to be instead of ‘cheating’ or ‘misrepresenting.’ The process may be slow because the older generation has loaded many misleading ideas on the locals, but it is our turn to right the wrong (Chien Ming Yeh 2013).

Some Chinese chefs call for a more “authentic” presentation of Chinese foodways in Newfoundland. For example, Joseph Mo states,

One day, if I have my own restaurant, I won’t follow the traditional North American style Chinese food. Instead, I will pick up the cooking style in China to present my own idea of Chinese food and Chinese restaurant. I will decorate my restaurant in traditional Chinese designs to introduce Chinese culture to my customers. In addition, I will celebrate traditional Chinese festivals with my customers. Last but not least, chopsticks will be served on the table in my restaurant (Joseph Mo 2013).



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

Mo tells me that he plans to adopt a Cantonese style cooking in his restaurant in the future because he is trained as a Cantonese cook.

Restaurant owners like Chien Ming Yeh have already begun the quest for another kind of deeper “authenticity.” He says,

In my restaurant, as you can see, instead of western cutleries, I set chopsticks. I use all oriental dishes and my restaurant is all decorated with traditional Chinese paintings, calligraphies and Buddhism sculptures. The mission of my restaurant is not only doing business, but also introducing culture. I intend to promote our oriental cultures which have been existed for more than 5,000 years, I mean, the traditional Chinese culture and the native culture of Taiwan to local people, who may know little about it (Chien Ming Yeh 2013).

Yeh’s tea house has become a popular culinary destination in St. John’s for both Chinese and non-Chinese diners and he attributes his success to his insistence on presenting Taiwanese tastes. However, for chefs like Yeh, differences between Chinese food in China and in North America, especially in Newfoundland, are due to the same reasons as in the old days. Often changes can be attributed to factors such as a lack of ingredients. Chien Ming Yeh admits, “No, I can’t guarantee everything people get here is the same as what people can get in Taiwan because I have to replace some ingredients with local materials” (Chien Ming Yeh 2013). As Rennies So, owner of the Magic Wok, noted, nowadays many Chinese restaurants in the province still rely heavily on a bi-weekly delivery of goods shipped in from Toronto (Rennies So 2009).

Scholars Shun Lu and Gary Alan Fine criticize efforts to return to earlier foodways that in most cases represent an impossibility anyway. They argue that exact reproduction should not be the goal: “The maintenance of a food pattern does not depend on whether it is identical with an original model but on whether the ‘fundamental’ characteristics of the food are defined as being continuously present, connected to core cultural beliefs, and recognized as a differentiated food pattern” (Lu and Fine 1995, 539). Anne Kaplan, in the same vein, asserts that “It is sentimental fallacy that change is an enemy of tradition... people... constantly alter traditions to fit their lives; a static tradition is ... a dead one” (Kaplan 1986: 3). More importantly, authenticity always lies in “its perception in the public mind” (Shelton 1990).

In not recognizing North American Chinese food as real “Chinese,” the young chefs overlook the role these dishes played in preparing customers for the emergence of what



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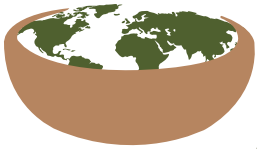
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they define as more “traditional Chinese food.” Dishes such as Peking Duck, Kung Pao Chicken and sweet and sour pork, that are shared by menus of Chinese restaurants in Newfoundland and those in larger Chinese centers, provide customers, particularly Chinese customers, with a foundation from which to discuss their perceptions of Chinese food. In the negotiation, they may be able to ask for the more “authentic” or “traditional” presentation. Based on my observation as a server at the Magic Wok Eatery, both Chinese customers and those non-Chinese customers who have been exposed to foodways in China are more apt to have specific requests for how they want their food to be prepared. For example, when they order Ma Po Tofu, they might ask for Chinese cabbage instead of mixed vegetables and to have Chinese pepper in the dish. The transformation of Chinese food also reflects the functions of Chinese restaurants as places that “assist the customer to relate and interpret what is presented to him and to appreciate the novelty in a different cuisine” (Rosenberg 1990), and places “in which customers can encounter the other, while not straying too far from their own tastes” (Lu and Fine 1995:348).

Conclusion

In St John’s, Chinese foodways are defined differently based on the participants’ knowledge and experiences. Similar to the concept of tradition as mutable and contingent (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1984), and often “understood as a process of cultural construction” (Glassie 2003:179), authenticity is also a “locally constructed folk idea” (Lu and Fine 1995: 538). In many cases, the judgment of whether a dish is authentically Chinese is based on neither its taste nor cooking style but on pre-existing concepts of authenticity and power. These concepts are constructed during interactions among members of different cultural groups who vie for the authority to define “authenticity.” Lily Cho contends: “As I have argued elsewhere, ‘Diasporic are not just there. They are not simply collections of people, communities of scattered individuals bound by some shared history, race or religion... Rather, they have a relation to power. They emerge in relation to power’” (2007:15). Chinese restaurants therefore become a forum where different groups discuss, negotiate, create, recreate and renegotiate what they believe to be authentic Chinese food. Authenticity thus becomes a technical strategy to separate “us” and “others,” and more thoughtfully, becomes a resource reserved for Chinese, who, through identifying authentic Chinese food, obtain the power to negotiate Chineseness. In fact, Shun Lu and Gary Alan Fine see that “neither type of restaurant, whether consumption-or connoisseur-oriented, has authenticity as its primary goal. Tradition as such is not the primary object of concern for social actors” (Lu and Fine 1995:547). Lily Cho’s analysis clearly reflects this idea:

What that Chineseness is, whether or not it is an accurate or authentic



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

reflection of Chinese culture, is not the point. It is the very openness to interpretation, the very fact that these restaurants do not offer a static and authorial claim to Chineseness, that renders them as such fine counterpublic spaces. They do not constitute a republic of difference, but rather a counterpublic of uncertain and constantly negotiated differences. In this sense, they do not resolve the problem of home and homelessness for diaspora. Instead, they offer a crucial mediating space through which that problem can be staged and navigated (2010:129).

Likewise, many people of Chinese descent understand the pursuit of authenticity in the restaurant business to be an impossible mission because, as Joseph Mo says,

It is impossible to judge a dishes cooked in one restaurant more authentic than the one cooked in another place. I understand authenticity in the way that somebody can cook exactly the same as the creator of this dish when it first came out. However, nobody can do it, even the master who teaches you. How can you say yours is authentic? What we can do is to do it traditionally. You are always learning and cooking in a tradition no matter what tradition is (Joseph Mo 2013).

Turgeon and Pastinelli write, “Food is mobile, multivocal, and polysemic,” that it is able to move “from one group to another,” express “different voices,” and “take on different meanings depending on the intention of the consumers” (Turgeon and Pastinelli 2002: 250). Chinese food in Newfoundland conveys what these authors describe as “a set of alternative values: tradition, continuity, authenticity, and pluralism” (2002: 256). Chinese food in this case is rooted in various Chinese culinary traditions, which are brought with and maintained by Chinese immigrants, and the larger Newfoundland context, which over time has evolved from a relatively closed, homogeneous population to a more open and multicultural society. Newfoundland’s Chinese culinary history provides an example of how people positioned in divergent culinary streams continuously negotiate their perceptions of the “authentic” Chinese food in light of these shifting cultural dynamics.



Digest

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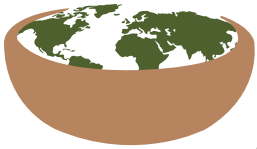
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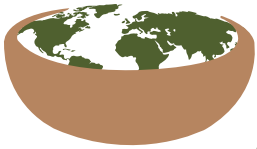
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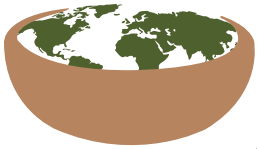
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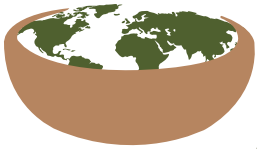
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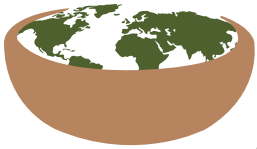
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Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

Notes

¹ In the Daily News on August 19th, 1895, his name was called Soo-oo-Hin. Margaret Walsh Cheng and Miriam Yu use “Wang Chang” in their article (Cheng 1978:3, Yu 1986:19), but John Kenneth Sparrow calls him “Sue Hoo Hing” in his report (Sparrow 2006: 6). They all indicate that this is the person who founded the first Chinese laundry with Fong Choy. The reason for this confusion is likely caused by the pronunciations of different Chinese dialects.

² According to this Act, every Chinese person, except members of the Diplomatic Corps, clergymen, tourists and some other favored categories, had to pay the tax to get entry into Newfoundland (*Evening Telegram* April 21, 1906). In addition, it also placed a limit of one Chinese passenger per every fifty tons weight per ship. In Canada, the Chinese Immigration Act was first introduced in 1906 and in 1923, similar to the law of the United States, a new version of Chinese Immigration Act was enacted to exclude all Chinese immigration. These discriminatory acts were removed after the World War II when Canada joined the United Nation (for more information, see Peter Li 1998 and Edgar Wickberg et al 1982). In 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized on behalf of Canadian Government for this historical mistake.

³ This treaty allowed American cargo ships to access to the five Chinese ports that were forced open to the British as a result of the first Opium War between China and the Great Britain in 1840.