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THE CHINESE BUFFET: A HYBRID DINING PRACTICE IN AMERICA

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## ABSTRACT

The Chinese buffet, a relatively new culinary form, has taken America by storm since the 1990s. This thesis explores the cultural phenomenon of the Chinese buffet in the United States. Although other culinary historians and scholars have studied the role of Chinese food in American life, they have tended to focus on the adaptation, variations, and democratization of Chinese food in America. The Chinese buffet remains understudied. To investigate the distinctiveness of the Chinese buffet in America, this thesis presents an ethnographic study of several Chinese buffets, located in Central Pennsylvania, from the perspectives of both producers and consumers. The thesis argues that the Chinese buffet represents a fusion of three old cultural myths that continue to have great relevance in the United States and China: the American myth of Cathay, the American myth of abundance, and the Chinese myth of the Gold Mountain. The findings suggest that the Chinese buffet, as a site of convergence for three cultural myths, expresses the American Dream for both the Chinese buffet restaurant owners and their patrons. On the one hand, Chinese buffet restaurant owners capitalize on the popularity of Chinese buffets while serving a plethora of Chinese and American food. On the other hand, Chinese buffets deliver instant gratification and a vision of good life to patrons through a virtually endless supply of delicious food as they immerse in the grandeur of the restaurants.

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## PREFACE

Growing up in Hong Kong, a gourmet-food paradise, I took Cantonese cuisine for granted. In fact, I did not even show a preference for Chinese cuisine until I immigrated to the United States in December 1996. I soon realized that I missed Chinese food more than ever. After trying out almost every Chinese restaurant in Philadelphia's Chinatown, I expanded my culinary footprint to Philadelphia's suburbs. It was at this moment of exploration that I stumbled upon the Old Town Buffet. Located in a strip mall approximately 12 miles east of Philadelphia's Chinatown, this "all-you-can-eat" Chinese buffet dazzled me with its food selection. For \$12.99, I could eat as much Alaskan snow crab legs and lobster with ginger and scallion as I liked. While some patrons enjoyed sushi, pan-fried dumplings, and cream puffs, others opted for crawfish, onion ring, or the seaweed salad. There was always something for everyone.

A visit to Old Town Buffet evoked fond memories of the international buffet I savored in Hong Kong. Embellished with stylish décor, buffet restaurants in Hong Kong are usually located in three to five-star hotels which offer stunning city or harbor views. Prepared by world-class chefs, these all-you-can-eat buffets feature Japanese, Indian, Thai, Italian, and American dishes along with various Chinese regional cuisines made with fine ingredients that present a feast for your eyes and stomach. Their prices typically range from HK\$200 (US\$25) to HK\$1,000 (USD\$130). Although I did not expect to ever find a Hong Kong style international buffet in the United States, I wondered about the origin and presentation of the Chinese buffet in America. My interest in this culinary form has prompted me to ask several questions. How exactly is a Chinese buffet Chinese? How American is it? How does it deploy and play with Chinese symbols and myths? Does it reflect any American symbols and myths at the same time? Why is

the Chinese buffet conspicuously absent in Chinatowns? How authentic is the Chinese food served in Chinese buffets? Does authenticity matter at all? These questions flashed across my mind as I beheld this amazing foodscape.

Other culinary historians and scholars have studied the role of Chinese food in American life. However, they have tended to focus on the adaptation, variation, and democratization of Chinese food in America. The Chinese buffet remains understudied, and I contend it is important to consider the popularization of Chinese culture within American society. This thesis will concentrate exclusively on the Chinese buffet, a relatively new culinary form that has taken America by storm. The central question of this thesis specifically concerns the distinctiveness of Chinese buffet in the United States and its implications for American culture in a global context.

I argue that the Chinese buffet represents a fusion of two national legacies, or what American Studies scholar Henry Nash Smith identifies as “myths” – Chinese and American.<sup>1</sup> When the Gold Rush of 1849 lured more than twenty thousand Chinese people from Canton (now Guangdong Province), China, to California to chase wealth, they referred to San Francisco as the “Gold Mountain” because they could get rich in America, the land of plenty. Although the Gold Fever is long gone, the Chinese myth that casts America as the Gold Mountain remains alive today as Chinese American restaurateurs see the Chinese buffet as the new Gold Mountain of the twenty-first century. Meanwhile, America’s historical attraction to a China of the imagination, known as Cathay, was created through the consumption of tea before the Civil War. This oriental wonderland was different from the real China. It was an exotic land of pagodas, willow trees, and idyllic scenery that Americans had enjoyed contemplating since the days of the

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<sup>1</sup> Henry N. Smith, *Virgin Land: The America West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), 123-260.

tea trade in the nineteenth century. In addition, early records of the American abundance identified by David Potter could be traced back to 1820 when author Washington Irving proclaimed America's natural and culinary abundance in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."<sup>2</sup> As a result of the industrial revolution, America had been transformed from an agricultural society to an industrial powerhouse throughout the nineteenth century. Consequently, mass production and modern advertising shaped the American consumer culture ever since.

I find that the Chinese buffet articulates the American Dream for both Chinese buffet owners and their patrons. On the one hand, owners capitalize on the popularity of Chinese buffets while serving a plethora of Chinese and American food in the restaurants' atria. On the other hand, Chinese buffets deliver instant gratification and a vision of good life to patrons through a virtually endless supply of delicious food as they immerse in the grandeur of the restaurants.

To learn more about this cultural phenomenon, I applied the tools and methods of ethnography to study the Chinese buffet from the perspectives of both owners and consumers. According to American Studies scholar Simon Bronner, ethnography is a research method to observe a cultural scene like the Chinese buffet and investigate participants' symbolic communication, such as speech and behavior.<sup>3</sup> I visited four Chinese buffet restaurants that served Chinese food in buffet style exclusively within a 30-mile radius of Penn State Harrisburg in Middletown, Pennsylvania. Located ten miles southeast of Harrisburg, Penn State Harrisburg has more than 5,000 students. I conducted interviews with two Chinese buffet restaurant owners

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<sup>2</sup> David M. Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954), 67.

<sup>3</sup> Simon J. Bronner, "Ethnography," in *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), <http://eas-ref.press.jhu.edu/view?aid=825> (accessed December 24, 2016).

about their business and collected data through surveys distributed to two hundred sixty-nine students at Penn State Harrisburg about their Chinese buffet experience. Each interview lasted for thirty minutes and each survey took five minutes to complete. I hypothesize that Chinese buffet combines the popularity of Chinese food with the abundance of America, thus producing a hybrid dining practice in America. Given the small sample size, I do not pretend to offer comprehensive and conclusive results. Rather, I view my results as suggestive of trends that may be shaping the consumption and production of Chinese food in buffets.

This essay is not the first to discuss Chinese food in the United States. In 1995, Shun Lu and Gary Fine offered their interpretation in “The Presentation of Ethnic Authenticity: Chinese Food as a Social Accomplishment,” an article that attempted to explain the manifestation of multiculturalism in Chinese restaurants. In their study, Lu and Fine argued that Chinese food in America was altered or Americanized for the better so that American patrons could encounter foreign and yet familiar food at the same time. They used the ethnographic research method to observe restaurant owners, chefs, and patrons at four Chinese restaurants in the college town of Athens, Georgia. Two of these restaurants served lunch buffet. While Chinese patrons compared the food at these restaurants to that in their homeland and found it inauthentic, American patrons did not even challenge the authenticity of the food at all.<sup>4</sup> Whereas Lu and Fine focus on the owners or chefs’ adaptation and creation of Chinese food to please Americans’ palates in Athens, I find that the owners or chefs’ strive to preserve a number of traditional dishes to retain and attract their Chinese and Chinese American patrons in Central Pennsylvania.

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<sup>4</sup> Shun Lu and Gary A. Fine, “The Presentation of Ethnic Authenticity: Chinese Food as a Social Accomplishment,” *Sociological Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1995): 539-540.

Just as Lu and Fine examined Chinese food in a small southern city, Constantine Vlisides, Wen-Mei Chiang, and William Pan delved into Chinese buffets in another college town: New Haven, Connecticut. In 2000, these authors described this cultural phenomenon in “Popularity Factors of ‘All-You-Can-Eat’ Chinese Buffet,” an article that aimed at identifying the factors that attract patrons to dine at Chinese buffet restaurants. From their marketing and management perspectives, the authors contended that Chinese buffet was a cultural entity that satisfied the demand of a multicultural America. They reiterated that Chinese buffets gained acceptance in America because most patrons are non-Asians. Their statistical analysis revealed that consumer behavior at Chinese buffet restaurants varied with consumers’ demographics, motivations, perceived value, and levels of satisfaction. In particular, the sanitation issue was a major concern among patrons.<sup>5</sup> While Vlisides et al. concentrate on various aspects that contribute to the success of food service operations in America, I focus on the fulfillment of the American Dream through the production and consumption of Chinese buffets.

With consumer behavior at Chinese buffet restaurants in the spotlight, Kelly Tian and Robert Tian went beyond college towns to Buffalo, New York. In 2011, these authors provided their insight into Chinese buffets in “Food Consumption and Cultural Awareness: An Anthropological Case Study of Consumer Behavior at a Chinese Restaurant,” an article that investigated the functions of ethnic restaurants in the United States. Taking an anthropological approach, Tian and Tian asserted that consumers chose to dine at ethnic restaurants for nourishment and cultural experience simultaneously. They demonstrated the correlation between consumption patterns, human interactions, and cultural awareness of consumers at a Chinese

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<sup>5</sup> Constantine E. Vlisides, Wen-Mei Chiang, and William Pan, “Popularity Factors of ‘All-You-Can-Eat’ Chinese Buffets,” *Foodservice Research International* 12, no. 1 (2000): 3, 5, 19.

buffet restaurant.<sup>6</sup> Whereas Tian and Tian emphasize consumer satisfaction and their knowledge of Chinese food culture through a business lens, I perform myths analysis that promotes cultural understanding of Chinese buffet in America.

The gastro-cultural discourse on the impact of Chinese food in the United States remains a hot topic. In 2015, Haiming Liu presented his viewpoints in *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express: A History of Chinese Food in the United States*, a book that explored the Chinese restaurant experience from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. In his research, Liu claimed that successive waves of Chinese immigrants played important roles in energizing Chinese food culture in America. From the operations of Canton Restaurant, the first Chinese restaurant in San Francisco, to Panda Express, the first fast-food chain that spread across the fifty states, the production and consumption of Chinese food in the United States according to Liu epitomized adaptive patterns of Chinese American history as developing from an ostracized to a model minority. The emergence of P.F. Chang's China Bistro, the first full-service restaurant chain in America co-founded by a European American and a Chinese American, further complicated the question of ethnic identity of Chinese Americans.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, Liu failed to mention Chinese buffets in his book. Given the influence of Chinese buffet in American society since the 1990s, I call for the inclusion of this dining practice in the Chinese restaurant experience in America.

Building upon these scholarly interests in Chinese American foodway, I address transnational American Studies with a focus on the cultural meaning of Chinese buffets.

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<sup>6</sup> Kelly Tian and Robert G. Tian, "Food Consumption and Cultural Awareness: An Anthropological Case Study of Consumer Behavior at a Chinese Restaurant," *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness* 5, no. 4 (2011): 53.

<sup>7</sup> Haiming Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express: A History of Chinese Food in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 1-6, 134 – 135.

Contrary to Vlisides et al.'s observation, I find that both Asians and non-Asians frequent and love Chinese buffet for a number of reasons. The study of consumer behavior alone cannot accurately reflect the cultural phenomenon of Chinese buffet. Therefore, this ethnographic research offers a balanced view by including both the owners and patrons of Chinese buffet restaurants.

Chapter One provides an overview of the history of Chinese food in America. From shark's fin soup and chop suey, to Peking Duck and General Tso's Chicken, I will explain how this ethnic cuisine has been adapted to suit the Americans' palates. Nowadays, Americans may enjoy Chinese food in fast-food or casual dining restaurants. However, Chinese buffets have gained popularity in the past twenty years. By tracing the origin of Chinese buffets in America, I will interpret how this relatively new cultural form is a true mixing of Chinese and American culture.

Chapter Two analyzes the consumer side of the Chinese buffet. I will investigate how the size, variety, and authenticity of Chinese buffets affect patrons' choices of restaurants. Instead of searching for authentic Chinese food at Chinese buffet, patrons satisfy their visual and gastronomic desires with massive arrays of Chinese and non-Chinese food there. After presenting and interpreting the results from the students' surveys, I find that Chinese buffets embody the two American myths – the myth of Cathay and the myth of abundance. Chinese buffets combine Americans' desires for an exotic image of China with an unlimited supply of food.

Chapter Three focuses on the producer side of the Chinese buffet. I will answer the questions of why and how immigrant Chinese buffet restaurant owners established Chinese buffets in America, as well as how they build their wealth through the Chinese buffet business.

In pursuit of prosperity in America with a positive work ethic, not only do Chinese buffet restaurant owners bring the Chinese Gold Mountain myth to life, but they also live the American Dream.

Our culinary adventure begins in 1849. Shortly after the gold miners set foot in California, Chinese merchants arrived at the port of San Francisco. The purpose of their Trans-Pacific voyage was not to dig gold. With an eye to earning their first bucket of gold and many more, they conducted trade with Chinese and non-Chinese clients on American soil.<sup>8</sup> While some of them engaged in retail or hospitality industry, others satisfied their customers with a taste of China in the restaurant business.

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<sup>8</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 11, 14.

## **Chapter 1**

### **The History of Chinese Food in America**

I still vividly remember my first day in America – and my first meal in June 1996. After a fourteen-hour flight from Hong Kong to Los Angeles, a tour bus transported our group from the airport to a hotel where we would settle down for the next few days. I could not wait to visit Disneyland, Universal Studio, Hollywood Sign, Chinese Theatre, Chinatown, and Beverly Hills. When I headed to the hotel restaurant for breakfast the next morning, I was disappointed when the server brought out congee, Chinese crullers, and pork floss for our group. Did I travel all the way from Hong Kong to eat Chinese food in America? I wanted an American breakfast given to a table of non-Chinese tourists. In fact, at that moment I experienced culture shock. As a visitor, I wished to immerse myself in American culture, including its food. Why would an American hotel serve Chinese food to a group of Chinese visitors to begin with? If the hotel wanted us to feel like home, then its mission failed. Perhaps I could find a better taste of home in Los Angeles' Chinatown if I desired.

Inevitably, Chinese food has been closely associated with Chinatowns and Chinese communities in the United States ever since Cantonese immigrants began crossing the Pacific Ocean in 1849. As America's first Chinatown, San Francisco's Chinatown has witnessed the evolution of Chinese food in America. From the establishment of the first Chinese restaurant to the invention of chop suey, and the sprouting of various Chinese regional cuisines across the

continent, San Francisco was the “cradle of America’s Chinese food.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Chinese food has been a popular dining option among Americans for generations. Journalist Matt Schiavenza proclaimed that “nearly everyone in America loves Chinese food.”<sup>2</sup> As of 2016, more than forty-five thousand Chinese restaurants flourish in the United States, surpassing the total number of McDonald’s, Burger King, and Wendy’s outlets combined.<sup>3</sup> Whether they provide dine-in, take-out, online order, delivery, à la carte, or buffet style, Chinese restaurants offer a variety of culinary experience to consumers in and out of Chinatowns.

This chapter offers an overview of the development of Chinese food in America. It begins with the emergence of Chinese restaurants in San Francisco during the Gold Rush of 1849. When more Chinese contract and free laborers came to America in the 1850s to the 1870s, the anti-Chinese sentiment escalated, resulting in the legislation of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 which curtailed the immigration of Chinese workers to the United States. I will describe how Chinese restaurants in major Chinese communities survived and thrived in the Chinese Exclusion Era. The hostility towards the Chinese Americans softened by the time China and the United States became allies during World War II (1939 – 1945). Although the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943, the national-origin quota system remained stringent until the Immigration and Nationality Act was passed in 1965 and enacted in 1968. Since then, the influx of Chinese immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and later China created a demand for

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<sup>1</sup> Yong, Chen, *Chop Suey, USA: The Story of Chinese Food in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 71.

<sup>2</sup> Matt Schiavenza, “China’s Culinary Diversity in One Map,” *The Atlantic*, July 26, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/07/chinas-culinary-diversity-in-one-map/278138/> (accessed January 7, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> “Chinese American Restaurant Association,” *Chinese American Restaurant Association*, <http://www.ca-ra.com/chinese-american-restaurant-association/> (accessed January 7, 2017); Haiming Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express: A History of Chinese Food in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 145.

Chinese regional cuisines, which altered the ways Americans consumed Chinese food at the same time. By the 1990s, Chinese buffets became a trend in the United States. At the turn of the new millennium, American entrepreneurs began to tap into the rapid growing Chinese restaurant business by promoting genuine Chinese food to domestic and international markets with an American twist.

### **Gold Rush Era, 1849 – 1852**

Before the Treaty of Nanjing (1842), Canton was the only port available for international maritime trade in China. Canton was a metropolitan area while San Francisco was a frontier fishing village with about a thousand people prior to the Gold Rush (Figure 1.1).<sup>4</sup> When the news of gold discovery reached Canton, Cantonese merchants saw a golden opportunity to generate wealth in San Francisco. One way to get rich was to open restaurants in the United States because restaurants did not exist in San Francisco before 1849.<sup>5</sup> As a matter of fact, restaurant dining was a relatively new concept in America because most people enjoyed home-cooked meals prepared by themselves, servants, or chefs.<sup>6</sup> Home chefs offered food at boardinghouses too.<sup>7</sup> When people traveled, the inns or taverns they checked in would provide set meals on a first-come first-served basis, but the food was not noticeably delicious. On the contrary, with a long history of culinary business in China, Cantonese entrepreneurs were knowledgeable about restaurant operations. Canton Restaurant, the first Chinese restaurant in

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<sup>4</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 14; Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 73.

<sup>5</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 74.

<sup>7</sup> Wendy Gamber, *The Boardinghouse in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 8.



served great Chinese food amid Chinese ambiance and hospitality. He was surprised that the Chinese bartender and waiters were fluent in English. As Asian American Studies scholar Haiming Liu pointed out, these early Chinese immigrants could speak some English because they had interacted with British and American merchants and missionaries in Canton, and they picked up more English as they worked in America.<sup>12</sup> In a letter written by Charles Plummer, a gold miner or forty-niner, to his father in 1851, he commented that the Chinese were “very good citizens” who helped building California as the best place to live in.<sup>13</sup> However, Plummer did not realize that Chinese could not become American citizens at that time because according to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1790, only free, white men could become naturalized citizens.<sup>14</sup>

Chinese food excited Americans’ palates upon their arrival. Ryan discovered “very palatable chow-chow, curry, and tarts” without further explaining what exactly the dishes were made with.<sup>15</sup> A forty-niner William Shaw enjoyed the “curries, hashes, and fricassees served up in small dishes” which he did not bother to find out their ingredients because they were “exceedingly palatable.”<sup>16</sup> Other forty-niners ordered “Hangtown fry,” a precursor of egg foo yung, and considered it as “a cheaper alternative to American meals.”<sup>17</sup> They also found that

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<sup>12</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 11, 21, 23, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Peter J. Blodgett, *Land of Golden Dreams: California in the Gold Rush Decades, 1848-1858* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1999), 73, qtd. in Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 22; Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco: 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 45.

<sup>15</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> William Shaw, *Golden Dreams and Waking Realities: Being the Adventures of a Gold-Seeker in California and the Pacific Islands* (London: Smooth, Elder, 1851), 39-40, qtd. in Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 103, qtd. in Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 22.

Chinese food were more pleasing than American food.<sup>18</sup> Liu noted that Chinese and American patrons ordered from the same menu, and Chinese chefs prepared these authentic Cantonese dishes in America the same way they would have cooked in Canton without any intention of altering the cooking method or ingredients to satisfy their American patrons. During this period, delicacies like bird's nest, sea cucumbers, and Chinese mushroom appeared on the menus as well. Besides Chinese food, some restaurants offered mutton chops and grilled steaks, along with tea or coffee. While some chefs knew how to cook Western food from their previous experience in Canton, others learned the skills as they understood more about the Western diet.<sup>19</sup> As eateries in mining towns offered "all you can eat" meals to forty-niners at a fixed price, some Chinese restaurants followed suit.<sup>20</sup>

### **Post-Gold Rush Era and Anti-Chinese Movement, 1852 – 1881**

California remained the epicenter of gold mining in the 1850s. Although most of the surface gold or easily accessible gold had been extracted by 1850, miners around the world still flocked to California.<sup>21</sup> While the output of gold reached its peak in 1852, Gold Rush immigrants hit an all-time high the same year.<sup>22</sup> Among the 67,000 immigrants in California, 30% of them originated from China. As gold mining became more competitive, American

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<sup>18</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 22-24.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph R. Conlin, *Bacon Beans, and Galantines: Food and Foodways on the Western Mining Frontier* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1987), 192.

<sup>21</sup> "The Gold Rush of 1849," History.com, 2010, <http://www.history.com/topics/gold-rush-of-1849> (accessed January 7, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> "The Gold Rush of 1849"; *From Gold Rush to Golden State in California as I Saw It: First-Person Narratives of California's Early Years, 1849-1900*, October 19, 1998, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/california-first-person-narratives/articles-and-essays/early-california-history/from-gold-rush-to-golden-state/> (accessed January 7, 2017).

miners became more intolerant towards Chinese miners.<sup>23</sup> For example, the Foreign Miners Tax of 1850 and 1852 drove a number of Chinese immigrants away from mining to other businesses that would not have a direct conflict with the American economy, such as laundries, groceries, restaurants, factories, and farming. After the Gold Rush, Chinese laborers and European Americans from the East Coast participated in the construction of Transcontinental Railroad in the 1860s. Once again, anti-Chinese tension intensified among European Americans. In 1877, when labor leader Denis Kearney ran for the president of Workingmen's Party in California, his racially charged campaign message stated that "the Chinese laborer is a curse to our land, is degrading our morals, is a menace to our liberties, and should be restricted and forever abolished, and the Chinese must go."<sup>24</sup> Instead of recognizing the Chinese people's contributions to American society, European Americans mocked, robbed, abused, and even killed the Chinese in a series of anti-Chinese violence in the hope of driving them out of the country.<sup>25</sup> Rather than surviving in a hostile environment, many Chinese headed to the East Coast, Canada, Mexico, or went home to China for good.<sup>26</sup>

Nonetheless, this period saw the spread of Chinese communities and the formation of Chinatowns outside San Francisco. As Chinese merchants or laborers pursued opportunities elsewhere, Chinese eateries followed them. The next Chinatowns were founded in Oakland, Marysville, and Sacramento, California in the 1850s, followed by Portland, Oregon, and St.

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<sup>23</sup> "From Gold Rush to Golden State."

<sup>24</sup> Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 105, qtd. in Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 45.

<sup>25</sup> "Lesson Fifteen: Industrialization, Class, and Race: Chinese and the Anti-Chinese Movement in the Late 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Northwest," Washington.edu, <http://www.washington.edu/uwired/outreach/cspn/Website/Classroom%20Materials/Pacific%20Northwest%20History/Lessons/Lesson%2015/15.html> (accessed January 7, 2017); Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 143.

Louis, Missouri, in the 1860s. A lot of Chinese immigrants settled in Los Angeles, Tacoma, and Seattle in the 1860s too. However, their Chinatowns had been displaced by various construction projects or race riots in the 1870s and 1880s. The Transcontinental Railroad transported the Chinese further east. In the 1870s, Chinatowns began to take shape in Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., New York, and Boston.<sup>27</sup>

As Americans began to explore San Francisco's Chinatown, they developed different preferences towards Chinese food. While some of them found joy in inexpensive cafés operated by the Chinese that served American food like steak, pork, eggs, and beans, others ventured for Chinese banquets which challenged their taste buds with sumptuous delicacies like shark's fin soup, preserved duck eggs, fish maws, and small, steamed dishes in bamboo steamers called *dim sum*.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, the perceptions of the Chinese, Chinese food, and Chinatown changed as anti-Chinese agitation heated up. Unlike Ryan, Shaw, and other forty-niners who praised Chinese food as the best food ever, the aroma of Chinese food triggered unpleasant feelings to some Americans. In the 1850s, journalist Charles Stoddard noted that "strange odors of the East" permeated San Francisco's Chinatown while another journalist John Borthwick reported that "a peculiarly nasty smell pervaded this locality."<sup>29</sup> To make the situation worse, rumor of the Chinese rat eating habit ran rampant across America. Even Mark Twain refrained from eating Chinese sausages at a Chinese restaurant in Virginia City, Nevada because he doubted if they were made with the corpse of a mouse.<sup>30</sup> Although some tourists from the East Coast enjoyed sightseeing, eating, and shopping in San Francisco's Chinatown in the 1860s to the

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<sup>27</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 77-81, 89-91, 95.

<sup>28</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 124-126.

<sup>29</sup> John D. Borthwick, *Three Years in California* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1857), 75, qtd. in Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 38-39.

1870s, others were appalled at its gambling facilities, brothels, and opium dens.<sup>31</sup> Considering the Chinese people undesirable, unclean, or threatening, some Americans felt that the consumption of Chinese food was socially and politically inappropriate.<sup>32</sup>

### **Chinese Exclusion Era, 1882 – 1943**

Waves of anti-Chinese movement culminated in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Under this immigration law, Chinese immigrants could not become naturalized citizens of the United States, and only Chinese scholars, diplomats, and merchants were permitted to enter the United States while shunning Chinese laborers for the next ten years. In 1892, the United States Congress renewed the exclusion for another ten years in the Geary Act and extended the Chinese Exclusion Act indefinitely in 1904 until it was repealed in 1943.<sup>33</sup> The enactment of Chinese Exclusion Act did not tone down American's tension towards the Chinese right away. Notably, American miners perpetrated a massacre and killed fifty-one Chinese miners in Rock Springs, Wyoming in 1885.<sup>34</sup> The next year, a mob expelled two hundred Chinese laborers out of Seattle, Washington, in a race riot.<sup>35</sup> In 1887, a gang assaulted and mutilated at least thirty Chinese miners in Hells Canyon Gorge, Oregon. The anti-Chinese movement in the 1880s wiped out about two hundred Chinatowns and rural Chinese communities across the Pacific Northwest.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*, 85; Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 96.

<sup>32</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 128.

<sup>33</sup> "Chinese Immigration and the Chinese Exclusion Acts," United States Department of States, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/chinese-immigration> (accessed January 7, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 95.

<sup>35</sup> "Anti-Chinese Riot at Seattle," *Harper's Weekly*, March 6, 1886, <http://immigrants.harperweek.com/ChineseAmericans/Items/Item095L.htm> (accessed January 7, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 95.

Although sporadic attacks erupted, the hostility towards the Chinese gradually diminished around the turn of the twentieth century. To most Chinese, Chinatowns in major American cities became their hubs where they worked, lived, and ate. In particular, Chinese restaurants served as social venues.<sup>37</sup> In 1899, a *Washington Post* reporter referred to a recently opened Chinese restaurant in Washington, D.C. as “the resort and meeting place” for the Chinese to enjoy Cantonese food, chat in Cantonese, and play games like cards and dominoes.<sup>38</sup> To middle-class Americans, Chinatowns became their exotic travel destinations now that the Chinese had been repressed and seemed less frightening. They joined escorted Chinatown tours to visit Chinese temples, fake opium dens, theaters, souvenir shops, and Chinese restaurants. However, as historian Yong Chen explained, middle-class Americans did not patronize Chinese restaurants all the time. Since the 1890s, marginalized European Americans, working class Americans, and African Americans often dined at Chinese restaurants because Chinese food was affordable, and savory, yet convenient and exotic. Chinese food also appealed to Jewish Americans since much of Chinese food was vegetarian and did not mix dairy and meat so it could be eaten out in Kosher diets. Besides providing gathering places to these socially and racially discriminated groups, Chinese restaurants democratized social dining experience across the United States by making restaurant dining an option accessible to every American.<sup>39</sup>

The Chinese Exclusion Era brought about a major change to the Chinese restaurant menus. As Yong Chen mentioned, a majority of Americans did not show a preference for Chinese fine dining or fancy food items since the Chinese and the Americans possessed different concepts about food. Whereas the Chinese emphasized methods of preparation and nutritional

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<sup>37</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 89-91.

<sup>38</sup> “Like Oriental Cuisine,” *Washington Post*, November 30, 1902, 28, qtd. in Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 90.

<sup>39</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 96, 99, 103-104.

values of food, Americans cared for quantity and nourishment. Among bird's nest, shark's fin, chow mein, and a variety of food choices in Chinese restaurant, "chop suey" won Americans' hearts. Literally meaning "mixed pieces," chop suey comprises two Cantonese words which refer to a stir-fried dish of different ingredients. As early as 1886, journalist Allan Forman tried chop suey in New York's Chinatown for the first time and loved it.<sup>40</sup> He described chop suey as "a toothsome stew, composed of bean sprouts, chicken's gizzards and livers, calfe's [*sic*] tripe, dragon fish, dried and imported from China, pork, chicken, and various other ingredients which I was unable to make out."<sup>41</sup> Two years later, a Chinese American journalist Wong Chin Foo observed that chop suey was "a mixture of chicken's liver and gizzards, fungi, bamboo buds, pig's tripe, and bean sprouts stewed with spices. The gravy of this is poured into the bowl of rice with some [sauce], making a delicious seasoning to the favorite grain."<sup>42</sup> Later versions of chop suey added celery and onion while replacing animal organs with meat. Without a standard recipe, chop suey was prepared at the chefs' discretion, making it even more appealing as an exotic food choice.<sup>43</sup> Some Americans even made chop suey at home with canned chop suey or chop suey ingredients.<sup>44</sup> Whether chop suey satisfied American's curiosity, provided inexpensive hot lunch for American workers, or symbolized freedom for divorced women, this trendy meal spread from New York to Hawaii as chop suey houses proliferated across America

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<sup>40</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 158-160.

<sup>41</sup> Allan Forman, "New York's China-Town," *Washington Post*, July 25, 1886, 5, qtd. in Coe, *Chop Suey*, 158.

<sup>42</sup> Chin Foo Wong, "The Chinese in New York," *Cosmopolitan* 5 (March-October 1888): 297-311, qtd. in Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 50.

<sup>43</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 53, 57.

<sup>44</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 140.

in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>45</sup> Chop suey even made its way to coffee shops, soda fountains, nightclubs, as well as school, military, and church cafeterias.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to chop suey, fortune cookies rose to its prominence in the early twentieth century. While chop suey is a Chinese American invention, the fortune cookie, a crescent-shaped cracker with a short message printed on a slip of paper, is a Japanese American creation.<sup>47</sup> Why do Americans tend to associate it with the Chinese? Sometime before World War I (1914 – 1918), Japanese immigrant Makoto Hagiwara operated the Japanese Tea Garden at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco and entertained tourists with tea and *senbei*, a traditional Japanese rice cracker which comes in different flavors, textures, shapes, and sizes.<sup>48</sup> Inspired by *senbei*, Hagiwara created the first fortune cookie and later outsourced its production to Benkyodo, a confectionery store owned by Suyeichi Okamura, who also claimed that he made the first fortune cookie.<sup>49</sup> Since the 1920s, Chinese restaurateurs purchased fortune cookies from Japanese or Chinese fortune cookie makers and they started to appear in California's Chinese restaurants.<sup>50</sup> While military servicemen were on leave from or in transit to the Pacific theater during World War II, they enjoyed anything between chop suey and chow mein, as well as fortune cookies in San Francisco.<sup>51</sup> When they went back home after the War, they missed San

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<sup>45</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 169-174, 209; Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 140.

<sup>46</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 192.

<sup>47</sup> Jennifer 8. Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures in the World of Chinese Food* (New York: Twelve, 2008), 45; Cedric S. Yeh and Noriko Sanefuji, "Origins of a Fortune Cookie," Smithsonian National Museum of American History Blog, July 8, 2010, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/2010/07/origins-of-a-fortune-cookie.html> (accessed January 7, 2017).

<sup>48</sup> Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*, 47; Seiichi Nagao, "Japanese Snack Food," in *Snack Foods Processing*, ed. Edmund W. Lucas and Lloyd W. Rooney (Boca Raton, Florida: CRC Press, 2002), 457-458.

<sup>49</sup> Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*, 46-47; "Origins of a Fortune Cookie."

<sup>50</sup> Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*, 41.

<sup>51</sup> Steven A. Shaw, *Asian Dining Rules: Essential Strategies for Eating Out at Japanese, Chinese, Southeast Asian, Korean, and Indian Restaurants* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 80; Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*, 41.

Francisco's "authentic" Chinese fortune cookies so much that Chinese-run fortune cookies factories popped up across America to meet this demand.<sup>52</sup>

The 1906 San Francisco earthquake reduced America's first Chinatown and the surrounding neighborhoods to rubble.<sup>53</sup> Soon after Chinatown was rebuilt, businesses rebounded. The Chinese and the Americans thronged Chinese eateries once again, especially chop suey houses. The introduction of nickel-operated mechanical pianos to chop suey houses in the 1910s inspired the development of nightclub style Chinese restaurants in New York and later San Francisco from the mid-1910s through the early 1960s.<sup>54</sup> One of the most famous nightclubs was Forbidden City in San Francisco.<sup>55</sup> Targeting Chinese and American patrons, these nightclub-restaurants offered American food along with dance and music entertainment featuring Chinese performers.<sup>56</sup> Beyond chop suey houses and nightclubs, some Chinese restaurants capitalized on the duality of serving both Chinese and American food in their facilities around 1920s, as seen in "The Nankin American and Chinese Restaurant" in Philadelphia and the Oriental Café in Baltimore which highlighted "Chinese-American cuisine" and "Chinese cuisine" on the menu.<sup>57</sup>

### **Post-World War II Era, 1945 – 1968**

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the G.I Bill of Rights, helped millions of veterans transition to civilian life after World War II. With improved

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<sup>52</sup> Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*, 41.

<sup>53</sup> Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*, 162.

<sup>54</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 175, 188-190.

<sup>55</sup> Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*, 197.

<sup>56</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 188-190; Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*, 197.

<sup>57</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 135, 138.

financial security and better occupational outlook, the post-war years brought about economic prosperity and a baby boom in America which set off an exodus to the suburbs.<sup>58</sup> Chinese restaurants competed with pizza parlors and fast food stores to become part of the suburban landscape. They promoted generous portions of Chinese food at an affordable price with appeals such as the “family dinner,” a multicourse meal that allowed patrons to pick their own combination of soup, rice, noodles, egg roll, or egg foo young. In the meantime, Chinese restaurateurs sought to revitalize their stagnant businesses in Chinatowns. For example, The Peking Restaurant in Washington, D.C. introduced “Peking Style Native Foods” such as Moo Shu Pork and Peking Duck to its patrons. In San Francisco, Johnny Kan brought upscale Chinese banquet restaurants back to life to attract culinary tourists. Many Chinese restaurants in major cities replaced their decades-old decorations with modern décor to improve the ambiance. Some of them even created new menus for their patrons to enjoy.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, the golden age of chop suey was over by the late 1950s.<sup>60</sup>

Americans’ love of Chinese food was not limited to gastronomical consumption. Chinese cookbooks began to emerge in the post-war era. Although the first Chinese cookbooks appeared in the 1910s, they were written for Americans in response to the rising popularity of Chinese restaurants by American authors. Chinese American authors, mostly female, chimed in and tailored their Chinese cookbooks towards mainstream readers since the 1940s. However, they had different motivations. Not only did the Chinese American authors educate readers about the culinary history of China and the regional variations of Chinese cuisines, but they also

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<sup>58</sup> The Post War America, 1945-1968 in American Memory Timeline, <http://loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/postwar/> (accessed January 7, 2017); Coe, *Chop Suey*, 211.

<sup>59</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 211, 215, 219-220.

<sup>60</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 164.

preserved and celebrated family traditions through genuine Chinese cooking. In particular, given the persistence of racial discrimination in America and gender prejudice in Chinese communities, cookbooks provided a platform for Chinese American women to express themselves while launching a channel of communication for Chinese American authors to interact with their American audience.<sup>61</sup>

A suburban home would not be complete without a television in the 1950s to 1960s. Along with sitcoms, game shows, news, and advertisements, viewers enjoyed cooking programs too. Three years after American chef Julia Child debuted in *The French Chef* on Public Broadcasting Services (PBS) in 1963, Beijing-born restaurateur and chef Joyce Chen brought Chinese home cooking to live in *Joyce Chen Cooks*, the first Chinese American television cooking program.<sup>62</sup> As Chef Chen demonstrated how Chinese food was prepared before the viewers' eyes, she also popularized authentic Chinese food such as Peking Duck, Moo Shu Pork, Scallion Pancake, Hot and Sour Soup, and Peking Ravioli, a term she coined for potstickers.<sup>63</sup> At Joyce Chen Restaurant in Cambridge, Massachusetts, patrons could order their food from a menu. Since the late 1950s, Chef Chen encouraged them to try authentic Chinese food alongside American food like salad and roast turkey in a buffet style, creating a prototype for Chinese buffet.<sup>64</sup> In general, cookbooks and televised cooking programs offered an opportunity for Americans to learn more about Chinese cuisine. While some would be eager to cook Chinese food at home, others would head out to Chinese restaurants for the sake of convenience.

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<sup>61</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 161-172.

<sup>62</sup> Tasha Oren, "The Blood Sport of Cooking: On Asian American Chefs and Television," in *Global Asian American Popular Cultures*, ed. Shilpa Davé, Leilani Nishime, and Tasha Oren (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 250.

<sup>63</sup> Oren, 250; Stephen Chen, "Savoring the Legacy of Joyce Chen," Joyce Chen Foods, <http://joycechenfoods.com/about/legacy> (accessed January 7, 2017).

<sup>64</sup> Niu Yue, "Carrying on a Chinese Food Legacy," *China Daily USA*, April 2, 2015, [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-04/02/content\\_19985670.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-04/02/content_19985670.htm) (accessed January 7, 2017).

A demographic shift would soon shake up the restaurant scenes in Chinatowns and the Chinese communities. Three years after the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act of 1943, wives of Chinese citizens finally reunited with their husbands in the United States.<sup>65</sup> When the War Brides Act of 1945 was extended to Chinese American servicemen in 1947, about six thousand Chinese brides moved to America with their newlywed grooms.<sup>66</sup> However, the most significant wave of Chinese immigrants did not kick in until the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965. With separate quota, the number of Chinese immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong rose from 105 to 20,000 annually. The quota did not apply to China until the United States and China established diplomatic relations in 1979. Consisting mostly of students, technicians, scientists, and scholars, these post-1965 Chinese immigrants represented diverse social and cultural backgrounds. While some of them could find jobs in their respective fields, a number of them resorted to working in Chinese restaurants temporarily or permanently due to the lack of English proficiency, an American college diploma, or a professional license. Incidentally, since subsequent generations of American-born Chinese began to acquire technical or professional jobs in the mainstream society, they did not wish to work in family-owned businesses in Chinatowns, including Chinese restaurants. Whereas American-born Chinese left Chinatowns for suburbs to assert their American identities, new Chinese immigrants filled their spots and injected diversity in Chinatowns while acculturating to their new country.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 217.

<sup>66</sup> Philip E. Wolgin and Irene Bloemraad, "Our Gratitude to Our Soldiers: Military Spouses, Family Re-Unification, and Postwar Immigration Reform," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, no. 1 (2010): 29; Coe, *Chop Suey*, 117.

<sup>67</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 90, 109-111.

## Asian-American Movement, 1968 – 1979

Despite the socio-economic growth in the United States, civil unrest lurked behind. A century after United States President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation to outlaw slavery in 1863, African Americans still struggled with racial inequality in the post-war era. Since the 1890s, state-sponsored segregation and disenfranchisement, also known as Jim Crow laws, separated African Americans and European Americans in almost every facet of life, from housing to entertainment, and education to transportation.<sup>68</sup> Although African Americans had been challenging the status quo over the years, the Civil Rights Movement did not take flight until the 1950s through the 1960s.<sup>69</sup> Fueled by the Civil Rights Movement and protests against the Vietnam War (1955 – 1975), middle-class college students from different Asian groups in America banded together to call for racial, social, economic, and political equality in the Asian American Movement which began in 1968. With the goal of developing a pan-Asian identity and Asian American Studies programs in higher education institutions, Asian Americans also operated non-profit organizations which delivered human services to ethnic communities and reinforced ethnic-consciousness within each Asian group.<sup>70</sup>

The Asian American Movement coincided with the influx of post-1965 Chinese immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong. In terms of culinary heritage, these Chinese Americans proudly displayed their Asian Americanness through regional cooking styles. In the early 1970s, the United States entered “a Chinese culinary renaissance” when Chinese regional

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<sup>68</sup> Brian Black, “Jim Crow,” in *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), <http://eas-ref.press.jhu.edu/view?aid=363> (accessed January 7, 2017).

<sup>69</sup> Peter Wallenstein, “Civil Rights and the Civil Rights Movement: An Overview,” in *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), <http://eas-ref.press.jhu.edu/view?aid=355> (accessed January 7, 2017).

<sup>70</sup> William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 1, 10, 42.

cuisines and restaurants flourished in major American cities.<sup>71</sup> Meanwhile, when United States President Richard Nixon visited China to normalize Sino-American diplomatic relations in 1972, he also opened the door to authentic Chinese food. After the Americans had watched how Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai entertained President Nixon with a Chinese banquet in Beijing, many Americans headed out to Chinese restaurants to taste Peking Duck while some Chinese restaurateurs from New York to Chicago served the nine-course banquet similar to the one that President Nixon consumed in China.<sup>72</sup>

The post-1965 immigrants, especially those from Taiwan, gave a face-lift to Chinese restaurants in America in the following decades. Unlike immigrants from Hong Kong who were generally Cantonese, most Taiwanese immigrants moved to Taiwan from various provinces in China over different periods. Initially settled by the indigenous people of Taiwan, the Fujianese from Fujian Province migrated to Taiwan during the sixteenth century, followed by the Hakka people in Guangdong Province.<sup>73</sup> When Mao Zedong's Communist Party took over China in 1949, members of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party fled to Taiwan with their families and became the majority of the population. Originated from different regions across China, such as Sichuan, Hunan, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Shandong, these Taiwanese migrants from China brought along their culinary traditions with them to Taiwan and then the United States.<sup>74</sup>

When Chinese regional cuisines were transplanted to Taiwan, they might be subject to change. The taste and appearance of the same regional dish prepared in Taiwan and China might

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<sup>71</sup> Shaw, *Asian Dining Rules*, 83.

<sup>72</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 103.

<sup>73</sup> Fujianese referred to the Chinese people from Fujian Province located on the southeastern coast of China. Hakka people referred to Chinese migrants from northern provinces who settled in Guangdong and surrounding provinces.

<sup>74</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 69, 87, 90-92.

differ due to variations in cooking methods and available ingredients.<sup>75</sup> Sometimes, the Taiwanese invented entirely new Chinese dishes that were unknown in China. For instance, in honor of military leader Tso Tsung-tang (or Zuo Zongtang in Mandarin) in Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911), a Nationalist chef Peng Chang-gui from Hunan created General Tso’s chicken in Taiwan around the 1950s.<sup>76</sup> According to Peng’s recipe, chickens are cut into small chunks first, and then lightly covered with starch. After deep-frying several pieces of chicken at a time, they are stir-fried with soy sauce and pepper. Serving General Tso’s chicken and other Hunan dishes at Peng Garden, his first restaurant in Taiwan, Peng popularized Hunan cuisine since the 1950s.<sup>77</sup> Despite his initial failure, he operated several Hunan restaurants in New York City from the 1970s to 1980s.<sup>78</sup> Modeling after his success, more and more Hunan restaurants appeared in the United States.<sup>79</sup> However, Chef Peng credited the popularity of Hunan cuisine to Henry Kissinger, former United States Secretary of States, whose visits to Peng’s restaurant in New York put a spotlight on Hunanese food.<sup>80</sup>

### **The Growth of Chinese Population and Chinese Restaurants, 1980 – Present**

In response to skyrocketing real estate prices and surging population in Chinatowns, the Chinese started to congregate in communities outside Chinatowns in the 1980s.<sup>81</sup> In New York,

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<sup>75</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 100-101.

<sup>76</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 99-101; Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*, 82.

<sup>77</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 99.

<sup>78</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 103; Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*, 79.

<sup>79</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 99-104.

<sup>80</sup> William Grimes, “Peng Chang-kuei, Chef Behind General Tso’s Chicken, Dies at 98,” *New York Times*, December 2, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/02/world/asia/general-tso-chicken-pang-kuei.html?smid=pl-share> (accessed January 7, 2017).

<sup>81</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 111.

the Chinese departed Manhattan for Flushing, Queens and Sunset Park, Brooklyn.<sup>82</sup> In Los Angeles, they expanded their presence in the San Gabriel Valley area like Monterey Park, Rosemead, and Alhambra.<sup>83</sup> As a result, Chinese restaurants with distinct regional flavors blossomed in these suburban communities.<sup>84</sup> Surprisingly, fine Cantonese cuisine made a comeback in America's Chinatowns in the 1990s.<sup>85</sup> Overshadowed by the uncertainty of Hong Kong's future when its sovereignty would be transferred from the United Kingdom to China in 1997, many Hongkongers immigrated to the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore from the 1980s to 1990s. Upon gaining citizenships in these countries, some Hongkongers settled down while a number of them returned to Hong Kong for social, economic, or cultural reasons.

Another significant group of Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States from Fuzhou in Fujian Province, China since the 1980s. From the 1940s to 1970s, there were about a few hundred Fuzhounese living in New York.<sup>86</sup> When Communist leader Deng Xiaoping implemented an economic reform in the late 1970s, China welcomed foreign investments and technology in designated Special Economic Zones and Coastal Development Areas.<sup>87</sup> While many Chinese people from different regions moved to Fuzhou, one of the Coastal Development Areas, for a better economic prospect, a lot of Fuzhounese emigrated out of the area, both legally

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<sup>82</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 244.

<sup>83</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 117.

<sup>84</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 244.

<sup>85</sup> Shaw, *Asian Dining Rules*, 83.

<sup>86</sup> Fuzhounese refers to the Chinese people from Fuzhou, the capital of Fujian Province; Kenneth J. Guest, "From Mott Street to East Broadway: Fuzhounese Immigrants and the Revitalization of New York's Chinatown," in *Chinatowns Around the World: Gilded Ghetto, Ethnopolis, and Cultural Diaspora*, ed. Bernard P. Wong and Chee-Bang Tan (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 42.

<sup>87</sup> Guest, "From Mott Street to East Broadway," 42; Coe, *Chop Suey*, 246.

and illegally, to earn even more money in the United States, Europe, Australia, and Japan.<sup>88</sup> In particular, they found the United States especially attractive because Chinese restaurant workers, from busboys to chefs, were in high demand.<sup>89</sup> Although these Fuzhounese immigrants did not speak English, they could find many low-skilled jobs through newspaper advertisement or Fuzhounese employment agencies along East Broadway in Manhattan's Chinatown. They also utilized a seamless transportation system that was set up by Fuzhounese entrepreneurs to shuttle them from New York to any Chinese restaurants or businesses along the Eastern seaboard, the Midwest, and the Southeast.<sup>90</sup> Eventually, the Fuzhounese spread to the West Coast for more opportunities.<sup>91</sup>

Once they have amassed enough money, many Fuzhounese wanted to run their own Chinese restaurants. While some of them hired builders and architects to construct brand new restaurants, others purchased existing Cantonese restaurants and turned them into all-you-can-eat buffets or take-out restaurants. Journalist Jennifer Lee noticed that in the Midwest and the South, Chinese buffet was “an economic product of the shifts of capital and labor skills.” With all the food labeled and presented in the restaurants' atria, waiters or waitresses only needed to ask patrons for the kind of beverages they liked, collect used tableware, clean up tables and floors, and give them the bills. In other words, instead of allocating money to English-speaking restaurant workers, it was directed towards the purchase and production of more food for patrons.<sup>92</sup> However, it was unclear when and how exactly Chinese buffet restaurants were established. To the best of magazine editor Betty Xie's knowledge, the first Chinese buffets

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<sup>88</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 246; Guest, “From Mott Street to East Broadway,” 42-44.

<sup>89</sup> Coe, *Chop Suey*, 44.

<sup>90</sup> Guest, “From Mott Street to East Broadway,” 45-46.

<sup>91</sup> Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*, 186.

<sup>92</sup> Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*, 188.

traced their origins in Canada. New York soon followed the trend and Chinese buffets became burgeoning businesses across the country by the late 1990s.<sup>93</sup>

Unlike fast-food chains such as McDonald's, Burger King, or Wendy's, Chinese restaurants tended to be independently owned and operated in the United States. Targeting a non-Chinese clientele, Chinese fast-food chains such as Panda Express, Pick Up Stix, and Mark Pi's Express emerged to compete in America's fast-food culture since the 1980s. Among these Chinese fast-food chains, Panda Express was probably the most famous of all. Upon finishing his master degree in applied mathematics at University of Missouri, Taiwanese immigrant Andrew Cherng opened his first Chinese restaurant, Panda Inn, in Pasadena, California in 1972. He would never have imagined operating a Chinese fast-food restaurant in a shopping mall in Glendale, California until one of his patrons, a real estate developer, discussed the idea with him in 1983. Based on the recipes of his late father, a chef who had worked in China, Taiwan, and Japan, he modified the food to suit Americans' palates and started the first Panda Express with his wife Peggy from Hong Kong. With standardized food preparation and step-by-step cooking procedures, they made sure their staff knew how to cook and serve hot Chinese food like Orange Chicken and Beef with Broccoli for their patrons in a short amount of time.<sup>94</sup> In ten years, they opened the 100<sup>th</sup> location at University of California, Los Angeles. Panda Express even operated drive-through stores for on-the-go patrons since 1997. Throughout the 1990s – 2000s, Panda Express extended their footprints to airports, sports stadiums, theme parks, and air force bases.

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<sup>93</sup> Shaw, *Asian Dining Rules*, 111.

<sup>94</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 136-141.

Their success in the United States led them to explore international markets in Mexico, Canada, Puerto Rico, Guam, South Korea, and Dubai since the 2010s.<sup>95</sup>

Since Chinese food has been so popular in America, Americans also wished to cash in on the Chinese restaurant business over the years. As early as 1908, a German immigrant attracted patrons to his chop suey restaurant in New York with German music.<sup>96</sup> In the 1920s, a Japanese immigrant operated Crown Chop Suey Parlor in Pasadena. In 1993, American restaurateur Paul Fleming co-founded P.F. Chang's China Bistro with Chinese restaurateur Philip Chiang in Scottsdale, Arizona. From 1998 to 2012, P. F. Chang's China Bistro was the first Chinese restaurant available for public trading on Nasdaq Stock Market. Featuring simple and fresh, yet authentic Chinese regional cuisine, such as Mongolian beef, Hong Kong Style Sea Bass, and Ma Po Tofu, along with a wine list and American desserts, P.F. Chang's China Bistro was the first casual dining chain in the United States.<sup>97</sup> Its contemporary interior design and pleasant ambiance appealed to the middle- and upper-middle class mainstream Americans.<sup>98</sup> By 2014, P.F. Chang China's Bistro, together with its subsidiary fast-food chain, Pei Wei Asian Diner, operated more than 400 restaurants across America and about 75 restaurants in North America, South America, the Middle East, and South Korea. Similar to Panda Express, P.F. Chang's China Bistro primarily catered to non-Chinese patrons.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> "Our Family Story | Panda Express Restaurant," Panda Restaurant Group, <https://www.pandaexpress.com/ourfamilystory> (accessed January 7, 2017).

<sup>96</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 140.

<sup>97</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 61, 130-134.

<sup>98</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 131; John Heckathorn, "An Interview with Philip Chiang, Founder of P.F. Chang's," *Honolulu Magazine*, October 10, 2011, <http://www.honolulumagazine.com/Honolulu-Magazine/Biting-Commentary/October-2011/An-interview-with-Philip-Chiang-founder-of-PF-Changs/> (accessed January 7, 2017).

<sup>99</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 134, 141.

## Conclusion

How well would American-style Chinese food be received if they traveled all the way to China? During the golden age of chop suey, a chop suey restaurant was opened in Beijing in 1928. Remarkably, the people in Beijing did not exhibit any interest in this dish that they deemed American, and the restaurant folded up before long.<sup>100</sup> When Jennifer Lee distributed fortune cookies to people in China sometime around 2008, they had no idea how to tackle the cookies. Instead of breaking the cookie in half, most of them put the entire cookie in the mouth only to find a piece of paper inside.<sup>101</sup> In 2013, Cornell University alumni Dave Rossi and Fung Lam operated Fortune Cookie, an American-style Chinese restaurant in Shanghai.<sup>102</sup> Serving General Tso's Shrimp and Mapo Tofu Cheese Fries, in addition to Orange Chicken, Chow Mein, and Sweet-and-Sour Pork, they managed to attract both Chinese and Western patrons.<sup>103</sup> However, they decided to return to the United States after their business venture and closed Fortune Cookie in 2016.

Perhaps American-style Chinese food performs better in the United States. Though popular, Chinese restaurant chains do not reach all small and mid-size cities in the United States. Rather, Chinese buffets, dine-in, and take-out restaurants attain success in these places. In the next chapter, I will interpret Chinese buffets as an exotic dining experience to consumers while conveying American abundance before their eyes.

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<sup>100</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 68.

<sup>101</sup> Lee, "Introducing Fortune Cookies to China."

<sup>102</sup> "Shanghai Gets a Taste of American-style Chinese Food," CBSNews.com, December 22, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-gets-american-chinese-food-at-restaurant-fortune-cookie/> (accessed January 7, 2017).

<sup>103</sup> "Shanghai Gets a Taste of American-style Chinese Food"; "Fortune Cookie," Facebook.com, July 13, 2016, [https://www.facebook.com/pg/fortunecookieshanghai/posts/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/fortunecookieshanghai/posts/?ref=page_internal) (accessed January 7, 2017).

## Chapter 2

### The Consumption of Chinese Buffets

Right before the last week of class in December 2016, the Institutional Review Board at Pennsylvania State University gave me a green light to begin my research project on Chinese buffets. I could finally roll out my survey to measure consumers' preference towards Chinese buffet. However, the timing seemed somewhat awkward because my target consumers, fellow students at Penn State Harrisburg, were busily preparing for their final papers, projects, and exams as they headed into the home stretch of the semester. After I discussed the matter with several professors, they agreed to let me distribute surveys at the start or the end of their classes. The days came when I visited the classrooms. The students' enthusiastic response melted my worries away. While some students were curious about my choice of topic, others wondered whether a Chinese buffet could be deemed authentic at all. Hoping to learn more about their dining experiences at Chinese buffets, I went home happy with stacks of completed surveys in my hands.

Without a Chinatown, locating regional Chinese cuisines may be tricky in Central Pennsylvania. However, finding Chinese food in this area is fairly easy. One simply needs to drive around town or look them up on mobile devices. While patrons may enjoy popular Chinese food like Wonton Soup, Crab Rangoon, General Tso's Chicken, and Beef with Broccoli at dine-in or take-out Chinese restaurants, Chinese buffet restaurants offer the same food in larger quantities at an affordable price (usually between \$8 and \$16 in Central Pennsylvania). Moreover, patrons at Chinese buffets have access to a myriad of choices. From spicy squid to coconut milk sago, Chinese buffets open up patrons' taste buds to new experiences while still

delivering familiar items like pizza and apple pie. Oftentimes, unfamiliar items are considered exotic to American patrons, and yet are genuine to Chinese patrons. Instead of worrying about what to order at dine-in or take-out Chinese restaurants, patrons can take their time to explore what appeals to their visual and gastronomic desires in any sequence and amount at Chinese buffet restaurants. In essence, patrons can concurrently celebrate their love of Chinese food and marvel at the display of abundance through their visits to Chinese buffet restaurants.

This chapter describes the consumers' perspective of the Chinese buffet in the twenty-first century. It begins with an overview of two deeply rooted American "myths" from the nineteenth century – the myth of Cathay and the myth of abundance. The former explains how Americans invented an exotic vision of China, also known as Cathay, through their consumption of tea before the Civil War. The latter illustrates how Americans took advantage of their natural and material abundance to create a consumer culture that promoted instant gratification and a vision of good life. The chapter next explains how both myths animate Chinese buffets, rendering them more attractive in the eyes of patrons, and why Americans appreciate the Chinese buffets, despite its questionable authenticity and intriguing inclusion of non-Chinese food.

## **Mythologies**

### *The Myth of Cathay*

Before Americans developed a taste for Chinese food in the mid-nineteenth century, they had been drinking tea imported from China since the colonial period. The tea trade was monopolized by the British East India Company until the American Revolution broke out in 1775. Under the Treaty of Paris (1783), the United States became a sovereign nation. When the first American commercial vessel, the *Empress of China*, departed New York harbor for Canton,

China on February 22, 1784, American traders signaled their desire to establish a business relationship with China. They gave American ginseng and Spanish silver dollars to Chinese merchants in exchange for tea, porcelain, silks, and nankeens.<sup>1</sup> Through tea consumption and active imaginations, Americans developed the myth of Cathay – a vision of an exotic China – at a time when China remained isolated from the rest of the world. Indeed, Canton was the only designated port for international maritime trade during this period.<sup>2</sup>

In particular, tea and porcelain teawares received special attention once they entered American households. Sipping tea out of porcelain cups and saucers, Americans indulged in the aromatic and delectable tea while engaging in a romantic intrigue with the blue and white porcelain. Besides reaping stimulating effects and therapeutic benefits from their sips, Americans adored the natural scenery painted on the teawares because they offered a gateway to Cathay, a fantasized, exotic destination where one could run away from “household chores, misbehaving children, debilitating illnesses, or the pressures of the workaday world and take a brief flight of fancy to a strange but wonderful realm.” Enticed by the surging demand for teawares in the 1780s, the British imitated Chinese porcelain, notably the willow pattern, and exported them to the American market at a lower price than its Chinese counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to tea and porcelain, tea advertisements played a vital role in presenting China as wonderfully exotic. Although tea had become a popular pantry item by the early nineteenth century, the tea market fluctuated. If tea merchants overstocked or speculated in tea, they might earn less profit or even go bankrupt. In addition, the United States suffered a significant trade

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Haddad, *The Romance of China: Excursions to China in U.S. Culture, 1776-1876* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), xix.

<sup>2</sup> John R. Haddad, *America's First Adventure in China: Trade, Treaties, Opium, and Salvation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 139.

<sup>3</sup> Haddad, *The Romance of China*, 20-24.

deficit with China since the Chinese showed no desire to import American commodities other than illegal opium. Therefore, to increase their sales margins, tea merchants turned to advertising to encourage greater tea consumption in America. These advertisements – instead of reflecting China’s realities, such as poverty, famine, opium addiction, rebellion, and unfair working conditions – portrayed what American Studies scholar John Haddad calls “a sanitized and romanticized version of China” that was “distant, mysterious, idyllic, and exotic.” From cheerful employees working in tea farms with hills, streams, and pagodas as its backdrop, to industrious laborers loading crates of tea onto a Chinese junk in the port of Canton with pagodas in the background, these idealized images flooded the American consciousness with the frequent appearance on lithographs, trade cards, newspaper, and posters.<sup>4</sup>

Without a reliable account of China, Americans associated a popular piece of literature with images featured on teawares and tea advertisements during the antebellum period. *The Arabian Nights*, also known as *The Thousand and One Nights*, captivated American readers with a collection of folk tales from the Middle East to South Asia. Not only did they recognize that the most famous character, Aladdin, was Chinese, but Americans also noticed that several stories were set in China. Hailed (incorrectly) as the most historically accurate literary work about the Eastern culture of the time, *Arabian Nights* contributed another romanticized vision of China. Nevertheless, the combination of the whimsical fables in *Arabian Nights* and the exotic paradise in China found on porcelain and tea advertisements further complicated the distinction between dreamy Cathay and real China.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Haddad, *The Romance of China*, 63-69.

<sup>5</sup> Haddad, *The Romance of China*, 35.

As John Haddad asserted, Cathay epitomized an oriental rendition of the Garden of Eden in which human and nature coexisted in harmony.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the American myth of Cathay bore many similarities with *Chinoiserie*, France's eighteenth century fascination with things Chinese. We might define both as popular imaginings of China that based off of people's interaction with material goods like teas, porcelains, wallpapers, and silks. In both cases, China comes across as fantastic, highly exoticized, and not grounded in reality.

Powered by their rich imagination and the lack of evidence to disprove the existence of Cathay, Americans decided to let the colorful images stay in “a state of splendid conflation.” With the myth of Cathay in mind, some Americans enjoyed a taste of the Orient while breaking away from their mundane lifestyles. Others set sail for China for commercial, religious, or scientific purpose as they compared the blissful images of Cathay with the actual scenes from Canton in the first few decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Myth of Abundance*

After America had declared independence from the Great Britain, they sought ways to set themselves apart from Europe. Their ambitions motivated them to “surpass and excel Europe in every conceivable aspect” while holding the young nation together at the same time.<sup>8</sup> However, in the absence of architectural wonders like palaces or cathedrals, as well as cultural treasures like the arts and literature, the construction of an American nationalism seemed easier said than done. Since the Industrial Revolution had transformed much of the British countryside into

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<sup>6</sup> Haddad, *The Romance of China*, 24.

<sup>7</sup> Haddad, *The Romance of China*, xix, 14, 20-36.

<sup>8</sup> David Morse, *American Romanticism Volume 1: From Cooper to Hawthorne Excessive America* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1987), 1, 3.

factories and urban slums, Americans soon realized that the beautiful landscape and bountiful natural resources in America were their prized possessions that Europe would envy. In short, America had something that England lacked: bountiful nature and agricultural abundance.

Ironically, Americans had been reading pirated copies of British literatures printed by American publishers at the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> While American and European scholars believed that a new nation like the United States did not have a rich history that could inspire American writers and artists, Americans turned to the nature and expressed themselves with themes that were uniquely American.<sup>10</sup> One of the earliest revelations of American abundance in American literature was “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” In 1820, America’s first professional author Washington Irving created this short story that was set in the scenic Hudson Valley in Tarrytown, New York.<sup>11</sup> Before untangling a love triangle between the daughter of a well-to-do Dutch farmer with a sojourning schoolmaster from Connecticut and a local bully, Irving unfolded the breathtaking “sumptuous time of autumn” before his readers. In this fertile Hudson Valley, the sky was “clear and serene, and nature wore that rich and golden livery which we always associate with the idea of abundance.” At a harvest feast hosted by the farmer, donuts, crullers, cakes, pies, ham, smoked beef, fruits, fish, chicken, milk, and cream glamorized the party table. The food “all mingled higgledy-piggledy ... with the motherly teapot sending up its clouds of vapor from the midst – Heaven bless the mark!”<sup>12</sup> Historian Elizabeth Bradley

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<sup>9</sup> Christopher Munden, “A Brief History of Early Publishing in Philadelphia,” Phindie.com, April 29, 2010, <http://phindie.com/a-brief-history-of-early-publishing-in-philadelphia/> (accessed February 14, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth L. Bradley, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and Other Stories* (New York: Penguin Group, 2014), viii.

<sup>11</sup> “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” The Center for Fiction, October 29, 2014, <http://centerforfiction.org/calendar/the-legend-of-sleepy-hollow> (accessed February 14, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Washington Irving, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” (Project Gutenberg, 2008), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/41/41-h/41-h.htm> (accessed February 14, 2017).

pointed out that Irving was “the architect of America’s founding mythology.”<sup>13</sup> Not only did Irving paint a picture of American abundance, but he also added some ghostly elements to the short story that became part of the American popular culture until the present time.<sup>14</sup>

Besides literature, Americans also wished to separate themselves from the British in their food traditions. Since Americans assumed that the British elites preferred beef to other meat, Americans wanted to eat like the British too. Nevertheless, pork was the most consumed meat in Antebellum America because beef was hardly affordable. Cattle were imported from the Great Britain and raised on the East Coast until cowboys herded millions of Texas Longhorn cattle to the Midwest and the West after the Civil War. By the 1880s, Chicago had become the meat capital of the United States where fresh beef was shipped across the nation in refrigerated cars. During this “Golden Age of American Beef,” beef price was cheap and Americans could enjoy it any time. According to Haiming Liu, through the democratization of beef consumption in America, Americans felt that they were “people of extravagance” who “ate better than their counterparts in Europe and a lot better than people in Asia or other parts of the world.” Remarkably, Texas Longhorn cattle meat was not as palatable as British cattle meat. However, Americans emphasized the quantity – their beef abundance – more than the quality or the culinary preparation of beef.<sup>15</sup>

The last quarter of the nineteenth century, also known as the Gilded Age, witnessed the transformation of an agrarian America into an industrial powerhouse. The abundance and discovery of natural resources like coal and oil propelled industrial development while creating

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<sup>13</sup> Bradley, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and Other Stories*, viii.

<sup>14</sup> “Irving’s ‘Legend’: The Story Behind the Story,” Historic Hudson Valley Blog, September 9, 2015, <http://www.hudsonvalley.org/community/blogs/irvings-legend-story-behind-story> (accessed February 14, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Haiming Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express: A History of Chinese Food in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 34-35.

jobs for millions.<sup>16</sup> Historian David Potter pointed out that other places on Earth were showered with natural abundance too. Why then was America crowned the land of plenty? While some analysts claimed that Americans were lucky enough to have “wandered unwittingly into a vast cornucopia” and “accepted [the abundance] with moronic complacency,” Potter attributed the success of converting America’s abundance to social wealth to the resourcefulness and effectiveness of Americans, or the people of plenty. American factories churned out toys, stationery, clothing, personal items, and household appliances more than ever. Since the supply of consumer goods was greater than the demand, businesses tended to increase its output to make sure their brands and products were well-known. This was the moment when modern advertising kicked in to generate demand while educating consumers that these goods were necessities and would provide them with a vision of good life. Since then, the material abundance in America had become “a basic condition of American life” and shaped the national character of Americans.<sup>17</sup>

The natural and material abundance in America encouraged multiple expressions of a folk idea of unlimited good in the society. According to legends of American buried treasure, America is a country with endless bounty and ample opportunities which awaits wealth seekers to discover. Unlike most legends with a pre-defined ending, folklorist Alan Dundes suggested that legends of American buried treasure tended to be open-ended because they were “standing invitations to Americans to dig and provide their own happy ending to the story.” Most importantly, since individuals’ achievements of unlimited good were independent of one another, everyone would be able to enjoy a taste of success. However, these triumphs were never meant

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<sup>16</sup> *Rise of Industrial America, 1876-1900, American Memory Timeline*, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/> (accessed February 14, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> David M. Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954), 67, 85-86, 91-110, 173.

to be everlasting. Rather, the idea of unlimited good built from one successful climax after another. With “more mountains to be scaled, problems to be solved, money to be made,” this folk idea would likely cause frustration at the same time.<sup>18</sup>

How did Chinese buffets bring the myth of Cathay and the myth of abundance to life? The myths enhanced the attractiveness of Chinese buffets. Upon entering Chinese buffet restaurants, consumers encountered Chinese-themed decorations as massive arrays of food were displayed before their eyes.

## **Survey Results**

### *Methodology*

To what extent did the exotic settings and food abundance contribute to the Chinese buffet dining experience? In order to learn about consumers’ preferences at Chinese buffet restaurants, I recruited students at Penn State Harrisburg to participate in a survey. With permissions from several professors at Penn State Harrisburg, I distributed the surveys to undergraduate and graduate students during five minutes of their class time. A few professors informed me that their schedules were tight, and requested an online version of the survey so that they could send the link to their students if they wished to participate. Their participation was anonymous and voluntary, and they did not have to respond to any question that they feel uncomfortable answering. Among a total of 269 surveys that were collected, 13 of them were classified as invalid because 11 respondents had never visited a Chinese buffet in the United

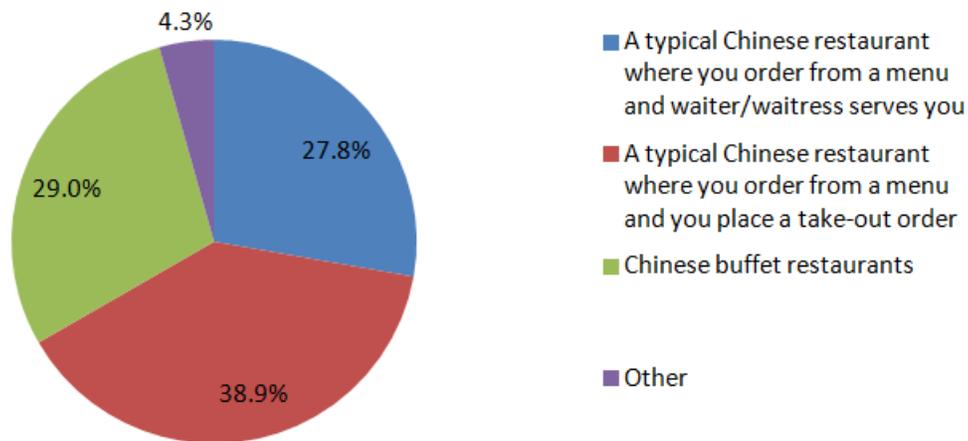
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<sup>18</sup> Alan Dundes, “Folk Ideas as Units of Worldview,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 84, no. 331 (1971): 96-98.

States and 2 of them had stopped dining at Chinese buffet restaurants. Therefore, only 256 surveys were used in this analysis.

### *The Passion for Chinese Food*

Chinese food has been a popular dining option in the United States. When respondents had a choice, the majority of them preferred to order Chinese food from a menu. While 98 of them liked to place a take-out order, 70 of them liked to be served by a waiter or waitress (Figure 2.1). However, when respondents were asked if they liked Chinese buffet, 142 of them enjoyed it while 26 of them did not. In fact, 19 respondents patronized Chinese buffet restaurants at least once a week while 99 respondents visited a Chinese buffet at least once a month.



**Figure 2.1. Preferred ways to enjoy Chinese food.**

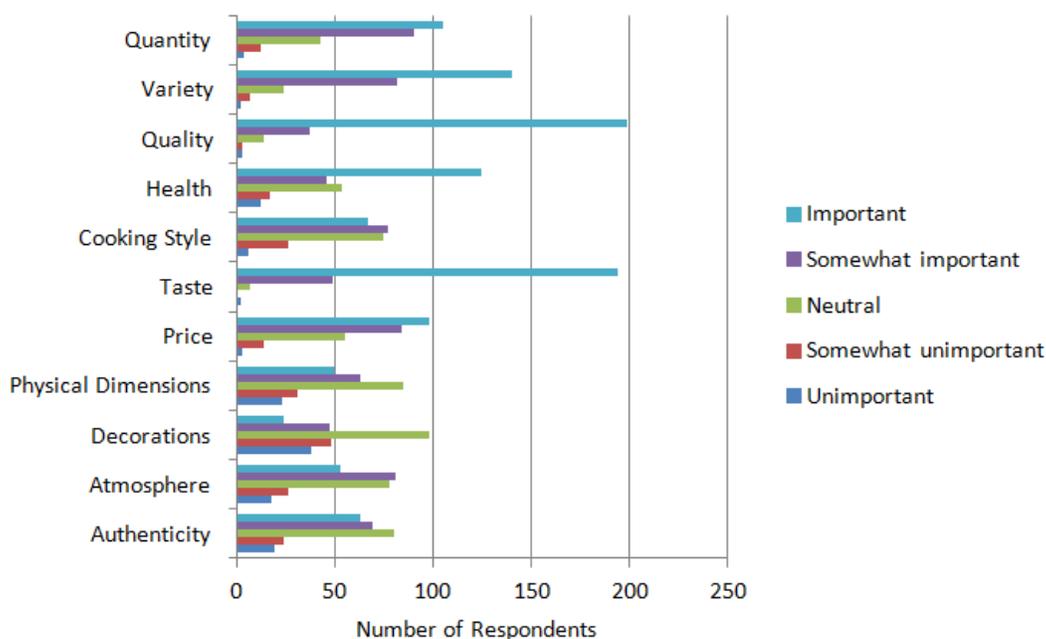
*The Love Affair with the Chinese Buffet*

What attracted respondents to Chinese buffets? Many of them admired its “varieties,” “choices,” “selections,” and “options,” while some found it a “cheap” and “economical” way to eat “unlimited” or “good” Chinese food. In addition, two respondents pointed out that Chinese buffets gave them an experimental dining opportunity. A male respondent noted that he had the “freedom to mix and match” while a female respondent observed that the Chinese buffet “offers a variety of food that I am unfamiliar with so I am able to try new things without having to [commit to] one huge meal of something I’m not sure I like.” Three respondents explained that Chinese buffets offered them an experiential dining practice. More than just enjoying the food, these diners sought out unique culinary adventures in Chinese buffet restaurants. A male respondent replied, “I like Chinese buffets with a nice atmosphere. I like its presentation.” While a female respondent noticed that a Chinese buffet restaurant was “different from [an] ordinary restaurant,” a male respondent appreciated the presence of a hibachi (Japanese grill) station in a Chinese buffet restaurant.

*Attractiveness*

Like other entrepreneurs, Chinese buffet owners try to attract and retain their customers. In this survey, respondents were to choose from a list of 11 aspects that influenced their Chinese buffet experience, namely, quantity, variety, quality, health, taste, price, physical dimensions of the service area, decorations, atmosphere, and authenticity. According to our respondents, the top three factors were: quality (77.7%), taste (76.4%), and variety (54.9%). The least important factors were: decorations (9.4%), atmosphere (20.7%), and authenticity (24.6%) (Figure 2.2). From time to time, Chinese buffet owners would come up with special menus. During Chinese

New Year, Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, lobsters and crabs were usually added to the buffet. However, 80.5% of the respondents failed to realize the existence of such additions.

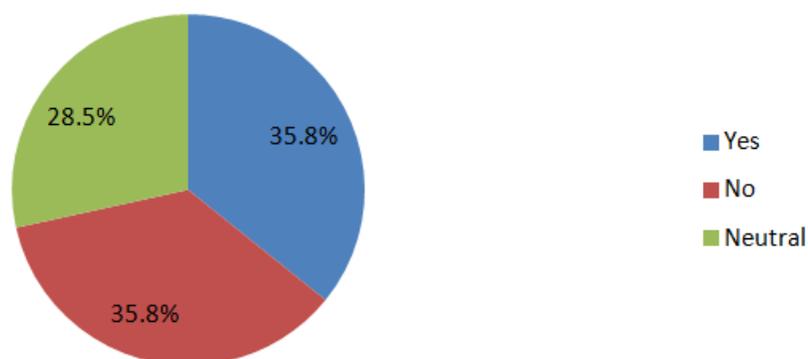


**Figure 2.2. Eleven aspects that influenced dining experience at Chinese buffet restaurants.**

### *Size*

One prominent feature of Chinese buffet restaurants is their size. When asked if they agreed with the statement “People tend to think ‘bigger the better’ when it comes to buffets,” the respondents’ answers were divided. While 35.8% of the respondents agreed that “the bigger the better,” 35.8% of them disagreed and 28.5% of them did not care about the size at all (Figure 2.3). Specifically, if size referred to the physical dimensions of the serving area, only 25.1% of the respondents expressed an interest in visiting a larger Chinese buffet restaurant. If size

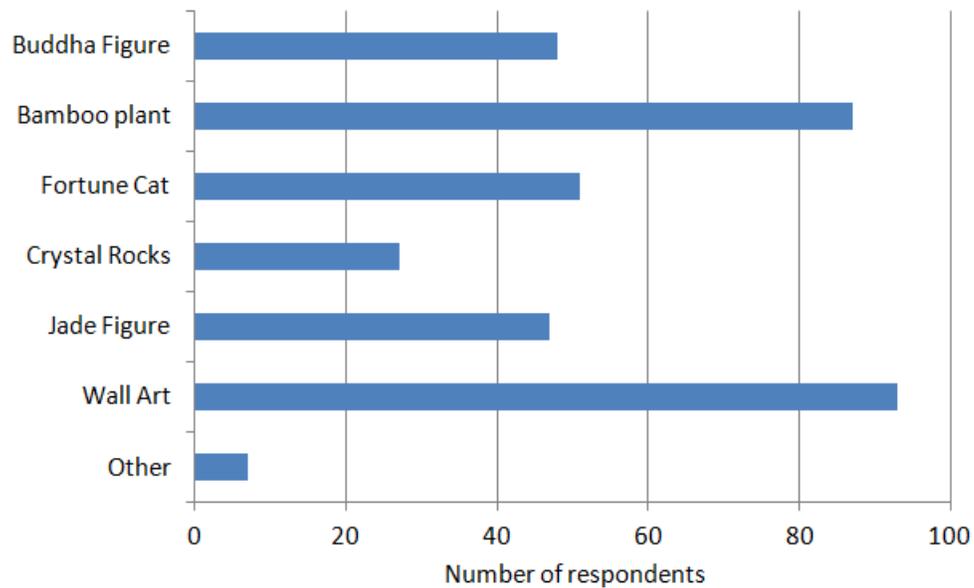
referred to the number of food choices, 64.3% of the respondents were eager to dine at a Chinese buffet restaurant with an expanded food selection.



**Figure 2.3. Do you think “bigger the better” when it comes to buffets?**

### *Decorations*

Another notable feature of Chinese buffet restaurants is their decorations. When asked if the presence of Chinese-themed decorations enhance their dining experience, 49% of the respondents took pleasure in the decorations while 47.3% of them did not. The survey asked respondents to choose their favorite Chinese-themed objects from the following list: Buddha figure, bamboo plant, fortune cat, crystal rocks, jade figure, and wall art. The top three choices were wall art, bamboo plant, and fortune cat (Figure 2.4). Some respondents indicated that the presence of “fish pond,” “water pond,” “bonsai tree,” “water feature,” “historical references,” “crazy dragon art,” and “sumo wrestler” would be attractive decorations for Chinese buffet restaurants.



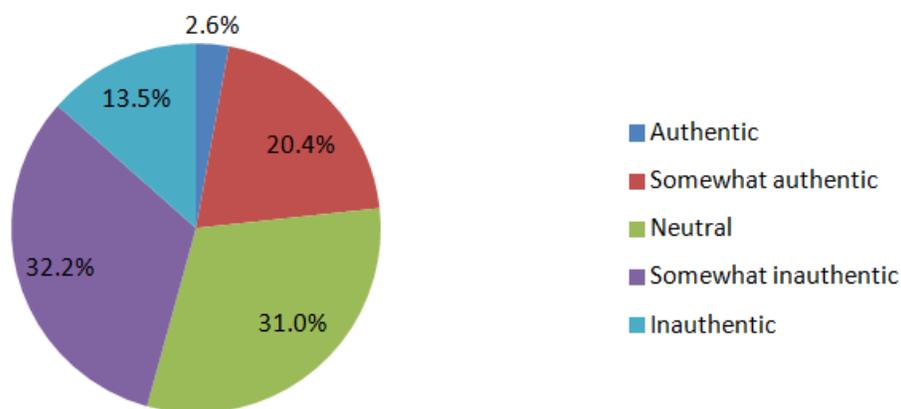
**Figure 2.4. Decorations that enhanced dining experience at Chinese buffet restaurants.**

### *Restaurant Reviews*

Restaurant review websites or mobile applications play important roles in twenty-first century dining. Documenting their dining experience in writing or photographs, or rating the restaurants with circles or star symbols, reviewers comment on the restaurants they had visited. On these websites and apps, they rate restaurants on a number of categories: ambiance, authenticity, service, and sanitation. About 60% of the respondents consulted restaurant review websites like Tripadvisor.com or Yelp.com before they headed out. In particular, 78.8% of them claimed that such websites affected their choice of Chinese buffet restaurants.

### *Authenticity*

Unlike typical Chinese restaurants, Chinese buffet restaurants serve mostly Chinese food along with some American and Asian food. When respondents were to decide on the authenticity of Chinese food served at Chinese buffet restaurants, 32% of them felt that it was somewhat inauthentic while 31% of them found it neither authentic nor inauthentic (Figure 2.5). Would a visit to Chinatowns, China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong give respondents a real taste of authentic Chinese food? When asked to compare the authenticity of Chinese food served in Chinese buffet restaurants with that in Chinatowns, 73 of 139 respondents considered the food served in Chinatowns more authentic. Among 49 respondents who had been to China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong, 46 of them believed that Chinese food was more authentic there.



**Figure 2.5. Authenticity of Chinese buffets.**

## Discussion

As the survey result reveals, respondents did not patronize Chinese buffet restaurants in search for authentic Chinese food (Figure 2.2). So, why did they like the Chinese buffet, a relatively new culinary form that has taken America by storm since the 1990s? Unlike typical Chinese restaurants where customers ordered from a menu, Chinese buffet restaurants offered massive arrays of Chinese and non-Chinese food in front of their eyes at an affordable price. As we shall see, Chinese buffet owners combined the two American myths – the myth of Cathay and the myth of abundance – to satisfy consumers' desire through Chinese buffets. In addition, my observation at four Chinese buffet restaurants in Central Pennsylvania would reinforce the embodiment of these myths in Chinese buffets. To maintain their anonymity, these restaurants will be identified as Restaurant A, Restaurant B, Restaurant C, and Restaurant D in this thesis.

### *Tracing the Myth of Cathay in Chinese Buffets*

Many dishes served in Chinese buffet restaurants were not available in typical Chinese restaurants. Rather, they catered to the Americans' palates. For example, salad, fruit, raw bar, American food (French fries, pizza, pasta, fried chicken, mashed potato, etc.), carving station, ice-cream, and dessert were classic American fares. However, upon closer inspection, some unfamiliar Chinese food items blended in with these American-oriented sections: baked egg tarts next to macaroni and cheese and baked fish filet (Figure 2.6), loquats between peaches and pineapple (Figure 2.7), frog legs next to mashed sweet potato and stuffed potato skin (Figures 2.8), almond cookies next to palmiers and monkey munch (Figure 2.9), and steamed flounder next to blue crabs (Figure 2.10). When these unfamiliar and yet authentic Chinese food items appeared in Chinese buffet restaurants, they might be considered exotic.



**Figure 2.6.** Baked egg tarts (lower right), Restaurant B. (Author's collection.)



**Figure 2.7.** Loquats (second from left), Restaurant B. (Author's collection.)



Figure 2.8. Frog Legs (upper left), Restaurant D. (Author's collection.)



Figure 2.9. Almond cookies (upper left), Restaurant D. (Author's collection.)



**Figure 2.10. Steamed flounder (left), Restaurant D. (Author's collection.)**

Free to fill their plates with exotic foods that appealed to them, patrons could design their own versions of culinary trips to the dreamy Cathay. Moreover, the presence of exotic food might trigger patrons to imagine that these food items were probably part of the regular diet of the Chinese people. The coexistence of Americanized Chinese food and authentic Chinese food did not bother patrons at all because they were in control of what they wanted to eat. For these reasons, the eagerness of mixing and matching of different food items and the willingness of trying unfamiliar food at Chinese buffets exemplified the myth of Cathay.

Similar to the exotic images on teawares and tea advertisement, decorations and atmosphere in Chinese buffet restaurants also conveyed the myth of Cathay to patrons. The most common objects used were Buddha figure (Figure 2.11), bamboo plant (Figure 2.12), fortune cat, known originally as *maneki neko* in Japanese (Figures 2.11 and 2.13), crystal rocks, jade figure (Figure 2.14), and wall art (Figures 2.15 – 2.17). Lighting, interior design, music, and other elements contributed to the atmosphere. The ceilings of the atria were lit in colorful light to

produce a heavenly effect (Figures 2.13, 2.18, and 2.19). Instead of using traditional partitions such as doors or walls, rooms were divided with a moon door (Figure 2.20), a glass panel with lucky messages (Figure 2.21), a water screen (Figure 2.22), and other water features (Figures 2.23 and 2.24) at Chinese buffet restaurants. Chinese music was played softly in Restaurant C, but it was barely noticeable. However, from the list of 11 aspects that influenced their dining experience at Chinese buffet restaurants, respondents showed the least interest towards decorations and atmosphere (Figure 2.2). Perhaps they had seen these decorations and experienced the atmosphere in so many other Chinese restaurants that they considered these items to be standard icons in every Chinese restaurant. However, just because decorations and atmosphere had relatively less impact on patrons' Chinese buffet experience, these results do not necessarily mean that patrons held little interest in these factors. In fact, these factors did appeal to patrons because they wanted to enjoy Chinese food in an exotic setting. The difference in rankings merely signified patrons' priorities when they dined at Chinese buffet restaurants.



**Figure 2.11. Fortune cat and Buddha figure, Restaurant C. (Author's collection.)**



**Figure 2.12. Bamboo plant (back), Restaurant A. (Author's collection.)**



**Figure 2.13. Fortune cats, known originally as maneki neko in Japanese (middle left and right), Restaurant D. (Author's collection.)**



Figure 2.14. Jade figure (middle right), Restaurant D. (Author's collection.)



Figure 2.15. Bamboo wall art, Restaurant B. (Author's collection.)



Figure 2.16. Beijing's Temple of Heaven wall art, Restaurant A. (Author's collection.)



Figure 2.17. Chinese garden wall art, Restaurant A. (Author's collection.)



Figure 2.18. Ceiling and atrium, Restaurant A. (Author's collection.)



Figure 2.19. Ceiling and atrium, Restaurant C. (Author's collection.)



Figure 2.20. Moon door, Restaurant A. (Author's collection.)



Figure 2.21. Glass panel with lucky messages, Restaurant D. (Author's collection.)



**Figure 2.22. Water screen, Restaurant C. (Author's collection.)**



**Figure 2.23. Water feature, Restaurant B. (Author's collection.)**



**Figure 2.24. Water feature, Restaurant A. (Author's collection.)**

Patrons who paid attention to the decorative features enjoyed the presence of wall art, bamboo plant, and fortune cat most (Figure 2.4). Interestingly, not all objects represented the real China. First of all, while the majority of artworks were Chinese-themed, a few were Japanese- or western-themed (Figures 2.25 and 2.26). Secondly, bamboo plant could be found in temperate and tropical regions around the world. However, the bamboo plant was often associated with the Chinese culture because of its frequent appearance in Chinese arts and literature as well as its image as the food source for giant pandas, the national symbol of China. Last but not least, the fortune cat who greeted patrons at the entrances of Chinese restaurants was a common Japanese figurine. Formally known as *maneki neko* in Japanese, these beckoning cat figurines were placed in store windows to attract potential customers to enter their stores in Japan.<sup>19</sup> It is a symbol of good fortune. As Chinese restaurant owners wanted to generate more

<sup>19</sup> Inge M. Daniels, "Scooping, Raking, Beckoning Luck: Luck, Agency and the Interdependence of People and Things in Japan," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9, no. 4 (2003): 620.

revenue and welcome more customers, they adopted *maneki neko* as their mascot. Despite their various backgrounds, these objects stimulated patrons' fantasy and provided a temporary getaway to an exotic Cathay while they dined at Chinese buffet restaurants.



**Figure 2.25. Japanese lady wall art (middle), Restaurant A. (Author's collection.)**



**Figure 2.26. Western wall art, Restaurant B. (Author's collection.)**

Would the myth of Cathay make or break our respondents after traveling to China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong? In other words, when one has beheld the real China, is one still attracted to the inauthentic food and exotic décors of America's Chinese buffets? While the majority of our respondents acknowledged that the food in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong was more authentic, about half of them still enjoyed Chinese buffet. Like their predecessors who had visited China in the nineteenth century, our respondents experienced the real China in person with the myth of Cathay and their knowledge of Chinese culture in their mind. They might realize that the food in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong was more authentic, but they might also be disappointed that they could not find the Americanized Chinese food they were used to enjoy while they were there. Consequently, upon their return to the United States, some of them might have developed an appetite for authentic Chinese food while others might continue to cherish Chinese food served in Chinese buffet restaurants or other Chinese restaurants in America.

#### *Tracing the Myth of Abundance in Chinese Buffets*

Most respondents associated Chinese buffets with “varieties,” “choices,” “selections,” and “options.” With their unconventional presentation and atmosphere, Chinese buffet restaurants displayed more than 100 different dishes in distinct sections at the restaurants' atria simultaneously (Figures 2.13, 2.18, and 2.19). These distinct sections usually consisted of salad bar, fruit, raw bar, soup, Chinese food, American food, seafood, carving station, sushi bar, hibachi station, ice-cream, and dessert. Notably, one or two seafood dishes would be added during holidays. Unless patrons had a special affinity for seafood, this addition simply blended in with the existing parade of food. Patrons also visualized the “unlimited” and fresh supply of food when buffet attendants walked in and out of the kitchen to replenish empty or near-empty

silver platters in the atria. The abundance in Chinese buffets is also a variant of the legends of American buried treasure. Although the dishes were lined up by sections, patrons were free to discover what they wanted, and each of them happily returned to their tables with their unique combinations of food.

Like the party hosted by Irving's Dutch farmer, patrons participated in abundant feasts at Chinese buffet restaurants any time they wanted. As a matter of fact, the medley of Chinese, Japanese, American, and Italian food amplifies the sense of abundance. In other words, abundance has expanded since Washington Irving's time so that it now consists not just of wheat, fruit, and fowl from the American countryside, but also the culinary contributions of immigrants. Unfortunately, the display of abundance often induces wastefulness. A lot of food could be wasted when patrons filled up their plates without finishing them, or too much food was prepared which could not be served again the next day. In 2016, research conducted by the Food Waste Reduction Alliance revealed that 122.3 million pound of food waste came from the American restaurant business. While 94% of the food was discarded and ended up in landfills, 4% was donated to the needy and 2% was recycled as animal feed or bio-based materials for making cosmetics and biofuel.<sup>20</sup> To encourage responsible food consumption and minimize food waste in Chinese buffets, owner of Restaurant B erected several signs in the serving area that read: "Dear Customers / Please / LOVE FOOD NOT WASTE" (Figure 2.27). The symbol of a heart replaced the letter "O" in the word "LOVE" and the symbol of the Earth substituted the letter "O" in the word "NOT." He also listed the ingredients and spiciness of the dishes on their labels. For example, Baked Egg Tart was made with pineapple, egg, and mayo; and Vegetable

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<sup>20</sup> "Analysis of U.S. Food Waste Among Food Manufacturers, Retailers, and Restaurants," Food Waste Reduction Alliance, 2016, [http://www.foodwastealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/FWRA-Food-Waste-Survey-2016-Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.foodwastealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/FWRA-Food-Waste-Survey-2016-Report_Final.pdf) (accessed February 14, 2017).

Lo Mein contain peanuts; Chicken with Garlic Sauce was spicy; and General Tso's Chicken was "little spicy." When patrons were better informed, they could decide what to try or avoid instead of piling up their dishes with food that would likely be wasted.



**Figure 2.27. "LOVE FOOD NOT WASTE" sign, pre-portioned pineapple chunks, and marshmallows (lower right), Restaurant B. (Author's collection.)**

With numerous dining options in America, consumers might have a hard time choosing a restaurant. Through the lens of other consumers, restaurant review websites and mobile applications gave potential consumers some ideas about how attractive the restaurants were before their visits. Many respondents found that these restaurant reviews affected their choice of Chinese buffet restaurants. Although they could not taste or smell the food, they could have a glimpse of various aspects of the restaurants, such as presentation, size, quantity, quality, variety, price, decorations, and atmosphere. Research conducted by the National Restaurant Association in 2015 found that seven factors influenced consumers' decisions in choosing a restaurant: healthier options, eco-friendly dining, local foods, technology, mobile options, ethnic cuisine,

and quality, innovative food.<sup>21</sup> This trend was consistent with the choices of our respondents who were concerned about quality and taste most, followed by variety, health, and quantity (Figure 2.2). As discussed earlier, the Chinese buffet was characterized by its variety and quantity, both indicators of abundance. When the National Restaurant Association performed the research, the seven factors were proposed based on customers' experiences and expectations at different kinds of restaurants. However, the scope of this thesis was limited to Chinese buffet restaurants only. Therefore, it was not surprising that variety and quantity did not make it to the National Restaurant Association's research.

The notion of hugeness or vastness has been connected to American culture. For example, many people considered the sizes of supermarkets, shops, and houses in America extremely enormous. These spacious structures were usually filled with material goods. Likewise, Chinese buffet restaurants usually occupied a significant amount of space in strip malls and shopping plazas. Upon entering the restaurants, patrons would notice the gigantic serving and seating areas. Together with the display of a plethora of food, everything seemed big and bountiful. However, only 35.8% of the respondents thought that 'bigger the better' when it came to Chinese buffet. One way to account for this reaction was David Potter's idea that material abundance was "a basic condition of American life."<sup>22</sup> With this mindset, respondents might regard the material abundance, from the physical dimensions of the buffet restaurants to the display of food, as basic conditions of Chinese buffet. Although they might have taken abundance for granted, Americans did appreciate the size that Chinese buffet offered. On the

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<sup>21</sup> "7 Factors Consumers Consider When Choosing a Restaurant," National Restaurant Association, February 13, 2015, <http://www.restaurant.org/News-Research/News/7-factors-consumers-consider-when-choosing-a-rest> (accessed February 14, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Potter, *People of Plenty*, 67.

one hand, Chinese buffet restaurants provided large social venues for families and friends.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, they offered a lot of food choices to accommodate different dietary practices of almost everyone.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of serving Chinese and American food at the same time was not the brainchild of Chinese buffet owners. As explained in Chapter One, Cantonese and American food were available in Chinese restaurants for patrons to enjoy from the Gold Rush to the Chinese Exclusion Eras.<sup>25</sup> In the 1950s, chef Joyce Chen wanted her patrons to try something beyond chop suey by first serving authentic Chinese dishes in her restaurant and later presenting them with American food in buffet style.<sup>26</sup> However, it was not until the 1990s when the Chinese buffet reached new dimensions with its display of abundance. When respondents patronized Chinese buffet restaurants, they did not worry too much about cooking style or authenticity (Figures 2.2 and 2.5). Rather, they focused on quality, taste, variety, health, and quantity of Chinese buffets (Figure 2.2). Their emphasis on variety and quantity was somewhat similar to Americans' preference towards Texas Longhorn cattle meat in the late nineteenth century. As Haiming Liu proposed, Americans loved fresh, cheap beef that they could enjoy as frequent as they pleased, in addition to celebrating the beef abundance (quantity) over the quality or the culinary preparation (cooking style and authenticity) of beef.<sup>27</sup> While quality had become the

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<sup>23</sup> Kelly Tian and Robert G. Tian, "Food Consumption and Cultural Awareness: An Anthropological Case Study of Consumer Behavior at a Chinese Restaurant," *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness* 5, no. 4 (2011): 53.

<sup>24</sup> Constantine E. Vlisides, Wen-Mei Chiang, and William Pan, "Popularity Factors of 'All-You-Can-Eat' Chinese Buffets," *Foodservice Research International* 12, no. 1 (2000): 3.

<sup>25</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 23-24; Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 124-126; Yong, Chen, *Chop Suey, USA: The Story of Chinese Food in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 135, 138.

<sup>26</sup> Niu Yue, "Carrying on a Chinese Food Legacy," *China Daily USA*, April 2, 2015, [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-04/02/content\\_19985670.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-04/02/content_19985670.htm).

<sup>27</sup> Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 35.

most important aspects for respondents' consumption of Chinese buffets, many of them identified Chinese buffets as "cheap" and "economical" way to eat "unlimited" and "good" Chinese food any time. In other words, they did not visit Chinese buffet restaurant to pursue authentic Chinese food.

## **Conclusion**

Unlike buffet restaurants in Hong Kong, Chinese buffet restaurants in the United States offer take-out and catering services. Ultimately, these services extend the exoticism and abundance beyond the confines of the buffets themselves. Whether it is a take-out for patrons on the go or Chinese buffet catering at the annual Chinese New Year Celebration at Penn State Harrisburg, Americans can enjoy Chinese buffet anywhere.

By merging Americans' pursuits of exotic experience and abundance, Chinese buffets have transformed the way Americans consume Chinese food. With elaborate designs and exotic dishes, Chinese buffets evoke patrons' imagination of virtual visits to China. Meanwhile, instead of ordering a few dishes at a time from a menu, patrons dive into a variety of ready-to-eat and unlimited Chinese, Japanese, and American food. From the consumers' perspective, the Chinese buffet articulates the American Dream because it delivers instant gratification and a vision of good life to Americans. In the next chapter, I will investigate the ways that producers of Chinese buffets built their wealth while achieving the American Dream.

## Chapter 3

### The Production of Chinese Buffets

I overcame several hurdles on my way to interviewing Chinese buffet owners. To find out if they would agree to participate in my research project, I called a dozen Chinese buffet restaurants located within a 30-mile radius of Penn State Harrisburg. The hosts or hostesses of these restaurants picked up the phones and screened my calls. Most of them explained that their bosses were busy and declined the interviews on their bosses' behalf. Four of them asked me to leave my phone number so that their bosses would call me back. I kept waiting patiently for the owners to return my calls. While two owners did call me back and inquired about the nature of my research, I did not hear from the other two owners. When I made follow-up calls to their restaurants, the hosts or hostesses told me that the owners did not express an interest in an interview. I arranged interviews with those who agreed to meet in December 2016.

The popularity of Chinese food in America prompted the growth of the Chinese restaurant business over the past few decades. In particular, Chinese buffets took America by storm in the 1990s. With so many dishes to be presented at the restaurants' atria at the same time, how do Chinese buffet owners profit on their businesses? Jennifer Lee noted that a Chinese buffet could be a profitable business because Chinese buffet owners, mostly Fuzhounese, tended to spend more money on increasing the quality and quantity of food instead of hiring skilled waiters or waitresses. She also observed that when Cantonese restaurateurs sold their restaurants upon retirement, the majority of buyers were the Fuzhounese. Oftentimes, they turned these restaurants into Chinese buffet restaurants. Like the Cantonese who came to

America to get rich in the restaurant business, it was time for the Fuzhounese to participate in what Lee has called “a wok-fueled American dream.”<sup>1</sup> While consumers enjoy all-you-can-eat Chinese and non-Chinese food in exotic settings, Chinese buffet owners chase wealth through Chinese buffets.

This chapter illustrates the producers’ perspective on the Chinese buffet in the twenty-first century. It begins with an overview of a Chinese myth from the nineteenth century – the myth of the Gold Mountain. It explains how the Chinese, starting with the 1848 discovery of gold in California, developed a hopeful vision of the United States. This glorious vision was one in which the Chinese prospector strikes it rich, vaulting rapidly from impoverished to successful. That same myth has survived into the twenty-first century – though gold no longer plays a role. Indeed, whereas the Chinese originally sought wealth through gold mining, many now seek prosperity through restaurant ownership. This chapter then describes how the Chinese buffet manifests the Chinese myth of the Gold Mountain and elicits the American Dream of going from rags to riches.

## **Mythology**

### *The Myth of the Gold Mountain*

When gold fever spread to China in 1849, Chinese men came to the United States to seek gold. These Chinese adventurers came from two regions in the Pearl River delta in Canton, namely, the “Four Counties” and the “Three Counties.” The “Four Counties” consisted of Sunwui (新會, now Xinhui), Toisaan (台山, now Taishan), Yanping (恩平, now Enping), and

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer 8. Lee, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures in the World of Chinese Food* (New York: Twelve, 2008), 188.

Hoiping (開平, now Kaiping). The “Three Counties” included Seundak (順德, now Shunde), Naamhoi (南海, now Nanhai) and Punyu (番禺, now Panyu). As Asian American Studies scholar Ronald Takaki explained, they dreamed of getting rich quick in America and reuniting with their families in China in a few years, except for some who stayed in America for personal, financial, or legal reasons.<sup>2</sup>

The Cantonese coined the earliest Chinese term for the faraway place where gold was discovered.<sup>3</sup> Instead of translating San Francisco phonetically or literally, they called it 金山 (Gam Saan in Cantonese, Jinshan in Mandarin). Literally meaning “gold mountain,” Gam Saan is laden with gold where opportunities and abundance await.<sup>4</sup> It also refers to California or America in a broad sense. Likewise, the Cantonese called America 花旗, or “Flowery Flag” (Fakei in Cantonese, Huaqi in Mandarin) based on the intricate pattern on the American flag.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, chasing wealth in America was not as quick and easy as it seemed. As discussed in Chapter One, most of the easy-to-mine gold in California had been extracted by 1850. However, the Chinese still came to California to seek wealth. As gold became increasingly difficult to reach, the Chinese switched to wage labor positions in factories and on the western portion of the Transcontinental Railroad as a result of industrialization.<sup>6</sup> They

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald T. Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Little, Brown, & Company, 1998), 31.

<sup>3</sup> Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco: 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 31, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Marlon K. Hom, *Songs of Gold Mountain: Cantonese Rhymes from San Francisco Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 5.

<sup>6</sup> “The Gold Rush of 1849,” History.com, 2010, <http://www.history.com/topics/gold-rush-of-1849> (accessed March 12, 2017).

worked in a racially hostile environment and often risked their lives to earn their living.<sup>7</sup> Despite the absence of literal gold, the myth of the Gold Mountain endured. The Gold Mountain came to symbolize the material promise of America for the ambitious and adventurous Cantonese men.

The desire for sojourning in America had never diminished among the Cantonese since 1849. During the early business trade in the eighteenth century, European and American merchants had been buying more Chinese goods such as teas, porcelain, and silk than selling western goods to the Chinese, such as fur, cotton products, and mechanical curiosities. Over the years, a severe trade imbalance existed when the Europeans and Americans paid for the Chinese goods in silver. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, British merchants reversed the trade imbalance by selling opium to China, and American merchants soon followed suit. This new strategy drew silver back to the western countries as the opium addiction in China grew. While the Chinese government sought to eradicate opium, British merchants did not cooperate. To avoid further financial loss, they appealed to the British government for help. The British launched two wars against China in 1839 and 1856.<sup>8</sup> After losing the First Opium War (1839 – 1842) and Second Opium War (1856 – 1860), China had to pay millions of dollars as compensations to the Great Britain and France. As a result, the Chinese government imposed heavy taxes on its people. Many of the peasants could not pay the taxes and were driven from their lands.<sup>9</sup> Since they were unable to find jobs in other industries due to foreign interventions after the Opium Wars, sojourning in America became desirable.

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<sup>7</sup> “The Gold Rush of 1849”; *From Gold Rush to Golden State in California as I Saw It: First-Person Narratives of California’s Early Years, 1849-1900*, October 19, 1998, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/california-first-person-narratives/articles-and-essays/early-california-history/from-gold-rush-to-golden-state/> (accessed March 12, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1990), 129-155.

<sup>9</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 33.

The Opium Wars presaged a series of socioeconomic problems in China, especially in Canton. Although flood and drought were not uncommon in Canton, domestic rebellions, such as Taiping Rebellion (1850 – 1864) and Red Turban Rebellion (1854 – 1856), diverted government's resources from natural disaster control and relief efforts to military suppression. During this period of social unrest, an average laborer earned US\$4 - \$6 in China. In contrast, a railroad worker in America could earn an average of US\$30 - \$35 per month. On the one hand, Cantonese peasants and laborers were attracted by advertisements showing that America was a land of plenty and where they were welcomed to work, earned a lot of money, and enjoyed material abundance. On the other hand, they had witnessed Gold Mountain sojourners returning to Canton with their wealth. Compounded with unfavorable agricultural and commercial prospects in Canton, Cantonese men were ready to find a better opportunity abroad while leaving their wives and families behind. While they did not have enough money to fund their trips to America, they could borrow money from brokers to buy tickets for their outbound journey. They would pay the loan and interest back as soon as they earned money in America.<sup>10</sup>

The emigration of Cantonese men altered the social economic and literary landscape in Canton. While their remittances improved the quality of life and education of their families in China, their departure for the Gold Mountain prompted those who stayed behind in Canton to create folk songs known as “Gold Mountain songs.” The following song described the loneliness and anxiety of a Cantonese sojourner in Gold Mountain in 1852:

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<sup>10</sup> June Mei, “Socioeconomic Origins of Emigration: Guangdong to California, 1850-1882,” *Modern China* 5, no. 4 (1979): 473-487.

咸豐二年造金山，  
 担起遙仙萬分難；  
 竹篙船，  
 撐過海，  
 離婦別姐去求財；  
 唔掛房中人女，  
 唔掛二高堂。

Translation:

In the second reign year of Haamfung [1852], a trip to Gold Mountain was made.

With a pillow on my shoulder, I began my perilous journey:

Sailing a boat with bamboo poles across the seas,

Leaving behind wife and sisters in search of money,

No longer lingering with the woman in the bedroom,

No longer paying respect to parents at home.<sup>11</sup>

When the Cantonese man left home for America in 1852, he departed with uncertainties. On the one hand, he hoped to seek wealth in America. On the other hand, he missed his wife, sisters, and parents in Canton dearly. According to Confucius teaching, filial piety is one of the most important virtues. Also, as described in “The Doctrine of the Mean” (中庸 or Zhong Yong in Mandarin), one of the Four Books of Confucian philosophy, there is a “duty of universal

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<sup>11</sup> “Jingshan fu xing” (Songs of the Wife of a Gold Mountain Man), *Xinning zazhi* 1100 (January 1949): 68, qtd. in Hom, *Songs of Gold Mountain*, 39.

obligation” between husband and wife.<sup>12</sup> By sojourning to America, the man could neither pay respect to his parents in person nor fulfill his obligation to his wife, and he felt very uneasy about it. Another song reflected the financial promises of traveling to Gold Mountain:

燕鵲喜，  
 賀新年；  
 爹爹去金山賺錢，  
 賺得金銀成萬兩，  
 返來起屋兼買田。

Translation:

Swallows and magpies, flying in glee:  
 Greetings for New Year.  
 Daddy has gone to Gold Mountain to earn money.  
 He will earn gold and silver, ten thousand taels,  
 When he returns, we will buy a lot of land.<sup>13</sup>

Swallows and magpies symbolized a happy beginning of Chinese New Year. During this festive season, the Chinese wished for good fortune. For the family illustrated in this song, the father was absent from the New Year celebration because he had been away to work in Gold Mountain where he would earn a lot of money, gold, and silver. Upon his return, the family would be able

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<sup>12</sup> Confucius, James Legge, *Confucian Analects: The Great Learning, and the Doctrine of the Mean* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971), 406-407.

<sup>13</sup> Yuanzhu Chen, ed., *Taishan geyao ji* (A Collection of Taishan Folk Songs) (1929; reprinted. Taipei: Folklore Books, 1969), qtd. in Hom, *Songs of Gold Mountain*, 40-41.

to build new a new house and acquire farmland. They had high hopes for the father to return to the homeland with pride and glory.

The Gold Mountain seemed to be a friendly host and offered a bright future to the Chinese in the beginning. Yet the situation darkened in the 1870s. When the Americans realized that the Chinese competed with them from gold mining to manufacturing industries, they became increasingly hostile to the Chinese. As described in Chapter One, a multitude of taxes and legislations were levied on the Chinese, followed by successive waves of anti-Chinese movement. The anti-Chinese movement started in California but soon spread across America. With the goal of earning money for their family in China, the Chinese could endure toil in America. Yet, the racial discrimination and unequal job opportunities disappointed them. In the words of Asian American Studies scholar Marlon Hom, the Chinese workers “were haunted by the Gold Mountain Dream.”<sup>14</sup> The following poem captured the anxiety of Gold Mountain men as they continued to labor in a country that no longer welcomed them:

自到邊疆地。受盡番奴氣。

天崖走過至花旗。觸景依然懷故里。

莫傷氣。祇爭財與利。

黃金擲入荷包裡。整定歸鞭有日期。

Translation:

Since coming to the frontier land, I have taken all kinds of abuse from the barbarians.

I have come across the horizon to the Flowery Flag Nation;

The surroundings still fill me with thoughts of home.

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<sup>14</sup> Hom, *Songs of Gold Mountain*, 92, 93.

Don't despair: All we need is profit and money.

Should our purses be stuffed with gold,

We'll pick out a date and have our homebound whip ready.<sup>15</sup>

Upon his arrival to America, this Chinese man realized that America was not a friendly nation at all. Rather, the barbaric Americans bullied him. His passage to America only reminded how much he missed his homeland. However, he endured it all because he had a clear goal in mind: to achieve financial gains. He looked forward to striking it rich and returning home with lots of gold and money.

The implementation of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 dramatically decreased the number of Chinese laborers to America. As explained in Chapter One, this law primarily affected laborers, and exempted scholars, diplomats, and merchants who could still enter the United States freely.<sup>16</sup> However, this immigration law did not discourage Chinese laborers from reaching America. From 1882 to 1943, a Chinese man who was eager to work in America could become a “paper partner” or “paper merchant.” He would first identify a Chinese merchant who conducted trade in America. By paying the merchant an amount of money, the man became a business partner of the merchant. After obtaining paper work to prove his status as a merchant, he departed for Gold Mountain.<sup>17</sup>

A magnitude 7.8 earthquake (moment magnitude scale) rocked San Francisco on the early morning of April 18, 1906. While the fire after the earthquake swallowed the entire

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<sup>15</sup> *Jingshan ge ji* (Songs of Gold Mountain), 1911, qtd. in Hom, *Songs of Gold Mountain*, 110.

<sup>16</sup> “Chinese Immigration and the Chinese Exclusion Acts,” United States Department of States, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/chinese-immigration> (accessed March 12, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Estella T. Lau, *Paper Families: Identity, Immigration Administration, and Chinese Exclusion* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 34.

downtown San Francisco, it also destroyed immigration records of the Chinese immigrants that were housed in the Hall of Records.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, one of the worst natural disasters in American history did have one positive effect as far as Chinese immigrants were concerned. A Chinese man in San Francisco could declare that he was born in the United States and therefore an American citizen.<sup>19</sup> As a citizen, he enjoyed the freedom of traveling outside and re-entering America.<sup>20</sup> When he returned to China, not only could he bring a wife to America, but he could also take his children along because the children of American citizens were also American citizens, regardless of their places of birth.<sup>21</sup> The Chinese man could also retroactively claim the birth of a child in China for each year he stayed in America.<sup>22</sup> After forging Chinese birth certificates for his “sons” or “daughters,” he sold them to young men or women who wished to come to America. To ensure they could pass the immigration exam in America, he provided his “paper sons” or “paper daughters” with crib sheets filled with detailed facts about his family and home in China.<sup>23</sup> They memorized information and threw the crib sheets to the Pacific Ocean when the Golden Gate was within sight.<sup>24</sup> If their answers matched those of the Chinese man provided to the immigration officer at his exit interview, then they could enter America. Otherwise, they would be deported.<sup>25</sup>

What was the entry experience of the Chinese immigrant like? Prior to 1910, steamships from Asia would first dock at “Tongsaan Matau” (唐山碼頭, Tangshan Matou in Mandarin), or

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<sup>18</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 234; “Chinese Immigration and the Chinese in the United States,” The United States National Archives and Records Administration, <https://www.archives.gov/research/chinese-americans/guide/html> (accessed March 12, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 234.

<sup>20</sup> “Chinese Immigration and the Chinese in the United States.”

<sup>21</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 235.

<sup>22</sup> “Chinese Immigration and the Chinese in the United States.”

<sup>23</sup> Lau, *Paper Families*, 47.

<sup>24</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 236.

<sup>25</sup> Lau, *Paper Families*, 47.

the China dock (now Pier 50 in Mission Bay, San Francisco). Asian immigrants stayed at the “Muk uk” (木屋, Muwu in Mandarin), meaning “Wooden Barracks,” where immigration cases were processed. From 1910 – 1940, the immigration station was relocated to Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. Asians who had departed and sought re-entry to America were also processed there. Besides distinguishing real sons or daughters from fake ones, the immigration officials also examine the immigrants’ health conditions. Since the immigration station was understaffed, Chinese immigrants were detained and interrogated for days, months, or even years on Angel Island. Male and female immigrants were housed separately in the Angel Island Wooden Barracks with minimal facilities and privacy. To express their misery and resentment, they scribbled poems all over the walls of the barracks while some of them committed suicide.<sup>26</sup> The following poem showed an immigrant’s despairs towards the immigration process during his/her detention on Angel Island:

美例苛於虎。人困板壁多。  
 所留候審受掣磨。鳥入樊籠折太墮。  
 慘莫訴。呼天嘆無路。  
 關過金門難若此。飽嘗況味悔奔波。

Translation:

American laws, more ferocious than tigers:  
 Many are the people jailed inside wooden walls,  
 Detained, interrogated, tortured, like birds plunged into an open trap -- What suffering!

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<sup>26</sup> Hom, *Songs of Gold Mountain*, 71-72.

To whom can I complain of the tragedy? I shout to Heaven, but there is no way out!

Had I only known such difficulty in passing the Golden Gate ...

Fed up with this treatment, I regret my journey here.<sup>27</sup>

This Chinese immigrant came to America with a great expectation. However, the period of waiting and suffering on this crowded Angel Island was unbearable. The immigrant began to dread sacrificing his/her freedom and dignity with mistreatment in return. Unfortunately, no one had ever warned the immigrant about the attachment of such a perilous scenario to a Gold Mountain journey before his/her departure, and he/she got stuck on Angel Island.

The myth of the Gold Mountain also inspired Chinese American authors in the twentieth century. In 1980, Maxine Hong Kingston offered her interpretation in *China Men*, a collection of short stories about her ancestors' journey to Gold Mountain and fictional tales about contemporary Chinese American experience. Kingston's father was born in China at the turn of the twentieth century. As he grew up, he heard countless stories about the glamour of Gold Mountain. Four Gold Mountain sojourners came home with three or four thousand American gold dollars each in 1850. It was also a place where the "plains covered with cattle from horizon to horizon" and men ate "slabs of meat." Fed up with his job as a village teacher, he decided to explore Gold Mountain in 1924, leaving his wife and children behind. Before his departure, the women in his family asked him to bring back luxury items like "Dunhill lighters, Rolex wristwatches, Seth Thomas clocks, Parker pens, Singer sewing machines, glass window panes, davenport, highboys, pianos." Clearly, the "gold" of the 1850s had become consumer goods and luxury items. Kingston's father brought along two sets of immigration documents: his very

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<sup>27</sup> *Jingshan ge ji* (Songs of Gold Mountain), 1911, qtd. in Hom, *Songs of Gold Mountain*, 84.

own legal document and another set that was purchased as a “paper son” of a Gold Mountain sojourner. After days of interrogation on Angel Island, he finally landed in America.<sup>28</sup>

How does the myth of the Gold Mountain animate Chinese buffets of the twenty-first century? Whereas the Cantonese traveled to America in the hope of striking it rich in the nineteenth century, the Fuzhounese discovered modern-day “gold mines” in the Chinese buffet business where they attained financial stability and material abundance for themselves and their families.

## **Interview Results**

### *Methodology*

In response to Americans’ preference towards Chinese food, Chinese restaurateurs jumped on the Chinese buffet bandwagon while they searched for the Gold Mountain in America. To investigate producers’ motivations for investing in the Chinese buffet business and presentation of the Chinese buffet, I interviewed two Chinese buffet owners in the Central Pennsylvania area. I met the first owner in person at his restaurant and talked to the second owner over the phone as he requested. Their participation in the interviews was anonymous and voluntary, and they could skip any question or end the interview at any time. In order to protect their identities, I referred to the first owner as “Owner A of Restaurant A,” and the second owner as “Owner B of Restaurant B.” Restaurants A and B are the same establishments mentioned in Chapter Two.

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<sup>28</sup> Maxine H. Kingston, *China Men* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1980), 41-46, 53-60.

*The Story of Owner A*

Born in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, Owner A is a 29-year-old Chinese male. He immigrated to the United States with his family 16 years ago. Upon graduation from high school, he joined the family's restaurant business. He was formerly a real estate agent, but he returned to the restaurant business later. Besides learning the business of running a restaurant from his family and previous work experience, he paid attention to the latest trends in food-related business and checked out information from different websites. Before establishing Restaurant A, he had opened a Chinese buffet restaurant. Owner A thought that the Chinese buffet has been so popular in America because it offers a lot of food at the right price.

Owner A has heard about the Chinese people who flocked to America, the Gold Mountain, to get rich in the mid-nineteenth century. To Owner A, whether the Chinese buffet is like the Gold Mountain, a profitable business in which the Chinese can earn a lot of money, depended on the timing. He explained that when the buffet business first began in America in the 1990s, those owners reaped a lot of money because everyone wanted to try this new concept back then. Later on, new Chinese immigrants saw the opportunity and opened Chinese buffet restaurants as well. Gradually, older style buffet restaurants were phased out and replaced by fancier, large-scale buffet restaurants. Yet, these changes did not necessarily translate into profits. In particular, the increase in overhead expenses might lower the profit, and the presence of more Chinese buffet restaurants in a given region could lead to market saturation, which would lower the profits of each restaurant in general. With about a dozen Chinese buffet restaurants in Central Pennsylvania, he found that the competitions among these restaurants were not quite friendly because "some owners wanted to drive others out of business." Meanwhile, he

kept an eye on restaurant review websites because he wanted to understand the consumption pattern of younger generations.

Above all, the operation of Restaurant A helps Owner A achieve his goals. He enjoys financial stability, saves money for his children's college education, lives in a nice home, and drives a luxury car. As with numerous Chinese parents who regard education as the key to achieving money and success, he explains that education is very important for his children. He is happy and thankful that he has a successful business. Meanwhile, he thought it might be time to change his career because he wanted to try something new. Nevertheless, the Chinese buffet business allowed Owner A to achieve his Gold Mountain dream of material abundance and college education for his children.

What are the factors behind a successful Chinese buffet restaurant? Owner A pointed out that he devoted a lot of time and energy to his business. To enhance consumers' dining experience, he strived to prepare quality and delicious food, as well as committed to offer good service, cleanliness, and ambiance in his restaurant. He conveyed ambiance through decorations purchased in New York's Chinatown, China, and local stores (Figures 1.16, 1.17, 1.20, 1.24, and 1.25). By serving a variety of Chinese and non-Chinese food in his buffet, he hoped that there would always be something to suit all tastes. He would also add special seafood items to the buffet during holidays. Remarkably, Owner A considered the Chinese food served in his restaurant inauthentic. He was not bothered by it at all because he thought the Chinese food in his restaurants were Americanized and therefore inauthentic.

Owner A offered his views concerning the desires of consumers. Although he agreed with the statement "People tend to think 'bigger the better' when it comes to buffets," he did not believe that the size of a buffet, in terms of physical dimensions of the serving area, had a big

impact on the attractiveness of his restaurant. However, if size referred to the number of food choices, it might appeal to his patrons to a certain extent only: “Patrons have been saturated with the concept of variety in Chinese buffets over the years. Nowadays, they pursue freshness and quality of food.” Granted, an increase in the number of food choices rendered frequent replenishment or replacement of food. Speaking of food quality, Owner A observed that middle- to upper-class Americans seldom visit Chinese buffet restaurants these days. Rather, they preferred to spend more money on eating Chinese food in casual dining restaurants where fresh food was cooked to order.

### *The Story of Owner B*

Owner B is a 32-year-old Chinese male who was born in Fuzhou, Fujian Province. He immigrated to the United States when he was 16 years old and has been living in Central Pennsylvania since. He joined his family’s restaurant business after his high school graduation. Prior to opening Restaurant B, he had worked in a Chinese buffet restaurant and opened a Chinese bakery café. With the help of his family, he acquired the skills of running a restaurant. He benefited a lot from talking to his customers. He also liked to think about new ideas and test them out in his restaurant. The reason why Chinese buffet became a trend in America, as Owner B suggested, was that customers could spend a little money for a lot of variety. It also offered “one stop eating” experience for families with different food preferences.

Owner B was familiar with the history of immigration of the Chinese people to America, the Gold Mountain, to chase wealth during the Gold Rush Era. When asked if he thinks that the Chinese buffet is like the Gold Mountain, a profitable business in which the Chinese can get rich in America, he replied, “You can find a Gold Mountain in almost every business so long as you

have confidence and put customers first.” On the one hand, he believed that people with confidence tended to have higher achievements. On the other hand, he noticed that customers were more likely to patronize the same business again if the business recognized their needs. Navigating in the business world with these philosophies, Owner B featured quality food and services in his restaurant while promoting good relationships between employees and customers. He noticed a fair competition among Chinese buffet restaurants in the area. Although his restaurant did not distribute coupons through community magazines or postal mail, he advertised his restaurant on newspaper and websites.

Through his engagement in the Chinese buffet business, Owner B is satisfied with his accomplishments. Besides achieving financial security and reserving money for his children’s college education, he sees a brighter future with confidence and lives in a nice home. He emphasized that a luxury home would be an extravagance. Like the Gold Mountain sojourners who worked hard to save money for their families and retirement, Owner B to save money for his future too.

To ensure his customers would feel welcome and patronize his business again, Owner B focused on multiple aspects in the operation of his restaurant. He insisted on the production of quality and appetizing food, as well as the use of traditional and creative cooking styles. He attempted to build up the restaurant’s ambiance by incorporating local architectural designs (black wall edges) and Chinese elements (bamboo) (Figure 3.1). A number of decorations were custom made in the United States while his uncle constructed some of the wooden structures. Since Americans loved varieties, he offered Chinese and non-Chinese food in his buffet. He usually featured lobsters as a special addition to the holiday menu. Notably, Owner B catered to the taste of his Vietnamese customers by creating more seafood dishes, such as steamed whole

fish. He also served baked fish filets for his customers who preferred boned fish instead. He thought that the food at his restaurant is neither authentic nor inauthentic.



**Figure 3.1. Blending Chinese elements (bamboo) with local architectural designs (black wall edges), Restaurant B. (Author's collection.)**

Did Owner B think “bigger the better” when it comes to buffets? He disagreed, “The bigger the restaurant, the harder it is to communicate with staff members, especially when there are lots of decisions to make.” He explained that the physical dimensions of the serving area could not be too big either. Otherwise, it would look too empty, and potential customers might not come in. Owner B proposed that the size of a restaurant depended on the location, population and the spending power of the residents. An increase in the number of food choices would make the restaurant more attractive. However, it would be very important to maintain the quality and taste of the food while figuring out where and how the increased number of dishes would be displayed. Owner B observed that the abundance of food at Chinese buffet certainly

exhibited varieties. Unfortunately, it also created wastefulness if patrons did not finish what they had picked.

## **Discussion**

Both Owners A and B emigrated from Fuzhou around the year 2000. After venturing in various businesses, they choose to operate Chinese buffet restaurants. Offering a variety of food at a reasonable price, Chinese buffets catered to the Americans' palates while generating substantial profits for the owners. As we shall see, Chinese buffet owners brought the myth of the Gold Mountain to life in pursuit of success and prosperity.

### *Tracing the Myth of the Gold Mountain in Chinese Buffets*

Similar to the Cantonese who left their homes to strike it rich in America, the Fuzhounese followed their footsteps a century later, legally and illegally. As Chapter One revealed, despite the economic expansion in Fuzhou since the late 1970s, the Fuzhounese barely benefited from it.<sup>29</sup> Rather, they had to compete with workers from other provinces who rushed to Fuzhou for jobs. Whereas sweatshop workers in Fuzhou earned an average of US\$1,500 per year in 2010, busyboys who worked in Chinese restaurants in America could earn about US\$1,500 per month. The Fuzhounese had witnessed the power of remittances from overseas Fuzhounese: new houses, new municipal works, and new schools were built everywhere. Since Americans love Chinese food and the demand of Chinese restaurant workers is high, the Fuzhounese feel the call

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<sup>29</sup> Kenneth J. Guest, "From Mott Street to East Broadway: Fuzhounese Immigrants and the Revitalization of New York's Chinatown," in *Chinatown Around the World: Gilded Ghetto, Ethnopolis, and Cultural Diaspora*, ed. Bernard P. Wong and Chee-Bang Tan (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 42-44.

of Gold Mountain too because they could get rich in the thriving Chinese restaurant industry in America. On the cusp of the new millennium, Owners A and B immigrated to America. Their families also engaged in the Chinese restaurant business.

Owners A and B knew that America had been referred to as the Gold Mountain. Initially, both of them were hesitant to equate Chinese buffet with the Gold Mountain as an endeavor for the Chinese to get rich in America. To Owner A, Chinese buffet had past its prime because he perceived that the golden era of Chinese buffet happened in the 1990s to the 2000s. To Owner B, he visualized a Gold Mountain in every business with a positive work attitude and ethic. Nevertheless, through their Chinese buffet enterprise, they did earn “gold and silver” like the Cantonese Gold Mountain sojourners and could afford to buy luxury items like those requested by Maxine Kingston’s female family members.<sup>30</sup> They attained wealth and prosperity. Their expectations of a college education for their children signaled a path to upward mobility. Not only did they animate the myth of the Gold Mountain, but they also lived the American Dream because they seized the opportunity and worked hard in the Chinese buffet business to achieve their goals.

With about twelve Chinese buffet restaurants in the Central Pennsylvania area, how do they boost their competitiveness and profits? As marketing and communications strategist Fern Glazer pointed out, Americans loved coupons, whether they got them in the mail or online. If they searched coupons online, they would most likely check out the restaurants’ websites first before checking their social media pages. Americans age 50 to 64 clipped the most coupons in the mail or online, followed by seniors aged 65 and above.<sup>31</sup> Restaurants A to D announced their online presence by establishing websites and social media pages. In particular, Restaurant C

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<sup>30</sup> Hom, *Songs of Gold Mountain*, 40-41; Kingston, *China Men*, 46.

<sup>31</sup> Fern Glazer, “Deal Makers,” *Nation’s Restaurant News* 46, no. 25 (2012).

included printable coupons on its website. While Owners of Restaurant A, C, and D published coupons in community magazines regularly which were delivered by postal mail, Owner B explicitly stated that he did not distribute coupons to his customers during the interview. He believed that customer loyalty came from quality food and services, in addition to good employee-customer relationships. Owner A, on the other hand, advertised his business on the back of several Capital Area Transit buses that served the Greater Harrisburg area. However, advertising in print or on public transportation did increase restaurants' expenses. A more economical way to attract customers was online coupons. Since Restaurants A and D have been distributing coupons in print, they might as well maximize the advertising power by posting coupons on their websites.

Chinese buffet restaurants offered a variety of food at a fixed price with unlimited portions. With so many ingredients, preparations, and presentations to take care of, how did these restaurants survive? According to celebrity chef Benjamin Christie, buffet could be a profitable business. For example, buffet restaurants could create different dishes with similar ingredients. In Restaurant A, broccoli was used in at least three different dishes: Mixed Vegetable with Mushroom, Beef with Broccoli, and Chicken with Broccoli (Figure 3.2). In Restaurant B, chicken pieces appeared in at least four different dishes: Chicken with Garlic Sauce, Jalapeño Chicken, General Tso's Chicken, and Baked Honey Chicken (Figures 3.3 and 3.4). Another way to make a buffet cost-effective was to serve food in pre-plated portions.<sup>32</sup> Restaurant B showcased its variety of cakes in pre-sliced servings (Figure 3.5). Pineapple chunks and marshmallows were put on skewers before patrons swirled them in a chocolate fondue fountain (Figure 2.27).

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<sup>32</sup> The Restaurant Blogger, "The Ins-n-Outs of a Buffet Operation," August 8, 2008, <http://www.therestaurantblogger.com/the-ins-n-outs-of-a-buffet-operation/> (accessed March 12, 2017).



**Figure 3.2.** Three different dishes that used broccoli (upper left to upper middle), Restaurant A. (Author's collection.)



**Figure 3.3.** Chicken with Garlic and Jalapeño Chicken, Restaurant B. (Author's collection.)



Figure 3.4. General Tso's Chicken and Honey Baked Chicken, Restaurant B. (Author's collection.)



Figure 3.5. Pre-plated desserts, Restaurant B. (Author's collection.)

## Conclusion

Despite racial discrimination and limited opportunities, the Cantonese Gold Mountain sojourners have chased wealth in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century. Whether they engaged in gold mining, trading, restaurants, laundries, agricultural, manufacturing, and other service sectors, most of them did not plan to stay in America. Rather, they worked hard and wanted to get rich quick before reuniting with their families in China. Likewise, inspired by numerous success stories about how their fellow villagers struck it rich in America, many Fuzhounese discovered economic prosperity in the burgeoning Chinese buffet business in the 1990s. Through the production of Chinese buffets, the Fuzhounese satisfied Americans' crave for Chinese food in abundance while generating personal wealth. That is why the Chinese buffet is a twenty-first century representation of the nineteenth-century myth of the Gold Mountain. It is also a Chinese American version of the American Dream because the group's industriousness contributed to their success in America, and intended to bring their families over in pursuit of having better lives in the United States than they did in China.

## Conclusion

The interdisciplinary nature of American Studies allows me to explore topics related to American life and culture from multiple perspectives. My area of interest – the Chinese buffet – is a culinary form and a cultural scene that is uniquely American. In this thesis, I have located cultural meaning in modern Chinese buffets, viewing them as sites of interplay between ancient American and Chinese mythologies: the American myth of Cathay, the American myth of abundance, and the Chinese myth of the Gold Mountain. Americans' desire for Chinese food and abundance in exotic settings has culminated in the grandeur of Chinese buffets since the 1990s. In the meantime, Chinese buffet restaurant owners profit from their businesses, allowing them to achieve their dream. It is a win-win situation for both parties.

What is the distinctiveness of the Chinese buffet in the United States? For both the consumers and producers, the American Dream manifests itself in the Chinese buffet. On the one hand, the unlimited supply of fresh and tasty food signifies instant gratification to consumers. On the other hand, the production of Chinese buffets, which caters to Americans' visual and gastronomical abundance, creates opportunities for producers to pursue prosperity and upward mobility in the American society. Ultimately, the Chinese buffet combines the popularity of Chinese food in abundance with a vision of good life, making it a hybrid dining practice in America.

This ethnographic research encompassed the consumption and production of the Chinese buffet. Notably, most patrons did not visit Chinese buffet restaurants in search for authentic Chinese food. Rather, they enjoyed walking around the spacious restaurants' atria while filling their plates with a combination of exotic and familiar food. In order to attract their American patrons, Chinese buffet owners admitted that their food was inauthentic or somewhat inauthentic. However, some Chinese buffet restaurants did offer "exotic" or authentic Chinese food – such as steamed buns, steamed fish, and frog legs – to impress patrons who looked for authentic Chinese food. In the absence of a Chinatown in Central Pennsylvania, the presence of authentic Chinese food, though small in number of choices, might be considered a blessing.

In fact, authenticity is a relative and subjective idea. Ever since Chinese food was introduced in America in the mid-nineteenth century, a number of Chinese dishes in America have been modified and adapted to please Americans' palates, and alternative ingredients have replaced those that appeared in the original recipes. In this way, my thesis perhaps opens the door to the future analysis of the role of authenticity in Chinese America food. Alternatively, I could also imagine a project in which the researcher compares and contrasts the tastes, preferences, and behaviors of Chinese American patrons and non-Chinese patrons. Do they react similarly to exotic décor or are the jade Buddha statues there to entertain non-Chinese diners? Do Chinese Americans and non-Chinese choose the same dishes and exhibit the same tastes or is there a wide discrepancy? Do the two groups define "authentic" Chinese food in the same way? My research, though answering some questions, has generated others. Clearly, the topic of Chinese buffets remains a fertile field of academic inquiry. I leave it to other researchers to design projects that can explore some of the questions raised by this research.

In closing, I wish to share that a new trend is brewing in Philadelphia's Chinatown. During my visit in the summer of 2016, I observed the infiltration of non-Chinese restaurants which occupied former Chinese restaurants spaces: Japanese-style crepes, Thai-rolled ice-cream, and Korean barbecue. These new restaurants energized Chinatown while bringing in more culinary tourists. In other words, Chinese food has knocked down so many barriers over the last 150 years that other exotic Asian cuisines face far less resistance when they try to penetrate the competitive world of American restaurants. Remarkably, some of these Asian restaurants are owned and operated by the Chinese. However, it is unlikely that the above Asian food items will make it to Chinese buffets. Their production, though not extremely complicated, requires special equipment, skills, and extra staff members to tend to the stations. Ideally, crepes and ice-cream should be eaten as soon as they are prepared. Among the four Chinese buffet restaurants I visited in Central Pennsylvania, one of them has been renovated recently. It features a larger sushi selection, a chocolate fondue fountain, a popcorn machine, and a cotton candy machine. Although an extra staff member needs to operate the popcorn and cotton candy machines, popcorn and cotton candy are comparatively easier to prepare and can be made slightly ahead of time without affecting their quality and freshness.

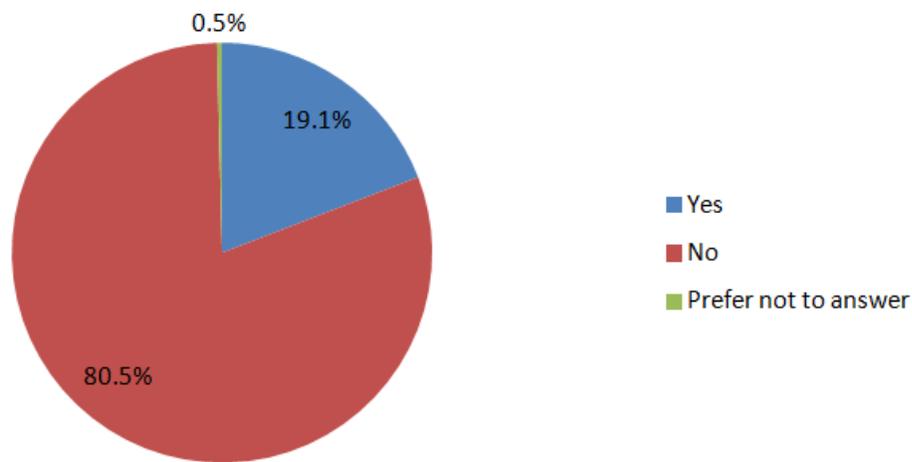
I hope you enjoyed this intellectual Chinese buffet and take some of the findings with you the next time you visit a Chinese buffet restaurant. So please consider this thesis – what is the American expression? – food for thought.

### Appendix A

#### Student Chinese Buffet Dining Preferences Survey Results

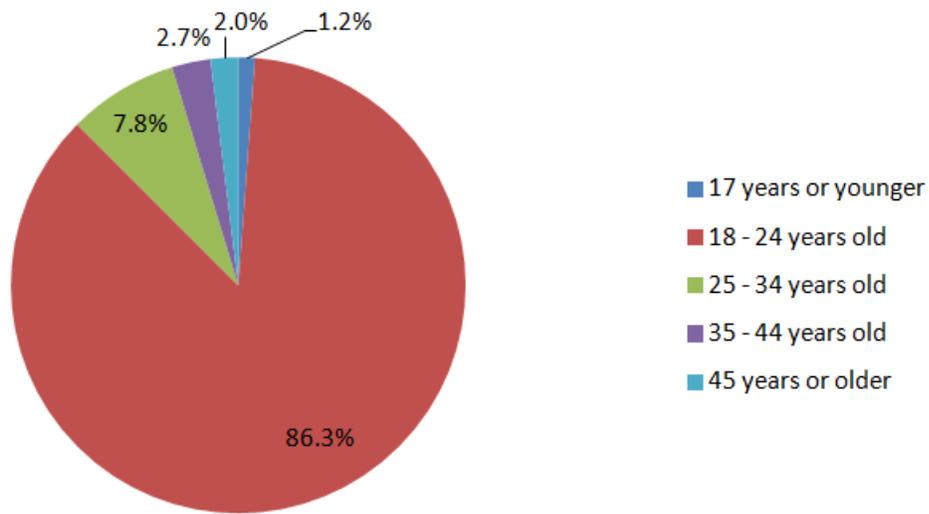
##### 1. Are you a person of Chinese descent?

(256 responses)



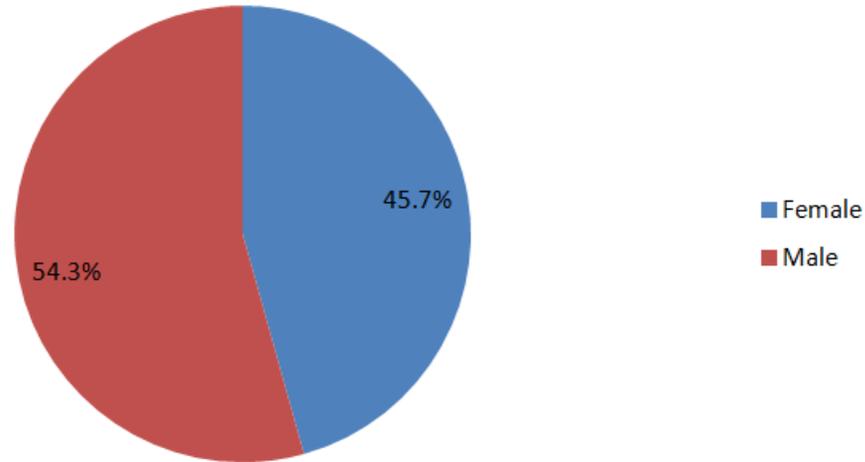
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##### 2. What is your age? (256 responses)

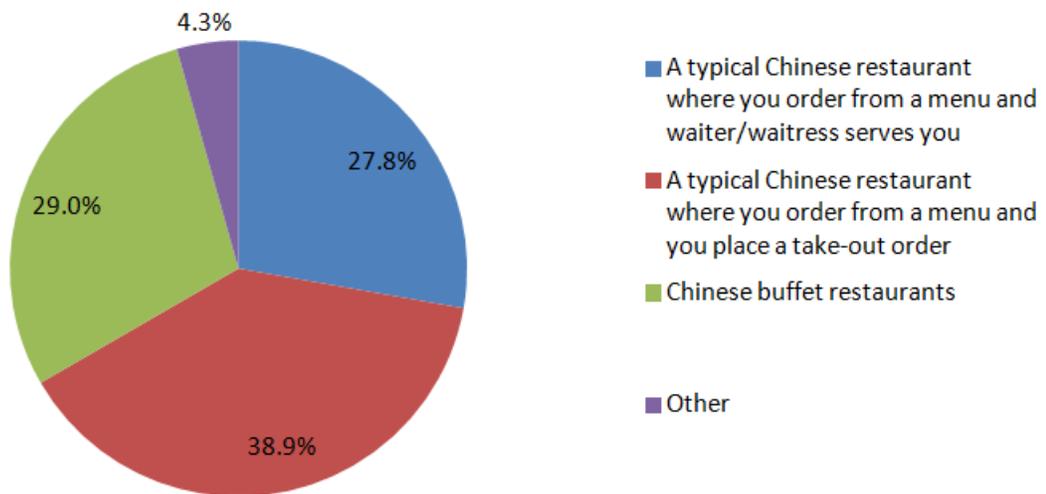


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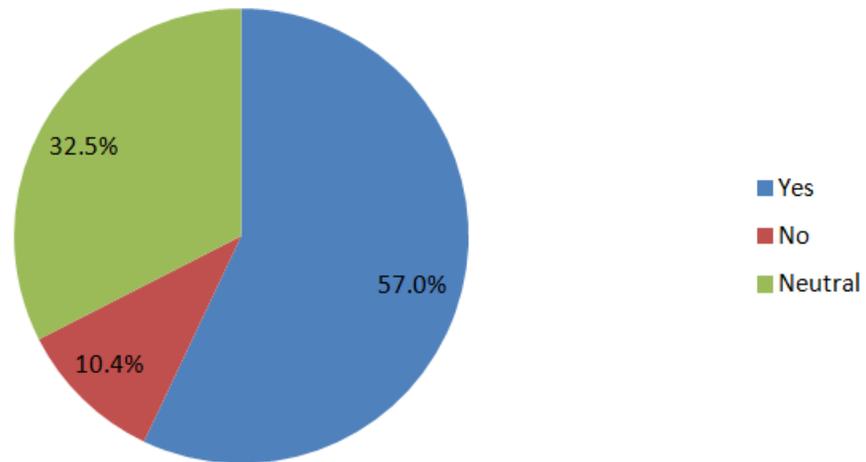
### 3. What is your gender? (254 responses)



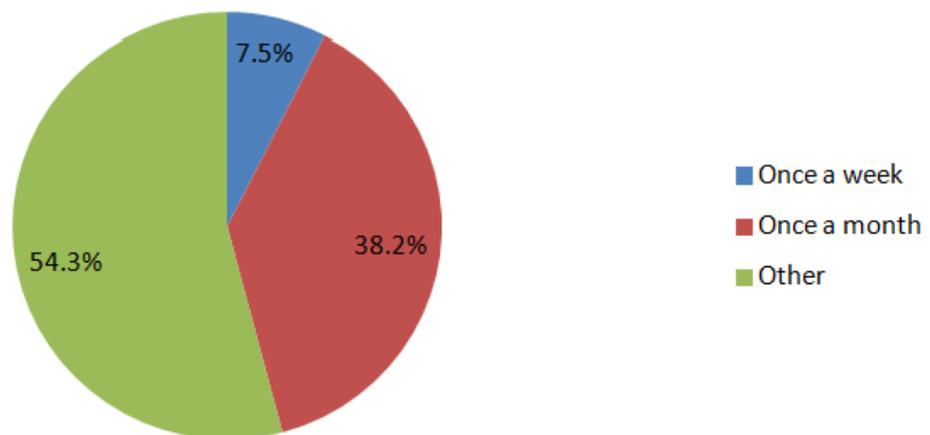
### 4. How do you prefer to eat Chinese food? Please select one answer only. (252 responses)



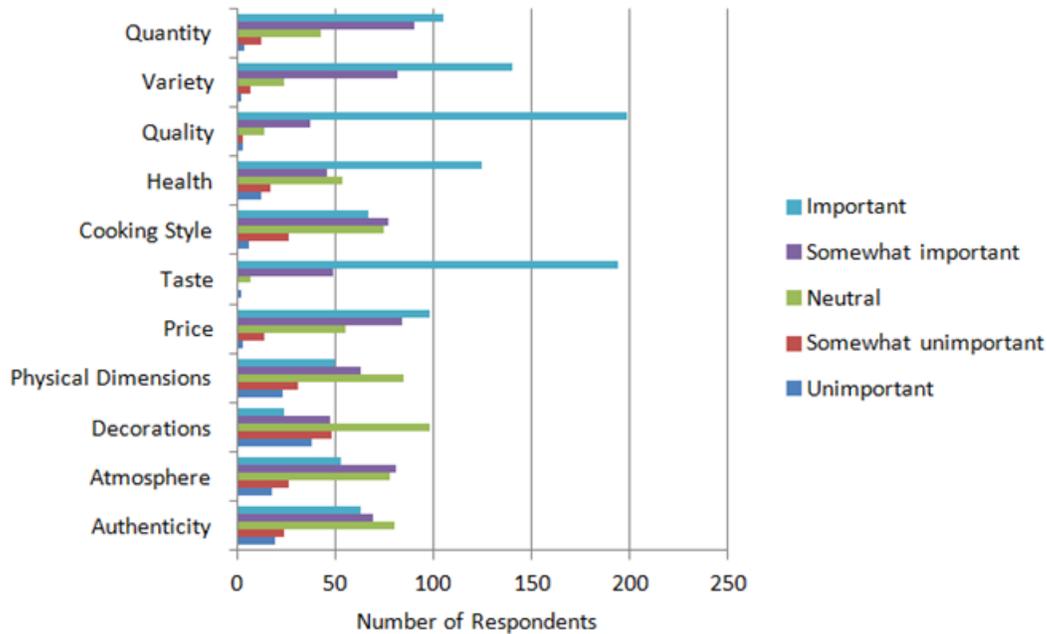
### 5. Do you like Chinese buffet? (249 responses)



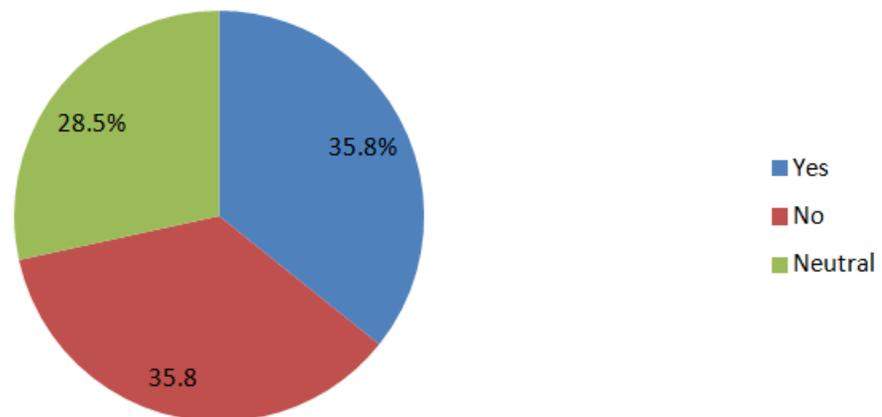
### 6. How often do you eat at a Chinese buffet restaurant? (241 responses)



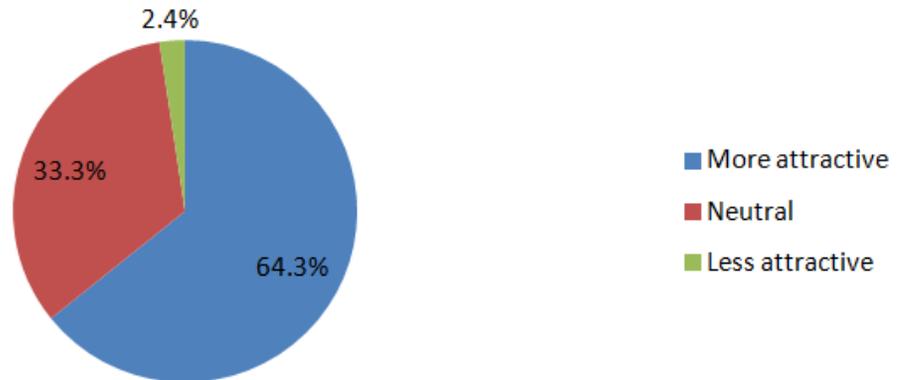
## 7. How important to you are the following aspects of a Chinese buffet restaurant?



## 8. "People tend to think 'bigger the better' when it comes to buffets." Do you agree with this statement? (246 responses)

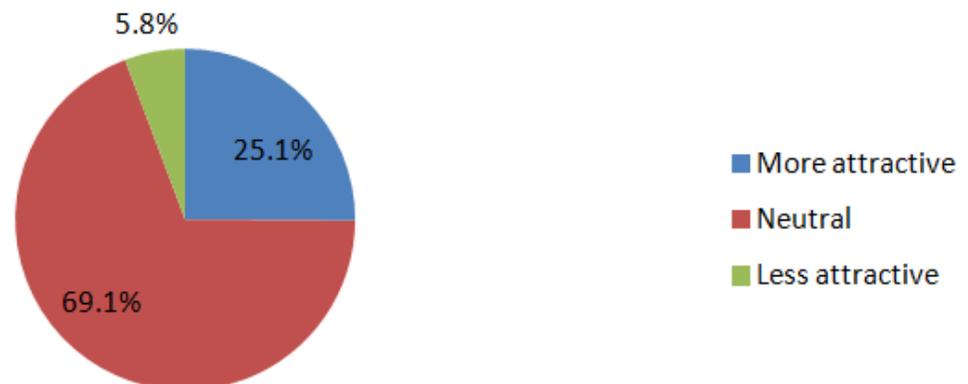


**9. If a new Chinese buffet restaurant advertises itself as the biggest in the region, would the size, in terms of the NUMBER OF FOOD CHOICES, affect its attractiveness?** (249 responses)

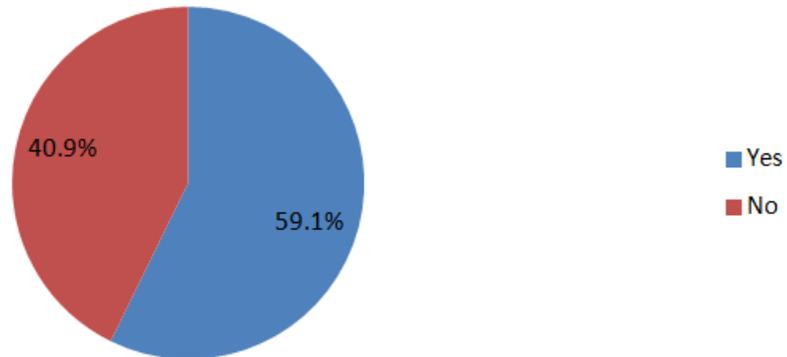


**10. If a new Chinese buffet restaurant advertises itself as the biggest in the region, would the size, in terms of the PHYSICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE SERVING AREA, affect its attractiveness?**

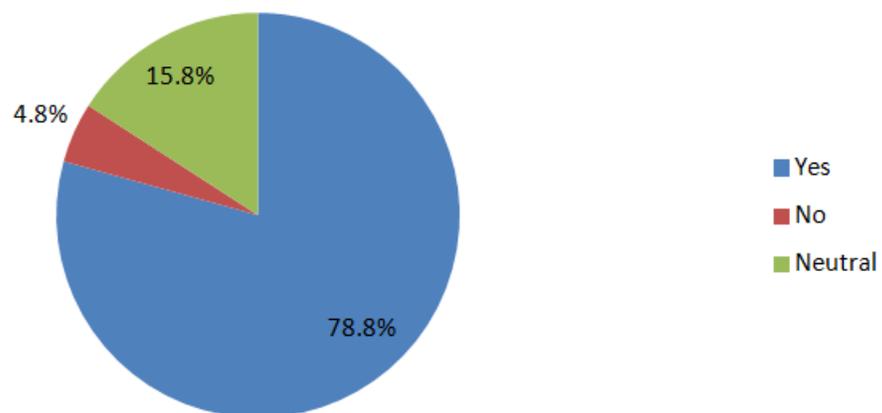
(243 responses)



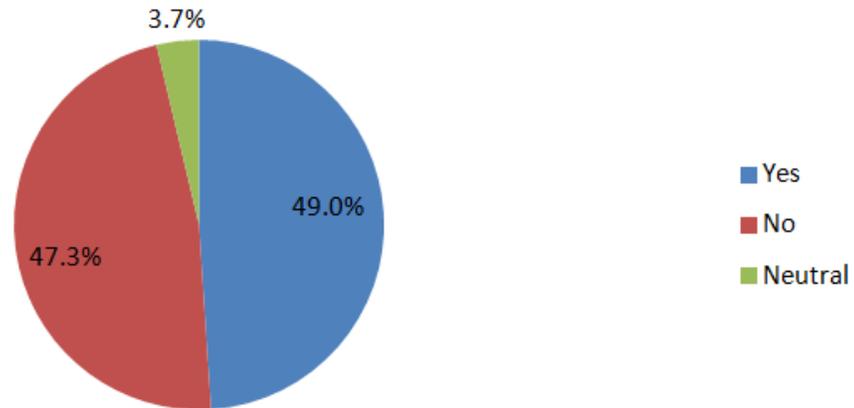
**11a. Do you pay attention to the comments posted on restaurant review websites, such as TripAdvisor or Yelp?** (247 responses)



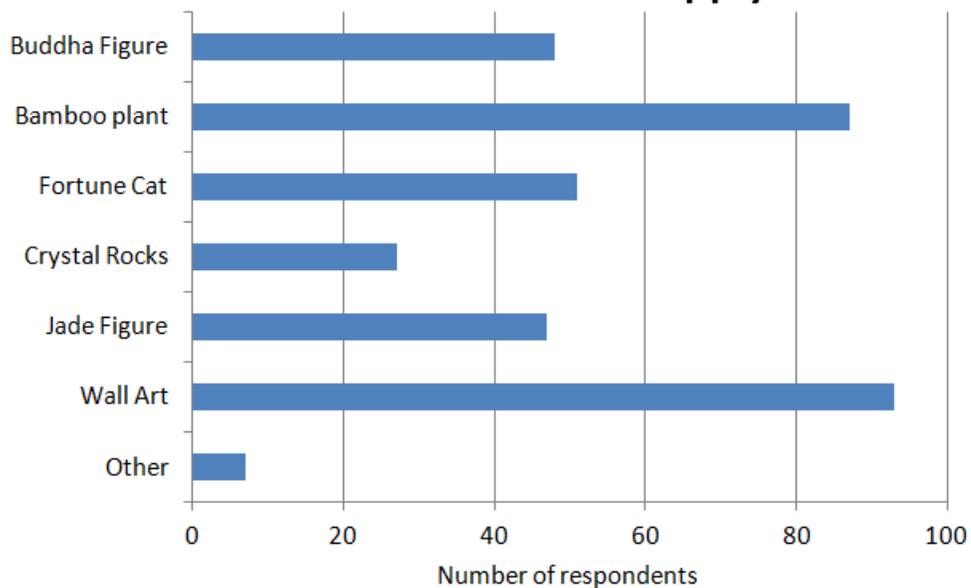
**11b. If yes, do they affect your choice of Chinese buffet restaurants?** (145 responses)



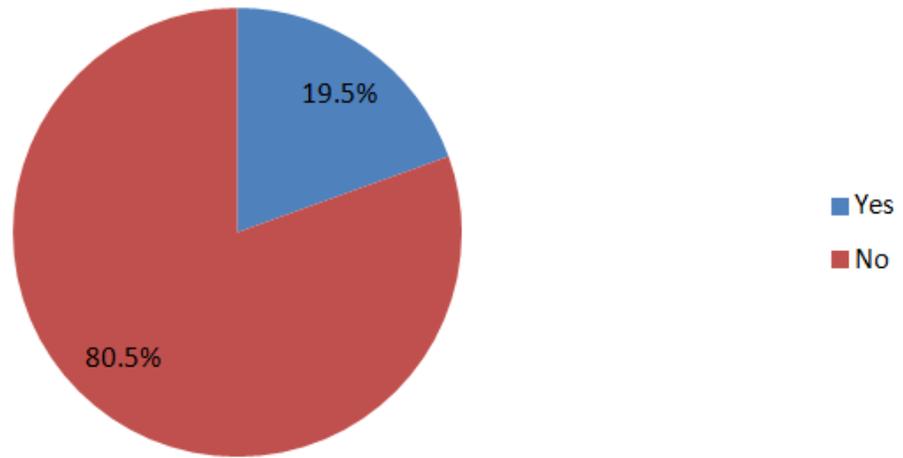
**12a. Does the presence of Chinese-themed decorations enhance your dining experience at Chinese buffet restaurants?** (243 responses)



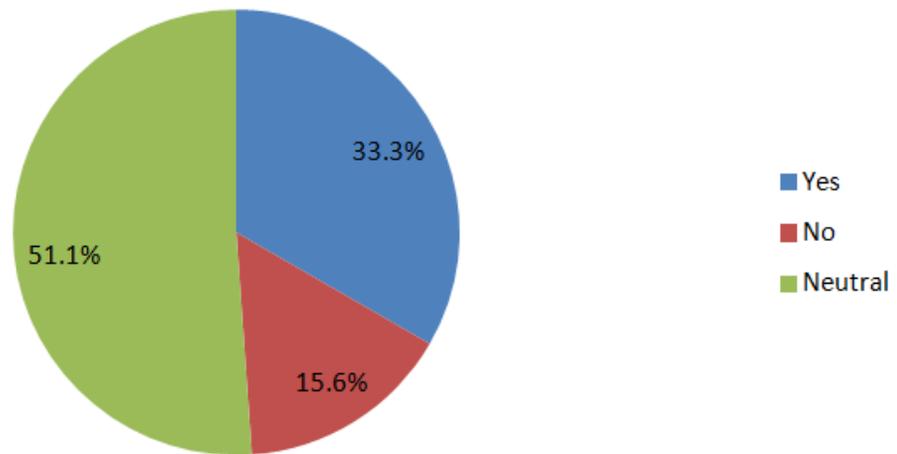
**12b. If yes, which item(s) are you interested in? Choose all that apply.**



**13a. Do you notice any special menu during holidays?** (241 responses)

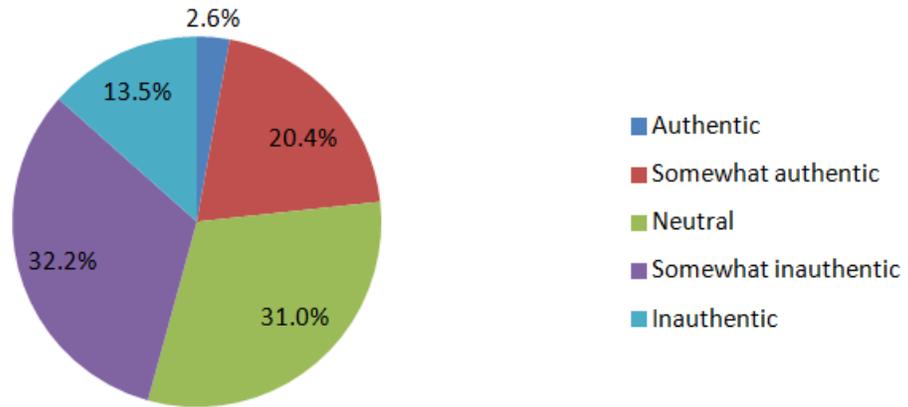


**13b. If yes, do you enjoy the special menu?** (45 responses)

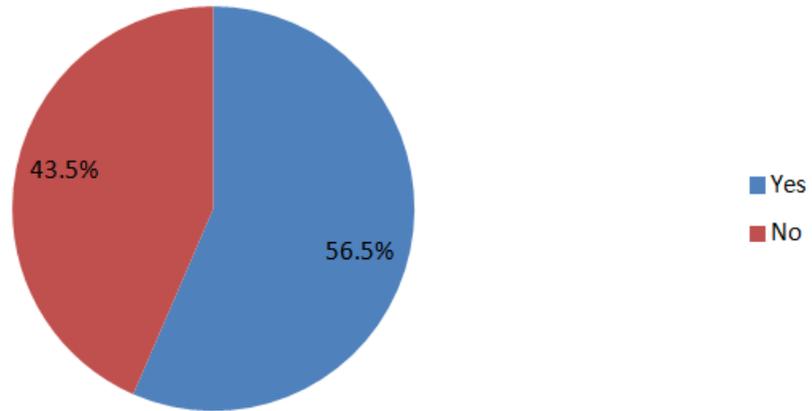


### 14. How authentic do you think is the Chinese food served at the Chinese buffet?

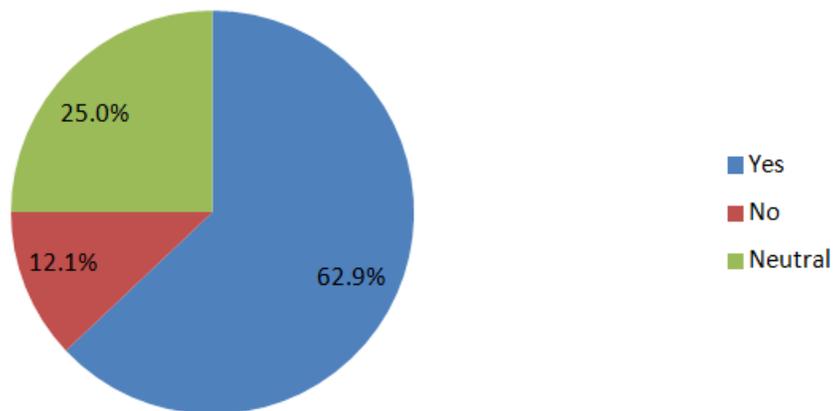
(245 responses)



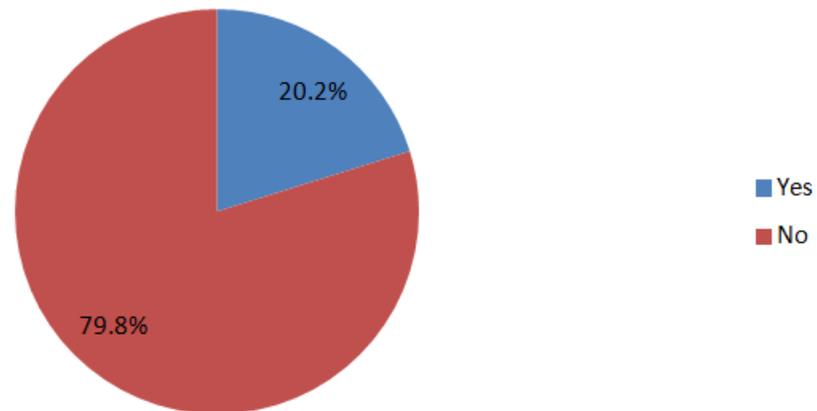
**15a. Have you visited a Chinatown in the United States?** (246 responses)



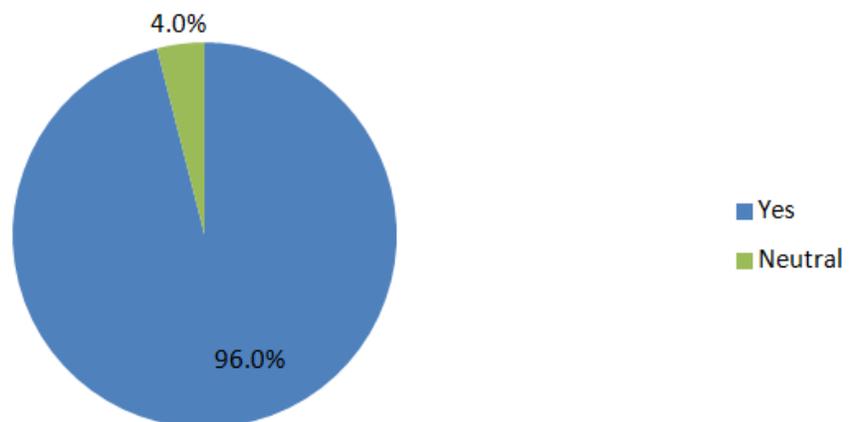
**15b. If yes, is the food served in Chinatown more authentic?** (116 responses)



**16a. Have you visited or lived in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong before?** (248 responses)



**16b. If yes, is the food served in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong more authentic?** (50 responses)



## Appendix B

### Student Chinese Buffet Dining Preferences Survey Questions

1. Are you a person of Chinese descent?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Prefer not to answer
  
2. What is your age?
  - 17 years or younger
  - 18-24 years old
  - 25-34 years old
  - 35-44 years old
  - 45-54 years old
  - 55-64 years old
  - 65 years or older
  - Prefer not to answer
  
3. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Prefer not to answer
  
4. How do you prefer to eat Chinese food? Please select one answer only.
  - A typical Chinese restaurant where you order from a menu and waiter/waitress serves you
  - A typical Chinese restaurant where you order from a menu and you place a take-out order
  - Chinese buffet restaurants
  - Others: \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Do you like Chinese buffet?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Neutral
 If yes, why do you like Chinese buffet? \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. How often do you eat at a Chinese buffet restaurant?
  - Once a week
  - Once a month
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. How important to you are the following aspects of a Chinese buffet restaurant?

	Unimportant	Somewhat unimportant	Neutral	Somewhat important	Important
Quantity	<input type="radio"/>				
Variety	<input type="radio"/>				
Quality	<input type="radio"/>				
Health	<input type="radio"/>				
Cooking style	<input type="radio"/>				
Taste	<input type="radio"/>				
Price	<input type="radio"/>				
Physical dimensions	<input type="radio"/>				
Decorations	<input type="radio"/>				
Atmosphere	<input type="radio"/>				
Authenticity	<input type="radio"/>				

8. "People tend to think 'bigger the better' when it comes to buffets." Do you agree with this statement?  
 Yes     No
9. If a new Chinese buffet restaurant advertises itself as the biggest in the region, would the size, in terms of the number of food choices, affect its attractiveness?  
 Less attractive                       Neutral                       More attractive
10. If a new Chinese buffet restaurant advertises itself as the biggest in the region, would the size, in terms of the physical dimensions of the serving areas, affect its attractiveness?  
 Less attractive                       Neutral                       More attractive
11. Do you pay attention to the comments posted on restaurant review websites, such as TripAdvisor or Yelp?  
 Yes     No  
 If yes, do they affect your choice of Chinese buffet restaurants?  
 Yes     No
12. Does the presence of Chinese themed decorations enhance your dining experience at Chinese buffet restaurants?  
 Yes     No  
 If yes, which items(s) are you interested in? Check all that apply:  
 Buddha figure     Bamboo plant     Fortune cat     Crystal rocks  
 Jade figure     Wall art     Other: \_\_\_\_\_
13. Do you notice any special menu during holidays?  
 Yes     No  
 If yes, do you enjoy the special menu?  
 Yes     No
14. How authentic do you think is the Chinese food served at the Chinese buffet?  
 Inauthentic     Somewhat inauthentic     Neutral     Somewhat authentic     Authentic
15. Have you visited a Chinatown in the United States before?  
 Yes     No  
 If yes, is the food served in Chinatown more authentic?  
 Yes                       No                       Neutral
16. Have you visited or lived in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong before?  
 Yes     No  
 If yes, is the food served in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong more authentic?  
 Yes                       No                       Neutral

## Appendix C

### Chinese Buffet Restaurant Owners Interview Questions

1. Where were you born?
2. How old are you?
3. How long have you been living in the United States?
4. What brought you to Central Pennsylvania?
5. What attracted you to enter the Chinese buffet business?
6. Over the last 20 years, the number of Chinese buffet restaurants has been growing in the United States. Why do you think Chinese buffets are so popular?
7. Are you aware of the other Chinese buffets in Central Pennsylvania?
  - Yes     No
  - If yes, is there a friendly competition?     Yes     No
8. When the Chinese people came to the United States in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to search for gold, they thought the United State was a place to get rich and referred to it as the Gold Mountain. Have you heard about it?
  - Yes     No
9. Do you agree that Chinese buffet is like the Gold Mountain, a profitable business in which the Chinese can get rich in the United States?
  - Yes     No
10. Do you think your Chinese buffet business help you achieve your goals?
  - Yes     No
  - If yes, what is/are the goal(s)? Check all that apply:
    - A brighter future     Financial stability     College education for your children
    - A nice home     Other: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Do you think the size of a buffet, in terms of the number of food choices, affect the attractiveness of your restaurant?
  - Yes     No

12. Do you think the size of a buffet, in terms of the physical dimensions of the serving area, affect the attractiveness of your restaurant?  
 Yes     No
13. "People tend to think 'bigger the better' when it comes to buffets." Do you agree with this statement?  
 Yes     No
14. How did you learn the business of running a restaurant?  
 Reading books     Previous work experience     Family     Friends     Other: \_\_\_\_\_
15. Is this the first restaurant you have ever owned?  
 Yes     No
16. Do you own other Chinese restaurant(s) at present?  
 Yes     No  
If yes, what kind of restaurant is it / are they?
17. Have you opened a Chinese restaurant before?  
 Yes     No  
If yes, what kind of restaurant was it / were they?
18. Have you worked in any restaurant before?  
 Yes     No  
If yes, what kind of restaurant was it / were they?
19. What was/were your previous occupation(s)?

20. How important to you are the following aspects of your Chinese buffet restaurant?

	Unimportant	Somewhat unimportant	Neutral	Somewhat important	Important
Quantity	<input type="radio"/>				
Variety	<input type="radio"/>				
Quality	<input type="radio"/>				
Health	<input type="radio"/>				
Cooking style	<input type="radio"/>				
Taste	<input type="radio"/>				
Price	<input type="radio"/>				
Physical dimensions	<input type="radio"/>				
Decorations	<input type="radio"/>				
Atmosphere	<input type="radio"/>				
Authenticity	<input type="radio"/>				

21. How did you choose the restaurant's name and what does it mean?

22. Why do you serve Chinese and non-Chinese food in your buffet?

23. Do you offer special menu during holidays?

Yes    No

If yes, what kind of food do you add to the menu?

24. How authentic do you think is the Chinese food served in your buffet?

Inauthentic    Somewhat inauthentic    Neutral    Somewhat authentic    Authentic

25. Where did you purchase your decorations for the restaurants?

26. How do the decorations help to attract your customers?

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## ACADEMIC VITA

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### **Education**

- Major and Honors: American Studies
- Thesis Title: The Chinese Buffet: A Hybrid Dining Practice in America  
Thesis Supervisor: John R. Haddad

### **Work Experience**

Curatorial Intern May – July 2016

The Hershey Story, Museum on Chocolate Avenue, Hershey, PA

Supervisor: Valerie S. Seiber

- Cataloged and housed international product packaging and promotional materials with PastPerfect
- Published “What is Hershey’s in Chinese?” for the Curator’s Corner blog on the museum’s website, located at <https://hersheystory.org/what-is-hersheys-in-chinese/>
- Published “Camp Curatorial Curiosity,” a blog documenting the internship experience, located at <https://rkyee.wordpress.com/>

Curatorial Intern

January – May 2016

Milton Hershey School Heritage Center, Hershey, PA

Supervisor: James D. McMahon

- Organized digitized audio/video materials and conducted quality control
- Cataloged objects belonging to Milton and Catherine Hershey with PastPerfect
- Published “Chocolate Coated Memory,” a blog documenting the internship experience, located at <https://yeer2016.wordpress.com/>

Archivist Intern

August – December 2013

Hershey Community Archives, Hershey, PA

Supervisor: Tammy L. Hamilton

- Arranged and described records for Ronald McDonald House Charities of Central Pennsylvania (RMHC) with Describing Archives: A Content Standard
- Processed and cataloged RMHC materials and created a finding aid, located at <https://data.hersheyarchives.org/Public/guides/201346.pdf>

Archivist Intern

August – December 2013

Archives and Special Collections, Penn State Harrisburg Library, Middletown, PA

Supervisor: Heidi A. Moyer

- Accessioned, arranged, described, processed, and cataloged records for College History Archives (CHA)
- Created a finding aid and co-curated an exhibit on student life with CHA materials
- Published “A Tale of Two Courses: When American Studies Internship Meets Honors Service Learning ,” a blog documenting the internship experience, located at <https://rky5018.wordpress.com/>

### **Awards**

- Richard E. Ziegler and Stephanie A. Ziegler History Scholarship, Penn State Harrisburg (2016 – 2017)
- George Wolf Award for Academic Excellence in American Studies, Penn State Harrisburg (2016)
- Certificate of Achievement, Capital College Honors Program, Penn State Harrisburg (2013)
- Finalist, Hong Kong Outstanding Students Award, The Lion & Globe Educational Trust (1993)

### **Professional Membership**

- The Society of Americanists
- The Eastern American Studies Association
- Epsilon Alpha Kappa, the first American Studies Honor Society

### **Publications**

- “A Tale of Two Food Blogs: Culinary Tourism in Hong Kong from a Chinese American Perspective,” in *New Errands: The Undergraduate Journal in American Studies*, volume 3, issue 1 (2015)

### **Presentations**

- “The Chinese Buffet: A Hybrid Dining Practice in America,” The 2017 Annual Conference of the Eastern American Studies Association, Harrisburg, PA
- “A Tale of Two Food Blogs: Culinary Tourism in Hong Kong from a Chinese American Perspective,” Undergraduate Roundtable, The 2015 Annual Conference of the Eastern American Studies Association, Glassboro, NJ

### **Community Service Involvement**

- Judge, The Hershey Story History Contest for Young Writers (2015 – Present)
- Graduate Student Representative, The Eastern American Studies Association (2015 – 2017)
- Vice President of Membership Engagement, National Society of Leadership and Success, Penn State Harrisburg Chapter (2013 – 2015)
- Editor, “The Honor Pride,” a blog for the Honors Program at Penn State Harrisburg, located at <http://thehonorpride.blogspot.com/> (2013 – 2015)
- Career Peer, Career Services, Penn State Harrisburg (2013 – 2014)
- Campus Guide, Admissions Office, Penn State Harrisburg (2011 – 2012)

### **Language Proficiency**

- Cantonese
- Mandarin