

Chop Suey as Imagined Authentic Chinese Food: The Culinary Identity of Chinese Restaurants in the United States

HAIMING LIU

Introduction

In the small hours of one morning in 1917, John Doe, a white laborer, strolled into the Dragon Chop Suey House at 630 West Sixth Street, Los Angeles, and ordered chicken chop suey. The steaming bowl was set before Mr. Doe by a grinning Japanese. “I won’t eat it,” barked Mr. Doe, “There’s no poultry in it.” The flying squad was called in and was happily annoyed at this midnight incident. The officers offered to act as a jury and demanded sample bowls of chop suey. The Japanese owner declined and Mr. Doe was free to go.¹ The laborer demanded real meat, the officers wanted free meals, and the owner of this Chinese restaurant was actually Japanese, but everyone was thoroughly familiar with the concept of chop suey. As this story shows, by 1917 chop suey was a well-known restaurant meal in America.

Food is a cultural tradition. The popularity of Chinese restaurants reflects how an Asian cuisine was transplanted and developed in American society. Chinese migration was a transnational flow of people, social networks, and cultural values. Chinese immigrants arrived in America with their own lifestyles, labor and vocational skills, business expertise and capital, family rituals and traditions, religious and philosophical beliefs. Food is one of the earliest and probably the most visible aspects of transnational Chinese culture in America. Canton Restaurant, with seating for three hundred, was established in San Francisco as early as 1849. A business directory in 1856 lists five restaurants and thirty-eight grocery stores among eighty-eight Chinese businesses in San Francisco.

Food also reveals history. The restaurant business represents an important aspect of Chinese American experience. Ever since the early twentieth century, an increasing number of Chinese immigrants have become restaurant workers and proprietors. The 1920 census indicates that of the 45,614 Chinese employed, 11,438 were cooks, waiters, and/or restaurants operators.² In the 1930s, 6 percent of Chinese adult males in California and 20 to 25 percent of them in East Coast cities worked in the restaurant business.³ By the late 1940s, there were about 4,300 Chinese restaurants in the continental United States, and 7 percent of the American population frequented Chinese restaurants. Ten years later the number of Chinese restaurants grew to 4,500 but, even more remarkably, they had over 20 percent of Americans as their frequent customers. In 1959, New York City alone had about 750 Chinese restaurants.⁴

Most Chinese immigrants learned the restaurant trade in the United States when other jobs were not available to them. After the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the economic recession in California in the 1870s, and especially the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, the Chinese faced constant racial harassment and discrimination in their economic and social lives. Chinese concentration in the restaurant business illustrates how the racialized environment drove the Chinese into menial service occupations. Like the laundry, restaurant work became a trademark occupation of the Chinese. From 1900 to the 1960s, most Chinese restaurants in America were called chop suey houses, and chop suey was synonymous with Chinese food in the United States. When numerous chop suey houses spread across American cities, food became a tangible component of Chinese American ethnic identity.

Through chop suey history, this article aims to show how migration is often a process of negotiation between cultures. As the Chinese have adapted themselves to American society, some elements of their home cultures have remained, others have disappeared, and still others have changed. Chinese food is an interesting case of such cultural migration and change. As chop suey became a hit dish and Chinese restaurants carved a niche in the American food market, few American clients realized that there were no such things as fortune cookies in China. What Americans came to know as chop suey, General Tso's chicken, and egg foo young were very different from their Chinese counterparts. In fact, high-class restaurants in China seldom served chop suey. Since 1900, chop suey's ingredients, flavor, and cookery changed considerably in order to meet local tastes. As chop suey and other popular Chinese dishes became less Chinese in their culinary content, they simultaneously appeared more "authentic" in their culinary identity. Thus, the Chinese restaurant business emerged as the most visible and enduring emblem of the Chinese in the United States.

What constituted chop suey's culinary identity in America were a number of social expectations. American clients desired Chinese dishes they believed to be genuine. Chinese proprietors hoped to accommodate American tastes. Furthermore,

chop suey and Chinese cuisine in general had to be cheap, bargain ethnic food. The racialized environment of American society did not allow chop suey to be high-class cuisine. Chop suey's authenticity was in fact a locally constructed invention. Though it was accepted as a genuine Chinese dish, chop suey's authenticity was only true to itself.⁵ Through food history, we see how the formation of Chinese American ethnicity was not a simple blending of Western and Asian cultures but a process in which Chinese immigrants and their descendants adapted to their social environments, built new identities and new cultural sensibilities. Race and ethnicity played important roles in such processes.

This article argues that the development of Chinese cuisine in the United States was a complex historical process. As an aspect of transnational culture, its authenticity and culinary identity often rested on its real and imagined Chinese roots, while its popularity depended on how well Chinese restaurant proprietors adapted the flavors, ingredients, and cookery of Chinese cuisine to the tastes and markets of local American communities. Both international and local conditions impacted its development. This dynamic interaction between Chinese food and American customers was an interesting process of cultural negotiation. While the Chinese restaurant business helped shape the American diet, Chinese food was at the same time being shaped, transformed, and altered by American popular taste. In this case, adaptation was a two-way process. Serving a wide range of American clients, chop suey eventually evolved into a popular American ethnic food and a distinct culinary identity for the Chinese restaurant business.

This evolution illustrates the theory of "the invention of tradition."⁶ A tradition needs legends that tell about its origins. Collective memory, constant storytelling, and broad public imagination carry and pass on a tradition from generation to generation. In the meantime, a tradition may experience constant negotiation and contestation in the process of cultural migration. Traditions that seem timeless and ancient are in fact being constantly modified and reinvented within any given historical context. Hence what is authentically Chinese in one place or time is often not so in another. What makes chop suey amazing is that its "Chineseness," as first popularized and reified in the United States, was then transported back to China in the 1940s. This process demonstrates that what constitutes Chineseness is very contextually specific. The "homecoming" of chop suey was an invention of American Chineseness. Though the visit of Li Hongzhang (Li Hung Chang) to the United States in 1896 contributed to its invention, as I explain below, it was the American racial environment, ethnic agency, the historical imagination of Chinese immigrants, and the American popular craze for chop suey that made that invention successful. As chop suey generated numerous jobs for Chinese immigrants and established a culinary bond between Chinese food and American customers, it also became a motif in jazz musician Louis Armstrong's songs and in artist Edward Hopper's paintings. The invention and subsequent popularity of

chop suey illustrate how an ethnic cuisine became an integral part of American food culture.

The Origin of Chop Suey

There are several versions of the story about the origin of chop suey as a famous Chinese American dish. According to one version, the cooks for the Chinese railroad workers did not know much about cooking and just put rice, vegetables, and a little bit of meat together for a simple Chinese meal called “chop suey.”⁷ The late Chinese American historian Iris Chang cites a more popular West Coast version in her book *The Chinese in America*. According to Gold Rush folklore, a group of drunken American miners entered a Chinese restaurant in San Francisco late one night, just as the shop was about to close. The owner, in an effort to avoid a confrontation, decided to serve them. He quickly threw together a handful of leftover table scraps to create the dish we now know as chop suey.⁸ In another book that recounts this version, the author emphasizes how the Chinese cook was a much smaller man in comparison to the bigger, more powerful-looking, hungry white miners. “Chop suey” quickly became the business sign of every Chinese restaurant in the American West. Following the incident, every city with a population over 25,000 had one or more chop suey houses.⁹ The East Coast version of the chop suey legend is even more interesting, as it relates to the visit of a high-ranking Chinese official, Li Hongzhang, to the United States in 1896. The story claims that Li did not touch much Western food and preferred to go to Chinatown for Chinese meals, even though he was honored with sumptuous banquets and receptions during his visit. In Chinatown, his favorite dish was chop suey.

Each version is historically logical but not accurate. The Gold Rush version is obviously a folktale rather than a fact. Early California journal and newspaper articles on Chinese restaurant food during that period never mention chop suey. However, Chinese immigrants arrived in California first, and Chinese restaurants did become popular with white Americans and other immigrants as early as the Gold Rush era, though they served mainly genuine Chinese food. The California version connotes the deep historical roots of the Chinese in American society. Moreover, this tale indicates that chop suey was not a fancy Chinese delicacy but a common dish created in the United States rather than in China. Though the New York version is also a fiction, it is meaningful in several ways. First, as an alleged favorite food of Li, chop suey embodied “authenticity” as a Chinese dish. Its symbolic Chinese roots made the dish a product of transnational culinary culture. Second, this “authentic” label helped chop suey establish itself in America and contributed to its growing popularity. Such legitimacy was needed more on the East Coast than the West because they served mainly non-Chinese customers.

Historian Renqiu Yu has documented how the New York version of the story of chop suey’s origin was actually invented by Chinese immigrants who were trying

to capitalize on Li's visit and market Chinese food to the American public. Yu points out that Li never ate in Chinatown and actually tried to stay away from Chinese communities in America.¹⁰ While the New York version was not true, it indicated how closely the Chinese community followed American news coverage of Li's visit. As the most important high-ranking Chinese official to visit the United States during that time, Li received a royal reception and great media attention during his American trip. American journalists and returning diplomats also traveled with him on his ship. News reports about Li included detailed descriptions of what he ate. For example, one report mentioned that Li had brought his own cooks who prepared for him seven meals a day while traveling on the ocean. His meals included shark fins and birds' nests.¹¹ Another report said that when he attended a dinner hosted by ex-Secretary J. W. Foster, "Li drank sparingly of champagne during the banquet, and ate a little ice cream, but touched no solid food."¹² In still another report, when Li hosted a dinner at the Waldorf Astoria for U.S. diplomats who had served in China, he "let the veal and grouse pass untouched." Then his Chinese servant brought him his "real dinner," which consisted of "boiled chicken, cut up in small square pieces, a bowl of rice, and a bowl of vegetable soup." The report claimed, "For the first time in the history of the Waldorf, Chinese chefs have prepared Chinese dishes in Chinese pots, pans, and skillets. And the dishes they have cooked have created more curiosity and consternation than the presence of the great Viceroy himself."¹³ Instead of providing realistic coverage of Chinese food culture, the American media's scrutiny of what Li ate delivered an exotic and mysterious image of Chinese cuisine. While American news reports explored the "Oriental" lifestyle of a high-ranking Chinese official, Chinese immigrants discovered a business opportunity with Chinese food.

Why Chop Suey?

Chop suey's popularity had a lot to do with its humble origins and flexible cookery. Wong Chin Foo, one of the earliest Chinese American journalists, wrote in 1888 that "a staple dish for the Chinese gourmand is Chow Chop Suey, a mixture of chicken's livers 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."¹⁴ "Chow" in Chinese means "to stir fry," and "chop suey" means "animal intestines." In Chinese cuisine, this was not a delicacy but a humble dish. Many Chinese families and restaurants knew how to cook this dish because Chinese food culture seldom wasted any part of butchered livestock. Its cookery, however, varied from region to region. In northern China, for example, those cooking intestines did not necessarily use bamboo shoots. Restaurants in China usually listed the dish as "Chao zasui" in contemporary romanization and Chinese pronunciation. "Chow chop suey" was Cantonese pronunciation, as early Chinese immigrants were mostly Cantonese. "Chow" was coincidentally similar in spelling and pronunciation to the English word "chop" and

was therefore often misunderstood as such. American customers assumed that “chop suey” was a dish in which chicken or pork was chopped into fine, delicate pieces. However, the original chop suey or “Chao zasui” in China was a dish of stir-fried animal intestines. “Chop,” pronounced as “za” in Mandarin pronunciation, literally means “miscellanies.” Together with “sui,” the term means animal intestines.

Wong’s description in 1888 still revealed some original features of chop suey in China, as it included animal intestines. However, his description of the cookery should not be regarded as a standardized recipe. In fact, there was no official recipe of its ingredients and cookery since chop suey in China was a common homemade dish. When Chinese restaurants in America began to serve this dish, they had the flexibility to use whatever ingredients were available and whatever sauces they found tasteful and convenient. There were many different versions of chop suey when it was first spread across America. The only common practice was to use a wok to stir-fry a bundle of ingredients with an innovative sauce. The humble origins of this dish and its varied cooking traditions allowed Chinese cooks to tailor it in different ways and adapt it to the tastes and needs of American customers. In 1903, a *New York Times* article on chop suey noticed the flexible cookery by the Chinese cooks and pointed out, “The fact is that no two cooks make it exactly alike. Everything seems to depend on the mushrooms and the mysterious black or brown sauce that is poured over the stew. . . . That sauce they put on it is a powerful steadier, whatever it may be. A man who likes the dish seldom gets through one portion of chop suey after a night out without feeling a second one.”¹⁵ The mysterious black or brown sauce was actually Chinese soy sauce made from soybeans, which had existed in Chinese culinary culture for a long time. Many early Chinese restaurants used it in their cooking. Sauce determines flavor, and flavor shapes customers’ tastes. When soy sauce was upheld as a key element responsible for chop suey’s success, it was a concrete example of how the American palate had reacted to and accepted Chinese flavors.

Ten years after Wong Chin Foo’s article, journalist Louis Beck published his book *New York’s Chinatown*, which points out that there were at least seven high-end Chinese restaurants in Chinatown. They were located on the upper floors of “gorgeously decorated and illuminated buildings” with Chinese lanterns “suspended in reckless profusion from every available point. . . . The eating rooms are kept with scrupulous cleanness, and no unusual dirt will be found in the kitchens.”¹⁶ Their menus were thirty dishes long, ranging from shark fins, an expensive two-dollar dish, to the seventy-five-cent fried duck’s web and the fifteen-cent chop suey. In Beck’s observation, chop suey consisted of “a Hash of Pork, with Celery, Onions, Bean Sprouts, etc.”¹⁷ Unlike Wong’s description, Beck’s version of chop suey was totally different from the original one in China. Meat had replaced intestines, and celery, onions, and bean sprouts had become major ingredients. Beck also describes how Chinese restaurants catered to all kinds of American clients, including African Americans. He points out that “black Americans were among the earliest fans of

eating Chinese.” “Their average daily receipts are estimated at \$500, . . . and \$25 [comes] from negroes, who seem to delight in frequenting the lower class places.”¹⁸ Hanna Miller writes that “early menus offered a number of dishes that would have been familiar to the traditional black palate, including collard greens, pig’s feet, and barbecued pork. While the waitstaff may have whispered slurs in their native language, there is no record of any overt ethnic tension in New York’s first Chinese restaurants.”¹⁹ Beck’s and Miller’s descriptions indicate that Chinese immigrants in New York’s Chinatown had already changed the culinary content of chop suey and were serving many non-Chinese customers.

Chop suey’s marketable potential was also due to its modest price: “Chop suey enthusiasts declare that to get the dish in perfection, it is still necessary to go to the stuffy little places in Chinatown, where less attention is paid to appearances than is required in the newer resorts uptown. Furthermore it is cheaper in Chinatown. A heaping dish of chop suey is served for 15 cents.”²⁰ Beck reports that a typical chop suey joint in Chinatown was crudely decorated and provided no tablecloths. Waiters cared more about getting sales than receiving tips, but the places and the waiters appeared clean.²¹ Outside of Chinatown, chop suey cost a little bit more. In a better-decorated Chinese restaurant, “a heaping dish of suey, with a cup of tea, a bowl of rice, costs 25 cents without mushrooms and 35 and 40 cents with them. But from the gourmet’s point of view, the mushrooms (canned after a Chinese fashion) are supposed to be the principal feature of the dish.” Use of canned mushrooms was obviously a key ingredient in chop suey and well liked by American customers—“the cranberry sauce to the turkey.”²² This is yet another interesting example of how chop suey diverged from its original form and flavors and became an increasingly Americanized Chinese dish.

New York Goes Chop Suey Mad

Media coverage about Li’s visit prompted momentous curiosity and interest by the American public in Chinese culture and food. Thousands of New Yorkers flocked to Chinatown during Li’s visit, which for most of them was the only place where they could feast their eyes on “exotic Chinese culture.” Even the mayor of New York City, William L. Strong, paid a visit to Chinatown on August 26, 1896, probably for the first time during his term of office. As a result, Chinese restaurants and stores did thriving business during this period.²³ Building on this momentum, motivated Chinese restaurant proprietors began to take chop suey out of Chinatown and opened stores in non-Chinese communities. They first targeted those customers who were active in the city’s nightlife. According to a 1903 *New York Times* article, the first Chinese who opened a chop suey house outside of Chinatown was a Chinese man named “Boston.” He closed his restaurant at Doyer Street in Chinatown and reopened it on 3rd Avenue and Rivington Street, and “he did so well that soon many other Chinese followed him.”²⁴ Charley Boston, who also went by the name of Lee Quong June (or

Li Quen Chong), was a thoroughly Americanized, wealthy Chinese American merchant, and a leader of the famous On Leong Tong in New York's Chinatown.²⁵

Though little information is available on whether Boston was the first chop suey proprietor outside of Chinatown, the article's report on how the earliest chop suey houses were opened outside of Chinatown in New York was significant. It marked the beginning of the Chinese immigrants' move out of Chinatown in another major financial pursuit. By the 1890s, the Chinese population in the city of New York had reached 13,000, though only 4,000 lived in Chinatown while the rest were scattered throughout the city. About 8,000 Chinese were doing laundry work in the vicinity of New York.²⁶ The laundry business had already become an important menial service occupation for the Chinese while the restaurant business was still not. Before chop suey became a popular dish, the number of Chinese restaurants was far fewer than that of laundries. If Chinese immigrants could take advantage of Li's visit and cook up a dish as his favorite, they would be able to make the Chinese restaurant business another feasible economic niche for themselves. After all, Chinese laundrymen were also an American phenomenon, as there were no laundries in China.

Chop suey soon became a popular food. More and more people in New York learned to like it. At the turn of the century, a social trend in American metropolitan cities like New York or San Francisco was to eat out. Rapid urbanization created many office jobs for young men and women who liked to go to restaurants as places to hang out. City nightlife also generated more sales for the restaurant business. Once or twice a week, or even more often, many New Yorkers had a "hankering" for chop suey.²⁷ But they did not want to come all the way to Chinatown for chop suey meals after theater hours. Some had safety concerns about eating Chinese in Chinatown at night. Many also wanted to hang around in the theater area, as middle-class bachelors often hoped to encounter actresses after the performances. In theater districts such as Rectors, Italian and other ethnic restaurants were already serving a fast, theatrical crowd of New Yorkers.²⁸ So a well-known man in the Broadway café set, who used to bring well-dressed night parties into Chinatown frequently to have chop suey treats, suggested to Charley Boston that he open a chop suey house outside of Chinatown. The man guaranteed the success of such an undertaking.²⁹

When Boston's store became an immediate success, other Chinese followed suit. Chop suey houses soon mushroomed in New York City, as the Chinese were anxious to squeeze into the New York restaurant market. Competition from newly established chop suey houses soon forced Boston to relocate his restaurant to Seventh Avenue, near Thirty-fourth Street. Then more chop suey houses appeared, pushed past him, and opened up from the wealthy Long Acre district to Harlem, the predominately African American neighborhood. According to the 1903 *New York Times* article "Chop Suey Resorts," "the result has been the establishment within a few months, of one hundred or more chop suey places between Forty-fifth Street and Fourteenth Street, and from Bowery to Eighth Avenue. A large number of these

are in the Tenderloin.” When Liang Qichao, a leading Chinese intellectual, visited the United States in 1903, he observed that there were three- to four-hundred chop suey houses in New York alone.³⁰ Though Liang’s estimate may not have been accurate, New York City at that time did experience an explosive growth of chop suey houses. A *New York Times* article in 1900 exclaimed that, “judging from the outbreak of Chinese restaurants all over town, the city has gone ‘chop-suey’ mad.”³¹ In 1901, a returning American diplomat from China also observed, “There is a growing taste on the part of New Yorkers for Chinese dishes. Chinese restaurants have sprung up all over the city, and they are well patronized, especially at night. The dish mostly in demand is chow chop suey, a most delicious concoction, if properly prepared.”³²

While popular, chop suey was also viewed as an exotic and mysterious food. According to another *New York Times* article, “Innumerable attempts have been made to get Chinamen to tell what chop suey is made of. Chinese cooks have been hired by families, but never seemed to be able to impart the secret of the dish to others. When Americans asked the Chinese cooks about the chop suey recipes published in books and periodicals, they often smiled knowingly without making any response.”³³ In fact, chop suey was anything but a mysterious dish. Chinese cooks were fully aware of its humble origins and knew that the chopped meat and vegetable ingredients were very different from the original chop suey in China. They were just developing a new dish under an old name, as American clients did not eat animal intestines. The new version both provoked and satisfied American curiosity and tastes. However, Chinese cooks did not want to deny chop suey’s Chinese origin. Though they had changed chop suey’s culinary content, they knew its authenticity depended on its ethnic roots. Chop suey is thus an interesting example of the formation of ethnic culture in American society.

Chinese restaurant proprietors proved to be shrewd businessmen outside of Chinatown. According to “Chop Suey Resorts,” the chop suey house in Harlem, for example, was “a far cry” from the one in Long Acres, an upscale neighborhood in uptown Manhattan. The latter was under “the light of multi-colored lanterns, and amid the silk and bamboo decorations that are quite luxurious from an Oriental point of view.” Called a “resort” by the article, the chop suey restaurant in Long Acres competed with other high-end American restaurants across the street and “claimed the most exclusive patronage of the town.” Its clients were apparently those middle- or upper-class Americans who were active in nightlife. To cater to their eating habits, chop suey houses in the uptown area opened only at night: “This resort, like a great many others of its kind that thrive within ten blocks of it toward any point of the compass, is not open in the daytime. Only the cheaper sort of places, much further down town, are open before nightfall, and they do business very much in the style of American restaurants that are compelled to serve early breakfast.”³⁴ However, the decorations, floor plan, and interior and exterior design of a cheaper chop suey joint outside Chinatown and the work uniforms of its cooks and waiters looked very similar to other less expensive New York restaurants.³⁵ Chop suey proprietors did not

aim to serve Chinese clients or attract fluctuating tourist business but mainly wanted to build a reliable local clientele.

When opening in an upscale area, chop suey houses usually did not have safety issues. According to “Chop Suey Resorts,” Chinese chop suey houses were as safe as any other restaurants along upper Broadway or the avenues that ran parallel to it. The article emphasizes that the owners were involved in no illegal activities, unlike some of the other restaurants open at night. It quotes a few police officers who spoke favorably of the chop suey houses in regard to safety issues. The article points out, “Many persons who have seen this crop of chop suey establishments have jumped to the conclusion that opium smoking and kindred vices usually associated with Chinamen have been going on there with the tacit consent of the police.”³⁶ The article also states that, in addition to the “resort” chop suey restaurants, there were a couple of chop suey houses in the uptown area that were exclusively frequented by African American clients who “were afraid to go to Chinatown” but had “developed an extreme fondness for chop suey” because it had a lot of chicken meat. Though those chop suey restaurants were not as fancy as the one in Long Acres, they were clean and safe. Meanwhile Chinese immigrants did not overlook Harlem, a predominantly African American community and a tourist site as well. Chop suey businesses served all social classes and all racial groups.

As food historian Harvey Levenstein points out, “The proliferation of a new lower-middle class of male and female office and shop employees after the turn of the century created a burgeoning market which neither the old saloons nor the higher-class restaurants could tap. Short lunch hours and expanding cities made going home for lunch impossible. Hot lunches were regarded as necessary and lunch pails were too working-class. As a result, new kinds of restaurants tried to fill the growing gap in the middle.”³⁷ By the 1920s, chop suey became a popular lunch choice for the female labor force in New York: “It is vigorously vying with sandwiches and salad as the noontime nourishment of the young women typists and telephonists of John, Dey and Fulton Streets. It rivals coffee-and-two-kinds-of-cake as the recess repast of the sales forces for West Thirty-fourth Street department stores. At the lunch hour there is an eager exodus toward Chinatown for the women workers employed in Franklin, Duane and Worth Streets. To them the district is not an intriguing bit of transplanted Orient. It is simply a good place to eat.”³⁸ A Chinese restaurant owner proudly pointed out that, in addition to lunch business, he also had breakfast clients, and chop suey seemed destined to become a necessity of New York life. When he retired, he wanted to take chop suey to China.³⁹

A Trademark Identity for Chinese Food

The booming chop suey business in New York was so eye-catching that a man named Lem Sen from San Francisco came to claim the “copyright” of the dish. According to a 1904 *New York Times* article, Lem Sen reportedly equipped himself with many legal

documents to show that “he was the original inventor and sole proprietor of the dish known as chop suey.” Hiring Rufus P. Livermore, a lawyer who had an office in the St. Paul Building, Sen threatened to obtain “an injunction in the Supreme Court restraining all Chinese restaurant keepers from making and serving chop suey.”⁴⁰ Though Sen’s action looked like a prank and the news report was anecdotal in nature, his claim revealed an important truth about chop suey—it was actually invented in America. The report went on:

According to Lem Sen, Livermore’s client, chop-suey is no more a national dish of the Chinese than pork and beans. The Chinaman, who says he invented it, says there is not a grain of anything Celestial in it.

Lem Sen, according to his own story, says that he was born in San Francisco. He was never in China. He worked for many years in a Chinese restaurant in San Francisco, and was later employed in a “Bohemian” restaurant run by an American.

It was just before the arrival of Li Hung-Chang on a visit to this country that a real interest in things Mongolian and Celestial began, says Lem Sen. The owner of the restaurant in San Francisco suggested that Lem Sen manufacture some weird dish that would pass as Chinese and gratify the public craze at that time. Lem Sen says that is [*sic*] was then he introduced to the astonished world the great dish.⁴¹

As the alleged “inventor” of chop suey, Sen emphasizes that he was born in the United States, had never been to China, and had intended to “manufacture some weird dish that would pass as Chinese.” The dish was obviously Chinese in name but American in reality. As chop suey gratified the “public craze,” it embodied Chineseness as imagined by Americans.

Sen’s claim also illustrated the immense popularity of chop suey in American society at the time. Numerous Chinese restaurants simply named themselves Chop Suey Bowl, Chop Suey House, Chop Suey Café, Chop Suey Palace, Chop Suey Food Garden, or Chop Suey Parlor. Tuey Far Low, one of the largest restaurants in Los Angeles’s Chinatown, had a huge “chop suey” banner outside.⁴² Some owners added a geographic term to their restaurant names, such as Shanghai Chop Suey Café, which probably indicated that the restaurant also served Shanghai-flavored food or that the owner came from Shanghai. Others placed their last names before “chop suey,” such as the Sun Chop Suey Restaurant. By identifying their businesses as family-owned, some owners tried to imply stability and reliable service of their stores. The dish established a culinary identity for these Chinese restaurant businesses.

Following Li Hongzhang's visit, the Chinese restaurant business enjoyed a golden era from 1900 to the 1920s. During that period, the culinary content of chop suey was gradually Americanized, and Chinese restaurants carved a firm niche in the American food market. Chop suey houses were not only a New York phenomenon but spread into Boston, Long Island, New Jersey, and Connecticut. In 1900, Chicago had only one Chinese restaurant. By 1905, Chicago had forty Chinese restaurants. Only five were in Chinatown. By 1915, it had 118, and only six or seven were in Chinatown.⁴³ On the West Coast, the number of Chinese restaurants was also growing, and there were not only Chinese but also Japanese and Korean chop suey proprietors: "In 1900, there were but two or three Chinese restaurants in Los Angeles, frequented almost exclusively by Chinese. There were at least 15 Chinese restaurants by 1910, as Caucasian customers discovered that Chinese food was quite good and not at all poisonous as some had imagined. Several of these Chinese restaurants were outside Chinatown and a few were in downtown Los Angeles."⁴⁴ In the 1920s, one of the largest Chinese restaurants in the Los Angeles area was Crown Chop Suey Parlor in Pasadena, owned by a Japanese immigrant, Mr. Kawagoye.⁴⁵ However, New York had the most Chinese restaurants. In 1905, San Francisco had only forty-six Chinese restaurants. Twenty years later, the number grew to seventy-eight, which was still far behind that of New York.⁴⁶

With the rapid growth of chop suey houses in New York and other American cities, Chinese immigrants had successfully developed another major occupational channel for themselves. Chinese food had become a popular ethnic cuisine. Chop suey restaurants existed in American society for a prolonged period of time. According to historian Huping Ling, twenty-three out of forty-plus Chinese restaurants in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1976 were still called chop suey shops. While the large restaurants used fancy names and luxury furnishings, small chop suey shops needed only a kitchen, a front area with a counter, and a few chairs. They served basic Americanized Chinese food, such as chop suey, egg foo young, or chow mein, and provided a popular, inexpensive food option for many St. Louisians.⁴⁷ For a long time, chop suey was a synonym for Chinese cuisine in the United States.

As chop suey was gradually accepted as a major American ethnic food, its cookery became more standardized. Vegetable ingredients included bean sprouts, celeries, bamboo shoots, water chestnuts, and mushrooms. Meat replaced animal intestines. On the menus of Chinese restaurants, there were "Chicken Chop Suey," "Pork Chop Suey," "Beef Chop Suey," and "Fish Chop Suey." Chinese proprietors tried to develop a kind of standardization and familiarity to promote their restaurant businesses. Following chop suey's popularity, American newspapers and magazines began to publish review articles about the dish. One review quoted a New York doctor who believed that chop suey was as "digestible again as a broiled lobster." The article recommended it as a healthy food, especially for those who drank too much beer. According to the article, a dish of chop suey was the finest thing in the world for those customers who "have been taking a little more beer than they

should, and want to feel all right in the morning.” The sauce helped “steady the stomach,” and “the Chinese custom of serving tea with the go-to-bed meal is a splendid one.” After drinking beer, a person who ate a chop suey meal “sleeps like a top.”⁴⁸ More likely, it was the large amount of carbohydrates in the rice and noodles of the meal that functioned as the real sobering agent. Tea was helpful too, though chop suey operators served tea mainly because they could not get liquor licenses due to racial discrimination. Liquor usually brought more sales and higher profits for restaurant businesses, especially during night hours. But for chop suey houses, tea was the only beverage option. In later decades, there were also reviews that discussed the healthfulness of the Chinese diet and pointed out how Chinese food could function as a Chinese doctor for health problems.⁴⁹

Newspapers and magazines also began to carry chop suey recipes, due to the growing interest of American society in Chinese food. In 1901, a Mr. Fales, a former vice consul in Xiamen (Amoy), China, wrote an article on how to cook chop suey for the *New York Times*: “For the benefit of those who do not care to go to a Chinese restaurant, let me give the recipe, so that it can be made by any intelligent housewife.” Fales’s recipe mentions chicken livers and gizzards but his major ingredients are “one pound young, clean pork, cut into small pieces, half an ounce of green root ginger, two stalks of celery.” For cookery, Fales advises, “Sautee this in a frying pan over a hot fire, adding four tablespoonfuls of olive oil, one tablespoonful of salt, black and red pepper to taste, dash of cloves and cinnamon. When nearly done add small can of mushrooms, half a cup of either bean sprouts or French green peas, or string beans chopped fine, or asparagus tips.”⁵⁰ Mr. Fales’s chop suey was a far cry from Chao zasui, the stir-fried animal intestines in China. It is doubtful whether he had actually tasted Chao zasui as a Western diplomat in China. His chop suey looked like an elegant Western dish that would no doubt fit well the tastes of middle-class American families. In fact, many American housewives became interested in learning how to cook chop suey at that time. Fales’s *New York Times* article, moreover, was not the only published recipe for chop suey. During the 1910s to 1950s, recipes on how to cook chop suey, rice, and other Chinese dishes were also regularly printed in newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times*.⁵¹ Though Mr. Fales’s recipe was for an Americanized Chinese dish, what made his recipe appear authentically Chinese and himself appear an authority on Chinese food was his longtime diplomatic career in China. As a piece of transnational culture, chop suey had an American base but symbolic Chinese roots.

As an American Food Icon

As a popular dish, chop suey eventually became part of the English vocabulary. According to Imogene Lim and John Eng-Wong, both *A Dictionary of Americanisms* in its 1951 edition and *The Oxford Dictionary* in its 1989 edition include “chop suey” and “chow mein” and cite examples of their usage as early as 1898 and 1903.⁵² “Chop

suey” is also defined in *Webster’s Dictionary* as “a dish prepared chiefly from bean sprouts, bamboo shoots, water chestnuts, onions, mushrooms, and meat or fish and served with rice and soy sauce.”⁵³ As a culinary term, chop suey denoted concoction and blending. The term soon lent itself to American popular culture and art. Artist Edward Hopper’s famous oil painting *Chop Suey* was accomplished in 1929.⁵⁴ The chop suey restaurant in this famous piece of art is not a humble food joint in Chinatown but a stylish coffee shop where middle-class Americans socialized. Featuring two fashionable white women in an elegant chop suey café in New York, the painting and its theme of stillness reflect how chop suey had evolved into a food cultural icon that had been fused into American social life. Jazz musician Louis Armstrong’s “Cornet Chop Suey” was released in 1926 during the culmination of his career. Sidney Bechet’s “Who’ll Chop Your Suey When I’m Gone?” in 1925 goes as follows: “Chop suey, chop suey! / Mixed with all the hokum and bally hooey, / Something real and glowing grand / Sheds a light all over the land. / Boston, Austin, Wichita, and St. Louey, / Chop suey. Chop suey, chop suey! Chop suey, chop suey!” Together with Armstrong’s music, Bechet’s hit song reverberated and further boosted chop suey’s rising fame.

While chop suey restaurants carved a niche in the American food market, they also generated a series of Americanized Chinese dishes like chow mein, General Tso’s chicken, egg foo young, and paper-wrapped chicken. Like chop suey, most such dishes had humble origins in China. Chop suey houses seldom offered Chinese delicacies such as sea slug, bird’s nest, or shark fins to American clients. While expensive because of their rarity and nutritious qualities, Chinese delicacies had plain tastes. They would not sell well in American restaurant markets.

As a popular food, chop suey began to appear on the dining tables of an increasing number of average American homes. According to one review, “Chinese chop suey is so delicious that the hostess cannot make a mistake in placing it before her guest in such a luncheon menu as the following (which is equally as good a supper menu); Chop suey, Hot graham, Rolls, Coffee, Orange soufflé.”⁵⁵ In Sinclair Lewis’s novel *Main Street*, we see an interesting scene describing how middle-class Americans learned to accept Chinese food. The main character Carol uses chow mein as an entry food for her dinner party guests:

Before they were quite tired of the concert Carol led them in a dancing procession to the dining-room, to blue bowls of chow mein, with Lichee nuts and ginger preserved in syrup.

None of them save that city-rounder Harry Haydock had heard of any Chinese dish except chop sooey. With agreeable doubt they ventured through the bamboo shoots into the golden fried noodles of the chow mein; and Dave Dyer did a not very humorous Chinese dance with Nat Hicks; and there was hubbub and contentment.⁵⁶

Though Lewis presents quite a nervous scene, the novel indicates that chop suey and chow mein had become familiar foods to many Americans. It was just a matter of whether they should treat a Chinese dish as a decent party item or still as a bargain food.

Chop suey was also used as an army food. According to Harvey Levenstein, chop suey and chow mein were staples of the mess hall, joining spaghetti and tamales as the only “ethnic” dishes listed in the 1942 edition of the U.S. Army cookbook, prepared with ketchup and Worcestershire sauce.⁵⁷ It was a favorite dish of President Dwight D. Eisenhower. When he was a major stationed in Washington, D.C., in the 1930s, Eisenhower was a faithful customer at Sun Chop Suey Restaurant owned by Jew Gam On on Columbia Road. He often took his wife and young son there. His patronage was interrupted during World War II but then resumed when he came back from the war. As President, Eisenhower continued to order his favorite food—chicken chop suey—there for his family from time to time. His request was simply that the chop suey be good and hot.⁵⁸ Though President, Eisenhower displayed the eating habits of average American customers when it came to Chinese food. He tended to stay with one dish, such as chicken chop suey. He ate it not as an exotic food but as a regular meal available to the American public.

No Chop Suey in China

American society eventually realized chop suey was only an imagined authentic Chinese food. In 1924, the *Los Angeles Times* carried an article entitled “China Has Most Things Chinese But Chop Suey Isn’t to Be Found There.” According to the article, “China has played a little joke on the world. Its citizens in America have popularized chop suey as if that dish were characteristically Chinese. It is not. It is unknown in China.”⁵⁹ An article in the *New York Times* in 1928 also noted that the dish was virtually unknown in China. Though beef was a common ingredient in chop suey, the average Chinese did not consume beef frequently.⁶⁰ But chop suey was not a joke. Chinese restaurant proprietors probably knew what they were doing from the very beginning. When job opportunities were so limited for Chinese immigrants during the exclusion era, restaurant work became one of the few viable options. As an imagined authentic Chinese food, chop suey was a meaningful social construct in the racialized environment of American society.

Though there was no chop suey in China, the dish had an intrinsic linkage with its home country. Its imagined authenticity depended on this linkage. While its imagined authenticity made it appealing as an ethnic food, its changed ingredients, cookery, and flavors fit American local tastes. The legendary story of chop suey as Li Hongzhang’s favorite dish was persistently attractive and widely circulated. Its culinary identity embodied transnationalism. When another *Los Angeles Times* article confirmed that China had no chop suey, it repeated the famous legend. According to

the author of the article, in “any of these meals I have yet to get a taste of chop suey. The truth seems to be that there is no such dish known in China although it is commonly served as Chinese throughout the United States.”⁶¹ Interestingly this article was actually commenting on the restaurant market in Canton, the hometown of numerous Chinese immigrants and a city with numerous restaurants. Cantonese food is one of the eight famous Chinese regional cuisines. But chop suey is not part of Cantonese cuisine. In linking chop suey to Li Hongzhang, the article points out,

It originated at a dinner that Prince Li Hung Chang gave in New York when he made his trip around the world. Prince Li carried his own chef with him, and the menu was strictly Chinese. One of the dishes especially delighted the wife of the guest of honor and she asked Li what it was. Prince Li called in his chef, and the chef replied in Chinese that it was his own creation called “chop suey” which meant a mixture or hash. Prince Li then said in English: “It is a chop suey.” The American women spread the news of “chop suey,” the wonderful dish.

The article finally concludes, “The name was taken up by the Chinese restaurants in America and today chop suey is the chief concoction that they serve.”⁶²

Entitled “China Disowns Chop Suey,” another *Los Angeles Times* article in 1937 put a different spin on the story: “Chop suey, you know, considered all over the world, except in China, as being a typical Chinese dish, is not Chinese at all. The story is told the Viceroy Li Hung Chang, upon being pestered by American newspapermen during a meal as to the name of the dish he was eating, snapped ‘Chop Suey’ (literally ‘dirty mixed fragments’) in his annoyance. The name stuck and Chinese restaurateurs, both in America and Europe, were quick to see the publicity value of the name.”⁶³ Of course, the dish was created by neither Li Hongzhang nor his chef. It was invented by the hundreds of Chinese immigrants who capitalized on this legend in their restaurant careers in the United States. The invention of chop suey shows how real and imagined Chinese legends could be used as cultural capital for Chinese immigrants in their economic lives, and how China continuously functioned as their cultural home.

Ironically, chop suey, as an invention of overseas Chinese, attempted to return “home” as it followed Western travelers to China and tried to settle in places where Americans congregated. A *Los Angeles Times* article in 1924 reported that, searching China from end to end, one could not find a dish of chop suey, a Chinese cook who knew how to prepare it, or a restaurant that appeared similar to a chop suey house in America, except in the American quarter of Shanghai.⁶⁴ During World War II, when American soldiers went to China, they searched around Chongqing, the wartime capital and a city in remote southwest China, for real chop suey. Some local restaurants advertised, “We serve authentic San Francisco-style chop suey.”⁶⁵ In this

advertisement, we see how chop suey was an American dish with a foreign name. Food historians Waverley Root and Richard de Rochemont point out that American culinary history has been so characterized by its cosmopolitan tradition that sometimes restaurateurs invented their cuisine with foreign names. While chop suey “has gotten around the country, in restaurants or in cans,” many Americans “who eat it certainly do not think of it as part of their native fare; yet it was invented in the United States and was unknown in China until very recently, when it began to be imported into that country for the delectation of the American visitors beginning to arrive there.”⁶⁶ After Japan was defeated and Shanghai regained its international life and prosperity, Westerners could find a neon sign on a main street that proclaimed “Genuine American Chop Suey Served Here.”⁶⁷ In the 1950s, Tokyo had many restaurants that offered Chinese dishes, but only a big restaurant that served American food offered chop suey.⁶⁸ In 1928, a chop suey restaurant was also opened in Beijing. However, local Chinese customers failed to develop an appetite for the invention by their overseas brethren. The chop suey restaurant in Beijing was soon closed. Compared to Shanghai, the Western community and influence was much smaller in Beijing. Local Chinese had never heard of chop suey: “It was an American dish and there were not enough Americans in Beijing to support it.”⁶⁹ Many Americans who liked Chinese food were shocked to learn that the only chop suey house in Beijing had closed and that average residents of cities in China knew nothing of chop suey.⁷⁰

Chop suey eventually faded away from the American restaurant world. When a new wave of Chinese immigrants arrived after the 1965 immigration reform, the Chinese restaurant business experienced a new surge. The new immigrants preferred genuine rather than Americanized Chinese food. They brought new tastes, created new businesses, and built new communities. Suburban Chinese neighborhoods emerged in Flushing, Queens County, New York; Monterey Park; and a host of San Gabriel Valley cities in Southern California, where thousands of Chinese restaurants congregated. Few of them served chop suey. Genuine Chinese food had replaced Americanized dishes. The cookery and menus of many contemporary Chinese restaurants closely followed the culinary trends of Asia. Chop suey lost its historical appeal even in Chinese restaurants that catered mainly to non-Chinese customers. Riding on the immigrant boom, the Chinese restaurant business in America began a new chapter.

Conclusion

History is full of surprises. Few people expected to see chop suey become the most well-known and frequently ordered Chinese dish in America. There were many famous dishes in Chinese food culture, but none of them had chop suey’s luck. When Li visited the United States, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 had been extended for another ten years by the Geary Act of 1892. Li was fully aware of the unequal

treatment of the Chinese in America, especially in California. In fact, he purposely tried to avoid the American West during his visit. In his comments on the Geary Act, Li pointed out that the law denied Chinese immigrants the same rights granted for other immigrants and that the Chinese Exclusion Act was a most unfair law. He asked American journalists, “Do not consider me as a high Chinese official, but as a cosmopolitan; not as a Mandarin, but as a plain citizen of China and of the world, and let me ask what you expect to derive from excluding cheap Chinese labor from America? Cheaper labor means cheaper commodities, and better commodities at lower prices. . . . You are proud of your liberty and your freedom; but is this freedom?”⁷¹

During the Chinese Exclusion period (1882–1943), the racialized environment forced many Chinese immigrants into menial service jobs that required long hours, hard labor, and offered no competitive threat to white Americans. Restaurant and laundry work were such occupations. When placed in a larger historical context, it is not difficult to understand why and how chop suey had an inevitable mission to become an imagined authentic Chinese food. Chop suey was not classical cuisine in China. Its humble origins allowed numerous Chinese immigrants to start modest restaurant businesses without formal culinary training. Meanwhile, as the Chinese were seen as an inferior race, it was almost impossible to introduce a real authentic Chinese delicacy to the American public. Shark fin or bird’s nest symbolized social status in Chinese cuisine but American society had no market for any type of high-class Chinese culture. Food embodied human culture and was a tangible symbol of Chinese identity. Popular as it was, chop suey essentially represented cheap exoticism in the eyes of American clients. It survived and succeeded mostly as a bargain food. As the most famous Chinese dish in America, it met not only American tastes but also their social expectations of Chinese cuisine.

Known as Li Hongzhang’s alleged favorite food, chop suey had a transnational culinary identity. Though Li’s visit could not protect Chinese immigrants from Chinese exclusion laws, it did accidentally help them promote chop suey as a famed Chinese dish, which in turn allowed the Chinese restaurant business to move out of Chinatown and expand into mainstream American communities. Chop suey’s success epitomized the significance of Li’s historic visit to the United States in 1896. A Chinese immigrant writer wrote in 1948 that this Chinese dish was no longer an old-time Chinese food but a dish specially prepared for American people: “It is called Li Hong Chang Chop Suey; and the same dish has ever since that time been listed on the menu in that name—chop suey.”⁷²

Notes

I would like to express my deep thanks to Xiao-huang Yin, Zuoyue Wang, Jinzhao Li, Da Zheng, and Wei Li for their insightful comments on this article, and to the California State University system that granted me the Wang Family Faculty Fellowship to support my research.

¹ “Couldn’t Tell about the Chicken,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 1917.

² Quoted in Calvin B. T. Lee, *Chinatown, U.S.A.* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 57.

³ Mai Liqian (Him Mark Lai), *Cong huaqiao dao huaren: Ershi shiji meiguo huaren shehui fazhan shi* [From Overseas Chinese to Chinese Americans: A History of Twentieth-Century Chinese American Social and Economical Development] (Hong Kong: San Lian, 1992), 85.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 393.

⁵ For a theoretical discussion of cultural authenticity, see Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁶ See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁷ Waverley Root and Richard de Rochemont, *Eating in America: A History* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1981), 277.

⁸ Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (New York: Viking, 2003), 14.

⁹ Lee, *Chinatown U.S.A.*, 71.

¹⁰ Renqiu Yu, “Chop Suey: From Chinese Food to Chinese American Food,” *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* 1 (1987): 87–100. Yu has documented several other versions of the story of chop suey’s origin. While inspired by Yu’s pioneer research, this article further explores the culinary identity and the historical significance of chop suey restaurants in America.

¹¹ “Viceroy Li While At Sea,” *New York Times*, August 29, 1896.

¹² “Dinner in Honor of Li,” *New York Times*, September 5, 1896.

¹³ “The Viceroy Their Guest,” *New York Times*, August 30, 1896.

¹⁴ Wong Chin Foo, “The Chinese in New York,” *Cosmopolitan*, March–October 1888, 297–311.

¹⁵ “Chop Suey Resorts,” *New York Times*, November 15, 1903.

¹⁶ Louis J. Beck, *New York’s Chinatown: An Historical Presentation of Its People and Places* (New York: Bohemia, 1898), 47.

¹⁷ Ibid., 50. For a complete list of the menu items and the content of chop suey, see *ibid.*, 49–52.

¹⁸ Beck, *New York's Chinatown*, 54.

¹⁹ Hanna Miller, “Identity Takeout: How American Jews Made Chinese Food Their Ethnic Cuisine,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 39, no. 3 (2006): 446.

²⁰ “Chop Suey Resorts.”

²¹ Beck, *New York's Chinatown*, 48.

²² “Chop Suey Resorts.”

²³ Yu, “Chop Suey,” 93.

²⁴ “Chop Suey Resorts.”

²⁵ He was also known as “Diamond Charley Boston,” as he often wore big diamond rings on his fingers. See Bruce Edward Hall, *Tea That Burns: A Family Memoir of Chinatown* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 158–59; Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 65; and “Hold Chinaman as Head of Opium Ring: Charley Boston, Reputed Brains of Smuggling Syndicate Seized in Chinatown,” *New York Times*, January 31, 1911.

²⁶ Beck, *New York's Chinatown*, 12 and 58.

²⁷ “Chop Suey Resorts.”

²⁸ Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 50.

²⁹ “Chop Suey Resorts.”

³⁰ Liang Qichao, *Xin dalu youji* [Diary of Traveling in the New World] (1904; repr., Changsha, China: Hunan Renming Chubanshe, 1981), 52.

³¹ “Heard About Town,” *New York Times*, January 29, 1900.

³² “How to Make Chop Suey,” *New York Times*, November 3, 1901.

³³ “Chop Suey Resorts.”

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See photo in Lui, *Chinatown Trunk Mystery*, 66.

³⁶ “Chop Suey Resorts.”

³⁷ Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 185.

³⁸ Bertram Reinitz, "Chop Suey's New Role," *New York Times*, December 27, 1925.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "Chop Suey Injunction: Lem Sen of 'Frisco Here to Allege Copyright Infringement," *New York Times*, June 15, 1904.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² For a photo of an exterior view of Tuey Far Low, see Daily News, "Chop Suey Restaurant in Chinatown, Los Angeles," 1938, Department of Special Collections/UCLA Library, A1713 Charles E. Young Research Library. Available through the Online Archive of California, California Digital Library, <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb9m3nb692/?&query=Tuey%20Far%20Low&brand=oac>. The restaurant was located at 436 Gin Ling Way in Chinatown, Los Angeles.

⁴³ Ben Bronson and Chuimei Ho, "1901: The Boom in Chinese Restaurants Begins," Chinese-American Museum of Chicago Raymond B. & Jean T. Lee Center, posted June 6, 2005, updated February 5, 2006, http://www.ccamuseum.org/Research-2.html#anchor_90 (accessed July 2007).

⁴⁴ William Mason, "The Chinese in Los Angeles," *Museum Alliance Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1967): 16.

⁴⁵ *Pasadena City Directory* (Pasadena, CA, 1920), 268.

⁴⁶ Tonia Chao, "Communicating through Architecture: San Francisco Chinese Restaurants as Cultural Intersections, 1849–1984" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1985), 223.

⁴⁷ Huping Ling, *Chinese St. Louis: From Enclave to Cultural Community* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2004), 148.

⁴⁸ "Chop Suey Resorts."

⁴⁹ See Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 104.

⁵⁰ "How to Make Chop Suey."

⁵¹ About thirty to forty food review articles published chop suey recipes during this period. See, for example, Marion Harland, "Common Sense in the Home: Chop Suey and Some Rice Dishes," *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1913.

⁵² Imogene L. Lim and John Eng-Wong, "Chow Mein Sandwiches: Chinese American Entrepreneurship in Rhode Island," in *Origins and Destinations: 41 Essays on Chinese America* (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1994), 417. Also see Imogene Lim, "The Chow Mein Sandwich: American as Apple Pie," *Radcliffe Culinary Times* 3, no. 2 (1993): 4–5.

⁵³ *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1988), s.v. "chop suey."

- ⁵⁴ To view Hopper's painting, see Mark Harden, "Edward Hopper: Chop Suey," Artchive, <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/H/hopper/chopsuey.jpg.html> (accessed July 2007).
- ⁵⁵ Laura A. Kirkman, "Chinese Chop Suey in the Guest Luncheon Menu," *Efficient Housekeeping*, *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 1922.
- ⁵⁶ Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1921), 79.
- ⁵⁷ Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 122.
- ⁵⁸ "Eisenhowers Keep Yen for Chop Suey: Send Out for Dish to Capital Restaurant That Has Been Their Favorite Since 1930," *New York Times*, August 2, 1953.
- ⁵⁹ "China Has Most Things Chinese But Chop Suey Isn't to Be Found There," *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 1924.
- ⁶⁰ "Chop Suey, Popular Here, Is Hardly Known in China," *New York Times*, November 11, 1928.
- ⁶¹ Frank G. Carpenter, "Old China as Seen in Canton," *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1924.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*
- ⁶³ "China Disowns Chop Suey," *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 1937.
- ⁶⁴ "China Has Most Things Chinese."
- ⁶⁵ Yu, "Chop Suey," 96. See also Cheng Benchang (Ben John Chen), *Meiguo huaqiao canguan gongye* [The Chinese Restaurant Business in America] (Taiwan: Yiyu Qiye Youxian gonsi, 1971), 32.
- ⁶⁶ Root and Rochemont, *Eating in America*, 277.
- ⁶⁷ Grace Zia Chu, *The Pleasures of Chinese Cooking* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 52.
- ⁶⁸ Root and Rochemont, *Eating in America*, 277.
- ⁶⁹ "Chop Suey Café in Peking Fails—Untraveled Chinese Don't Know about Dish; It's American," *Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 1928.
- ⁷⁰ "Chop Suey, Popular Here."
- ⁷¹ "Li on American Hatred," *New York Times*, September 3, 1896.
- ⁷² Garding Lui, *Inside Los Angeles Chinatown* (Los Angeles, 1948), 174.

Selected Bibliography

Beck, Louis J. *New York's Chinatown: An Historical Presentation of Its People and Places*. New York: Bohemia, 1898.

- Bronson, Ben, and Chuimei Ho. "1901: The Boom in Chinese Restaurants Begins." Chinese-American Museum of Chicago Raymond B. & Jean T. Lee Center. http://www.ccamuseum.org/Research-2.html#anchor_90 (accessed July 2007).
- Chang, Iris. *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History*. New York: Viking, 2003.
- Chao, Tonia. "Communicating through Architecture: San Francisco Chinese Restaurants as Cultural Intersections, 1849–1984." PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1985.
- Chen, Ben John. *Meiguo huaqiao canguan gongye* [The Chinese Restaurant Business in America]. Taiwan: Yiyu Qiye Youxian gongsi, 1971.
- Chu, Grace Zia. *The Pleasures of Chinese Cooking*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962.
- Erenberg, Lewis A. *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890–1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Gabaccia, Donna R. *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Hall, Bruce Edward. *Tea That Burns: A Family Memoir of Chinatown*. New York: Free Press, 1998.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Lai, Him Mark. *Cong huaqiao dao huaren: Ershi shiji meiguo huaren shehui fazhan shi* [From Overseas Chinese to Chinese Americans: A History of Twentieth-Century Chinese American Social and Economical Development]. Hong Kong: San Lian, 1992.
- Lee, Calvin B. T. *Chinatown, U.S.A.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965.
- Levenstein, Harvey. *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1921.
- Liang, Qichao. *Xin dalu youji* [Diary of Traveling in the New World]. Changsha, China: Hunan Renming Chubanshe, 1981.
- Lim, Imogene. "The Chow Mein Sandwich: American as Apple Pie." *Radcliffe Culinary Times* 3, no. 2 (1993): 4–5.
- Lim, Imogene L., and John Eng-Wong. "Chow Mein Sandwiches: Chinese American Entrepreneurship in Rhode Island." In *Origins and Destinations: 41 Essays on Chinese America*, 417–36. Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1994.
- Ling, Huping. *Chinese St. Louis: From Enclave to Cultural Community*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2004.
- Lui, Garding. *Inside Los Angeles Chinatown*. Los Angeles, 1948.

Lui, Mary Ting Yi. *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Mason, William. "The Chinese in Los Angeles." *Museum Alliance Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1967): 15–20.

Miller, Hanna. "Identity Takeout: How American Jews Made Chinese Food Their Ethnic Cuisine." *Journal of Popular Culture* 39, no. 3 (2006): 430–65.

Root, Waverley, and Richard de Rochemont. *Eating in America: A History*. Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1981.

Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Yu, Renqiu. "Chop Suey: From Chinese Food to Chinese American Food." *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* 1 (1987): 87–100.