

THE ADAPTATION OF ENGLISH MENU ON CHINESE FOOD IN AMERICA

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THE ADAPTATION OF ENGLISH MENU ON CHINESE FOOD IN AMERICA

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## Abstract

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Melissa E. Gormley

Chinese food was first introduced in the United State through Chinese immigration in the 1800s. The California Gold rush promoted the first large wave of Chinese immigrants to the west coast from the Canton region of South China. Since then Chinese food in the United States has evolved from the earliest Guangdong style cuisine serving the early Chinese migrant workers mainly to Americanized Chinese cuisine. The proliferation and popularization of Chop Suey represents the emergence of first Chinese American Cuisine at the turn of twentieth century in the United States. After the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act and Nixon's visit in 1972, the second large wave of Chinese immigrants brought various Chinese regional food to America, the era of Chop Suey gradually declined with the new modified Americanized Chinese food. The adaptation of Chinese food in America was reflected in English menu. The paper analyzes the adaptation of the Chinese food menus in the United States from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, discussing how the menu was created, adapted and integrated with the Chinese immigration history to the United States from the early characteristics of Guangdong cuisines to Chinese American dishes from the perspective of sociolinguistics.

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## **Chapter I Introduction**

When did Americanized Chinese food appear in the United States? How did the political, economic, cultural and social environment of the United States affect the evolution of the Chinese food menus in American Chinese restaurants? Lastly, how did the Chinese food menus reflect the attitude of Americans for Chinese food from early discrimination and hostility to appreciation of popular Asian food? From the above prompts, this paper describes the evolution of the Chinese food menus chronologically from the mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century to 21<sup>st</sup> century with the two large waves of Chinese immigrations, which illustrates the correlation between the adaptation of the Chinese food menus and the history of Chinese immigrations from the perspective of sociolinguistics.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This paper will explore how the Chinese food menus were integrated, adapted and evolved with consistent changes in American attitudes and policies towards Chinese food, beginning with the first large wave of Chinese immigration to the west coast from the perspective of sociolinguistics. This paper will also focus on examining how sociolinguistic and socioeconomic variables influence the linguistic features of the Chinese food menus. For example, how will the length and frequency of the words on the Chinese food menus affect the prices of dishes in the historical context? What is the trend of contemporary Chinese food that transplanted in the United States? According to this analysis, the readers will understand why Chinese food in America is not authentic and traditional, but is actually American food. The trend of contemporary Chinese food evolved and developed in a diversified direction, departing its more cultural attributes. A common example of this is the popular dish General Tso's Chicken.

## **Definition of Terms**

### **The wave of Chinese immigration**

The process of Chinese immigration can be divided into three periods: 1849-1882, 1882-1965, and 1965 to the present. The first period began with the California Gold Rush and ended with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. During the second period (1882-1965), only diplomats, merchants, and students and their dependents were allowed to travel to the United States. Other Chinese immigrant activities were mainly limited to Chinatowns. During this time, the U.S. government continued to limit the Chinese immigrant's rights. In the third period, the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, the Civil Rights Act in 1964, and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 brought a new period of Chinese American immigration. Finally, in 1965 Chinese immigration was changed to be on an equal basis with all other countries of the world. The American government established an annual quota, and 20,000 Chinese could receive U.S. citizenship. Under these new laws, two types of Chinese immigrants were allowed to enter the U.S. The first type consisted of highly select and well-educated Chinese. The second type were those who escaped political instability or repression, and poverty-stricken refugees.

[http://www2.hawaii.edu/~sford/alternatv/s05/articles/qin\\_history.html](http://www2.hawaii.edu/~sford/alternatv/s05/articles/qin_history.html)

### **Social relationship**

How each of us as social beings adapt our language to suit the situations and the audience often contrasted with social characteristics, the relevant traits that we are seen to possess (Herk, 2012).

### **Americanization**

In linguistics, Americanization is the influence of the distinctive lexical and grammatical forms of American English on other varieties of English language (Nordquist, 2019).

### **The Chinese forty-niners**

It refers to the people who joined the rush for gold in California in 1849. Tens of thousands of gold seekers from around the world had joined the California gold rush. About two thirds of these forty-niners were Americans. The motive of fortune also brought settlers from Mexico, South America, Europe, Australia, and China. The Chinese forty-niners refers to the people who joined the rush for gold in California in 1849 (Teresa, 2010, P. 308).

### **The Gold Rush**

The California Gold Rush was the largest mass migration in American history since it brought about 300,000 people to California. It all started on January 24, 1848, when James W. Marshall found gold on his piece of land at Sutter's Mill in Coloma. The news of gold quickly spread around. People from Oregon, Sandwich Islands (now Hawaii) and Latin America were the first to hear the breaking news, so they were the first to arrive in order to test their luck in California by the end of 1848. Soon the others from the rest of US, Europe, Australia and China followed and since they mainly arrived during 1849 they were called the "forty-niners".

<https://www.historynet.com/california-gold-rush>

### **Chop Suey**

Chop suey, in fact means "of odds and ends" and it was just scraps of ingredients tossed together (Jurafsky, 2014).

### **Authenticity**

Authenticity relates to the flavor, taste, preparation, and ingredients of the food. Authenticity is a very important factor in Chinese cuisine. In Chinese food culture, authenticity and flavor are far more important than the hygiene issue. Chinese clients often judge a restaurant according to the flavor of the food rather than the sanitary condition of its kitchen (Liu, 2009).



## **Culinary identity**

Culinary Identity refers to the combination of a region's Prevailing Flavors, Geography, History, Ethnic Diversity, and Culinary Etiquette. People and culture can be distinguished from Culinary Identity. Food is more than a basic source of nutrients; it is also a key component of our culture, central to our sense of identity. Identities, however, are not fixed social constructs, but constructed and reconstructed within given social formations reflecting the existing and imagined structural constraints and lived experiences of subjects (Koc, Mustafa, Welsh & Jennifer, 2020).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the Chinese food menus in the United States and the history of Chinese immigration according to the studies on the linguistics features of the Chinese food menus. This seeks to help language learners understand the adaptation and Americanization of the Chinese food menus into American culture as a special language variety through parallels of the development of Chinese food into the history of Chinese immigration.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study is to understand the difference between American Chinese food and authentic Chinese food, helping language learners to appropriately translate American Chinese cuisines and better understand the culture of American Chinese food, ultimately promoting cultural exchanges between China and the United States.

### **Methodology**

The focus of the study is to illustrate how the Chinese food menus were integrated, adapted and evolved with consistent changes in American attitude and policies towards Chinese food. I will conduct a library research plan on that focus. First, I will use various available offline

and online resources to find available journal articles about Chinese immigrants, English menus on Chinese food, and restaurants history in the United States; Then, I will make a comparison between the menu and historical events and policies to find the social relationships of English menus on Chinese food in America; Lastly, I will make notes and do literature reviews of all articles and draft the paper.

## Chapter II Review of Literature

The first wave of Chinese immigration in the United States of America was in 1815. Estrada & Batalova (2020) stated, “The population of Chinese immigrants in the United States has grown nearly seven-fold since 1980, reaching almost 2.5 million in 2018, or 5.5 percent of the overall foreign-born population.” With the survival, development and struggle of Chinese immigrants in the United States, the popularization of Chinese food in America can be regarded as the efforts of Chinese Americans in transplanting, preserving and adapting to American socioeconomic development and culinary culture. Reading American Chinese restaurants food menus can tell us a great deal about the business ideas of the food they provided, the customers they served, the prices and descriptions what they offered and the frequency and length of the words they used. From the perspectives of linguistic features and sociolinguistics specifically, it helped to make a research on the relationships between American Chinese food and Chinese immigration history from the evolution of the Chinese food menus from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Linguistic Features of Restaurant Menus

Jurafsky, Chahuneau, Routledge & Smith (2013) conducted a study and used a very large dataset consisting of 6500 menus downloaded from the website *allmenus.com* for restaurants in 7 cities: Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. They studied the restaurants menus as an object of linguistic study to address the correlations between linguistic and socio-economic variables. In their follow-up studies, Jurafsky et. all (2013) wrote a computational software and statistics tools to count the numbers of linguistic words shown on the menus of restaurants in different price ranges to testify a number of hypothesis, of which some were proposed by previous researchers. The goal of those

hypotheses tests was to find out how menus reflected socio-economic differences and what linguistic differences can be reflected on the restaurant's menus in different price ranges. The results provided that menus can be regarded as a window of linguistic strategies that correlated with the attitude of people and socio-economic developments. According to their research, cheaper restaurants focused more on diner choice and preferred to use vague and distinct words; middle-priced restaurants used longer and appealing adjectives to show their food quality and authenticity; high-priced restaurants preferred to use short words and high-status foreign words to show the quality of their food. Jurafsky (2014) took a great deal of examples of the correlations between menu language such as words length, and frequency and economic factors such as the restaurant price in the chapter one of his book "the language of food: A linguist reads the menu."

The research of Jurafsky et. all (2013) put forward a very enlightening point of view on how menus reflect people's economic status and social culture from the perspective of linguistic features of restaurants menus. The limitation of their research was the control of the variables. Jurafsky et. all (2013) limited the multiple variables which may greatly influence the restaurants menus, such as the type of food, the cuisine of the restaurants, the location and community and historical and political environments. The previous studies of Jurafsky et. all (2013) provided a good research direction for analysis of the evolution of the Chinese food menus in the United States. Apart from the main linguistic factors studied by Jurafsky et. all (2013) in his journal article, it is a worthy issue to be explored on whether the other factors which were controlled in their studies may affect the evolution of Chinese food menus in the United States. As Lee (2008) pointed out the numbers of Chinese restaurants in the United States far exceeded that of fast food chains such as McDonald's, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Wendy's. Chinese

restaurants in the United States played a vital role in American history, with the first Chinese restaurant originating in San Francisco on the West Coast. The history context of Chinese food and immigrants in the United States are very important variables that influence the adaptation of the Chinese food menus in the United States since the first Chinese restaurant was established in San Francisco in 1849.

### **The Development of Chinese Food with the Wave of Chinese Immigration in the US**

Chen (2017) described that Chinese food migration to the United States went through the process of transplantation, discrimination, rapid development and great popularization. Chinese food was the first ethnic cuisine transplanted by “The Chinese forty-niners” in the first large wave of Chinese immigrants in the United States in the gold rush era. The gradual decline of gold mining and the implementation of the Chinese Exclusion Act drove Chinese immigrants to seek work in menial service businesses: laundries and restaurants in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Chop Suey, a common dish in American Chinese cuisine, had been created by Chinese immigrants to cater to the American palate in order to survive in such an environment and became the first popular Chinese dish accepted by mainstream Americans. With the repealing of the Exclusion Act of 1869 and President Nixon’s visit to China in 1972, the second large wave of Chinese immigrations from the other regions of China flooded to the United States and promoted the prosperity of Chinese food in different regional flavors.

Chen (2017) outlined the rise of Chinese food in the United States from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It played a crucial and necessary role in American history and culinary culture. As Jurafsky (2014) pointed out, the researchers can learn from the linguistic features of the food menu to testify the socioeconomic status, the key issue about how the linguistics features of

Chinese food menus reflect the evolution of Chinese food can be conducted through the extension of the model of Jurafsky (2014) by introducing more variables in further studies.

### **The Chinese as the Pioneers in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

Liu argued, “the pioneer Chinese immigrants brought with them capital, vision, business experience, and social networks” (2015, P. 28). The pioneer restaurant businesses played a very important role as a foundation of the history for state of California in the 1950s. He pointed out that the first large wave of Chinese immigrants came to San Francisco not only for the purpose of digging gold but also running businesses in the gold rush era. Liu (2015) showed that early Chinese immigrants ran very successful restaurant businesses by offering genuine but affordable food, promoting relevant grocery markets, and pioneering fishing businesses, which Anglo-Saxon Americans didn’t have menu or restaurant services in the first half of the nineteenth century.

As Liu stated, “During the gold rush era, Chinese and non-Chinese clients used the same menu and consumed the same kind of food prepared by Cantonese chefs in Chinese restaurants” (2015, P. 24). The early Chinese restaurateurs targeted both Chinese and non-Chinese customers among them Americans and Europeans. They accepted aspects of Chinese culinary culture, including the eating habits and Chinese food ingredients, although the cultural discrimination still existed. Americanized Chinese food like Chop Suey was not desired by all customers. The Chinese food menus under those circumstances reflected both authentic Cantonese dishes and English dishes for white American customers. Liu (2015) pointed out that early Chinese immigrants in San Francisco had an open willingness to learn the mainstream American lifestyle and integrated Chinese identity into American society. Based on that, examining the early restaurant food menus in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century may reflect both traditional and adaptative

linguistics features of words to attract the customers. Analysis of Chinese restaurant food menus from online datasets of the menus in New York Public Library can be conducted to testify the hypothesis.

### **The Era of Chop Suey**

Liu (2009) pointed out Chop Suey was among the first icon of ethnic American Chinese dish at the turn of the twentieth century. According to Liu, Chop Suey was genuine American cuisine which was created and adapted to the tastes of the American customers. The success of Chop Suey depended on social, political and economic factors under those circumstances. Liu (2009) stated the discriminatory caricatures of Chinese eating habits of rice and rats and the politically appealing Exclusion Act limited the spread and prosperity of Chinese food in the last three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Exclusion Act that forced Chinese immigrants focused on running the restaurants was not threatening to American laborers. It created simpler and cheaper Chinese food to adapt to the mainstream tastes of Americans. Chop Suey represented the resistance of Chinese Americans to survive economically and culturally under those circumstances. Liu (2009) argued that Chop Suey was essentially an imagined authentic Chinese dish to Americans, he explicitly explained why some typical authentic Chinese dishes that previously appeared on the menu in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century gradually disappeared at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Shark's fin and Bird's nest soup. Some traditional Cantonese dishes such as Pig's feet, liver and kidney were replaced by more Americanized Chinese cuisine "the three old dishes: Chop Suey, Chou Mein and Egg Foo Yang.

### **Chinese Cuisine and Jewish American**

Liu (2015) pointed out another historical adaptation of the Chinese food menus at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Kung Pao Kosher. In the 1900s, the same racial discrimination and political

and cultural persecution promoted the negotiation between the communities of Chinese and Jewish Americans; Similarly, the trend of American urbanization and the proximity of the location of two communities made Jewish Americans to visit Chinese restaurants frequently and even became their culinary tradition. Liu (2015) pointed out the way of Chinese cooking habits “Stir fry” made the Jewish Americans ignore their strict Kosher tradition and accept Americanized Chinese food.

This trend was also reflected on the menu according to the description of Liu (2015). He stated some Chinese restaurants entered the Jewish community to better cater to the needs of Jewish Americans, and the menu was adjusted accordingly.

Dishes like shark’s fin or bird’s nest soup disappeared as they were only attractive to Chinese customers. Animal intestines were rarely used. Sliced meats, chopped celery, onions, and bean sprouts were standard ingredients. The menu began with hot tea as a free drink. Soup was served at the beginning rather than at the end of the meal. (Liu, 2015, P. 76)

### **The Prosperity of Americanized Chinese Food after the 1960s**

Liu (2015) and Chen (2014) found that the second large wave of Chinese immigrations from Taiwan, Hongkong and other regions of China moved to the United States and strongly promoted different Chinese regional flavors. Jennifer Lee (2008) noted that the spread of Hunan cuisine was due to three chefs who migrated to America and opened restaurants in New York in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Liu (2015) noted that with the success of Peng Garden Restaurant established by chef Peng Changgui in 1974, many immigrants from Taiwan followed the success of Chef Peng and opened Hunan restaurants to offer adaptative Hunan cuisines to American customers. General Tso’s chicken invented by Chef Peng became popular and widespread in the



United States. Lee (2008) interviewed Chef Peng in Taiwan and pointed out General Tso's chicken was sweeter, sourer and deeper fried than the original spicier version created by Chef Peng. She also pointed out that different vegetables such as broccolis appeared in Americanized General Tso's chicken to attract more customers in the 1980s. The menu of Hunan restaurants today in the United States all show Americanized Hunan dishes. Fortune cookies and Chinese takeout that quite often appeared on the Chinese food menus were also Americanized cuisines invented in the United States according to Li (2008).

Liu (2015) noted that the adaption of Chinese food in the United States followed a tendency for the native hometowns of Chinese immigration. The adaptation may be reflected on the Chinese food menus. Liu (2015) studied that Hong Kong immigration pushed the return of Cantonese Cuisine through the popularity of Dim Sum in the early 1980s. More and more Chinese immigrants from different region came to the United States. They brought different regional flavors of Chinese food and gradually tailored to American tastes, finally becoming an integral part of American culinary identity. Chen (2014) pointed out that many mainstream Chinese restaurants used a division of dishes into a Chinese menu and an American menu as a common practice across the nation to serve both Chinese and American customers in the early twentieth century.

### **The Adaptation of the Chinese Food Menus in the US**

A team composed of Anderson, Brayman, Chang, Huang & Saint (2018) conducted a project which was part of the DH 101: Intro to Digital Humanities course at UCLA. They studied New York Public Library's "What's on the Menu?" collection data and compared the history of 150 years of Chinese food in the United States with the linguistics features of Chinese food menus. They used the statistic tools to analyze the changes of dishes, the length and frequency of

the words and the trends of keywords on the Chinese food menus. From the information collected in the dataset, Anderson et. all (2018) studied the patterns linking the historical events and discriminatory laws of Chinese immigration with the development of Chinese food in the United States. They found out that changes in the frequency of the words and variety of the dishes appeared on the Chinese food menus indicated that the evolution of Chinese food were intended to cater to the tastes of Americans from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The analysis of the dataset on menus and dishes mainly focused on the linguistic features of the Chinese food menus to examine the relationships between the evolution of Chinese food and the history of Chinese immigration in the United States since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Jurafsky et. all (2013) focused on the correlation between the socioeconomic variables and linguistic features from the American menus without the consideration of historical contexts.

A Chinese scholar Liu (2017) stressed out the Chinese food menus in the new era beginning from the 1960s embodied more closely the traditional Chinese culinary culture, such as the healthy values of “Turtle and Snake Soup” as a traditional expensive Chinese dish, the traditional theory on homology of medicine and food and the design of the zodiac also appeared in the design of the Chinese food menus. Liu (2017) pointed out the changes on the Chinese food menus have gradually promoted the transplantation of Chinese food culture in the United States and shaped the American open and inclusive cosmopolitan cultural and culinary identity.

Liu (2017) also emphasized the historical changes of the Caucasians’ cultural attitudes and strategies towards Chinese immigrants from the perspective of the evolution of Chinese food in the United States. She pointed out the Caucasians’ cultural attitudes and strategies towards Chinese immigrants can be classified in three stages: the hostility in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century,

assimilation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and cultural tolerance and appreciation in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Libby (2006) depicted the history of Chinese restaurants in Portland, Maine to clarify how Chinese restaurateurs in Portland had to cater to the taste of the general community by offering strictly Americanized dishes based on Cantonese cuisine in 1858. In 2005 Portland had 22 Chinese restaurants which provided a variety of Chinese regional flavors other than Cantonese. By describing the history of Chinese restaurants in 147 years, Libby (2006) showed the evolution of Chinese restaurants and food menus from Chop Suey Joints serving American Chinese dishes to proliferation of Chinese restaurants. He stressed out the large proliferation of buffet style restaurants which provided both American and Chinese food. The changes on the Chinese food menus described in this article are in line with the process of compatibility and adjustment of local American and Chinese cultures in Portland through diets.

### **Summary**

The research of Jurafsky et. al (2013) inspired the researchers to study the influences of the variables on food menus, such as the type and cuisine of food, the linguistic features of menu languages and the historical contexts and so on. The history of Chinese food in the United States was closely linked with the immigration waves. Liu (2015) and Chen (2017) conducted many works for linking the history of Chinese food and immigration with the adaptation of the Chinese food menus. Both Chen (2017) and Liu (2015) summarized the evolution of the Chinese food in the United States with the fluctuations of Chinese immigration history from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. As they pointed out, the first large immigration wave of the Chinese shaped American culinary culture in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century created an ethnic Americanized Chinese dish known as Chop Suey at the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century. It promoted an era of prosperity of different regional flavors

after the 1960s. Portland as an example testified the evolution of the Chinese food menus according to Libby (2006). Lee (2008) also illustrated three symbolic Chinese Cuisines to testify their authenticity. Liu (2017) focused on white Americans' attitudes towards Chinese food with the second large Chinese immigration wave after the 1960s. Similar to the research of Jurafsky et. all (2013), the project conducted by Anderson et. all (2018) compared the timeline of Chinese immigration history and evolution of Chinese food with the linguistic features of the Chinese food menus, revealing the changes in American attitudes and policies towards Chinese Americans and the Chinese food menus interact mutually.

### **Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations**

Due to the history of American Chinese food from “Chop Suey” to “General Tso” since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the evolution of the menu history in American Chinese restaurants reflected how Americans’ attitudes to Chinese immigrants and food changed from discrimination to acceptance, and finally integration of the west and east. The evolving history of the menu in American Chinese restaurant also reflected how Chinese immigrants adapted and adjusted to the social environment of politics, economy and culture in the United States. Finally, the menu of American Chinese restaurants was created and integrated into Americanization since the first Chinese immigrants moved to the United States ran the first restaurant, consistently adjusting to the social and economic environment, forming a unique and Americanized variation of language and culture.

How did the changes of linguistic features on the Chinese food menus reflect the Chinese immigration history and adaptation of Chinese food in the United States? Conversely, what is the future trend of Chinese food in the United States according to the analysis of the evolution of Chinese food menu from the perspective of sociolinguistic features in the historical context? Following the lead of the recent studies and analysis of prospective Chinese food menus datasets, through the extension of the model of Jurafsky (2014) by introducing more variables in the history contexts, we will infer the future trends and correlations of consistent adaptation of Chinese food in the United States, learn the change of the attitudes of Americans towards Chinese food according to testify the relationships between the Chinese food menus genres and the evolution of Chinese food and immigration.

What’s more, there are many other variables which affect the Chinese food menus adaptation. Besides some variables that we have discussed in this paper, such as the variety of

food, the length and frequency of words, and even some changes in drinks and desserts, which have been discussed in previous studies in this paper. The other variables that have not been discussed in the paper, such as the change of restaurant name on the menus, the design of pictures and even the decoration of the menu (fonts, sizes and formats), will they reflect the historical evolution and future trends of Chinese food in the United States? In this field, I have many research areas worth exploring.

I am also curious about the discrimination of Chinese people on the diet of rats and cats. The discrimination on Chinese culinary culture in the United States can be traced back to the early 18th century. Where did they come from? There are not such definite signs to prove the tradition of eating the rats and cats in Chinese Culinary culture in the history of five thousand years. Even today, the discrimination against Chinese diets still affects everyone in the world. The research in this area will be conducted in the future works.

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