

Chop Suey



Presented by: Jacqueline Girard, Jeremy Jones, Macha O'Dwyer,
Hanna Osburn, Kaitlyn Roddick and Taylor Stewart

Dr. James Murton
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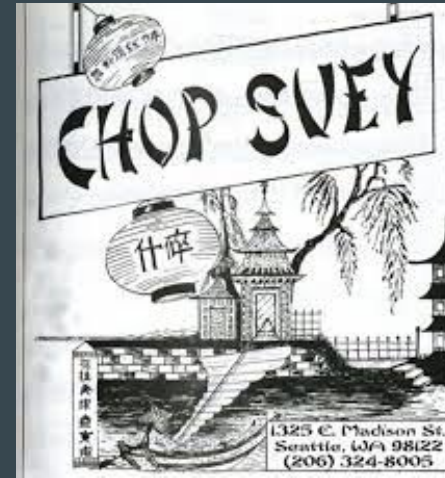
Chop Suey

- I. Origins
- II. Ingredients, Tastes, Preparation and Enjoyment
- III. China, America and Chop Suey
- IV. Industrialization and Impact

Why has chop suey become so important to American Culture?

Legend has it...

- Lem Sen, 1904
 - First to claim ownership
 - Native to San Francisco
- Albert Lee, 1931
 - Second to claim ownership
 - Chinese Tuxedo, New York
- Li Hongzhang
 - Visited the USA in 1896
 - Tasted hurriedly put-together dish in NY
- American miners
 - California
 - Stew cooked from leftovers



Murky Origins

- Culinary system
 - Creating of method, diffusion of food, role of social identity, role of state
- As a cooking method, chop suey is indisputably Chinese in origin
 - A representation of the food of the Chinese rather than the “treasures” in haute cuisine
 - *Chao* (stir fry) - widespread in Song dynasty
 - Cantonese origins
 - *tsap seui* - miscellaneous leftovers
- Market of mass consumption of chop suey
 - American innovation that started in Chinatown
 - “Chop suey is no more authentic in Chinese cuisine than Irish stew”
 - Johnny Kan, with Charles L. Leong, *Eight Immortal Flavours: Secrets of Cantonese Cookery from San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley, Calif.: Howell - North Book, 1963, II.
- Influx of Chinese immigrants starting from the 1848 Gold Rush in California
 - Change in culture = change in culinary system - introduction of chop suey
- State
 - Trade, State
 - Linked to America’s geographical and socio economic expansion



The Importance of Chinatown for Chop Suey

- Tourist destination for Chinese and American-Chinese food
- Americanized Chinese food
- Chop Suey was created as a dish for chinese immigrants to be able to have a little taste of home even in America



What are the ingredients: Traditional Recipes

- The old chop suey recipe consists of pork fried in oils, to which a variety of vegetables are added. The liquids and cornstarch form a slightly thick sauce
- Vegetables include green onion, chinese cabbage, bean sprouts, celery, carrot, and mushrooms



Why these Ingredients: Traditional Recipes

- Reflective of origins
- Many of these ingredients would be familiar to Chinese people who immigrated to America.
- Some ingredients imported but still available close by in Chinatowns
- Vitamins, fibre, and protein



What are the ingredients: Modern Recipes

- In the newer recipe, the chicken is mixed with vegetables consisting of onion, celery and bean sprouts to which salt, pepper, and broth are added
- This is a vegetarian option but because of versatility, you can add whatever
- The sauce is made with water, cornstarch, soy sauce, and sugar



Why these Ingredients: Modern Recipes

- Simplified amount of ingredients compared to older, easier to make
- Less imports and more local, using what was available



What does traditional look like?

- Pork
- Bean Sprouts
- Napa Cabbage
- Chicken Stock
- Rice Wine
- Sesame Oil
- Carrots
- Button Mushrooms
- Soy Sauce

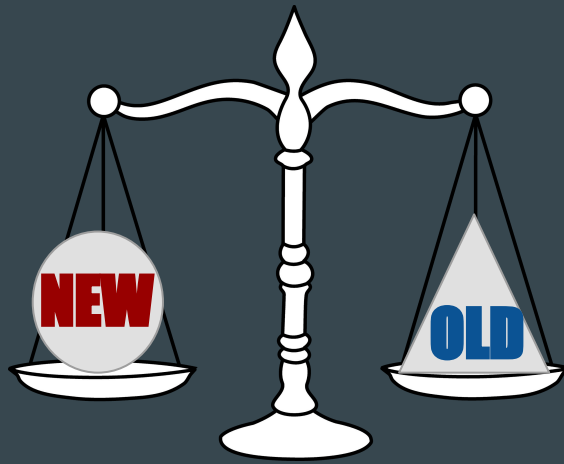
(Chen, 2014, 98)



What's Cooking Now?

- In a skillet with methods of saute and searing
 - Any type of desired meat/protein
 - Bean sprouts
 - Onion, celery, baby corn, broccoli, carrots
- Topped on a bed of rice





Do you think you have the NEW or the
OLD chop suey?



Results

A - Old

- Savoury taste bud receptors
- Complex tastes
- Variety of oils used
- Reflective of different Chinese culinary practices



B - New

- All about flavour, less about sustenance. Use of castor sugar and ginger pull flavours and add a sweetness to balance umami flavours
- Americanized cuisine that is beloved by many when it used to be the leftover thrown into a pan
- Became customizable to individuals



Switch it up

- Using different vegetables
- Incorporating different proteins
(pork, beef, chicken, quail eggs, tofu)
- Using broth instead of water
- Substituting bean sprouts



Why Might People in the Past Have Enjoyed Eating This Food

- Chinese Immigrants/Chinese-Americans
 - Familiar recipe would remind them of home, be familiar and comforting- culture
 - When restaurants in Chinatowns, they would eat it in a comfortable, social environment - functional
- Non-Chinese Americans
 - Restaurant had combination of low prices and the convenience of long hours and fast delivery (Chen 2014, 126) - functional
 - Served generous portions and a wide variety of dishes
 - Chop suey was cheap, filling, and exotic (Coe 2009, 174)
 - Savoriness to the food (Chen 2014, 128)
 - Versatility, customizable

Asia to America

- Chop Suey was first being made and eaten by Chinese immigrants in the chinatowns of American cities in the late 19th century / early 20th century.
- Chinese restaurants then started to spring up around the different cities selling many dishes including chop suey
- Americans started to take a liking to Chop Suey and it became very popular
- Chop Suey houses then opened up in New York where it became a huge fad where entire restaurants were dedicated to different ways of making the food

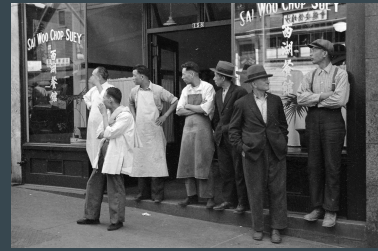


Chinese's Current Culinary Impression of Chop Suey

- “That mixture of meat and bean sprouts, bamboos hoots, water chestnuts, celery, onions, and what not is about as much a chinese concoction mixed in an American bar in Paris as an American cocktail.”
 - “Chop Suey, Popular Here, Is Hardly Known in China,” *New York Times*, November 11, 1928, 151; “China Has Most Things Chinese but Chop Suey Isn’t to Be Found There,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1924, 12.
- “Chop Suey by no means represents the real Chinese cuisine. The Chinese themselves never take it because they do not like it.”
 - Tow, *Real Chinese in America*, 92.
- A joke on the world for believing it is Chinese
 - “It is unknown to China”
 - “Chop Suey, Popular Here, Is Hardly Known in China,” *New York Times*, November 11, 1928, 151; “China Has Most Things Chinese but Chop Suey Isn’t to Be Found There,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1924, 12.
- Chinese American
 - Not either or
 - Not an accurate representation of Chinese Cuisine



The Long Road Towards Acceptance



- “It has taken the American public a long time to swallow its chop suey”
 - “Onward March of Chop Suey”, *Sun* (New York), November 29, 1908, sec. 2, 2.
- When Chop Suey first became popular in America only a few chinese dishes were accepted onto the American menus
- Chop Suey was one of these dishes because the ingredients could be modified from their original recipe
- It wasn't always popular among Americans because like the chinese culture they believed their food would be alien too
- The ingredients in the food was alien and expensive to get in America
- This is why the Americans modified their food



Chop Suey and Industrialisation

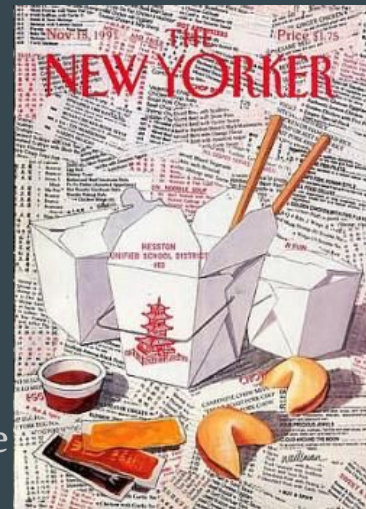
- “...a type of food, based on Chinese cooking, that has been designed for Americans.”
 - Paul Chan and Kenneth Baker, *How to Order a Real Chinese Meal* (New York: Guild Books, 1976), 5.
- Mass consumption
- Standardized
- Preserved in cans
 - transportable, accessible
- Creolization of Chinese and American culinary systems
 - Chinese method with American ingredients
- Economic Power
 - Chinatowns and restaurants that served Chop Suey



A vintage advertisement for Chun King Chow Mein and Chop Suey. At the top, a line drawing shows a family of four sitting at a table. Below it, the text reads "ENJOY 'EATING OUT' AT HOME!". The main headline says "Serve Six for less than \$1.00". The brand name "CHUN KING" is written in large, bold, red letters, with "CHOW MEIN and CHOP SUEY" underneath. A photograph of a plate of Chow Mein is shown. Text below the plate says "Three Choices in BIG New 3 Lb. 'Family-Economy' Size... Now at Your Grocers!". A woman is depicted at the bottom, smiling and holding two cans of Chun King products: "beef CHOP SUEY" and "chicken CHOW MEIN". Small text at the bottom left says "Also available in 1 lb. cans to serve 2 or 3 persons... look for the Chun King foodie section at your grocer."

The Impact on American Culture

- “There is no American town without a Chinese restaurant.”
 - Sun Yat-sen, *Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary: A Program of National Reconstruction for China* (1918; rept., Taipei: Sino-American, 1953), 24.
- 1946
 - 1,101 Chinese restaurants in 11 American cities alone
- 1970
 - 10,000 Chinese establishments across America
- Edward Hopper, *Chop Suey*, 1929
 - Integration in American Culture and Art
- “Chop suey is a necessity in life.”
 - St. Paul Globe, May 8, 1904, 42
 - Forms American National Foods
 - American staple, culture, identity, acceptance
 - Food Sovereignty



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