TOWARD A CULTURAL INTERPRETATION OF THE CHINESE
RESTAURANT IN THE MOUNTAIN WEST

by

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ABSTRACT

Toward a Cultural Interpretation of the Chinese Restaurant in the Mountain West

by

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The history of Chinese restaurants in the American West shows that Chinese food became a part of the social and cultural realities for Chinese people, especially in the earliest years, partly because regional food helped maintain regional language and dialect. Beyond that, it also demonstrates how restaurants—even more than other service industries such as laundries—provide a living context in which Chinese met non-Chinese, and where the non-Chinese could become acquainted with Chinese art, eating customs, regional cookery, embroidery, and even family life. In other words, the Chinese restaurant became in time a bridge between the two cultures, and has therefore had an important function in intercultural relations. Moreover, certain developments in
Chinese restaurant customs are found only in the United States (soup served first instead of last; everyone receiving a fortune cookie rather than one person getting a sign of good fortune); this fact testifies to a cultural dynamism among the otherwise conservative Chinese workers who established themselves in a strange land far from home. An interpretation and "decoding" of these elements from the viewpoint of a contemporary "mainland" Chinese forms the central discussion of this thesis. (86 pages)
INTRODUCTION

There seems to be at least one Chinese or Chinese-American restaurant in just about every major town and city in the Mountain West, and yet the documentary evidence about Chinese restaurants and their history in this area is very sparse. Perhaps because the earliest of these restaurants were quite simple and informal, perhaps because of racially based business restrictions, perhaps because some establishments did business in buildings owned by others, there is very little original reference to Chinese restaurants in early business directories, tax lists, town maps, and the like. Yet, from recollections of early Chinese pioneers and in census rolls, we have strong evidence that Chinese people did cook for themselves and for others. A proper chronological history of the Chinese restaurant in America has not been done, and data available at USU do not permit it to be done in this study.

Rather, the thesis of this study is that the Chinese restaurant developed and persisted because it served several cultural and social needs of Chinese immigrants, as well as providing a service to others that did not threaten race-conscious Americans.

Thus, this study attempts a cultural interpretation of Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West. It starts from the
beginning of the Chinese restaurant business in the area and studies this phenomenon until it is fully developed. The thesis will also explain how Chinese food is prepared, ways of Chinese cooking, as well as discuss the cultural meanings of Chinese restaurants. The contribution of Chinese restaurants to the cultural scene in the Mountain West is emphasized in this study.

The Mountain West includes mainly six states: Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming. The Chinese pioneers came to this area in the late 1850s. They were mostly laborers who had worked in mines and who had been involved in the construction of the transcontinental railroad. After the completion of the railroad and the abandonment of some of the mines, many Chinese went into big towns and cities to seek other and better jobs. Chinese communities of various sizes were established in cities and big towns, and Chinese restaurants started appearing in the area of the Mountain West.

Originally, this study was designed to be based on selected interviews with owners of Chinese restaurants; however, several obstacles and complications arose. For one thing, many of today’s restaurant owners have started up their businesses recently, and therefore they are not aware of the situation in early times in the Mountain West. In addition, and more of a problem, many restaurant owners are hesitant to talk with outsiders asking questions about how they run their
affairs; perhaps they have been pestered by local officials looking for illegal laborers or checking for code violations. In any case, even though the author is Chinese, she found it virtually impossible to obtain enough in-depth interviews to provide a good statistical cross-section. However, in the earlier stages of the research, it became apparent that an interpretive approach might be used: assuming that culturally based food has an expressive level, this thesis examines the kinds of cultural dimensions that give depth of meaning to Chinese food. In particular, the function of "public" food as an expression of identity for Chinese and a medium of interchange between Chinese and Americans is examined. A few references to interviews and accounts of visits to restaurants are provided, but they function not as central data but as supporting information.

Chapter I, "The History of Chinese Restaurants in the Mountain West," outlines the history of the development of Chinese restaurant business. There are three sections in this chapter: Chinatown, the Cradle of the Chinese Restaurant Business; the Development of the Chinese Restaurant Business; and Conclusion. The first section discusses the formation and the function of Chinatowns in the Mountain West. In the second section of this chapter, reasons for the development of a Chinese restaurant business are given. The chapter also emphasizes that the period of the development of the Chinese restaurant business was a period of display of Chinese culture.
and the creation of Sino-American culture by the pioneer Chinese.

In order to interpret the cultural meanings in Chinese cooking, Chapter II, "Chinese Food," explains Chinese diet, Chinese ways of preparing food, Chinese cooking, the characteristics of Chinese food, the meanings of Chinese food, and Chinese cooking schools. The chapter stresses mainly the interpretation of Chinese food and the ways it is prepared, as well as the cultural role of Chinese foods and restaurants.

Chapter III, "The Cultural Meanings of Chinese Restaurants in the Mountain West," discusses cultural meanings of Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West area. Chinese restaurants' names, decorations, and ownership, as well as bowls and chopsticks are discussed from the cultural point of view. The variations of Chinese food and ways of serving it are aspects of the development of a Sino-American culture. Chinese chop suey, chao mian, and fortune cookies are the creations of Chinese-American culture. The fortune cookie is based on Chinese lucky dumplings and the adopted American culture: everyone has an equal opportunity for luck. The interesting part of this chapter is the description of the characteristics of Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West.

What the cultural contributions of Chinese restaurants are in the Mountain West is answered in Chapter IV, "The Cultural Contributions of Chinese Restaurants in the Mountain West." The Chinese restaurant has become one of the elements...
of American culture; yet, it continues to serve in both societies by carrying Chinese culture on and demonstrating Chinese cultural to the American people. For example, Chinese restaurants hold Chinese holiday celebrations and give holiday feasts in their local area. And they offer the opportunity to the American people to learn how to use Chinese chopsticks. Chinese restaurants are the representatives of Sino-American culture, for they not only serve Chinese food but Chinese-American and American food as well. Consequently, they function as bridges that connect the two cultures in an intimate way.

Chapter V, "Conclusion," gives a general review of the study and comments analytically on the thesis of this study: that the Chinese restaurant has played an important inter-cultural role in the Mountain West.
CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY OF CHINESE RESTAURANTS

IN THE MOUNTAIN WEST

The history of the development of the Chinese restaurant business in America is the history of the retention of Chinese culture by the pioneer Chinese immigrants and also the history of the creation of a new Sino-American culture. Mining and railroad construction brought the pioneer Chinese to the Mountain West. As soon as they settled, Chinatowns were formed as a protection for the non-English-speaking Chinese. Yet, Chinatowns were not only the places where the pioneer Chinese could get rid of their nostalgia (missing hometown food and homesick) for a while, but they, and especially the restaurants in them, were also exhibitions of Chinese culture. Chinese restaurants in Chinatowns formerly served the function of "women's work," because the miners and railroad workers were almost all male and they needed to have a service supply. Another reason for developing service business was the racial prejudice at that time, which excluded Chinese laborers from competing with the Caucasians.

Indeed, there have been many reasons and dynamics for the development of the Chinese restaurant business. The most important one is the cultural and language nostalgia of the
early Chinese immigrants, in which eating places and restaurants played an important role. The increasing Chinese population in the Mountain West is also one of the reasons. The wonderful Chinese cuisine, as well as the creation of Chinese-American foods: chop suey and chao mian, was a remarkable reason, too. The legends about chop suey and chao mian during the pioneer period did help to enlarge the Chinese restaurant business. Through the development of the Chinese restaurant business, Chinese restaurants can be seen in almost every town in the Mountain West.

1. Chinatown,
the Cradle of the Chinese Restaurant Business

Since the late 1850s, mining and railroad construction have attracted Chinese laborers to the Mountain West. By 1870, Idaho had a Chinese population of 4,274; Nevada had 3,152; Montana had 1,949; Utah had 445; Wyoming had 143; and Colorado only had 7.¹ Most of the Chinese were miners and railroad workers, and a few were laundrymen and railroad cooks. As soon as they settled down, Chinese communities were founded and were named Chinatowns by the Americans.

During the pioneer era, the Chinese community or Chinatown in the Mountain West provided protection and mutual aid and served as a place to preserve the Chinese cultural heritage. In Chinatown, the pioneer Chinese could speak their own language, buy their own goods and eat their own hometown food in the eating places or restaurants. Although in the early times there were not many formal Chinese restaurants in Chinese communities in the Mountain West, there were eating places and boarding houses that served the same function. Leung Ka's store in Ogden, Utah, served both as a store and a place of refuge, offering sleeping rooms and meals.²

To Americans, the first images of Chinese people were not only the clothes they wore and the hair they braided but also their bowls and chopsticks. Wallace Clay, an eyewitness of the Chinese railroad workers' life in Box Elder County of Utah, described the cultural difference he saw as a young boy:

Each Chinaman would take his big blue bowl and ladle it full of the mixture and deftly entwine his chopsticks between his fingers and string the mixture into his mouth in one continuous operation, while in the meantime he would be drinking his cup of tea and still more tea.³

Chinese bowls, chopsticks, and tea were readily identified as distinctive traits by the Americans, even by a little child.

That is a part of the early cultural influence of the pioneer Chinese in the Mountain West.

During the railroad construction and mining period, Chinatowns in the Mountain West were not like Chinatowns in San Francisco. They were small and served the basic needs of the Chinese miners and railroad workers. They had few restaurants, which only satisfied the nostalgic Chinese. There are few documents that describe the early Chinatowns in the Mountain West as having wonderful Chinese restaurants and appealing to many others besides Chinese. One description of the early Chinatown in Park City, Utah, says, "Chinese laundries and restaurants were scattered in different parts of the town...." An advertisement in the Park Record gives a piece of information about a Chinese restaurant in old Park City:

Charley Ong Lung has lately opened up a first class restaurant, opposite the Marsac Mill, where can be had choice meals at all hours. Oysters in every style. Meal tickets-twenty one meals for $7.₄

At the completion of the railroad construction, many Chinese laborers moved to big towns and cities to seek better jobs. Larger Chinatowns were established. Chinese restaurants were opened, not only for the purpose of serving the railroad workers and miners, but also for the people from all walks of life and the foreigners (non-Chinese). Salt Lake

₄ Conley, in Papanikolas, 264.
City Chinatown is a very typical example. By 1900, the Chinese population in Salt Lake City had increased to 271, from 131 in 1880. A bigger Chinatown was formed. A description in *The Peoples of Utah* says:

Plum Alley ran north and south dividing the city block between Main and State streets, the cross streets being first and second south. Within and around Plum Alley the Chinese developed a micro-community with grocery and merchandise stores, laundries and restaurants. 5

Chinese stores, laundries, as well as restaurants were definitely recognized as the elements of Chinatown. By 1940, the Chinese population declined again to 131. In 1942, Salt Lake City Chinatown was reported to have entirely disappeared. 6

After 1943, the repealing of the exclusion laws encouraged many Chinese to open up their own businesses. Chinese restaurants proliferated through the Mountain West. By 1986, Salt Lake City had 50 Chinese restaurants; in Idaho, there were 60, in Montana 40; in Nevada 70; in Colorado 180; and in Wyoming 40. 7 Although there are not large Chinese populations in many places in the Mountain West, yet there are one or more Chinese restaurants in most towns. For example, by 1980 there were 15 Chinese restaurants in Ogden, Utah, 8

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5 Ibid., 261.
7 The numbers of Chinese restaurants in the states mentioned are from the Mountain West phone books.
while the Chinese population was 77; in Rock Springs, there were 10 Chinese restaurants and the Chinese population was 96. Although Chinatowns were the nursing mother of the Chinese restaurant business, present-day Chinese restaurants do not require a large Chinese population. They have become a part of the American scene.

2. The Development of the Chinese Restaurant Business

There are dynamics and reasons for the development of the Chinese restaurant business in the Mountain West. For social and cultural reasons, the pioneer Chinese built up restaurants in Chinatowns and outside. Socially, because they came to America as laborers and almost all of them were male, they mainly hired cooks to cook for them, or they ate at eating places by paying weekly. Consequently, many eating places and restaurants were established. For cultural reasons, they wanted to go to places where they could talk Chinese and eat Chinese food.

After the completion of the railroads and dwindling of large mining operations in the Mountain West, most of the Chinese laborers stayed in America. They moved into big

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cities and so did the cooks who used to cook for the laborers. Whether the cooks opened restaurants is unknown, but Chinese businesses, which were less competitive with established white businesses, were founded at that period. Chinese restaurants and laundries started to spread over the Mountain West area.

There were also some other reasons for this development. Before the repeal of the exclusion laws (the repeal of the exclusion laws was passed in 1943), immigration by Chinese laborers was limited by the American government. The only Chinese who were allowed to enter or stay in the United States were students and businessmen or persons who had at least 1,000 dollars to support themselves. This certainly encouraged those who wanted to set up their business, yet, they could only open up businesses, like restaurants and laundries, which were less competitive with the businesses of other races. And also after the repeal of the exclusion laws, Chinese immigrants felt more free to open their business and many of them settled down as American citizens.

Another interesting reason for the development of the Chinese restaurant business may have been the legends about the best-known (to Americans) Chinese dishes: chop suey and chao mian. For some, these legends portray the sprouting of the Chinese restaurant business. Different stories about Li,

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Hong-zhang, a special envoy of the Chinese emperor, and six hungry miners were a big influence to Americans about Chinese restaurants. In 1896, after a tour to Russia, Li decided to return to China by way of the United States (he made a trip to New York). He was welcomed by the president and the world-renowned kitchen and chefs of the Waldorf Astoria. Yet, during his five-day visit to the United States, he preferred nothing but the food prepared in Chinese restaurants in New York's Chinatown. The dish he liked most was chop suey, and perhaps for this reason, chop suey became famous among Americans.

Earlier, "good, cheap and plenty" Chinese food had also attracted many non-Chinese railroad workers and miners. The New York Tribune, during the pioneer time, described the fare like this: "Chinese meals cost $1 to eat as much as you like at Kong-Sung's near the water, Whang Tong's on Sacramento Street, and Tong Ling's on Jackson Street." In Pigtails and Gold Dust, Alexander Mcleod wrote:

At the Chinese restaurants a square meal could be bought for one dollar. Their charge for regular boarders was sixteen dollars a week, while the others charged from twenty to thirty dollars (Mcleod, 1948).

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To the poor miners and railroad workers, cheap and plentiful food was good enough. Obviously, Chinese restaurants attracted their attention. Another story is about six Golden Mountain miners. It was very late one night, and six hungry miners went into a small Chinese restaurant. They asked the owner for some food. The owner told them the food had been sold out. But the miners were not in the mood to look for another restaurant. They insisted to eat right there. Afraid the miners might smash his restaurant, the owner put all the leftovers together and served it to them. As hungry as they were, the miners ate everything they had and told the owner that was the best food they had ever tasted. At last, they asked for the name of the food. The owner told them it was called "chop suey," meaning everything put together. From then on, the miners came to the restaurant and insisted on "chop suey" and nothing else. Consequently, Li's name was used ironically by Chinese businessmen to develop the Chinese restaurant business. The legend of the six miners tells how delicious chop suey is, even if it is a miscellany.

If we see chop suey as a partial reason of the development of the Chinese restaurant business, the cultural meaning and the history of chop suey should be explained. Actually, there are two kinds of chop suey in America, one real traditional Chinese dish and one created dish based on

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12 Sung, Mountain of Gold, 203.
the previous one. In "Chop Suey: from Chinese Food to American Food," Yu, Renqiu describes chop suey like this:

Chop suey is the Cantonese pronunciation of za sui in Mandarin. Literally, chop ぞい means "different," and suey ぞえ means "pieces." It is a common phrase in Chinese, simply meaning entrails (viscera) and giblets. In China, as in many agrarian societies, people do not want to waste any part of butchered livestock, so entrails and giblets are a part of the daily diet. There are scores of Chinese recipes for cooking chop suey, that is, entrails and giblets. However, chow (fried) chop suey is probably the most common dish in restaurants throughout China.

In America the name chop suey remains, but the materials are substantially different. Entrails and giblets have been replaced with different kinds of meat, and the meaning of chop suey has been rendered as to chop finely, i.e., or as a mixture, a little of this and a little of that. Furthermore, it has been asserted that chop suey is not of Chinese origin at all but an invention of Chinese Americans.13

The stories about chop suey not only gave influence to Chinese food among the American people and enlarged the Chinese restaurant business, but they also indicated the creation of a Sino-American culture. The original purpose of cooking chop suey was not to waste the entrails and giblets. Yet, it was so rare for an American to eat entrails and giblets. In order to attract American customers, different kinds of meat were substituted for entrails and giblets. Hence, the invention of Chinese-American food was also one of the reasons that made the Chinese restaurant business run successfully. Many Chinese restaurants were named "Chop Suey"

to bring up their business.

Another example of the creation of Chinese-American food is chao mian. Chao mian in America has noodles, bean-sprouts, meat, carrots and some other vegetables, which can not be found in restaurants in China. It is said chao mian was invented by a Chinese cook who by mistake dropped some noodles in a dish he was cooking, and the dish turned out to be so delicious. In fact, the changing of the ingredients in chao mian was also to attract American customers, and to enlarge the business. (Chinese chao mian usually contains noodles which have already been steamed and meat. Unlike the American chao mian, chao mian in China has no vegetables in it.)

Chop suey and chao mian are the inventions of Chinese-American cuisine. At the same time, they are the creation of Sino-American culture. They illustrate, in the form of food, a dynamic ability to adapt to cultural tastes and assumptions.

3. Conclusion

Early Chinatowns in the Mountain West were the cradles of the Chinese restaurant business although many of them do not exist any more now. Especially in the Mountain West area, Chinatowns were the places which nursed the Chinese restaurant business. No document mentions that the original Chinese restaurants were built outside of Chinatowns, thus we can
infer that almost every Chinese restaurant's history has a connection with Chinatown. Of course, many Chinese restaurants have been built recently, yet, like the pioneer Chinese, the pioneer Chinese restaurants offered experiences and information to the next generations or the "new comers."

To a certain degree their existence encouraged the later ones to be founded.

Any cultural development has its dynamics and the development of new blood as a motivation. The development of the Chinese restaurant business was based not only on social and economic dynamics, but also on cultural grounds. The creation of Sino-American culture gave opportunities to Americans to experience Chinese culture and at the same time enjoy their own. The combination of Chinese and American culture has also brought good business to Chinese restaurants.

Nowadays, Chinese restaurants can be seen everywhere in the Mountain West, even in small towns. They have become a part of the scenery, the Chinese cultural representative in everyday American life.
CHAPTER II

CHINESE FOOD

The development of the Chinese restaurant business stands second only to the Italian restaurant business which is the biggest one in America.  

This development occurred not only because the Chinese in America had the money to open up their restaurants and that after 1943, there were hardly any laws to prevent Chinese people from setting up their own businesses, but also because Chinese food is so delicate, so tasty, and comparatively inexpensive. For Chinese people, however, it was more: in many ways, food carries the culture. In addition, people in America like Chinese food because the Chinese diet is appealing, perhaps because Chinese people prefer everything they eat to be fresh. Chinese food in restaurants or at home is not only colorful and aromatic, but also tasty.

Chinese food is good to eat, yet it is troublesome to prepare and cook, for cooking Chinese food is like making a piece of art. The cutting, the combination, as well as the cooking of the food itself require a lot of skills and experience; they need a Chinese hand. The styles of Chinese food are

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14 Sung, Mountain of Gold, 203.
food depend on different cooking "schools." In America, most of the Chinese restaurants are Cantonese, because Canton is generally known as the culinary capital of China, and also because most of the early Chinese immigrants were Cantonese. Other regions also have their own styles and specialties: Sichuan is famous for hot dishes, and Hunan is well known for spicy and hot dishes. Consequently, in America, Chinese food represents the range of Chinese cultures and settlement. As this study will show, this range may be interesting to the dining tastes of Euro-Americans, but for Chinese-Americans the restaurants have afforded a sense of regional identity and language identity parallel to the culinary expressions.

1. Chinese Diet

The pioneer Chinese who came to America were almost all Cantonese. Their diet was mainly southern Chinese, which in turn was based on what the area was rich in. Generally speaking, the Chinese diet includes more than the dried fish, oysters, dried pork and sweet rice which have been described in many books. Actually, Chinese people eat various kinds of vegetables, meat and rice. By choice and tradition, they eat the best available in their area.

There have been many descriptions about the diet of Chinese railroad workers. Although those workers worked in
America, their diet was:

Dried oysters, dried cattle fish, dried fish, sweet rice, crackers, dried bamboo, salted cabbage, Chinese sugar, dried fruits and vegetables, vermicelli, dried seaweed, Chinese bacon, dried abalone, dried mushrooms, peanut oil, tea, rice, pork, and poultry.15

If one did not know about Chinese diet, one would wonder why they ate almost everything dried. Of course, dried foods, prior to refrigeration, were commonly used all over the world. But the reasons why Chinese pioneers in America ate dried foods are both practical and cultural. Because they planned to go back to China after they earned a lot of money, they did not want to change their diet while in another country. They felt nostalgic, so they wanted to eat their own diet while doing hard work. During the 1860s-1880s, hardly any document mentioned any Chinese grew Chinese rice or vegetables or operated farms in American. Thus, that big Chinese railroad army in America had to ship dried or preserved Chinese ingredients from China or preserve them by themselves. Consequently, the diet of those pioneers has become the prototype of the Chinese diet in America.

Actually the Chinese diet which we find in various Chinese restaurants includes not only the items mentioned above, but also other fresh vegetables and bean products. Chinese people divide vegetables into two kinds: ground crops

and water crops. All kinds of vegetables which grow from the ground, like Chinese cabbage and eggplants, are called ground crops. Seaweeds, lotus seeds, lotus roots, and water chestnuts are water crops. And also there are some other foods, like bean curd and bean sprouts. Chinese people prefer everything they eat fresh, no matter where they are, whether in America or in China. They think that refrigerated meat is not as good as fresh meat. Hence, they buy meat freshly butchered. Fish, shrimps, lobsters and crabs must be swimming in water.\textsuperscript{16} Even today in San Francisco's Chinatown, Chinese or Chinese Americans still keep this tradition for they believe that the freshness of food gives nutrition and good flavor of dishes.\textsuperscript{17} Rather than dying out in the new country, Chinese cuisine has continued to develop and expand.

Dried and fresh Chinese food can be found in every Chinese restaurant in America. They are the basic Chinese diet and represent Chinese cultural values. From the diet, one can see the qualities of centuries of civilization. The Chinese diet is still highly appreciated by almost every Chinese and Chinese-American in America. Consequently, the

\textsuperscript{16} Sung, \textit{Mountain of Gold}, 205.

\textsuperscript{17} In San Francisco's Chinatown, there are lots of open markets. People sell their fresh vegetables on the streets. One can find all sorts of Chinese vegetables there, which are impossible to be found in the Mountain West. One also can find fresh, alive and swimming fish, shrimps, lobsters and crabs in any fisherman's shop. The most interesting thing one notices in San Francisco is that there are few Chinese or Chinese Americans who go to supermarkets to buy their food.
2. The Characteristics of Chinese Food

We do not know exactly what the earliest Chinese immigrants were thinking about their food, but long-standing tradition gives us many bases for speculation. There are some basic Chinese cultural assumptions about food: a) any Chinese dish is supposed to be colorful, aromatic and tasty; b) in order to keep the freshness and good flavor of the ingredients, Chinese cooks prepare each dish by order; c) Chinese dishes are supposed to be eaten hot; d) the ingredients of a dish, except the preserved or dried ones, should be fresh or alive as mentioned before; e) different "schools" of cooking give different flavors to a dish. Thus, the characteristics of Chinese food not only represent the high quality of the food, but also reveal Chinese cultural attitudes and regional preferences.

Whenever Chinese people appreciate a dish or praise a cook, they say the dish is colorful, aromatic and tasty. However, making a dish colorful has to do with the freshness, the combination of ingredients, and the time of cooking. Fresh vegetables may give brightness to the color of a dish. The particular combination of ingredients is also important to the color and flavor of a dish. Spicy dice-cut chicken
with vegetable (jiang bao ji ding) must have dice-cut chicken meat, potato, cucumber and red sweet pepper. Thus, the dish has white, yellow, green and red colors. Yet, if it is cooked longer than it should be, the dish may still have its color, but it will not be as bright as it should be.

Good qualities of materials used for cooking also affect the flavors of food. Chinese people believe that chickens bought from live poultry markets have a better flavor than those from supermarkets. If an alive fish is steamed, one can smell the sweet freshness of the fish. A dish has good flavors also because Chinese cooks use various ingredients, such as green onions, ginger-roots, Chinese prickly ash, anise-seed, gourmet powder, soy sauce and sesame oil. These ingredients add special flavors to the dishes. Most Chinese foods are spicy, sweet and sour or hot. By any degree, Chinese foods are tasty. One can have a hot spicy dish by eating at a Si Chuan restaurant. If one wants to have a special sweet and sour dish, one should go to a Hunan restaurant.

Betty Lee Sung describes:

Unlike most restaurants where the food is generally prepared beforehand and kept hot on steam tables, Chinese cooks cook each dish to order. Your lobster is still alive at the time you give your order, but fifteen minutes later, it will appear piping hot on your table.\(^1^8\)

One can not only sense the freshness of the ingredients; at the same time, he would feel self important because the dish is cooked according to his order. This characteristic of Chinese food is one of the reasons why Chinese food is famous.

While one has his dishes on the table, he is supposed to eat them hot if the dishes are cooked hot. For example, hot candied flossy apple (ba si ping guo) has to be eaten hot with cold water, for if one eats it when it is getting cold, then he will lose the enjoyment of floss and the taste of the crispness of the dish.19

Different cooking schools have different flavors and styles as well as kinds of foods. The Canton school owns the title of culinary capital of China, for its delicacy of food and various flavors of dishes. The Hunan school is famous for spicy, hot, and sweet and sour food. The Si Chuan school is famous for its hot, seasoned with garlic, and oily food. The Shandong school is famous for its roasting ducks. Hence, different styles and flavors of food from different schools of cooking are another characteristics of Chinese food. This character of Chinese food has been appreciated and recognized

19 Ba si ping guo is cooked with apples. First a cook has to cut apples into one inch dices, then boil the sugar with oil in a pan. Finally, the cook puts the apple dices in the hot sugar, so the apple dices are covered with sugar. Then a candied flossy apple dish is done. While people are eating the dish, they have to use some cold water to dip a dice in the water, to cool down the outside of the dice. Thus, one can see the floss while getting a piece and also taste the crispness after the sugar cover has been cooled with the cold water.
by Chinese in America and Chinese-Americans, who often experience their cultural roots and sense of local background by eating in different style restaurants.

3. Preparing and Cooking Chinese Food

A cook prepares and cooks Chinese food just like an artist doing his art work. The first step of preparing Chinese food is cutting, for different ways of cutting affect the flavor of a dish. The second step is the combination of materials used for cooking. Good combinations will add special flavors and textures to a dish. The last step is cooking. Depending on the dishes and the materials used, different ways of cooking are utilized. Stir fried meat should not be steamed, for example. The time of cooking is also important to a Chinese dish. The cooking tools Chinese cooks use are different from those of other cooks: they prefer cleavers, ladles, chopsticks and woks. Preparing and cooking chinese food thus, reflects Chinese culture. It shows the cleverness and the skill of Chinese people, as well as the ways they keep the nutrition in dishes through cooking procedure.

Cutting. The way in which ingredients are cut affects the flavor and the taste of a dish. Chinese cutting methods include slicing, shredding, mincing, dicing and paring. Stir
fried meat with onions (cong bao rou) must have thinly sliced meat in order to be cooked in 2-3 minutes, so that the flavor of the quick fried meat and onion can be freshly enjoyed. Shredded meat cooked with fresh kidney beans (rou si chao dou jiao) must have shredded cut meat to accompany the shredded cut fresh kidney beans. The textures enhance each other and the flavors of both meat and beans should mix, producing a special flavor. Spotty faced dou fu (ma pu dou fu) has the dice-cut dou fu with minced meat. The character of the dish can be easily seen by looking at the minced or grounded meat on top of the dou fu. Spicy dice-cut chicken (jiang bao ji ding) has dice-cut chicken meat, potato and some other green and red colored vegetables. Because this dish needs a longer time to cook in order to let the flavors of each ingredient get into each other, dice-cut is the most suitable way for the cooking. Pared noodles (dao xiao mian) are so special to the northern Chinese for their abnormal shape and taste. Each short noodle of dao xiao mian is pared out of a big piece of dough. The shape of the short noodle looks like a small fish. The taste in the mouth is like noodles, yet is not quite. It has a special feeling in the mouth, because of the way it is cut. Consequently, the ways ingredients of a dish are cut not only affect the flavors of the dish, but also add special and visual taste to the dish.

**Combination.** The combination of materials used for
cooking should be elegant and healthy, because the combination of the materials directly affects the flavor, taste and as well as the nutritional value of the dish. For example, cucumber and shrimp meat can be put together, for both pink and light green colors fit each other. After the dish is done, one could taste the refreshing and tasty cucumber, and meanwhile the strong shrimp flavor. If one puts egg-plant and shrimp meat together, firstly, the colors are not matched; secondly, the flavors can not be mixed; thirdly, the cooking time of each material is different. Good combinations of food can also make a dish more nutritious. A dish of cucumber and shrimp meat can only be cooked for 2-3 minutes, otherwise the vitamins and protein will be lost.

Method. There are six basic Chinese cooking ways, such as dry-roasting (kao 烤), stir-frying (chao 炒), fricasseeing or braising (dun 煮), deep frying (za 炸), roasting with sauce (shao 燒) and steaming (zheng 蒸). A typical Chinese cook should basically know how to use these six cooking methods. After knowing about the six basic ways of cooking, one could easily understand the meaning of a Chinese menu, for instance deep-fried chicken (za ji 炸雞) and steamed fish (zheng yu 蒸魚). There are also some other cooking ways, such as slowly pan-frying (jian 煎), smoking (xiun 煙) and boiling (zhu 煮).

Time. The time of cooking is very important to a dish, because it directly affects the color and the taste of the
dish. If stir-fried meat with onion or cong bao rou is cooked more than 5 minutes, then the customers have to use scissors to cut the meat; and if light stir-fried sweet pepper with meat is cooked for more than 2-3 minutes, then the colors of the sweet peppers will be gone. As mentioned before, improper time of cooking will also detract from the nutritional content of a dish.

**Tools.** Cooking tools which Chinese cooks use are quite different from others. They are basically cleavers (dao 刀, which are heavy and sharp), woks and ladles.\(^{20}\) All the tools are traditional Chinese cooking tools. They were invented for their own cooking purposes. The dao is very easy to use for the ways of cutting mentioned before. The wok is easy to stir, and also can contain a lot of things and save fuel. A ladle is so convenient for cooks to add water, oil and some other materials to dishes. Some cooks prefer chopsticks and some of them have to use chopsticks because of the food they cook. For example, in Lee's Mongolian Bar-B-Q and Restaurant in Ogden, Utah, the cook prepares the Bar-B-Q on a special

\(^{20}\) The wok is a Chinese cooking pan. It is made of metal, with a convex bottom, for frying, braising, steaming, etc. It is said, the ancient Chinese invented the wok for two purposes: a) the deep and smooth convex shape of a wok can contain a lot of things and is easy to stir; b) every part of the wok can get the heat from the fire, which can save fuel. Because of the wok, Chinese stoves have their own special shape. They mainly have convex cooking wholes on their tops in which woks can be easily fitted. Even nowadays, gas and electricity stoves in China still have the convex shape for woks.
Chinese stove and "wok," which is a round stove with a thick, flat and round piece of iron on top (the visit made on August, 10, 1988). The flat and round iron top is the so-called "wok." The cook has to use a pair of long chopsticks to chop and spread the ingredients on the flat "wok" and when it is done, he uses the long chopsticks to scrape the dish in a beautiful and sharp action into a bowl. Chopsticks are the only proper tools.

Presentation. Preparing and cooking Chinese food is like doing an art work. Chinese cooks are like artists. They present their dishes with the color, flavor, taste and texture of their own artistic choice, which needs a wide range of traditional knowledge and experience. They cook more colorful food for wedding banquets and festivals, and less colorful and heavy food (with a lot of meat) for funeral feasts. For a birthday party, cooks will present long life noodles, and sweet and colorful dishes. They know the traditions and customs, and they are quite willing to contribute their skills to represent and participate in Chinese culture.

A good cook should know his own culture and use his skill to represent the culture. From the procedure of preparing Chinese food, one can see how knowledgeably the Chinese select materials used for cooking and how artistically they make beautiful combinations and textures of food. Because Chinese ways of cooking are so special, Chinese foods themselves are
special as well. Because of important factors like these, it is not difficult to imagine how important their food was to those lonely Chinese miners and railroad workers far from home and living among people who looked like ghosts to them.

4. The Meanings of Chinese Foods

Beyond the techniques and skills lies the more complex area of cultural meaning. Chinese food is not only delicious to eat, but also has meanings. Noodles (mian) at a birthday party are called long life noodles (chang shou mian), and at a wedding, they would be called happy noodles (xi mian). Chinese dumplings (shui jiao) also have meanings. Most Chinese people eat dumplings at the eve of Spring Festival or Chinese New Year. They believe that dumplings can bring them a prosperous and peaceful new year. Also there are many other Chinese foods which have meanings. For instance, a new year’s day dinner must have chicken, duck, fish and meat, because they carry

\[\text{21} \text{ Because the noodles are long, Chinese people name them long life noodles to wish people have a long life and happy noodles to wish people have a long happy marriage life.}\]

\[\text{22} \text{ Chinese water dumplings are made of skins and fillings. The skin is made of flour and the fillings are usually meat and vegetables. After making dumplings, people will boil them with water, and that is why people call them shui jiao (shui means water and jiao means dumplings).}\]
the meanings of wealth, prosperity and surplus for the next year. People believe that food consumed on New Year's day dramatizes their fortune in the coming up year.

Long life noodles (chang shou mian 長壽麺) are widely known and eaten in China. Most of the Chinese people except some of the minorities, eat long life noodles when they have their birthday parties. They think the noodles are the symbol of life and they never break them into two or more pieces when they boil them, because they believe if they break the noodles, their lives would be shortened. On other occasions, Chinese people eat noodles as well, such as during a wedding party, happy noodles (xi mian 賢麺) must be eaten, for they are the symbol of happiness and a long married life for the new couple.

Besides the long life noodles and the happy noodles, there are some other foods which represent other wishes during a birthday party and a wedding. Shou tao (壽桃) or long life peaches which are Chinese steamed bread in the shape of peaches, are the symbol of long life. Another interesting example is that during a wedding, some elderly people will put dates and peanuts in the new couple's bed. In Chinese, the word for date is pronounced zao (枣), which

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23 There is a legend in China which tells about a "long life man." He was so old that no one knows how long he had been in this world. He always had a walking stick in one hand and a peach in the other. His name is Lao Shou-xing (老壽星) which means long life man. Consequently, people see peaches as the symbol of long life.
has the same sound with zao (早) meaning early, and peanuts mean hua sheng (花生), which has the same sound with hua (花) meaning all things put together or mixed, and sheng (生) meaning birth. The homophones for dates and peanuts thus carry people's wishes for the new couple to give birth to both boys and girls, and the earlier the better.

Chinese people eat dumplings for special occasions and whenever they want to eat. For example, at the eve of the Spring Festival or Chinese new year, most Chinese families eat dumplings, and when families get together, people eat dumplings as well. Dumplings themselves have a lot of meanings. The shape of a dumpling looks like the ancient shoe-shaped golden or silver ingot, which was used at one time for money (yuan bao 元寶). People believe that on the eve of a Chinese new year, the more dumplings they make the richer they will get during the next year, for the dumplings are the symbol of money. So, making and eating dumplings on the eve and during the first day of a Chinese new year became a tradition. No one can trace back to when people started this belief and when it became a tradition. People nowadays still keep this tradition wherever they are, in China, Taiwan, and
outside the country as well. 24

Usually people eat dumplings without meat on the eve of a new year and dumplings with meat on the first day of the new year. Dumplings without meat are called su jiao zi (素馅子). People believe in eating "plain" dumplings to welcome a clean and untroubled new year. From the first day of the new year on, people start eating meat dumplings or whatever meat they want to eat to celebrate the new year.

People also call dumplings "family reunion dumplings" (团圆饺⼦), because whenever they make dumplings, they need a lot of working hands which is the symbol of many people getting together. As well, when people are making dumplings, they put the fillings in the skin and squeeze the skin together, hoping that their family members are always like the fillings of dumplings, always together inside the skin and never lost.

In addition to long life noodles, happiness noodles, family reunion dumplings, etc., there are many other Chinese foods which have meanings, such as meat balls with a diameter of 2-3 inches. Chinese people call this kind of meat ball "lion's head," which is only presented during happy occasions.

24 In addition to the meaning mentioned above, the tradition has another meaning. During the first 15 days of a new year, people should not use knives, scissors, needles and anything with a sharp edge, otherwise, it will be considered unlucky or broken for the next year. Consequently, making many dumplings allows a family not to cook for some time.
or celebrations. Consequently, cultural meanings of Chinese food give deeper values to the food. Once one knows the meanings of the food, one not only enjoys the flavors and the tastes, but also shows respect to the culture. As well, these old traditions indicate to us that the early Chinese immigrants to America were eating not only to sustain themselves but to celebrate their culture. For the Chinese, eating is a consciously expressive activity.

5. Chinese Cooking Schools

Different cooking schools give different styles and tastes to Chinese dishes. The Hunan school is much closer to the Si Chuan school (which is famous for its hot food), because it is special in spicy, hot, and sweet and sour dishes. The Shandong school is the general type of northern cooking school. It is special in roasting, steaming and soft frying. The last and the best cooking school is the Canton school. The Canton school is a general term for southern Chinese food. Because its specialties are high class banquet dishes, steamed delicacies, as well as the quick stir-fried dishes, the Cantonese cuisine has long held the title as

25 Whenever there is a big celebration, Chinese people have a lion dance. The most interesting part of the dance is the dance of the lion’s head. Thus, naming a thing “lion’s head” has the meaning of celebration.
culinary capital of China. The outsiders probably wonder why there are so many cooking schools in China. The reasons for this are that the styles of schools depend on the regional weather and what the region is rich in. Consequently, different cooking schools represent different regional diet, tastes and styles of food.

The Si Chuan school is famous for its garlic-seasoned, oily and hot dishes. Si Chuan province is in the south part of China, where the weather is hot and humid. During fall and winter time, the weather is moist and cold (yet the temperature is seldom below 10 degrees Celsius). Consequently, the people there believe that if they do not take good care of their health by eating some special foods, they could get arthritis or other diseases. In order to get rid of the cold and drive away the moist element in their bones, eating hot pepper and garlic became the Si Chuan people’s everyday diet. Since Si Chuan people like to eat hot pepper and garlic, the Si Chuan school’s cooking style has followed suit.

The Hunan school is famous for its rich, hot, spicy, and sweet and sour dishes. Hunan is an even more southern province in China, and it is rich in all sorts of vegetables, rice and river fishes. The weather there is hot and moist. Hence, hot, spicy, and sweet and sour food are the specialties of the Hunan school. The flavor of spicy, sweet and sour, and hot can disguise the rotten food. (It is said that in ancient
Europe, people imported Chinese spicy sauce to cover the taste of rotten meat.)

The Shandong school represents typical northern food style, for Shandong province is in the middle of the northern part of China. Its food tends to be roasted, steamed, and soft fried. In the northern part of China, people grow wheat and corn a lot, because the weather is not warm enough and also there is not enough water to grow rice. Consequently, people eat a lot of wheat and meat. Roasting and steaming became the Shandong cooking style. The Shandong school's famous gourmet specialty is "Peking duck," which is famous not only for its wonderful taste, but also for its ways of cooking. First the cooks hang all the ducks in a big oven, roasting them for a while, and then afterward smoke them. They have to turn them once in a while and control the time correctly. When the ducks are done, they will be presented with some small and thin pan cakes, green onions and some bean sauce. (People will put the duck meat, green onion and bean sauce on the pan cake and roll it up like tacos.)

The Canton school represents generally the southern school styles, for Guangdong province is surrounded by Fujian, Jiangxi, Hunan, and Guangxi provinces. Regionally, the weather, temperature, moisture and soil are so good that people there can grow all kinds of things. Besides, the province is along the Pacific Ocean so there are also many sea foods available. Because of the abundance of raw
materials, and a variety of vegetables and seafood, the cooking school has much more choices and ingredients to cook with. Consequently, the Canton school is famous for its various kinds of dishes, such as high class banquet dishes, steamed delicacies and quick stir fried dishes.

There are many other cooking schools in China, like the cooking school around Tianjin and Beijing area, which is called royal or palace cooking (gong ting peng ren 宫庭). This cooking school tends to stress the delicacy of any food, for it was founded for the emperors and their royal families. And it also collects all the cooking styles. Although there are so many different cooking schools in China, they all have some aspects which are similar. Their similarities and differences make Chinese food special and famous not only in China, but also in the world.

6. Conclusion

Chinese food and cooking represent Chinese culture in many ways. Generally speaking, in America, people believe that the Chinese diet is mainly rice, vegetables, eggs and pork. Yet, if we divide Chinese people by regions and Chinese restaurants by their names (sometimes, restaurants are named after provinces in China), it is easy to discover that the Chinese people from different regions eat a different diet,
and, as one would expect, the restaurants reflect this same spectrum of options and specialties. The color, flavor and taste of a Chinese dish are the basic characteristics of Chinese food. Hot Chinese dishes should be eaten hot. Cold dishes are always served first. The ways of preparing and cooking Chinese food are the results of long years of experience by Chinese people. The meanings of Chinese food not only express Chinese traditions and customs, but also make Chinese food more appealing. Chinese cooking schools distinguish different styles of Chinese food. They are the culinary representatives of regional and cultural realities. Since the Chinese who settled in the Mountain West came from various areas in China, but mostly from the Cantonese region, in which several of these styles are combined, we can be sure that many of these food customs were familiar to them and meaningful to their sense of being Chinese in a strange land.
Chinese restaurants in any place outside of China are the representatives of Chinese culture. They represent Chinese culture not only by presenting their wonderful Chinese cuisine, but also by their names, decorations, cooks, menus, as well as Chinese bowls and chopsticks. Through many years, cultural changes have been made. Chop suey and chao mian, which are the origins of Chinese-American food, became the famous Chinese food. On the other hand, traditional Chinese serving ways do not exist in most of the Chinese restaurants in present-day America. Many Chinese restaurants even advertise Chinese-American and generic American food on the headline of their advertisements. For many reasons, the characteristics of Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West show a great contrast to traditional Chinese restaurants. Their characters are special, dynamic and can not be found elsewhere.
Chinese restaurants in America can be easily recognized by their names and decorations. Also, when one enters a Chinese restaurant, he can not only smell the delicious Chinese food, but also actually see Chinese waiters, waitresses, and menus, as well as bowls and chopsticks. To Americans, Chinese restaurants always have Chinese characters for their names and English translations. Actually, there is hardly any translation which can fully interpret the meanings of a Chinese name, which contains an indication of class level, what kinds of food are served and the history it has. The decorations, menus, and bowls and chopsticks in a Chinese restaurant also have their special meanings.

The name of a Chinese restaurant always has its special cultural meanings. It is very simple and easy for a Chinese or a Chinese-American, if he knows Chinese characters, to judge a Chinese restaurant by reading its Chinese name, because usually the English translation does not tell everything the Chinese name bears. The name of a Chinese restaurant often is something that would be meaningful to a
Chinese but would mean nothing to most Westerners. For example, a Chinese restaurant in Denver, Colorado, called Little Shanghai Cafe, has a Chinese name (ya xu yuan). By only reading its English name, one can not tell the level of the restaurant. Yet, if he reads its Chinese name, he can immediately find out that the meaning is totally different from the English translation. Meanwhile, he can also infer the class of the restaurant. The exact translation for the Chinese characters would be, elegant, chat, garden. The full meaning of the name is, an elegant restaurant with private rooms for customers, which has nothing to do with Shanghai Cafe. In Chinese, the desired level of the restaurant can be seen.

(yi pin xiang), in Provo area, Utah, has an English translation of First Wok. To Americans, "First Wok" might mean the oldest restaurant or the number one in cooking. Actually, the Chinese name means the number one delicious food. At the same time, the name of a Chinese restaurant can tell what kinds of food they serve. Hunan King serves Hunan food and Hong Kong Restaurant serves Cantonese food.

The name of a Chinese restaurant also represents its history and Chinese culture as well. As previously noted, in


27 Little Shanghai Cafe, 460 South Broadway Denver, Colorado 80202.
the early times, the legends about chop suey and chao mian are among the reasons for the development of the Chinese restaurant business. Consequently, a lot of restaurants were named Chop Suey and Noodle House to attract customers and enlarge their business.²⁸ In Ogden, Utah, there is a Chinese restaurant called "Chop Suey," which might be the only "Chop Suey" remaining in the Mountain West now, for there is no other restaurant named "Chop Suey" in the phone books. Although it is not advertised for its old age, one can see the newer restaurants do not have the name of "Chop Suey."

Most important of all, the names of Chinese restaurants represent Chinese culture. The words dragon, wok, chopsticks, the Great Wall and the names of Chinese provinces are widely used by Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West. To Americans, they are the symbols of Chinese culture. For example, in Billings, Montana, a restaurant is called Dragon, and in Las Vegas, Nevada, a restaurant is called Golden Wok. Consequently, a name of a Chinese restaurant has its special meanings. It not only tells people the level, the food, and the history it has, but also suggests Chinese culture and identity to non-Chinese customers.

The decorations of a Chinese restaurant in America represent Chinese culture not only in their colors and forms,

²⁸ Chinese people call all kinds of noodles mian (면), such as, chao mian (stir fried noodles), zhu mian (boiled noodles) and zheng mian (steamed noodles).
but also in their meanings. When a person enters a Chinese restaurant, the first impression he gets is the atmosphere and the colors. In any Chinese restaurant, there would be red, green, and some spring colors such as pink and light green, that are considered Chinese or oriental colors. Those colors have the meanings of happiness and life. Consequently, they can be found in Chinese paintings, furniture, table cloths, carpets, lanterns and other decorations.

Most of the Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West do not have Chinese furniture or only have some Chinese furniture, for it is expensive and too delicate to be practical. For example, Mandarin Garden in Logan, Utah, has half western-styled, solid furniture and half elegant Chinese wood-carved furniture. One of the other decorations in a Chinese restaurant is Chinese calligraphy. Almost every Chinese restaurant has a Chinese name and inside it would have Chinese calligraphy of some famous persons hanging on their walls, which, the Chinese believe, are the symbols of Chinese culture.

The decorations in a Chinese restaurant have special cultural meanings. Chinese lanterns hanging outside of a chinese restaurant (usually they are red and round ones), have the meaning of happiness and celebration. Some Chinese restaurants have palace lanterns inside them. Palace lanterns always are hexahedrons with story pictures on each side. They used to belong only to the royal families. Now people use
them and hang them to suggest the luxury of their restaurants. Some Chinese restaurants have smiling arhats outside and inside their restaurants. In Ogden, Utah, a restaurant called China Nite has a big smiling arhat outside their door; and Mandarin Garden has a smiling arhat inside it. Although the arhat is a Buddhist character, now people give it a much more general role in their imaginations. Many people believe that a smiling arhat can bring happiness and richness to any business. And it is the symbol of good luck, too. Any Chinese decorations in a Chinese restaurant suggest Chinese culture; even Chinese music in a Chinese restaurant is a kind of decoration of the atmosphere.

Chinese waiters and waitresses are the exact people who represent Chinese culture. They present Chinese culture in many ways, from their smiles, their dress, the ways they act to the knowledge of Chinese customs they have. It is also one of the reasons why American people like Chinese restaurants. There are many books or documents that describe those Chinese waiters and waitresses, who do not speak much or good English, but they seldom make mistakes in the orders. Of course, in small towns, there are some Chinese restaurants in which the only Chinese are to be found in the kitchen.

Chinese menus are always a "puzzle" to Americans (or the "foreigners," as the Chinese call them). Almost all Chinese menus have Chinese characters for the names of dishes and English translations, that, most of the time, only have the
main ingredients. And some Chinese restaurants do not even translate their daily specials. It is only the person who knows Chinese who can understand the menus. Consequently, menus written in Chinese are a privilege to people who know Chinese, for those who do not know Chinese have to ask the waiters or waitresses about the menus before they order. Of course, there is no way to change it, because this is one of the characteristics of Chinese menus: special and "mysterious."

Chinese bowls and chopsticks are much mentioned and described by American public. Wallace E. Clay in his unpublished paper, "Personal Life of a Chinese Coolie 1869-1899", describes Chinese railroad workers' life in Box Elder, Utah like this, "With all kinds of pots and pans and skillets hanging around the walls, plus cubby holes for tea cups and big and little blue china bowls and chopsticks...." To Americans, during the early times, wherever there was a Chinese, there would be chinese bowls and chopsticks.

Chinese people use bowls because they eat rice and noodles a lot. And the Chinese custom is that while one is eating, he should not bend over his food, which indicates politeness. A bowl is perfect to be held in hand and brought to the mouth. The reason why Chinese people do not use forks and knives is that Chinese food is always finely cut. One does not have to spend energy to cut in front of a Chinese dish. Chopsticks are also good for eating or picking up rice,
noodles, as well as the finely cut dishes. Chinese people believe that chopsticks are the perfect artistic eating tools to be used with food.29

Chinese names, decorations, menus and bowls and chopsticks of a Chinese restaurant all have their cultural meanings, even though an English translation for a Chinese name might not be correct or exact. Chinese decorations in a Chinese restaurant are one of the parts of the customers' entertainment. They not only make a Chinese restaurant nice and elegant, but also represent Chinese culture or give the customers cultural influence. Chinese menus, and bowls and chopsticks can be seen in every Chinese restaurant in the Mountain West. Yet, most of the Chinese restaurants do not serve meals with bowls and chopsticks, unless one asks for them, because they are too expensive. Thus, it is clear that these elements not only characterize Chinese values but also provide a bridge between cultures.

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29 There are different kinds of chopsticks, such as, ivory, silver, bamboo and wooden chopsticks. They are usually painted with beautiful designs. One of the other advantages for using chopsticks while eating is that there would not be food sticking on chopsticks like on forks.
2. Origins and Variations of Chinese Restaurants in the Mountain West

There have been many changes in Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West. Chinese restaurants in China, Hong Kong, San Francisco, and back East are famous for their orthodox schools of cooking or real Chinese food. Yet, in the Mountain West, Chinese restaurants are well-known for their combination of Chinese and American food. This variation is based on many reasons, one of them being that in this region, restaurants are opened mainly to American or "foreign" customers. Chinese traditional serving ways are hardly to be seen in Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West. The modern sequence of serving food is the Western way: soup, meal, and dessert. Another variation is the changing of dinner sets, which is that forks, knives, spoons and plates substitute for Chinese bowls and chopsticks. The fortune cookie in Chinese restaurants in America is one of the variations or inventions. The fortune cookie is based on Chinese lucky dumplings which are eaten during the eve of Chinese New Year. Variations and adaptations have changed many Chinese traditions and customs in America; in fact, they are the dynamics of new things which are seldom to be found back in China.
In 1940, the Chinese population in the Mountain West was only 1,298 and by 1980, it reached 16,249. San Francisco by 1940 had already had a population of 17,782 Chinese. Chinese restaurants in San Francisco serve real Chinese food because they have enough Chinese who appreciate their food. Compared with San Francisco, the Chinese population in the Mountain West is quite small. Yet, there is a Chinese restaurant in almost every town in the Mountain West. Consequently, for the sake of their customers, Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West have to serve Chinese and American food, a kind of combination in which the Americans can taste Chinese food and their own.

Another reason for many of the Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West to serve Chinese and American food is that most of them were opened after 1940 and some of them are newly opened (which means they are only 5-10 years old). Before they opened their restaurants, the owners would find out the business trend and the best ways of earning money. Variations have had to be made. Many Chinese restaurants serve Chinese and American food when they begin their business. From their advertisements, the percentage of those which serve Chinese and American food can be easily seen. There are 11 out of 100 Chinese restaurants which serve Chinese and American food in

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Utah, 6 out of 53 in Idaho, 5 out of 36 in Montana, 13 out of 172 in Colorado and 7 out of 30 in Wyoming. There are 4 Chinese restaurants in Logan, Utah, and 3 of them serve Chinese and American food (based on personal interviews and visits, from October, 1988 to present). Of course, Chinese restaurants elsewhere serve Chinese and American food but do not mention it in their advertisements.

Chinese traditional ways of serving food, like the combination of Chinese and American food, have been altered because of the situations and customers. The Chinese traditional order of serving food should be: tea, appetizer (usually cold and light, without much meat dishes), main course, soup and tea again (this tea is to clean the mouth). This traditional way of serving food has been mentioned in many Chinese literary books and textbooks.

In *The Dream of the Red Mansion*, written by Cao Xueqin, one of the stories describes how Dai Yu acted when she first came to Da Guan Yuan (the Red Mansion).\(^\text{31}\) It tells the Chinese traditional way of serving food and also mentions a small thing which is useful for this study. The story goes like this: after dinner, the maids offered everyone a cup of tea. Dai Yu’s first response was that the tea was for drinking. Then, she thought she’d better wait for a while and see what

\(^{31}\) For an English version of this work, see John Minford, trans., *The Story of the Stone* (also known as "The Dream of the Red Mansion"), (Hammondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1982).
other people do with it. Later, she found out the tea was for cleaning the mouth. Also in a text book, Character Text for Beginning Chinese, it describes the way of serving Chinese food, which is tea, appetizer, main course and soup.\textsuperscript{32} Traditional Chinese medicine believes that, before eating anything, drinking some tea can clear up the stomach and drive away the cold air. Thus, drinking tea or hot water before eating became an everyday Chinese custom. Sometimes, at a banquet, wine is offered, combined with cold and vegetable dishes and then the main course, and at last, soup. Soup, coming last, serves the function of smoothing down the food one eats and helping digestion. Chinese food usually is plentiful and rich. After a Chinese meal, one is hardly wanting of anything. Consequently, there is not usually any immediate dessert after a meal, but there might be some fruits afterwards.

Chinese restaurants in America serve food only partially in this traditional order. They mainly follow the Western way: soup, appetizer, main course and dessert. Interestingly enough, most of the Chinese restaurants do not serve dessert, unless one asks. Although the variation is made to the convenience of those Western or American customers, Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West or in America still keep some of the serving ways (most of them serve tea before meals and

do not serve dessert).

Other than serving ways, there have been many other changes in Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West. A great difference in place settings is one of them. In Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West, it is rare to see them serve meals with bowls and chopsticks, unless a customer requests them. Almost every Chinese restaurant in the Mountain West uses forks, knives, spoons and plates. One of the reasons for the variation is that customers prefer forks and knives, for it would be torture for a hungry customer to learn how to use chopsticks while eating, and also it would be a great cultural shock to require an American customer to pick up a bowl and bring it to his mouth, which to him would be like lifting a plate to his mouth. Another reason for the change is that forks, knives, spoons and plates are very practical, easily washed and last long. A waiter in Lee’s Mongolian Bar-B-Q and Restaurant in Ogden, Utah, was asked why most of the Chinese restaurants do not use bowls and chopsticks. His answer was that they are too expensive (interview on August, 10, 1988). A result of these facts is that a new custom has been created: one has to ask for bowls and chopsticks in a Chinese restaurant in the Mountain West.

After a Chinese dinner in a Chinese restaurant, many Americans feel curious and sometimes anxious to see or read what they have in their fortune cookies. To them, fortune cookies are absolutely Chinese. Actually, Chinese fortune
cookies in America have American origins. They were invented by those Chinese pioneers who came to America to seek their fortune. Chinese fortune cookies are based on Chinese lucky dumplings. During the eve of the Chinese Spring Festival or Chinese New Year, most of the Chinese people make new year's eve dumplings. Usually, dumplings are made within a family group. In each family, there will be only one lucky coin put in one dumpling among the many. Whoever in the family gets it will be the lucky person for the following year. Here in America, fortune cookies not only have the shape of dumplings, but most important of all, they represent Chinese tradition, custom, and beliefs. Luckily, they have a piece of fortune in every cookie, not like the real Chinese lucky dumplings. Fortune cookies thus reflect the American attitude that everyone should have an equal opportunity to get a piece of fortune, whether a good one or a bad one.  

Many old Chinese traditions have been maintained in America, but the relative scarcity of Chinese customers in the Mountain West has brought about some particular changes, as we have seen. As mediators which introduce Chinese culture

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33 When I first went to a Chinese restaurant in central Utah, as a student from China, I was surprised by the fortune cookies. After dinner, the waitress brought up several fortune cookies, because we had a group of people there. I picked up one and found out there was a piece of fortune in it. I was so happy and screamed out that I got the one (judging by my cultural knowledge). As soon as I found out everyone had a piece of fortune, I felt so disappointed and realized this was American culture: everyone has an equal chance.
to the America people, Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West serve a most important role. With their variant food, ways of serving and plates and forks, they make American people in the Mountain West feel at home to eat in a Chinese restaurant. They can eat Chinese food, Chinese-American food and at the same time sense the Chinese culture. Still others are described in the following section.

3. Particular Characteristics of Chinese Restaurants in the Mountain West

When the Chinese first came to the Mountain West, the businesses they set up were small. The ownership was usually a partnership. Some of the cooks were not as highly qualified as others, and some of them were the owners themselves. Even now the Chinese restaurants still evidently have this character. The combination of Chinese and American food, as well as the tendency to not use Chinese bowls and chopsticks in a Chinese restaurant, are among the obvious characteristics of the Mountain West Chinese restaurants. White American waiters and waitresses are often to be seen in Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West, which would be quite rare in those of both coasts. Although Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West are not as highly ranked as those of in San Francisco or big cities where more Chinese reside, yet, they
exist in large numbers and there is a Chinese restaurant in virtually any town in the Mountain West. Consequently, Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West are not only the representatives of Chinese culture, but also the representatives of Sino-American culture; in this area, they may be the only such representatives.

During the nineteenth century, Chinese business systems in China had not been much influenced by Western society. Chinese businesses were small and successful. Following the traditional way of running business, the pioneer Chinese came to the Mountain West and set up their small restaurants. Also after the completion of the railroad construction and during the exclusion period, some of the Chinese laborers who had saved some money set up their own restaurants and noodle houses. In the beginning, they did not have much money to build big restaurants, but they did succeed in creating small and practical ones. A photo in The Peoples of Utah shows a pioneer Chinese noodle house, which is only a one door and one window small white hut, squeezed in between big buildings.34

Many Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West today have a partner ownership. Unlike the old and high ranked Chinese restaurants in San Francisco and New York, Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West are newer and smaller. Most of the owners at the beginning of their restaurant business did not

34 Conley, in Papanikolas, 267.
have enough money to open them on their own. They had to seek partners. The Mandarin Garden Restaurant in Logan was set up by the end of 1986 and it has two owners. Hunan King in Salt Lake City, which was opened up in December, 1986, also has two owners. Coincidentally, both of them have a manager owner and a cook owner. Many of the shared-ownership owners, after they earned enough money and gained the experience, have opened their own restaurants. Although partner ownership only occupies a short period of the development of the Chinese restaurant business, yet it is one of the characteristics of the Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West.

Serving both Chinese and American food is a distinguishing character of the Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West. A menu from a Chinese restaurant can tell how good and various American food in the restaurant is. China House, a Chinese restaurant, located at 1079 North Main, Logan, Utah, has a typical menu; American food in the menu occupies the whole front page. One of its customers made a very interesting comment about it: "The steaks are very good there." Although it satisfies many American customers, Chinese who want to have some real Chinese food would not go there.

Chinese cooks in the Mountain West have their special characteristics. For example, the Wok recently opened in Logan, Utah. A very interesting thing to be noticed is that the owner-cook is a Mormon missionary (Caucasian) who just
came back from Taiwan. It is common in the Mountain West to find cooks are the owners themselves or some Chinese who know how to cook. For instance, there are two cooks in Hunan King in Salt Lake City. One of them is the owner who had few months of cooking school training before he came to America. The other is a student (about 40 years old) from the University of Utah. Of course, most of the cooks have had their cooking school training. Yet, compared to the cooks from San Francisco and New York, most of whom were invited from Hong Kong, mainland China and Taiwan, the cooks in the Mountain West are less orthodox.

As I mentioned in the variation section, Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West seldom serve food with bowls and chopsticks, unless one asks for them, because the variable cost is high. Practically, they use forks, knives, spoons and plates. This is not only a characteristic of the restaurants but also a new custom of the restaurants.

Besides this "new custom," there are a lot of American (Caucasian) waiters and waitresses in Chinese restaurants. One reason for this is that some of the Mountain West Chinese restaurants are in small and far-away towns where not many Chinese reside. Consequently, they have no supply of Chinese waiters and waitresses; and some of them prefer American Caucasians for they do not have language problems with the
customers. Consequently, white waiters and waitresses form other special characteristic of Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West.

An interesting peculiarity of Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West is their surprising number. In the Mountain West, almost in every town, no matter big or small, there is a Chinese restaurant. Compared with San Francisco's Chinese population and Chinese restaurants, the difference is striking. In the U.S. 1980 Census of Population, it shows San Francisco has a Chinese population of 82,480 and the five Mountain West states have a Chinese population of 16,249. Yet, in San Francisco, there are only about 127 Chinese restaurants and in the Mountain West, there are about 359 Chinese restaurants.

The above characteristics of Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West make the restaurants special, especially their Chinese and American food. The food they serve not only satisfies those nostalgic Chinese, but also the curious Americans. Although white waiters and waitresses do not know

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35 In many Chinese restaurants, Chinese students and green card holders are hired to be waiters and waitresses. Those people are mainly from Hong Kong, mainland China, Taiwan and Indonesia, and English is not their native language.

36 The numbers of Chinese restaurants are only approximate, based on the listings in phone books. Even though the number must be considered approximate, I obtained it by searching every phone book for towns and cities in Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming (as well as for San Francisco).
much about Chinese culture, they are often the mediators between Chinese and American gastronomic cultures.

4. Conclusion

Chinese restaurants in America are not only the places where one can obtain a different cultural cuisine, but also where one can be culturally educated. The decorations in a Chinese restaurant satisfy the curiosity of those who are interested in Chinese culture: Chinese paintings, calligraphy, carpets, as well as the china. Usually, Chinese paintings are hanging on the walls of Chinese restaurants, and they represent many styles, most commonly Ming-Qing, country, and modern style. The paintings in Chinese restaurants might not be as highly qualified or painted by famous artists (usually, they are duplicated ones) as those in China. Yet, they represent Chinese painting styles and provide knowledge and atmosphere to those who have not yet had a chance to know about Chinese paintings. A good many people can recognize Chinese paintings, not because they have been to China or studied Chinese art, but because they have become acquainted

37 Ming-Qing (Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty) style is a very traditional Chinese fin brush painting style. Country style is Chinese traditional folk painting style. They are water-colored paintings. The most famous country style is Young-Liu-Qing style. Modern style includes water-paintings and oil-paintings.
with the content and styles from pictures they have seen in restaurants.

Like Chinese paintings, Chinese calligraphy is recognized by many Americans who can easily tell Chinese restaurants or stores by recognizing Chinese characters. It doesn't mean they really know the meaning of Chinese characters, but they see Chinese characters as a kind of art for the way they are drawn. Thanks to the great cultural contribution of Chinese restaurants and stores, American people have the opportunity to see Chinese characters or calligraphy. In ancient China, restaurants, bars and tea-houses were the places where scholars went to talk about their knowledge, sang poems, wrote calligraphy and drew paintings. Consequently, it became a custom for restaurants, bars and tea-houses to hang scholars' and artists' calligraphy and paintings on their walls. Chinese restaurants and tea-houses in America inherited this tradition, which not only introduces Chinese high culture to American people, but also Chinese traditions and customs.

Chinese waiters, waitresses, menus, bowls, chopsticks as well as Chinese food are the mediators which connect American people with Chinese culture. One can also hear people talk in the Chinese language and enjoy some Chinese music played on a record player. All of these elements give one a "taste" of being in another culture. Consequently, to some extent everything in a Chinese restaurant gives a Chinese cultural flavor (except for the American dollars which have to be
Because of their location, and because of a different kind of customer, as well as the location of principal Chinese populations, Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West are quite different from the traditional and orthodox ones elsewhere in America. By offering American food, serving with forks, knives and plates, as well as hiring Caucasians as waiters and waitresses, Chinese restaurants have accommodated themselves to the special conditions in the west. These changes give the business a freshness, a new blood. Hence, a brand new culture is born in the Mountain West: Sino-American culture.
CHAPTER IV

THE CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHINESE RESTAURANTS IN THE MOUNTAIN WEST

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Chinese restaurant is one of the elements which form a dynamic aspect of the American culture. The cultural functions it serves are various. During the pioneer period, the cultural influence the Chinese restaurant gave was quite small, except directly on the Chinese themselves. With the development of the Chinese restaurant business, the cultural influence became bigger and bigger. Chinese restaurants everywhere in America are the bearers of some Chinese culture. They are the places where Chinese and Chinese-Americans can find their cultural heritage. They also represent Chinese culture by their food, decorations as well as Chinese language the waiters and waitresses speak in the restaurants. Chinese-American foods in Chinese restaurants are the creations of Sino-American culture. Consequently, Chinese restaurants in America are the mediators which connect the two cultures.
1. The Cultural Influence of Chinese Restaurants

During the pioneer era, Chinese restaurants and eating places were set up in Chinese communities, where Chinese laborers and immigrants resided. The food they served was cheap, plentiful and tasty, which not only satisfied the nostalgic Chinese laborers, but also appealed to many other non-Chinese laborers. In *Pigtails and Gold Dust*, a description shows how the Chinese restaurants during the pioneer time gained their customers and business:

At the Chinese restaurants a "square meal" could be bought for one dollar. Their charge for regular boarders was sixteen dollars a week, while the others charged from twenty to thirty dollars. The Occidental restaurants would serve the customer with potatoes, an article unused at the time by the Chinese, as an inducement and feature to draw the trade from the Chinese. To attract the trade from the Chinese, many restaurants displayed signs advising the people that potatoes were served at every meal free, but to the hungry miners just in from the "diggings," the Chinese restaurants were an attraction they would seldom miss. 38

As more and more people ate in Chinese restaurants, Chinese food became well known, chop suey and chao mian being the best known. In order to enlarge the business, more kinds of dishes were added on Chinese menus, which later we have come to know as different cooking school styles. The

different styles of cooking not only have enriched the kinds of Chinese dishes, but also have introduced Chinese local cultures to the American people. Definitely enough, if one asks people who like Chinese food how the food tastes, they will tell you "Chinese food generally is spicy and delicious. Si chuan and Hunan dishes are hot." Nowadays, more or less, almost every American knows about Chinese food and Chinese bowls and chopsticks. Although most of them do not quite know the meanings of these elements, they can tell they are Chinese and bear Chinese culture.

As noted, the decorations of Chinese restaurants have given great cultural influence to the American people as well. There are always some Chinese characters for the Chinese name of a Chinese restaurant. Inside, there will be some Chinese paintings, calligraphy, embroideries and Chinese carved-wood furniture, which are seldom to be found in Chinese stores and elsewhere. Consequently, some Americans go to Chinese restaurants not only to be entertained by the food, but also to enjoy the cultural display of the restaurants.

2. Chinese Restaurants in America

Carry Chinese Culture On

The Chinese restaurant has been the bearer of Chinese culture in America, since the day it was established. Chinese
restaurants also serve as places where Chinese and Chinese-Americans seek their roots. In a Chinese restaurant, the first generation of Chinese can taste their hometown food and the second, third and fourth generations can seek their cultural heritage by eating different foods with different cooking styles or by sensing the local cultures back in China. Some Chinese restaurants hold local Chinese holiday celebrations and devote money to some Chinese or international activities. And in some special Chinese restaurants, such as dim sum, one can indeed experience distinctly Chinese traditions and customs.

As Chinese and Chinese Americans' living standard rose, many of them have moved out of the Chinatowns. Yet, they still need the special Chinese goods supply and most important of all, they realize the importance of keeping their cultural heritage through language and custom. They see Chinese food as one of their cultural affiliations. Many of them regularly go to Chinatown or Chinese restaurants to feel and participate in the Chinese culture. To have a Chinese lunch at a Chinese restaurant on Sundays or on holidays is a practice enjoyed by many Chinese families. Consequently, not only the first, but also the second, the third and the fourth generations of Chinese can find, experience, and enjoy their cultural

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heritage.

Chinese restaurants also serve the function of holding holiday celebrations and traditional ceremonies. In Salt Lake City, Utah, during almost every Chinese Spring Festival (Chinese New Year), Chinese restaurants and stores donate some money to hold ceremonies, such as the dragon dance in the center of downtown. And almost every Chinese restaurant in the Mountain West serves Chinese New Year's dinner, which costs about $8-12, featuring many kinds of food. Chinese restaurants in any local community are the central supporters of Chinese culture (usually because they are well-known and financially they can afford the expenses).

Dim sum is a special kind of Chinese restaurant, where people eat, converse, make business deals and sometimes settle family affairs. Dim sum is a Cantonese phrase or term for tea-house; and it is also the Cantonese pronunciation for dian xin (点心) in Mandarin, which is pastry. Many dim sum in America only open at lunch time. In a dim sum, Chinese traditional serving ways and customs can be found, which many Caucasian customers appreciate. Also in dim sum, according to McCawley:

There is no written menu or the written menu is merely an adduct to the customer's principal source of food: the waiters and waitresses who walk around the restaurant pushing carts or carrying boxes with large stacks of three or four items, whose names they call out in Cantonese. Customers can inspect the dishes that each waiter is distributing and take whichever ones they want. At the end of the meal, a waiter generally computes the bill by counting the plates on the table (if the dishes are not all the same prices different sizes of plates may
be used to correspond to the different prices, or a dish may be served on two stacked plates, indicating that it is twice the price of a "normal" dish).  

After the counting, the waiter will put a pair of chopsticks on top of a dish, which indicates that other waiters or waitresses are not to add any dishes on the table.

Another custom in dim sum is when one finishes his tea, he should open the lid of the tea-pot, which shows he wants some more tea. As soon as the waiters or waitresses see it, they will bring another full tea-pot. Also there are some customs between customers themselves, such as when a friend pours out tea for you, you do not have to say "thank you"; you can just tap the table a few times with the fingertips, which means "thank you." It is said that this custom derives from a legend: during the Qing Dynasty, a very famous emperor whose name was Qian Long went to a tea-house, where he could see and hear his people and know whether his officials were treating his people right. In dim sum, when a friend pours out tea for you, you have to say "thank you." In ancient China, "thank you" was always accompanied with a kowtow gesture which is two hands held together like one big fist raised up to one's head level, which requires bowing one's

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41 In ancient China, women were not allowed to go out. So bars and tea-houses were the places where men sat down and talked about business and family affairs. Consequently, tea-house became a public business dealing place and also a place where one could get all kinds of information.
head. Qian Long would never bow to anybody because he was the emperor and above everyone. Consequently, when his servant poured out tea for him, he did not want to say "thank you" or kowtow to his servant, yet, he did not want people to see his impoliteness and find out his secret either. Thus, he knocked on the table a few times to mean "thank you." Since then, tapping on the table has become a custom in tea-houses.

Most important of all is the social function dim sum serves in American society. To Chinese people and Chinese-Americans, dim sum is still a place where people make their businesses and deal with family affairs. For example, a marriage agreement may be decided over a lunch at dim sum. And Chinese merchants usually lunch at a tea-house, so they can talk about their business and at the same time enjoy the distinctive food.\(^{42}\)

In the Mountain West, dim sum is not easily found. There are only two dim sums listed in the Mountain West phone books, and they are owned by the same people. One of them is in Salt Lake City, Utah, and is called Charlie Chow Dim Sum and Then Sum. It has been open for 2-3 years. In this dim sum, no Chinese traditions and customs are performed. It has Chinese, Japanese and Caucasian waiters and waitresses. And it only serves dim sum as an appetizer. Yet, whatever changes took place, they still serve dim sum and different kinds of tea;

and they serve the very important cultural function of giving the people in the Mountain West the idea of what dim sum is.

3. Chinese Restaurants Represent Dynamic Aspects of the Sino-American Culture

The creation of Chinese-American food is one of the contributions of Chinese restaurants in America, especially in the Mountain West. As noted, chop suey, chao mian, as well as Chinese fortune cookies, are Chinese-American creations. They have the capacity to overlap or interrelate the two cultures. Serving salads, sandwiches and steaks in Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West gives the Chinese restaurant business fresh blood and the dynamics to go on.

This is a topic which is often overlooked by people who comment on intercultural relations or on "assimilation." Often, one group is seen as "losing" its identity, or "giving up" certain features of its cultural heritage, and usually these changes are seen as negative, like erosion, or surrender. But folklorist John Vlach for example has shown how the common "shotgun" house in America actually derives from an African architectural idea which was modified by the Blacks' new situation in America. The Black quilt, the Japanese New Year and Obon ceremonies, and very likely the central traditions of most immigrant groups have changed
greatly because of their new context. Many have disappeared, while many have intensified because of their greater meaning far from home: what used to be everyday behavior can now function as a cultural symbol. But many scholars overlook the creativity and dynamism in this situation: cultural differences can result in new expressions which bridge the gaps, and represent both cultures at once.

While some people may therefore believe that Mountain West Chinese restaurants lost their cultural identity by combining Chinese with American food customs, yet they survived in this way. The new circumstances needed the variation and the change motivated the business. Through the interaction between these variables, we could easily see variations are necessary and meanwhile they represent Chinese culture in a new aspect.

Chinese restaurants in America are examples of the melting pot, as well as of cultural dynamism, creativity, and display. Tourists from different parts of the world would try all kinds of restaurants in America, among which Chinese restaurants are the ones seldom to be missed. Combining with others, Chinese restaurants helped to form the American scene. Although most of the Chinese restaurants in America keep their cultural characteristics, yet, more or less, they have been Americanized. Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West are

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good examples, of the ways in which ethnic minorities select and intensify elements of their culture for retention; as well, they testify to the dynamics which allow for cultural and economic survival.

4. Conclusion

Historically, Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West, during the railroad period, are always mentioned with Chinatowns or Chinese communities where Chinese railroad workers resided. The restaurants were not as famous as those railroad workers themselves, who were recognized as the greatest contributors to the American railroad construction. Most of the time, Chinese restaurants only served the function of satisfying these railroad workers. Hence, their influence in American society or (to take a regional area) the Mountain West was pretty small. The primary and the increasing influence was during the beginning of the 20th century. At this period of time, more and more Chinese restaurants were established and they were commonly accepted by the American society.

The peak of the cultural influence of Chinese restaurants should be counted from the repealing of the exclusion laws until now. The numbers of Chinese restaurants increased and the coverage of the areas spread. The Chinese restaurant
represents a cultural presence in almost every part of the area.

Looking through the characteristics and the variations (in foodways) of Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West, one might say they have lost their cultural identity, but as these chapters have demonstrated, the reverse is true: the most precious value of them is that they have not only adapted to the environment (changes through the process of evolution), but also provided a cultural influence for the people.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

1. The Development

The history of the development of the Chinese restaurant business is the history of the display of Chinese culture and the creation of Chinese-American culture. Although almost all Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West during the pioneer period were started in Chinatowns, which were the cradles of the Chinese restaurant business, yet, later on they spread all over the country. There are also some other reasons for the development of the Chinese restaurant business, such as the wonderful Chinese food itself and the legends about chop suey and chao mian.

Yet, the most important dynamic of the development comes from cultural differences, which later led to the creation of a Sino-American culture. The Chinese restaurant business in the Mountain West developed under special conditions. During pioneer times, the restaurants were mainly in Chinese communities and most of their customers were Chinese laborers. After 1943, more and more Chinese restaurants were established in big cities, and their customers switched from mainly Chinese to other races. Chinese-American food were invented,
and a new way of serving Chinese-American food has become one of the characteristics of the Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West.

Although many Americans have come to like Chinese food, yet, they seldom fully know the cultural characteristics and the meanings of the dishes. Consequently, Chinese restaurants have played the role of mediators which introduce and display some esoteric knowledge and culture to the American people in the form of food, which can serve as a common bonding among peoples. This does not of course create a deep understanding between cultures, but it tends to prevent total strangeness and intercultural fear.

2. The Contribution

The contributions of Chinese restaurants in America are various. On one level, the contribution of Chinese restaurants has been the cultural influence upon American culture by the pioneer Chinese. They not only opened up Chinese restaurants in a foreign land, which gave the Americans the first knowledge of Chinese culture by serving wonderful Chinese gourmet food with bowls and chopsticks, but also invented the famous Chinese-American food: chop suey, chao mian and fortune cookies. Chinese decorations, Chinese waiters and waitresses who speak the Chinese language, the
holiday celebrations, and the traditions and customs of Chinese restaurants are just like an ongoing exhibition of Chinese culture. Many Americans go to Chinese restaurants to enjoy the delicious Chinese food, and at the same time to experience the cultural differences. A Chinese restaurant is like a living cultural museum.

More importantly, Chinese restaurants have provided a context in which Chinese culture could make its accommodations to the new world, in which certain meaningful expressions in language, food and custom could be maintained, and in which new experiences could be articulated.

3. Cultural Identity

It was not easy for the Chinese restaurant to establish or maintain a cultural identity in this strange new world. Through the years, as an ethnic unit, it had to adapt to the environment. As Susan Kalcik in her article, "Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and the Performance of Identity," points out:

All immigrants and their succeeding generations find their traditional foodways altered to some degree to adjust their sense of ethnic identity and their
relationship to the larger unit of American society. Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West are typical examples of this principle. Regionally, there is not a big Chinese population and the customers are mainly Caucasians. Consequently, the foodways have to be changed to satisfy the local people (a lot of catsup is added to Chinese dishes and the serving ways are changed to "foreign" ways).

Adjusting is only an internal change, which can be a response to fit into the environment. Yet, for a culture to survive, its acceptance of the environment plays an important role as well. In American society,

A food stereotype is used as a weapon against an intruder: the formula operating appears to be "strange people equals strange food"....
...the new group presents its food in acceptable, safe arenas (their internal adjustment) where Americans try it out and learn to like it and perhaps even learn to cook it themselves.

By lowering the prices, offering a greater quantity of food and changing the foodways, the Chinese restaurant survived in American society.

Having been accepted by the American society, a Chinese restaurant starts to perform the cultural identity it has established. The food and foodways form a communication

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between outside and inside ethnic group members. In Chapter I, Chinese foodways are seen to serve the function of communicating with the inside group members, for Chinese food not only satisfied their nostalgia, but also preserved the language and maintained group harmony. The tasty, inexpensive, as well as plentiful Chinese food in a Chinese restaurant also communicated with the outside group members, such as the hungry miners and other races.

Many Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West have to explain their foodways, such as the meanings of food and how to use chopsticks, for the local people have less knowledge of Chinese foodways. Their explanation constitutes an act or statement of cultural identity. Certainly, there are some other ways to express cultural identity. In Chapter III, Chinese food, menus, bowls and chopsticks, decorations, and waiters and waitresses are described as the cultural identity, despite the variations which give the special aspects or characteristics to the Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West. Serving holiday food is another typical example of enjoying and performing cultural identity. Chapter IV gives evidence of how local Chinese restaurants serve holiday food and hold ceremonies. Although changes have occurred, yet, it is only the way for the group to communicate with outside and inside members; therefore, the cultural identity is still

46 Ibid., 56.
4. Conclusion

The development of the Chinese restaurant business is the process of an ethnic group both maintaining itself and accommodating itself to American society. And its foodways give American people, the plurality, a chance to know about Chinese culture. Although because of the cultural differences and local reasons, Chinese restaurants in the Mountain West have had to change their foodways, they still have and provide a cultural identity, serve the function of communicating to the local people and most important of all, represent Chinese culture. Susan Kalcik believes:

The idea that even the differences in foods are paralleled by a level of similarities is a comfort too, in that it suggests foodways as a channel for communication that is available when others may not be. Americans set aside certain times and places for tasting food across cultural boundaries and thus experiment with crossing those boundaries in a very safe manner. 47

Chinese restaurants everywhere in America offer them the chance.

47 Ibid., 60.
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