



Food Heritage and the Chinese Singaporean Community

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A brief overview

25 Jan 21

Some thoughts, if you are a Chinese Singaporean

- What is my dialect/topolect group?
- What is the dialect of my Dad and my Mum?
- What is my favourite food from my Mum/Dad/Grandpa/Grandma's cooking?
- What is my favourite hawker food?

Taking a perspective

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Chinese Food in Singapore

Outline

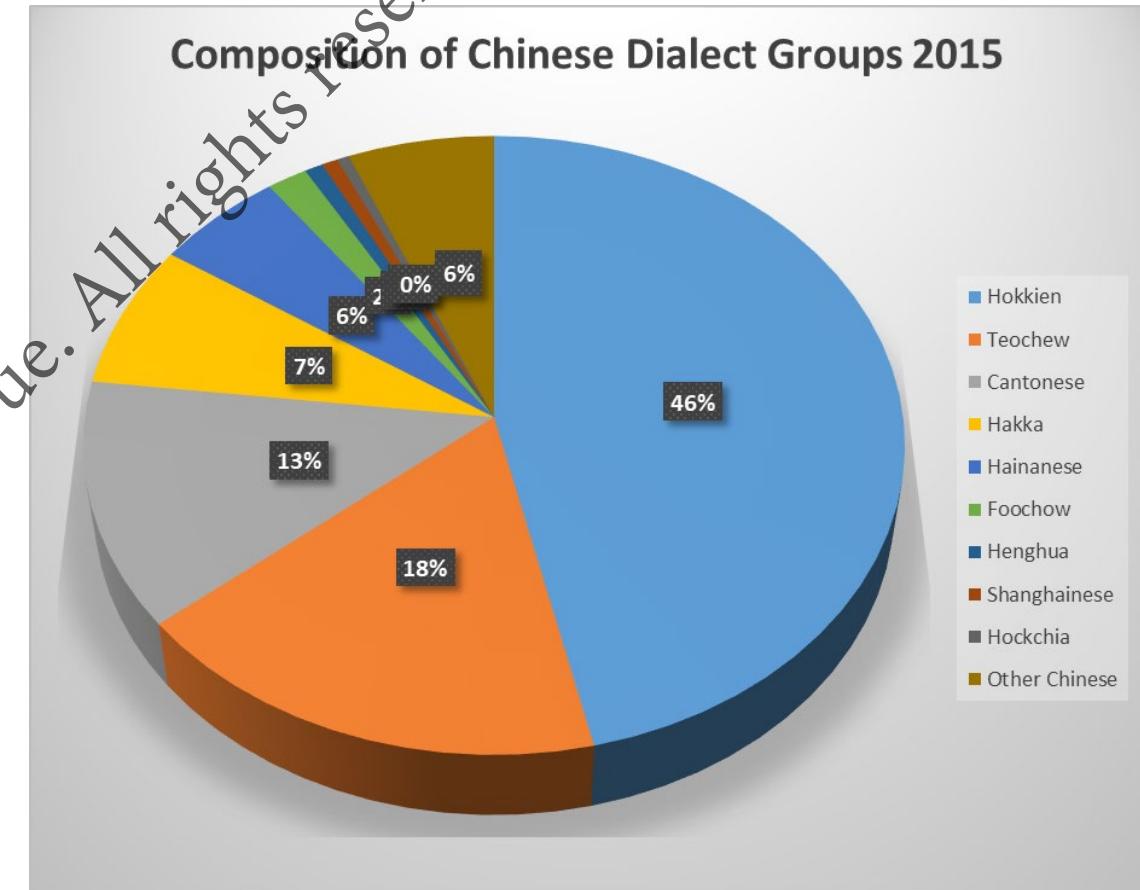
1. Chinese Diaspora in Singapore (composition of major dialect groups)
2. Historical
 1. From China to Nanyang (Singapore)
 2. Home Cooking
 3. Hawking to survive, using recipes from Home (Grandpa/Grandma)
 4. Influence from different dialect groups
 5. Innovation to stay competitive and meeting changing taste
 6. Cross dialect group Marriages
3. Festivities/Occasions
 1. Family – births, birthdays, funerals
 2. Family Belief Festivals – Chinese festivals
 3. Chinese Temple festivals

Jiak Ba Buay? Sic Bao Meh?

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Chinese topolect (dialect) groups in Singapore

	2015	
Hokkien	1,515,285	46.42%
Teochew	574,793	17.61%
Cantonese	418,894	12.83%
Hakka	245,936	7.53%
Hainanese	180,968	5.54%
Foochow	56,802	1.74%
Henghua	26,154	0.80%
Shanghainese	22,410	0.69%
Hockchia	16,894	0.52%
Other Chinese	205,871	6.31%
TOTAL	3,264,007	100.00%



Which dialect had the greatest influence on food in Singapore?

<https://data.gov.sg/dataset/chinese-resident-population-by-age-group-dialect-group-and-sex-2015>

From China to Nanyang (Singapore)

1. Coolie Dens (Coolie Keng) or Relatives' (or from same village) homes
 1. Simple meals and whatever was available
 2. Home Cooked Food

“Coolie Keng” to sintua (shen tan) 神坛
Shared rooms for Majie/Samsui women
A common place for letters and use of Letter writers

Soon Seng Coolie Quarters



<https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/photographs/record-details/34d94c6e-1162-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

Home Cooked Food

1. Home Cooking

1. Simple dishes similar to what's back home
2. Make do with what's available in the market
3. Getting what could be shipped from back home



Wet market on the street, at Trengganu St,
ca 1962

In modern days, some ingredients continue
to be shipped to Singapore
Will the demand diminish? eg Arrowhead
(Chiku)



<https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/photographs/record-details/d2ff2c01-1161-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

Hawking to survive

1. Tapping on family dishes

1. Remembering Grandma or Mum's cooking back home
2. Some dishes were already being cooked in the home
3. Easiest way to start making some income

Which Mum or Grandma dish could be found in the Hawker Centres?

A street hawker, ca 1960



<https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/photographs/record-details/b89e4f7e-1161-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad>

Influence from different dialect groups

1. Historical

1. Over time, offerings to customers change to meet the demands
2. Majority of Chinese were Hokkien, Teochew and Cantonese
 1. Char Kway Teow (Teochew) **CKT**
 2. Wanton Noodles (Cantonese) **WTM**
 3. Fish Ball Noodles (Hee Wan Mee)/Minced Meat Noodles (Bak Chor Mee) (Teochew) **BCM**

3. Apprentices from different dialect groups



Do you know that the word ‘Bak’ is common to both Teochew and Hokkien? Bak means meat and so you could identify the word Bak in “bak kwa” and “bak kut teh”.

Innovation to stay competitive and meeting changing tastes

1. Enhancing Taste
 1. Add ingredients (Fishball Noodles with more different ingredients)
 2. Offer variations – from soup to “dry” version (for noodles)

Quick “fix” to enhance taste.
Have you seen this MSG at home?



Cross-dialect marriages

How many of you have a mixed lineage?



1. Singapore – a place where different dialect groups meet and interact
 1. Ability to converse in different dialects
 2. Smaller dialect groups learnt another dialect to communicate
 1. Hainanese -> Hokkien
 2. Hakka -> Hokkien or Cantonese
 3. HengHua, HockChew, HockChia -> Hokkien
 4. Depends on the neighbourhood
 3. Practices got mixed, to a certain extent depending on wife & husband
 1. In-laws had great influence then
 4. Dishes cooked in the household depends mainly on the wife/mother

Festival/Occasions

1. Family – births, birthdays, funerals
2. Family – engagement, wedding
3. Family Belief Festivals – Chinese festivals
4. Chinese Temple festivals

Food to celebrate and commemorate
Food for guests
Food for remembrance
Food for dedication and offering
Food for visits

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Festival/Occasions - Family

1. Family – births, birthdays, funerals

1. Births

1. Baby Month Old celebration

2. Baby Year Old Celebration

2. Birthday Celebrations

1. Mee-Sua with Eggs

3. Funerals

1. Different dialect/ancestral village, different tradition

2. Offering of first 49 days

3. Offering at Death Anniversaries



Picture from <https://jixiangconfectionery.com.sg/>



Festival/Occasions - Family

2. Family – engagement, wedding
 1. Engagement
 1. Exchange of gifts & pastries
 2. Announcement to relatives with traditional pastries
 2. Wedding
 1. Exchange of gifts & food (varies with different dialect groups)
 2. Wedding banquets – 8 course dinners

Elaborate rituals in engagement and wedding ceremonies

Wedding day – important to report to ancestors of new member, serving of tea to elders

Wedding day – certain food were considered important such as the roast pig for the

Cantonese to accompany the bride back to her home, and the return and the head and tail

Festival/Occasions – Family Belief Festivals

3. Celebrations at home

1. Winter Solstice – rice balls for southern Chinese
2. Remembering Ancestors – Qing Ming, 7th Month, Winter Solstice, CNY Eve
 1. Qing Ming – At the tomb: Cockles (Teochew), Popiah (Hokkien)
 2. Death Anniversaries
3. Sending off Kitchen God
4. Traditional Kueh like Nian Gao
4. CNY Eve Reunion
 1. Steamboat
 2. Traditional Home cooked dishes
5. CNY Dishes
 1. Rabbit Fish (Teochew)
 2. 7 types of Vegetables (Teochew)



Festival/Occasions – Chinese Temple Festivals

4. Temple Festivals

1. Family traditions in going to certain Temples
2. Ancestral related Temples – linked to ancestral village
3. Kampong/Street Community events
4. Dialect based temple events
 1. Mazu – all southern dialect groups have their temples
 2. Tu Di Gong – temples of major dialect groups

In the old days, one would prepare food from home and bring to temple to offer to the Gods, as they still do in villages in China



Nanyin at Thian Hock Keng since 1948



Wak Hai Cheng Beo (Yue Hai Qing)

Some Chinese Pastry Shops in Singapore



Poh Guan Cake House (Teochew)



Tan Hock Seng (Hokkien)



Teochew Kueh



Yong's (Teochew)



Tai Thong (Cantonese)

Chinese Pastries/Kueh-kueh in Singapore



And more ...

Chinese Pastries/Kueh-kueh in Singapore



AngKu Kueh



潮州鼠麹糕 or 鼠麹粿 ce kag goi (Teochew)



Huat Kueh



Thnee Kueh (Nian Gao)

Chinese Pastries/Kueh-kueh in Singapore



Zhun Dui



Egg Tarts



Pineapple Tarts



Fan Shi Dan



Teochew Kueh



Hum Cheem Paeng

Chinese Pastries/Kueh-kueh in Singapore



Teochew Png Kueh



Teochew Soon Kueh



Koo Chye Kueh

Traditional food like Soon Kueh no longer has the “soon” (bamboo shoots) in them. Why? Hardly any big bamboo forests to harvest from. Young people would have lost the taste of bamboo shoots.
Have you tried bamboo shoots?

Chinese Pastries/Kueh-kueh in Singapore



Teochew Huat Kueh

原名: 潮州酵粿 (Kac Kueh)。又名: 潮州发粿, 米粿 , 松粿

Some kueh like the now commonly known as Teochew Huat Kueh is still very much in the domain of the Teochew community.



Hainanese Yi Bua



Mee Jian Kueh

Nyonya Kueh-kueh in Singapore

Food influenced by other ethnic groups?



And more ... Pictures taken in Tiong Bahru Galicier

Chinese Food in Singapore - Hakka



Traditional Hakka Dishes in Plum Village Restaurant

Abacus



Hakka Lei Cha at Thunder Tree



Hakka Yong Tau Foo



Hakka Beef Balls

Hakkas still maintain some of their signature dishes, although apart from a few you don't find them in Hawker Centres. Lei Cha is not from all Hakka groups.

Chinese Food in Singapore - Teochew



Teochew Ter Huang Kiam Chye at Jln Kukoh Hawker Centre



Braised Meat at Old People's Park HC



Kway Chap at Amoy Food Centre



Cha Kway Teow in Pasir Panjang Food Centre

Many dishes were created during the time of poverty and scarcity and so all parts of the pig were made into delicious food. Many young people do not take innards (we call spare parts) these days. Anyone has eaten the pig ears? CKT has also evolved with addons

Chinese Food in Singapore - Teochew.



Teochew Specialty Jelly in Jalan Berseh Hawker Centre



Steamed Pomfret @ Ban Heng Waterfront



Braised Duck Sean Kee Duck Rice at Sin Huat Eating House



Teochew Muay at Teo Heng, Hong Lim FC

What is the difference between Muay (Beh), Jok (Congee) and Pao Fan?

You know that there are different words for uncooked rice and cooked rice. In Hokkien/Teochew – Bee and Png. What does it mean if you are called a Bee Tang or a Png Tang?

Bak Kut Teh in Singapore – Teochew/Hokkien



Teochew Bak Kut Teh (BKT)

Where is the TEH of the BKT
What is the difference between
Teochew and Hokkien Bak Kut Teh?
Teochew BKT soup is less complex and
more peppery. Hokkien BKT has more
herbs in the soup.



Hokkien Bak Kut Teh

Chinese Food in Singapore – Hokkien



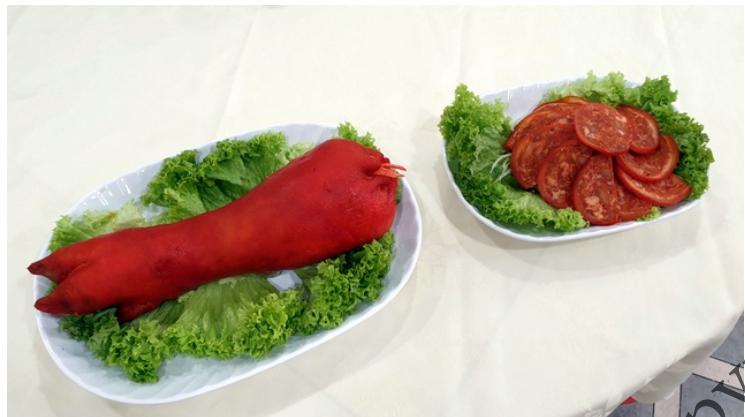
Traditional Hokkien Mee



Sea Cucumber Duck



Kong Bak



Kun Tue (restuffed pork leg)



Pau

Quan Xin Yuan Hokkien Restaurant

Chinese Food in Singapore – Hokkien



Traditional Hokkien Prawn Noodles

One of the more popular Hokkien Prawn Noodle soups that would have prawns of different sizes to attract the patrons.

There is also the Penang version Prawn Noodles



New Prawn Noodles



Popiah

Popiah in Spring Court Restaurant

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Chinese Food in Singapore - Hockchew



Steamed White Cabbage & Cold Crab at Lee Do Fuzhou Restaurant

Better known Fuzhou food to the general public must be the Fuzhou Fishballs, which has meat stuffed inside the fishball.

The other must be the oyster fry, which was also known as “tang ji” when they were making it with the small bamboo clams that seem to have disappeared in Singapore.



HockChew Oyster Fry



Chinese Food in Singapore: Hainanese (Cantonese)



GoldenHill Chicken Rice, Jalan Rumah Tinggi
Chicken Rice Ball, Dickson Rd
Heng Ji Chicken Rice,
Chinatown Complex Hawker Centre

Chicken Rice stall for half
a century might
disappear

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Chinese Food in Singapore: Hainanese ...



Golden Mile Thien Kee Steamboat Restaurant

Probably one of the better known steamboat restaurants from the heydays of steamboat in Middle Road area



Chinese Food in Singapore – Hainanese



Hainanese Curry Rice in
cafeshop at Beo Crescent



Hainanese Beef Beehoon in Amoy St
FC



Deepfried Chilli Pomfret in Mooi Chin
Restaurant (it is now history)

Well known Hainanese food includes Pork Chop

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Chinese Food in Singapore – Hainanese Satay



Chinese Satay at Chinatown Complex Hawker Centre

The Chinese version of Satay, notably the Pork Satay. Unique part must be the sauce that comes with grated pineapple. Well known Tiong Bahru Satay is now in Pearl's Hill Terrace.

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Wei

Chinese Food in Singapore - Cantonese



Toh Kee Roast Duck with Roast Meat and Char Siew



Paper Chicken from Hillman Restaurant, Kitchener Rd



Soya Sauce Chicken at Chiew Kee, Upper Cross St



Sweet & Sour Pork at Kok Sen



Yong Tau Foo



Sweet & Sour Pork at Claypot & Cooked Food Kitchen

Chinese Food in Singapore - Cantonese



Dao Ji (Wen) Roast Duck with Roast Meat and Char Siew



Chinese Roast Chicken



Roast Duck, Port and Char Siew Rice



Crayfish & Prawn Hor Fun



Congee (Jok)

Roast Pork, Char Siew and Roast Duck must be in the Cantonese food domain. But you can find various Roast Pork in other dialect groups like the Hainanese. You can even find North Carolina Roast Pig which is huge. And Balinese Babi Guling

Chinese Food in Singapore - Cantonese



Dim Sum at Dim Sum Place (halal)

Tim Sum (Dim Sum) was once like a coffeeshop in Chinatown, Nam Thong, Tai Thong.. And later came in the big ones like May Flower. These days, there are many.

Dim Sum at Red Star

Chinese Food in Singapore - Cantonese



Claypot Chicken Rice at Chinatown Complex Hawker Centre



Yunnan Ham



Waxed Ducks and Sausages

How many of you have tried the Duck Liver Sausage?

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Chinese Food in Singapore – Cantonese Soup



Watercress Soup



Lotus Root Soup



Pickled Mustard Green Duck



Bittergourd Soup



ABC Soup



Red Bean Peanut Chicken
Feet



Tripe soup

Cantonese are well known for double-boiled soup

Chinese Food in Singapore - HengHua



Some simple traditional HengHua dishes in a Temple event at Cheow Leng Beo (Yishun Ind Park A)

Food that the people in a typical HengHua village might have

Chinese Food in Singapore - HengHua.



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HengHua restaurant food has gone upmarket in Singapore. From small coffeeshop styled restaurants you can find them in malls now.

HengHua dishes from Putian Flavor Food Restaurant in Kovan

Chinese Pan-fried Food in Singapore ↗ evolution?



The panfried dishes were very popular in the early days in Newton Circus Food Centre. Now you can find them in many hawker centres

From the home, with a little twist, this chill crab has become a national signature dish. Do you know Palm Beach Seafood?

Panfried dishes at Pasir Panjang Hawker Centre

Chinese Food in Singapore – A mix



Rojak at Pasir Panjang Hawker Centre



Sungei Rd Laksa

Chinese Rojak has evolved, from the purely simple jicama (Bankwang), pineapples, bean sprouts and taupok to add-ons like green apple, you jia kway (you tiao). The hay-koh (sweet prawn paste) and grated peanuts are the important parts.

The Laksa “war” has ravaged over the decades, with each claiming to be the originals. The patrons have their own favourites. Katong is one vicinity of competition. Sungei Road Laksa has its own history.

Chinese Food in Singapore - Noodles



Bittergourd Beehoon at Hong Lim HC



Wanton Noodles at Bukit Merah View HC



Fishball Noodles at Old People's Park HC



Bak Chor Mee (BCM) at Eunos

From rice and flour came various “pasta” from rice vermicelli (Beehoon) to thick bee-hoon to Kway Teow (rice) to noodles of various kinds (dried form - mee-kia, mee-po and wanton mee) and oily form (sic mee). And then the different dishes from prawn noodles to BCM.

Chinese Breakfast in Singapore

Do you take any of these for breakfast?



Dao Zhong and Chee Cheong Fun with Wu Tau Koh in Chinatown Complex Hawker Centre

Chee Cheong Fun from People's Park Centre Basement



Teochew Chwee Kueh at Hawker Centre at Jalan Leban



Hokkien Wa Kueh at Chinatown Complex Hawker Centre

Chinese Breakfast in Singapore



Glutinous Rice, Beehoon/congee, Vegetarian Beehoon and Rice Dumpling at Chinatown Complex HC



Many hawker centres, especially those with wet market serves many breakfast food. Housewives would go to market, eat and tapao back such breakfast for the family

Kopi Tiam in Singapore

Or do you take such breakfast sets?



This Kopi Guyu seems to be an international item, but with a different name. Now there is one coffeeshop that is popular with the young as a retro coffeeshop, even young tourists

Kopi Guyu



Chinese Vegetarian Food – a growing & trend



More recent vegetarian food that are created with bright colours to meet different palates from Chinese to Indian



Chinese Vegetarian Dishes at Miao Yi Restaurant

Chinese Vegetarian Food in a temple.



Chinese Vegetarian dishes at Jin Long Si in 2006

Chinese Vegetarian Food in a temple.



Chinese Vegetarian dishes at Sean Hua Zee Temple Festival

Chinese Sweets in Singapore



Red Beans - Cantonese Tong Shui at People's Park Centre



Tau Suan at Old People's Park Hawker Centre



Chendol from Old Amoy Chendol at Chinatown Complex FC



Green Beans with Coconut Milk at Bukit Merah View HC



Wan Tau Long (Aiyu Jelly)



Black Sesame

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Wet Markets in Singapore

Where you can still find traditional ingredients



Chinatown Complex Wet Market

Chinese Singaporean Favourites

Do you eat only Chinese food or mix in the course of a day?



Singapore Indian Fish Head Curry at Karu



Mutton Briyani at Makanan Bollywood



Roti Prata at Liang Seah St Corner



Putu Mayam from Chinatown



Thosai at Santhi Vilas, Cuff Rd

Chinese Singaporean Favourites



Nasi Padang at Warung Aneka Rasa in People's Park Centre



Lopes



Mee Rebus



Mee Soto

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Chinese Herbal Drinks in Singapore

Do you know what is cooling and heaty?



Che Qian Cao



Sabah Snake Grass



Fresh herb Stall



Bottled Herbal Tea from
Koong Woh Tong 恭和堂



Pre-packed Herbal Tea from Ming Tai
in Chinatown



Xia Gu Cao 夏故草

What happened to Chinese Tea in Singapore



Seems like
Chinese Tea is
only for the
Chinese Gods?

Nanyang Tea packing at Pek Sin Choon, 36 Mosque St



Gongfu Tea

Have you ever
eaten Bak Kut Teh
with some
Chinese Tea?

Or drunk tea with
friends in a tea
shop?



Evolution of Tea drinking – “Beer”

Food & Festivals in Singapore

Chinese festivals provide for the continuation of traditional Chinese food.

Some of the Chinese Festivals in a year

1. Winter Solstice (22 or 23 Dec)
2. Sending off Kitchen God (24th Day of 12 Lunar Month – 12M24)
3. CNYEve (Offerings to Ancestors) (12M29 or 30)
4. CNY Eve Reunion Dinner (12M29 or 30)
5. Chinese New Year Day (1M01) – 15 Days
6. Qing Ming (3 or 4 Apr)
7. Dumpling (Dragon Boat) Festival (5M05)
8. 7th Month Festival (7M15) 1 month of 7th Lunar Month
9. 7 Sisters Festival (7M07)
10. Mid-Autumn Festival (8M15)
11. Nine Emperor Gods Festival (9M01-09) - vegetarian
12. Chong Yang (9M09)

Food & Festivals in Singapore

Pre-Chinese New Year gift and tidbits for visitors to the house



Queues forming to
buy Bak Kwa in
Chinatown



Bak Kwa



Varieties of cookies



CNY Hampers

CNY Reunion Dinner



A mix of Cantonese set with Japanese Sashimi, cut to thin slices for Lohei

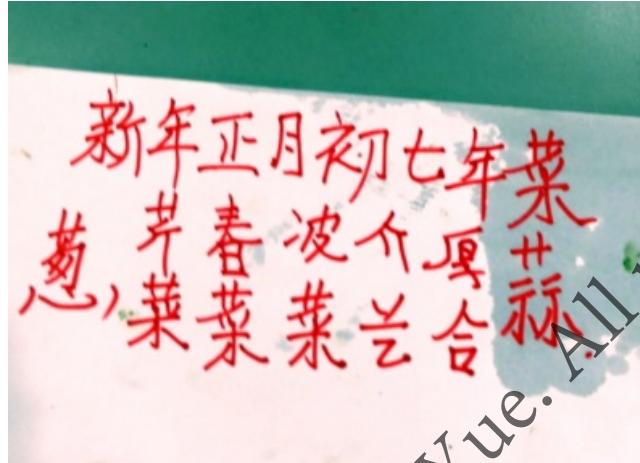


Great-Grandma's cooking for 4 generations – typical Hokkien dishes with influence from other dialect groups

Food & Festivals in Singapore (CNY)



Teochew Tradition of a dish with 7 different vegetables on the 7th Day



Lohei, from restaurants to the homes.



Teochew CNY Fish

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Food & Festivals in Singapore



7 Sisters Festival – a unique Cantonese festival

A festival observed by mainly Majie and young ladies, that could be seen in Singapore Chinatown – Kreta Ayer Rd area in the 50s to 70s. Based on the legend of the Cowherd and the Weaving Girl

Known as QiXi and QiQiao, Japanese Tanabata, Korean Chilseok



Cantonese cookies for 7 Sisters Festival

Left: 金錢餅
Right 棋子餅

A giant “plate” re-created for an event at Chinatown Heritage Centre. Plate is now in Sar Kong Mun San Fook Tuck Chee Temple Heritage Gallery

Food & Festivals in Singapore

7th Month Festival: Offerings to the ancestors & the “Good Brothers”



Community Event for prayers to ancestors



Individual family prayers in the temple,
followed by lunch with members of the family



Welcoming the “Good Brothers” on the first
day of the 7th Month

Food & Festivals in Singapore

Chinese Temple festivals form an important occasion for offering traditional Chinese food.

Some of the Chinese Temple Festivals in a year

1. Prayer to the Jade Emperor (1M08-09)
2. Monkey God (Da Sheng) Festival (1M15 & 8M16)
3. Earth Deity (Tua Pek Kong) Festival (2M02 & 8M15)
4. Goddess of Mercy (Guan Yin) Festival (2M19, 6M19 & 9M19)
5. Guang Ze Zun Wang Festival (2M22 & 8M22) – patron deity of Nan An people
6. Xuan Tian Shang Di Festival (3M03 & 9M03) – deity of water
7. Mazu Festival (3M23) – goddess of the sea
9. 9 Emperor Gods Festival (9M01-09)

Food & Festivals in Singapore (Temples)

At a Chinese Temple Festival
Dinner



Chinese dinner caterers innovate to be competitive in price and meeting the changing palate

Temple Festival Grand 8 Course Dinner – Nam Sien

Food & Festivals in Singapore (Temples)

At a Chinese Temple Festival dinner



Temple Festival Grand 8 Course Dinner (Por Tiong Beo)



Our Food Heritage in Singapore

Our Chinese food landscape in Singapore will continue to evolve, how much will we lose? And how much changes will there be?

Food binds our cultural heritage

1. When we eat a dish, we remember an occasion
2. Give Grandpa or Grandma an old dish, he or she might be able to share with you a story of old times. If you are Hokkien, ask if they have tried Mee-Theh
3. When we have lost an old dish over a generation or more, we might find it hard to rediscover or recover
4. Learn how to cook the old dishes from your Grandma

Our Food Heritage in Singapore

Food, be it heritage, fusion, modern or international, will always tantalise our palate. Singapore is a melting pot of many cuisines.

Some Food Blogs/Facebook Groups

1. Johor Kaki - <https://johorkaki.blogspot.com/>
2. Heritage Singapore Food FB Group
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/singaporeheritagefood>
3. Makan Singapore - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/27353682693>

You can find me on my Facebook Timeline:
<https://www.facebook.com/tao.victor>

Thank you!

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