

Asian Cookbooks in America

Chinese cuisine has been shaped over China's long history and when it was brought to America, it took on a whole new identity. The influx on Chinese Americans increased during the construction of the transcontinental Railway, pausing during the Chinese Exclusion Act, and picking back up again once the Act was disbanded. As a result of the increase of Chinese Americans there was a drive to experience their culture through food, that lasts today, "Chinese food is one of three ethnic foods most frequently consumed away from home (Italian and Mexican being the other two)." One way of tracking the cooking and cuisine of Chinese food in America is through the cookbooks published throughout history.

This began with the first cookbook being published during the early-mid 20th century. It is important to study the cookbooks because "they are the straws of the initial adage sharing cultural heritage in personal ways, portraying Chinese food and authors' perceptions of it in the United States." Notice that this is different than a common belief that the cookbook simply relays the current conditions – it is the perception of the author of the current conditions. This is important because many of the early cookbook were not authored by Chianese Americans. So, "Every page shows how an author viewed what he or she believed to be Chinese food, what he or she thought their readers believed and expected, or both." This leads to the contents of the very first cookbook.

A Description of Some Chinese Vegetables and subtitled Their Nutritive and Economic Value. It is a US government document made by someone who is not Chinese by decent. Still, in it is described to be, "Chinese roots and tubers; greens and cucurbits; seeds and grains; fruits, nuts, and flowers; fungi and algae; and a few miscellaneous items-saying that these foods were used by the Chinese in San Francisco and other cities and were staple foods in China." It is important to note even with the accuracy of the claims coming into question, this document is produced during the heightened anti-Asian sentiment that is spread and caused by the US government.

With this being the start of a long history of Chinese food in an America. As the food slowly changed to be more inviting for the non-Chinese descendants the cookbook reflected that, "current authors perceive less desire for use of organ meats, and so recipes for them have declined, as has the use of unusual foods such as quail, partridge, snake, goose, winkle, and razor clams. Other differences emerged, including, but not limited to, cookbooks for vegetarians, cookbooks featuring special needs (low fat and low cholesterol diets), specialty cookbooks, and cookbooks offering recipes that save time and energy." Chinese cookbooks in America reflect the ever-shifting cultural landscape, revealing how authors—often non-Chinese—perceive, adapt, and represent Chinese cuisine amid evolving social, legislative, and culinary trends. Over time,

these publications have traced the transformation of Chinese cooking as it assimilated into American life, ensuring the continued popularity and evolution of Chinese food.

Newman, Jacqueline M. "Chinese Food: Perceptions and Publications in the United States." *Chinese Studies in History*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2001, pp. 66–81, <https://doi.org/10.2753/CSH0009-4633340366>.