Dim Sum and the Chinese Diaspora

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Summary

This study examines the role of food in identity maintain and form a presence in the United States. Dim sum is the physical link that connects individuals to their heritage culture and local communities.

Despite variability in the importance that immigrants attribute to food, it remains one of the most resilient tools that immigrants sought out to Chinatown or the San Gabriel Valley in Los Angeles because they wanted to stay close to their roots. I would further my research into capturing the visual culture of the food that exists within these ethnic enclaves by doing a community study and visiting the top 15 dim sum restaurants in the San Gabriel Valley and documenting through a photo or film ethnography.

Future Research

Through generations of going to yum cha, not much has changed since the beginning of dim sum. Chinese immigrants who came to America had to assimilate to the American culture by situating themselves in areas that already existed. Many of them sought out to Chinatown or the San Gabriel Valley in Los Angeles because they wanted to stay close to their roots. I would further my research into capturing the visual culture of the food that exists within these ethnic enclaves by doing a community study and visiting the top 15 dim sum restaurants in the San Gabriel Valley and documenting through a photo or film ethnography.

Findings

“San Gabriel at that time, around about 1970...1980. Around 1980 is when it became busy with Chinese people. Before, it was always Chinatown. But before Chinatown, there were so few tea houses. But, as soon as the population grew, a lot of people from different areas in Los Angeles, established the San Gabriel Valley. They made it busy. Like in Monterey Park, San Gabriel, and those places. A lot of people began to establish food businesses and started to work. But our Chinese people, usually worked in the food and restaurant businesses. When starting and opening a tea house, individuals needed a lot of money in order to open it. So now, the Chinese businesses have flourished since it turned out to be so many more people.”

“People like to sit there for a while. Some people like to read newspapers and talk with people. In Hong Kong, a lot of people liked to go to the horse tracks to watch the races. So going to yum cha, people talk about the horses and the jockey and stuff like that. Everyone is there to sit and chat. Because Hong Kong places are so small, people regularly see each other at those tea houses. That’s why they sit together or meet one another there to connect and socialize. It’s not whether we like it or not. It’s because when you go yum cha, it’s a great place to sit and get some leisure. If not, where else are you going to go to just sit and chat?”

Key Concepts

- Adaptation: whether or to what extent individuals or social groups adapt to new patterns of cultural conduct, and willingly include different forms of behavior into their everyday practices.
- Distancing: the extent to which individuals are willing to interact and establish relationships with members of social groups other than their own.
- Identification: how individuals and ethnic groups self-identify, or are identified by others as members of an ethnic group through certain cultural practices, such as food, clothing, music, and religion.
- Integration: the ability of an individual or a social group to utilize and contribute to every dimension of economic, social, cultural and political activities in the society.

References