

PREVALENCE AND ACCEPTABILITY OF CHINESE FOOD IN KOLKATA

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ABSTRACT

Background: *In Calcutta the cheap eating houses which were in abundance 30 years ago have disappeared. The street vendors who sold only raw commodities in the past now sell prepared foods as well. Small shops have been replaced by transportable stands. Street foods are adopted because they are inexpensive, the taste is acceptable and they are conveniently sold wherever people congregate. While the Chinese have been visiting India for millennia in search of Buddhist teachings. As all immigrant communities tend to do, the Chinese assimilated Indian sensibilities and beliefs the Indian culinary world was affected by a new cuisine. The first Indo Chinese restaurant Eau Chew opened in Kolkata. New restaurants mushroomed all over Kolkata, and legends like Fat Mama and Kim Fa were born, offering newer dishes with fancier combinations and names. Before you knew it “Indian Chinese” had tickled the taste buds of folk in every small town and city. The Chinese food served in India is extensively Indianized, and there are certain Indian expectations of what Chinese food is.* **Objective:** *The main focus of research is on the Chinese food prevalence and its acceptability to Chinese food palatable to Indian pallet.* **Methodology:** *A quantitative research was done on the basis of random sampling. Random sampling was done for Chinese immigrants and local historians. The total no. of respondents was (n=100) between age 20 to 80 years.* **Results:** *After the analysis of the results it was discovered that the prevalence and acceptance of Chinese food in Kolkata still exists strongly and the demand for it still continues among the local people and historians as well.* **Conclusion:** *The authentic Chinese foods still remain strange to the Indian people. The intrinsically Indian-Chinese food claims the position of Chinese food in India, and it is popular and widely accepted as Chinese food.*

Key Words – *Indian Chinese cuisine, Chinese food, Acceptability, Demand*

INTRODUCTION

Chinese food is widely available in Kolkata; it is spicy, red and greasy and is mostly vegetables or chicken or fish served with noodles or rice. It is influenced by Tibetan- Mongolian culture, which is further influenced by Chinese cuisine modified to suit food preferences of Indians. The Indian-Chinese food originated in 18th century, when the British East India Company established Calcutta (now Kolkata) as capital of Colonial India. Calcutta was in the middle of the trade route through which various commodities like tea and silk were transported from China to Britain; hence soon various communities of workers came to Calcutta.

Yang Dazhao was a tea trader who landed in Calcutta in 1778 and set up a sugar mill, bringing people from the mainland to work for him. And by the end of Second World War, about 26,000 Chinese were settled in country. These immigrants came from different regions, which lay the roots for Chinese Cuisine in India. As all immigrant communities tend to do, the Chinese assimilated Indian sensibilities and beliefs. As often happens when immigrant groups land in a new country, the Chinese soon felt a longing for their native cuisine and started using newfound local ingredients to recreate their beloved dishes. By 1901, the census recorded 1,640 Chinese people living in the city, researchers Zhang Xing and Tansen Sen wrote in a chapter on the Chinese in South Asia in the *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora*. By the end of the Second World War, they say, the number had surged to at least 26,250. These Chinese immigrants came from different regions but could broadly be categorised as Cantonese carpenters, Hakka shoemakers and tannery workers, Hubeinese dentists, and Shandong silk traders, Zing and Sen write. These immigrants would lay the roots for India's obsession with Chinese cuisine.

The Restaurants located in China's Second Chinatown, Tangra began incorporation of new techniques and ways to make food more appealing for Indian customers, especially by adding more chilli and garlic. Chinese Indians today are located in ethnic neighbourhoods in Kolkata and Mumbai. The largest population is in Chinatown, Kolkata where about 2,000 live and another 400 Chinese Indian families in Mumbai's Chinatown. Mao Zedong's communist regime and the First World War amongst other events were responsible for continued immigration in the early 1900s. This part of Kolkata has turned into an important destination for sourcing finished and semi-finished leather, over the past several decades; it has served as the location of Kolkata. Supreme Court's decision in 1995 to shift tanneries, the key source of sustenance for the Chinese-Indians, due to environmental concerns provoked exodus. Most have migrated to other countries and others are making a living through Restaurants. Even though the heyday of Tangra seems to be in the past, it is still legendary for its authentic Indo-Chinese cuisine. Over the years, disappearing tanneries have metamorphosed into restaurants One of the earliest records of immigration to India from China can be found from 1820. These records states that the first Chinese people to reach India

was of Hakkas but does not elaborate on the professions of these immigrants. A huge chunk of the Chinese population in Kolkata resides around Tiretti Bazaar; one can find many Chinese temples in this locality also. Every day early morning especially weekends a group of Chinese food sellers sets up temporary shop just behind Poddar Court selling some delicious and sumptuous Chinese breakfast. This market is set up in a parking lot which continues till around 6:30a.m. on weekdays and 9:00a.m. on weekends. One can find following items such as Momo, dumplingsoup, shrimp pork/fish pao, Khwai Choy Pan. As these days, though, the Chinese restaurants across the country are mostly Indian-owned and have Indian cooks. Therefore, the study focusses how the idea of Indianized Chinese food spread also, its prevalence and its acceptability to Chinese food palatable to Indian pallet (The story of how India fell in love with Chinese Food; Oct, 2018).

Biswas, 2017, in the book “The Chinese Community of Kolkata: A Case Study on Social Geography”; 2017 states that, The Chinese community of a Kolkata has been settled in India for more than two centuries. The relationship to the host society and to the authorities, particularly the dominant host culture, has gone through different stages with different forms.

One Major observation was that Indian Chinese restaurants mostly use Indian spices, flavours, and materials to make Chinese food, in which the main flavours are spicy, and pungent. The cooked food is served in a bowl, and eaten with spoon, and fork (Sankar, 2016).

Nandi, 2004 at Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi; mentioned in the book “The Changing Popular Culture of Indian Food: Preliminary Notes” says Indian Chinese, this food is one of the fastest growing cuisines in India. So much so that waiters and cooks from Northeast India and from among expatriate Tibetans are in high demand in these restaurants. They can pass off as Chinese and give patrons the feeling that they are getting the authentic stuff. Some wonder if the subterfuge is needed in the first place, given that the patrons are often non-demanding, first-generation urbanites, perfectly happy as long as they get their fried noodles.

“(For) every community, wherever they go, food is an important way to create a sense of belonging and familiarity,” said Bonnerjee, 2018 associate professor at the OP Jindal Global University, Haryana, who has studied the history of Calcutta’s Chinese community. This work is carried out to find out what creates “Chinese” in “the Chinese food in India”. The “Chinese” in Indian–Chinese food comes from various things, from the ambience of the restaurant to the food. The visuals that restaurateurs or street hawkers use to create identifiable Chinese ambience, the colour they use, the utensils, the sauce bottles, and the wok were similar throughout. Apart

from these, the taste in Indian–Chinese food was also identical. The understanding of the popular Chinese food is uniform and defined by some set of predefined identifiers.

METHODOLOGY

The primary data was collected by the self-designed questionnaire conducted on November, 2018 of the old Chineseimmigrants andlocal historians situated in Kolkata.

The study wasalso based on the secondary information available at various source of information like cook books, books by food historian, blogs and various websites.

The study was conducted on the basis of sample survey in various parts of Kolkata city. The areas where data was collected wereTangra (also known as Chinatown), Terratti bazar.

Random sampling was done for Chinese immigrants and local historians. The total no. of respondents was(n=100) between age 20 to 80 years, out of which females were 34%(n=34) and males were 66%(n=66).

Tools and Techniques: A self-designed questionnaire was framed related to respondent’s demand for Chinese food in Kolkata. The questionnaire was formed on the basis of Likert’s scale. Likert’s scale was used to represent people’s attitude to this topic. The respondents were asked to think about the preferences for the Chinese food and rate their preferences on the scale.

The study adopted three-point rating scale method of questionnaire to obtain information about the respondents.

The rating scale adopted is as follows:

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Statistical analysis: The results were computed as frequency and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prevalence and acceptability of Chinese food was collected through questionnaire making it a 100% response rate. The data was collected and compiled to find the results.

Table 1: Prevalence and acceptability of Chinese food in Kolkata

Questions	Yes		Maybe		No	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Are you fond of Chinese food in Kolkata?	82%	82	8%	8	10%	10
Do you know places to find Chinese Food in Kolkata?	78%	78	10%	10	12%	12
Is the demand for Chinese food more than the other cuisines in Kolkata?	50%	50	10%	10	40%	40
According to you is there any similarity between Indian Food and Chinese Food?	6%	6	66%	66	28%	28
Do you think Chinese food is influenced by Bengali food?	46%	46	22%	22	32%	32
Would you like to have more Chinese food outlet in your locality?	48%	48	20%	20	24%	24
Do you think Bengalis have a decrease in palette for authentic Chinese food?	68%	68	6%	6	26%	26
Do you think Chinese food outlets are on a rise nowadays?	34%	34	18%	18	48%	48
Are you aware of health effects of Chinese food?	46%	46	20%	20	34%	34
Do you think Chinese Food is unhealthy?	68%	68	16%	16	16%	16

On the basis of the data collected from the questionnaire from 100 respondents, data was compiled and analysed to find out the various results.

Out of the sample population 82% have the fondness for Chinese food in Kolkata whereas, only 10%(n=10) respondents showed no fondness towards Chinese food prevailing in Kolkata also the current study depicts, this food is one of the fastest growing cuisines in India.

Respondents staying in Kolkata almost 78% knew about the Chinese food outlets in Kolkata and only 12% are unaware of it, but 10% respondents were also there who not sure about the places for Chinese food. Demand and advertisement are reasons for popularity of Chinese food outlets due to lack of information and awareness. The study also showed majorly that the 50% of the respondents have demand for Chinese food more than other cuisine which decreases the demand for other cuisines up to 40%. As the descent of Chinese people in India goes to various decades back as compared to other international Cuisines.

When asked about the similarity between Chinese food and Indian food, 66%(n=66) respondents were not sure about this fact and only 6% people could find the similarity because of the common ingredients used in preparing the Chinese food and Indian food such as garlic, ginger& oil. These ingredients are common in Indian gravies and sauces. Also, when asked about the influence of the Bengali food on Chinese food in Kolkata only 46%of the respondents said yes,as they felt that Bengalis residing in Kolkata have played a dominant role in promoting the Chinese food especially non-vegetarian Chineseespecially fish dominance. There were 68% respondents who agreed on the decreased palette of the Bengalis for authentic Chinese food due to increased variety of various other international cuisines in the market rest 28% did not agreed to it & said no.Only 34%(n=34) respondents of think that there is a rise in Chinese food outlets in Kolkata whereas 48%(n=48) do not agree to this since many new flavours have occupied the market.

Regarding the awareness about the health effects of Chinese food only 46% of respondents agreed to and 34% of respondents are still unaware of it. Chinese cuisine is healthy as it include lot of vegetables and use of olive oil in the preparation.

Also, when asked about the unhealthy side of the Chinese food, 68% (n=68) of the people felt that Chinese food is unhealthy because of the ingredients such as MSG, chilli, vinegar and at times deep-friedfood to hint the Indian palate. However, 16% of respondents did not agree to it and said no.

CONCLUSION

Popular Chinese food served in India is not exactly the authentic Chinese food. It is Indian food customized as per Indians' imagination and expectation of what Chinese food should be. Its colour, level of spiciness and pungent, and the way it is served create certain expectations on Chinese food among Indians. However, it is not considered Indian food, and it is positioned between Indian and Chinese food categories. Therefore, it could be considered as a new cuisine, the Indian-Chinese cuisine, which is neither Indian cuisine nor Chinese cuisine.

After the analysis of the results it was discovered that the prevalence and acceptance of Chinese food in Kolkata still exists strongly and the demand for it still continues among the local people and historians as well. The areas of less satisfaction were the no rise in that existing demand which showed stagnancy in development of the cuisine. The above-mentioned results interpreted are neither to be generalised for all the people staying in Kolkata.

Therefore, the authentic Chinese foods still remain strange to the Indian people. The intrinsically Indian-Chinese food claims the position of Chinese food in India, and it is popular and widely

accepted as Chinese food. People still crave and demand for the Indianized version of Chinese food served in Kolkata.

The Chinese food sellers can develop new recipes and change as per the modern trends and demands of the market since new cuisines are attracting the public, also keeping the traditional recipes intact as people still have craving for it. Also, the Chinese outlets can enhance their outlets by decorating them in a new modern way and introducing fusion Chinese food.

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