You Are What You Eat: Chinese Ethnic Restauration in Paris as Identity Work

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This study investigates the role of French-born Chinese restaurateurs in Paris as arbiters of identity who are redefining the cultural significance of Chinese cuisine for a predominantly non-Chinese clientele. Utilizing semi-structured interviews, the field study delves into how these ethnic entrepreneurs utilize their culinary concepts as a platform for cultural identity negotiation and challenging dominant cultural narratives. The primary research question(s) explored are: How do these restaurateurs use their mercantile and culinary strategies to stage diasporic identity and influence sociocultural dynamics? To what extent does internalization of dominant tastes (habitus) influence their staging of identity versus more pragmatic principles of instrumental rationality? The findings reveal that dining and food consumption extend beyond mere social activities to become venues for complex cultural negotiations, where ethnic entrepreneurs challenge and navigate cultural hegemonies and identity formation processes. The study underscores the nuanced role of ethnic cuisine in altering cultural perceptions and power dynamics within a multicultural urban context. This research suggests further comparative analysis across different diasporic communities and direct engagement with consumers and industry stakeholders to enrich understanding of the broader sociocultural implications of ethnic culinary entrepreneurship.

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Introduction: Cultural Staging and Entrepreneurship within Diasporic Culinary Institutions

Taste is often understood primarily as a matter of personal preference or physiological stimulus. In reality, taste is not epistemologically neutral; it is profoundly shaped by an individual's unique socialization, or the processes by which they have interpellated, internalized, and reappropriated the norms, values, behaviors, and preferences of a group. Likewise, what an individual perceives as tasteful or distasteful wields social meaning (Janes, 2014; Hojlund, 2015). The act of tasting is far from passive. Eaters are engaged in the reflexive activity of assigning meaning and value to their tasting experience based on their sociocultural conditioning. While physiological responses to certain foods do influence tastes, debating nature versus nurture in regard to acquiring certain tastes obscures questions concerning the social function of taste in demarcating and perpetuating sociocultural perceptions and distinctions. Moreover, taste is not static. Rather, it has the capacity to continually evolve based on exposure, new associations, and cultural learning (O'Brien and Ianni, 2022). In this context, taste can be understood not merely as a sensory preference but as socially meaningful qualia tethered to an individual's identity and position within cultural hierarchies.

This paper seeks to investigate how ethnic culinary entrepreneurs participate in the symbolic staging of Chinese culture to the French public through their restaurant concepts. Specifically, it aims to understand what approaches French-born Chinese restaurateurs in Paris employ in order to redefine the cultural meaning of Chinese cuisine and enhance its popularity among non-Chinese audiences. In what ways does their distinct socialization as "third culture" individuals dictate how they curate, perform, and commercialize their cultural identity?

I argue that these ethnic entrepreneurs function as key cultural intermediaries who strategically reshape public narratives around Chinese cuisine by actively reconfiguring how Chinese culture is represented, understood, and consumed among the French public and within the French cultural imagination. Their restaurant concepts, I contend, are not only sites of consumption but stages wherein cultural identity is continuously negotiated and reimagined. As such, analyzing their decisions as entrepreneurs through the traditional lens of instrumental rationality and profitability is insufficient.

To situate my argument, I start by understanding France's world-renowned, long-standing gastronomic tradition. Gastronomy and dining are central to French culture. The term restaurant itself originates from the French verb "restaurer," which translates to "to restore" or "to renew." French cuisine's cultural association with haute cuisine, valorized as refined and proper, positions it often in diametric opposition to many ethnic cuisines stigmatized as uncivilized or unhealthy. Solidifying French cuisine's elite status in the global cultural imagination, in 2010, UNESCO included "Le repas gastronomique des Français" (The gastronomic meal of the French) on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The concept of the gastronomic meal far

exceeds the food itself, holistically describing a social tradition of dining marked by conviviality, harmony, a well-defined course structure, and freshness of products (UNESCO, 2010). This recognition stabilizes French culture into a static, recognizable identity. Conversely, it skims over contention surrounding the "Frenchness" of cuisine, cementing a power dynamic in which French gastronomy can only incorporate influences from other cultures insofar as they can be integrated into the established tradition without tainting the French identity (Simek, 2021). Despite increasing openness of French culinary tradition to foreign flavors, ingredients, and techniques, these novelties must cautiously tread the fine line between palatability and disgust. Analyzing the integration of Indochinese rice in French cuisine, Elizabeth M. Collins explains:

> "... then, and now, racialised persons are not to be eaten with at the table, but may find a place either on it, as a consumable product, or behind it, as someone who serves, or both" (Collins, 2020).

While the French repas gastronomique is lauded as appreciative of ethnocultural diversity, in reality, it may operate as an instrument of selective cultural assimilation, enfolding novel foreign ingredients into its culinary regime without extending the possibility of inclusion to the foreign individuals themselves (Ibid, 2020). Due to continually evolving tastes and preferences, foreign, non-Western culinary elements often end up as ephemera, incorporated into the French gastronomic tradition only when temporarily deemed appealing.

I am fascinated by the symbolic significance of food and food cultures as harbingers of sociocultural meaning. Eating and dining are perceived as highly social activities among most cultures (Dunbar, 2017). Sharing food with others such as through eating together or serving diners at restaurants can function as an indispensable medium for cultural understanding and immersion. The typology of different cuisines and how they are perceived by diners all over the world often directly reflects vestiges of colonialism and exoticism (Karaosmanoğlu, 2020, Staszak, 2008). In ecological, economic, and sociological contexts, food is power; its power as a purveyor of social meaning is not inherent but rather realized and interpolated by individuals themselves.

Furthermore, I have long been intrigued by the diachrony of diasporic identity, having previously conducted extensive research on the history and contemporary lived experiences of Chinese Americans. I knew early on that I wanted to focus on the role of ethnic entrepreneurship in shaping the Chinese diaspora in France, a relatively understudied and overlooked community in dominant discourses surrounding European immigration. Whilst exploring Paris, I quickly noticed the abundance of Asian restaurants; not Chinese restaurants per se, but "traiteurs asiatiques" and other pan-Asian establishments, a marked difference from the regional Chinese restaurants that have proliferated in the United States.

After conducting preliminary research on the waves of Chinese immigration to France, largely to Paris, I discovered the economic centrality of restauration among the Chinese diaspora, especially for the first generation (Lipovsky and Wang, 2019). While restauration tends to be far less common among the descendants of Chinese immigrants as career options are more plentiful, it follows logically that the culinary institutions opened by "third culture kids"—those born and raised in a different sociocultural context from their parents—will reflect their unique socialization (Useem and Downie, 1976). This is especially true if they choose to open Chinese restaurants—microcosms that reveal how these entrepreneurs have uniquely internalized Chinese culture despite having grown up in a Western country.

Much of France's Chinese population derives from Wenzhou, a city in the Zhejiang province located in China's Southeastern region. Wenzhou is renowned in China for its high concentration of private businesses and for serving as a primary epicenter of China's export economy. The Wenzhounese are known for their fervent entrepreneurial spirit, seen as embodying self-reliance, resilience, and a self-starter attitude (Beraha, 2014; Li, 2018). My fascination with this particular community stemmed from my curiosity regarding how and why these diasporic peoples came to France, the extent to which they have preserved close transnational ties, and how their economic activity abroad has shaped the socioeconomic fabric of the city at large. Unlike my past endeavors, I was interested in pursuing exploratory ethnographic research premised upon the principle of observing "life as it happens" (University of Virginia). This research paradigm and technique allows for a direct, firsthand examination of the culture, practices, social interactions, and experiences of entrepreneurial Chinese immigrants in France.

As the daughter of first-generation Chinese immigrants, I am constantly observing the differences in lifestyles and attitudes between immigrants and their descendants. The unique socialization of these groups creates vast divergences in individuals' perceptions of themselves, their sociocultural identity, their values, and their allegiances. While I lean closer to the American side having been born and raised in the United States, I do not feel fully tethered to either identity and its associated norms, values, and expectations. Since being in France, my Chineseness has felt more pronounced than ever. How I am perceived here feels sharply defined by my race. Chinese cuisine is often connoted via derogatory racial stereotypes in the Western imagination. Despite the globalization of cuisines and evolving cultural appetites that have helped change perceptions, Chinese cuisine and those associated with it are still situated within a precarious, subordinate sociocultural position. Studying the lived experiences of those with cultural backgrounds similar to my own despite our differing contexts of socialization yields immense academic and personal import.

Methodology

To tackle my inquiries, I sought to observe firsthand the motivations, experiences, and comportments of those in this specific entrepreneurial niche primarily through conducting full-length interviews.

Restaurants were selected through purposive sampling, informed by personal interest, alignment with my research parameters, and prior patronage. My primary criteria were: (1) the restaurant was founded and/or operated by people of Chinese heritage; (2) it was located in a relatively non-Chinese ethnic neighborhood in Paris; and (3) it appeared to cater predominantly to a non-Chinese clientele. I aimed to choose restaurants with an emphasis on distinctive branding suggesting a conscious effort to shape public perceptions of Chinese cuisine and culture.

After finding restaurants of interest, I contacted them directly via their listed corporate emails or through social media. In

my brief self-introduction both during the outreach stage and the actual interview, I described myself as a student conducting a research study seeking to better understand the experiences of French-born Chinese in the corporate restaurant industry. I informed them that the interview would be brief and that I would be including their business in a map of recommendations to share with my American peers in an effort to foster goodwill and incentivize participation.

Researcher-interviewee interactions reflect the positionality of both parties (Hmed, 2008; Philipps and Mrowczynski; 2019). Steiner Kale, professor of educational psychology at the University of Aarhus metaphorically characterizes interviewers as miners or travelers. While miners dig with the assumption that there is some definitive truth to be discovered, travelers learn by way of the journey of learning and exploration. (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2017). Over the course of the interviews I conducted, I sought to distance myself from the role of a miner, instead reflexively adapting and reformulating my interview and broader research questions.

In my case, the interviewees' statuses as restaurant owners or affiliates meant that their expressed opinions may have been influenced by commercial interests. While I attempted to come across as neutral as possible, reminding interviewees that there were no right or wrong answers, it is possible that the informants did not completely trust me due to my position as an outsider, an American student researcher, potentially engendering hesitance to share certain details. However, I believe my identity as a fellow young Chinese helped mitigate the degree of sociocultural distance between myself and my subjects, allowing for a much greater degree of liberated speech. I did not feel as if the interviewees were purposefully hiding anything from me; the sessions resembled natural, open conversations rather than sterile, prescriptive interviews.

I interviewed a total of four individuals who work at and help curate the public image of two different new-age Chinese restaurant groups in my desired research niche. One of the interviewees was himself the founder of a restaurant group. Another was the mother of a girl I previously interviewed, allowing me to gain a sense of intergenerational differences. I discovered that the two restaurant groups perceived each other as competitors, facilitating illustrative comparison. All interviews were conducted in French with some communication in Chinese or English depending on what the interviewee was most familiar with. Due to the limited time frame of the study and some subjects' lack of availability, I was unable to conduct an extensive number of interviews. This did not prove to be an issue for the purpose of this study as the goal was depth about the experiences of a selected set of individuals, not breadth as achieved through statistical representativeness. Observational data helped fill in the gaps. Following a positivistic research paradigm in which my research questions were fairly well-defined, I conducted structured observation, observing from afar my physical surroundings and subjects in their working state both as a client and interviewer (Mulhall, 2003; Salmon, 2015).

Rather than tightly structured or group interviews, I conducted semi-structured interviews lasting approximately an hour with thematic open-ended questions. The question guide I prepared in advance provided a useful schematic to ensure a comprehensive, time-efficient interview. Following the qualitative interview guide set forth by Kvale and Brinkmann, I began with broad introductory questions inquiring about my subject's educational and work background, how they arrived at their current role, their family history, and their overall business concept. Based on the direction and contents of their response, I continued to probe deeper and ask follow-up questions. Apart from questions prompting factual, more objective responses, I sought to elicit honest, unfiltered descriptions of feelings and opinions from my subjects.

To focus on the conversation at hand without worrying about taking detailed notes, I obtained consent from interviewees to take audio recordings of each interview in its entirety (Knott et al, 2022; Powney, 2018; Hofisi et al., 2014). In comparison to surveys, in-person interviews facilitate interactivity and leave room for the discovery of unexpected topics that may prove to be more relevant or substantial (Jamshed, 2014). Moreover, the face-to-face component allows for live observation of verbal and non-verbal gestures, cues, and mannerisms that can be illustrative.

I found all my subjects to be open-spirited and fairly easy to talk to. Whenever they mentioned a term or concept in French that I was unfamiliar with, they readily provided clarification. Since the interviewees primarily ranged from 18 to 30 years old with the exception of one, it felt easier to build rapport and have more naturally flowing conversations. Despite our sociocultural and economic differences, I did not feel the presence of an unequal power dynamic at play while speaking to any of my subjects. While potentially not didactically sound, I did express my own opinions to subjects at times in order to solicit their reactions. While the youngest interviewee—the one least intimately involved with the internal business operations and strategy of the restaurant group—expressed a rather pessimistic viewpoint about conforming to pressures to assimilate to Western tastes similar to my own, the restaurant owner appeared more defensive when I conveyed these critical opinions.

It is worthwhile to note that convenience sampling affected my research due to time and access constraints. Selection bias may have influenced my sample of interviewees as those who responded positively to my outreach may have been more media-savvy or keen to public engagement, especially given my status as a young foreign researcher. This limitation is acknowledged as a constraint on the generalizability of my findings.

Lastly, while interviews were conducted primarily in French with the occasional use of English and Chinese, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in the original languages used by the interviewees. For the sake of analysis, I adopted a meaning-based translation approach, prioritizing the preservation of intent, tone, and nuance over verbatim accuracy. While I am fluent in English and Mandarin and have fairly advanced proficiency in French, I am acutely aware that some semantic subtleties may have been lost or altered in translation. To mitigate this, I consulted native speakers in each language when clarification was needed. While the multilingual nature of my interviews added complexity, I believe this afforded my participants the ability to express themselves in the most authentic way possible.

Literature Review: Ethnic Entrepreneurs of Taste and Diasporic Identity Formation

Scholars have frequently examined the role of culinary institutions as a critical locus of diasporic economic activities among Chinese immigrants abroad. Frank Chin, a cultural studies scientist, argues that the ethnic cuisine business reinforces the inferiority of immigrants who are only accepted insofar as they provide for the consumption and enjoyment of Asian food by non-Asian

individuals. This process often results in the commodification and reduction of Asian cuisine to exoticized stereotypes, severing it from its cultural significance and history. By pointing out the ways in which Westernized Asian cuisine may conversely perpetuate superficial, flattened notions of Asian culture and people, Chin destabilizes the notion that the success of Chinese restaurants in the West signify social mobility for immigrants (Chin, 1974). Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, Professor Emeritus of Asian American and Asian Diaspora Studies at UC Berkeley, observes that while "food pornography appears to be a promotion, rather than a vitiation or devaluation, of one's ethnic identity," food pornographers—those serving their rendition of cultural cuisine to culinary tourists—effectively "wrench cultural practices out of their context and display them for gain to the curious gaze of 'outsiders'" (Wong, 1998).

On the contrary, competing perspectives argue that the act of serving stereotypical Westernized versions of Chinese cuisine retrofitted to Western tastes and expectations actually functions as a means of deflecting colonial violence. Rather than being forcefully defined by notions of Otherness, restauration empowers these socially marginalized people to strategically choose how to stage their culture for non-ethnic consumers, keeping their identities intact (Cho, 2010).

This paper does not seek to comment on the binary question of whether a restaurant's food is authentic or not, rather shifting the discussion toward who is granted the power to arbitrate what is viewed as authentic Chinese cuisine. Furthermore, this paper does not seek to analyze culture in a broad national sense, but rather on the micro-level in regard to how individuals internalize norms, values, and dispositions within their activity of redefining culture via their own culinary concepts.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu famously conceived the notion of habitus, the acquired dispositions, and ways of thinking, behaving, and acting imbued in individuals as a product of their socialization. At a subconscious level, an individual's habitus fundamentally guides their decision-making processes in navigating the social world. Taste is profoundly influenced by habitus, a combination of internalized factors including one's socioeconomic position, and thereby functions as a tool of social distinction. He explains:

> "The dialectic of conditions and habitus is the basis of an alchemy which transforms the distribution of capital, the balance-sheet of a power relation, into a system of perceived differences, distinctive properties, that is, a distribution of symbolic capital, legitimate capital, whose objective truth is misrecognized" (Bourdieu, 1984).

For third culture French Chinese individuals, their habitus and how they have valorized, internalized, and appropriated the tastes of the dominant culture within which they have been socialized profoundly influence their beliefs and behaviors. Ethnic entrepreneurs are uniquely empowered to shape and produce new "tastes" with their culinary concepts.

While extant literature on representations of Chinese culture abroad has examined topics of diasporic economic activities, the ethnic labor market, exoticism, and the centrality of cuisine as a mode of exporting culture, there exists a dearth of research surrounding the specific typology of Chinese restaurants in France as sites of witnessing, representing, and renegotiating Chinese culture and identity. Unlike in the United States, in France, Chinese restaurants, especially those specializing in regional cuisines, are much less prevalent. Nonetheless, these settings are indispensable in shaping the French cultural imagination and informing diasporic identity formation.

Sociologists Marina Avanza and Gilles Laferté enumerate how identity is not a fixed set of traits but instead is proactively formed based on an individual's unique interactions with their external environment that is laden with cultural elements. The marginalized individual is externally defined and categorized but also maintains a degree of agency renegotiating and discursively producing their own identity based on how they have internalized norms. (Avanza and Laferté, 2005). Entrepreneurs of identity are commonly defined in the literature as those who derive social or economic value from some facet of or all of their identity (Leong, 2016). They are in a pole position to define not only themselves but moreover represent the broader identity group(s) to which they identify with to outsiders (Ibid, 2016). Thus, by studying how Chinese restaurateurs, who serve as literal and symbolic entrepreneurs of Chinese identity, interpellate Chineseness and subsequently decide how to represent and share their culture, this study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of experiencing cuisine as a mode of accumulating cultural capital and conceiving Otherness. Cultural identity is not a static, monolithic concept; individuals exercise a degree of agency in internalizing, understanding, expressing, and negotiating their identities in response to social contexts and constraints.

The emergence of a new generation of young Chinese restaurateurs in Paris within the past five years has aroused a growing interest in examining their role in reshaping the narrative and perceptions surrounding Chinese cuisine. These mavericks include those born in France, exchange students, and new immigrants. For the sake of this paper, I will focus on those of Chinese origin born and raised in France, categorized in sociological literature as Third Culture Kids (Useem, 1973). Unlike their predecessors, their motivations for opening restaurants tend to be more voluntary and they often have access to better financing options. Nonetheless, although they may not necessarily be shackled by the same socioeconomic barriers their predecessors faced, they are still situated within and tied to the norms and expectations of a racially codified regime (Lise, 2020; Moutot, 2023; Mung, 2012). Recognizing this reality is crucial for understanding the continual importance of shaping and presenting cultural identity to the non-ethnic world for this new generation.

Studying restaurants as bearers of social meaning far exceeds examining the food they serve (Cho, 2010). This paper will analyze the symbolic dimensions of dining establishments including but not limited to menu design, sourcing, staffing, spatiality, ambiance, customer interactions, service, and culinary practices. For many diners, eating at an ethnic restaurant serves as a primary mode through which they experience and interpret another culture. Taking a holistic approach promotes a deeper understanding of how restaurants reflect and contribute to the production and reproduction of social meaning, cultural understanding, and structural inequalities.

Chinese restaurateurs and identity negotiation: Straddling between hypercorrection and reversal of stigma

In choosing how to represent their culture via the institution of a restaurant, an ethnic restaurateur internalizes and extracts specific elements from their habitus to then transmute them into actual practices and characteristics to be consumed by an external audience. Culture is not static or objective; rather, it is subjectively interpreted by individuals and then selectively shared with others. Restaurants and cuisine are critical mediums through which culture is deliberately staged based on these subjective interpretations. Borrowing from Professor of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Lausanne Martina Avanza, certain individuals in each identity group are more well-positioned to serve as proxies of the community, defining and shaping cultural norms and representations. This perspective emphasizes the agency even socially stigmatized people hold in constructing their self-image and the identity of the group to which they belong.

Abdelmalek Sayad, one of Pierre Bourdieu's collaborators, coins the notion of "hypercorrection" to describe the phenomenon wherein individuals with stigmatized identities attempt to correct and overcompensate for their perceived otherness through continually demonstrating their high degree of integration into dominant society (Sayad 1999). Sayad emphasizes that the stigmatized, subjugated individual "est condamné à la surenchère en tout, dans tout ce qu'il fait, dans tout ce qu'il vit et en tout ce qu'il est." Due to their stigmatization, no matter how hard they try, they cannot escape the socially imposed paradigm to which they are perpetually tethered. The agent is condemned to one-upmanship in every single facet of their life as they strive to assimilate themselves within the norms, expectations, and values of the dominant society they aspire to. They embark on a lifelong mission of "bluffing," of constructing and maintaining a precariously crafted image of who they want to be, the group to which they seek to affiliate with. In Avanza's terms, it is a matter of "appartenance," of demarcating both an aspirational reference group and a negative reference group that the agent conversely wishes to distance themselves from (Avanza and Laferté, 2015).

Scholars define this process as "anticipatory socialization" in which individuals attempt to appropriate their aspirational identity, typically the dominant identity, adopting their comportments, tastes, behaviors, and beliefs in hopes of eventually actually assuming this new, elevated social categorization (Starr and Fondas, 1992; Yamaguchi, 1998). Even though cultural identification and assimilation are often viewed as all-encompassing and distinctly social projects, on a basal level, they can be viewed as individual battles; stigmatized individuals are engaged in social battles against their will and must choose how to self-present accordingly.

Examining the practice of hypercorrection by marginalized groups requires analyzing all the subliminal ways in which they have been socialized. Do they demonstrate strong desires to assimilate, to completely identify with the norms, values, and dispositions of the dominant culture? On the contrary, are they insistent on preserving the authenticity of their own cultural identity even in the face of stigmatization? The question comes down to how marginalized individuals choose to self-present and whether their self-presentation differs based on specific social contexts.

Sociologist Erving Goffman corroborates Sayad's theorization of stigma, similarly characterizing it as a social process in which an immutable attribute becomes a justifiable basis for devaluing another individual (Goffman, 1963). As a result of being stigmatized, individuals are constrained in their ability to navigate the social world due to their inability to be accepted as "normal." He adopts an interactionist approach, arguing that individuals with stigmatized attributes that are not necessarily immediately recognized but revealed over time, like a criminal record, gradually adopt a devalued status upon revealing their condition to others. Goffman points out that once assuming or validating their belonging to a stigmatized position, the individual cannot escape this classification in the eyes of the majority. People can attempt to pass as "normal," intently picking up on the norms and dispositions of "normals" to master their ways of life and thereby conceal their deviancy. However, these passers effectively condemn themselves to an anxious state of perpetual precariousness. In Goffman's words, they can only strive to achieve "phantom normalcy," a false guise of acceptance. Despite being proximate to "normalcy," these individuals still live with the constant risk of new stigmas arising.

Emphasizing the futility of assimilationist, passing strategies, sociologist Louis Gruel, heavily influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, discusses a vastly different act of resistance to being stigmatized, known as "reversal" or "return" of the stigma. In this response, stigmatized individuals embrace the stigma and the socially inferior position they have been relegated to instead of aspiring toward normalcy (Gruel, 1985). This can manifest itself in behaving and acting in ways that openly reveal or even exaggerate their stigmatized attributes, refusing socially imposed shame and reclaiming their disqualifying traits as prideful. Bordieu conceptualizes this reversal as part of a desire for social autonomy, as a "collective reappropriation of this power on the principles of construction and evaluation of his own identity that the dominated abdicates for the benefit of the dominant as long as he accepts the choice of being denied or of denying himself in order to be recognized" (Bourdieu 1980).

In the context of ethnic restaurateurs, examining each aspect they have deliberately chosen to incorporate into their restaurant and cuisine illuminates their specific response to sociocultural stigmatization. Restaurants are sites of social meaning that far exceed the food they serve. In order to gain a full understanding of these young Chinese restaurateurs' methods of shaping cultural representations via restauration, symbolic dimensions of dining establishments including but not limited to menu design, sourcing, staffing, spatiality, ambiance, customer interactions, service, and culinary practices must be holistically analyzed.

The young Chinese restaurant owner interviewed emphasized the prevalence of "kitsch" items used to decorate his restaurant targeted toward serving trendy middle to upper-class young city-goers. French postmodernist Jean Baudrillard describes, "To the aesthetics of beauty and originality, kitsch opposes its aesthetics of simulation: it everywhere reproduces objects smaller or larger than life... it apes forms or combines them discordantly; it repeats fashion without having been part of the experience of fashion" (Baudrillard, 1998). Kitsch objects are expendable aesthetic and cultural iconography. They tend to be unrefined and flattened, ersatz simulations of a bygone era stripped of historical significance. In Baudrillard's terms, they are "pseudo-objects" which reproduce

but should not be confused with the "authentic" (Baudrillard, 1970).

Kitsch objects are appealing to today's neo-bourgeoisie for their self-aware irony and effortless ability to be appreciated and understood, facilitating a positive affective response for the viewer (Ortlieb and Carbon, 2019). This marks a profound shift in taste; kitsch objects were once intended as a means for lower classes to replicate art enjoyed by the bourgeoisie but have now undergone a reversal in which they appeal to high-brow and hipster tastes (Hsiao 2015). Artmaking and an individual's taste in art functions as a fundamental mode of symbolic communication about one's identity as influenced by their socialization.

While hipsterism typically arises out of disillusionment with traditional notions of economic prosperity and bourgeois taste, hipsters nonetheless tend to be relatively well-educated and middle to upper-class. Importantly, they cement their social position not necessarily with physical capital, but more so by accumulating cultural capital. Modern hipster culture is characterized by an infatuation with vintage, birthed out of nostalgia for an over-glorified past era. Owning kitsch items is seen as ironic, elevating a hipster's social position by projecting to others that they understand the distinction between good and bad taste but actively choose not to conform to bourgeois notions of taste they deem superfluous (Yonts, 2018). Thus, by displaying "kitsch" representations of Asian culture like lucky cats, dragon lanterns, use of the color red, bamboo plants, and plastic tableware printed with Asian-inspired designs (Appendix A), the restaurant owner appeals to the seemingly perverse tastes of their desired target clientele. This restaurateur is not alone in their design choices; similar restaurants in the city with the same target demographic adorn their space with Asian-inspired wallpaper, lanterns, and Chinese porcelain (Appendix B).

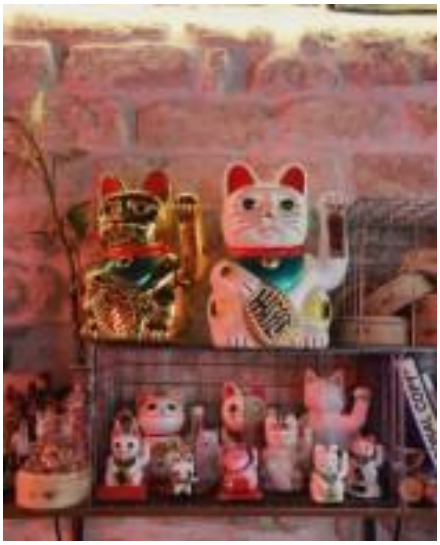

Figure 1: Abundance of Lucky Cat (traditionally Japanese) figurines

On one hand, the use of kitsch decor can be interpreted as an act of returning to or an ironic reversal of stigma. By overtly displaying kitsch Chinese iconography, the restaurateur may be attempting to reclaim elements of Chinese heritage, traditions, and aesthetics that are often stigmatized and fetishized. This reappropriation helps restore agency to the ethnic entrepreneur in defining their own cultural narrative.

While the use of kitsch aesthetics can be understood as a strategic effort to appeal to a culturally literate clientele or even as a form of cultural reclamation, it risks reinforcing the very stereotypes it seeks to subvert. The deliberate deployment of kitsch cultural decor may inadvertently flatten complex cultural iconography into commodified, reductive symbols for consumption by non-ethnic audiences. In attempting to portray Chinese culture in a manner that is trendy and palatable, restaurateurs may feel pressure to aestheticize their culture in ways that align with, rather than challenge reductionist narratives. As such, while kitsch may serve as a strategic tool for cultural expression, it may also circumscribe what types of cultural representations are seen as desirable.

Figure 2: Small plates, "oriental"-inspired plastic cups

Analyzing other elements of the restaurant's design and ambiance helps paint a fuller portrait of the restaurateur's intentions which are ultimately influenced by their individual socialization. The interviewee pointed out his desire to "garder l'esprit du Marais," retaining the building's "travaux modernes" with original exposed brick walls, wooden ceiling beams, clay tiling, and bar to produce a coveted vintage feel. Blending nostalgia for the past with modernity, the strategic incorporation of anachronistic Asian design elements against the rustic, modernist backdrop of the surrounding non-ethnic businesses renders the space markedly different from the first-generation Chinese restaurants in the city.

The owner is well aware of the profile of his clientele. He emphasizes that his primary competitors are, counter-intuitively, not other Chinese restaurants, but restaurants that similarly target French consumers who are "jeunes, assez branchés" (young and trendy) and spend most of their time in the quarter. The restaurant's location in the chic le Marais neighborhood profoundly impacts its spatiality, or the social phenomena shaped by and expressed in physical space (Kesteloot, 2009). While the restaurant is influenced by the spatial clustering of many other contemporary, hipster bars and eateries the quarter is well-known for, the owner points out that there are no other restaurants in the specific quarter he considers

direct competition. However, he explains that the menu pricing is influenced by that of other restaurants in the immediate area.

The implications of the restaurateur's expressed perceptions are twofold. First, this may illuminate the restaurateurs's attempt to materially and symbolically differentiate themselves from traditional Chinese restaurants of the previous generation by offering a hip, contemporary dining experience that distinguishes it from more conventional Chinese establishments. Furthermore, pricing their menu items in alignment with other French rather than Chinese restaurants suggests that the restaurant places importance on presenting itself as an "upscale-casual" establishment. On the topic of location, he repeatedly emphasizes how his restaurant's location allows it to "profiter de force de l'entourage" (benefit from the strength of surroundings) in this "quartier iconique avec les galeries, petits shops, le Marché des Enfants Rouges," a renowned tourist attraction. Apart from Parisians, opening the restaurant in le Marais allows it to capitalize on the foot traffic of passersby non-Chinese tourists. Understanding these intentions in gestalt suggests that the restaurateur's choices are primarily guided by hypercorrection. If he wanted to target Chinese consumers, it would make more sense to situate the restaurant near other Chinese businesses and restaurants. While it could be argued that he is simply trying to avoid competition in oversaturated areas, given the prominence of digital networks among the Chinese community abroad, he would also focus on promoting the restaurant via Chinese social media networks instead of solely on Western platforms like Instagram.

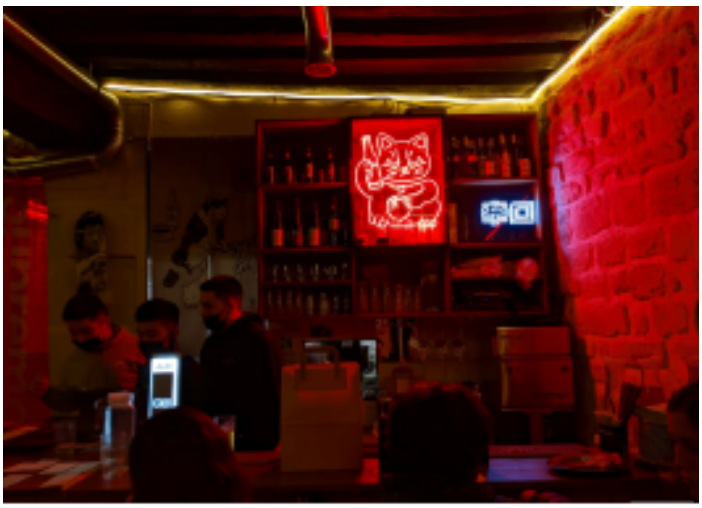

Figure 3: Dark, fluorescent lighting, exposed brick

When asked to categorize his restaurant, the young entrepreneur classifies it as a "Cantine chinoise parisienne." In France, cantines are typically lunch restaurants, and casual eateries known for serving students and office workers (Do it in Paris). While not typically expensive, these institutions are nonetheless intended to serve the sociocultural bourgeoisie, as seen in the emphasis on fresh, local, products and a plat du jour, daily specials that usually change depending on what is in season. The target audience is also revealed in the fact that these cantines tend to be decorated in a modern, trendy "industrielle-chic" style, often characterized by neutral colors, large windows, exposed brick walls, and bright white lights (Wang et al., 2019).

This deliberate positioning reveals not only a commercial strategy but can also be contextualized within deeper dynamics rooted in cultural capital. An individual's social class is not solely defined by their material wealth as measured in dollars or assets. Rather, it is an amalgamation of factors including their level of education, social network, and importantly, cultural capital. Bourdieu defined the latter as an individual's understanding and embodiment of a society's "high culture," constituted by symbolic elements including art, tastes, clothing, mannerisms, and competencies that an individual absorbs by being socialized as part of a particular social echelon (Bourdieu, 1984). This renders it possible for materially rich people to co-opt and reappropriate the lifestyles and culture of less wealthy groups whilst paradoxically bolstering their own higher social status.

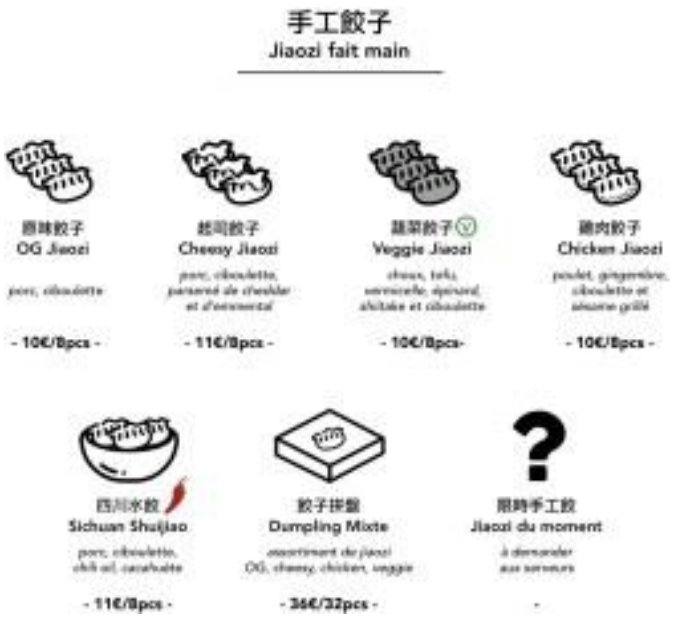

Figure 4: Copy of main course (dumpling) menu

The popularity of streetwear among wealthy consumers lucidly demonstrates this appropriation of subcultural styles by the rich. Streetwear is a form of self-expression that emerged from marginalized groups living in inner cities, influenced by elements of urban culture like hip-hop, skateboarding, and street art. Over time, it became celebrated by elite consumers and the fashion industry. Upscale fashion brands incorporated streetwear-inspired elements into their designs, resulting in the creation of luxury streetwear brands. This evolution has resulted in the mainstream co-option and repackaging of streetwear, severing it almost entirely from its original urban subcultural origins (Ayuningtyas and Adhitya, 2021; McLaughlin, 2019; Sola-Santiago, 2017). In this illustrative case, the wealthy appropriate elements from lower-class cultures in order to display their cultural capital and socially distinguish themselves. This project is far from neutral; the rich possess the material and social capital enabling them to demarcate what types of cultural elements and to what degree they are trendy or acceptable.

In regards to ethnic cuisines, trying cuisines of marginalized cultures, regardless of the authenticity of the culinary experience, can allow elites to signal virtues like cosmopolitanism and open-mindedness by boasting diverse, globalized palates. Eating

at a Chinese "canteen" designed to appeal to the preferences of non-Chinese folks allows Parisians to feel as if they are experiencing and discovering an exotic culture without having to depart very far from their own comfort zone. The restaurateur outlines what he views to be the "Nouvelle génération de cuisine chinois" (new generation of Chinese cuisine): "Plus facile à approcher et plus compréhensible" (easier to approach and more comprehensible). French diners and tourists can experience a simulation of Chinese culture via a setting, menu, presentation of dishes, and language familiar to them yet still novel enough to be compelling.

This logic appears to be shared amongst owners of similar restaurants in this category, even with slightly varying educational and family backgrounds. Mamahuhu, a Paris-based restaurant group with three modern, upscale-casual Chinese eateries located in the 4th and 10th arrondissements, quarters that are not known for being occupied by Chinese people, also seeks to "[naviguer] entre tradition et modernité" (navigate between tradition and modernity). Its press package to the public delineates its driving mission as follows:

> "... we want to free ourselves from the conventional codes of Asian food and embrace our quirky side! We work with traditional and childhood recipes but in a setting that aims to be uninhibited and festive. To sum up, we are neither modern nor traditional, we have chosen to create our own stories and atmospheres, personal and timeless" (Mamahuhu Group, 2022).

Despite founder Andrè Tan's prestigious background as a SciencesPo Master's graduate and ex-investment banker, he grew up heavily immersed in the traditional Asian restaurant industry, first working in his family's pan-Asian restaurant in Fontenay-sous-Bois and later in Asian canteens in the 13th, home to Paris's "Chinatown." He describes traditional Chinese restaurants like his family's as "assez naturel : c'est ce que les gens savaient faire en arrivant" (quite natural: that's what people knew how to do when they arrived), in contrast to today's young Chinese founders who choose to open restaurants on a far more voluntary basis (Tan, 2022). While Tan is the son of first-generation immigrants and spent time in China for the specific purpose of immersing himself in Chinese culture, unlike the other restaurant owner whose parents grew up in France and who did not work in Chinese restaurants prior to opening his own, the two restaurateurs' establishments are markedly similar in their kitsch-cool yet modern decor, pan-Chinese offerings, convivial yet relaxed atmosphere, predominantly French clientele, and guiding philosophy. Thus, despite their slightly differing internalization of Chinese culture, they seem to share similar interpellations into French norms and understandings of dominant preferences. This consistency seems to suggest the pervasiveness of desires to hypercorrect by ethnically marginalized individuals. At the same time, neither restaurateur is attempting to provide a fully "authentic" culinary experience, rather departing from the culturally codified expectations of traditional Chinese restaurants altogether.

La Carte: Mapping culture via the menu

"The carte, the map, the menu, remains with us as one of the primary means by which food is represented, textualized, as a metonym of the boundaries of the nation" (Cho, 2011).

Author and assistant professor of English at the University of Western Ontario Lily Cho provides a unique interpretation of diasporic agency through the lens of Chinese restaurants, a stalwart in rural Canadian communities. As a result of transnationalism, these no-frills culinary institutions are profoundly bicultural, even if they serve "authentic" Chinese cuisine. Cho centers the agency of Chinese restaurant owners and focuses on the centrality of Chinese restaurant menus as physical referents of bifurcated Chinese-Canadian identity as projected to the external community. She explains:

> "The menu stabilizes a kind of Chineseness which offers its consumer the possibility of a reassuring uniformity not only in the Chinese food on the menu, but also in the Chineseness which Chinese food signifies. Chinese restaurant menus present a comforting, palatable Chineseness which can be reproduced and disseminated through the institution of the restaurant" (Cho, 2010).

These young, trendy Chinese upscale-casual eateries share similar menus not just in the dishes offered but moreover in their structural and aesthetic composition. The aforementioned restaurant in the Marais offers a small menu with only 6 different main dishes, one of which is seasonal; each dish is a type of fried dumpling distinguished only by filling flavor. On the menu, diners can also find "tapas," small appetizers ranging from popcorn chicken to edamame, lucidly showcasing the restaurant's pan-asian character and lucid Western influence. The menu features an extensive beverage selection including soft drinks, wines, and specialty craft cocktails, offerings seldom found in traditional Chinese restaurants. When asked to describe the fare, the restaurant owner described his desire to offer "les choses spéciales pour la clientèle parisienne tout en gardant l'authenticité" (special things for Parisian customers while retaining authenticity).

Cho focuses on the banality of certain offerings in Chinese restaurants intended to please the palates and expectations of Western customers. She explicitly characterizes this choice by restaurateurs as a "compulsive return to the stereotype" that gives non-Chinese diners exactly what they expect and desire from Chinese food, thereby "[fulfilling] the colonial hunger for itself; they consume their own projection." She continues:

> "The reproducibility of Chineseness embodied in the restaurant menu frustrates the construction of a knowable authentic Chinese subject at the same time that it offers up a palatable Chineseness which gives the impression of knowability" (Cho, 2010).

Seen in this light, the Chinese subject and their identity remain wholly intact by providing a pastiche of Chineseness via Westernized Chinese cuisine. Appealing to the tastes of Western diners is not an act of conforming to dominant norms that require significantly diluting or sometimes simply rejecting authentic Chinese cuisine, but rather of cultural preservation and self-definition.

While the specific restaurants in our analysis may not fall into the category of the eateries Cho describes, given their vastly different audiences, her commentary on not only the contents but moreover the form of menus in ethnic restaurants remains highly relevant. Our restaurant owner interviewee notably critiques the

format of menus in traditional Chinese restaurants in France, characterizing them as unwieldy books that can be overwhelming and exceedingly difficult to interpret by non-Chinese diners. By offering a short, sleek menu replete with trendy graphic design, the restaurant does not only improve its readability and accessibility to French clients but can moreover appeal to desires for freshness and seasonality emphasized amongst its target audience.

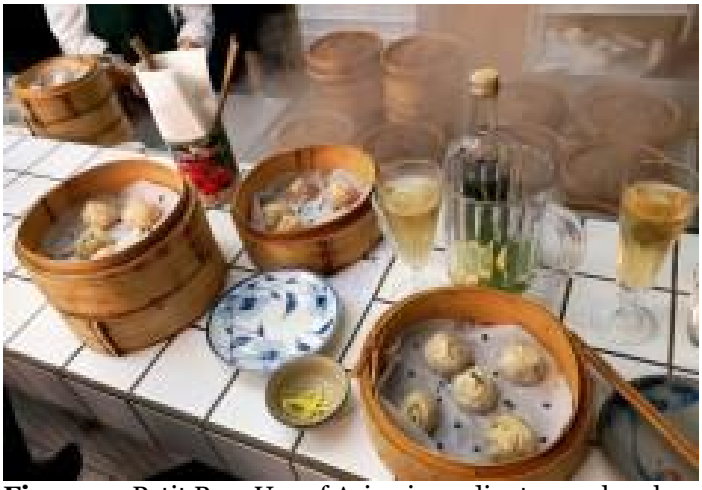

Figure 5: Petit Bao: Use of Asian ingredient cans, bamboo baskets

Flavor Frontiers: How Far is Too Far?

When asked about the flavors of the dishes at one of the most well-known new-age Chinese restaurants in Paris, one of the interviewees pointed out that the dishes, though found in traditional Chinese cuisine, were "plus sucré et plus acide... et aussi avec assez du lait" (sweeter and more acidic... and also with enough milk). The other restaurant owner pointed out their special signature dumpling dish known as the "Cheesy," pan-fried dumplings filled with pork and Emmental cheese, a popular cheese among the French largely primarily manufactured in France-Comté.

The types of flavors present in the dishes served at these "new-age" Chinese restaurants intended for non-Chinese audiences must straddle the fragile balance between being foreign enough to satiate diners' desires for an exotic encounter yet familiar enough to be deemed palatable (Cho, 2011; Finkelstein, 1989; Janes, 2014; Karaosmanoğlu, 2020). A reaction of disgust to a foreign flavor symbolically marks the departure from acceptable to transgressive or rogue foreign cuisine (Janes, 2014). For restaurateurs and chefs, serving food to non-ethnic audiences is an act of mutual negotiation, to search for a point of compromise between diners' gastronomic and cultural curiosity and the preparation of traditional ethnic cuisine (Gibet, 2019).

Ethnic restaurateurs are in charge of demarcating the boundaries of authenticity and culinary tradition via the flavors they choose to serve to their primarily non-ethnic clientele. Certain dishes are ubiquitous among restaurants in China yet nearly completely absent in Chinese restaurants serving Western audiences. An example brought up by sociology professors Shun Lu and Gary Alan Fine in their work examining how restaurateurs fit Chinese food into specific market niches is whole steamed fish, which is perceived as unappealing to non-Chinese tastes due to the traditional consumption of the fish in its entirety, head and tail included, as well as the emphasis on the flavor of the fish itself which may be perceived as either too "light-flavored" or "fishy" (Lu and Fine, 1995).

How a Chinese restaurateur chooses to adapt the flavors of the dishes served closely corresponds with their perceptions of their target clientele and their level of exposure to Chinese cuisine. Demands for authenticity vary depending on the sociocultural context of the market and diners' knowledge of Chinese culinary tradition. Given Paris's status as a globalized city with a fairly large concentration of locals and tourists who likely have a desire to cultivate culturally diverse palates, these restaurateurs may perceive there to be a higher demand for dishes and flavors which adhere to culinary tradition. After dining at these establishments, I was pleasantly surprised by how closely the dishes corresponded to those prepared by my parents and that I have had during my visits to China. If demands for authenticity were at all not considered a priority for these restaurateurs, they would not have deliberately chosen to brand their restaurants as Chinese instead of pan-Asian or fusion.

As aforementioned, this paper does not seek to comment on authenticity or the opposite. In regards to flavors, restaurateurs' decisions regarding what flavors to offer are based on how they view their guests' tastes, in the broad sense. These decisions are often readapted to keep up with evolving trends and tastes. For example, if a restaurateur perceives their target diners as aligning more closely with the identity of the connoisseur rather than the consumer, they will correspondingly prioritize non-food elements of the dining experience like ambiance and food presentation. Lu and Fine (1995) continue:

> "Some restaurants present their food with a stronger flavor, others with a lighter one, but in either case, the decision is made on the basis of customer responses, mediated by servers and interpreted by the owner. Objects acquire meaning through the responses of those who experience them, not through a global ideology of how they should "truly" be" (Lu and Fine, 1995).

Conceptions of authenticity comprise only a singular concern in the negotiation between the entrepreneur in charge of staging cultural identity and diners. For the restaurateurs in our study, to attract a non-ethnic clientele with relatively high degrees of cultural capital, the flavors offered must provide diners with a novel culinary experience that is not overly foreign yet nonetheless satisfies their desire to validate themselves as open-spirited individuals with a worldly taste.

Forging Mavericks: Processes of Entrepreneurial Socialization

There exists a vast corpus of literature examining factors that influence an individual's desire to pursue entrepreneurship. Many economists propose that the decision to become an entrepreneur instead of pursuing salaried work as an employee is centrally based on standard utility maximization. Economics professor Charles A. Campbell delineates that in choosing to become an entrepreneur versus an employee, an individual weighs between his potential profits from either option (Campbell, 1992). The difference in utility between the two options is influenced by the expected average income from pursuing entrepreneurship multiplied by the probability of success compared against the income from regular,

salaried work multiplied by the probability of finding stable work. Other scholars have added macroeconomic factors to the economic theory of entrepreneurship, pointing out the profound impact of interest rates and business-creating environments in a geographic area on the perceived viability of entrepreneurship (Amit, Muller, and Cockburn, 1995; del Olmo-García, Crecente, and Sarabia 2020).

Much of the extant research on entrepreneurship seeks to define unique personality traits that inherently render business owners more likely to gravitate toward entrepreneurship (Greenberger & Sexton, 1988). However, this approach has been critiqued for upholding an overly static understanding of entrepreneurs, their intentions, and their behaviors, disregarding their ability to learn, develop, and grow with each experience and endeavor. While identifying qualities common amongst entrepreneurs can provide useful insights into part of what it takes to commit oneself to self-employment, these traits are not necessarily innate. The personality traits of an entrepreneur often manifest directly in their behavior (Gartner, 1988).

Entrepreneurship occupies a double dimension; it is often steeped in an individual's desires to assimilate into and elevate themselves within both economic and social spheres. Literature regarding the socialization of entrepreneurs generally focuses on an individual's educational experiences, absorption of norms, leadership capabilities, and values, all of which can be influenced by their family, peers, industry, and internal psychology. Being exposed to a family business from a young age can yield both promotional and deterrent effects on an individual's motivation to become the business's successor or pursue self-employment (Lozano-Posso and Urbano, 2017; Nason et al. 2019). These differential effects may depend on their relationship with family members, sense of professional fulfillment, and feelings of ownership over the business (Björnberg and Nicholson, 2012).

Moving beyond a purely economic dimension, H. Bouchiki and J. Kimberly (1994) put forth a typology of the "genesis of the entrepreneurial act," delineating five different types of decisions to become an entrepreneur. These include the cases in which individuals have no choice but to be self-employed, such as when they are unable to find salaried work. There is also the opportunistic decision in which the entrepreneur is not actively engaged in an entrepreneurial venture but rather seizes a compelling opportunity that arises at a given moment in time. They also discuss the scheduled decision in which the entrepreneur has been surrounded by entrepreneurial activity their entire life, such as a family business, and thus views entrepreneurship as the expected, most viable path.

Sociologists Jose Arocena et al. elaborate on the socialization of entrepreneurs, theorizing that there exist "three poles constituting a system of action causing the appearance or disappearance of the creative project" (Arocena et al., 1983). These include the personal pole, an individual's upbringing and background, the relational pole, concerning their network and environment, and the professional pole, or their professional savoir-faire acquired via experience and observation. An entrepreneur's unique role as an agent of innovation is demarcated by their risk appetite (Boutillier and Uzunidis, 2014). Being socialized in certain networks and observing different social, familial, and institutional conditions that help an individual manage the perceived level of expected risk can greatly motivate them to launch an entrepreneurial endeavor.

Associate Professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Charles Murnieks and co-researchers further expand on the formation of entrepreneurial identities. Individuals interpellate and subsequently internalize external perceptions of what it means to be an entrepreneur (Murnieks, Mosakowski, and Cardon, 2014). Even though the specific roles and behaviors expected of entrepreneurs are not universal, objective notions held among members of society, the notion of entrepreneurial identity in an aspiring entrepreneur becomes the central bedrock of their self-conception. This encourages the individual to affirm their identity by enacting the expected behaviors associated with it as a means of building self-esteem and experiencing other forms of positive affect.

Viewed through this lens, it is plausible that the decisions of these young French-born Chinese to open new-age, trendy Chinese restaurants in Paris may stem primarily from their instrumental rationality, referring to a systematic and logical approach to decision-making premised upon principles of cost-benefit analysis (Bréchet and Prouteau, 2009).

The restaurateur may simply recognize the burgeoning demand for Chinese cuisine among non-Chinese audiences and seek to tap into a lucrative market. By adapting the menu, presentation, or dining experience, they aim to attract a broader customer base and increase their revenue potential. Cultural identity can function as a strategic asset or branding choice. A young Chinese spokesperson at the previously mentioned restaurant's primary competitor highlights the rising popularity of establishments with "Un visage chinois" (a Chinese face).

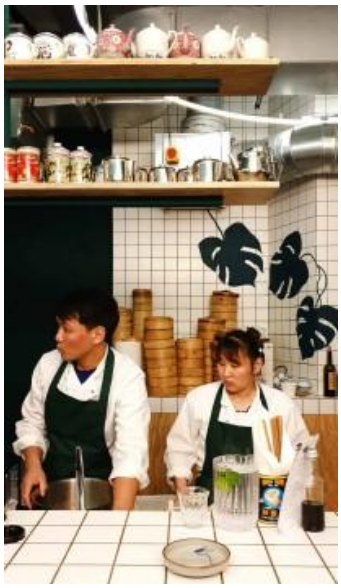

Figure 6: Display of Chinese teapots and spice jars

To set itself up for success, a restaurant must ensure that the food they serve is appealing to its desired clientele. It cannot bank on the possibility that diners' attitudes surrounding certain foods and flavors will change over time. In the case of these third-culture French Chinese entrepreneurs, diluting or modifying flavors based on perceptions of non-Chinese diners' tastes may be chiefly motivated by economic concerns. Serving cuisine strictly adhering to Chinese culinary traditions may not be a priority. Rather, interviewees highlighted their intentions of allowing

non-Chinese audiences to discover Chinese food in an accessible, contemporary way that still caters to their Western tastes.

From a profit standpoint, the restaurateur interviewed expressed that sometimes, using traditional vegetables, ingredients, and spices is not cost-efficient given the need to source or import specialty items. Importing from abroad feels especially unnecessary if ensuring strict adherence to Chinese culinary tradition is not considered a primary concern. However, all interviewees conveyed their desire to uphold some degree of proximity to culinary tradition. The restaurateur emphasized the savoir-faire of their shifu (executive chef) and the use of family recipes as a springboard. Thus, while these restaurateurs are ultimately subservient to the tastes of their Western audience, they must fulfill diners' desires for a semblance of authenticity, even if illusory.

Moreover, offering a limited menu is partly influenced by the restaurant owner's desires to streamline sourcing, inventory, and preparation operations. With fewer options to prepare and fewer ingredients to manage, the restaurant can simplify processes, minimize customer wait times, and deliver faster service. The shorter, sleek-looking menu also allows the restaurant to create a modern and curated brand identity, amplifying its appeal to a more upscale clientele and thereby allowing for the restaurant to charge higher prices. Moreover, knowing that they are targeting French diners, it makes sense to include an extensive drink list to easily cross-sell beverages to these consumers alongside food.

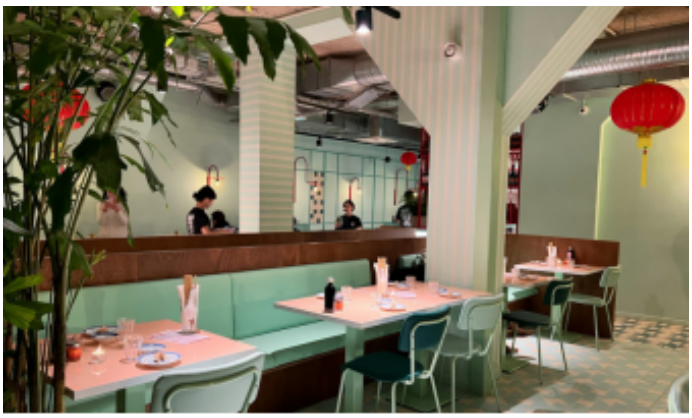

Figure 7: Chinese lanterns, bamboo, porcelain inspired tableware

In a world-renowned culinary hub like Paris, differentiating oneself from competitors is critical to stay afloat. By defining and operating within a specific, relatively undersaturated niche of contemporary, trendy Franco-Chinese eateries, these restaurateurs can position their restaurant as a unique offering in the market, solidifying their competitive advantage. However, the restaurant's targeting of French rather than Chinese diners means that it must inevitably compete with neighboring non-Chinese restaurants. Thus, their economic success depends on the trendiness of Chinese cuisine among non-Chinese audiences, which can be volatile due to changing social perceptions of the Chinese population. It seems implausible that these restaurants can, or even desire to, completely depart from the expectations of Chinese culture and cuisine as the restaurateurs still place value on preserving some degree of tradition and culinary authenticity. Therefore, they may still be impacted by negative stereotypes surrounding Chinese food and restaurants in general.

Importantly, these entrepreneurs of taste in this relatively niche market understand that they are involved in the dual dynamic of serving food that appeals to and corresponds to market preferences whilst simultaneously influencing changes in the market (Lu and Fine, 1995). Thus, supply and demand each actively produce the other.

While economic motivations are prominent, they are not mutually exclusive from cultural considerations. Many restaurateurs strive to strike a balance between preserving the goals of cultivating authentic cultural experiences whilst also staying relevant in a hypercompetitive market with constantly evolving consumer demands.

Conclusion: Implications for Cultural Identity Negotiation and Sociocultural Dynamics

This research study aims to investigate the sociological phenomenon of the public staging of diasporic identity and degrees of acculturation by examining mercantile strategy in regard to the activities of French-born Chinese restaurateurs and affiliates. Specifically, it focuses on the niche segment of Chinese restaurants in Paris owned and operated by individuals of Chinese descent, but which primarily cater toward a non-Chinese clientele.

Dining and food consumption are fundamentally social activities that take on different meanings based on sociocultural contexts and diners' habitus. The rising popularity of Chinese cuisine, at least in the way that it is served by these "new-age" third culture restaurateurs, demonstrates just how profoundly ethnic entrepreneurs can influence dominant cultural narratives by strategically staging their foreignness. Symbolic and physical forms of culinary tourism, the deliberate, exploratory engagement with foodways perceived as foreign, can thus fundamentally reshape narratives of Otherness by turning cultural difference into a site of discovery and personal value creation for non-foreigners. Traditionally marginalized individuals are not passive interpolators of norms and expectations but rather wield a marked degree of agency in defining themselves in relation to the dominant culture. Understanding these phenomena yields an array of implications:

Firstly, while hierarchies of taste are subject to change based on shifting perceptions of what constitutes "highbrow" taste, it remains unlikely that ethnic cuisines historically critiqued as inferior can undergo a complete paradigmatic shift from lowbrow to highbrow status (Bourdieu, 1984). Even if certain elements get integrated into the haute culture and are embraced by the sociocultural bourgeois, these cuisines are often fundamentally altered or adapted to cater to the dominant tastes of the cultural elite. In the process, they are often severed from their original, authentic cultural context and significance. Moreover, the mainstream acceptance of an ethnic cuisine does not correspond to the social integration of the people whose culture the cuisine derives from.

Secondly, contrary to dominant framings that cast marginalized people as passively complicit with static norms, these entrepreneurs of cultural identity have a marked degree of agency in deciding how to confer cultural value and meaning to the broader public. This ongoing process of mutual identity negotiation can take place in various domains including but not limited to cuisine, art, fashion, and media. What may be perceived as the commodification and flattening of culture may be a strategic choice enabling these ethnic entrepreneurs to rewrite their own narrative and engage in

cultural self-preservation. However, if it is the case that cultural assimilation is the restaurateur's ultimate goal, Asian cuisine, no matter how much it is contorted to fit the norms of the dominant society, will never fully be disentangled from its stigmatized cultural origins.

Finally, ethnic entrepreneurs are dually socialized within the context of differing sociocultural dispositions, behaviors, norms, and tastes in addition to the more pragmatic principles of instrumental rationality. Depending on their desired audience and image, they draw upon their cultural background, social networks, and perceptions of clients' tastes and profiles to create niche business concepts that can profoundly shape external cultural perceptions. At the same time, as business owners, their goals are also mediated by concerns related to broader market dynamics, consumer trends, and economic realities to ensure the viability and sustainability of their ventures. It would be a vast oversimplification to view entrepreneurial pursuits through a purely economic lens. Entrepreneurs with a heavy focus on branding toward certain audiences, particularly those targeting clientele outside of their own sociocultural group, are likely in pursuit of both economic and social capital.

For future research, a comparative analysis between the staging of culture via culinary institutions by different diasporic communities, examining their unique mercantile strategies, would be valuable. Rather than purely interviewing those on the internal business side, informal interviews or surveys could be conducted with restaurant clientele themselves to gauge how they interpret and engage with the restaurateur's choices. Further, it would be illustrative to interview other stakeholders in the dining and restaurant industry such as executives of corporate groups that invest in restaurants to understand what they forecast as trends among consumers.

The Chinese diaspora in France, especially Wenzhounese immigrants, embody transnationalism, maintaining close networks domestically and abroad (Li, 2018). Correspondingly, it would be worthwhile to explore the transnational physical and virtual networks that influence the strategies and operations of these "new-age" Chinese restaurants. Learning how these establishments are perceived by mainland Chinese audiences could offer meaningful insights into the nuances of transnational identity and globalization within diasporic communities.

In regards to the sociology of entrepreneurship, a key area of adjacent research involves investigating what motivates ethnic entrepreneurs' decision to pursue a portfolio of multiple, potentially diverse business ventures. How do ethnic entrepreneurial logic and activities differ across cultural domains? Studying entrepreneurial failures can shed light on what psychological factors and behavioral traits help entrepreneurs cope with setbacks and manage to bounce back.

Lastly, a logical extension of the current study would be to examine the broader sociocultural implications of the rising popularity of Chinese cuisine served by third-culture Chinese restaurateurs. This could involve exploring how their practices facilitate cultural hybridity, the dynamic interplay of cultures, and influence the broader discourse surrounding multiculturalism heavily emphasized in Paris and other global cities. A focused analysis of power dynamics as reflected within Asian fusion cuisine, a genre that reflects the deliberate, complex exchange of different cultures, could offer valuable insights into how restaurateurs across cultures navigate and reshape narratives surrounding cultural identity. Concurrently, it would be meaningful to examine the unique role of non-ethnic restaurateurs who extensively utilize foreign culinary ingredients and techniques. As individuals endowed with greater sociocultural capital and often more visibility by mainstream audiences, how do they contribute to either reinforcing or deconstructing dominant narratives? This question raises other interesting inquiries surrounding authenticity, appropriation, and who should be able to profit from the performance of cultural differences.

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