

1927

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Frances Thomas
Iowa State College

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Recommended Citation

Thomas, Frances (1927) "Chow Mein Versus Chop Suey," *The Iowa Homemaker*: Vol. 7 : No. 10 , Article 3.
Available at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol7/iss10/3>

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Chow Mein Versus Chop Suey

By Frances Thomas

"I VOTE for Chop Suey," said Ethel Wilson gayly, as the Chinese waiter approached the table with his order pad in his hand. "What's the use of our coming down to Des Moines to eat in a Chinese tearoom if we don't order Chinese food?"

"Well, it's one sure thing we don't have Chinese food in Ames very often," chimed in the second co-ed, "so I'll take the same."

"Chicken Chow Mein for me, please," said the pretty little girl across the table from Ethel. "I really do like real Chinese food even if you two do prefer American chow."

"Why, Mary Butler," explained Patsy Radnall indignantly, "do you mean to tell me that Chop Suey isn't a Chinese dish?"

"It surely is not," was the emphatic answer. "Haven't you ever heard the old myth of how Chop Suey originated?"

"No, tell us, please do," chorused the other two girls.

"Well," said Mary slowly, "the story goes like this. A long time ago a quite prominent and wealthy Chinese gentleman landed in New York and registered in a fine hotel there. The first meal he ordered consisted of meat, potatoes, cabbage and celery, all served in separate dishes. This disgusted the Chinese gentleman, for in China, you know, all the food served at one meal is served in one large dish, one thing heaped on another. So he asked the waiter to have the food chopped in small pieces and put together in one large dish. That was the beginning of our Chop Suey."

"Well, for goodness sake!" said Patsy indignantly, "I'm going to change our orders, Ethel. We came for Chinese food and I want it. I wonder what Chicken Chow Mein will be like?"

"Oh, it'll have chicken, bean sprouts and Chow Mein noodles in it," said Mary. "You know the Chinese of the upper class eat lots of chicken. They have as varied a diet as we Americans. There are more vegetables raised in China, and the people eat them freely. There are large vegetable and fruit markets, and the products are very cheap. None of the citrus fruits grow in China, but there are some fruits un-

known in America which are grown in China.

"Of course, we'll get some rice with our order. You see, rice is the favorite food of the Chinese people. The lower classes live almost entirely on rice and tea. If you tip your Chinese coolie five cents at noon, he can buy his lunch of rice and tea and be quite well satisfied.

"There, doesn't that look good?" she continued, as the waiter set before them three dishes of Chow Mein. "No, you can't order milk, Patsy, if you want to carry out the Chinese customs. It must be—"

"Why, don't they have milk in China?" interrupted Ethel quickly.

"They don't use any milk or dairy products, so Aunt Josephine says," replied Mary. "All the butter and cheese used in China by Americans is imported from Australia or California. You see, they raise but a few cattle and once in a while a goat or two.

"When Aunt Josephine worked in the Presbyterian Mission at Peking, the lady in charge of the mission started a goat dairy, and began giving goat milk to the sick Chinese children. Finally the Chinese mothers began to realize that it helped their children, and now they buy all the milk the dairy produces, although the matron has increased the herd considerably."

"My, this is good," broke in Patsy, "especially the chicken. Do they eat eggs in China, Mary? Seems to me I've heard that they export eggs to the United States."

"Oh, they eat dozens of eggs, Patsy, and fish, too," replied Mary. "They like fat meat, especially pork. Aunt Josephine says that they varnish all their meats so they may be hung in the markets exposed to the air and insects. Wouldn't it seem funny to buy a slab of varnished bacon?"

"I believe I'd rather have our bread than theirs," she continued, as she took another Parker House roll from the plate. "They have bread like our baking powder biscuits, only it's made out of some kind of dough minus the baking powder. They bake the biscuits in real slow ovens and they never do get brown. Wouldn't we miss our crisp rolls, though?"

"What are we going to have for des-

sert, Mary?" said Ethel, as the waiter began to clear away their empty Chow Mein plates. "Can we have real Chinese dessert, too?"

"Well, let's have Chinese rice cakes and ice cream," answered Mary. "Ice cream isn't a Chinese food, but I never feel as if I've finished my meal unless I have ice cream for dessert. Aunt Josephine said she missed ice cream more than any other dish when she was in the Orient. Wouldn't we feel cheated if we couldn't order a real sundae whenever we felt like it?"

"You'll love the rice cakes, though. The Chinese make wonderful cakes of all sorts. They even make tiny ones and wrap them up in little packages as we do our firecrackers. Yum, yum, they are good.

"It's surely too bad we couldn't have watermelon," she continued, as the waiter placed their dessert in front of them and moved away. "But since it's winter—"

"You don't mean to say they have watermelon in China?" interrupted Patsy.

"They have just loads of them, Patsy, so you'd better move to China, you like watermelon so well," replied her friend. "They slice them and pile them in little piles before the stores. They raise lots of cantaloupe, too, but Aunt Josephine says they are tasteless, probably because they are a cross between a melon and a gourd. Anyway, the melons are a popular dessert and awfully cheap. Then, too, they use the watermelon seeds and lotus seeds for a dessert. Well, have you girls had enough of China for the day?"

"This is my treat," said Ethel, as she gathered up the bill. "I really feel as if I'd spent a day in China, and it's been loads of fun. I vote for Chinese food often."

"Chinese food is always excellent. Aunt Josephine says," said Mary, as they made their way to the street. "Now let's make a dash for that Ames bus."

Recreation is intended to the mind as whetting is to the scythe, to sharpen the edge of it, which otherwise would grow dull and blunt.—Bishop Hall.