Chow Chop Suey: Food and the Chinese American Journey. Anne Mendelson. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. xx + 336 pp. $36.99. E-book ISBN: 9780231541299.

In her book, *Chow Chop Suey: Food and the Chinese American Journey*, Anne Mendelson offers a unique insight into the origin of a well-loved cuisine deeply rooted in histories of immigration, racialized oppression, and international relations which converged in uneven and sometimes surprising ways to create the conditions of possibility for the formation of a novel and quintessentially American Chinese food. Her outline of the history of the formation of Chinese immigrant communities and China-U.S. relations from the Gold Rush Era to the end of the twentieth century blends seamlessly with an examination of Chinese cookbooks written by both white Americans and Chinese in America alike. Her central observation is that American Chinese food was not created over the natural course of an immigrant group's incorporation into the national interior. Rather, American Chinese food was crafted by Chinese for a (predominantly white) non-Chinese clientele as a necessity for survival born of the anti-Chinese political climate that characterized the end of the nineteenth century.

The first chapter outlines the history of the first wave of immigrants from China. Mostly from southern Guangdong via the Toisan-California Pipeline, she outfits these "fortune-seekers" with a *xiang banfa* instinct which she describes as meaning something like "find a solution" or "come up with a plan." These merchants (*hua shang*) and laborers (*hua gong*) were uniquely equipped to cater to a Western clientele due to a longer history of western penetration into the ports of southern China. Chinese cooks demonstrated an incredible ability to quickly learn to replicate Western culinary practices with surprising accuracy, despite a nearly insurmountable language and cultural barrier. This proved to be beneficial to those who, upon arrival in the United States, entered the service economy.

Chapter two examines the features of Chinese cuisine that made it so deeply incomprehensible to Westerners, while the Cantonese were paradoxically able to learn to reproduce Western cooking with relative ease. This Mendelson deems the culinary "language" barrier. While Western cooking recognized boiling, baking, roasting, frying, and broiling, Chinese cooking relied primarily on what would come to be named "stir-frying" and steaming. The preparation work, ingredients, final cooking method, and even equipment were foreign to the Western audience. Lacking adequate descriptive terms for these Chinese dishes, early observers described them as "fricassees," "ragouts," "curries," or "hashes" which all suggested a general mélange of meats and vegetables in sauce.

The third chapter tells in greater detail the history of the Chinese in California and on the West Coast. Included in this history are early descriptions of Chinese food, the importance of the transpacific pipeline for both food supplies and people, and the labor of the Chinese on the transcontinental railroad as well as on the farmlands of California. The anti-Chinese climate that emerged with the burgeoning immigrant communities culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Merchants and laborers alike decided that their best hope for safety against deportation was self-employment in minimal enterprises that required little capital and few English-language skills.

Restaurants thus became important tethers for the diminished North American Chinese community.

What occurred next was the slow formation of permanent "Chinatowns." These communities banded together against racism through the formation of representative bodies such as the Six Companies in San Francisco, which would come to be known as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA). This group would be instrumental in the *U.S. v. Wong Kim Ark* (1898) trial that ultimately upheld birthright citizenship for Chinese Americans. As a result of this ruling, later generations of Chinese American citizens were able to found families and larger communities, and Chinatowns emerged across the country. Restaurants necessarily played a large role in the centering of these communities, even as they were reinvented for a white clientele through the expression of an opulent and exotic chinoiserie designed to pique non-Chinese interest.

Chapter five outlines the "birth" of Chinese American cuisine as non-Chinese diners discovered what became known as "chop suey." The name, derived from "chow chop suey" (Cantonese, *chau tsap sui*; Mandarin, *chao za sui*) described Cantonese stir-fried dishes as a class, or any assemblage of stir-fried ingredients. Instead of the more subtle, light flavors favored by Chinese themselves, the dishes were altered with the addition of overpowering, thick, colorful, and sugary sauces (soy, sesame, sweet and sour), boneless meats, deep frying, more familiar vegetables, and a diversity of noodles. What emerged was a chop suey fanaticism and a growing desire for cookbooks.

The following chapter highlights how an improved understanding led to the book *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese* (1945). With broadening academic interest in immigrant communities and middle class interest in Asian fashions and representation in media, Chinese culture was propelled into the mainstream. Dr. Yuenren Chao and his wife Dr. Buwei Yang, the authors of *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese*, were both highly educated and high-class native, Chinese whose experiences were not by any stretch of the imagination like those of the majority of Chinese immigrants. Yet, their positioning as multinational, multilingual cosmopolitans made them uniquely positioned and qualified them as translators and authors. Their book was the first English-language Chinese cookbook to benefit from an advanced linguistic awareness that allowed them to grasp the issues of "translating" a cuisine across a previously insurmountable cultural and language gap.

Chapter seven follows the development of new kinds of exchanges between certain privileged people of Chinese and non-Chinese ancestry. Prominent and influential restaurants cropped up as the Chinese restaurant vogue reached its climax during the 1960s and 70s. Essential to this evolution were political changes such as the Hart-Cellar Act (1965) which ended the plight of Chinese seeking to immigrate, as well as the creation of modern Taiwan which became a center for Chinese culinary innovation. The immigration of affluent, sophisticated Mandarin-speaking newcomers triggered a new fad for "Mandarin," Szechwan, Shanghai, Mongolian, Hunan, and other northern Chinese culinary styles. Food writers jumped at the newly elevated upscale Chinese cuisine, and with these new developments came increased desire for cookbooks that could educate and instruct home cooks in these new fashions.

The eighth chapter explores the overlap of the postwar and Cold War Chinese restaurant craze with two reinforcing trends: the American cooking-class fad that began to attract Chinese-born instructors and the obsession of cookbook editors with broadening the instructional potential of recipes through the innovative use of page design, illustrations, recipe format, and photography. These experiments in supraverbal innovation would greatly affect English-language Chinese cookbooks because of the barriers to communication that were not amenable to purely verbal bridging strategies.

Her examination of the history of Chinese cuisine is completed by observations of the post-1970s period to explore more contemporary struggles of the Chinese American community and their implications for the Chinese culinary scene. As the spotlight shifted away from Chinese restaurants and home-cooking, the Chinese culinary elite moved towards the promotion of gimmicks such as "fusion" cuisine and tokenized literature. Meanwhile, Asian American activists and academics were pushing for equal justice, opportunity, and representation in American institutions. The Hart-Cellar Act (1965) also created the conditions under which more diasporic Chinese communities could immigrate, including from the recently recognized People's Republic of China. With them they brought "new" Chinese cuisines that slowly diffused beyond recently settled neighborhoods throughout the end of the twentieth century. As these new cooking styles have gained popularity, Mendelson claims that by 1990 a sizable portion of the previous Cantonese and postwar Mandarin-speaking communities had "graduated from restaurants" and the need to cater to a white clientele for survival.

Mendelson's work has captured the struggles of early Chinese in the United States and the ways in which it led to the creation of what we now recognize as American Chinese food. However, this reader would have liked to see more engagement with the Chinese American communities and families who formed the foundation of the restaurant scenes throughout this history. Additionally, she ends her volume with the conclusion that while the Chinese used cooking to please outsiders as a crucial weapon to survive threat and persecution, they were able to eventually relax their reliance on the restaurant business. No longer compelled to do what they did "so wonderfully," they have "earned" the freedom to create new meaning and connection in the fabric of a new, multicultural American life. This framing of liberation as earned through the supposedly agentic weaponization of skillful servitude, "wonderfully" performed, softens the violent history of oppression faced by these communities and their predecessors. It is clear that her expertise lies in cookbook analysis, rather than critical historical and social critique. Any attempt at critically addressing the experiences of Chinese Americans fall devastatingly short. However, she has succeeded in her goal of elucidating the historical struggles (of white people) to traverse the seemingly impregnable linguistic and cultural barriers to culinary understanding and their situation within larger contexts of U.S. immigration and foreign policy and domestic racialized social dynamics.

Elizabeth Fuhan Mason, M.A. Student, San Francisco State University