

## *A Chinese Kaleidoscope; An American Mosaic*

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Whenever there's a customer saying that day's her or his birthday, the manager will help celebrate her or his birthday by lighting up candles, having employees all singing "HAPPY BIRTHDAY" song, and giving extra fruits and ice cream as gifts. That manager had ever made the restaurant a hit until his unknown departure in the 80s.

The Chinese immigrants who were owners of restaurants that time were all hard-working workers. Some ever worked as waiters or in the kitchen for long, and the others often worked daytime in other industries but took a job in the restaurant over weekends. After several years' hardship in the catering industry, they'd naturally start up their own business by running a restaurant. It depends. Some people did make a great fortune from that; some lost all because of the poor management or some obstacles.

Speaking of how to expand the business, meeting the customers' needs is one of the great tools. First when customers come and try to seat them, make sure they get wherever they desire, if the table and seat is not reserved yet. And be friendly all through the mealtime and a thoughtful reminder of person belongs make a huge difference. While introducing dishes or some today specials to customers, it's better to be thorough but also peculiar in response to their preference instead of only recommending those expensive ones. To top it off, be sure to appreciate the customers' feedback especially for the ones on dishes. That will absolutely affect if they'd come visit again.

The most part needs to be pointed out here is the cleanness of bathroom in the restaurants run by those Chinese immigrants. Some simple, small ones were presumed to have a dirty bathroom, but for some with more high-end, elegant interior designs, they also surprisingly didn't keep an eye on that. In all Western restaurants, keeping bathrooms or rest rooms clean and tidy is no exception. From that point of view, the Chinese Immigrants even didn't have the habit of maintaining bathrooms clean, they should have their employees from South America take on that duty periodically every day.

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So the timetable for cleaning the bathroom on a daily frequency is do the cleaning first in the early morning, checking up once more time at noon together with adding up some bathroom supplies including tissues, hand sops, etc., and doing the checking routine again for 3 times around 7pm, 9pm and before closing the restaurant. Beyond keeping the bathroom free of unpleasant smells and the mess, the restaurants are better not to store random, heavy stuff there. Well use the storage space to its best.

Tips are typically the main income for waiters and waitresses in the restaurants. In general customers pay 15% on their orders in America. And tips would go further up if customers are satisfied with the service. Tips issues might vary from restaurant to restaurant. In some small restaurant serving homely dishes, when waiters argue with customers for less or not paying tips, the owner or manager should step out for to reconcile. Besides trying to avoid the dispute, the owner or manager would make it up for the waiters by paying them reasonable tips. In some restaurant of a large scale, tips are even far more ample than sales, everyone (including kitchen staffs) are able to get partial tips.

Middle to high-end restaurants are careful about staffs' uniforms. Black suits and ties, white shirts, leather shoes are essentials to outfits of management seniors. Uniforms of waiters are diverse in different restaurants. As for payment, Takeout places, family-run restaurants, and some fast-food restaurant usually accept cash only. Oppositely, customers in more high-end restaurant can pay by cards at their convenience since the riche are not used to bringing a lot of cash for dining out. Persona checks are rarely found only except for coming with identity card with a photo occasionally.

Many Chinese Immigrants diving into the catering industries would all expect to profit within a short period of time. And what they usually do is never, ever think to re-invest on their own restaurants by pulling out some profits to purchase new kitchen equipment, maintain or make the restaurant polished, and give a pay raise to employees.

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With the profits completely shared among the partners and investors, when restaurants no longer make lots of incomes, and understandingly investors were far less willing to put more bucks into renovation, restaurants just went out of business then. The young generation of immigrants now is with strength of high education and bilingual. If they'd well manipulate how to invest and re-invest their business, there is no doubt they could change the world.

To prevent fire is important to restaurants, by the way. The 70% of reasons accounting for the fires in Chinatown were originated from the kitchen, especially from the oil stains there for years. Although fire extinguishers were set inside the restaurant as required, they didn't usually necessarily help control or stop the situation, or sometimes they even didn't work. However an interesting Chinese old saying regarding that a restaurant after a fire might sometimes get better since the fire god visits explains some restaurant did do their business better after the fire and renovation. Needless to say, keeping floor dry and safe is also on top of the checklist of a restaurant.

### **The Era When It's Allowed to Paly Firecrackers in Chinatown, All Restaurants Were Packed with Customers**

Though living overseas, the Chines immigrants are still passionate about family gathering and all kind of celebration on important Chinese holidays. Before the 90s, people were able to play firecrackers during the Chinese New Year in Chinatown. Around Mott Street area was usually the most crowded. So on the Chinese New Year's Day together with its following weekend, people from all over crashed into Chinatown participating those traditional Chinese New Year's events and lining up for restaurants. New York Times also ever specially reported the prix fixe menu from famous Chinese restaurants in Manhattan before the Chinese New Year; that helped bring along huge sales then.

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During the crazily busy business hours, employees sometimes needed to start working since 10am until 2am the next day. Though extremely exhausted but it's one of those unforgettable days of good business.

Nothing is more exciting than a full-house restaurant to the experienced owner. When things all come out at the same time, it does test the managers or the owners if they possess the ability to put everything under the control. If things are going well with the still good service, the same tasty dishes, and customers' satisfaction, it will more guarantee the returning of consumers. Otherwise, they probably won't come back again.

Working in Chinese restaurants is tough and usually for long hours. The kitchen staffs in particular have to suffer from the somehow intense temperature there in addition to the huge fatigue. Except that kitchens of the big restaurants are equipped with central air conditioners, the ones inside small restaurant often feel alright and tolerable in winter but insanely hot in summer. Not mentioning when the restaurants are full of customers and then stoves and ovens are all on, the temperature in the kitchen could reach 100 °F. And it's sad from working and standing for long, most kitchen staffs are commonly diagnosed with arthritis when getting old.

“SIDEWALK CAFE” had been popular at a time before the 80s. Some restaurants extended their seating areas into sidewalks by applying for permission from the New York City Government and also paying the annual fee on that. There were 2 types of “SIDEWALK CAFE”. One is open-ended to define an outdoor seating area by fences, no good for summer and winter season. The other is close-ended, that will require to building a shelter as if entirely made of glass windows with a central air conditioner to adjust temperature. That's why it'd be utilized all year round. The closed-ended “SIDEWALK CAFE” is best known in France and also welcome by many customers from western countries at that time.

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However “SIDEWALK CAFE” was banned due to streets in Chinatown becoming too crowded as more immigrants moved in. Since then outdoor seating areas were no longer found there.

As recalled, there was a time when I had a chance to maybe serve old customers’ company on their 5-hours cruise trip around Manhattan Island. But it fell through at the last minute in terms of us not being able to purchase a special type marine insurance for employees. We then missed that great opportunity to create some good sales by offering fresh and good service on boats. From there, I did learn how to constantly stay in touch with people or customers we know is one of the keys to well sustain the catering business.

In a world, being part of the 1<sup>st</sup> generation of Chinese immigrants to U.S.A., most people came without higher education, background of specific professions, and good English ability. Therefore they went into the catering business since it’s easy to start with as a job. About half century ago, the Chinese immigrants only included “Chow Main” and “Chop Suey” in menu at Chinese restaurants. Nowadays, a large number of Chinese people run all kinds of restaurants and all types of business within food and beverage industry.

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Besides traditional ones, the whole categories cover cafes, "OPEN KITCHEN", fast food chains in food court inside shopping malls, buffets, all kind of homely dishes from all over China, and some other exotic restaurants including American steakhouses, Italian foods, French cuisines, and so on. The range of restaurant business was wide and they all can be served on site or delivered by bicycle and car. Though more and more Chinese immigrants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation are no longer passionate about joining in the catering industry, still lots of immigrants who just come to American and will seek for labor jobs in restaurants to support themselves, hoping to have their own business one day.

### **Eating in Guangzhou: Fresh, Light, and Tasty**

It's been long saying "Eating in Guangzhou" and that quite explains how fresh, light and tasty Cantonese dishes can be. Being one of "FOUR ASIAN TIGERS" since the 60s, Hong Kong has had a rapid economy boom. With an abundant lifestyle, Hong Kong people are more picky about foods than ever. So the restaurants not only continued to invent new dishes, but also modernized traditional ones. This tiny city now lives a large population and attracts hundreds of thousands tourists to visit every year. The Food trends in Hong Kong are changing all the time and restaurants of middle to large scale all have diverse, outstanding characteristics to keep customers coming again and again. The era of "Eating in Hong Kong" was hence made sure then.

Mxim's Caterers Limited is the largest and also one of very successful chain restaurants in Hong Kong, operating a diverse range of fast food shops, bakeries, cafes, and restaurants offering traditional Chinese (including Guangzhou Garden, Beijing Duck, etc.), Japanese, Southeast Asian and other cuisines. With efficient and professional management within the complicated hierarchy of this big corporation, Mxim's Caterers Limited takes the lead in the catering industry both in China and overseas.

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As long as you manage your business well, it doesn't matter how large your restaurant is or what price points your service and dishes are at, you will find your customers. Take female handbags for instance. Now matter how expensive or how low their prices will be, all handbags have their markets and targets somewhere. However the owners and investors for restaurants in Hong Kong perceive that to the best of its knowledge.

It's no exception that most restaurant would open at a location on ground floor in order to easier attract more customers. Only hotel or some private clubs have their own restaurants somewhere inside their buildings or in penthouses. But because of the pricy rent in Hong Kong, lots of restaurants have no way to afford a location on the ground floor. Then with that not-easy-found spots, they need to come out better strategies to bring in more customers. Food, service, pricing ranges, comfortable ambience are always factors taken into consideration by both the owners and customers.

Many restaurants in Hong Kong also run a private membership system, aiming to serve those entrepreneurs on the top of social class to meet, hang out and dine with their friends. Usually those restaurants never serve people who are not their members. And being a member is required to pay annual membership fee and spend at least certain amount of money every year. In this way they enjoy the premier service, special orders, and delicate set course meals. Customers there will be served right away when they're greeted into the restaurant, too. However those restaurants with private membership are not yet popular among the Chinese community in America.

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Cha Chan Ting, Cart noodles, and places serving all kinds of congee, rice and noodles are where common people go for everyday meals. Those easy and cheap restaurants are mainly located in which the Chinese gather around; Cantonese Yumcha on the other hand is quite an epidemic in Americans and much appeals to American customers as well. Yumcha restaurants do more business over the weekends when family and friends usually go meet there kind of as a routine.

Unlike Cantonese, the rich in Shanghai as I've seen there don't usually do the Yumcha or have Dim Sum for breakfast. They'd prefer to have servants to make house tea and breakfast instead. Blue and white collar class would just randomly buy breakfast from streets on their way to work; that averagely costs them around 2 CNY to have either fried bread sticks, Steamed buns, or soybeans milk, etc. Some people even just have leftovers from last night as breakfast. There are some very famous restaurants for breakfast, such as Nan Xiang Dumpling House and Yung Ho Tou Chang Restaurant.



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Take Nan Xiang Dumpling House's vigorous everyday scene for instance. There're always about 20 employees busily hand-making soup dumplings in the half-open kitchen separated by a glass window from the customers and pedestrians since it's open. The restaurant occupies 3 floors. The ground floor is for takeout and to sell foods with the cheapest price. Usually it takes half an hour or an hour to wait in line for purchase. To get in Nan Xiang Dumpling House on the second floor, it probably takes up to 15 minutes. The pricing of its foods and services on the third floor is the most expensive. Therefore customers no need to wait. So far Nan Xiang Dumpling House hasn't run on a chain store mode. And with its great everything, demand always exceeds supply there.

People in China were poor before the open economy started. Life necessities were oftentimes scarce, and stores and restaurants were not that many. However, those store and restaurants were ironically very profitable in terms of demands exceeded supplies at that time. People of that era only sought for preventing from hunger. The taste of food didn't really matter. They even didn't really care if restaurants come in with a good interior design or if they were clean or not. One of the main reasons accounting for that was the catering industry was severely and completely manipulated by the government based on planned economy. No one could open any restaurant or store without permission from the government. That sets quite a difference from what people today are picky about different styles and flavors of foods in any anyway.

### **No Matter How Many Crowds Big or Small Restaurants Can Sit, They Own Their Audience.**

In the U.S. food stands might fit up to a few customers due to the limited, small space on streets. What people called a restaurant usually can serve a single one customer, small or big groups of people. The very maximum for a restaurant to serve could be around 1,000 people. Moreover, most restaurants here don't really contain private rooms; some with roughly 20 ones can be quite amazing. On the contrary, in China nowadays some of huge restaurants even occupy 5 to 6 floors in a building and can be able to fit several hundreds of people at the same time. They even have 300 private rooms for customers who look for privacy. The design and service are so extravagant and spectacular that they should be listed on Guinness World Record!

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As the economy has been rapidly growing vigorous and also since China has a enormously huge population, it has topped U.S. as No.1 economy by purchasing power. With its tremendous markets waiting there as well as the fact the Chinese is noted for “eating well”, all kinds of food and catering companies, corporations all tried to enter the Chinese markets. Take Shanghai for example, it’s convenient for people to get access to all cuisines from all over the world. Among them, Macdonald’s and a few fried chicken chain restaurants periodically have new stores in different locations. 90% of those stores are positively profitable. And it’s expected to go better in the near future. For some local or 5-star hotels, they offer very high-end dishes to the customers as “Manhan Quanxi”, that contains at least 108 unique dishes (such as dried sea cucumber, snowy palm, shark fin soup, etc.) and is one of the granted meals ever documented in Chinese cuisine. The price range runs from several thousand up to million CNY. Some of dishes from the feast even have a fabulous gift package for customers’ selection. However the package oftentimes look greater than it’s actually being tasted.

Moreover, “INTERNATIONAL FOOD COURT” is another cool from the Western culture, and it’s well accepted in China now, in which people could enjoy a variety of special dishes from worldwide at once with family and friends. New World Department Store China Limited is currently one of the prominent spots in Shanghai.

Part of Nanjing E. Road, from he Bound to People’s Park, is particularly crowded with trendy stores, famous restaurants and high-end hotels. Like Trump Tower in the NYC, the newly built Shanghai Mart there inclusive of everything about department stores, restaurants of all cuisines, and corporation offices. On weekends, there will be nearly million people gathering around or visiting the area.