

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

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**Ethnography of a Chinese Family Restaurant in the Czech Republic**

**Bachelor's thesis**

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**Prague 2021**

**Statement:**

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In Prague, 30.07.2021

Jiayi Huang

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## **Abstract**

**This thesis focuses on Chinese migrants in Prague and their sense of (non) belonging in the host country, and popularization of their home country. Through an ethnographic investigation of a Chinese Family restaurant in Prague, Czech Republic, this thesis explores the ways in which cuisine operates as a tool enabling Chinese migrants to make sense of their migratory experience while negotiating their sense of (non) belonging and identity in the host country.**

**Keywords: Anthropology; Ethnography; Migration; Transnationalism; Globalization**

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# 1 Introduction

Food is one of the essential cultural forms for Chinese people. Food culture not only is a reflection of the daily life practices of the Chinese, but is also a carrier of Chinese nostalgia and cultural self-identification. The catering industry is therefore a pivotal sector for overseas Chinese. It not only is the starting point for the career development of many Chinese migrants, but also provides them with spiritual and cultural sustenance. It is also a bridge for communication between the Chinese and the rest of the world.

Following the steady rise of international migration of Chinese throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the country's radical 'opening-up' economic policy in 1979 triggered a new wave of immigration (Xiuming 2001). The areas most affected by the reform and opening-up policies have been the coastal villages in southern China, with Shenzhen as the centre. These villages occupy a relatively advantageous geographical location, being close to the major ports, and have been the target of preferential policies as well as favourable trade development trends and influences. With the change of people's economic thinking and investment vision in the country, a growing number of Chinese people have chosen to go abroad in an effort to take advantage of increased international trade.

If eating is a social-cultural practice, then restaurants are usually the place of choice for people. Due to people's living needs, overseas Chinese restaurants have become an inevitable venue. Eugene Anderson (1988) put forward this notion in his book *The Food of Chinese* based on his survey of Chinese residents in California. He argued that these Chinese people could maintain their daily eating habits more faithfully than other immigrant groups. As an integral part of Chinese culture, cuisine has contributed significantly to the formation of the Chinese community, with many a 'Chinatown' and its distinctive restaurants in overseas countries.

However, as a relatively unpopular destination country among Chinese migrants, the Czech Republic has a relatively small number of immigrants, who arrived relatively recently. It has not witnessed the formation of large-scale Chinatown communities and settlements.

In my thesis, I will show that, for Chinese Czechs, Chinese restaurants are not only

places for satisfying the appetite, but also a setting where migrants have a sense of belonging, memory and identity.

This thesis focuses on Chinese migrants in Prague and their negotiation of (non) belonging in popularizing the taste of home. Based on an ethnographic investigation of a Chinese Family restaurant in Prague, Czech Republic, this thesis explores the role of food in Chinese migrants' desire to make sense of their migratory experience while negotiating their sense of (non) belonging and identity in the host country.

This study is guided by the following questions: ***For what reasons and emotional needs do migrant owners and managers choose to run their restaurants? How do they run a restaurant? How do they adapt to life in the Czech Republic? How do they construct their identity?***

In this case study, I have observed their dietary habits, life passage rituals, cultural conventions and social networking. I will show how, with the combination of Czech-Chinese food and traditional Chinese food, the restaurant retains its Chinese characteristics as well as absorbs local characteristics. Secondly, I will show how the restaurant provides a meeting place for Chinese migrants working and studying in the Czech Republic to help them enjoy a taste of their home country and gain emotional sustenance. Finally, I will show how the place serves as a venue for establishing personal relationships and cultural understanding between the ethnic minority and majority.



## 2 Theoretical background

Ever since the end of the Cold War around 1990, the pace of globalisation has been accelerating, bringing countries closer to one another, and with growing numbers of people migrating each year. In an era of mass migration, Chinese immigrants are one of the major migrant groups, especially in Europe. Ever since the 1970s, over 1.7 million Chinese immigrants who have migrated to developed nations, including around 0.7 million to Europe (Zhu, 2002). By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, around 40% of new immigrants in Europe were Chinese. Correspondingly, China's dietary culture and lifestyle have also been transmitted into European societies. To meet the dietary needs of Chinese migrants, various Chinese restaurants have sprung up in all countries throughout Europe. With the continuation of globalization in recent years, an increasing number of people worldwide have become immensely interested in things distinctly Chinese culture. As one of the essential cultural symbols in daily life, Chinese cuisine has become one of the major channels through which outsiders can learn more about Chinese culture.

Moreover, compared with popular immigration destinations such as the US, the UK, and Germany, the number of Chinese immigrants in the Czech Republic are much smaller relative to the rest of the country's population, and to date there have been few studies on the overseas operation status of Chinese restaurants therein.

### 2.1 Research on globalisation

Globalisation as a term refers to the strategic approach of spreading resources, such as human resources, goods and services, across the world. Globalisation is a process that can be identified as a means of promoting ties between people from various countries around the world by integrating their cultures. According to Appadurai (1990), "*The central problem of today's global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenisation.*"

" He extended the theory of *anthropological political economy* to include five global cultural flow domains: *ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and*

*ideoscapes*. It should be stated here that he indicated that the concept of globalisation has become more complicated throughout the ages. However, he argued that globalisation could be identified as a strategy of interactions between cultures, whereby cultures can be significantly different from one another, or may be similar. The end of World War II marked the launch of modern globalization, which accelerated around the turn of this century, and which can be identified as an ongoing process (Ehrenreich *et al.* 2012). Globalisation also is a process that helps various forces across the world to be integrated. As a result of globalisation, services and products go beyond a country's geographic boundary and merge into the culture and society of other countries.

## **2.2 Catering and consumption research**

In the research field concerning catering and consumption, many works have been focused on functional analysis. According to Marchisio (2006 p.5), "*Stores are a kind of media between private and public life. Catering consumption is not only an individual activity aimed to satisfy individual needs, but also a public and collective activity. During such an activity, people can conduct ideological, cultural, sentimental, economic and political exchanges with one another.*" In a chapter on diet and communication, the author analyzed the important function of diet (*ibid* p.184): "*The formation of communication and consciousness can be said to be started simultaneously while diet is a part of communication. Diet is the media of interplay between organisms and the outside world as well as the media between self and non-self.*" Consumption is a type of production activity for social integration, according to Herpin (2005): "*For instance, through dinner parties, we can produce or reproduce the unity within groups. Through the collective consumption of institutions or companies, we can produce or reproduce organizational loyalty.*"

Wu Qing (2009 p.115) analyzed how consumption has become an important means for constructing identification and forming consumer community. He also pointed out that "*in the consumption society today, consumption behavior itself has become an important means for us to conduct self-identification and attribution and identify and classify others*".

The above research studies on catering and consumption have provided rich

theoretical resources for linking catering with culture, which is the subject of this thesis, in which I argue that catering consumption is closely related to self-identification.

### **2.3 Research on catering and culture**

Catering and culture have been topics of growing interest in the academic community in China and abroad. Anthropologists' theoretical research on diet commenced with the discussion of its functions. For example, Marvin Harris (1987), an American anthropologist, emphasized that food satisfies the essential functions of human beings. It has been claimed that the choice of food for different ethnic groups depends on whether the food is good for eating in the first place, which involves striking a balance between the actual benefits and costs of people's preferred food, i.e. whether a less familiar dish is better than the food with which they are accustomed. Therefore, according to the theory of functionalism, diet is not a single physiological and social problem, but a widespread social livelihood phenomenon. Secondly, the expression of food is not limited to its dietary function, but includes a social function that should be emphasized; thus, means that food serves a role of symbolic expression in society. For example, in *Good to eat: Riddles of food and culture*, the American anthropologist Marvin Harris (1985) considered the dispute between carnivorousness and vegetarianism, analysed the various peculiar phenomena and customs caused by eating in human society, and explained the cultural differences and ethnic characteristics of eating. His book explores the genetic factors, digestive physiology factors, nutritional factors, and cultural factors behind dietary customs, and the interaction between the various factors. The author's analysis of the reasons for the cultural and ethnic differences in food provides a reference for the functional analysis of the Chinese restaurant platform in this thesis, which means the differences in eating habits are influenced by various factors and evolve gradually with cultural changes.

Structuralists, represented by Lévi-Strauss, seek out the so-called "universality" of the model of human thinking via specific objects and examples. In other words, various object characteristics in the social system are selected and used as instrumental elements to identify the so-called "deep-seated structure". For example, Levi-Strauss (1965) proposed the

*culinary triangle*. Levi-Strauss' (1965) contribution is that he pointed out the apparent characteristics of dichotomy concepts such as 'raw' and 'cooked', 'cooked' and 'fully cooked', 'roasted' and 'cooked', 'boiled', and 'smoked' in the food code, and how they can be applied to ceremonial behaviour and myth.

Meanwhile, other anthropologists such as Marshall Sahlins (1976) have tried to seek a balance between functionalism and structuralism, and inject cultural elements into dietary research. Sahlins rejected the notion of treating food and meeting human survival needs as a one-dimensional causal relationship, arguing that different food systems have their respective cultural characteristics. He also claimed that cultural order is regarded as the order of objects, and that objects exist as an object law for the representation and evaluation of people and occasions, functions, and situations. Therefore, production is the reproduction of culture in the object system.

Eli Sagan focused on the relationship between a special ethnic group's food system in terms of tradition and inheritance, ancestral souls, and belief systems. He opined that both the regulation of food classification and the spiritual definition in special ritual occasions lend support to the hypothesis of there being a relationship between food and spiritual origin (Sanday 1986). In the 1960s, the symbolic anthropology school represented by Geertz emerged. They regard culture as a symbolic system, and explore social behaviours through the lens of cultural models in social development.

## **2.4 Research on the role of catering in the cultural identity construction among Overseas Chinese**

Research on the role of catering in cultural identity construction among overseas Chinese has accompanied the growing number of Chinese immigrants throughout the globalized world. Among them, Andrew Coe (2009) wrote in his book *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States* that Chinese cuisine has passed through different periods in the United States, evolving from cheap chop suey and unfamiliar dishes being judged harshly by white people channeling their racial discrimination and criticism, to wider acceptance of cuisine among different ethnic groups,

to the current era in which Chinese cuisine is enjoyed by nearly everyone.

Another recent work on American Chinese food is *Chop Suey: The Story of Chinese Food in America*, written by Yong Chen (2014). Although he also discusses the changes in the role of American Chinese food in the United States, the author's views and research methods are different from Andrew Coe (2009). Yong Chen's book describes the development of Chinese cuisine in the United States and the reasons for its popularity, and explores the history of Chinese immigration to the United States and changes in social class. He also demonstrates that mass consumption is a very important phenomenon in modern American society, and that material abundance supports the operation of the mass consumption system. According to Chen (2014), "*The success of American-style Chinese food in the United States does not depend on American society's understanding and love of Chinese food culture, but should be attributable to the convenience, rapidness and low price in the development history of Chinese food in the United States, which aligns with the mass-consumption characteristics of American society.*"

Chinese migrants must adjust themselves to the local social, environmental and economic conditions wherein they live and work. This also reasonably explains the localization of most overseas Chinese restaurants, and people's doubts as to the authenticity of overseas Chinese restaurants.

In addition to academic monographs and books, there are also some journal papers discussing the development of Chinese food in different countries. Chinese scholar Li Li's 2002 article, 'Cultural and Intercultural Functions of Chinese Restaurants in the Mountain West: An Insider's Perspective', and Liu Hai-ming's 2008 article, 'Food, Culinary Identity and Transnational Culture: Chinese Restaurant Business in Southern California', have adopted a combination of macro-perspective and specific case analysis, trying to explore the specific functions of Chinese food in society in the new era.

A number of Chinese scholars have investigated the inheritance of and changes occurring in Chinese culture. Examples include Yan Chunlong's 2008 article [transl.], 'Research on Overseas Chinese Media & Overseas Chinese Cultural Identification - "Lianhe Zaobao", An Early Century Case Study'. This paper takes the Chinese Spring Festival in Singapore as an example, and expounds on the origin and status quo of other traditional

festivals. The author proposed that the Chinese observe traditional customs and rituals such as the Spring Festival, which is a manifestation of the Chinese person's adherence to Chinese cultural identity; meanwhile, *Lianhe Zaobao* is an important carrier with which Chinese migrants retain Chinese culture. Although many Chinese migrants are enthusiastic about promoting Chinese culture overseas, overseas Chinese culture is not completely equivalent to endemic Chinese culture. In 'Fusion and Symbolism - Cultural Paradigm Research of Overseas Chinese' [transl.], Li Dongcai (2013) proposed that the cultural traditions of the Chinese living in China and overseas Chinese amount to a mixed cultural tradition in terms of cultural forms, and are the product of a number of heterogeneous cultural exchanges. This cultural tradition is a hybrid of multiple cultural traditions, rather than a simple patchwork of several cultures. Through persistent cultural exchanges, multiple cultural traditions can be preserved and continued. It can be seen that overseas Chinese culture is the result of the symbiosis of many cultures (*ibid*).

The reason why contemporary Chinese traditional culture continues to be passed on by the Chinese is due to the rich connotation and good adaptability of the traditional culture itself. On the other hand, it also has a very positive effect on Chinese migrants from a practical perspective. Holding fast to the foundation of Chinese traditional culture is an important criterion for making Chinese who they are, which is of great significance to the Chinese community. Zeng Ling (2003) chose Singapore's Chinese culture as the research object in his book, in which he discussed the community characteristics of festival customs among Singaporean Chinese, and emphasized that their festival customs have an important role and transmit values inherent to Chinese culture and their ethnic identity.

Ancient Chinese cuisine culture not only integrates the philosophy of yin-yang and the five elements in traditional Chinese culture, but also is compatible with the health-preserving theory of traditional Chinese medicine (Farquhar, Zhang 2012). With its plethora of cultural and artistic achievements, aesthetic food fashion and national characteristics, Chinese food consists of several distinctive local cuisines, which altogether constitute a sophisticated banquet table. These different cuisines can be classified according to times and techniques, regions and economy, nationalities and religions, food materials and utensils, folk customs and functions. Chinese cuisine is imbued with diverse cultural tastes

and cultural values.

## **2.5 Chinese emigrants and the rising popularity of Chinese food in the Czech Republic**

The Chinese government's 'opening up' policies in the late 1970s enabled many Chinese citizens to emigrate and establish immigrant communities in several countries worldwide. A large proportion of these migrants resettled in the United States, Canada, Australia and some Southeast Asian countries. The opening-up policies have coincided neatly with the acceleration of globalization around the turn of the century, which in turn has facilitated the rapid development of China's economy and society. The rising international stature of China, as well as the development of immigration policies and Entry-Exit Administration in various countries, triggered an upsurge in Chinese emigration. In particular, Europe has become one of the fastest-growing regions for overseas Chinese immigrants (Song 2013 p.69).

In 1988, China and Hungary signed a bilateral visa agreement to exempt all Chinese citizens from having to apply for a Hungarian visa, a relaxation in policy that enticed many Chinese immigrants into the Central-Eastern Europe country. However, in 1992 this same agreement was revoked, and most of these Chinese immigrants returned home or emigrated to Western Europe, the Czech Republic, Poland and other neighbouring countries. Notably, Czechoslovakia in 1992, and later the Czech Republic in 1993 tried to redress the underdevelopment of their catering service and textile industries by offering attractive business opportunities to a selection of Chinese immigrants, most of whom came from Zhejiang, Fujian and nearby provinces, and some of whom hailed from neighbouring European countries, and also Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong (Moore & Tubilewicz 2001 p.618).

As Markéta Moore and Czeslaw Tubilewicz explained, there are several reasons for the sluggish and changeable development of Chinese immigration in Czechoslovakia, and later the Czech Republic (following partition in 1993). The stringent immigration policies restricting the long-term residence of foreigners in the Czech Republic is the most obvious.

Secondly, compared with Germany, Italy, Britain, France, which are more attractive to immigrants in terms of economy, culture and politics, the Czech Republic was a lacklustre destination. Moreover, in Czech society there was more widespread xenophobic and racist bigotry against ethnic minority groups, and even its government was complicit in the violence against ethnic groups, until 1996, when the international community condemned these abuses (Moore & Tubilewicz 2001). At the time, the Chinese immigrants did not intend to stay in the Czech Republic for long, and most of them treated the Czech Republic as a temporary transit residence (Kwok 2012). However, following the mid-1990s the Czech Republic has witnessed improvements in its economy, culture and politics, and some Chinese immigrants decided to persist in living and working in the country.

Meanwhile, improving diplomatic relations between China and European countries, as well as the rapid development of China state-owned enterprises and international trade, have contributed to the increase in opportunities for Chinese migrants to live and do business in Europe. As mentioned above, the Czech catering service and textile industry in the 1990s were underdeveloped, and there was much scope for Chinese enterprises and individuals to enter the market. With the increases in Chinese enterprises and caterers in the Czech Republic, the demand for Chinese food in the country has also increased.

As Markéta Moore and Czeslaw Tubilewicz mentioned, in 1988 there was only one Chinese restaurant in Czechoslovakia, while in 1994 (in the Czech Republic) the number had increased to about 40. However, due to the economic situation of the Czech middle class and their lack of enthusiasm for eating out, as well as the high price of food in Chinese restaurants, most customers of these pioneering Chinese restaurants were Chinese enterprise staff, Czech businessmen, politicians and elites, and some Western tourists. The degree of acceptance was not very high among ordinary Czech citizens, and so many of the Chinese restaurants struggled to make a profit (Moore & Tubilewicz 2001 p.618). In order to reverse this situation, many Chinese restaurants introduced cheaper set meals and traditional Czech dishes, thus providing the indigenous Czech a wider range of options. They not only achieved a fusion of Chinese and Czech tastes, but also introduced fast food consisting of a dish or meat collocation with staple noodles or rice. The dishes had changed from the more complex traditional Chinese food to fixed fast food set meals, and the number and range of



dishes on the menu had also been reduced. The prices also were reduced due to the reduction in the cost of raw materials and the reduced complexity of dishes. With this new business model, Chinese restaurants reduced their costs and attracted more customers. Like most improvised European Chinese food, 'Czech Chinese food' had become more filling, affordable, and moderate in flavour (Guo 2012 p.34).

As Marchisio (2006 p.24) has detailed in his study of the changes in Italian cities, leisure activities and new forms of entertainment, "*The different tendencies of various consumer groups are also manifested in their different hobbies and tastes, which profoundly affect the production of various production institutions...the application of new technologies and the employment and income of individuals or groups dominate the direction of consumption and different social needs.*" The Chinese restaurants in the Czech Republic operate under similar parameters. Recently, the "belt and road" initiative advocated by China has attracted ever more Chinese enterprises, overseas students and Chinese tourists to the Czech Republic, which means more customers for the Chinese restaurants. However, customers from China, as well as Czech natives who are interested in Chinese culture, often have higher requirements and greater demand for Chinese food. The former expect a product that carries that authentic flavour of their hometowns, while the latter seek authenticity in the cuisine. Facing this change, restaurants have had to respond quickly to these customers' requirements. Some restaurants specializing in high-quality traditional Chinese food have launched more authentic Chinese dishes whilst retaining the 'fast food' options. Some young people have brought with them more popular Chinese catering culture and food types to the Czech Republic, such as the famous milk tea culture, the new style of hot pot, and special snacks. In this transformation, the increasing number of Chinese restaurant owners has re-evaluated their management strategy for attracting customers. In doing so, they now offer a service which induces in the migrant consumer emotional resonance and brings back memories of their home country.

## **3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Research problems and questions**

When I first formulated the research theme and research question, my research direction was to study the cultural customs and festivals of Chinese immigrants in the Czech Republic, and observe the daily life of the owner of the restaurant, the intended research object of this case study. However, when I commenced the field research, I soon learned that these restaurant operators spend most of their time working inside their restaurants, leaving them very little time for personal and leisure activities. Since the research object is a Chinese restaurant in Prague, such a limited scope does not permit me to explore in depth the cultural customs and festivals of the Czech Chinese immigrant community. Therefore, after a period of fieldwork, I turned my attention to observing the internal activities of the restaurant. I chose to volunteer in the restaurant as a waitress, helping customers order food, serving dishes, checking out, and cleaning up the restaurant. In doing so, I decided revise my research questions. Here is the first research question:

***How does the food or restaurant become a tool for Chinese migrants to make sense of their migratory experience while negotiating their sense of (non) belonging and identity in the host country?***

In order to answer this question, I needed to analyse the restaurant itself and observe the restaurant's operators in an effort to determine the relationships between the operators, customers and restaurant staff, and to focus on the importance of food and restaurants in these relationships. In investigating the intermediary role of food and restaurants, this thesis is guided by three further research questions:

***For what reasons and emotional needs do migrant owners and managers choose to run their restaurants?***

***How do they adapt to life in the Czech Republic?***

***How do they construct their identity?***

At the same time, I observed the eating habits, cultural customs and social networks of these Chinese immigrants through my daily dealings with restaurant staff.

Therefore, I will consider how this restaurant combines Czech-style Chinese food and traditional Chinese food in an effort to blend the local dining characteristics with the Chinese characteristics of this restaurant. Furthermore, I will explain how this restaurant has become a hub for Chinese migrants working and studying in the Czech Republic, who cherish the memories of their home country and gain a sense of nostalgia in the catering establishment. Finally, I will describe how this restaurant can be used as a venue for building personal relationships and cultural understanding between ethnic minorities and the majority.

### **3.2 Research methods**

These are the qualitative research methods that I have employed:

1. *Ethnographic participation observation*. To better understand and participate in my research setting, I chose the fieldwork method research paradigm that is commonly used in anthropology to observe the participants and the ethnography. Participant observation is a commonly applied method or technique in anthropological fieldwork for data collection. It facilitates the establishment of a close relationship with the target culture, requiring the participants to partake in social activities that belong to a specific culture. Moreover, the researcher-participants should observe the perspectives and immerse themselves in the lives of the community and the social group for a considerable length of time. “*The purpose of the participant observation method is to observe and study the culture, whilst participating in the said culture like a member of the cultural group*” (Punch 2014).

Chinese restaurant T, a couple-operated Chinese restaurant in a residential area of Prague, was selected as my fieldwork sample. My participation lasted from November 2019 to February 2020. As I worked as a waitress in the restaurant, the restaurant owners did not require any working hours from me, but allowed me to continue working and observing in the restaurant for more than three days a week, from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. I observed the daily lives of the staff and the behaviours of the customers, and experienced the daily business processes inside the restaurant, all of which provide useful insights into the restaurant operations.

As a Chinese student studying in the Czech Republic, I eat Chinese food as a matter of

habit, and I always seek a Chinese restaurant that serves high-quality food. I found one Chinese restaurant through a friend's recommendation, and I became a regular customer at the said restaurant prior to this study. I cultivated a good relationship with the restaurant owners, so when I offered to volunteer in the same restaurant in order to conduct this fieldwork, they happily allowed me to commence.

In the restaurant, I was mainly responsible for serving meals and conducting other manual work. I was granted a certain degree of freedom to observe the restaurant activities, and to interact with the restaurant staff. All the restaurant staff members are of Chinese descent, mainly southern China, hence we encountered no language or communication barriers. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the restaurant owners and staff all come from the same village. They have their own dialect, which slightly affected my observations during the course of conversation. All the staff members and the owners would eat together, so I had plenty of time to communicate with them and establish good relationships. At the same time, Mrs. H., as my main informant, had been in contact with me for many months prior to the project, and had provided me with relevant materials for this research.

2. *Semi-structured and unstructured interviews.* Since the restaurant exists as a place of consumption, I interviewed some customers via semi-structured interviews without interfering with the restaurant operations. The respondents were asked pre-established questions that related mainly to restaurant impression, food evaluation and understanding of Chinese culture. This style of interviewing is more stimulating, provoking rational and factual reactions in addition to emotional responses (Punch 2014).

For the restaurant staff and the few customers who were willing to participate in a more detailed discussion, I developed an interview which was a combination of the semi-structured and unstructured interview formats. The latter is non-standardised, open-ended and in-depth, and requires greater flexibility (Punch 2014). It requires the researcher to gain the informant's trust and build rapport with them. Fortunately, I had good relationships with the restaurateur and some Chinese customers even before I chose the restaurant as the fieldwork sample. At the same time, one of my Czech customers and informant could speak fluent Chinese, which reduced the language barrier. Through my informant Mrs. H., a female waiter named Zhou, two Chinese customers named Guo and Li,

a Czech customer named Peter, and a Korean customer named Cha, all provided sufficient and relevant research data and support.

The interviewees include managers, employees and customers. To understand the evaluation and opinions of various groups of people in the restaurant, the customers were randomly selected and interviewed. Some of the interviewees required that their personal information be kept confidential, so they are represented by nicknames in lieu of their real names.

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Number of interviewees</b>
Owners (husband and wife)	2 (No. 1, No. 2)/Mrs. H., Mr. L.
Waiters	2 (No. 3, No.4)/Zhang, Zhou
Cooks	2 (No. 5, No. 6) /Li, Liu
Chinese customers (including international students, tourists and local Chinese)	3 International students (Nos. 7 - 9)/Huang, Sun, Qian 2 tourists (No. 10, No. 11)/Zheng, Wang 2 local Chinese (No. 12, No. 13)/ Guo, Wu
Foreign customers (including Asian and Czech customers)	1 Customer from other Asian countries (No. 14)/Cha 4 Czech customers (Nos. 15 - 18)/Peter, Maria, Vaclav, and Ludmila

3. *Emic and etic perspectives.* When engaged in fieldwork, cultural anthropologists pay much attention to “emic” and “etic” perspectives. A careful distinction of these perspectives was proposed and systematically elaborated by American anthropologist Marvin Harris (1987), a representative figure in the cultural materialistic school. The emic approach is to describe, explain, analyse and criticise an investigated culture from the perspective of the culture owners. In this research study, I observed and participated in the restaurant operations as a restaurant service worker. Consequently, my perceptions of the restaurant staff and the customers changed, and I also began to feel like a restaurant worker as I became familiar with my assigned roles. This situation allowed me to appreciate the

feelings of the restaurant staff better, and facilitated my close observations of specific behaviours and words. Meanwhile, I was still a customer in the said restaurant. Nevertheless, I also maintained a certain distance from the phenomena being studied, to avoid overlapping my observational role with my staff's identity.

In anthropological research, the researcher, as an outsider, has to observe from a researcher's perspective to analyse and explain the data investigated, and try to learn and comprehend from the background, experiences and opinions from the perspectives of the person or people being researched. Since I am from China, I have some understanding and experiences of Chinese culture. However, such experience and knowledge are still different from the cultural background of people working and dining in Chinese restaurants in the Czech Republic; hence, I also needed to assume an outsider's perspective to observe certain phenomena, identify specific differences or similarities, and analyse the causes. However, in making external observations, I also incurred the risk of misjudging the phenomena being observed due to my own particular understanding of Chinese culture, potentially drawing erratic conclusions and generalisations.

Therefore, I chose to combine the emic and etic perspectives to enable an extensive use of both, and to minimise subjective speculations and conclusions.

### **3.3 Ethical issues and dilemmas**

To ensure that the study was conducted in a reasonable and ethical context, I first communicated with the restaurateurs and asked for their permission, then I signed a contract with them promising to keep sensitive information confidential. I also rendered anonymous the names of people involved in the research, including the restaurant's name. For the purpose of anonymity, and in order to mitigate potential harm to the research participants, this thesis does not include bibliographical sources and other information that might help identify the restaurant and the research participants. This is also the reason why I cannot supply fieldwork photography. At the same time, I worked as hard as any other restaurant staff member during the fieldwork period.

When I began my fieldwork, I encountered many difficulties. Firstly, I had no prior

experience of working in a restaurant, so the beginning of the field study was marked by a steep learning curve as I spent time learning relevant knowledge. Secondly, as mentioned, I had to work at least as hard as the other restaurant staff members. Thirdly, I could not speak the Czech language well, so I needed assistance from other staff members whenever Czech customers would come to the restaurant.

In my field notes, I wrote:

*“It was six o’clock in the evening, and the restaurant was full of customers. ‘a yi’<sup>1</sup> (Mrs. H) was anxious that I might not be able to take good care of the customers, so she let me stay at the bar instead to dry up the cleaned glasses and prepare drinks for the customers. Later, a Czech man came to the bar and signalled that he wanted to order. I smiled awkwardly and looked for my colleagues to assist me. But, at that time, ‘a yi’ (Mrs. H.) and the other staff were quite busy that no one could help me. I did not know how to deal with the situation, so I was a little flustered. Thus, I stayed at a spot where neither the man nor ‘a yi’ (Mrs. H.) could see me, to avoid further embarrassment.”<sup>2</sup>*

With no previous experience of working in a restaurant or knowledge of the Czech language, I felt daunted by these initial experiences. Although I had frequently visited the restaurant before, my position and experience as a staff member were entirely unfamiliar experiences.

Another conundrum on my part was that my relationship with the chef was not initially amicable. Fortunately, my relationship with the restaurant owner and the service staff proceeded smoothly from the beginning as we had known one another prior to the fieldwork. As my informant and ‘gatekeeper’, Mrs. H was supportive, and helped me overcome the difficulties that I had initially experienced. She did not impose too many restrictions, and was sympathetic with me as a researcher. On the other hand, the chef was less accommodating. This was clearly recorded in my field notes:

*“Today is my third working day. ‘a yi’ (Mrs. H) said to me, ‘Don’t worry if the chefs are in a bad mood. They are not targeting you; they are just bad-tempered.’ What she said*

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘a yi’ in the field notes is what I call Mrs. H in daily life. In Chinese, it can be used to refer to female elders with whom one has a close relationship.

<sup>2</sup> Field notes from 08.11.2019

*was significant for me. During the first three days of work, my communication with the chef was minimal. On the one hand, when the restaurant was busy, there was almost no communication with the chef; on the other hand, I was slightly scared when facing the chef, because sometimes he looked irritable, which was in stark contrast from the enthusiasm of others.*”<sup>3</sup>

This diary entry provides an example of a problem I encountered when I started my research. Initially, my communication with the customers and chefs was not that successful. To solve this problem, I began teaching myself the Czech language. Meanwhile, I chose to communicate with the chef whilst during lunch break in an effort to build good rapport. This proved to be a wise strategy; I entered into more interactions with the Czech customers, and the chef became more amiable and conversant with me.

The selection of interviewees and the interview requests also presented some challenges. Nonetheless, Mrs. H was supportive during my interview requests and helped me select the interview subjects. She provided information of the customers, including anecdotes of their relationships, and helped me ask the customers whether they would participate in the interviews. In addition, during the interviews, many customers and employees did not want their voices to be recorded, leading to the likely omission of some key data. Nevertheless, preservation of their anonymity takes priority over extrapolating all possible data.

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<sup>3</sup> Field notes from 15.11.2019



## **4 Empirical part**

This chapter first introduces the restaurant, and its employees and customers. Secondly, it summarises the development history of the restaurant through interviews with the restaurant operators. Based on my fieldwork notes, the structure, food, cultural display and daily rhythm of the restaurant are discussed in more detail. Finally, the restaurant staff and customers are described and analysed via the contents of my interviews with them.

I then discuss the role of restaurants and food in constructing a sense of belonging and identity amongst Chinese immigrants. I will explore the contrasts and fusion between Czech-style Chinese food and traditional Chinese food. Thereafter, I will illustrate how the restaurant has provided a venue for Chinese customers who miss their home country and hold a strong emotional attachment. Finally, I will consider how the restaurant serves as a venue for ethnic minorities and the majority to establish healthy relationships and cultural understanding.

### **4.1 Ethnographic setting**

There are many Chinese restaurants in Prague, Czech Republic. For this research project, I chose one Chinese restaurant within a residential area of the city. Due to the restaurant's firmly established reputation, inventive dishes and management philosophy, as well as hospitality, the restaurant has become very popular amongst Chinese circles in Prague during the past three years, and it is frequented by a relatively large number of local customers. As a typical family business, the restaurant is operated by a couple, Mr. L and Mrs. H. In the management of restaurant operations, Mrs. H. takes a leading role. She is tasked with supervising all things, including accounting expenses and serving the customers. Meanwhile, Mr. L. is mainly in charge of deliveries, kitchen and purchasing. He is also responsible for serving whenever there is a high number of customers in the restaurant.

There are two people in charge of the kitchen. One cook is responsible for the preparation and cleaning, whilst the other is mainly responsible for cooking. Mr. L. serves as

the cook when the restaurant is busy, or when one of the chefs has a day off.

In the restaurant, a standardised division of labour has been adopted whilst retaining the flexibility of the family restaurant model, as described by Marchisio (2006 p.7). In addition to the owners and chefs/cooks, there are one or two waitresses who are mainly responsible for serving customers' orders, serving dishes, and cleaning. As a small family business, the restaurant has few employees; this enabled me to communicate, and establish good rapport and harmonious relationships with the staff and managers as my informants.

Nevertheless, one apparent disadvantage of this structure is that the employees and managers spent nearly all their time working in the restaurant. Some employees had fixed shift breaks, but the managers needed to work in the restaurant every day and had little private time. In fact, the only time they ever took a holiday was when they were with their relatives, which meant the restaurant would also be closed.

Due to careful management, this booming Chinese restaurant has become the first choice amongst many local diners and overseas Chinese students. Even Koreans, Americans and visitors from various countries who are working and living in the Czech Republic have become regular restaurant customers.

#### **4.1.1 Location**

The location of the restaurant is near the geographical center of the residential area, with many hotels, universities and office buildings in the vicinity. The number of customers is large, their needs are diverse, and the demand for restaurants is greater. Tram routes are not far from the restaurant, and the location of the restaurant is easy to find. However, due to its position on the side of the main road, there are not many parking spaces. Nevertheless, its convenient location in terms of transportation affords the restaurant access to a large flow of people nearby. There is a certain restriction in terms of the class of consumer, in that the clientele are mostly working class. There are many different shops nearby, including a grocery store, mini market and supermarket, a pet shop and a general store, as well as a kebab restaurant and a Korean restaurant. Besides, there exist many unique ethnic restaurants nearby, including an Indian restaurant, a teahouse, a pizzeria, clubs and bars. The

surrounding environment is community-based, the types of restaurants are diverse, and there is a certain degree of competition among the catering establishments. Most of them are restaurants representing ethnic minorities; fortunately, in recent years there has been growing acceptance and recognition of such restaurants in the city.

#### **4.1.2 Introduction to the restaurant**

The owner of the Restaurant T., Mrs. H., detailed the history of the restaurant to me: *“When I came to Europe in 1995, I started working as a waiter in a restaurant in Germany. In 2007, I wanted to start my own business and finally decided to open a Chinese restaurant. Since there were a relatively smaller number of Chinese restaurants in the Czech Republic at that time, there was less competition compared with Germany.”*<sup>4</sup>

Similar to the views of most Chinese immigrants entering Europe, the owners originally preferred Western European countries, as the Czech Republic was less attractive to Chinese immigrants than more economically developed countries like Germany. It lacked the socioeconomic pull effects. However, as explained by Brettell and Hollifield (2014), because of the small number of immigrants, better business opportunities and immigration conditions have been created; these constitute pull effects. Meanwhile, the large number of Chinese immigrants entering Germany has produced much greater pressure and competition, amounting to a push effect. This is why my informants came to the Czech Republic.

Moreover, because of the relatively small number of Chinese immigrants in the Czech Republic, the quality and quantity of Chinese food are lower, compared with Chinese food on offer in countries with larger Chinese communities. When Mrs. H. investigated Chinese restaurants in the Czech Republic, she found that these restaurants were generally old-fashioned, the food they offered was very simple, and that most of them were low-end restaurants. Therefore, she and her husband decided to place stronger emphasis on Chinese characteristics in their restaurant’s decoration and dishes:

*“We spend much time in the restaurant so that the design will make us feel at home. On the other hand, I also hope that the restaurant could show Chinese culture and provide real*

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<sup>4</sup> Field notes from 07.12.2019

*Chinese food to the Czech people.”<sup>5</sup>*

In order to highlight Chinese characteristics, most of the restaurant decorations are purchased from China to create a more authentic restaurant atmosphere. Secondly, in terms of the design of the dishes, the restaurant offered only traditional Chinese food at the beginning. However, due to the low revenue during the first year, the owners decided to add to the menu the kind of Czech Chinese dishes being offered in many other Chinese restaurants in the Czech Republic, whilst retaining the traditional Chinese cuisines as dining options. The operators said that this not only would protect the income of the restaurant but also make it easier for customers to try traditional Chinese food.

This business model continued until 2016. With the continued development of globalization during the 2010s, the number of Chinese customers has gradually increased, and the increase in international communication between the Czech Republic and China has led to an increase in customer demand for authentic Chinese food. In order to meet the requirements of customers, the restaurant has developed a brand new menu, mainly providing authentic traditional Chinese food. The owners believe that it is precisely because the restaurant retains authentic Chinese food flavours and production methods that it attracts a large number of Chinese customers.

At the same time, in order to further expand its popularity and maintain contact with existing customers, the operators have also established online chat groups. In the chat group, the restaurant announces new dishes from time to time, and also cooperated with a milk tea shop to provide a free food delivery service. If customers need home delivery, they can order milk tea and dishes together with a free delivery fee via the chat group. These Chinese customers not only give the restaurant a high evaluation, but also provided valuable suggestions on how to improve the dishes.

As Mrs. H. says:

*“Sometimes, I also miss the dishes my parents cooked, so as a Chinese restaurant, we are willing to meet their requirements for unique dishes to the best of our abilities. It is what I can do for them.”<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Field notes from 07.12.2019

<sup>6</sup> Field notes from 14.12.2019

For her, the food not only provides sustenance, but also acts as the carrier of emotions connected with and memories of her parents and her home town.

After a number of years of operation, the restaurant now enjoys a large number of regular customers, as well as many new customers introduced by friends. Meanwhile, because of its advantageous geographical location, residents and office workers nearby will prefer to have a meal or throw a party in the restaurant. During my two months of participant observation, I detected the following strategies applied by the owner in her everyday practice in the restaurant:

1. *Combining Czech fast-food, Czech-Chinese food and traditional Chinese food*

As a small family business, the restaurant provides both traditional Chinese food and Czech-style Chinese food. Like most Chinese restaurants in the Czech Republic, this restaurant offers Czech-style Chinese food, including affordable set meals and dishes which can be ordered separately, as well as dishes like *Smažený sýr*, which is very popular in the Czech Republic. At the same time, in order to retain ethnic characteristics, the restaurant also provides traditional Chinese food. Compared with the Czech-style Chinese food, traditional food preparation is a more complicated process, and demands an abundance of raw materials as well as more exquisite arranging of dishes; for these reasons, traditional Chinese food is often more expensive.

2. *Treating customers as friends or family*

“Customers are God” is the criterion of the service industry; however, Mrs. Hu prefers to treat her customers as friends. In her words, “*God and Buddha are sacred and inviolable, and they never show up easily.*” Although not fully believing in God, she still has a sense of awe for them. She always says that customers are friends and relatives, rather than God. Instead of wearing a professional smile, she and her employees often treat customers as family and friends with a sense of closeness from the heart. This is especially the case with Chinese students: “*They left their families to study and live in foreign countries; I would like to take more care of them. They are*

*just like my kids,”*<sup>7</sup> says Mrs. H. To regular customers, she often will talk about recent happenings or annoyances. Due to her sincere and enthusiastic attitude, students, employees, professors, workers and police have become regular customers of the restaurant and friends with her.

### *3. Human-based management and home-style relationship*

As a very principled person, Mrs. H always takes charge in managing the restaurant by herself to ensure that everything will go well. Additionally, she recently announced that the restaurant will continue to offer traditional Chinese food alongside Czech-style Chinese food. Secondly, in the restaurant, she places the interests of employees above everything else. The business hours are fixed, from 11:00hrs to 23:00hrs every day, and employees never work overtime even if customers request they do so. *“We are family,”*<sup>8</sup> says Mrs. H. According to Zhou, a service worker in the restaurant:

*“Mrs. H. likes to have my suggestions. We do not have blood relative, but we are just like families. She always is by my side to help me when I get any problems in the Czech Republic. For examples, my visa procedures are she accompanied me to handle, and when I was pregnant is also, she accompanied me to go to the hospital to check.”*

Zhou said that she greatly respects and trusts Mrs. H. When the restaurant is not very busy, Mrs. H. will ask the staff to go to the nearby supermarket to buy their favourite food, and take a rest.<sup>9</sup> Mrs. H. usually does not reprimand employees; on the contrary, she often reminds them about the importance of safety. However, she is passionate about tidiness and beauty of dishes, insists on practicing proper cleaning and hygiene before touching food, and is concerned about the proper arrangement of wine and drink, style of cups, even the quantity and quality of the beer bubbles.

## **4.2 A description of one day in the restaurant**

The owners usually come to the restaurant at 10:30 a.m. to open the door for the employees, so I would usually arrive at the restaurant at 10:50 a.m., and would take ten

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<sup>7</sup> Field notes from 14.12.2019

<sup>8</sup> Field notes from 17.12.2019

<sup>9</sup> Field notes from 07.01.2020

minutes to change clothes and get ready for work. After I cleaned up the indoor area, the restaurant would open around 11:00 to 11:30 a.m.

Whenever I entered the restaurant, the restaurant staffs were already there. Mrs. H. would be chatting with waiter Zhou at the front desk, and would pour me a cup of hot water after greeting me. I should mention that the working hours were suitable for me, as I did not have to get up early in the morning (!). The late morning opening time enabled me to fortify myself with a loaf of bread before making my way to the restaurant. Upon arrival, Mrs. H. asked me if I had breakfast. If my answer was negative, she insisted on preparing breakfast for me; she felt that the bread that I brought was not nutritious enough, and so she would make me a simple breakfast with two boiled eggs and a chicken sandwich. I would then sit outside the bar and consume my breakfast, whilst conversing with the staff about daily trivia.

Immediately after I finished my breakfast, a Czech man entered the restaurant. It was already 11:20 a.m., and the restaurant finally welcomed its first guest. Usually, the restaurant would officially open at the time of arrival of the first guest. Zhou handed both a fast food menu and a standard menu to the customer, who ordered a glass of beer and kung-pao beef. She then quickly wrote the orders on a paper and pasted it on a whiteboard in the kitchen. She called the chef, who was still resting, and informed him about the order. (The chef of the restaurant is actually married to Zhou. They also have a three-year-old son who is resident in Prague.)

By 11:30 a.m. the number of customers in the restaurant had begun to rise; the restaurant ushered in its first dining peak, and the place became busy. I was in charge of serving a table of Chinese students and their American professor. I handed a Chinese menu to the students, and then a standard menu and fast food menu to the professor. Then, I asked them what they wanted to drink so that I could prepare in advance and leave them ample time to browse the menu. I went back to the bar to prepare the glass of beer and three bottles of cola that they ordered. In the restaurant, both beer and cola have their brand-specific cups. I put these on a tray and handed them to the customers. The rules concerning the use of trays were conveyed to me by Mrs. H. on my first day at the restaurant. The reasons for these rules are (i) to prevent the drinks from spilling on the floor, as the spillage cannot be mopped up easily and quickly; and, (ii) to avoid prolonged contact between the hands and the cups. The

Chinese students ordered three dishes, whilst the American professor ordered a portion of fast food. I took the menus back and put them on a table where they were stored. Then, I posted the two orders on the whiteboard in the kitchen, and reminded the chef of the corresponding table number and the dishes ordered.

At the same time, the restaurant offers a wide range of takeaways. One Czech woman came to the bar, quickly browsed the menu and asked me which dishes were not spicy. I replied that the dishes could be made non-spicy, and that I would make a note of her request. She then ordered a sweet-and-sour chicken package. (I should note that, in the restaurant, the dishes that needed to be packaged should be indicated as ‘takeaway’ on the upper-right corner of the order paper, so that the chef places the dishes directly in the packaging box.) As she waited, I gave her a small glass of plum wine – one of Mrs. H.’s rules, which helps guests feel more relaxed whilst they are waiting. About ten minutes later, I heard the chef ringing the bell, implying that some dishes were ready. I went into the kitchen and packed the takeaway into a medium-sized plastic bag, took the package out and handed it to the customer. By this time, the American professor went to the cash register and offered to pay. I then took out the wallet in the cash register drawer and gave him change.

The restaurant’s first peak period lasted until 3 p.m., after when the chef began to prepare our lunch. The lunch was usually placed on the kitchen table as a self-service. Since the restaurant would have customers from time to time, Mrs. H. would usually wait for us to eat first. Whenever the restaurant was not very busy, we would converse together at the bar.

At nearly 6 p.m., the restaurant was about to usher in the second peak period. Mrs. H. told me that if a guest spends more than 200 crowns (Czech koruna) during dinner, they were entitled to a free drink. In view of this, I chose not ask the customers what to drink first, but would ask them instead if they had read the menu. Upon hearing their choices, I could determine if I needed to provide free drinks. There were many customers for dinner, so we needed to prepare tableware and tissues in advance. During peak time there was no time to rest; I had to go back and forth between the guests, the kitchen and the bar, whilst cleaning the cups that were needed. This kind of workload would leave many people feeling exhausted, and by the end of the shift I felt a strong urge to return home and rest.

Finally, it was time to sign off work. The chef began to prepare dinners for the staff at



around 10:00 p.m. At around 10:40 p.m., we started to count the quantity of the types of drink ordered, and also cleaned up the restaurant, which by then was closed to new customers. After all the remaining customers had left, we then changed our clothes and prepared to leave.<sup>10</sup>

### **4.3 The role of the restaurant as a venue for communicating Chinese culture**

In this section, I describe how the restaurant operates as a place in which the owners' understanding of Chinese culture are materialized and displayed to customers.

#### **4.3.1 Chinese cultural elements in the restaurant's interior design and decoration**

Although this Chinese restaurant is small in size, it is replete with Chinese elements. Firstly, its doors, which open and close on both sides, are akin to a Chinese fan-shaped screen, which is a kind of traditional Chinese furniture. On the arched top, there is a plaque with the name of the restaurant in Chinese and Czech. The Chinese name is taken from a poem of the Yuan Dynasty, titled "supernal fragrance" (delicious food). On both sides of the gate there are two sizeable fan-shaped glass windows equipped with two pieces of wood. There are colour paintings divided into two areas on the four boards. One is a Chinese landscape painting, which includes the Great Wall of Beijing; the bamboo and panda in Sichuan; the Tiantai Mountain in Zhejiang Province; and Yandang Mountain. The panda and the Great Wall are the most well-known Chinese elements, while the colourful paintings of the two mountains depict the typical natural landscape in southern China. The other painting depicts food, including Maotai in Guizhou, plum wine in southern China, and Czech beer, roast duck, steamed fish, roast chicken, beef, rice and chilli pepper. In China, chicken, duck, fish and beef are indispensable meats in the festival menu, and rice is also the leading staple food in southern China. The chilli pepper, an indispensable seasoning in many Chinese dishes, is used for warming up the body in the relatively wet and cold south, and has become

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<sup>10</sup> Field notes from 10.11.2019

a unique ingredient in China's food culture. These particular elements contained in the decor of the restaurant send out a clear signal that the restaurant is Chinese.

The restaurant is located on two floors: the aboveground, and underground floors. The aboveground area has three parts: a bar, kitchen, dining area and toilet. Walking into the restaurant, the bar and cash register are the first things that the visitor will see. The couplet pasted on the columns on both sides of the bar are Jixiang and Ruyi, which represent good luck and happiness in Chinese culture. On top of the ordering area of the bar, there is a Samantabhadra with the Chinese characters *you qiu bi* and *ying* on its base, which means "all requests will be granted". Mrs. H. believes that Bodhisattva can bring good luck, and will watch over her. On the desk of the cash register, there is a jade Chinese cabbage *bai cai* designed to attract



Figure 1 "Cai Shen"

wealth; the term *Cai* means "wealth" in Chinese. On the right side of the cash register, there is a portrait of the *Cai Shen*. According to Chinese Taoism, Cai Shen is the god of wealth, and his statue is employed in blessing the business. Taoism has had a profound influence on politics, economy, and culture throughout Chinese history. Mrs. H. said that she likes these decorations with Chinese characteristics, as they not only arouse memories of her hometown and give her a sense of security, but also promote an understanding of Chinese culture among more people.

The aboveground dining area holds up to 21 people, and consists of two walls, and a window on the right side of the bar. There is a miniature model tea set hung on one wall, and below the tea set there is an introductory text on Chinese tea culture in the Czech language. Then there is also a traditional Chinese painted folding fan, depicting a tiger standing on the top of the mountain. The tiger and dragon have been symbols occupying a significant position throughout the historical development of China. The tiger and dragon feature in legends in which demons are chased away, evil spirits are slain and houses are guarded, and

they have long been the objects of worship and reverence. The tiger and dragon also symbolise grandeur and power, and beautify authority in Chinese culture. They are perceived as being empowered with vigour and vitality, and feature prominently in national customs and culture. On the middle of the second wall is a Chinese landscape painting of the Three Gorges, one of the famous landscapes of the Yangtze River flows through the southern part of China. The Yangtze is the longest river in China, the longest river in Asia. She explained, “*The Yangtze River is the mother river of my hometown, and it is also my memory of my hometown.*” <sup>11</sup>

Jade decoration is also an essential part of Chinese cultural tradition. The two sides of the painting are decorated with jade carvings, including jade cicadas, accessories, weapons and coins. In the dining room there are also blue and white porcelain of China and European styles positioned in front of the windows.

There are also two symmetrical *Fu* characters hanging on the wall. The character “Fu” first appeared in oracle bone inscriptions, and originally meant “God’s blessing”. It embodies people’s yearning for a happy life; it is a good luck charm with wishes for a better future. Every Spring Festival, every family will paste the character *Fu* in the house.

However, positioned at the top of the wall, there is also a Christmas wreath. Mrs. H. said: “*After all, we live in the Czech Republic and celebrate Christmas. The Christmas wreath is lovely, so we put it here.*” <sup>12</sup>

The underground area of the restaurant, a dining area, accommodates up to 35 people. It includes a semi-enclosed space separated by a screen, behind which there stands a long table for 12 people. There are woodcarvings of plum blossom, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum on the wall. As symbols of uprightness, purity, humility, and perseverance against harsh conditions, the four plants are called “four gentlemen” in Chinese culture and are the traditional virtues of Chinese



Figure 2 *The Great Wall*

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<sup>11</sup> Field notes from 20.12.2019

<sup>12</sup> Field notes from 20.12.2019

culture. On the external wall there are eight typically Chinese-styled landscape paintings with different plants, such as lotus, crane and pine. Mr. Li explained:

*“I like this Chinese calligraphy and paintings with artistic conception. What they draw are plants, animals and scenes, but also the spiritual quality of the Chinese people. They are precious wealth left by history.”*<sup>13</sup>

The restaurant’s decorations provide clues of the owners’ Chinese identity, incorporating several distinctive Chinese elements. I noticed also that although the owners’ use of restaurant decoration mainly includes Chinese elements, there are European imports including Christmas wreaths and snowflakes, local cultural elements with which local Czechs are familiar. Reflecting on this hybrid decor, I am reminded of the remarks by Liu (2008) who, in his study of Chinese food in the United States, suggested that Chinese food culture in the United States is both ethnic and transnational. Likewise, the Chinese food culture of the restaurant in this case study is also ethnic and transnational, integrating Chinese emblems with those of the local culture.

In summary, the owners have invested much effort in the decoration, with the aim of drawing visitors’ attention to characteristic Chinese cultural elements and symbols. Mrs. H. also told me that she is currently saving up money for re-designing and re-decorating the restaurant and menu which will incorporate more Chinese elements, carvings and paintings, which will enable Czech patrons to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese culture. For Mrs. H., the selection and positioning of features and symbols in the restaurant’s existing decor has been guided by sentiment, with each feature evoking memories and associations with her home town and country.

#### **4.3.2 The Triple Menu and its reflection of Chinese culture**

The triple menu not only provides customers with a wide choice of dishes, but is also a significant transmitter of Chinese culture. The home page shows a map of China and a brief introduction to China, including China’s climate, history, geographical location, customs and habits, as well as diet and hobbies. The listings of dishes on the menu each have an

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<sup>13</sup> Field notes from 20.12.2019

annotation detailing the raw materials and cultural stories behind the dish. The menu introduces the customer to both Chinese cuisine and China itself, providing background information on the origin and development of Chinese food, including different types of food and flavour characteristics.

Importantly, there are three different types of menus provided for different customers according to their preferences: fast-food, a standard menu, and a traditional Chinese menu. The fast-food menu, mainly composed of Czech-Chinese food, is divided into three categories: soup, set meal, and snacks. The menu, with its captions in Czech and English, is intuitive and in line with the characteristics of fast food culture, namely cheapness and convenience.

The standard menu is in Czech, English, Russian and Chinese. It is divided into eight parts: cold dishes, soup, soup noodles, staple food, hot dishes, speciality dishes, snacks, and desserts and drinks. Fast food is also listed in this menu, and is divided into six categories: pork, beef, duck, chicken, seafood, and vegetarian. The speciality dishes part consists mainly of traditional Chinese food. Compared to fast food, the ordering process for speciality dishes is more elaborate, and the price of a speciality dish is generally higher.

The traditional Chinese food menu is in Chinese and English, and the dishes differ from the standard menu. It offers more traditional Chinese dishes than the standard menu, and the food on offer is categorized differently, into five categories: cold dishes, soup, soup noodles (powder), staple food, and hot dishes. Mrs. H. explained:

*“These dishes, launched according to the requirements of our guests in recent years, are different from that of other regions in China, and its taste are vibrant. Besides Zhejiang dishes, there also [are dishes with] much different flavours, such as Sichuan dishes and northeast dishes on the menu. Moreover, the raw materials of these dishes can also be found locally in Czechoslovakia, but the cooking methods are more complex and time-consuming than the Czech-Chinese food.”<sup>14</sup>*

She also explained why there is no Czech language translation [verbatim]:

*“Because our Czech language is not very good to translate it accurately, this menu is*

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<sup>14</sup> Field notes from 26.12.2019

*just in Chinese and English. Moreover, due to that the number of translations is relatively little, and our dishes are still being updated, we will find a professional translator in future. However, I am also preparing a new menu and taking some pictures to make it easier for people who do not know Chinese food to order.”*<sup>15</sup>

In order to cater to customers from different parts of China, she specially added Sichuan and northern dishes to the menu. At the same time, she caters to the tastes of the local Czechs by retaining Czech-style Chinese food, although she has tried to recommend more traditional Chinese food to the locals. The restaurant’s owners are of the opinion that while this practice has diminished the authenticity of the dishes on offer, the new menus are drawing in more customers to the restaurant, both Chinese and locals.

#### **4.3.3 Food preparation and flavour**

In China, there is a saying, *nan mi bei mian*, which means that people living in the south of China eat rice, while the people who live in the north always eat wheat. The phrase translates as, “*Sweet taste in the south, salty taste in the north, sour taste in the East and spicy taste in the West*”. In terms of food taste, there are five primary flavours: Bashu, Qilu, Huaiyang, Guangdong, and Fujian. There are around 50 kinds of cooking methods for preparing Chinese food, 24 of which comprise mainly frying, steaming, frying, braising and boiling. When the restaurant opened, most Chinese food items of offer were sweet-tasting dishes originating from the south of the country; over time, spicy Sichuan food and salty northern China food were added to the menu. According to Mrs. H. [verbatim]:

*“Many raw materials are not easy to buy, such as my hometown food (Zhejiang food) mainly based on seafood. However, due to that, Czech (Republic) is an inland country, there are few kinds of seafood, and many of them are frozen. In order to avoid the effect of different raw materials, I add dishes like Sichuan cuisine and northern cuisine. On the one hand, I can choose fresh raw materials that can be bought in the Czech Republic; on the*

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<sup>15</sup> Field notes from 26.12.2019

*other hand, I can also meet different needs of customers. After all, my customers come from different countries and regions...’’<sup>16</sup>*

Due to the different ingredients and customer groups, Mrs. H. chooses to offer a variety of food products in an effort to meet the different tastes of customers and to solve the problem of high prices or lack of raw materials. These types of cuisine mainly include Zhejiang cuisine, Sichuan cuisine, northern cuisine and Czech-style Chinese food. In order to convey clearer information on these dishes, it is necessary to supply field pictures and illustrate the ingredients and features of each type of dish.

The first is a Zhejiang dish, which originates from Zhejiang along the coast. The staple food is mainly rice, and the dishes consist mainly of light seafood. Fishball soup (shown above) is a typical Zhejiang dish in southern China. Fish balls consist of meat scraped from yellow croaker or Spanish mackerel. The soup used to boil fish balls



*Figure 3 Fishball soup*

consists merely of water mixed with rice vinegar, pepper and scallion. This dish is very popular with customers in southern China, and in this case study is the restaurant owner’s favorite dish. However, this dish requires fresh fish, which is more expensive and not easy to store, so the restaurant relies more on other dishes.

Secondly, there is Sichuan cuisine. Sichuan food includes Sanxiang, Sanjiao and Sanliao. Sanxiang refers to shallot, ginger and garlic, Sanjiao to pepper and Chinese prickly ash, and Sanliao to vinegar, Pixian bean paste, and mash (Jiang 2010). Mapo tofu, one of the representatives of Sichuan food, features prominently in Sichuan cuisine and provides its distinctive ‘spicy-ness’. The main ingredient is tofu, the auxiliary is garlic



*Figure 4 Mapo tofu*

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<sup>16</sup> Field notes from 16.01.2019



sprout and minced beef, which can be replaced by other meat, and the seasoning consists of bean paste, chili powder, pepper powder and soy sauce. Many areas of China have a tradition of eating spicy food, so adding Sichuan food draws in more Chinese customers to the restaurant.

In addition, the Fried Pork in Scoop (Guo bao rou), a typical dish emanating from northeast China, is compared with the Kuře ve sladkokyselém omáčku (sweet and sour chicken), one of the Czech-Chinese dishes on offer. In traditional Chinese food, the main sour and sweet dishes contain fish, or pork and beef. During the Qing dynasty, a chef Zheng created the Fried Pork in Scoop dish, a combination of Chinese and Western flavours, because he needed to entertain guests from all over the world.

The production processes for pot-wrapped meat and sweet and sour chicken are roughly similar. Firstly, the salted pork or chicken is coated with starch and fried, and then drenched with a dressing made of sugar, vinegar and soy sauce. The difference is that carrot, pea and pineapple are added to the sweet and sour chicken to brighten the colour and increase the sweet and sour tastes. According to Mrs. H.,

*“We tried only to serve traditional Chinese food, but the response of customers was not particularly good. Many local people do not like spicy dishes. And of course, for local people, we also provide Chinese food more suitable for their taste, such as pork and chicken liked by the Czech. We also combine their traditional dishes to stir fry with cream sauce and add some fried or roasted food.”*<sup>17</sup>

Besides sweet and sour chicken, there are many other fusion dishes, including chop



Figure 5 Guo bao rou



Figure 6 sweet and sour chicken

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<sup>17</sup> Field notes from 16.01.2019



suey and Kung Pao on the menu. Chop suey, a typical fusion dish, is a transliteration of Chau tsap Sui in Cantonese, which originally referred to simple fried dishes in Chinese food, for which the raw materials are mixed with various kinds of vegetables and meat. There are no fixed recipes and cooking requirements, and the ingredients and cooking are simple and fast, respectively. However, the most prominent innovation in Chinese cuisine occurred in the United States. Kuřecí chop suey, a popular fast food dish served in Chinese restaurants in the Czech Republic, consists mainly of sliced stir-fried chicken with bean sprouts, mushrooms, broccoli, carrots, green beans and other vegetables, as well as creamy vegetable sauce. Kung Pao, another popular dish, has undergone a transformation in the Czech Republic. Gongbao in Chinese originally refers to the title of officials in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and its origins are related to the fried chicken in soy sauce in Shandong cuisine. Later, it was improved and developed by an official titled Gongbao in Shandong Province in the Qing Dynasty, to form a new dish - Gongbao (Kung Pao), or diced chicken (Zhao 2014). The traditional Kung pao chicken, which is called Kuřecí Kung Pao in Czech, is preserved in the menu. Besides, since pork is a commonly used ingredient in the Czech Republic, it is easy to buy, so the menus also include Vepřové Kung Pao (Kung pao pork).

The Czech-Chinese food range brings in Czech characteristics into Chinese cuisine. These dishes are usually served fried or roasted. In general, Czech-Chinese dishes bear a resemblance to traditional Czech meals such as Svickova. The Czech-Chinese food consists mainly of set meals of meat (including pork, beef and seafood), vegetables, bean curd, cream sauce, staple food (including rice), fried noodles, fried rice noodles, as well as fried shrimp, and Smažený sýr with French fries. In short, Czech-Chinese food is more in line with the Czech diet.

Meanwhile, depending on seasons and availability of ingredients, the restaurant will also provide some special dishes from time to time. For example, in summer there will be steamed crabs, wild vegetables, and cold noodles on offer. During traditional Chinese festivals, such as the Spring Festival, dumplings may be available. For these special dishes, the restaurant will make announcements of seasonal dishes to Chinese customers via the chat group in advance, and include recommendations to local customers when they are placing orders. The restaurant will also publish pictures and accompanying captions for

special dishes on the chat app. The design of recipes and changes of dishes also reflect the personal preferences of the operators who seek to retain traditional Chinese characteristics whilst adapting to local cultural habits. They hope that the local Czechs will learn more about and appreciate Chinese food and culture, and not feel that their own identity and cuisine are being challenged or disregarded.

#### **4.3.4 Waiters as living, moving cultural symbols**

In addition to the static menu and decoration, the waiters and waitresses – with their walking back and forth, their interactions between employees and operators, and their communication with employees, operators and customers – are cultural symbols moving in the dynamic cultural scene. The owner perceives them as essential mediators through which Chinese culture is transmitted to Czech customers.

The sight of Chinese waiters and waitresses shuttling through the restaurant rooms also informs customers about Chinese attire, as well as the appearance and personality of Chinese people.

The staff within and operators of the restaurant come from Zhejiang province, south China. The waiters and Mrs. H. each wear a modified Chinese dress with patterns: the upper outer garment is a Chinese style Tang suit with lotus, plum blossom and peony embroidering, which echoes with the Chinese landscape paintings in the restaurant and is an icon of Chinese culture.

The communication between operators and employees is mainly in the dialect indigenous to the aforementioned province. Mrs. H. and Mr. L. can speak Chinese, Czech, German, English and a little Russian, so there is almost no language barrier when they communicate with customers coming to dinner. They will talk about daily life and ask customers whether they are satisfied with the dishes. The service workers can speak Chinese, Czech and English. However, Czech and English are limited to brief exchanges relating to meals, so there is not much communication between them and Czech customers. According to Mrs. H., *“When the restaurant is not busy, I often chat with customers, to know whether the food is good or not and learn more about the local culture and introduce*

*Chinese culture.*”<sup>18</sup>

For example, on Spring Festival, the Chinese New Year, and a day when she holds a family reunion, she usually issues some small practical gifts with Chinese elements to the customers. Last year, she distributed copies of a calendar with Chinese landscape paintings. This year, she made some canvas bags with Chinese characters. She uses gift-giving to increase her interaction with customers. On the one hand, through these gifts with Chinese cultural symbols, she wants to show the Czechs about the Chinese culture; on the other hand, it is also aimed at increasing the emotional and cultural exchanges with customers, and consolidating the personal ties with them.

#### **4.3.5 Customers' experience**

In the interviews, the customers articulated their understanding of Chinese culture through their dining experience. Most of them said that Chinese restaurants are a window through which to promote Chinese food and culture, and widen the Czech people's understanding of China, enrich Czech catering culture and boost cultural exchange. At the same time, some customers said that in the context of the restaurant, the scope for learning about Chinese culture is limited. One customer, Peter, opined:

*“When entering the restaurant, you can see many decorations with Chinese style, including things on the wall or table as well as service workers, which are introducing Chinese culture. Due to the fragmentary and shallow illustration of Chinese's culture, it is impossible to have a deep understanding of Chinese culture here. I [worked] in Beijing for ten years. I know that the cultures differ from each other in different regions of China, but there are only a few of them displayed here. Secondly, there is no performance. If coordinated with fit dance, Chinese songs broadcasted in the restaurant will get a better effect. Chinese restaurants offering Czech people with Chinese food enrich Czech-catering culture, and contribute to the cognition of Chinese customs for Czech people. In my opinion, a successful ethnic restaurant should show more national culture and bring customers a different experience. Besides, [a restaurant serving] only traditional Chinese food*

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<sup>18</sup> Field notes from 25.12.2019

*emphasizing the authentic taste can bring out national characteristics. In some traditional Czech restaurants, music performances and interactive dance performances impressed me. Besides, service, the image and communication way and the behaviour of service workers, also [form] an important part of the culture.”*<sup>19</sup>

Another customer remarked,

*“I think the effect of cultural display in restaurants is not good, because most people are coming here to eat and pay less attention to other things.”*<sup>20</sup>

According to the interview data, to some extent, there is the perception that Chinese restaurants function as a window into Chinese culture. Hence, with multicultural globalization, ethnic restaurants display different cultures to customers via the decor, menu and other emblems conveying unique national characteristics. Customers can also gain a deeper understanding of the cultural characteristics of different nationalities and countries through such interaction. At the same time, there are also limitations to the customer's understanding of the relevant culture via these media alone. There are a number of factors to consider. First of all, the exhibition and catering within the catering establishment are determined by business positioning. If the ethnic restaurant wants to show their national culture, they should pay attention to the role of national culture, so the customers can better understand the cultural connotation. Secondly, the extent to which cultural information is transmitted to the customer depends to a significant extent on the customer's own curiosity. Only customers who are engaging enough, who are observing the environment, will become mindful of the cultural atmosphere in the restaurant. The knowledge and background of customers also affect their cognition of national culture. Generally, customers look forward to learning about ethnic culture, experiencing different food as well as exchanging culture through pictures, characters, video, and performances relating to or being provided in restaurants.

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<sup>19</sup> Field notes from 25.01.2020

<sup>20</sup> Field notes from 21.02.2020

## **4.4 The restaurant as a venue for social interaction**

Following the advancement of *Homo Sapiens* during the Ice Age and the formation of social culture and catering from around 8000BC onwards, food, which previously served a merely physical need, has since developed specific social attributes and has become a particular cultural phenomenon connected with certain functions in the daily lives and social activities of people, meeting their own psychological and social demands from various aspects. One critical social function of catering is to regulate interpersonal relationships through everyday catering activities amongst the different subjects, in order to fortify the unity and cooperation amongst individuals or groups. (Marchisio 2006 p.5)

Ethnic catering not only entertains the curiosity of consumers from different countries and ethnicities, but also meets their food-related needs described above, thus engendering a sense of belonging and identification. The restaurant in this case study is an example of this function: for its Chinese employees, it encapsulates their entire social networks all over Czech Republic; as for the Chinese customers, it serves as their spiritual home; for the Czech locals, it is a place to experience and understand a culture from a different country.

### **4.4.1 Staff**

#### **4.4.1.1 Restaurant owners**

In this sub-section, I shall focus on the reasons why the restaurant owners chose to relocate abroad, the reasons for their choice of industry, and the ways by which their business has survived and prospered over the years.

In the 1990s, a mass exodus of people left China, mainly from the coastal provinces. The main destination countries were the United States and major European countries. Although China had implemented its opening-up policies and reform, its economy still lagged at that time. Therefore, having few options, many coastal cities in China felt dissatisfied with the current situation and chose to relocate abroad.

As Mrs. H. recounted:

*“At that time, we only earned over 80 RMB a month as a teacher in China, but I could earn 10 times more in Germany. Though the living expenses were higher, I could lead a better life. We can also get better living conditions for our children.” (Interviewee 1,*

Mrs. H.)<sup>21</sup>

In addition, Mr. L. said:

*“It happened that one of my friends was working in Europe at that time, so we wanted to go abroad to strive for a better future when we were still young.” (Interviewee 2, Mr. L.)<sup>22</sup>*

Mrs. H. and Mr. L. were two Chinese citizens who decided to go abroad in the 1990s. Although they chose to depart from their higher-status jobs and establish a Chinese restaurant in Europe, their decision was a financially prudent one guided mainly by recognition of the great differential between the valuation of currencies between European nations and China. In addition, cultural factors played a role, as any social action is inseparable from a certain cultural environment. According to Malinowski (1944), *“All organisations and coordination behaviours are the result of traditional continuity, and each culture has different forms.”* Both immigration culture and chain immigration together constitute a strong cultural factor that has promoted the upsurge of Chinese immigration overseas in recent years.

The restaurant owners admitted that one of the main challenges they face in the workplace is the language barrier. Although they had practiced English teaching prior to emigrating, thereafter they had to deal with the more complex language systems in continental European countries. Upon arrival in Czechoslovakia they experienced considerable difficulties, but soon managed to secure positions in a local Chinese restaurant via a referral by a friend.

Mr. L. recounted:

*“You know that we were English teachers, so I could speak English in Germany at the beginning, but it was not the everyday language used by them. It was very difficult to communicate, so we could only work in a Chinese restaurant through the introduction of a friend, assisting with miscellaneous work, or helping the chef with some work. I could also handle orders with some English-speaking customers.” (Interviewee 2, Mr. L.)<sup>23</sup>*

Mrs. H. further explained:

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<sup>21</sup> Interview notes from 31.01.2020

<sup>22</sup> Interview notes from 31.01.2020

<sup>23</sup> Interview notes from 31.01.2020

*“At the beginning, we basically didn’t know how to communicate when we came to open a store. Later, we learned the language through our own continuous practice and study. This was a painful process.” (Interviewee 1, Mrs. H.)<sup>24</sup>*

As the world has become more globalised, increased cultural exchanges have contributed to the spread of Chinese culture worldwide, and its food culture has undergone an unprecedented development. A growing number of Europeans have a predilection for Chinese food, and growing numbers of overseas Chinese students and tourists are choosing the Czech Republic. This trend has generated more customers and revenue for the Chinese restaurants in the Czech Republic. Mrs. H. said:

*“The situation now is definitely getting better. Now you can go anywhere in the world by plane, so many Czechs who have been to China also like to come to our restaurant, and they will also introduce the delicious Chinese food to their friends. In the past few years, travel and overseas education in the Czech Republic have become more popular. The number of overseas Chinese students in the Czech Republic has increased more than tenfold. We didn’t have many international students before, but now Chinese students are our largest customer bases. We also provide them with delivery services, so that they can eat delicious Chinese food even studying in a foreign country.” (Interviewee 1, Mrs. H.)<sup>25</sup>*

The number of international students going into these restaurants has risen, and there are Chinese students who have resided in Prague for many months or years, and thus have become accustomed to ordering Chinese food in these catering venues. They have also prompted the restaurants to employ changes in order to provide more customer-compliant services.

#### **4.4.1.2 Restaurant service workers**

This sub-section focuses on the service workers’ wages, employee benefits and working environment, and explores their views on future development.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Interview notes from 31.01.2020

<sup>25</sup> Interview notes from 09.01.2020

<sup>26</sup> There are two interviewees Zhou and Zhang in this chapter, both of the interview took place on 31.01.2020 in the restaurant.

According to Zhang:

*“The main reason for going abroad for work is the fierce competition in China. It is difficult for us without academic qualifications or skills to find a job in China. Although working in the service industry [here] is hard, the pay is better and the workload is lighter overseas than in China. As a waiter in China, you may have to work more than ten hours a day, and it’s impossible to have two days off a week like now. But here [Czech Republic] I can earn about 10,000 yuan by working about ten hours a day. If I am in China, it is impossible for me to earn 10,000 yuan a month.” (Interviewee 3, Zhang)<sup>27</sup>*

Zhang has lived in the Czech Republic for ten years, working as a waitress in the restaurant. For Zhang, by working in a Chinese restaurant in the Czech Republic she is better off as she earns much more than she could as a waiter back in China; this is the main reason why she is happy to continue living and working in the Czech Republic. Moreover, Zhang’s husband and children live in the Czech Republic and have no relatives living in China, so it would be impractical for her to return to China.

Another service worker in the restaurant, Zhou, expressed a slightly different view:

*“To be honest, I would still choose to return to China. After all, my family is there. And I am the only child of my family, so I want to work abroad and save some money to return to China and start a small business when I’m still young. If I have the opportunity and ability to bring my parents over to live together, I may choose to stay in the Czech Republic. But if I still work in a restaurant, I will have no chance to accompany them. After all, although the work is not very tiring every day, it takes a lot of time as you don’t know when the guests will come. That being said, I feel satisfied. The treatment and salary provided by the boss are quite good, and our relationship is very good. They take care of me just like my brothers and sisters and besides work, they also care for me in the daily life.” (Interviewee 4 Zhou)<sup>28</sup>*

Twenty-five-year-old Zhou also works as a waitress in the restaurant. Although both she and Zhang came to the Czech Republic in search of higher salaries, she intends to return to China afterwards, unlike Zhang. She still has relatives in China, and because her life in the Czech Republic is quite straightforward, as a young person, she said that she *“does not want*

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<sup>27</sup> Interview notes from 09.01.2020

<sup>28</sup> Interview notes from 09.01.2020



*to be a restaurant waitress forever”.*

Both Zhou and Zhang feel satisfied with their salaries and the working environment. Compared with other Chinese restaurants, the restaurant management permits them more off-time, with generous perks including staff meals and holiday benefits, which meet their personal needs. The managers and the frontline staff share a healthy employer-employee relationship almost on a par with friendship, which motivates the frontline staff to work hard. This congenial environment has softened the challenges of living abroad, particularly the difficulty in making friends due to the wide linguistic and cultural gulf. Zhang remarked:

*“It is not difficult to imagine that our life is still quite boring. Because we cannot speak the local language fluently, it is also difficult to make local friends. Our social interaction is confined to guests and colleagues. We spend more time in the restaurant than at home. So, for us, restaurants are the only place where we participate in social activities. And I don’t have any relatives except my husband and a daughter in the Czech Republic.”* (Interviewee 3, Zhang)<sup>29</sup>

Although she does not have a problem with daily communication in Czech, she has struggled to find a better job in the Czech Republic and enter into more in-depth interaction with the locals:

*“When I first came to work in this restaurant, because my previous residence was too far, the boss found a new apartment for me, and we would get paid in time on a monthly basis. I would get a bonus when the business was booming. The boss would send me home and invite me to his house to have a party on holidays. So, for me, this meant not just a workplace and the relationship between the boss and me was not just employment. Probably because we are both Chinese living abroad, our relationship would naturally be closer. They are more like my brothers and sisters, and this restaurant is more like my home.”* (Interviewee 4 Zhou)<sup>30</sup>

The everyday lives of the restaurant employees are quite simple. They seldom connect with people outside the restaurant, which in turn serves almost as a village wherein their work and social interactions are almost entirely based. For them, the restaurant is not just

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<sup>29</sup> Interview notes from 09.01.2020

<sup>30</sup> Interview notes from 09.01.2020

another workplace; it is their home in the Czech Republic, a place that carries both their joys and sorrows.

The Chinese employees appreciate the restaurant as being a combination of their workplace and family home, and their emotional attachment to this restaurant is indisputable.

#### 4.4.1.3 Restaurant Chefs

The restaurant has two chefs, both of whom are migrant workers who trained in China and obtained chef qualification certificates afterward. In China, the chef industry is highly laborious and competitive. Moreover, the global demand for good Chinese chefs is strong, with high wages often being offered to attract these chefs to relocate abroad.

Li, the restaurant's chef, said,

*“For me, it is not difficult to find a job. There are many Chinese restaurants in the Czech Republic, but there are not many Chinese who can work as chefs, and the number of people passing the exam to get a chef certificate is few, so basically I can choose the restaurant I want to work for as well as the pay and working conditions that I am satisfied with.” (Interviewee 5, Li)<sup>31</sup>*

Li's assistant, Liu, is mainly responsible for preparing and making simple dishes in the restaurant, and holds a different view:

*“The reason for working abroad is to earn more money than in China. I am not a star chef, but have just passed the elementary exam, so I can only work in a small restaurant in China. In contrast, working abroad is less stressful and more cost-effective.” (Interviewee 6, Liu)<sup>32</sup>*

The differing views between Li and Liu imply that Chinese restaurants in the Czech Republic need good Chinese chefs, as well as better working conditions and choices for Chinese chefs.

In many countries, immigrants tend to be concentrated in the gastronomical industry. The best Chinese chefs can earn up to twice their original salaries. However, in China, due to its large population density and its particularly complex Chinese food culture, the requirements for chefs are more stringent. In this sense, Chinese food being offered by

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<sup>31</sup> Interview notes from 09.01.2020

<sup>32</sup> Interview notes from 10.01.2020

many Chinese restaurants in foreign countries are different from that being served in China; they tend to be fusion dishes that have been improved to cater to European tastes. In a way, these immigrant chefs have gradually formed their own set of patterns and tastes. Furthermore, the requirements on cooking methods and craftsmanship outside China tend to be less stringent, which imperceptibly lowers the threshold in the industry and creates better opportunities for migrant workers abroad.

#### **4.4.2 Customers**

During the study period (November 2019 to February 2020), according to the field notes, the main customers were local Czech and Chinese residents. During lunchtime on weekdays, the majority of Czech customers were office employees working nearby, and most of them preferred takeaways. Around the same time, several students living nearby, especially international students, would enter the restaurant. During the evenings on weekdays, most of the Czech residents arriving preferred to dine inside the restaurant, although some ordered takeaways. The weekends witnessed many Czech customers arranging a party, generally at a fixed time on a weekly or monthly basis. During the weekends, the international students were more likely to order takeaway food during lunchtime and evenings. Additionally, many Koreans and Americans would order lunch and dinner in the restaurant.

Overall, most of the restaurant customers during the study period were Czechs, Chinese, Americans and Koreans who work and study in Prague. Most of them who have dinner in the evenings were regular customers. Furthermore, there are many tourists who come and dine in the restaurant, which is understandable, given that the restaurant is surrounded by many hotels and is close to the city centre.

##### **4.4.2.1 Chinese customers - reflections on cultural belonging**

###### **4.4.2.1.1 Students studying in the Czech Republic, and Local Chinese**

During the fieldwork, I conducted some interviews with some international students and Chinese citizens who had obtained residency status. These groups were similar: they have lived in the Czech Republic for at least a year, and constitute a large customer base for Chinese restaurants, with many of them becoming regular customers.

The international students are mostly newcomers who to a large extent are

unaccustomed to the local Czech Republic environment and culture, and who may be struggling to integrate. They are more sensitive and may feel homesick, and they carry a great emotional need for an outpost hosting a culturally familiar environment that is frequented by their kinsmen. According to Sun:

*“It is difficult to find...delicious and affordable Chinese restaurant [food] in the Czech Republic. I lived in Poděbrady when I first came to the Czech Republic. There were only two Chinese restaurants, and the dishes offered in each Chinese restaurant were almost the same, being the kind of Chinese food prepared for the Czechs. But in my opinion, this was a new style combining Chinese and Western elements and could not meet my needs. What I need is authentic Chinese food, whether it is Sichuan cuisine, Cantonese cuisine, hot pot, or Barbecue. I have lived in China for 20 years with my daily diet being like this. It is hard for me to get used to such transformed Chinese food as I am accustomed to authentic Chinese food.” (Interviewee 8 Sun)<sup>33</sup>*

Twenty-year-old Sun is a Chinese international student who is completing his third year of study in the Czech Republic. In the interview, Sun noted that he could not adapt to the local food when he first came to the Czech Republic. In his first year of study, there were only two Chinese restaurants. The food provided by the Czech Chinese restaurants was different to that back in China, in terms of taste and ingredients. This unexpected change made him feel greatly homesick. Fortunately, his attention was drawn to the restaurant that is the research object of this case study:

*“My friend discovered this restaurant by accident. He recommended this restaurant to me when we were chatting. When I first came here, I thought this restaurant did not have a nice decoration and stylish menu, so I was quite worried about whether it could provide delicious Chinese food. But now I come here twice a week for almost a year. It has enabled me to find the taste of my hometown. Though not as tasty as dishes offered by top restaurants, the home-cooked dishes are enough for me to taste authentic Chinese food. During the COVID-19 epidemic, they also provided food to our international students through takeaway food and would give us some small gifts every time (such as drinks or extra dish), especially when the world is grappling with the epidemic. As an international student, I don't have any relatives abroad. The care from my compatriots has made me feel that I would not be alone and my heart has been warmed.” (Interviewee 7 Huang)<sup>34</sup>*

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<sup>33</sup> Interview notes from 16.03.2020

<sup>34</sup> Interview notes from 16.03.2020

Huang is also a Chinese international student studying at a university in Prague. She was drawn to the restaurant via a friend's recommendation. Although the restaurant's decor did not appeal to her, the food provided by the restaurant tasted similar to the food back in China, so she approved of its authenticity. Moreover, she said that her interactions with the restaurant owners and employees have reduced her feelings of loneliness. In short, by dining in the restaurant she has gained a sense of belonging.

Unlike the two aforementioned students, Guo, a Chinese immigrant who has lived in the Czech Republic for 20 years, said that he does not often go to Chinese restaurants:

*"We don't usually go to Chinese restaurants, but on traditional Chinese festivals or memorable days we will choose to eat in Chinese restaurants, because it is troublesome to cook some special dishes at home, or the taste is not good if we make them. Going to a Chinese restaurant not only satisfies our appetite, but also our sentiments of celebration. When the table is full of familiar hometown dishes, for a moment, you will forget that you have been abroad for many years and have already [raised] children. Here, we have good times with our friends and forget all the troubles."* (Interviewee 12 Guo)<sup>35</sup>

Guo prefers to eat in a Chinese restaurant only during festivals, when he can celebrate with his friends and enjoy a more festive atmosphere. In his case, it is a manifestation of a sense of ritual. Guo's identity as Chinese becomes more apparent when he celebrates during the festivals, eating Chinese food and meeting his Chinese friends.

According to the interviewees, the restaurant not only meets their culinary expectations, but has also enabled them to meet many friends and experience joy. According to Qian:

*"The proprietress of the restaurant is really nice, and the waitress is also warm-hearted. During school, I was not used to school lunch, so I would eat at this restaurant every noon. Over time, I got familiar with everyone and even provided some suggestions for improvement from time to time. The boss would often ask me if I had any new ideas to improve the quality of their dishes. During the summer vacation, I went to restaurants to serve as the waitress for a period, which allowed me to fully integrate into this environment. I also deeply experienced the hardship and fun of the service industry. During my work, I made new friends from the same school, and even the proprietress recognized me as a nominal foster daughter and she would ask me to participate whenever there were festivals or restaurant activities. I think this was my biggest reward in this*

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<sup>35</sup> Interview notes from 25.01.2020

restaurant.” (Interviewee 9 Qian)<sup>36</sup>

During my interview with Qian, I learned that she used to work in the restaurant for a while and still had a close relationship with Mrs. H. During her stint in the restaurant, she also made great friends and expanded her social network.

I also interviewed Wu, a milk teashop owner who has cooperated with the restaurant:

*“I have been living in the Czech Republic for 15 years. Mrs. H. and I knew each other from the very beginning. I also ran my own milk tea shop in Prague. In the start-up days of their business, I also gave them support and helped them find a street shop at a favorable location, and we still have business cooperation until now. Because my shop is far from the city center, I provide special milk tea for their shop sometimes; so many customers choose to go there to drink for milk tea. When I go to deliver milk tea, the boss would cook lunch or dinner for me. Although they were not high-end dishes, this reciprocal business model and our long-term relationship for over a decade has allowed me not only to earn money, but also consolidate my relationship with my friends. This is something so precious.”* (Interviewee 13 Wu)<sup>37</sup>

Wu runs a milk tea shop in Prague and has lived in the city for nearly 15 years. She and Mrs. H. are very close friends. In order to expand her customer base and that of her friend, she supplies the restaurant with hand-made milk tea, and has since maintained a long-term cooperative relationship with the restaurant.

*“Catering is a medium of emotional exchange amongst people, who use food to express their emotions in daily life.”* (Marchisio 2005)

Reflecting on the interviews, it is evident that several Chinese immigrants who have chosen to study and live in the Czech Republic have gained a sense of belonging and identity via their custom with the restaurant.

#### **4.4.2.1.2 Chinese Tourists**

With the acceleration of globalisation under the Belt and Road Initiative, the Czech Republic has become a popular destination country for many Chinese tourists visiting Europe. From 2007 to 2018, over 500,000 Chinese tourists visited the Czech Republic (Czech Statistical Office 2019). A growing number of Chinese tourists have aspirations for moving to the Czech Republic. However, after eating Western food for a few days, Chinese tourists often sense a longing for Chinese food. Zheng, a tourist from China, provided this

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<sup>36</sup> Interview notes from 25.01.2020

<sup>37</sup> Interview notes from 21.02.2020

description of “Western food”:

*“(‘Western’ food) feels quite novel in the first few days. It is meaningful for tourists who don’t often go abroad to taste authentic Western food and understand Western food culture. But after a long time, I gradually feel that the variety of Western food is relatively simple. For example, we choose Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, and Poland as the countries to visit. The cuisine of these countries is similar. After a few meals, everyone began to have some discomfort after the initial novelty passed, and everyone wanted to eat Chinese food that we had eaten for decades. Besides, everyone came from different cities in China, so it was difficult for us to decide which flavor of Chinese food to choose from. Through [searches] on mobile apps, we got information about this restaurant. It was mentioned that it could provide dishes of different Chinese cuisine, and the taste was good. This was why we chose to come here. After tasting the food by ourselves, we found that the dishes did live up to our expectations.” (Interviewee 10 Zheng)<sup>38</sup>*

Zheng’s understanding of Western food is that it is considerably different from Chinese food; for him, Czech traditional dishes and Czech-style Chinese food are Western foods. Moreover, he initially had a strong desire to try Western food, but afterwards wanted to return to his familiar eating habits.

Wang, another tourist, remarked:

*“This trip made me understand that I could only eat Chinese food with my Chinese appetite. It does not mean that Western food is not delicious. It is because I cannot fully understand their food culture when eating Western food. The formed eating habits clash with Western food culture. For a simple example, in China, restaurants will provide guests with hot water or tea before serving, but in foreign countries, almost all drinks are cold and you can’t find hot water. And Chinese people pay attention to the combination of meat and vegetables, but after eating the grilled pork knuckle in Germany and the grilled ribs in the Czech Republic, though they were indeed delicious, we felt [they were] very greasy after eating them [just] once. I might not want to eat meat again for the next few weeks. But after a few meals, you still had to choose some fast food or fried food, which made me miss our Chinese food very much. Several of my friends felt the same.” (Interviewee 11 Wang)<sup>39</sup>*

The interviewees opined that although they were prepared to accept the new food

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<sup>38</sup> Interview notes from 20.12.2019

<sup>39</sup> Interview notes from 28.11.2019

culture, they struggled to integrate into it. They also felt a need for their own national cultural representations, which might permit them some flexibility amidst their progress towards acceptance. They further said that they might not entirely embrace a new culture to which they cannot adjust themselves, and that they have a very strong dependence and adhesion to their inherent culture formed over the years.

#### **4.4.3 Customers from other South-Asian countries and their cultural proximity**

Some of the customers come from other South-Asian countries, and although their sense of identity is not exactly the same as that of Chinese customers, theirs is considerably different in the context of the Czech Republic. One interviewee, Cha, comes from South Korea. One reason why I approached this interviewee is because there is a high degree of cultural similarity between China and South Korea, albeit with some subtle differences. Furthermore, both Chinese and Korean foods are popular amongst people in both countries. According to Cha:

*“I came to this restaurant through the introduction of a friend. I really like the spicy beef in their restaurant. Because beef is a type of expensive ingredient in Korea, beef will not be used in large quantities as the main ingredient in traditional Korean dishes, while Chinese food is different. A large piece of beef will be used as the main course. When I was a child, my parents would take me to eat beef only in the New Year or on my birthday. Now, Chinese food is popular in South Korea and I’ve been lucky to travel to China. I have found that Chinese food is so charming with tens of thousands of different dishes and dozens of different branches of cuisine, so I believe it can satisfy the dietary needs of anyone in the world. And Korean cuisine and Chinese cuisine also share many similarities, so it is easy for me to accept it. In terms of price, it is also cheap, and its price performance has exceeded my expectations. You can buy a lot of high-quality food with only a little money.” (Interviewee 14 Cha)<sup>40</sup>*

Cha, also an overseas student in the Czech Republic, is studying for a postgraduate programme at one of the universities in Prague. His attention was drawn to the restaurant via a friend’s recommendation, although he also investigated its evaluation by other customers online. He thinks that Chinese and Korean foods are similar, but prefers Korean over Chinese food for dietary reasons. This perhaps is an example of how differences in cultural background influence people’s choice of cuisine, although they generally find it

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<sup>40</sup> Interview notes from 10.01.2020



easier to accept cuisine pertaining to a similar cultural background and identity.

#### 4.4.4 Czech customers – reflection on cultural differences

As an important consumer group of this Chinese restaurant, the Czech locals' acceptance and identification with Chinese restaurants mark a small but intrepid shift from their own cultural identity. Most of these customers come for the dining experience, but do not know the Chinese culture and have never been to China before. Chinese restaurants are one of the few places where they can experience an exotic culture and its cuisine. Some native Czechs are highly interested in Chinese culture, and some have even stayed in China for a number of years. Their sense of familiarity with Chinese restaurants and Chinese food comes from their own life experiences, and dining in the restaurant conjures up memories and associations. According to Peter:

*“I have been in China for ten years, so I know something about Chinese culture. China is like my second home. I have adapted to the food and language there, so even if I return to the Czech Republic, I still want to eat Chinese food. I also have many Chinese friends living in the Czech Republic, and we often go to Chinese restaurants for dinner. Eating Chinese food is already a part of eating habits for me. It is not only the taste but also the cultural atmosphere of Chinese food and Chinese restaurants, which makes me feel still in China and reminds me of friends and life in China.” (Interviewee 15 Peter)<sup>41</sup>*

Vaclav, another Czech customer, has a different experience from Peter:

*“I have been eating here since the restaurant opened when I just began my career. Now my daughter is five years old. I invited Mrs. H. and Mr. L. when I got married, but they could not attend because they are too busy with the restaurant, but they gave us lovely Chinese porcelain. I like Chinese food here very much because I can have many choices. I like traditional Chinese food, and I order it occasionally, I also like this kind of Czech Chinese food, because there are rice, vegetables and meat in a whole serving, which suits my taste. I invite my family to the restaurant every weekend. [They] (Mrs. H. and Mr. L.) are already familiar friends.” (Interviewee 16 Vaclav)<sup>42</sup>*

Vaclav is a patron of the Chinese restaurant and he often eats there on weekends. Vaclav said that he has a strong emotional attachment with this restaurant because it was there for him when he was starting his career, getting married, and becoming a father. He

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<sup>41</sup> Interview notes from 15.11.2019

<sup>42</sup> Interview notes from 21.02.2020

has many good memories of this restaurant.

I also interviewed a Czech woman, Maria, who is also a patron of the restaurant. She and her friends regularly go for dinner on the last Friday of every month. She narrated:

*“My friends and I come here for dinner every month. We are no longer young, and our children have their own families, so most of us have few people [to talk with]. I like the atmosphere here. The restaurant is beautifully decorated with many Chinese paintings and china. I also like Chinese tea very much, but unfortunately I have never been to China. I often chat with the staff here, and they will tell me a lot about Chinese cultures, such as the Spring Festival and Chinese tea culture. They also tell me that my Chinese zodiac is ‘yang’, which means sheep. I will also tell them some of my stories and Czech history. During the Spring Festival and Christmas we will be given some gifts, which are different every year, including Chinese wine, zodiac calendars and bags. The quantity and taste of the food here are also very suitable for me. Usually, we will sit here for long, and no one will urge us to leave.” (Interviewee 17 Maria)<sup>43</sup>*

For Maria, this restaurant is the memory bank for her and her friends who regularly dine and socialize therein. Concomitantly, their cordial relations with Mrs. H. also helped them learn more about Chinese culture.

Another Czech customer, Ludmila, also values the restaurant as a venue for meeting old friends, and compliments its sympathetic, tolerant atmosphere:

*“We live in a nearby hotel and [have] come to Prague from all over the Czech Republic every year. We are all-blind or have vision problems. We also found this Chinese restaurant by accident. The food in this restaurant is exceptional, and there are many dishes we have not tried before. I like dumplings and dim sum here very much, with tea and hot wine, which make us feel warm in winter. Although I cannot see the restaurant and food, the staff will introduce carefully, which is a pleasant surprise for us. So, since we discovered this restaurant, we come here every year.” (Interviewee 18 Ludmila)<sup>44</sup>*

Ludmila said that although she could not see the restaurant decor or the appearance of the dishes whilst consuming her meals, she experiences Chinese food culture through taste and smell. She also mentioned that Mrs. H. introduced her to the various Chinese decorations in the restaurant as well as the customs during Chinese festivals. She was pleased to experience Chinese food and Chinese culture despite not physically being in

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<sup>43</sup> Interview notes from 17.01.2020

<sup>44</sup> Interview notes from 20.12.2019

China.

In summary, the interviews reveal an increased awareness among some Czech customers of Chinese food culture, which they have gained through experiencing the food and ambience within the restaurant. They appear eager to share their experiences about Chinese food culture with their relatives and friends. This word-of-mouth promotion of the business is also a channel for transmitting Chinese culture. Customers generally expect restaurant owners to understand their needs and respond to feedback. Over the years, by collecting feedback from Czech customers, understanding the difficulties they encountered while dining, and obtaining their evaluation of the food and ambience, the restaurant has familiarised itself with the tastes and needs of Czech customers and has upgraded their service. This is the process by which the local Czech culture is integrated with that of the Chinese.

#### **4.5 Culture fusion - negotiating the cultural difference and proximity**

According to Appadurai (1990), *“The issue of today’s global interaction is the tension between cultural homogeneity and cultural heterogeneity.”*

Globalization can be seen as a process of interaction between cultures, be they sharply contrasting or similar. The consumers’ sense of identification is the key to a restaurant’s survival. The customers’ connection with a restaurant is the confirmation of the fusion culture represented by the restaurant itself. (LiLi 2002) As mentioned, consumers from different countries bring with them different personal choices and tastes, and each of them has a different personal appeal. However, it is possible for all of them to find their own sense of belonging and identity in this restaurant, while meeting their own dietary needs. Chinese culture and Czech culture are exemplary cases of Chinese and Western cultures. Through adaptation and improvisation of Chinese dishes and culinary practices, the Chinese immigrant community in the Czech Republic has developed its own unique Chinese food culture. For example, European countries follow the meal-sharing system, while everyone shares all the dishes in China. Therefore, adapting to cultural differences, Chinese food restaurants in the Czech Republic combine rice and main dishes to produce the current Czech Chinese food style. Considering that most Czechs cannot eat spicy food and prefer eating meat and fried food, Chinese food restaurants in Prague deep-fry and season chicken with sweet and sour sauces, and ‘Sweet and Sour Chicken’ has become a popular choice among Czech locals. Similarly, they have also adjusted the

ratio of rice, meat, and vegetables in each individual dish, increasing the ratio of meat and making it the main component in many meals on offer, in an effort to address the dietary requirements of the locals. Though these modified meals might be classified as localised Chinese food, they are the products of mutual integration of two sharply contrasting food cultures.

Food and restaurants act as mediators. For employees and restaurant owners, the restaurant is also an incubator in which they construct and live out their sense of cultural belonging. For South Asian customers, it is a source of cultural proximity. For Czech customers, it provides an exotic cultural experience.

## 5 Conclusion

*“The conclusions drawn from an in-depth study of such a small part of the social unit may not be completely applicable to the others. However, such a conclusion can be used as a hypothesis or as a comparative material for other surveys, which serve as the best way to get a true scientific conclusion.”* (Fei 2010 p.25)

While on the field, I have learned that the restaurant’s business history, internal and external decorations, and the expression of dishes, altogether demonstrate cultural exchange and gradual integration. Traditional Chinese food spread out from China, and has been manifested in new forms in other parts of the world.

The creolization of catering consumption is a general trend. According to Tibere (2015), *“Creole is used to describe a state of mutual integration and hybridisation. Creolization emphasises the opposition and clash between individuals and groups, influenced by different cultures due to ideological or ethnic variances, laying a foundation for creation of a new culture.”*

On the one hand, the creolization of catering consumption is an instinctive response of people when adapting to changes in their cultural environment. On the other hand, it is the restructuring of personality by people. There are two reasons for the emergence of the creole phenomenon. Firstly, people in the modern society have increasingly stricter requirements for all aspects of catering, including the kitchen environment, food material production and the cultural and symbolic requirements for beverages and food. Secondly, food culture is fluid, and most of the food cultures of all ethnic groups around the world are in continuous dissemination, penetration, absorption and integration through multiple channels, by multiple means and on multiple levels. Changes in the source of raw materials, processing methods and the dining environment of some dishes in restaurants are gradually changing with geography and taste. The tastes of people from different countries will change imperceptibly when they taste different cultures. (LiLi 2002)

*“Food is just like the lens through which we can observe the changing trends of the society. An in-depth exploration of food can help people easily understand historical*

*transformation.*” (Liu 2015)

Food is often equated to the identity of a cultural group, so people use it often to express the cultural identity of their group. According to E.N. Anderson, the Chinese retain their daily dietary habits more permanently and persistently than other immigrant groups and such universal value recognition of Chinese food mainly originates from the same cultural background of the Chinese. Therefore, when the Chinese developed Chinese food in the Czech Republic, they were required to change the Chinese food according to the local environment to win the acceptance of the local customers.

Chinese restaurants in the Czech not only introduced popular Czech dishes such as *Smažený sýr* (fried cheese), but also created new dishes in line with the eating habits of the Czechs such as sour and sweet chicken. Thanks to the localisation of cooking techniques and selection of ingredients, the Czechs have accepted Chinese food graciously. In contrast, those who seek the original experience and authentic flavours of China have also criticised this kind of localisation. However, the characteristics of food not only bring with it a specific cultural individuality but also the potential to get modified into a modern commodity. After entering the European catering market in the Czech Republic, as an ethnic food, Chinese food is not solely enjoyed by original ethnic groups. To expand the value of a local commodity and cater to the modern market, it is an obvious choice to improve and modify ethnic food. Chinese food is not the only one to have experienced a localised improvement in the Czech Republic.

Most Chinese restaurants have transformed Chinese food within a limited scale, forming a standard and fixed model of Chinese food in the Czech Republic. As globalisation deepens, the Czechs have become more familiar with the Chinese culture. Consequently, they have higher requirements for Chinese food and are more curious about it. Some Chinese restaurants also provide the Czechs with menus initially intended exclusively for the Chinese patrons while some have added new flavours and dishes. For example, some Chinese restaurants have started serving hot pot. After tasting such authentic Chinese food, which is different from Czech Chinese food, the Czechs have become more curious about authentic Chinese cuisine, thus egging on Chinese restaurants to make suitable changes to meet customer needs. This process reflects the different stages of the Czechs to accept

Chinese food culture. Through field surveys on restaurants, it can be found that Chinese food culture can and is gradually integrating into the Czech society. It does not only represent the trend of globalisation but also endorses the possibility of food culture fusion between China and the Czech Republic.

Besides, Chinese restaurants in the Czech Republic also endeavour to spread Chinese culture. Due to the difference in cultural backgrounds of China and the Czech Republic, people's perception of the cultural connotation of Chinese food is very different. Therefore, to better express the Chinese culture, apart from merely conveying the Chinese characteristics of dishes, Chinese restaurants in Czech also fulfil their other medium effects during the cultural exchanges between the two countries. Enjoying Chinese food is not only a recognition of the dishes but also an expression of the Czechs' acceptance of Chinese food culture; because apart from making friends with the Chinese, dining in a Chinese restaurant is the most direct way to get familiar with the Chinese culture.

In the meantime, Chinese restaurants also help overseas Chinese find their own cultural identity in their own little ways, like by providing the Czech menu of Chinese food and traditional Chinese food menu and by celebrating the festivals.

Ultimately, through the development of Chinese restaurants, we can see not only the changes and integration of Chinese food culture with that of the local, but also the inheritance and dissemination of overall Chinese culture. (LiLi 2002) It has, even more, reflected a sense of identity and belonging of the Chinese in the Czech Republic. Whether for international students or Chinese workers or Chinese immigrants in the Czech Republic, Chinese food and Chinese restaurants do not simply meet their daily needs, but more so represent a material carrier of their cultural identity and a sense of belonging.

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