

## Social Media and Chinese Food as Popular Culture with Special Reference to Guwahati, Assam, North-East India

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### Abstract

Chinese cuisine can be considered as one of the most popular culinary traditions in India and is also amongst the top culinary cultures in the world. In our home city of Guwahati in the state of Assam, the use of social media, television advertisements and various food delivering applications on our phones for marketing Chinese dishes and recipes is much higher compared to any other cuisines. To show the popularity and demand of the Chinese cuisine, the researcher visited all the Chinese restaurants in Guwahati including the first and oldest Chinese restaurant in Guwahati “*China Town*”. The research work was completed in the year 2019. Many Chinese restaurants were opened in Guwahati. Over the course of time these Chinese restaurants became the centre of attraction in the city. Restaurants such as Chinatown, Ming Room, Chungfa, Confucius, Yo! China etc made Guwahati a popular hub for relishing Chinese cuisines throughout the city. “The close similarity between North East India and China played an important role in influencing Chinese cuisine as most popular one in these eight states. Travel enthusiasts refer to Shillong as the gateway to authentic Chinese food”. (Phukan 2015).

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### Introduction

Social Media has become an integral part of our lives. The invention of smart phones and easy access to the Internet has brought us a powerful tool like social media and it has become an important aspect from a multitude of perspectives in every individual's life in this day and age. It is a computer-based technology through which one can share its own ideas, thoughts and photographs to their online communities. The power of the social media platform is that it can connect to any person who has access to the internet on this Earth. The most popular social media platforms are- Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat etc.

Social media plays a vital role in making any activity or event famous worldwide irrespective of its magnitude. Most of the restaurants or cafes have their accounts on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, twitter etc. which help them to gain their popularity. When we specifically discuss about Chinese restaurants, we must keep in mind as to what kind of social media accounts need to be created. The interested audiences who follow these accounts need to have some minimal level of knowledge regarding Chinese cuisine, for example, names of some popular Chinese dishes. The

Indian populace on social media which follow restaurant pages on Chinese recipes show that they are more inclined towards other cuisines of the world rather than their Indian cuisine. Chinese food culture in India can be considered as a popular culture in a true sense because it is one of the only few cuisines which is prepared by almost all sections of people throughout the country.

### Chinese Food in Facebook

Facebook is one such kind of a social media application which is accessible to all. All Chinese food restaurants have their own page on Facebook. In Guwahati, the major dining places like Chinatown, Confucius and the ones which were closed and replaced with new ones also have their Facebook pages in their respective restaurant's name.

### Chinese Food in Instagram

Instagram is also popular social media application which is mainly used for sharing of digital media. It is very beneficial for the upcoming food vloggers to upload their content with respect to various food related activities. Accounts can also be created on Instagram. Pages of various Chinese restaurants

are also present on this platform. Various restaurants have even created multiple Instagram pages each and this has led to the creation of several food related pages by their competitors, vloggers and fans alike.

### Chinese Food in Twitter

Another useful social media application is Twitter where influential people in top positions of the white-collar world can tweet and can give direct feedback in response to the people who have commented on his/her Twitter page. People who use Twitter can follow world renowned chefs and can also upload food related pictures and videos of the food which they have prepared. Some chefs who are experts on Chinese cuisine have replied and given feedback on Twitter to various interested people and given them suggestions to make the recipes even better.

All the above-mentioned social media platforms have the potential to benefit and help grow various food business, especially the ones with lesser reputation but good cuisine. Social media is a one-stop shop for many of the tools one needs to grow their business. It connects us with people who are interested in our products. It has become an important tool for the digital marketing sector. Different kinds of photo editing app have come out which enhance the food pictures and make it more appealing to the people. The concept of food porn is highly used in social media. If we put the hashtag "#foodporn" in the Instagram search bar, a large number of high-quality food related media will come up. The term "food porn" was coined not in the age of social media but by the feminist critic Rosalind Coward in her book 'Female Desire'.

### Advertisements

Advertisements also played an important role in popularising Chinese food all over India. The hiring of professional actors to perform in advertisements also helped in circulating the idea of foreign cuisine in various parts of the country. Some of the most popularized Chinese food products in India via TV advertisements before the social media era were Ching's Secret and Knorr.

### Ching's Secret

Ching's Secret is an Indian brand of Indian Chinese cuisine ingredients, condiments and ready to eat meals, owned by Capital Foods specializing in a range of products in Indian Chinese, or 'Desi Chinese' cuisine. Ching's Real Chinese Tasty Chinese is the most famous Indo-Chinese advertisement in India. They also have Ching's Secret Masalas which they show Sridevi that too in a double role. Sridevi AKA Miss Dolly Dhillon show you how easy it is to make delicious Ching's Chowmin Hakka Noodles at home in almost no time. The tagline which they use in the advertisement is "kyuki humari ads bhi humare khaane jaisi hai, full on masaledaar, Sabse easy khaana, Ching's Desi Chinese hai banana." Ching's Secret presents a song for their brand which was acted by Ranveer Singh with the title 'My Name Is Ranveer Ching'. Ching's Desi Chinese collaborated with Ranveer Singh and Rohit Shetty and produced 'Ranveer Ching Returns-The War for Desi Chinese'. They believed that the Ching's audience is a really smart, young and cool one. So instead of bore them with another 'bhookh lagi hai-khaana do' ad with moms and kids they would rather entertain the audience with a film. They just made this effort to incline more people towards their product, not trying to change the world. This was their maximum mad tribute to mad max with a Bollywood twist. It's got all the ingredients of a

masaledaar blockbuster including Songs, Heroine, Villain, and food - all with a Desi Chinese way. Ranveer Singh is presently the brand ambassador of Ching's Secret. Earlier it was Shahrukh Khan and Sridevi. They launched a recent ad with Ranveer Singh five months ago. "

### Knorr

Knorr is actually a German food and beverage brand. Knorr India is famous for soups and instant noodles. They have 18 different kinds of soups with pure vegetables and no added preservatives. In noodles, they produced varieties of Chinese noodles like Schezwan, Hot and Spicy noodles and the Soupy noodles which is a magical mix of masala noodles with the goodness of vegetables in a hearty soup. Knorr has extended it to Masalas through which people can now cook restaurant like dishes sitting at home. They have introduced eight new Masalas. Knorr advertisements of soups and the famous soupy noodles made this brand more popular in India with the tagline 'Kha ke piyo ya pi ke khao'. Chinese food especially the noodles with Indian mix is what serves by this brand. It is same with the Ching's Secret. Kajol is mostly associated with Knorr and she is the brand ambassador of Knorr India.

### Mobile Apps for Finding Restaurant

Mobile applications are basically software-based programmes developed for devices like smart phones and tablet devices. The main purpose of this kind of application is to provide immediate result to the users. It can be developed for various entertainment purposes, navigation, education, sports, fitness, finding restaurants, online shopping, etc. Mobile apps are becoming more popular as it can be accessible in any place while other apps need desktop computer to run which is a major drawback.

Several apps have been developed related to food and to find a proper restaurant in the nearest area which can also provide reviews regarding the quality of food and the restaurant's service. Some of the most popular Mobile Apps for finding restaurants and food delivery services are- Zomato, Swiggy, Uber Eats, and Food Panda etc.

The owners of various restaurants claim that the most demanded dishes people order are from the Chinese cuisine. The reviews are mainly given on the dishes along with their service. The restaurants which are mostly searched in a day are the Chinese restaurants or the restaurants which are not completely Chinese but serve Chinese food. Chinese food items are very easy to prepare and can be easily found at cheap prices at many restaurants or stalls. For example, the Reboti Chat House is a famous and one of the oldest street food stalls in the highly populated area of "Panbazar" in Guwahati city where the famous Chinese dish Chicken Chowmein is served at a very cheap and reasonable price of Rs. 50 per plate with no compromise in taste. People in Guwahati also order food from such stalls using various mobile applications for food delivery service. Swiggy and Zomato are two of the most widely used food delivery services throughout the city. Through this we can observe that Chinese cuisine is an integral part of the Indian food culture and owners of food and restaurant businesses are often inclined towards opening chains of Chinese restaurants in various localities to which they have access to. In its true sense, Chinese food can be considered as a Popular Culture in India.

"The concept of popular culture can be witnessed through all this aspect. Popular culture is the culture of masses. Earlier it was believed that a true culture is only for the elite society

and treated others as inferior. The upper class thought that writings of William Shakespeare or the paintings of M.F Hussain can only be considered as culture where as the writings of Cecelia Ahearn or the paintings of Maya Burman is also an art but they are not categorised in terms of culture. In the Open University of UK presented a course on Popular Culture in between 182 and 1987. More than 5000 students enrolled for this course but the course had been closed town permanently in the year 1987. The course was directed by Tony Bennett and evaluated by Terry Eagleton and Raymond Williams and others. Popular culture can be witnessed in different sections like in music as pop music, in films, in sports, Television programs etc."

Popular culture has been defined in various ways by different people in different nations. Anything which becomes popular among the masses or an object which is widely accepted by the people comes under the concept of popular culture. In this case Chinese food has come under the umbrella of popular culture in India.

Some of the major festivals held in Guwahati which highlight the wide acceptance of Chinese food items in Assam and mainly in Guwahati city. They are-

The Great North Eastern Momo Fest which is the North East's first Momo Festival and was organised for the first time in Guwahati on the 5th, 6th and 7th of August, 2016. Guwahati witnessed the most amazing festival regarding Chinese Dimsums or Momos. This Fest was hosted by VAS Incorporated. The three-day festival was organised during the weekend of Friendship Day. The organising team mentioned that they had 14 stalls of different kinds of Momos from all the North Eastern States and also from other countries. They also arranged programmes for the entertainment purpose and the main event which was the centre of attraction of the Fest was the Momo Eating Competition. Social Media helped in popularising such an event.

Pre-Rongali Bihu Festival is one of the most renowned festivals in Assam. The 'Rongali Tourism Festival' is a recent development by the Assam Tourism Department. The fourth edition of Rongali Tourism Festival was held from 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> January at Srimanta Shankar Kalakhetra. Last edition was held at Veterinary Ground, Guwahati. They organised numerous competitions based on art, music and food. In this festival various stalls were set up which included cloth stalls having the traditional attire of Assamese women, ethnic food stalls etc. Apart from all this, they also showcased Assamese theatrical performances and in contrast to that also had rock band performances. In terms of food stalls, apart from the taste of Northeast Indian cuisine, they also had stalls set up selling various Chinese food items in this festival.

## Conclusion

Therefore, we can conclude from the research work based on the year 2019 that people were and still are more driven towards Chinese cuisine than any other cuisine. It has some of the best tasting dishes in the world with affordable prices. Instead of trying food from other countries, consumption of Chinese food is much higher in Guwahati. This shows the popularity or the impact it has created in the minds of the people. Social media has majorly contributed in popularising Chinese food and to make it part of the popular food culture in this country. The popularity of Chinese cuisine shall never diminish in the city of Guwahati, at least in the near future.

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