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**Keywords:** International Health Exhibition; China; world's fairs; Food studies; Victorian studies; Chinese restaurants; informal imperialism; Asian food; restaurant; Japan

**Abstract:**

This paper considers Britain's first large-scale Chinese restaurant, situated within the 1884 International Health Exhibition in London. It broaches the question of what cultural work did this Chinese restaurant and associated tearoom perform by considering two interrelated factors that governed the relationship between Britain and the British Empire, Europe, and the United States and China in the 1880s: The first is the recovery of exhibition culture's key role in the globalization of "foreign" food. Restaurants like those at the "Healtheries" presented "high culture" versions of Asian food in stark contrast to eateries catering to working-class populations in Limehouse and American/Australian Chinatowns and camp kitchens. The exhibitions worked to elevate China above stereotyped dog- and cat-eating "universal omnivores." The second revolves around the situating of China (and Japan) as modern through these exhibition restaurants and their location within an exhibition emphasizing hygiene and industry. I explore how outward-facing displays of culture and aesthetics at such expositions functioned within the networks of diplomacy surrounding Western informal imperialism in China, Qing Dynasty pushback, and intra-Asian competition, alongside new understandings of imperial culture as syncretic and absorptive.

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**“Nothing Corresponding to It in China”: Asian Food at London’s International Health Exhibition, 1884**

The history of Chinese foodways in the West has been dominated by places that saw considerable immigration of Sinosphere populations. What most people outside of East and Southeast Asia—be they consumers or scholars—know about “Chinese food” hails from the context of North America and, to a lesser extent, Britain’s “settler colonies,” especially Australia.<sup>1</sup> The diasporic communities foregrounded in these histories generally involve people from poor, southern Chinese backgrounds who, on arrival at their destination, worked in industries like mining and railroad-building in North America, South Africa, and Australia, or who served as indentured laborers on sugar, pineapple and rubber plantations in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. Many of these laborers migrated on to urban areas, working in and establishing laundry businesses and restaurants, perhaps the two most familiar industries in public perceptions of Chinese immigration.

These narratives about the introduction, adaptation, and dissemination of Chinese foodways into the wider cultural spheres of North America and Australia tell, and have been seen to tell, important and often affirming stories about the birth of the nation, the “taming” of the frontier, the proof positive of the “American dream,” the success of the “model minority,” and the origins of multiculturalism—even when they are also somewhat mythologized and even when they recognize how Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> Recently, there has been greater interest in the foodways of Sinophone diasporic communities, e.g. Cheuk Kwan’s documentary series “Chinese Restaurants” (<http://www.chineserestaurants.tv/>) and chef Lucas Sin’s “distance dining” pandemic project, involving “a dinner series about how Chinese food connects the world” ([junzi.kitchen/distancedining](http://junzi.kitchen/distancedining)). See also Morgan 2020.

foodways have served as flashpoints for histories of racism, prejudice, and workplace discrimination against East and Southeast Asian diasporic communities.

These narratives were already circulating widely in the Anglosphere by the late nineteenth century, alongside related narratives of Chinese peoples as dirty, disgusting, and abject, qualities cathected onto their ostensible diet of rats, dogs, and other objectionable foodstuffs.<sup>2</sup> But what about other contexts for the dissemination of Chinese foodways in places like Europe, where Chinese immigration was negligible (and mostly known through the press)?

This essay explores one such example of Western exposure to conceptions of Chinese cuisine: the Chinese restaurant and tearoom within London's 1884 International Health Exhibition. In so doing, it expands our understanding of Chinese foodways and their global reach by elucidating a context in which most Britons' first encounter with Chinese people and Chinese food was the exposition space—and one which presented an authorized version of China in very different class and cultural registers from those of the largely Cantonese Chinatowns of North America and Australia.

International exhibitions from the 1870s onwards were key vectors for introducing Western populations to unfamiliar aspects of global culture, as many scholars have shown. Foodways played a crucial and often overlooked role in this familiarization project. Exhibitions across Europe and North America featured Middle Eastern, North African, Indian, and Ceylonese tea or coffee houses and restaurants. The 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris included an Annamite (Vietnamese) restaurant, symbolizing France's new dominance over that region, while

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<sup>2</sup> See King 2020, 239. Similar notions that Japanese food was “indigestible to the American stomach” reigned in the US at this time (Jacob 2018, 156).

the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia hosted restaurants highlighting regional American cuisine: the Great American Restaurant, the Restaurant of the South, and the New England Log House and Modern Kitchen.

As scholars such as Brenda Assael have shown, temporary exhibitions like these and the “Healtheries,” as it was popularly known, were a crucible for “gastro-cosmopolitanism” (Assael 2018, 164). This environment allowed the British public to ingest the food from the world beyond Europe without much of the consequent danger that incorporation of other modes of thinking and behavior might entail. Instead, this consumption mirrored the absorptive, synthetic patterns of empire writ large; according to this model, Britain and Britons believed they had the power and discrimination to incorporate the foodstuffs and foodways of other cultures without ever altering the configuration or aesthetic models of their own behavior. Using archival sources and published materials about the Healtheries, I explore how outward-facing displays of culture and aesthetics at such expositions functioned within the networks of diplomacy surrounding Western informal imperialism in China, Qing Dynasty pushback, and intra-Asian competition, alongside new understandings of imperial culture as syncretic and absorptive.

Restaurants like those at this “South Kensington Caravanserai” presented “palatable”/ “high culture” versions of Asian food to millions of visitors in stark contrast to eateries catering to working-class populations in American/Australian Chinatowns and in camp kitchens across North America. The latter were more familiar to European publics through journalism, so the exhibitions worked to directly

counter consumers' readerly understandings of East Asian food by elevating China above the dog- and cat-eating "universal omnivores" of contemporary lore.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, those who mounted exhibitions about Britain's colonies and other global locations—from those responsible for the displays themselves to the commissioners charged with the overall organization of the events—evinced a clear awareness of media and other stereotypes about the places being represented, working sometimes to reinforce these and at other times to provide counternarratives that repositioned countries like China and Japan in higher class terms and on higher rungs of the "ladder of races." To do so, they also harnessed aspects of the developing public dining culture. These include the legacy of Victorian Britain's most famous chef Alexis Soyer, who revolutionized public dining in Britain at mid-century, and the related emphasis on French modes of preparing and presenting restaurant food as the measuring stick for sophistication.<sup>4</sup>

Although press reports about the Chinese in North America and Australia would have been key referents, exhibition-goers in Britain would have had little if any direct experience of Chinese people, let alone Chinese food. London's resident ethnic Chinese community in the late nineteenth century numbered, at most, a few hundred people.<sup>5</sup> As John Seed notes, "There was no talk of 'Chinatown' until the mid 1890s"—a decade after the International Health Exhibition (Seed 2006, 62).

Although a few eating houses did exist, journalistic accounts of these establishments mostly coincide with the later, sensationalist and Yellow Peril moment

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<sup>3</sup> This discourse of the unsanitary unintelligibility of Chinese eating habits has re-emerged in sensationalized reports about the origin and spread of Covid-19 from Wuhan. A viral video showing travel vlogger Wang Mengyun eating bat soup (in the Pacific Island of Pulau, not China) has spurred anti-Chinese xenophobia. See Palmer 2020; King 2020.

<sup>4</sup> On Soyer's involvement in exhibitions, see Bullock.

<sup>5</sup> See Holmes 1993, 74. See also Seed 2006, 63-67.

around the fin de siècle and the concurrent invention of Limehouse as Britain's Chinatown.<sup>6</sup> In the 1880s, there were not yet any Chinese restaurants aimed at British consumers or located in the West End.

Thus, the China Court at the International Health Exhibition—only the second time that the Chinese government had officially collaborated in such an event in Britain (the first being the International Fisheries Exhibition a year earlier)—operated against the backdrop of little direct public exposure to Chinese culture and a context in which India loomed large. This backdrop was also one of competing displays about geographical areas within and beyond the British Empire, where the novelty of the Chinese restaurant garnered significant press attention. At the same time, this and other exhibitions in the 1880s and 1890s constituted a calculated move by Japan, China, and Siam—as well as their Western mediators, who were largely responsible for the practicalities of the displays and staffing—to link culture and diplomacy under the broader aegis of globalization.

Although I hold with Tani Barlow (2012) and others that China was subject to forms of imperialism in all but name, it cannot be overemphasized how rhetorically important the sense of sovereignty—especially over the areas of culture and society—was to countering more infiltrative forms of imperialism and loss of economic authority. A particular crux for the 1880s and 1890s concerned questions of modernity and the steps Japan, China, and Siam were and were not taking to fashion themselves as modern states with modern infrastructure, military forces, and, at heart, peoples with modern subjectivities in the face of longstanding discourses of Asiatic stasis, determined resistance to change, and an ostensibly decadent high culture at odds with modern “Western” ways of being. The new, modern, and high-cultural

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<sup>6</sup> On Limehouse, see Witchard 2009, 91-132; Forman 2013, 193-223.

aesthetics of these displays were also meant to displace concurrent discourses of belatedness, poverty, and cultural exhaustion. Thus, these exhibition restaurants and their contextual location within the exhibition floorplan coalesced around the overall emphasis on hygiene, advanced food technology, and vegetarianism that itself signaled a certain kind of modernity.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 1. General plan of the International Health Exhibition (Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons).

In the cases of the 1883 International Fisheries Exhibition and the 1884 International Health Exhibition, these diplomatic concerns were at the forefront. Robert Hart, the Inspector-General of China's main revenue collection agency, the Imperial Maritime Customs Service (IMCS), was directly involved in China's displays in 1883 and 1884, with his brother and his factotum on site in South Kensington to handle the details of the shopping experience, the Chinese restaurant and teahouse, and the housing for the Chinese merchants and cooks brought over for the events.

The political backdrop for these exhibitions was also intra-Asian events with wider resonance in imperial arenas. Broadly interpreted, these included French territorial expansion in Southeast Asia, alongside growing American economic interests; British anxiety over Burma, Tibet, Afghanistan; and the proliferation of

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<sup>7</sup> In contradistinction to American world's fairs, such as Chicago's 690-acre World's Columbian Exhibition (1893), the exhibitions in South Kensington followed on from the 1851 Great Exhibition in using a multilevel indoor venue.

treaty ports in China. Chinese scuffles with the French over spheres of influence around “Tonquin” were also significant.

“NOTHING CORRESPONDING TO IT IN CHINA”

When the idea of a Chinese restaurant for the International Health Exhibition in London was mooted, Hart exclaimed to James Duncan Campbell, his factotum and head of his London office:

The English idea of the Chinese Tea-House and Chinese Restaurant has nothing corresponding to it in China except the fact that there are buildings in which people can buy and eat food and drink tea: if we could supply you with one of them bodily, you would indeed have a slice of the real life of China, but English sight-seers would neither eat it nor sit in it, and the [Exhibition’s] Committee would very soon beg us to move it out of that.

Hart’s initial consternation at what would become the Healtheries’ Chinese restaurant and teahouse speaks to a number of factors governing gastro-cosmopolitanism and cross-cultural encounters generally near the end of the nineteenth century: the management and packaging of alterity for middle-class consumer culture; the incommensurability of eating houses and dining aesthetics across wide cultural divides; and the tensions between exhibition organizers’ desire to reproduce “authenticity” and of sight-seers’ related desire to experience authenticity but intolerance of what that authenticity might entail. “It is very easy for all of you to plan for us in England and to invite us to do this,” Hart continues,

that and the other, and human nature is too prone to give all the thanks to those who *invite* and all the censure to those who fail to respond to

the invitation—forgetting the great difference there is between asking a man to dinner, and asking him to give one. —However, although the Yamen has not yet ordered it to be done, we—not to lose time—are putting our best foot foremost, and are making all the haste we can with a fixed *modus operandi* in mind.

(Letter to James Duncan Campbell, 14 Jan 1884, Hart 1975, Letter 458, 517)

Here, Hart identifies both his frustration with the task that he, as the head of the ICMS—an organization that had wide responsibility for China’s outward-facing exercise of diplomacy and soft power—was charged with, and his conclusion that once issued, the Zongli Yamen (China’s office of foreign affairs) would inevitably demand participation in such gastronomic diplomacy. However less “authentic” it would ultimately have to be than the miso-and-sushi-serving Japanese restaurant in the neighboring court, its goal was similarly to present an outward-facing idea of national cuisine.

It would fall to Campbell to carry out this project as Hart’s “personal fixer” (Bickers 2007). Campbell was a former member of the British Civil Service whom Hart had charged with establishing the ICMS’s London bureau in 1873—an office that, Robert Bickers notes, “at times rivalled the Chinese legation as the arm of the Chinese government in London” (Bickers 2007). In a speech at the Fisheries on October 24, 1883, Campbell framed that exhibition in terms of China’s reform policy of taking from the West that and only that it found useful: “the Chinese government, while ‘objecting to have its hand forced,’ is watching and testing various foreign appliances, in order to judge how far they may, with advantage, be grafted on existing

institutions” (Campbell 1883, 3). He added, “The appointment of Chinese ministers abroad, of distinguished officials like the Marquis Tsêng [Zeng Jize, China’s ambassador to London and Paris], and the co-operation of China in the international exhibitions of foreign countries are significant proofs of the importance that China attaches to the maintenance and extension of friendly relations and intercourse” (Campbell 1883, 3-4).

Campbell noted that the IMCS “employs about five hundred foreigners of various nationalities besides two thousand Chinese” (Campbell 1883, 4). Yet none of Campbell’s management team in Asia or Britain were Chinese. The key figures on the London side were Campbell and Robert’s brother James H. Hart. Despite his ceremonial role at events and his donation of books and calligraphy, neither the Marquis Tsêng nor others at the Chinese Legation seem to have had a formal role in the displays or restaurant.

There is little information about the decision-making guiding the construction of the restaurant and presentation of food there, but presenting the restaurant with an aura of sophistication was obviously a conscious decision. Given the iconic status of the Chinese banquet in travel writing and popular fiction like Jules Verne’s 1879 novel *The Troubles of a Chinaman* (serialized in English in *The Leisure Hour* in 1880), it could hardly have been otherwise.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the decision to involve an *chef de cuisine* from Hong Kong’s Government House and other chefs trained in European *haute cuisine* makes it doubly clear. So does the choice of a manager from a private West End club under whose “skilled direction” they served (*Illustrated Catalogue* 1884, 134).

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<sup>8</sup> On the British fascination with Chinese banquets, see Forman 2007.

Although the *Illustrated Catalogue* lists the owners of the shops on the “Chinese street,” I have found little data about the workers in the kitchen, restaurant, and teahouse nor about their welfare during their stay in Britain. According to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, about thirty Chinese men were brought over, four or five of whom were cooks (“The Chinese Court at the Healtheries” 1884, 6). Another piece in the *Gazette* notes, “They are taken great care of and are housed on the premises (“Lunch with the Celestials” 1884, 4).

There is also little information about who made decisions about what would be served in the restaurant and what kinds of exotic foods exhibition-goers could and could not tolerate, although the selections closely mirror what European travel writers and expatriates in China did and did not find palatable in their descriptions of banquets they attended. (The list of ingredients discussed below features the dried fruits and nuts that might be served at such banquets). However, there must have been a process of negotiation between ethnic Cantonese chefs, dishes prepared in a style that would come to be known as “Mandarin” in the US, and more familiar Continental preparations like those mocked by the satirical magazine *Punch* in its review.

## EATING AND INTERCOURSE

The restaurants and living exhibits and other displays bear witness to the Chinese government’s movement, in the 1870s, to cultivate a more outward-facing public image through participation in expositions (starting with the 1873 Austro-Hungarian Universal Exhibition in Vienna, the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, and the 1876 Palais du Champs Exposition Universelle in Paris), and to charge the Imperial Maritime Customs Service with the responsibility for organizing

the Chinese input.<sup>9</sup> Such participation, if initially haphazard and unprogrammatically, marked a considerable shift in Britain and China's mutual engagement. China had not, for instance, officially figured in the 1851 Great Exhibition. Earlier events, such as American Nathan Dunn's popular collection displayed in a "pagoda" in Hyde Park Corner in 1842, emphasized China's "curiosity" against the backdrop of Britain's expansionist skirmishes in the region. "At mid-century," as Lara Kriegel notes, "China was the material and ideological apotheosis of impenetrability, the ultimate barrier to be broken or distance to be crossed. A piece of the 'informal' empire, it was a contrast to knowable, colonizable India" (Kriegel 2003, 238). Kriegel reads the literature surrounding the unofficial displays about China at the Great Exhibition as embodying the contrast between England as progress and China as "stoppage" and insularity, with India figuring as potential; China also became a symbol for Toryism and was anathema to the liberal goals of the Exhibition and of England (Kriegel 2003, 238-9). Although, to a certain extent, these metaphors persisted in the late nineteenth century, they overlapped with the idea that China now also figured as potential, in line with the expansion of informal imperialism through the treaty port system and in line with broader attitudes towards material culture, including food. Indeed, part of Hart's reservations about participating in the exhibition could be said to have to do with the imperializing function of the exhibition hall and his own reluctance to serve two masters—not to mention his disdain for "English sight-seers," who were unwilling and unable to experience a more authentic slice of Chinese life. But Hart was also aware, as Peter H. Hoffenberg notes, that, "Exhibitions did not merely reinforce or unidirectionally manipulate previously formed ideas about nationalism, class, race,

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<sup>9</sup> The backdrop for this participation was the emergence of Japan as a key competitor and Japan's success in promoting its decorative arts at exhibitions. On China's presence at the Centennial Exhibition, see Pitman 2002-2003.

empire, and society. The structure of such events provoked an active reworking of this information and its accompanying behavior and bias..." (Hoffenberg 2001, 29).

Hart's compliance with the organizers' request to establish a restaurant at the International Health Exhibition was, therefore, grounded in his anticipation that the Chinese government had not yet but would "order it to be done." It also symbolizes the shift, by the mid-1880s, for more official and directed cooperation on the part of China. Using this form of soft power to "rework" Western attitudes towards China and the Chinese had the potential to enhance or preserve China's autonomy and sovereignty in a global setting and at a time of renewed erosion. (In 1893, China would refuse to participate in Chicago's Columbian Exhibition because of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.) Writing of the Kingdom of Hawaii's involvement in the "near global exhibition movement," Hoffenberg notes that such displays were central to "the exhibiting polity's place in the wider world, exhibits and participants making claims about transnational and internal developments and how those were linked" (Hoffenberg 2013, 60). Public sentiment at the time of the Healtheries backs up this interpretation: The *Times* reiterated Campbell's contention that Chinese participation constituted "a proof of the friendly disposition of China towards this country and of a desire to pave the way for the establishment of a closer intercourse between that Empire and the West" (July 10, 1884)—capturing, too, the ambivalence of whose purposes this "closer intercourse" would serve.

China's first large-scale participation in Britain, at the 1883 International Fisheries Exhibition in London, was a hastily organized affair, the invitation for China to take part having "arrived too late for any extensive collection to be possible," although it proved very "attractive" to the public (Campbell 1883, 4, 13). A year later, however, China came better prepared for the International Health

Exhibition, thanks mainly to the diligence of Campbell, who acted on the ideas presented to him by the Exhibition's organizing committee. Although Hart remained peevisish about exhibitions because of the time, resources, and expenses involved and later fretted that China would not be able to send merchants for the street of shops because of the "certainty" of war with France over Tonkin, nonetheless the China Court and its Chinese restaurant in 1884 ended up a star attraction for the over four million visitors.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 2. China at the Healtheries. From the *Illustrated London News*, Aug. 2, 1884.

Opening in July, three months after the start of the Exhibition season, the China Court and restaurant generated considerable and immediate publicity. Gushed the *Pall Mall Gazette*, "We venture to prophesy that these Chinamen, with their restaurant, their music, and their shops filled with all sorts of commodities, will become favourites with the sightseeing public of London" ("Lunch with Celestials" 4). The Court offered a veritable encapsulation of the "Celestial Empire," with its recreation of a mandarin's reception room and bedroom, its exhibit of a Chinese lady's boudoir and its display of, among other things, bridal and funerary cars, musical instruments and writing implements—all housed in a richly decorated space dripping with paper lanterns, silk tapestries, and folding screens.

The China Court imagined the "Middle Kingdom" as a mix of practical modernity and exotic tradition. And it differed from earlier displays of Chinese culture in Britain in two crucial ways, both of which depended on its interactive

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<sup>10</sup> To put this in perspective, the population of Greater London in 1881 was around 4.7 million and the city itself 3.9 million. See London Datastore.

qualities and on its function as a “living” museum: First, it introduced an explicit ethnographic or anthropological component not merely through the incorporation of objects of display, but also through the thirty Chinese citizens working at the Exhibition. These men carried out a variety of functions (from selling jade and curios shipped over for the “Street of Chinese Merchants” to playing music to waiting tables). Second, it introduced the British public to Chinese delicacies such as sharks’ fin and birds’ nest soups and difficult-to-use metal-tipped chopsticks for the first time. These two innovations served to nullify any sense of a fixed boundary between spectators and display, extending the model of exhibition-going from the realm of the visual into the haptic, the aural, and the gustatory. Attendees became implicated in a model of involved spectatorship, broadly recreating the experience of (extra-)colonial settlers and their pastimes—transporting them to China, as it were, despite whatever doubts Hart and Campbell might have had about authenticity.

### CONSUMING CATHAY

Nowhere was this embodied quality of spectatorship more apparent than in the sizeable Chinese restaurant and tearoom located in a specially constructed pavilion next to the main space of the China Court. The point of the Chinese restaurant was the *novelty* of both the taste sensations and the overall aesthetic experience. The restaurant’s focus on the aesthetics of eating offered a contrast (and corrective) to the village model used in the display of more “primitive” peoples such as the Irish, Africans, or indigenous Filipino groups.<sup>11</sup> This contrast emerged on two fronts: food presentation and the cuisine itself. The sheer elegance of the setting and the

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<sup>11</sup> For a thorough discussion of the exhibition of “living foreign peoples,” see Qureshi 2011.

articulation of the Chinese dinner as banquet equated East Asia with sophistication. (The Japanese section functioned similarly.) China donated cooking utensils, dinner services, tea cups, and so forth to the restaurant (*Illustrated Catalogue*, 1884, 134).

Chinese cuisine was presented as rarefied and understood through parallel and seemingly contradictory modes of analogy, exception, and absorption. These modes operated partly by building on longstanding notions of Chinese luxury (also associated with silk, tea, and, on the political economy end of the spectrum, Oriental decadence and excess). And while the value of the gustatory experience ostensibly rested in its function as a non-discursive means to encounter alterity, the Chinese restaurant was, inevitably, both the repository of visitors' prior exposure to discourses about China and the Chinese, and a site of intense discursive production (via the periodical press, official and unofficial guides to the Healtheries, and the lectures and *conversazioni* held on site—none of which were given by Chinese people). These operated in a kind of feedback loop, through which the fame of the Chinese restaurant and tearoom fueled more and more encounters with the exposure to “Chinese” foodways it sought to inculcate.

These modes explain how one writer for the *Times* could predict that so good was birds' nest soup, that it would be popping up on London menus everywhere, even while the point of the Chinese restaurant was the novelty of both the taste sensations and the overall experience.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, *Nature* proclaimed, “It is scarcely probable that the famous birds'-nest soup which Chinese cooks at the Health Exhibition offer to favoured visitors will ever become a popular dish in England” because the “tasteless, gelatinous compound is not suited to our palates” (1884, 271). But the

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<sup>12</sup> See also Kay 2015, who cites a similar sentiment from the *Exeter Flying Post*.

journal still lauded the novelty value of sampling something so radically other—and an item held up as an epitome of luxury since the early nineteenth century. “Should the visitor to the Health Exhibition who obtains some of this far-famed and mysterious soup have little relish for it, as is not unlikely, he will at any rate have the satisfaction of knowing that he has before him a dish the principal ingredient of which was formed by little swifts and bats which inhabit the Gomanton Caves in the center of the magnificent tropical forests of North Borneo,” concluded *Nature*. “There is probably no other article of food in the Health Exhibition, or in all Europe, more extraordinary in the mode of production, or in the method and circumstances under which it is obtained” (272). Unwittingly, this discussion of birds’ nest soup also points to the complexity of Britain’s imperial reach—a luxury foodstuff for Chinese epicures gathered by Chinese merchants from a region (North Borneo) under British oversight and circulated through traditional trading routes that persisted despite and because of British maritime supremacy in Southeast Asia.

Comments on dog-eating formed a prominent element in travelers’ descriptions of Chinese food and thus of exhibition-goers’ preconceptions of Chinese foodways. However, the banquet-based offerings of the Chinese Court’s restaurant and the fancy setting provide a stark contrast to the display of dog-eating Igorots at the Igorot village at the 1904 St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition and at the *Exposición de Filipinas* in Madrid in 1887. With the Igorots, dog-eating was a marker of savagery and freakery. The Igorot *rancheria* in Madrid, one Spanish commentator averred, revealed “the ingenuity of man without culture and put on display his bellicose customs, his domestic habits, his beliefs and superstitions” (Florez Hernández and Piquer y Martín-Cortés, 1887, 113, my translation). With the Chinese, however, dog-eating was made to fit a continuum of refinement; it transformed itself into a

gastronomic delicacy, rather than primitive indigeneity and indiscriminate omnivorousness it might otherwise signal. Unlike the deliberate display of offensive pet-eating in the later Igorot village, deploying a small indigenous group to showcase the radical alterity of a mostly Christian nation in order to justify America's civilizing mission in Asia after the Spanish-American War, dog-eating was conspicuously absent from the Chinese restaurant. But reporters at the Healtheries still made the connection, ritually, if only to disavow it. The *Illustrated London News* ran an article entitled "Edible Chinese Dogs" that was occasioned by the conjuncture of the Exhibition's Chinese restaurant and the display of nine specimens of "Chinese Chow-chow" at the Kennel Club's Crystal Palace Dog Show. It commented, "We have no precise information concerning the rule by which Chinese gastronomy is directed in selecting for human food certain varieties of dog, and rejecting others; but it is supposed that many of the lower class of people in China will readily eat any flesh of that kind." Despite the "chow-chow" philosophy pillorying Chinese people broadly as inappropriate eaters—made particularly ironic in this instance by the exclusivity of the fancy dog show—gastronomy, operating at a particular, and particularly higher, class register emphasized British commonality with, rather than distance from, the Chinese elite. Underlying this configuration is a multivalent understanding of breeding: the breeding of "certain varieties of dog" for consumption and consumption only and other varieties (presumably the Pekinese, made popular in Britain as a rare breed after the Second Opium War) as collectors' items. (These show dogs were worth several hundred pounds each.) The article ties the two events—dog show and exhibition—in this way: "The Chinese epicure has a refined though peculiar taste; and some of his dishes, though none of dog-flesh, may now be tasted at the International Health Exhibition" (1884, 37). "Peculiar" thus operates on an aesthetic scale of

refinement, echoing the movements of Aestheticism and Decadence as much as Chinese exoticism—or even conflating the two, in line with the related Anglo-Japanese style adopted by artists like James McNeill Whistler.

The food on offer at the Healtheries Chinese restaurant was modeled on a Chinese banquet. It was served to the general public as a *table d'hôte* and cost seven shillings and sixpence. Unlike the menu of the Japanese restaurant, however—created by Japanese commissioners and prepared by a team of chefs from Tokyo and representing a post-Meiji sense of national culture as intercalated through foodways—the Chinese fare at the Exhibition underwent a series of modifications.<sup>13</sup> These alterations are telling in terms of both the expectations on the part of “old China hands” as to what the British public could tolerate and in terms of the class dynamics at work in the European organizers’ attitudes towards their Chinese team (with the role of chef itself having a much lower status in China than Japan).

Where the Japanese took pride in representing their culture as it was to the extent that their restaurant served sushi and sashimi upon advance notification, cuisine-wise, the Chinese restaurant carefully stage-managed its offerings so as to produce delicacies sufficiently exotic to enchant the general public but, at the same time, sufficiently restrained so as to not incite disgust or leave people with a disagreeable feeling about China.<sup>14</sup> Despite some comments about the seasoning—an article from October, 1, 1884 in *Myra's Journal of Dress and Fashion* mentions “Some of them [the dishes] are strongly spiced, and through nearly all pervades sea-weed flavour we noticed in the bird’s-nest soup” (1884, 492)—it is unlikely that the food served would be recognized today as spicy.

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<sup>13</sup> On changes to the Japanese diet and food’s relationship to national culture, see Kushner 2012.

<sup>14</sup> See Nagai and Murai 1884, 31.

The staff that served the public in both the restaurant and teahouse was primarily British, with a couple of Chinese waiters circulating in blue tunics and “noiseless paper-soled shoes” initiating the myth of stealthy service and to provide “gratuitous instruction” to those brave enough to attempt to use chopsticks (“The Chinese Court at the Health Exhibition,” *Times*, 1884, 6f).

Figure 3. The List of Chinese Sent to the Health Exhibition, from *The Illustrated Catalogue of the Chinese Collection of Exhibits*. Note the origin of the cooks and waiters. (Courtesy of Internet Archive, [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).)

In the tea room, the servers were “English girls,” contrary to the expectations of many commentators, hoping to have their stereotypes about Chinese women—as cemented in prior displays of bound feet and interpretations of the ubiquitous willow pattern plate—instantiated. But these “English girls” still emphasized the association between tea and the idealized domestic. Most likely, the lack of Chinese women in the tea room stemmed more from the difficulty in finding women willing to come to Britain or able to obtain travel documents—in a context where there would have been no immigrants in London to hire—rather than concerns over Asian food/race and public health. By contrast, women did make up a good part of the workforce of Tannaker Buhicrosan’s Japanese Village at Humphrey’s Hall, which opened in London the following year.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, having “English roses” serve in the tea

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<sup>15</sup> The periodical *John Bull*, in an article entitled “Japanese Native Village” remarks on the “bevy of young Japanese ladies, who doubtless pose in the far East as professional beauties” (1885, 44). For more on the Japanese Village, see McLaughlin 2007.

room reinforced the association of tea and Englishness, rather than tea's status as a foreign commodity.

Notably, India's contribution to the Healtheries incorporated a teahouse with "native attendants." Again, a distinction emerges between exhibitions spaces about India—where the Indian and Ceylon tearooms in exhibitions of the same era employed men to do the serving—and those about China, which, in their greater reliance on aestheticization, identified the country with the qualities of softness and domesticity, as opposed to the masculine virtues conferred on "recreations" of the subcontinent.

The staff working behind the scenes at the Chinese restaurant had been selected with Western food prejudices in mind. A French chef hired for a familiarity with Asia, gleaned from service as an official cook to an admiral in Saigon, presided over the kitchen. The Frenchman oversaw a team of nine Chinese cooks. (Some sources cite a lower number.) Meanwhile, the main Chinese chef from Government House had been trained in "foreign cookery" (*Illustrated Catalogue*, 1884, 134).<sup>16</sup> The actual management of the restaurant was in the hands of someone from a popular West-End club, and service was Continental-style.

The menu and mode of presentation underwent a deliberate process of "Europeanization"—as it was explicitly termed at the time—"under the skilled direction of a gentleman of wide experience, who presides over the fortunes of a well-known West-end club, who has wooed the great science under every zone—tropic and frigid," according to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in an article on July 8, 1884 ("The Chinese Court at the Healtheries" 1884, 6).<sup>17</sup> The menus themselves were also in French, with

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<sup>16</sup> See also "Chinese Cookery at Kensington," 5d; "The International Health Exhibition," *London and China Telegraph*, July 7, 1884, 630.

<sup>17</sup> See also the *Pall Mall Gazette's Popular Guide* 1884, 20.

little introduction of Chinese vocabulary.<sup>18</sup> The aim was “to give a Chinese dinner in a European form” (“The International Health Exhibition,” *London and China Express* 1884, 723). As a result, “There was none of the disagreeable sense of garlic and pork which pervades most Chinese dinners.” Europeanization meant applying French techniques of service, presentation, and cooking to Chinese ingredients and methods. It was fusion cuisine *avant la lettre*: “As will be observed,” the *London and China Express* stated, “the *menu* would be more appropriately designated as Franco-Chinoise, and is arranged in a strictly classical style, blending many excellent Chinese dishes with those derived from the French *cuisine*” (1884, 723).

*Punch* mercilessly satirized the Europeanness of these repasts in an article devoted to “The ‘Chinoiseries.’” Reviewing the regular meals served at the restaurant (whereas some correspondents had based their write-ups on special events at which the most sophisticated foods featured heavily), the comic magazine complained of the “international character” of the dishes and staff. It ridiculed hors d’oeuvres such as “olives from Na-Ples, and some sausage, which may have come from the well-known cities of Stras-Bo-Urg or Bo-Log-Na.” After main courses of *Jambon grillé au Épinard* and *Suprême de Volaille à la Shanghae*, the correspondent was forced to ask the Swiss-German waiter:

whether or not there isn’t a Gallic Cook somewhere about the establishment? He admits with some hesitation that there is, but adds quickly, “That the *Chef* had lived for fifteen years in Pekin.” From which it is to be inferred that he (the *Chef*) had had ample time to

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<sup>18</sup> The use of French in upscale restaurant menus was a global phenomenon. It extended to menus at higher-end Chinese restaurants in the US (a practice that may have developed out of world’s fairs); this was the origin of dish names like “lobster a la canton.”

forget all his French cookery. But no, it is too late. The impression which has been haunting you for half an hour has become a certainty.

(“The ‘Chinoiseries,’” *Punch*, 1884, 48)

Whereas handing over the representation of China in general to the foreigners in the IMCS received little censure, even from *Punch*, ceding the preparation and serving of food to Europeans raised more troubling ideas about authenticity. *Punch*’s critique reveals an expectation that nothing on the plate should be familiar, right down to the ingredients. The ultimate irony was that *Punch* found the one item that it did proclaim authentic, rice wine, relatively unpalatable.

For other commentators, Chinese food’s affinities with French food and the ability for French methods of preparation to be applied to it and its ingredients had the opposite effect: Adaptability was the mark of a higher-order cuisine. Asserted the *Standard* on 17 July, “China possesses some special and many excellent articles of food. There is therein an admirable basis for the development of the highest class of the *cuisine classique*, the details of which can only be expressed in the comprehensive language of the French” (*Standard*, 1884, July 17; cited in *Illustrated Catalogue* 1884, 135).

Such a notion of Chinese haute cuisine was in direct contradistinction to the mixed class register of Chinese in the American context on which British journalists continually drew comparisons in their reviews of the 1884 restaurant. By this time, Chinese restaurants were already a part of the tourist trail in the US.<sup>19</sup> The 1882 edition of *Bancroft’s Pacific Coast Guide Book*, recommended San Francisco’s Hong Fer Low Restaurant, the “Delmonico’s of Chinatown” (Hittell, 1882, 100). In New York, journalist Wong Chin Foo (Wang Qingfu) claimed a few years later, “At least

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<sup>19</sup> See Roberts 2002, 135-6. See also Conlin, 1986, 190-1.

five hundred Americans take their meals regularly in Chinese restaurants in orthodox Chinese fashion, with chopsticks... Many of these Americans have acquired Chinese gastronomical tastes” (1888, 305). There had certainly never been a Chinese restaurant in Europe on this scale before.<sup>20</sup> Concluded *Society*, “for the first time on this side of China Town, ‘Frisco, will we be able to enjoy *bêche de mer* [sea cucumber] and bird’s nest soups, baked ices, saki, and all the components that enter into a dinner of the Celestial Empire” (1884, 13).

As *Society*’s characterization of what “we” would be able to enjoy indicates, the Exhibition worked at the opposite end of the spectrum from the working-class traditions of ‘Frisco. The Exhibition restaurant employed imported and expensive ingredients such as lily flowers, lotus root, shark’s fin, and lychees, and it altered the style of preparation from Chinese to Franco-Chinese, instead. Even the tea-house worked to this high-class standard: the tea served was not normally commercially available in Britain because the price at which it was marketed in Beijing was too high for British consumers.

Figure 4. Edibles and articles of food served at the Chinese Restaurant, from *The Illustrated Catalogue of the Chinese Collection of Exhibits*. (Courtesy of Internet Archive, [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).)

Food in the Chinese restaurant was served in the French order, in reverse of what observers noted was the Chinese tradition of beginning a banquet with sweets. Aside from palate cleansers like praline almond cream, served after the famous bird’s nest

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<sup>20</sup> Chinese restaurants continued to feature at later exhibitions in South Kensington. The same pavilion was used for a Chinese restaurant at the 1885 Inventions Exhibition and the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition.

soup, the meal literally proceeded from soup to nuts. Reactions to the recipes themselves were tested during at least two trial dinners to which a variety of bigwigs were invited, and which were also attended by the Chinese ambassador.<sup>21</sup>

### **HEALTH, HYGIENE, AND INTRA-ASIAN COMPETITION**

That Britain's first large-scale public exposure to Chinese foodways occurred at an exhibition highlighting health, hygiene, food science, and food industrialization is an historical accident—the conjuncture of particular political and cultural developments in the 1880s around China's engagement with the US, Europe, and their empires and competition with an industrializing Japan that was modernizing along recognizably Western lines. And most commentators in the periodical press and in exhibition speeches did not evince consistent or particular concern with health and hygiene vis-à-vis the China Court and other “ethnographic” and national displays. As the *Times* put it, the restaurant was another novelty for “students of the gastronomic branch of hygiene” (“Chinese Cookery at Kensington,” 1884, 5d). Nor do records at Britain's National Archives and among Hart's published correspondence suggest that the exhibition themes were a foremost concern among the organizers—even though China's contribution to the Fisheries Exhibition the previous year had been mostly topical. Nevertheless, the very fact of the restaurant and tearoom being situated at the International Health Exhibition raises certain questions—for instance, about Japan's more explicit engagement with exhibition themes, including in its restaurant. Moreover, it gives a certain valence to the IMCS's choice to present

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<sup>21</sup> I have found no records about what Zeng or other Chinese officials might have made of the food itself. The list of articles served in the restaurant (thousand-year eggs, Osmanthus extract, dried bean curd, etc.) suggest that the chefs might sometimes have prepared more recognizably Chinese meals.

rarefied, haute cuisine versions of Chinese food (which were implicitly more healthful than the dogs, rats, and omnivorous eating of journalistic fame), as well as subsidized “Imperial” Chinese tea that, in its proclamation of purity, countered the discourses of Chinese adulteration that were key to the marketing of black tea as Britain developed its own colonial plantations and sought to break the Chinese monopoly on tea production that had given rise to European and American interest in China.<sup>22</sup>

By contrast, food preparation, food hygiene, and food safety all formed an important part of the overall strategy of presenting healthy living at the Exhibition, which was replete with a wide variety of displays and demonstrations. The approximately 100 exhibits in the South Gallery included model dairies, bakeries, an apiary, the School Board for London’s Cookery Centre, economic workmen’s kitchens, working apparatuses for aerating water, and stands by manufacturers of spirits, sanitary equipment, and other items. Messrs. Robert Etzensberger and Co.’s model coffeehouse pavilion brewed the beverage in the firm’s patented cafetière. The pavilion featured iced coffee, served black or with milk (Sala 1884, 94). The Vegetarian Society also set up a restaurant, with meals described by *The American Architect and Building News* as “too literally ‘a good blow-out.’”

In this sense, these displays support Alda Blanco’s contention that “[t]he world fairs and colonial exhibitions which took place in the capitals of the expanding empires (primarily London and Paris) were very much about the present. Their objective was to showcase the commodities currently produced within these empires, to display the technological innovations that embodied their modernness, and to

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<sup>22</sup> On the adulteration of Chinese tea and the Planter Raj’s efforts to persuade consumers to switch from Chinese to British Empire tea in the late nineteenth century, see Rappaport 2017.

demonstrate the metropole's racial and cultural superiority with regard to their colonies" (Blanco 2005, 54). Yet cultural modernness and modernity, especially in the exhibition context, has always relied on their juxtaposition with the preservation of tradition and a conception of tradition as a building block for modernity. The place of the colony or the territory of imperial aspiration within this imagination, therefore, necessitates a careful negotiation of the potentiality to modernize and not simply an assumption of racial and cultural superiority.

The question arises of why the Chinese restaurant did not opt for more direct showcasing of food preparation, unlike the interactive consumer/consuming displays above—a strategy used subsequently by some Chinese restaurants in the US to reassure consumers about food safety—but instead relied on a strategy of presenting Chinese food in high-cultural frames within a design aesthetic referencing China's rich decorative traditions, tempering the primacy of longstanding discourses of stasis, semi-civilization, and resistance to modernity. Certainly, consumer concern about the cleanliness and hygiene of "native" bodies and food did exist in British and imperial exhibitions in the second half of the nineteenth century, although perhaps more prominently in the context of Indian peoples and in the context of ethnographic displays like the native villages. Van Troi Tran's work on the French environment demonstrates that such concerns were also operative across the Channel.<sup>23</sup> Yet there is little evidence that either exhibition organizers or visitors had such concerns about the Chinese (or Japanese) restaurant at the Healtheries. In fact, the regional newspaper the *North Wales Chronicle* was unusual in the press commentary in recycling such stereotypes: "There are also to be seen numerous repulsive looking

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<sup>23</sup> See Tran 2015, 164).

Japanese, and Chinamen dressed in their quaint and dirty-looking costumes” (“The International Health Exhibition,” 1884, 8).

There are several possible explanations for why they did not emphasize the hygienic preparation of their gastronomic offerings: First, it would have been antithetical to the ethos of fine dining promoted. Indeed, the press employed words like “gourmet” to describe both dinners and diners. The inclusion of European dishes among the Chinese ones also lent a stamp of hygiene, rhetorically cleansing the whole smorgasbord. Witness the *Standard*’s July 17 remarkable review of the restaurant: “The *menu* will consist of various delicate compounds and preparations intermingled with European dishes, all being of the best and most wholesome character, it being a special matter of consideration to develop [sic] the science of cookery as conducing to the best physiological results... Cookery is to become a hand-maid-in-chief to Health. Such is the ambition of China and the manager of its restaurant” (1884, 3).

Second, it is unlikely that this was a common strategy in the US or Australia at the time. Expensive and ornate Chinese restaurants like the Port Arthur in New York do not appear to have engaged in this strategy, since the luxury image necessitates obscuring the labor of cooking. It also specifically requires the body of the laborer to be hidden, especially—as Eric Hayot demonstrates in “Chinese Bodies, Chinese Futures”—where that body is as problematic to the American psyche as that of the Chinese coolie. Invisibility, not transparency, was what was required. Finally, the *table d’hôte* format primarily used at the exhibition restaurant meant the chefs did most of the preparation for the meals prior to the arrival of exhibition-goers.

Additionally, the Chinese restaurant was not physically located near the South Gallery, where the food hall was situated and where many of these food-related exhibits stood and thus did not have the immediate burden of highlighting modernity

through hygiene and industry. (By contrast, the Japanese restaurant was on the upper floor of the Eastern Arcade, just above the displays of heating and cooking apparatus, while the Siberian mare-milking and *koumis* demonstration was along the South Promenade running parallel to the South Gallery.) Moreover, the display of foodstuffs in this and other exhibitions generally was typed according to the category “substances of food, as products of industry.”<sup>24</sup> The emphasis on healthy living through modern methods of food production and preparation—not to mention the overall division of the Exhibition into the three groups of “food,” “dress,” and “dwelling”—provided an implicit context for all the eating-houses, the Chinese Restaurant among them, in which modern cookery and dining were integrally related to industrialization, hygiene and cleanliness, consumer culture, and an ever expanding repertoire of choices. This last element, the panoply of different tastes on tap at the exhibition and beyond it in the marketplace, was central to the notion of the sensation of novelty, which, in turn, was central to exposition philosophy in general, with its goal of stimulating and educating consumers.

In addition, if the Chinese restaurant did not explicitly promote hygiene, the excursus of the exhibition did supply the missing emphasis on health and nutrition through Dr. John Dudgeon’s contribution to the published records of the exhibition. Dudgeon, a long-term resident in China and a professor at the Imperial College in Peking, had close ties to Hart and the IMCS. His “Diet, Dress, and Dwellings of the Chinese in Relation to Health” extolled the Chinese diet for its healthfulness and nutritional balance (1884, 261).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, China 1873, 8-9.

<sup>25</sup> See also Roberts 2002, 143-144.

Notwithstanding, the contrast with the representation of Japanese foodways at the Exhibition—on both page and plate—is telling, especially in terms of a lesser emphasis on alterity and elitism and in terms of Japan’s perceived proximity not to its Asian neighbor, but to the West. In addition to its restaurant, Japan’s displays included two tables showing dinner services used for ceremonial banquets. These were a mix of traditional Japanese “appurtenances” and “Table-ware in Foreign Style” (Nagai and Murai 1884, 98-103). Japanese decorative arts, already understood in terms of simplicity and cleanness, here merged seamlessly with Western tableware. They also cement a hierarchical relationship whereby Japanese ceramics sits at a higher register than Chinese plates, whose signifier for the Victorians had been, since the eighteenth century, the ubiquitous and decidedly kitschy willow pattern plate.

The Japanese restaurant and teahouse featured a variety of *miso* and tofu dishes, alongside *tsukemono* pickles and *sunomono* salads.

NIPPON RIORIYA  
(JAPANESE RESTAURANT).

.....  
MENU.

MISOSHIRU

Miso Soup (Miso, a fermented mixture of Soy Beans, Wheat and Salt).

KUCHITORI

Side dish.

HACHIMONO.

Grilled, stewed, or roast.

CHOKU

Dressed Vegetables.

HAN.

Boiled Rice.

WANMORI

Soup of Fish or Meat with Vegetables.

SUNOMONO.

Salad.
KONOMONO. Vegetables, salted or preserved in Miso.
SAKE. Japanese wine.
CHA. Japanese Tea.
Foreign Wines extra.
SASHIMI, SUSHI, ETC. Very common food in Japan, will be served on special notice.

Figure 4. Japanese Menu. (From *The Health Exhibition Literature*, vol 17, 1884, 575.)

This menu reflects what Japan had officially consolidated as its “traditional” food by the 1880s and therefore wished to showcase to further its diplomatic aims. There is an emphasis on rice and seafood, rather than meat, while the preparation techniques involve boiling, stewing, grilling, and roasting, rather than frying (a preparation method introduced in East Asia by the Portuguese). Original Japanese names are retained and transliterated, including the term *rioriya*, emphasizing an equivalence, across cultures, of the concept of the restaurant—the very equivalence that Hart eschewed because of the incompatible gulf in taste he perceived between China and Britain. These moves garnered the expected praise for the “authenticity” of the food and setting at the Japanese restaurant, which opened after the Chinese one, while mitigating the “unpalatable” side of their alterity; rather than conjuring up exotica, these strategies for cooking, display, and description emphasize an educative function, in keeping with the overall themes of the exhibition and the Japanese commissioners’ intent to portray their country in a favorable but independent light. *The Times*,

reporting on “The Health Exhibition Japanese Restaurant,” September 17, 1884, stresses these very themes of “authenticity” and equivalence, noting, “the visitor who wishes to experiment with the viands and cookery of the East may learn how he would fare in the eating-houses of Tokio.” The article also refers to the restaurant as part of the Japanese commissioners’ project “for the prosecution of their benevolent purposes of instruction,” underscoring Japan’s claims to self-determination and insisting that Japan had useful things to teach the British public—the relationship presented was understood more as one of equals and less as one of proto-colonialism. Consequently, the reporter’s characterization of the meal is largely non-judgmental and never negative. The items on the menu evoke “pleasurable surprise,” the lobster is “delicious,” and the other dishes are extensively described without reference to palatability. Even the *sake*, which might have been expected to produce similar sentiments of dissatisfaction to those voiced about *samshoo* (Chinese rice wine), is merely labeled “the proper beverage at the meal.”

This sharp differentiation of emphasis on the models of the Japanese and Chinese restaurants encapsulates the distinct representational strategies that mark the stages from the “semi-civilized” (China’s purported status in political economy) to the “civilized” (Japan’s direction of motion). In so doing, they mark a confluence between the high status that British and European consumers gave to Japanese culture in the wake of the Meiji Restoration and Japan’s own acts of public, diplomatic self-definition by distinguishing itself as better and superior to its East Asian neighbors and, ultimately, a colonizing power in its own right. Such a hierarchy between Japan and China therefore reflects shared geopolitical perceptions of a weak and waning China versus a rising Japan. (In the decade after the 1884 exhibition, Japan would formally occupy Taiwan and Korea.). It also starkly emphasizes the context of intra-

Asian competition underlying China's decision to participate in exhibitions and to deploy gastronomy as one means to recuperate its standing.

## CONCLUSION

Although attendance figures are not available, the Chinese restaurant and tearoom at the "Healtheries" were an unmitigated success. So popular was the facility that it came to symbolize the whole enterprise of the Healtheries: As the *Standard* exclaimed on July 17, introducing dinners *à la Chinoise* was what would make the Exhibition of 1884 memorable. Accounts from the end of the Exhibition also show that the restaurant made £1,126 profit out of a total of £226,538 for the event as a whole; by contrast, popular exhibits such as Francis Galton's anthropometric laboratory only netted £30 over costs, while fish dinners at the Fisheries made £875 ("Accounts," 1886, 10a). (The *Times* did not report figures for the Japanese restaurant.)

The Chinese Court at the International Health Exhibition holds an important place in history as the first large-scale exhibition of China in Britain and the first venue to expose large numbers of Britons to the idea of Chinese food (even among those who did not try the restaurant, given the broad publicity it generated). Through its success, it undoubtedly mitigated stereotypes about the uncleanness and incommensurability of Chinese food and British palates. As Roberts comments, "Those who had partaken of it would previously have expressed disgust at the thought of eating some of the items on the menu, but fashion had overcome their prejudices, and the food had been pronounced delicious" (144). By making Chinese food chic, the Healtheries's Chinese restaurant paved the way for the Chinese restaurants that opened in London's fashionable West End at the start of the twentieth century.

The experience and fame garnered by the Healtheries' Chinese restaurant, alongside such other projects as the English translation of Chinese "classical" literature and the elevation of Chinese decorative arts, also bolstered a wider recuperation of Chinese civilization from political economy's stereotypes of stasis and Oriental decadence. Equally important was its function in addressing the amalgamation of Japanese and Chinese culture so common in the era's popular culture. Ironically, by nuancing public conceptions of Chinese culture and elevating the status of Chinese taste and aesthetics in the British imagination, the restaurant also closely aligned China with the respectable Japonisme over chinoiserie's reputation for kitsch and poor-quality cheap goods.

The last item served to patrons of the "celebrated Chinese dinner" at the Healtheries was the famed Imperial tea. It was known to exhibition-goers from Verne's novel, among other sources, where protagonist King-Fo drinks it after dinner: "it was the Imperial tea, in all its purity, the young leaf-buds allowed to be gathered only by children with gloves on their hands, and that but rarely, as every gathering kills a tree" (57). Rareness, exquisiteness, mystique: these were the qualities that this tea was meant to symbolize—and by extension, so too, was Chinese culture writ large. As Joseph Lavery argues was the case with Japan, there is also violence here; the extinction of the tea plant evokes the danger that the Chinese masses were thought to pose in Anglo-American discourse.

But there is a final twist: the tea, in Verne's version, is also "Direct from the stores of Gibb, Bibb, and Co." (57). What better way to encapsulate the history of the relationship between China and Britain—from the "trade imbalance" and the Opium Wars that imbalance generated in the first half of nineteenth century to the informal imperialism encroaching on China's sovereignty in the second half? And what better

metaphor could there for this fraught, entangled relationship than this most British,  
most Chinese moment of ingestion at a world's fair restaurant?

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