ABSTRACT

Since c.1900, eating Chinese food has become a weekly routine, a Christmas tradition, and a childhood memory for many Jewish American families. In their adaptation to American society, Jewish Americans made eating Chinese part of their American identity. The evolution and change in Chinese food and Jewish eating habits took place almost simultaneously. While Chinese immigrants invented chopsuey and other popular Americanized Chinese dishes, Jewish residential proximity to New York Chinatown allowed many Jewish immigrants and their families to frequent Chinese restaurants and become familiar with Chinese food. Based on a review of articles published in newspapers and popular journals in New York and scholarly writings on food history, this article explains how and why Jewish customers were attracted to Chinese food, and describes the dynamic interaction between the two cultures in an attempt to addresses the complexity of American ethnic identity.