

Comparing and contrasting wong's "noodles vs. sesame seed buns"

[Nutrition](#), [Fast Food](#)



"What did you have for dinner?" is a question asked thousands of times every day. Admittedly, people are facing a difficult problem of choosing what to eat, given the variety of options such as Chinese cuisine, American cuisine, and Japanese cuisine, not to mention many variants within each style. Throughout the years, the food industry has incorporated traditional methods as well as adaptations to a changing society. Fast food, for example, has grown exponentially over the past half century. By contrast, traditional foods such as rice remain a crucial part of food culture.

Two essays that highlight this contrast are Seanon Wong's "Noodles vs. Sesame Seed Buns" and Julie Dash's "Rice Culture." Wong's essay illustrates the significance of fast food, whereas Dash's essay discusses traditional cooking methods. While both authors talk about food and cultural traditions, Dash uses an informal voice to discuss preserving her traditions, whereas Wong uses an academic voice to describe the evolution of food traditions in Chinese culture. The main topic for both articles is food.

Wong reports on the flourishing of fast food in Hong Kong, showing how Chinese fast food companies have made inroads into the Hong Kong market. For example, as Wong points out, "Hong Kong's fast food industry... is dominated by Chinese companies such as Cafe de Coral, Fairwood and Maxim." (123) By contrast, Dash's "Rice Culture" clearly narrates her own rice tradition. Dash begins by telling us "I come from a family of rice eaters" (138). Apparently, food is the main idea of both Wong's and Dash's passages, and therefore, they use food as a reason to develop their stories.

Additionally, both authors discuss food in a manner that acts as a springboard to analyzing food's cross-cultural dimensions. Rice is, admittedly, a basic food in the Eastern world. However, "Rice Culture" tells us how Dash and Aunt Gertie cook rice American style. "Before cooking, Aunt Gertie would wash her rice, really scrub it in a bowl of water until all the water was clear" (Dash 140). She also asserts that "in the years that followed, the South Carolinian African captives played a major role in establishing a powerful rice culture in the antebellum South" (139).

American and African cultures were blended, Dash argues, through the South Carolinian method of introducing a African influence into the American form of rice cooking. Just as traditional cooking benefitted from cross-cultural pollination, so too did fast food, which, Wong argues, created a mixture of American and Chinese food culture. In "Noodles vs. Sesame Seed Buns", he finds that "As American fast food chains have boomed in Hong Kong over the last three decades, the demand for fast food --- American or otherwise --- has grown even faster" (123).

The cross-cultural issues are ostensibly merged. Moreover, both Wong and Dash illustrate the ways in which food terminology and language are altered cross-culturally. Dash's "Rice Culture" looks at foreign terms used to describe German foods. She compares "German spritzal to... elbow macaroni and cheese" (138). In this case, "spritzal" is explained as a kind of German noodle dish. Similarly, Wong uses "foreign" or non-native vocabularies as a way of introducing Chinese food.

His article states “ In 1996, Daniang Dumplings was merely a community restaurant in Changzhou in Jiangsu province with only six employees selling arguably the most prototypical of northern Chinese food --- Shuijiao”. (126) “ Shuijiao” is a foreign term that describes Chinese boiled dumplings. Both Wong and Dash explore the ways in which native foods are influenced by vocabulary and foreign influence, and this is a similarity in comparing the two articles. Although both Dash and Wong focus on food writing and the intersections between Western and Eastern cultures, there are noticeable differences in tone and voice between the two articles.

One huge distinction lies in their respective formality of language. In Dash’s “ Rice Culture”, she narrates the story in first person. She says, “ Today as I stand over a bowl of cold water and rice, scrubbing, I feel Aunt Gertie watching me. ” (Dash 140) “ I” dominates the article; her goal in the passage is not to make larger statements, but rather to share her personal experience of cooking rice. The first person tone is intimate. By contrast, Wong’s tone is formal and quantitative, a technique he employs to establish credibility and grab the reader’s attention.

He relies on facts, evidence, and statistics, in contrast with Dash’s more qualitative narration. In “ Noodles vs. Sesame Seed Buns”, Wong cites statistics such as, “ over 60 percent of the city’s denizens eat at take-away restaurants at least once a week, compared to only 41 percent and 35 percent in mainland China and the United States respectively” (123). For most readers, these numbers help to establish Wong’s credibility and are more persuasive as arguments rather than simply stating an opinion.

The tone of voice contrast between Wong and Dash can subtly lend credibility to their assertions. By analyzing our two main contemporary food models---modern and traditional---Seanon Wong and Julie Dash give us contrasting and complementary ways of looking at food culture. Dash brings up a method of how her aunt cooks rice, “ Before cooking, Aunt Gertie would wash her rice, really scrub it in a bowl of water until all water was clear,” (140) Dash illustrates “ Sometimes she would change the scrubbing water up to ten times! (140) this is an unorthodox and rarely used method, at least in the modern world. Thus, it can be regarded as a traditional way of cooking food, one that served the Aunt Gertie of the world well, but a way that even Dash finds hard to emulate. By contrast, Wong summarizes the fast food industry in Hong Kong. In his article, fast food represents a new, modern model for people who eat outside, or for people whose time constraints don't allow for more traditional ways of cooking. In “ Noodles vs.

Sesame Seed Buns”, Wong says “ Considering the omnipresence of McDonald's, KFC and Pizza Hut, American fast food has been a revolutionary force in China's everyday culture. ” Undoubtedly, in Wong's account, this is a kind of cultural invasion, in which he thinks that Western modern fast food has been detrimental to the values and traditions, not to mention health, of Eastern societies. The pervasiveness and variety of food culture and the importance of cultural distinctions are increasingly obvious in the contemporary world. This awareness is especially important where cultures intersect.

In these two essays, both authors come to terms with their own food culture, and address cross-cultural issues which are increasingly common. Dash uses a narrative voice to tell her traditional way of cooking rice, while Wong quantifies the modern fast food trend in Hong Kong. The traditional approach seems to emphasize quality, while the modern approach (with fast food signifying modern) emphasizes convenience. Most likely, the food industry of tomorrow will be more mixed, finding a way to integrate quality and offer convenience.

When that happens, we will have the best of both worlds; Dash's traditional approach melded with Wong's modern sensibilities. Word Count: 1260 words

Bibliography Dash, Julie. " Rice Culture. " Mirror on America: Essays and Images from Popular Culture. Ed. Joan T. Mims and Elizabeth M. Nollen. 5th ed. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins, 2009. 138-41. Print. Wong, Seanon. " Noodles vs. Sesame Seed Buns. " Mirror on America: Essays and Images from Popular Culture. Ed. Joan T. Mims and Elizabeth M. Nollen. 5th ed. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins, 2009. 124-27. Print.