

Chinese Corner

Food Word Migrations

Dynamic languages like Chinese and English seem to hungrily snaffle up new words on a regular basis, and the subject of food is particularly replete in terms of exchange words. In countries where English is the mother-tongue, we talk about Mandarin oranges and Chinese gooseberries, a.k.a. kiwi fruit [*qí yì guǒ* 奇异果, literally 'wonder fruit'], thanks to a long history of world trade. Yet sometimes the original name like *kumquat* [Cantonese *kam kwat*, meaning 'golden orange', but *jīn jú* 金橘 in Mandarin], is absorbed into the host culture along with the produce itself.

In the UK for instance, we often crave a cup of cha [*chá* 茶], whilst coffee [*kā fēi* 咖啡] is increasingly popular in China. Oh ... and you may want some chocolate [*qiǎo kè lì* 巧克力] with it too.

In the East and West alike nowadays, people love to book a party [*pài duì* 派对] in a restaurant. This may include a salad [*shā là* 沙拉] to start with. Or you could order some dim sum as a snack starter, served in small portions to literally 'touch the heart' [*dim sum* in Cantonese, but *diǎn xīn* 点心 in Mandarin]; followed by chop suey [*zá suì* 杂碎] meaning 'assorted pieces' or odds and ends, so could be a kind of sino-style bubble & squeak equivalent; and how about some chow mein [*chǎo miàn* 炒面] meaning 'fried noodles'? No Chinese meal will be complete of course without a tofu [*dòu fu* 豆腐] dish, especially if you are a vegetarian.

Throughout China, pizza [*bǐ sà* 比萨] is now a popular choice on some menus; on which you could have a squirt of ketchup [17th or 18th century, arguably tomato-based, sauce from the coastal provinces of Fujian and Guangdong. It is pronounced 'kôe-chiap', but in Mandarin *fān qié jiàng* 番茄酱, literally 'tomato sauce', to go with it...

At the end of your party, you will need to pay with your credit card [*xìn yòng kǎ* 信用卡], or 'trust-use card'. If you have forgotten your money however, you have the choice of kow-towing [*kòu tóu* 叩头] to the manager, literally 'knocking the floor with your forehead', by offering to wash dishes all evening, or else if you are particularly gung-ho [*gōng hé* 工合] and up for a fight, you can pretend to be a kung-fu [*gōng fu* 功夫] or 'martial art' master before attempting to make a quick getaway. Well, that is unless there is a typhoon [*tái fēng* 台风] or 'big wind' blowing outside!

As of 2013, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) contained around 1,000 words of Chinese origin, and many pundits are forecasting a huge influx of new arrivals over the coming years. So **Chinese Corner** in Issue 5 of **ETiC** will attempt to catch some newly migrating terms before the OED gets them. Please send any words or phrases you would like to nominate to etic@xjtlu.edu.cn.

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2014 is the Chinese year of the horse.

qiān lǐ mǎ [千里马], or 'a horse that can cover a thousand *lǐ* [=500 metres] per day' was used by people in ancient China to describe an able person, especially a person with special talents.