Reinventing the Traditional Guangzhou Teahouse: Caterers, Customers and Cooks in Post-Socialist Urban South China

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, based on ten months of field research and archival studies in Guangzhou (Canton), centres on an ethnographic portrait of a 120-year old teahouse, a state enterprise which combines the functions of teahouse and restaurant in a single establishment with the help of 180 staff. I approach the teahouse as a complex, shifting social space embedded in wider discourses and historical processes, and use the ethnographic portrait as a basis for exploration into several themes in the anthropology of urban China. The first chapter provides an historical background and deals with the rise, fall and revival of teahouse culture in the changing uses of urban space in the twentieth century. Chapter two discusses sociability among teahouse regulars, and explores the teahouse as a site for the forging of social ties and the negotiation of class, neighbourhood and gender identities. In chapter three I examine the role of the state sector of the catering industry in recent discourses of nostalgia and tradition. The fourth chapter reveals the shifting nature of Cantonese cuisine within the contexts of globalisation and discourses of modernity. Chapter five considers the significance of gender, native place and age for structuring opportunities in the teahouse workforce. Chapter six looks at cooks' reactions to the ongoing reforms of the state enterprise, and situates these within the contexts of kitchen work and cooks' occupational identities. The underlying argument in the thesis is that social identifications and cultural discourses in contemporary urban China must be understood not only as grounded in the present, but also within complex histories of continuities, ruptures and reinventions. In particular, I argue that there is scope for rethinking Maoism as being not only destructive but also productive of cultural traditions.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an ethnographic portrait of the Glorious China, a 120-year old teahouse in one of the older parts of Guangzhou (Canton), a city of over six million inhabitants in southern China. While Guangzhou was replete with teahouses and other similar establishments, the Glorious China was special in that it was one of the oldest and in that it was one of only around twenty state-run teahouses remaining in the city. "Teahouse" is perhaps a confusing term. Unlike in most parts of China, Cantonese teahouses (*chalou*) were more or less indistinguishable from many large "restaurants" (*jiulou*). Both tended to serve meals with rice and dishes at midday and in the evening, and tea with snacks (dimsum) in the mornings, afternoons and evenings. The Glorious China was multistoried and could serve up to 600 customers. Though certainly not a small teahouse by local standards, it was far from being one of the biggest.

Going out to a teahouse or restaurant for tea and dimsum was locally known as *yamchah* (Mandarin: *yincha*), literally "to drink tea". This extremely popular form of consumption and social interaction in the Cantonese-speaking world (and nowadays even beyond) has rarely been the focus of anthropological research, and never on Mainland China. (One notable exception is the work of Siumi Maria Tam , who has studied *yamchah* as a locus for the construction of cultural identities in Hong Kong (1997) and among Hong Kong immigrants in Australia (2002).) While preparing for fieldwork, *yamchah* had seemed to me to be an excellent medium for studying sociability and consumption in Mainland China. Research was to focus on the relationship between consumption practices in teahouses and wider social categories and distinctions. (This theme has remained important in the thesis, particularly in chapters one and two.) After arriving in Guangzhou I was given the opportunity to do research inside an establishment (see below, p.10), and decided then that I would also try to look into the role of cooks as producers of culinary culture.

On my first visit to the Glorious China I was accompanied by my friend and host in Guangzhou (Canton), Mr. Bao, and his former middle school classmate, Mr. Yu, who was now an official at the Liwan District Association of Industry and Commerce (*Liwan Qu Gongshangye Lianhehui*). Mr. Yu had been instrumental in setting up my research at the teahouse. While we were walking from his office to the teahouse, Mr. Yu explained to me that he had contacted the most "traditional" (*chuantong*) establishments in Liwan, those which had been founded before 1949 and therefore classified by the state as "old names in business" (*laozihao*). Liwan District, he pointed out, was particularly famous for its "old names teahouses", and since these were the "most representative" (*zui you daibiaoxing*) of Guangzhou's "food culture" (*yinshi wenhua*), he had felt that they would be the most suitable for my research.

It struck me later on that I had never mentioned anything to him about wanting to study Guangzhou's "food culture", let alone the most "traditional" and "representative" teahouses. Instead, in the research proposal I had sent to him I had outlined a sociological study of restaurant work. I had assumed that this kind of research would seem most acceptable and sensible to the local bureaucratic gatekeepers. Mr. Yu's assumptions were revealing in themselves. Clearly, teahouses in Guangzhou were in many ways preinterpreted for me. They were already implicated in discourses which defined "the teahouse" as a site of tradition and articulated this tradition with specific localities (the district and the city). An ethnographic study of teahouses in Guangzhou would have to take these discourses into account.

Indeed, Guangzhou's teahouses, and in particular the practice of *yamchah*, were frequently articulated with ideas of Guangzhou and "Cantoneseness". For example, the local Guangzhou food writer, Shen Hongfei (2000), insists that *yamchah* is at the very centre of "Cantonese people's identities" (*Guangdongren de shenfen rentong*), because the teahouse plays such a vital role in their social networks. He writes:

> A person is the sum total of his social relations; the social relations of a Cantonese are summed up inside a teapot, brewed with boiling water and sealed with a lid (Shen 2000: 220).

Another example is from a sociological survey of the city written in the 1980s:

> For Guangzhou people, morning tea, popularly called 'a bowl of tea and two snacks' (*yi zhong liang jian*) or 'savouring tea' (C. *taamchah*), is a way of enjoying life. Rich in local colour, it is one of the main distinguishing characteristics of the Guangzhou people's lifestyle (Deng 1988: 186).

What is perhaps most striking about these accounts is their timeless nature, the way they conveniently forget the Maoist years, a time when, as one elderly acquaintance in the city put it to me, "there was not much teahouse culture to speak of." How could teahouse going be so readily defined as something "traditional"? Was this a traditional cultural form that had simply survived the Mao years (Potter and Potter 1990: 251-269)? Or was teahouse culture being reinvented or "recycled" (Siu 1989; 1990) in response to changing social and political circumstances? Was there in fact scope for both continuity and reinvention here? These questions are central to the thesis, and are discussed at greater length in chapters one, three and four.

However, "tradition" was only one of many abstract concepts that were articulated within the teahouse. In the thesis I approach the teahouse as a complex, shifting social space embedded in several wider discourses and historical processes. Each of the six substantive chapters in the thesis contributes to my ethnographic construction of the teahouse from specific thematic and theoretical perspectives, and each deals with a specific theme or themes in the anthropology of urban China. In line with my argument that practices in the teahouse were implicated in wider discourses and political-economic processes, all of the chapters, some more so than others, move between fieldwork accounts from the teahouse and historical documents, newspaper articles and other written materials. I do not pretend to paint an exhaustive or comprehensive picture of all aspects of work, consumption and sociability at the Glorious China. On the contrary, part of my argument is that there is no unitary perspective from which the teahouse, as a socially constructed place, could be grasped as a totality. Thus, while my ethnography is not particularly "multi-sited" in terms of fieldwork practice (Marcus 1995), it is "multi-sighted" in that it views a single cultural institution from an array of different perspectives.

The chapters

Chapter one, "Teahouse culture in twentieth-century Guangzhou", provides a history of the Glorious China in particular and Guangzhou teahouses more generally. In the chapter, I focus on the changing roles of Guangzhou teahouses as sites of sociability and nodal points in the urban landscape. Chapter two, "Fashioning the teahouse: cohesion and difference among customers at the Glorious China", though more ethnographic than chapter one, is similar to it in that it deals with issues of space and place and explores how social ties were forged and how various social identities were negotiated in the teahouse.

Chapters three and four deal more explicitly with discourses on food and cuisine than do the other chapters. Chapter three, "Culinary nostalgia, tradition and the catering trade" is in some ways the central chapter of the thesis. Here I consider how the Glorious China teahouse was constructed as a site of local tradition. I move between present-day nostalgic narratives of the past and historical documents on the catering trade. In chapter four, "Rewriting the Cantonese menu: Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine*" I take a look at reinventions of Cantonese cuisine, situating these within the context of globalisation and against discourses of modernity.

Chapters five and six focus on the teahouse as a place of work. Chapter five, "Gender, native place and the teahouse workforce" considers the significance of gender, native place and other identifications for structuring opportunities for teahouse workers. In the final chapter, "The 'nucleus of the restaurant': cooks at the Glorious China", I look into cooks' reactions to the ongoing reforms of the state enterprise, and situate these within the contexts of kitchen work and cooks' occupational identities.

In arranging the sequence of chapters in the thesis I have followed three principles: temporal, spatial and thematic. Temporally, the first chapter is more strictly historical than the subsequent chapters. It provides an important historical background for the rest of the thesis. This history is absolutely crucial for understanding the complex mixture of pre-socialist, socialist, and reform era practices which, as I argue in chapters two through six, typified work culture and consumption at the Glorious China at the turn of the twenty-first century. These subsequent chapters take the time of my ethnographic field research in 1999-2000 as their starting point, but I frequently return to the longer twentieth-century history first introduced in chapter one to explore various ruptures, reinventions and sometimes unexpected continuities.

Spatially, the earlier chapters focus mostly on the "front regions" of the teahouse-restaurant, discussing its relation to other urban spaces in Guangzhou and on interactions, social distinctions and eating and drinking practices among its clientele. From chapter three the thesis gradually moves towards the "back regions" of the Glorious China, exploring work practices and relations among teahouse staff and managers. Parts of chapter five and chapter six in particular investigate parts of the Glorious China hidden from the view of most customers. This incremental shift from front regions to back regions parallels a thematic shift from "consumption" to "production". Rather than theoretically privileging either consumption or production, however, together the chapters in the thesis demonstrate how cooks, customers and caterers all participated in the ongoing redefinition of Guangzhou's teahouse culture, in negotiation with one another, with the legacies and memories of the past and with changing social, political and economic forces.

Research

This thesis is based on a total of ten months of field research in Guangzhou, between August 1999 and August 2000. Originally, my plan was to do fieldwork among customers in several teahouses in different parts of the city. The fact that my research became both narrower, concentrating on one particular establishment instead of several, and broader, to include not only consumption but also culinary work and catering, was largely thanks to my Chinese hosts, a family of three living in Tianhe District in the eastern part of Guangzhou.

My hosts took an active part in my research. They insisted that the only way I could really learn about teahouses was if I worked in one, and even utilised their personal networks in order to find me a position in a teahouse. At the end of September, Mr. Bao, the father of the family, contacted his old classmate, Mr. Yu. Mr. Yu agreed to contact several teahouses in the district on my behalf. After enrolling at the city's Zhongshan University (managers at the teahouses Mr. Yu had contacted insisted that I belong to a work unit that was responsible for me), handing in a research plan to the university and to Mr. Yu, and undergoing a medical examination and writing a "hygiene exam" (both requirements for employees in the city's food and drink industry), I was given a place as a "trainee" (*shixisheng*) in the Glorious China teahouse. (I was in fact never asked to do any work, except during the busy time around the Chinese New Year when lots of extra hands were needed in the kitchen.)

I began my research in the Glorious China in the first week of November. As is typical of ethnographic research in organisations (Hirsch and Gellner 2001), leaders and other gatekeepers in the organisation helped to shape the specific partialities of my research by regulating my access to different parts of the teahouse and to different people. Thus, while access to people in the dining areas was constrained above all by their willingness or otherwise to talk to me, research on the workplace was a somewhat trickier matter. Research access in organisations, as Eric Hirsch and David N. Gellner point out, is

> not something to be negotiated once and then forgotten about... It is, on the contrary, something that has to be both scrutinized for the way it transforms the research and [is] continuously negotiated throughout the time of fieldwork (2001: 5).

During my first month, I was obliged to wear a suit and tie and was placed at the front desk. As I discuss in chapter two, I became in effect a part of the restaurant's decor. At the beginning I was also popular with the general managers of the company, whose office was at a separate location from the Glorious China restaurant itself. (The company ran several establishments, as I point out in chapter one). For reasons unknown to me, they were under the impression that I was a "foreign expert" on restaurant management, and that I could help them improve their business. After I made it clear that this was not the case, and that I was there to learn from them, they quickly grew tired of me. Indeed, I was unable to get any interviews with top-level management, and had to rely on managers and staff at the restaurant itself for information on business strategies, reforms, and so forth. Despite my fall in status with the general managers, my presence was tolerated. In fact, their disinterest was also a blessing, because it gave me freer access to the different parts of the restaurant. By January, with the permission of the head chef, I was conducting more and more of my research in the kitchen and other "back spaces" of the restaurant.

Following a sporting accident in which I broke a collar bone I spent April in London and returned to Guangzhou in May. When I returned to Guangzhou I was still recovering from the injury, and decided to leave my hosts in Tianhe and move in with good friends, an Australian couple who lived in a more spacious, comfortable flat that was also much closer to the teahouse. Not willing to sustain a fall that could prolong my recovery, between May and August I also spent much less time in the slippery kitchen areas and more time in the dining spaces, talking not only to customers, but also to serving staff and managers.

I visited the Glorious China three to four times a week, during different times of day and on different days of the week. At crucial business times such as the two-week Chinese New Year I would spend every day at the restaurant.

On "days off" I would usually catch up on fieldnote writing and newspaper reading, visit the Zhongshan University Library, or take day trips in and around the city. Archival research at Zhongshan University was supplemented with work in the library at School of Oriental and African Studies in London. In the spring of 2001 I accompanied my wife on a five week long research trip to Shanghai. In the Shanghai Library I found many useful materials, including many older Chinese cookbooks which I had not been able to locate in Guangzhou.

Fieldwork was conducted in both Mandarin and Cantonese, often in both during the course of a single conversation. I did not use a tape recorder, but jotted down observations and parts of conversations in a notebook I kept with me at all time. Conversations were usually jotted down in a mixture of transcription and Chinese characters. I arrived to Guangzhou fluent in Mandarin and with a basic grasp of Cantonese, having received some training in the dialect and having previously lived in the city for a year. However, it was only during the last couple of months that Cantonese became my primary field language. For Cantonese (C.) terms, I have employed the Yale system of transliteration. For Mandarin (M.), pinyin.

CHAPTER 1. TEAHOUSE CULTURE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY GUANGZHOU

This chapter provides an historical account of the Glorious China and the larger teahouse culture in Guangzhou between the end of the nineteenth century and the end of the twentieth. In charting the rise, development, demise and revival of these cultural practices, I focus in particular on the relationship between urban space, social interaction and teahouse consumption. Having a grasp of this history of teahouse culture is crucial to understanding the complex mix of reinventions, continuities and ruptures with the past which I discuss in the subsequent chapters.

Teahouse culture in late Qing and Republican Guangzhou

The Glorious China was founded in 1876, making it one of the oldest teahouses in the city still in operation in the year 2000. Unlike the much more famous Taotaoju Teahouse and several of the other "old names in business" (*laozihao*), a term used for enterprises that have been around since before 1949, the Glorious China has been situated at the same site since it was first established. However, both the teahouse itself and the surrounding area have changed dramatically since the late nineteenth century. At that time, the establishment was situated in a semi-rural area at the northern edge of Xiguan, the Western Suburb. During the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and the early years of the Republic (1912-1949), the Western Suburb was Guangzhou's foremost centre for international and domestic trade and was also home to many of the city's tradesmen and their families, the most wealthy of whom erected extravagant mansions in the area. Xiguan was also the city's prime area for banqueting and other entertainments, and housed many of the most lavish eating places and brothels. (One writer, who visited the city in the 1820s, described Xiguan disdainfully as a "forest of flesh and sea of wine" (*roulin jiuhai*) (Wen Xun cited in Gao and Gong 1999: 42).) The Glorious China was probably a relatively modest establishment, however, offering teas and dry biscuits. It was housed in a single-storied brick building and was according to some informants called a "tea hut" (*chaliao* or *chashe*), a somewhat rustic name employed by many establishments on the city's fringes that wished to attract Xiguan merchants and other men seeking temporary refuge from city life.

Much more is known about the Glorious China since the 1930s. By then, the area around the teahouse was becoming increasingly urbanised and industrialised. This was part of the rapid growth and rebuilding of the city that had taken off in the beginning of the twentieth century, which included the destruction of the city walls, the widening of roads, the introduction of new modes of transport, and the construction of new centres of consumption and trade, with department stores and other features which emulated Japanese and Western models (Tsin 2000; Ho 1991). In 1936, sixty years after its original establishment, the Glorious China was completely rebuilt in a style which was at once more opulent than before and which fit in with the changing surroundings. Now a multi-storied "teahouse" (*chalou*) rather than a "tea hut", the rebuilding coincided with a change of ownership and management. As with most of the grand teahouses at the time, it was a shareholding company. Its 20-odd shareholders owned shares in several of the city's establishments and were most likely members of the teahouse-owners guild that had been founded in Xiguan in the late Qing.

Like many of the other buildings erected on the same road in the 20s and 30s, the Glorious China was two stories high and was built with an overhead terrace (*qilou*) on the first floor. The teahouse was part of a row of similarly terraced buildings, which together formed a long covered walkway. Such walkways became common on Guangzhou's most popular trading streets during the mid-Republican years, shielding pedestrians and vendors both from the torrential monsoon rains and the scorching subtropical sun. On either side of the Glorious China's front gate hung a couplet commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the teahouse and its new building. Next to the gate was a counter from which the teahouse sold cakes and biscuits to passers-by.

The first floor sported the so-called "Manchurian-style" windows (*manzhouchuang*) that were typical of the city's mansions and more up-market eating establishments. These were latticed windows with multi-coloured stained glass frames. The terrace in front of them was covered with potted plants. Inside, the ceilings were high on both floors. At the back of the relatively unadorned ground floor hall was a small courtyard (*tianjing*), a common feature in Guangzhou houses at that time, large enough to improve air circulation and light, but not big enough for tables and chairs. The first floor had two halls, front and back. The first floor halls were especially elaborate and refined, with square tables with marble tops and antique calligraphies and paintings hanging on the walls. After the rebuilding (and perhaps also prior to it), the Glorious China attracted a variety of mostly elite male customers, including both scholars and members of the new middle class, such as medical doctors. It was also a popular meeting place for traders, in particular real estate brokers and cloth merchants, who also conducted some of their business at the teahouse.[1]

Tea-drinking had become popular in the homes of China's elites already during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and had come into more general use by the Song (960-1278) (Schafer 1977: 122-124; Freeman 1977: 147).

Commercial teahouses were largely a Song innovation. They had flourished in the capitals of Kaifeng and Hangzhou and by the end of the dynasty could be found even in many smaller market towns (Freeman 1977: 158-163; Zhu and Shen 1995: 65-68). In Guangzhou and the Pearl River Delta, however, teahouses only appeared in significant numbers in the mid-Qing, during the years of the "Canton system" (1757-1842) (Ye 1992: 41). Under the Canton system all of China's trade with the West was confined to Guangzhou, a restriction which "brought to that city unprecedented prosperity" and greatly stimulated the commercial economy of the Delta's towns and villages (Faure 1996: 9). The Delta area fell behind the rising economy of Shanghai and its hinterland after the Opium War (1839-1842) had put an end to the Canton system, yet it still managed to double its total exports between 1883 and 1924 (Faure 1989: 34-35). And despite being increasingly overshadowed by Hong Kong, still Guangzhou remained an important trading centre, which together with Hong Kong linked the production of silks and other commodities in the towns and villages of southern China with markets in the West, in Southeast Asia and north along the Chinese coast (Siu 1993: 25, Tsin 1999: 23). Teahouses and restaurants prospered more than ever in Guangzhou during the late Qing and Republican years (Gao and Gong 1999: 43), adding to the city's China-wide culinary reputation, a reputation that may have been considerable even earlier during the Qing (Simoons 1991: 54-55).

A comparison can be made between the rise of teahouses in Guangzhou and that which occurred in Nantong County in Jiangsu Province, whose teahouse culture has recently been the focus of a fascinating study by the historian Qin Shao (1998). Shao points out that the explosive growth in the number of teahouses in Nantong at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century was closely related to the commercialisation of the local economy and the influx of merchants from neighbouring provinces, in particular tea traders from Anhui, who opened both teashops and teahouses (1998: 1010-1012). In Guangzhou, too, the expansion of the teahouse business in the mid-Qing was undoubtedly linked not only to the commercialisation of the economy, but also to the huge influx of teas and tea traders to the area. Tea was along with silk the most important commodity in China's trade with the West. Although Guangdong produced both of these commodities, at the time of the Canton system the bulk of the teas and silks exported from Guangzhou were produced elsewhere in China (Faure 1996: 9). Nineteenth-century Guangzhou was virtually crawling with tea merchants from major tea-producing provinces such as Anhui and Fujian (Gardella 1994: 35-36).

The close link between the number of teahouses and the development of trade points to some of the teahouse's social uses in late imperial and Republican China. Teahouses were an integral part of China's marketing systems (Skinner 1964). From the standard market towns all the way up to the great urban centres, they not only provided teas and other refreshments and entertainments such as storytelling and music, but were crucial nodal points where information was shared, social networks expanded and business deals, marriages and other contracts negotiated (1964: 20, 35, 39, 41, 42). In Nantong, teahouses were "centers of community life" (Shao 1998: 1016). Being "one of the most affordable of public social spaces" (1998: 1018), they were open to men of different social classes as sites of leisure, recreation, gossip, business, and conflict mediation (1998: 1016-1021).

As spaces for male sociality, leisure and business Guangzhou teahouses were not dissimilar to their counterparts elsewhere in China. Indeed, contemporary accounts suggest that Guangzhou's teahouses may have been even more significant than in other major cities. In the 1920s and 30s, visitors to Guangzhou who were based in Beijing and

Shanghai often commented on the uncommon popularity of teahouse-going in the city. In his travelogue of Guangzhou and Hong Kong, Huang Minghui (1936) insists on the universality of the practice of visiting teahouses among the residents of Guangzhou. He writes:

> All ilk of people, from the top to the bottom rungs of society, use the teahouse as their recreation centre, their lounge, often whiling away an hour or two before leaving (1936: 9).

Wang Wenyuan (1927), writing in the Beijing-based literary journal *Threads of Words*, describes his experiences of Guangzhou's teahouses and sweet shops during a twenty-odd day sojourn in the city in the late 20s. Like Huang, he emphasises the importance of the city's teahouses as places of relaxation and recreation (cf. Blofeld 1985: 57). Wang presents these establishments as constituting the few redeeming features of an unbearably hectic and materialistic city, declaring: "Busy modern man cannot do without such places of self-adjustment" (Wang 1927: 26). He describes Guangzhou people's habit of going out to the teahouse to drink tea and eat snacks as "more or less making an art out of everyday life" (1927: 25).

As sites of male leisure, which were rarely frequented by "respectable" women (Ye 2000: 130), Guangzhou's teahouses offered a variety of entertainments, including blind female singers and singing actresses (*chang nüling*) (Zuimian Shanren c.1975: 37-38; Xiao 1934: 25). To the shock of some outside visitors, many establishments even employed waitresses to serve and drink with customers (Cheng 1947: 73). But teahouses were not only places of leisure. They were also important as centres of information and business. As in the case of the Glorious China, a meeting place for cloth merchants and real estate brokers, certain teahouses were frequented by people involved in particular trades, so that potential customers and associates would know where to go for a specific service. One visitor in the late 1940s observed: "Bosses of many trades and brokers (*qianke*) often sit at a particular table at a particular hour in a particular teahouse awaiting business" (Qiong'an 1948: 24). The same writer went on to note that:

> People engaging in inferior practices, such as flesh merchants, gamblers, pimps, robbers, smugglers and other criminals also use the teahouse as a site for operating their schemes (1948: 24).

Indeed, many teahouses, locally referred to at the time as "ruffians' teahouses" (C. *deihmau chahgeui*), were associated with the "yin side" of Guangzhou society (Gong 1999: 251). The association between vice and certain teahouses, and perhaps to some extent teahouse culture more generally, is displayed on the cover of *Secret Records of the Guangzhou Underworld* (Zhong 1949), published on the eve of the communist takeover, which depicts gun-wielding gangsters "negotiating" (C. *gongsou*) at a table in an outdoor teahouse **(figure 1)**.

As Qin Shao stresses, late Qing and Republican era teahouses were "multifaceted public institutions" (1998: 1021), employed to various ends by large numbers of the male urban population of different social standings. In his monumental study of nineteenth-century Hankou, William T. Rowe stresses that teahouses actually brought together men of different social groups, providing arenas for non-class restrictive "public talk", akin to the coffeehouses of early modern Europe (1989: 60, 86). For Rowe, as for David Strand (1989), who points out that teahouses were important meeting places used both by traditional guild members and more modern-style labour activists in 1920s Beijing (1989: 154, 155, 165, 180, 196), teahouses were

FIGURE 1: TEAHOUSE GANGSTERS

implicated in the expansion of the public sphere in the late Qing and early Republic. Similarly, in his 1956 play *Teahouse* (*Chaguan*), Lao She presents an image of Beijing teahouses in the late Qing and Republic as sites where diverse segments of the population came together to discuss public affairs, albeit under the constant and growing surveillance of the state as indicated by the increasingly conspicuous signs hanging from the teahouse walls reading "Do not discuss affairs of state" (*mo tan guo shi*) (Lao She 1980).

However, the egalitarianism and convergence of social classes alleged for Hankou's and Beijing's teahouses stands in stark contrast to Shao's detailed study of Nantong, where "social division and exclusion existed within as well as between individual teahouses" (1998: 1014). Guangzhou's teahouse culture was similarly divided, although the divisions took a somewhat different form than in Nantong (1998: 1013-1015). The official Guangzhou guidebook from 1934 lists three "grades" of teahouse. "Tearooms" (*chashi*) were classed as "first-class" (*shangdeng*) establishments. Here "one needs to order from a menu and is served at one's table" (Guangzhou Shizhengfu 1934: 251). After that came the multi-storied teahouses (*chalou*) (such as the Glorious China) where this was not necessary as hawkers came around with snacks. The bottom rung were the "fried noodle shops" (*chaofenguan*):

> This is where rickshaw pullers (*chefu*) and other labourers drink their tea. The price of tea is the cheapest here, and they are [therefore] also popularly known as eight penny shops (*baliguan*) (1934: 251).[2]

Unsurprisingly, the guidebook only lists establishments of the first two grades.

Moreover, as in Nantong hierarchies existed not only between establishments but also within them. This was most apparent in the case of the multi-storied teahouses, which had become increasingly widespread in the city from the beginning of the twentieth century (Ye 1992: 41-42; Gong 1999: 251-252). Unlike the small, single-storied fancy tearooms and simple eight penny shops, the mostly two- and three-storied teahouses did seem to attract men from different classes. However, the teahouse space was socially divided. To begin with, the price of tea varied between different rooms in the same teahouse (Wang 1927; Wuxing Cihangshi 1919: *juan* 4:2). Often, the teahouses were segregated vertically, as was the case with the Glorious China after 1936, where the first floor was much more luxurious than the ground floor. Huang Minghui observes that the amenities in the teahouse were divided according to floor: the higher up one climbed, the cleaner and more refined it became (1936: 9-10). Similarly, John Blofeld, who visited Guangzhou in the 1930s, recalls that "[a]s the prices increased storey by storey, the top floor drew the wealthier patrons" (1985: 57). He writes:

> The sedate customers in the upper rooms, clad in long silk gowns, would fan themselves and sip tea with smiling decorum; whereas in the rooms nearer street level most would be wearing proletarian jackets and trousers of black silk gauze specially treated so as to be cool but not transparent. Untroubled by decorum, they might draw both feet up to the chair seat and stay perched there with their knees at chin level (1985: 57-58).

The divisions between and within teahouses involved not only prices, service styles, decor and decorum, but were also related to the quality of food and beverages. While the eight penny shops served basic noodle dishes and congees to working men, tearooms and multi-storied teahouses enticed a wealthier clientele with a lavish selection of teas and dimsum. For a teahouse proprietor in Republican Guangzhou, according to the historian of Guangzhou customs, Gong Bohong, the two most important employees were the tea blender (*jiaocha shifu*) and the dimsum chef (*dianxin shifu*) (1999: 252-253). The former mixed teas of various qualities and origins to suit customers' tastes and bring down overhead expenses. Some establishments went to great lengths to attract customers with the exquisite quality of their teas and brewing water. During the Republic, for example, the Taotaoju Teahouse had porters fetch fresh water every day from the famous Nine Dragon Spring (*Jiulongquan*) in the Baiyun Hills to the northeast of Guangzhou, and publicly transport the spring water through the city's busiest streets all the way to in the teahouse's location in the heart of Xiguan in the southwest (Huang ai dong-xi 1999: 37; Deng et al. 1997: 538).

By the 1920s the quality and variety of the dimsum appears to have become even more important than that of the teas. Before then, most teahouses served rather simple snacks, mostly dry biscuits prepared in advance. The elite tearooms, which began to open in the early 1900s and flourished in the 1920s and 30s, were the first establishments to prepare fresh dimsum to order "while you wait" (*jidian jizhi*). Under pressure from the tearooms, the grand teahouses now also began to provide their customers with freshly made delicacies. (In three-story teahouses the dimsum kitchen was situated between the second and third floors, ensuring that customers sitting higher up in the teahouse would receive the freshest and hottest delicacies (Huang ai dong-xi 1999: 36).) Tearooms and teahouses began to develop new dimsum, often by appropriating street foods and serving them up in smaller portions. Other dimsum were developed on the basis of Suzhou, Beijing, Shanghai and Western delicacies. Prawn dumplings (*xiajiao*), rice flour rolls (*changfen*), translucent dumplings (*fenguo*), stuffed sticky-rice wraps (*nuomiji*) and many other dimsum now considered standard *yamchah* fare in Guangzhou and Hong Kong, were all developed in the tearooms and teahouses of early and mid-Republican Guangzhou (Gong 1999: 251-254; Gao and Gong: 45-46; 120-127).[3]

The great variety of teatime snacks developed in Guangzhou's Republican-era teahouses and tearooms was frequently commented upon by outside visitors, who were used to the more simple snacks served in teahouses in most other Chinese cities. Visitors from the Jiangnan region, who were accustomed to eating rice and dishes at midday, were often surprised to find that in Guangzhou many people went to the teahouse for lunch:

> When the noon cannon is fired from Yuexiu Hill, people leave their work and go to a teahouse or tearoom. Guangzhou people really love to drink tea; they go three times a day - morning, noon and evening...What they mean by "drinking tea" (*yincha*) is not merely drinking some tea and that's the end of it. Rather, they also have to eat noodles or different kinds of dimsum (Huang 1936: 9-10).

Cheng Zhizheng, writing in the late 1940s for the Shanghai-based monthly, the *China Traveler*, also remarked on the apparently unusual Guangzhou eating patterns. Breakfast (*zaocan*), he writes, was just like "our" lunch (*wucan*). "And midday tea (*wucha*)? It is similar to our breakfast (*zaocan*). In addition to a pot of clear tea, there are snacks of all shapes and varieties" (Cheng 1947: 72).

After its reconstruction in 1936, the Glorious China also began to provide its customers with a variety of freshly made dimsum. By this time, however, more and more of Guangzhou's grand teahouses had begun to provide not only "snacks of all shapes and varieties", but also banquets with dishes and wines, which had previously been the exclusive domain of the city's restaurants. Prior to the late 1920s teahouses and restaurants (*jiulou* or *jiujia*, literally "winehouses") had been very distinct types of establishment. A guidebook to Guangzhou published in Shanghai in 1919 puts it succinctly: "Teahouses specialise in serving tea; there are snacks but no wine or dishes" (Wuxing Cihangshi 1919: *juan* 4:2). While teahouses served early morning and midday tea and in some cases also evening tea, restaurants were open primarily for the evening meal at around 6 p.m., and often for the morning meal as well which, as was noted by Cheng Zhizheng above, for many Guangzhou people consisted of rice and dishes (Wuxing Cihangshi 1919: *juan* 7:5; Guangzhou Shizhengfu 1934: 250-251).

Qing and Republican restaurants were frequented by a relatively restricted segment of the population. Although at some of the smaller and simpler establishments it was possible to order à la carte, most specialised in preparing set banquets for large parties (Wuxing Cihangshi 1919: *juan* 4:2). The rooms were often exquisite and spacious, and could be hired for exclusive use (*ibid.*). In teahouses, even the expensive rooms would not be private but would be open to individuals and parties arriving independently of one another. By contrast, restaurants provided relatively secluded spaces for private parties of elite male diners. Here, if they wished, they could be entertained by troupes of musicians and courtesans, or engage in gambling, prostitution and, in some establishments, opium-smoking (Wuxing Cihangshi 1919: *juan* 4:8; Gao and Gong 1999: 48; Gong 1999: 255). Although some Republican-era teahouses, as we have seen, were also used for these activities, restaurants were in many cases completely indistinguishable from brothels (Ho 1993: 123-124).[3]

An attempt in 1925 by the teahouse magnate, Tan Jienan, to provide banquets at the Taotaoju Teahouse was at first violently opposed by the teahouse-workers' union, who did not want its members to work under the same roof as people belonging to the restaurant-workers' union. By the end of the decade, however, he had broken down the resistance, and went on to open several combined teahouse-restaurants (Gao and Gong 1999: 49-50; Gong 1999: 256). In contrast to the clear distinction between teahouses and restaurants mentioned in the 1919 guidebook, the 1934 guide notes that "there are also [teahouses] that serve wine and dishes" (Guangzhou Shizhengfu 1934: 250). According to the historians of Guangzhou food, Gao Xuzheng and Gong Bohong (1999), the War years were crucial for the success of the new teahouse-restaurants. At the time of the Japanese invasion and occupation of the city in 1937, many establishments closed down or were destroyed by bombing. During the time of the puppet regime that ruled the city until 1945, several teahouses and winehouses reopened, however, often reemerging as dual-type establishments. Famous old teahouses and restaurants were now able to provide a wide variety of services, including dimsum, set banquets, à la carte dishes and home catering. The city's once numerous tearooms and home catering firms were unable to compete with these new combined teahouse-restaurants, and did not survive past the economic upheavals of the War years (Gao and Gong 1999: 49-53). The official guidebook from 1948 writes: "While there are differences between teahouses and restaurants, still most establishments do both [tea service and meal service]" (Liao 1948: 49).

The teahouse culture that emerged in Guangzhou during the Qing shared many features with that of cities and market towns throughout China. Yet by the Republican years, as noted by numerous visitors to the city, Guangzhou's teahouses were becoming increasingly large-scale and food-oriented. Unlike teahouses in many parts of China, the Guangzhou teahouse was not only an important site for leisure and social interaction, but was also a place people went to enjoy good food. This was especially apparent by the 1930s, when a unique kind of Guangzhou-style establishment emerged, which combined the hitherto strictly separated services of teahouse and restaurant. The multi-purpose teahouse-restaurants that came to dominate the catering trade condensed into a single space a wide range of consumption practices and styles of social interaction. The more secluded, "private" banqueting culture of the restaurants was now found in the same establishments that also provided the larger, more "public" spaces of the teahouses, which were more suited for use as "offices" and information centres, and where social distinctions between patrons were visible to all and sundry. Many aspects of this multifaceted teahouse culture were familiar from the Guangzhou of the late 1990s, but not before being profoundly transformed by the Maoist state of the 50s, 60s and 70s.

Levelling distinctions: teahouses in revolutionary Guangzhou

Chen Xiangchen had managed the Glorious China since 1936, and was one of its largest shareholders. In the early 1950s Chen became the sole owner of the teahouse. By then, he had bought out the other shareholders, many of whom had left with their families for Hong Kong and places farther afield, as did many teahouse proprietors and other businessmen in the late 40s and early 50s who feared for their prospects following the communist victory in 1949. One of the former shareholders, a relative of Chen Xiangchen's who had according to Chen's grandson attempted but failed to pursuade Chen to leave Guangzhou, set up his own "Glorious China" teahouse in Yuenlong in Hong Kong's New Territories in 1950.[5]

Chen Xiangchen's control of the teahouse was soon to come to an end, however. In the early 50s, the new municipal government demanded that Chen repay it for outstanding back taxes from before it had come to power, a move which forced many other teahouses and restaurants to close their doors temporarily or permanently (cf. Liu 1999: 28-29). Eventually, like many caterers and shop owners, he was coerced into accepting joint ownership and management with the state (cf. Vogel 1980: 156-173). Under the new system of joint public-private management (*gong-si heying*), to which Chen yielded in February of 1956, he was allowed to stay on as a manager in name but with greatly reduced influence. A second manager, a Communist Party member, was appointed by the municipal government. Chen Xiangchen retired in 1958 or 1959 and passed his so-called managerial position on to his son. By that time, however, the Chens no longer had any ownership rights over the teahouse, which had been completely taken over by the state. From 1958, the Glorious China, along with virtually all of the city's restaurants, teahouses, snack shops and bakeries, came under the centralised authority of the Guangzhou Food and Drink Service Company (*Guangzhou Yinshi Fuwu Gongsi*), a municipal-level company which was divided into district-level subunits in the early 1970s. Chen Xiangchen's son was expelled from the company during the Cultural Revolution decade (1966-1976) and sent down to the countryside for reeducation, after which the Glorious China had only a single manager.

At first, the Glorious China's services were actually expanded after 1956. A new kitchen was added, enabling the teahouse to provide rice and dishes - unlike many of its competitors, the Glorious China did not begin to provide banqueting facilities in the 1930s and 40s, but had stuck to teas and dimsum. Already in 1960, however, the dining area became limited to the hall on the ground floor, as the entire first floor was taken over by the Food and Drink Service Management Section of the Western District Trade Bureau (*Xiqu*

Shangye Ju Yinshi Fuwu Guanli Bu), which coordinated the restaurants, teahouses and snackshops in the district. (The district was more or less equivalent to the old Western Suburb.) Although the bureau moved its offices to another location later in the 1960s, the first floor was not reopened until 1983. Instead, it became a storage room for chairs, tables and other random items. These items did not, however, include the antique paintings and couplets that had adorned the inside and outside of the teahouse. These were all demolished by red guards and the teahouse staff during the campaign to "Destroy the four olds" (old culture, old beliefs, old customs and old habits) in 1966, at the beginning of Cultural Revolution. (A few other teahouses, including the Taotaoju, allegedly managed to hide some of their artifacts from the red guards.) In 1966 the Glorious China was also renamed the Facing the Sun Teahouse (*Xiang yang chalou*), the "sun" being Chairman Mao, resuming its original name only in 1973.

The Glorious China was in fact amongst a minority of Guangzhou catering establishments founded before 1949 that remained open throughout the entire revolutionary period. In 1958 only 2,800 teahouses, restaurants, snack shops and sweet shops remained in the city (Gao and Gong 1999: 60), compared to an estimated 12,000 eating establishments a decade before (Qiong'an 1948: 24), at which time Guangzhou's population had stood at around a million and a half. In 1972 there were only 512 operating eating establishments (Gao and Gong 1999: 61), catering to a city of more than two million inhabitants. These figures are comparable to those for Beijing provided by Martin King Whyte and William L. Parish (1984). In 1949, Beijing had fewer than two million inhabitants and over 10,000 eating places. By 1979 there were 656 restaurants for a population of nearly five million (1984: 98). Although efforts were made throughout the 1970s to expand the number of eating venues in Guangzhou (Gao and Gong 1999: 61), it was only in the 1980s that the catering industry regained the kind of vibrancy it had had in the late 1940s.

Part of the original decline in the number of eating and drinking establishments was no doubt a result of the new government's crackdown on prostitution, gambling and opium smoking, all of which as we saw earlier had had ties with the catering trade, and with the exodus of teahouse and restaurant managers and cooks to Hong Kong (Gao and Gong 1999: 59). But the sustained decline of the teahouse and restaurant trades in cities throughout China should be seen within the context of the wider political economy of the People's Republic. Former treaty ports such as Guangzhou and Shanghai were regarded suspiciously as a parasitic "cities of consumption" which had simply fed off the countryside without giving anything in return. Such cities were now to be transformed into centres of industrial production which would supply the country with manufactured goods (Whyte and Parish 1984: 33-34). Investments (mostly from local government, since the central government provided little economic support to the previously more developed coastal regions) went into Guangzhou's heavy industry, while infrastructure and retailing, including catering, were largely neglected (Schintz 1989: 314-316; Yusuf and Wu 1997: 113-114). Industrial production came first and was to be guided by central planning rather than by consumer demands (Vogel 1989).

In this production-led economy, China's cities "were to be functional rather than ostentatious, consumption was to be restricted to necessities" (Stockman 2000: 52-53). The frugal living necessitated by official policy was exacerbated by the incessant food shortages. These began already in the mid-50s, brought about not only by the problems of central planning and the neglect of infrastructure and distribution but also by agricultural policies that encouraged the production of grain over supplementary crops (Hartford 1992). Supplies of meats and vegetables were not reliable until well into the 1980s. Urban rationing began in 1954. It was in part a reply to shortages but also part of the policies aimed at levelling differences in income and consumption levels and "assuring basic nutrition" for all city dwellers (Smil 1995: 280). Urban households continued to receive subsidised grain rations until the early 1990s (Smil 1995; Ikels 1996: 26). According to informants, in the mid-80s Guangzhou's teahouse-goers still paid for their dimsum (which typically consist of a wheat or rice flour wrapping and a meat and vegetable filling) with a combination of grain coupons (*liangpiao*) for the wrapping and cash for the filling. Shortages were of course most severe during the horrific three-year famine that followed in the wake of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960). As Uncle Liu, a regular customer at the Glorious China in his seventies, told me once over tea:

> Before the Eight Year War of Resistance [against Japan] the food was very good in Guangzhou, 'For eating, it's Guangzhou' (*shi zai Guangzhou*). After the war the food quickly recovered, but not so during Mao's time. Then grain staples (*zhushi*) were a problem, how could people think of supplementary foods (*fushi*) ?

It is important to stress that Mao-era frugality was as much a moral project as it was an economic one. As the anthropologist Jack Goody has remarked, "[s]ince differences in cuisine parallel class distinctions, egalitarian and revolutionary regimes tend, at least in the initial phases, to do away with the division between the *haute* and *basse cuisine*" (1982: 147). Mao's China was certainly no exception to this. The regime was dedicated to the eradication of what it regarded as "wasteful consumption" and to the levelling of the kind of culinary distinctions displayed in Guangzhou's teahouses and restaurants. This is apparent in Lu Wenfu's (1987) satirical short novel from the early 1980s, *The Gourmet*, whose protagonist despises not just gluttony but any kind of elaborate or fanciful cooking. After the communist victory he is appointed manager of one of Suzhou's finest elite restaurants. He immediately sets about to create an egalitarian establishment that would attract workers and peasants and not create hierarchies between servers and diners, by radically simplifying the decor, service and menu (1987: 116-123).

According to Qin Shao, some of Nantong's early Republican elites had regarded teahouses as wasteful, unproductive and disorderly sites that stood in the way of China's modernisation. Instead, these elites promoted the use of new public spaces such as parks and libraries, which would help modernise the country by facilitating the improvement of people's minds and bodies (Shao 1998: 1021-1030). Similarly, the Guangzhou municipal government of the late 50s had clearly come to see "dining out" as falling short of their ideal image of a progressive socialist city. In stark contrast to its Republican precedents, the official Guangzhou guidebook from 1959 (Canton 1959) contains no section on food and drink. The only mention in the entire book of the city's once renowned eating scene can be found on a map of places of interest in the city. The map lists thirteen theatres, nine cinemas, eight cultural centres, seven parks and eight sports centres, but only one single eating establishment! Ideally, it would seem, teahouses and restaurants were to be substituted by more "healthy" spaces aimed at physical improvement and political education.

Shao explains that during Republican times, what he calls the "vilification of teahouses" in Nantong never translated into government policies aimed at restricting teahouse consumption. During the Maoist years, however, time not spent at work became increasingly filled with political and other collectivised activities, leaving less time or political legitimacy for leisurely excursions to teahouses and restaurants (Wang 1995). In the new society, it was not only production that was to be collectivised and state-led, but ideally also consumption and leisure. Throughout the country, canteens were established beginning in the 1950s in factories, enterprises and schools (Croll 1983: 231-234), making many of the commercial eating places superfluous. The collectivisation of consumption reached its apogee during the Great Leap Forward. In 1960, Guangzhou officials experimented with communal dining halls (*gonggong shitang*). In 1958, at the start of the Great Leap Forward, 2.65 million communal dining halls had been established in the countryside in an attempt to shift household preparation and eating to the collective (Chang and Wen 1997: 4; Croll 1983: 341-365). Many of these provided free meals, and peasants were encouraged to eat to their heart's content in order better to work for socialism (Chang and Wen 1997). In urban Guangzhou, however, the communal dining halls were apparently closed after only a few months (Vogel 1980: 266-268), and in the countrysde they were abondoned by 1962 (Chang and Wen 1997).

The politicisation of everyday life reached another high point during the Cultural Revolution, when teahouses and restaurants came under fierce attack as symbols of the "old society" and "bourgeois consumerism". People I met in Guangzhou who had lived through the Cultural Revolution recalled that at-the-table service was abolished in Guangzhou's catering establishments, as it symbolized the inequality of the old society. Certain dishes and snacks were simply taken out of production in the late 1960s and in many cases were not reintroduced until the 1980s (Zhong 1983). These included some of the foods associated with traditional annual festivals, which were seen as "wasteful" and "feudal" in the context of the state's attempts to introduce a new, simplified socialist ritual calendar (Whyte and Parish 1984: 317-319).

For example, the sale of moon cakes traditionally eaten at the mid-autumn festival had become an important source of revenue for the large teahouses in the Republican era, including the Glorious China. The production of mooncakes ceased completely at several famous teahouses, and was in many cases not restored until after 1978 (Guangzhou Shi 1998: 243-47).

The Glorious China was not the only only teahouse to be ravaged by red guards or to adopt a more revolutionary-sounding name during the Cultural Revolution. For example, the calligraphy on the sign board for the Lianxiang Teahouse (*Lianxianglou*) had allegedly been hand-painted in 1910 by the scholar Chen Ruyue, a member of the Hanlin Academy in Beijing. The sign was destroyed and replaced with one bearing the characters for the East is Rising Teahouse (*Dongshenglou*) (Gao and Gong 1999: 181). Another example was the Dasanyuan, whose name was a reference to the top graduates of the three levels of imperial examinations (Lin 1997: 21). It was renamed the Present Exceeds the Past Restaurant (*Jinshengxi fandian*) (Gao and Gong 1999: 188). Many master chefs came under criticism for the now suspect nature of their occupation and went into other jobs, and countless techniques and recipes were apparently lost with them (Hua 1983). Hundreds of eating places simply closed their doors (Gao and Gong 1999: 61).

Although the campaigns of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution stand out as the most radical attempts to reorder daily life, the political control over people's time and movements was implemented through a more gradual but thorough restructuring of urban space: the work unit or *danwei* system which was developed in the course of the 1950s, 60s and 70s (Lü and Perry 1997a). The ideal-typical work unit was a large, walled compound, based around a state-owned enterprise but adding to the functions of production and work those of housing, social welfare, health care, recreation and the allocation of consumer goods; a self-contained miniature society (Naughton 1997: 170; Gaubatz 1995: 29-32; Lü and Perry 1997b: 9-12). The system of heavily subsidised canteens built up since the 1950s was another key feature of the "redistributive economy" of the socialist work unit. These not only provided members with inexpensive foods, they also helped control the length of mealtime breaks (Yan 2000: 209). As Xiaobo Lü and Elizabeth Perry stress, in addition to their social functions *danwei* were also crucial for purposes of social and political control: it was through the *danwei* that political loyalties were monitored and public policies implemented (1997b: 8-9), and it was the *danwei* that was responsible for filling time spent out of work of with political activities (Wang 1995). Furthermore, contacts across *danwei* borders were strictly controlled, so that collective protests against the regime could often, if not always, be confined to individual work units (Lü and Perry 1997b: 8-9).

Teahouses, as we saw earlier, had the potential to bring together people from different parts of the city and different walks of life. Rowe contends that Hankou's many teahouses and wineshops were sites where ties were forged between groups living in different neighbourhoods, thereby partially offsetting the cellular nature which Hankou shared with other late imperial cities (1989: 60). In the even more cellularised cities of Mao-era China, it may well have been the case that both the number of teahouses and the opening hours of those that did exist were purposefully kept at a minimum in part in order to constrain the possibilities for the forging of horizontal, inter-*danwei* ties that could potentially threaten the state. Thus, as I clarify below, during the revolutionary years teahouse opening hours were closely integrated with working hours.

Despite the numerous setbacks to the catering trade, not all of Guangzhou's teahouses and restaurants disappeared during the revolutionary decades. Some up-scale eating spaces were reserved for official banquets for high-level cadres and foreign delegations, including the foreign businessmen who visited the Guangzhou Trade Fair, which was held annually beginning in 1957 (Gao and Gong 1999: 193; cf. Hsu and Hsu 1977: 313; Whyte and Parish 1984: 91). In the Mao era,

> dining someplace other than the workplace canteen or one's home - not to mention banqueting - was a prerogative largely monopolized by those with political prestige and position (Davis 2000: 14).

More modest establishments, such as the Glorious China, became in many respects supplements to the work unit system. Not all work units had canteens. Moreover, in the older parts of town, such as Xiguan, many work units were not spatially integrated compounds and could not provide housing at or near the work place (Ikels 1996: 207; cf. Gaubatz 1995: 32). According to people in Guangzhou, most teahouses kept very limited opening hours, which were meshed with the virtually uniform urban work schedule:

> "Twenty years ago," Ms. Li, an acquaintance in her sixties told me, "there was only morning tea, no late-night snacks (*xiaoye*)." Uncle Liu, who was ten years her senior, explained that before reforms, "everybody was a worker." He continued: "People had more regulated hours, so all teahouses would be closed by ten o'clock in the morning. Most people had to be at work by nine-thirty, and would stop off for morning tea on the way."

In contrast to the business negotiations and leisurely socialising found in Republican times, friends described going to the teahouse in the 60s and 70s as often being a stressful experience, which involved fighting for a seat and quickly gulping down one's tea and snacks, while other customers impatiently hovered around one's table waiting to grab a seat as soon as one left. The similarity between work-unit canteens and public eating places in the Mao era has recently been commented on by Yunxiang Yan:

> The work-unit mentality of 'feeding' instead of 'serving' people also made its way into restaurants in Beijing...Commercial restaurants also shared with the work-unit canteens the poor maintenance of internal space, a limited choice of foods, the requirement that the diner pay in advance, fixed times for meals...and, of course, ill-tempered workers who acted as if they were distributing food to hungry beggars instead of paying customers (Yan 2000: 209-210).

All of this is not to say that going to the teahouse in Mao's Guangzhou could not also involve pleasure. This is discussed further in chapter three, where I also suggest that the Maoist state had other reasons for preserving some of Guangzhou's catering establishments, in addition to those I have already mentioned. Here, however, I wish to stress the extent to which the revolutionary policies transformed the conditions for social interaction and consumption in the city. In late Qing and Republican Guangzhou the teahouse had been an important site of male leisure and sociability, of business, cuisine and conspicuous consumption. Much of this teahouse culture disappeared over the course of the revolutionary era.

Reviving the catering trade: new urban spaces in the post-Mao years

After 1978, the Maoist economic policy of "production first, livelihood later" (*xian shengchan hou shenghuo*) was abandoned in favour of one of production led by commerce and consumer demands (Vogel 1989). The state now not only tolerated but encouraged non-collectivised leisure activities

(Wang 1995; Deng 1988). Advertising was strongly promoted (Ikels 1997: 64-66). In the mid-1990s, the official work week was shortened from forty-eight to forty hours (1997: 222). Beginning in the early 1980s, massive government investment went into Guangzhou's urban infrastructure and distribution, which for decades had been neglected in favour of industry. Old storefronts were reopened and state shops were contracted out to private entrepreneurs (Vogel 1989: 196-219).

The new policies led to a renaissance for Guangzhou and many other former centres of "bourgeois consumerism". With the "opening up" to foreign trade and the gradual abandonment of the central policy of redistributing wealth from the coasts to the poorer inland provinces, Guangdong was able to capitalise on its comparative advantages as a coastal province with close ties to Hong Kong and Chinese communities overseas (Vogel 1989; Hook 1996). Guangzhou, the capital of the province described by Vogel (1989) as being "one step ahead" of the rest of China in the 1980s, once again assumed its historical role as a hub of international and national trade. By the late 1980s, "the gap between Guangzhou and other cities...was enormous" (Vogel 1989: 208).

In the countryside, the decollectivisation of agriculture and the expansion of free markets greatly stimulated the production of foodstuffs (Hartford 1992; Smil 1995). Following this, the subsidising and rationing of grain and other foods in the cities has increasingly given way to commercial trade (Ikels 1997: 58-59). With more plentiful shops and markets and an overall increase in real incomes, by the late 1980s Guangzhou residents were consuming less grain and more fish, meat, fruit, tea and alcohol. They were enjoying more abundant diets than perhaps ever before (Ikels 1997: 74; Deng 1988: 85-87, 270-271).

The reforms did not only transform what and how much people were eating but also where. More and more food consumption was now taking place outside of the home or work unit canteen. As Deborah Davis observes, "[w]hen the workplace lost its obligation to provide recreation activities, the commercial sector went into high gear" (Davis 2000: 12). In response to the rising demand, small-scale eating places and food stalls were opened by the large number of new *geti* (individual or family) entrepreneurs, who were allowed a maximum of seven employees. Many state-run restaurants and snack shops, under increasing pressures to become competitive, improved the quality of their foods, service and facilities, or simply sub-contracted their business to entrepreneurs. In the late 1980s, especially after the 1987 legislation which allowed non-state businesses to hire more than seven staff (Ikels 1996: 180-181), a growing number of so-called "privately run" (*siying*) eating places were being set up or were expanded from the existing *geti* establishments. By 1987, there were 7,851 registered eating and drinking places in the city's urban areas, compared to 512 in 1972 (Guangzhou 1988: 250). At the end of the 1980s, according to one report, 200,000 of the city's then three million residents were going out for morning tea every day (Li 1990: 18). A decade later, the number of registred catering establishments had more than doubled to over 16,000 in 1998 (Guangzhou 1999: 273).

The catering trade not only grew but also became ever more diverse. By the late 1990s Guangzhou residents were being offered a plethora of catering establishments, ranging from food stalls and snack shops to exclusive Japanese restaurants in five-star hotels. The lower end of the scale included the so-called *dapaidang*, a Hong Kong-inspired type of large, often open-air eating houses. The self-consciously "popular" (*dazhonghua*) *dapaidang* served hearty, heavy foods and alcohol, often into the wee hours of dawn. Some *dapaidang* were in fact multi-storeyed establishments specializing in game and seafood, which were distinguishable from teahouses and restaurants only in that they did not provide tea-time service with dimsum. In addition to *dapaidang*, places like the Glorious China faced competition from fast food restaurants (Watson 1997a; Yan 1997; 2000), Western-style cafés, Taiwanese-style tea art houses and a growing number of eateries serving regional foods from all around China. Being establishments where people went not only for the consumption of food but also for leisure, teahouses also had to contend with the city's numerous karaoke bars, discos (Farrer 2000) and bowling alleys (G. Wang 2000).

The extraordinary boom in the catering trade should not be seen as simply a function of the greater scope for private entrepreneurship and the rise in disposable incomes. Instead, the growing popularity of eating out has also to be understood as part of far-reaching social and cultural changes in urban China. The proliferation of commercial sites for leisure and consumption has parallelled the gradual displacement of the *danwei* as the focal point of urban life (Dutton 1998: 214-221). Although the majority of urbanites remained members of work units, in the 1990s a growing number of people were willingly leaving the relative security of the *danwei* to "jump into the sea" (*xiahai*) of the private sector, and by the second half of the decade more and more state enterprises were laying off workers or being shut down completely, forcing people out of the *danwei* system (Naughton 1997: 184). With the ongoing reforms of state and collective enterprises, access to consumer goods became more and more subjected to market forces, and the provision of social services was also increasingly becoming divorced from the individual work unit and displaced onto a combination of government agencies and market mechanisms (1997: 188-189; Tang and Parish 2000: 35-41).

Prior to the expansion of the market, the vast majority of urbanites had been heavily reliant on the redistributive economy of the *danwei*, and social relations had been more limited to the work unit. Personal social ties, or *guanxi*, were cultivated above all with gatekeepers in the state redistributive economy in order to gain access to scarce goods and services (Yang 1989; 1994). With the gradual move away from the *danwei* and the growing reliance on the market to provide goods and services, the uses of social connections did not decline but in fact were expanded and diversified (Davis 2000: 13). Social ties were forged between entrepreneurs and between individuals and families across work unit boundaries. Crucially, as Frank Pieke (1995) points out, the state bureaucracy continues to play a prominent role in what he terms the current "socialist market economy", and the cultivation of personal relations has become vital for coordinating what he calls the "market sphere" with the "bureaucratic sphere" of social action.

Eating has been crucial to the establishment of new social networks in post-reform China (Thompson 1994). Guangzhou's diverse range of consumption sites not only catered to different tastes and levels of expenditure but also provided spaces that could be used to forge diverse social ties. A banqueting culture had existed in the Mao years and early 80s, but because of the the expenses involved, the lack of public dining spaces and the strong official emphasis on frugality it was more likely to take place in people's homes, except in the case of "feasting on public accounts" in official transactions between cadres (Lu 2000: 132; Yang 1994: 139). However, from the 1980s, as Judith Farquhar writes,

> banqueting - in restaurants, conference centers, rural courtyards, and village and township meeting rooms - became a central technique for building and maintaining social relationships under the new entrepreneurial order (2002: 145).

As Farquhar points out, though, banquets should not only be seen in terms of their instrumentality, but could also at one and the same time be sources of pleasure (2002: 146). Eating for pleasure, as Farquhar demonstrates, is not a “natural” or ahistorical act, but should be seen against the backdrop of the frugality and critique of leisure during the Mao years. The consumption euphoria of the 1980s and early 90s has been seen as both a hedonistic fulfilment of Mao's utopian promises (Ci 1994) and a reaction against the politicization of everyday life during the Mao era, a politicization which had not entirely disappeared during the reform years (Farquhar 1994; Tang 1996). The growing popularity of going to teahouses, restaurants and other venues outside the work unit should thus to a certain extent be understood as part of a process whereby urban dwellers sought out spaces for leisure pursuits, consumption and social interactions that were more autonomous from the state and which lacked association with the political rituals of the Mao years (Davis et al. 1995). Chinese cities became less celluralised as the possibilities for social interaction outside and between work units grew, although the extent to which this process has led to the emergence of a "civil society" and a weakening of the power of the party-state is debatable (Wakeman 1993; Whyte 1993).

Reviving the Glorious China in the post-Mao era

In 2000, the Glorious China was still a state-owned and state-run enterprise, yet like other enterprises in China's state sector it had been subjected to two decades of reforms. Beginning in the mid-80s, the managers in Guangzhou's catering trade have been given greater autonomy and responsibility for losses and profits. Since then, hundreds of state-owned eating places have been contracted out to private entrepreneurs, while state-run restaurants that have not made profits have frequently been allowed to go out of business. In 1994 the district-level firm to which the Glorious China belonged was formally divided into three separate companies, one of which was called the Glorious China Food and Drink Service Company. In addition to the Glorious China Restaurant, its most important establishment, the Glorious China company also took over the smaller Dechang Teahouse (which went out of business a few years later) and the Yiyuan Restaurant (which was making great losses and was expected to soon be closed down). Several snack shops, a barber shop and a photography studio were also allocated to the Glorious China in 1994, but these were all contracted out to private entrepreneurs, although the company recently resumed management of three of the snack shops.

The company's head office, with the general manager, assistant general manager and about ten staff, was responsible for long-term business strategies and large-scale ventures. It was situated at a separate location from the eating establishments, whose own managerial staff were above all responsible for day-to-day operations, although the managers and assistant managers were also to varying degrees involved in the central office's decisions. As has been typical for China's state-owned enterprises, in spite of decentralisation many of the Glorious China's business decisions have been coordinated from above, at district and municipal levels, and major decisions initiated by the company itself have been dependent on the approval and cooperation of various local government organs, in particular the Liwan District Trade Bureau (*Shangye Ju*) (cf. Stockman 2000: 140-141).

Since the 1980s managers have attempted to transform the Glorious China from a centrally planned teahouse open only a few hours each day into a competitive and profit-making establishment. This transformation has involved some far-reaching changes to its menu, service styles and dining spaces. At first the company concentrated on its tea service and dim sum section. At-the-table service of tea and dimsum had already been reintroduced in the second half of the 70s, having been abolished during the Cultural Revolution. In the early 80s, morning tea service was expanded from four to six hours, and daily tea services in the afternoons and evenings were added. Many new dimsum were introduced. Having previously had to be content with black teas from Guangdong Province, customers were now given a choice of five or six different teas from around the country.

By the late 1980s and early 90s competition from the private sector was growing. Most seriously, several old teahouses in the area had been taken over by Hong Kong-backed private companies, and were attracting many local customers with better service, more attractive interiors and new varieties of dimsum and dishes. In response to this the Glorious China concentrated on improving its midday and evening dining facilities. The facilities in the kitchen, which was separate from the dimsum kitchen, were modernised and several high-ranking cooks were hired. Like many of the grand teahouses of the 30s and 40s, by the late 90s the Glorious China had become the locus of many different kinds of consumption and social interaction. It was open from 6 a.m. until midnight every day of the year, serving what people in the catering trade called the "three teas and two rices" (*san cha liang fan*), i.e., morning, afternoon and evening tea, and midday and evening meals. At midday and evening meal times customers had the choice of either dining in one of the public dining halls, where groups of diners tended to be smaller and meals cheaper, or else booking a karaoke room for a banquet behind closed doors. Set banquets were often ordered in advance, most often by local government agencies and work units and by local families celebrating life-cycle rituals or annual festivals. Menu items ranged from popular and relatively cheap dishes like spicy fish head stew and hot pots (the latter served during the winter months only) to expensive delicacies which often had to be ordered in advance for set banquets, for example abalone and shark fin soup.

Morning and afternoon tea was cheap and attracted mostly male workers and entrepreneurs, and male and female pensioners. Many pensioners came between 6 and 8 a.m., when tea was free in the common dining rooms. On weekends, regular morning tea drinkers were joined by many local families, a trend which had come about only in the 1990s.[5] In the evening tea times, groups of youths of both sexes often arrived for late-night snacks, and sometimes hired a private room to sing karaoke. The kinds of dimsum served reflected the shift in customers. In the mornings, the emphasis was on steamed foods, such as rice flour rolls and various kinds of dumplings, and on congees with a choice of ingredients, ranging from fermented eggs and lean pork to snake or frog. In the evenings there were more baked, fried and deep-fried foods. Older acquaintances, who preferred to go for morning tea, pointed out that elderly people often avoided baked and deep-fried foods, which they deemed excessively "heating" (*reqi*) to the body. During evening tea, when some people drank beer, stir-fried snails and other drinking snacks were also added to the menu.

Conclusion

Far from being an unchanging essence, teahouse culture in Guangzhou is deeply embedded in political economic transformations. In the late Qing and Republican years, the grand teahouse-restaurant emerged as a cultural form, which became closely associated with the city of Guangzhou. These teahouses were important nodal points in the urban landscape, crucial to a variety of leisure and business activities. During the Maoist years, the decline of the city's teahouses was not only an effect of broader historical shifts. Rather, as key sites in the city's "bourgeois consumerism", teahouses were subjected to a political project that sought to level social differences in society and transform the uses and meanings of urban space. Teahouse culture thus not only reflected wider changes. Rather, acting on them was one means of effecting political-economic change. In the reform years, Guangzhou's teahouse culture quickly revived with the new demands for urban public spaces caused by the rising incomes, the new forms of social networking and the pursuit of leisure. In adapting to the rising demands, teahouse managers drew on many familiar cultural forms, some of which had no doubt survived the Cultural Revolution years, others which were being "reintroduced". Indeed, the similarities between the teahouse culture of the Republican years and that of the 1980s and 90s were striking.

However, the "traditional" forms were not always adequate to meeting the demands of post-Mao consumers, not least in the context of the growing competition from a diverse range of new consumption sites. Like many other old establishments, the Glorious China has been forced to reinvent itself in the Mao years. The effects and contexts of this reinvention are explored throughout this thesis. By rearranging its interior spaces (chapter two), updating its menu (chapter four) and feminising its waiting staff (chapter five) the Glorious China management sought expand its catchment area beyond the immediate neighbourhood, which was not very well-to-do, and attract more parties of high-paying banqueters. At the same time, prices at the Glorious China Restaurant remained affordable to many families and small businesses in the area. In 1999 and 2000 the restaurant was according to managers simply breaking even and could not afford to alienate its most regular customers. As I discuss further in chapter two, despite management's aspirations to create what they called a “high-grade” (*gaodang*) establishment, local residents coming for *yamchah* and meals constituted the restaurant's most important customer base. As Ms. Li, the manager of the restaurant, lamented, “It is not a business district and few people come from afar. It [the Glorious China] is a lower-middle grade (*zhong-xia dang*) establishment."

CHAPTER 2. FASHIONING THE TEAHOUSE: COHESION AND DIFFERENCE AMONG CUSTOMERS AT THE GLORIOUS CHINA

Historians and sociologists of consumption in Western societies have recently drawn attention to the spatial dimensions of commercial eating venues, pointing out that where one eats is socially often as significant as what one eats. In these accounts, the restaurant is not simply a neutral site of consumption and interaction. Rather, the spatial layout and interior decor of a restaurant, by providing particular kinds of social spaces, is embedded in wider historical processes and relations of power. For example, in her book, *The Invention of the Restaurant*, Rebecca L. Spang (2000: 64-87) discusses how this new kind of commercial eating establishment, when it emerged in late-eighteenth century France, for the first time provided elite customers with private dining tables and personalised treatment in public spaces. In this way, on Spang's account, eighteenth-century Parisian restaurateurs created new opportunities for the cultivation and display of individual taste. Restaurants, she argues, were thus crucial in the emergence in France of "taste" as a marker of a person's individuality and social status (cf. Bourdieu 1984). In a similar vein, in a study of eating out in London and Paris in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Rachel Rich (2001) argues that the physical layout and interior decor of restaurants reflected middle class ideals of respectability by mimicking the middle class home, the rooms of which were becoming increasingly segregated in their functions. Restaurants, according to Rich, were vital public sites in that they not only provided spaces where middle-class men could display their culinary connoisseurship and social success, but also where middle-class women could dine while outside the home, even without the company of their husbands, while remaining in a quasi-domestic and therefore respectable setting.

Sociologists have similarly been interested in questions of "display" and "performance", often focussing on how restaurateurs create particular kinds of spaces to attract customers and guide these customers' actions. In their *Sociology on the Menu*, for example, Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil (1997) describe eating in public as "a mode of demonstrating one's standing and one's distinction by associating oneself with the ready-made ambiance of the restaurant itself" (1997: 143). In *Dining Out: A Sociology of Modern Manners*, Joanne Finkelstein (1989) goes even further in the view that restaurant space structures diners' interactions. She contends that in contemporary Western societies, through the creation of ambiance the restaurateur manipulates diners' behaviour to the extent that the latter are relieved of any "responsibility to shape sociality" (1989: 5). Social interaction in restaurants, according to Finkelstein, is a passive, formal and superficial form of interaction which cannot provide co-diners with any true sense of togetherness. The focus in the sociology of dining out has thus tended to be on how restaurants and restaurateurs structure eaters' actions, with little agency accorded to diners themselves, and scant interest in restaurant-goers' own understandings of their practices (see also Wood 1995: 103, 199; though see Warde and Martens 2000 for a recent critique).

In the previous chapter I discussed how during the post-Mao years the Glorious China had once again become the site of a diverse range of consumption practices. Here I build on this, beginning with a brief account of how teahouse managers at the Glorious China had recently reconstructed the dining spaces of the Glorious China in order better to fit in with the consumption demands of a rapidly changing urban society, and in particular to attract certain groups of diners. Like Spang and Rich, then, I regard changes to restaurant (and teahouse) space as being shaped by and, in turn, contributing to broader social transformations. In a similar vein to several sociologists of dining out, I perceive social interactions in the Glorious China to have been constrained by the the spatial layout, decor, service styles, types of food and general atmosphere provided by the teahouse-restaurant. At the same time, however, customers at the Glorious China did not passively accept what was provided for them, but actively shaped the restaurant space through their movements, consumption practices and talk. In other words, the teahouse and its dining spaces did not simply provide a stage on which tea drinkers and diners performed "teahouse culture" according to a more or less predetermined script, as Finkelstein and Beardsworth and Kiel might have it. Rather, in line with the recent anthropological interest in the ways in which places are themselves socially constructed by those who inhabit them (e.g., Rodman 1992; Feld and Basso 1996a; Gupta and Ferguson 1997), much of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of how regular customers in the teahouse actively "fashioned" (Feld and Basso 1996b) the teahouse in their everyday practices of consumption and social interaction.

As Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso put it, "as people fashion places, so, too, they fashion themselves" (1996b: 11). Crucially, this fashioning of place and self did not occur outside of wider social discourses and political-economic processes. On the contrary, key issues confronting urban Chinese today, such as growing social inequalities and changing gender relations, were actively and repeatedly brought into play in daily talk and interactions in the teahouse. Thus, while teahouse-going was in many respects a joint experience shared between regulars, it was not a homogeneous one. As Margaret C. Rodman (1992) points out, there is no privileged vantage point, whether it be "emic" or "etic", from which to grasp the totality of a given place. When viewed as social constructions, she emphasises, places are inherently multivocal, and often contested. The teahouse could mean different things to men and women, to the elderly and the young, to successful entrepreneurs and laid-off workers. The teahouse was a site where differences were constructed. Displays of social standing similar to those described by historians and sociologists of Western restaurants were thus important features of teahouse culture at the Glorious China. But so too, on the other hand, were the cultivation of long-term relationships and the articulation of common identifications. As much as it was a site of social differentiation, it was also an important site of social cohesion. By exploring how regulars fashioned the teahouse and themselves through everyday practices of consumption and sociality, I aim to further our understanding of how social identities and differences are performed, negotiated and contested in contemporary urban China.

Reconstructing the teahouse space

As I noted in chapter one, with the growing competition from private restaurants since the late 1980s, the Glorious China management has sought to expand its catchment area beyond the immediate neighbourhood and attract more high-paying customers from around the city, including government officials, businessmen and families, in particular by improving the quality of of its meals and banquets. This strategy was reflected in the reconstruction of the teahouse. The new focus on mealtime services went hand-in-hand with a rebuilding of the restaurant's interior. The most thorough renovation of Glorious China since the 1930s took place between 1993 and 1994, during which time the establishment was closed for almost one year. Two whole stories were added, making a total of four floors of dining spaces. There were now two large common dining rooms (*yingye dating*), one on the ground floor and one on the second floor. After the renovations, the Glorious China could seat up to nearly 600 guests at a time. However, the idea was not only to expand the total number of dining spaces but to provide new, secluded spaces for parties of banqueters. Significantly, following the refurbishment the Glorious China officially styled itself a "restaurant" (*jiulou*) rather than a "teahouse" (*chalou*). The first floor had a medium-sized room which could also be used for large private banquets, and a corridor with five smaller private rooms with televisions and karaoke sets. These "karaoke rooms" (*kalaOK tingfang*), or "hired rooms" (*baofang*) as they were also called, were brightly advertised on a new neon sign facing the street **(figure 2)**. The top and most exclusive floor had five of these private banqueting rooms.

In addition to the private banqueting rooms, another crucial public space was the grand entrance hall (*datang*). Not pleased with the results after the refurbishment in the mid-90s, the company redid the entrance hall again in 1999.The hall was key to the managers' presentation of the restaurant to prospective customers. Unlike the toilets, for example, the front hall was mopped several times a day. It was sparsely furnished, and was the only large public space in the Glorious China that was almost always kept free of dining tables. As at most large restaurants in the city, the entrance hall was furnished instead with a front desk and a large row of fish tanks. At the front desk, which was visible from the street as it was situated opposite the main entrance, customers could make bookings and

FIGURE 2: THE GLORIOUS CHINA
IN 1999

ask for information. During my first month at the Glorious China the managers insisted that I sit at the front desk wearing a suit and tie. That I was meant to be part of the restaurant's spatial presentation to the outside was clear from the managers' disappointment when I arrived one day without the beard I had sported during my first few weeks of fieldwork. "You looked much more like a foreigner before. That was good for business," Assistant Manager Ouyang said to me. The fish tanks demonstrated to customers that the restaurant had a variety of live fish and seafood that could be prepared for them immediately, ensuring maximum freshness - a must for any self-respecting Cantonese restaurant. Just inside the main entrance, a waitress stood in a cheongsam (*qipao*), greeting guests and showing large parties to their private rooms. A security guard, whom the local police required that the restaurant employ, usually stood at the other side of the entrance. I once asked Ms. Huang, who was in charge of the front desk, why it was that the Glorious China had an entrance hall:

> Ms. Huang: How should I explain? Let me make an analogy (*biyu*). It is like a home (*jiating*). You walk in and there is a front hall (*ting*), (bed)rooms (*fang*), a kitchen (*chufang*), a toilet (*cesuo*). Do you understand?
>
> J.K.: No.
>
> Ms. Huang: This way when people enter they feel like they are entering a home. Most restaurants have an entrance hall.

Ms. Huang's analogy suggested that the restaurant mimicked a domestic space in its functional distinctions between different rooms, in particular in the distinction between the more public spaces such as the entrance hall and the public dining rooms, and the more private ones within. On her account, the grand entrance hall or front hall was particularly crucial to the construction of the restaurant as a "home away from home".

Similar to Rich's late-nineteenth century restaurants in London and Paris, Guangzhou teahouses like the Glorious China drew on familiar symbols and architectural features to recreate a domestic-type setting. The geographer Ronald Knapp describes the main, central hall as the "core of a Chinese house" (1999: 21). It contains the family altar and is the focal point of both ritual and everyday activities. According to Knapp, the front gates opening on to the central hall are often kept open, publicly demonstrating the domestic altar, the foremost symbol of family unity (*ibid.*). Similarly, the Glorious China's opulent entrance hall was visible to passers-by, both through the glass walls and through the front doors, which, weather permitting, were always kept wide open while the restaurant was open for business. The massive restaurants that were being opened up in the 90s on Guangzhou's semi-rural fringe also had similar entrance halls, which would frequently sport an altar, often with statues of deities such as the war god Guan Di (a patron of many entrepreneurs in Guangdong) or the gods of Good Fortune, Success and Longevity (*Fu Lu Shou*). The state-run Glorious China, being a socialist work unit, was bare of such symbols of "feudal superstition". At Chinese New Year, however, the establishment hung New Year's couplets outside the main gates and decorated the entrance hall. Many Guangzhou residents adorned the main room of their flat with tangerine trees and flowering peach trees, both of which carried auspicious meanings for the New Year. Similarly, at Chinese New Year the Glorious China decorated its main hall with a massive flowering peach tree at a cost of several thousand yuan. **(figure 3)**

Although it copied the architecture and decorations of the traditional Chinese house, the spatial layout was in fact a new invention which reflected the social transformation of post-Mao urban China. In Republican

FIGURE 3: THE ENTRANCE HALL AT CHINESE NEW YEAR

times the Glorious China had had an elaborate front door, but no separate entrance hall. In the 1960s, the teahouse had a single, common dining space, a reflection of the collectivist ideology of the times. Even in the mid-1980s the Glorious China had like many other restaurants been entirely closed during the Chinese New Year. In the 90s, however, the two-week holiday had become the most crucial time of the year for the city's Cantonese-style restaurants.[1] Throughout the city, more and more families and individuals were holding New Year's banquets in public eating places. As people expanded their networks of personal relationships the number of banquets they had to give and attend skyrocketed. On certain days of the New Year, the Glorious China's turnover could increase seven times or more, from 20,000 yuan on an average day to as much as 150,000 on New Year's Eve (*nian sanshi*) and the Second Day of the New Year (*chu'er*). By mimicking aspects of the traditional Chinese house, the spatial layout of many of Guangzhou's teahouses and restaurants reflected the partial move out of the work unit and the ways in which which urban Chinese have increasingly come to carve out their own "private" or "domestic" spaces in the "public" domain (Chen 1995; Kraus 2000; Yan 2000).

The Green Bamboo

As in other commercial eating venues, social interactions in the Glorious China were constrained by the the spaces and services provided by the restaurant. As I discuss further below, the kinds of consumption practices that took place at banquets in the private banqueting rooms were quite distinct from both meals and *yamchah* in the public dining rooms. However, customers also fashioned the teahouse themselves. Indeed, the uses of the dining spaces were profoundly affected by the fact that the teahouse had not been very successful in its attempts to attract more high-paying customers. The banqueting rooms were often not booked at midday and evening mealtimes, allowing customers who had drinking tea in these rooms to remain in their seats. Indeed, the deluxe karaoke rooms on the top floor were usually empty. Except during the Chinese New Year they were used mostly by the Glorious China management in their own *guanxi* practices, especially for banqueting officials from government offices like the Trade Bureau (*Shangye Ju*) and the Hygiene Bureau (*Weisheng Ju*), something workers at the restaurant referred to sarcastically as "the little bosses treating the big bosses".

Teatime customers, especially, in many respects appropriated the teahouse space as their own. Some had regular seats which their friends would save for them. The boundary between the "front region" of diners and the "back regions" of the teahouse staff (Goffman 1959) was repeatedly blurred by *yamchah* regulars who, rather than wait to be served, would fetch their own tea water. Some would even walk straight into the dimsum kitchen on the ground floor to get their freshly steamed rice flour rolls (*changfen*), flaunting the signs at the entrance to the kitchen that read "staff only". Waiting staff often resented regulars' behaviour as a challenge to their own authority over the teahouse space, probably not an uncommon phenomenon considering that power struggles between servers and customers are typical of the restaurant industry (Whyte 1946). One head waiter described the elderly customers on the ground floor as "bandits" (*tufei*), who spent only a couple of yuan yet sat around for hours and treated staff in a high-handed manner.

In Hong Kong, Eugene Cooper found:

> Going to *yam ch'a* on a regular schedule assures one of

> continuous contact with the usual crowd, and it is common to find oneself seated at the same table with many of the same people each morning (Cooper 1986: 182).

Similarly, at the Glorious China some customers formed loosely knit groups, who would regularly have tea together at "their" table or karaoke room.

During my fieldwork I got to know one such group particularly well. They met in the Green Bamboo (*Cuizhu*), one of the five karaoke rooms on the first floor. I first became aware of this group of regulars in November 1999. The head chef of the restaurant and I were drinking tea in one of the small dining rooms. An acquaintance of his entered and he introduced us. "Sam", as the head chef's acquaintance insisted that I call him, invited me to have tea with him some time. He explained that no arrangements were necessary, since he came to that room nearly every morning to drink tea with his "friends" (*pengyou*), whom he described as "regular guests" (*shuke*) at the teahouse. Sam referred to the Green Bamboo as "our room", and boasted (untruthfully) that the room was always reserved for him and his friends. During the following seven months, I occasionally stopped by the Green Bamboo for morning tea.

Like the other karaoke rooms, the Green Bamboo was furnished with a television and karaoke machine, a cupboard with eating utensils, and a single round table with a white tablecloth and a lazy susan. The table could comfortably seat twelve people, but a few more people could be squeezed into the room when necessary. The karaoke equipment could be used at midday and evening meal times and during evening tea, at which times the room had to be hired at a minimum expenditure of 300 yuan (100 yuan during evening tea). At morning and afternoon tea times, however, the doors were kept open to anyone, which meant that people were constantly coming and going, and the table was usually shared by individuals or parties who had arrived independently of one another. The room was insulated from the noises created by the clattering of dimsum trolleys, the trolley-pushers shouting their wares, and the scores of people chatting and eating in the public dining spaces. The large banqueting table in the room allowed tea drinkers enough space for a degree of individual privacy, but its roundness lured their eyes and ears to the people around them. The physical space shaped sociability in the Green Bamboo, which as we shall see was both individual-centred and highly interactive.

Sam and his friends made up a group with a core of about ten people who came to drink tea as often as they could, which was usually on weekdays sometime between 7 and 11 a.m. Most were, like Sam, family men in their middle to late thirties and forties. Two were women, one a retired government bureaucrat in her fifties and one an entrepreneur in her thirties. Several of the men were self-employed shop owners. Others, like Sam, were office workers. Two were laid-off salesmen, who had formerly worked for state-run companies. They had all met in the Glorious China, and most of them had been drinking tea there for five or six years. Several retired men and middle-aged couples also frequented the room, and a few of them were quite friendly with Sam's crowd. Although Sam and his friends were not the only tea drinkers in the room, they were the only ones numerous and loud enough to form a recognisable cohort, albeit one that was difficult to define with any precision.

Sam and his friends had carved out a space of their own in the Green Bamboo. When a regular entered, people would make space for him or her if the room was crowded, and if necessary fetch an extra chair from outside the room. Often, the person would not wait for a waitress to set his place for him, but would go straight to the cupboard and fetch a teacup, a small bowl and a pair of chopsticks. When their tea pots were empty, they would refill them themselves from the thermoses that stood on top of the cupboard. A couple of the regulars habitually drank rice spirits (*mijiu*) in the morning, which they bought outside the teahouse. If they did not empty a bottle, they would simply put the cap back on and place it behind the television set for the next day. For regulars, going to the teahouse was part of their daily routine. Someone going away for some time would be sure to tell the others. If a person was inexplicably absent for several days on end, enquiries would be made. More than just a neutral dining space, for regulars the Green Bamboo was a nodal point in their personal geographies.

Yamchah *sociability*

As I mentioned above, the regulars in the Green Bamboo had met over the years in the teahouse itself. By coming to the same room on a regular basis, people enlarged and maintained their "networks of personal connections" (*guanxi wang*) outside of the family and the work unit system. Connections made and maintained through *yamchah* in the Green Bamboo could often be useful, and appeared to be especially important for the shop owners and laid-off workers who frequented the Green Bamboo. For example, regulars would sometimes bring objects of jade to the room and ask Mr. Zhu, who had a shop in a nearby jade market, to evaluate these for them. Occasionally, they would buy jade from him at the teahouse for themselves or on behalf of others. Mr. Fu, a wholesaler of cloth, was probably the most successful businessman in the group. On two occasions that I heard of, he helped to arrange temporary jobs for A-Biu, a laid-off salesman. But these were relations were not simply or exclusively instrumental. Sam and A-Biu, for instance, first met in the teahouse and had become good personal friends over the years, frequently socialising even outside the teahouse.

Yamchah is an ideal medium through which connections can be made and information and even goods exchanged. In order to understand the specificity of *yamchah* sociability, *yamchah* can be contrasted to other social events involving food (cf. Douglas 1971). Three types of "food events" took place at the Glorious China: *yamchah*, ordinary rice-meals (*fan*) and banquets (*yanxi*). Of these food events, banquets were the most formally structured, group-oriented and hierarchical. As a key practice in the creation of *guanxi* ties, banqueting is an important social skill in post-Mao China which requires that the diner show deferral to others and be attentive to the messages conveyed between host and guest and between diners through the choice of foods, seating arrangements, toasting order and other non-verbal means (Cooper 1986; Kipnis 1997). As Andrew B. Kipnis stresses in his perceptive discussion of banquets in North China: "Eating and drinking during banquets was collective and negotiated rather than a matter of individual hunger or taste" (1997: 52).

Ordinary rice-meals at the Glorious China tended to be less elaborate than banquets. By contrast to banquets and even ordinary rice-meals, *yamchah* tended to be more individual-oriented. When a customer arrived in the teahouse, he would go directly to one of the dining halls or rooms, and sometimes go straight to his habitual table. A waitress would ask him how many people there were in his party, and what kind of tea he would like to drink. After sitting down, the waitress would return with his pot of tea and a bill (*dan*). She would sometimes pour a first cup of tea and wait with a tray as the customer rinsed his bowl, chopsticks and cup with it. She would then let the customer pour the water on to the tray. Steamed dimsum were pushed around on trolleys, while fried snacks and rice congee were prepared and served from counters in the two common dining halls. As the customer was handed his dimsum, the serving staff would stamp his bill in the appropriate price category. Steamed and fried dimsum were always served in dainty portions of threes or fours, making them easy both to share and to eat individually. Congees were served in bowls that were perfect for one person, but which could also be shared between diners using smaller, individual bowls.

Norms of hospitality and reciprocity were relaxed during *yamchah*. In contrast, even at very casual lunches between colleagues, people would never openly share the bill. While this was often true of parties going out to *yamchah*, too, this was not the case with regulars. Even when they arrived together or had made an appointment to meet, they would get individual bills, ordering their own pot of tea and their own dimsum. In the Green Bamboo, tea drinkers would usually pour tea from their own pot for the people sitting close to them, and sometimes offer them some of their dimsum, but I rarely witnessed anyone paying another regular's bill. The fact that people in the Green Bamboo sometimes attempted (and occasionally succeeded) to pick up my bill demonstrates that they regarded me as an outsider to their group, a guest rather than a friend.

Alcohol is another good example of the voluntary and individual-centred nature of *yamchah.* Sam and A-Biu regularly drank rice spirits during morning tea. They might share a bottle, but more frequently they would have one each. Although they were social drinkers in the sense that they drank with food and in the company of others (Harrell 1981), they usually did not offer other people to drink with them, or if they did offer they never persisted. They did not make toasts, and usually poured their drink for themselves. Instead of downing small winecups in one go as was customary with toasts, they would fill a tumbler and sip it down slowly. Again, men would sometimes offer cigarettes to each other and sometimes not. When they did, they often casually threw them across the table, sometimes while looking the other way. By the same token, tea drinkers were not required to take part in conversations going on at the table or even take much heed of anyone else. During *yamchah*, people were at their leisure to come in, sit down, read the morning paper for an hour and then leave. This casual, voluntary style was in marked contrast to other eating events, which involved specific sequences of activities, a heightened host-guest relationship, an attention to the hierarchy between diners and a constant focus on the other people at the table

The boundaries between the different food events were not absolutely clear-cut. Going out for weekend *yamchah* with friends or family, though often a casual affair, still required some of the same behaviour as at meals and banquets. Friends meeting for *yamchah* might drink tea until a mealtime and then decide to order some dishes and rice. Rice-meals sometimes approached banquets in their degree of structuredness and formality. Nonetheless, banquets clearly highlighted social distinctions. Sometimes, Kipnis argues, through eating and especially drinking together boundaries between banqueters could be broken down over the course of the banquet, a process which could potentially strengthen the bonds which ideally underpin good *guanxi* relations (cf. Farquhar 2002: 152-153). However, Kipnis also makes it clear that banquets quite often did not proceed in this way but remained formal and rigidly structured. *Yamchah*, at the other end of the continuum, deemphasised social hierarchies from the outset. Here, *guanxi* relations were "produced", to use Kipnis' term, in a different way. By downplaying social distinctions and obligations, *yamchah* helped create a space to talk to friends and acquaintances and strike up conversations with new people. The easy access and freedom of movement in and out of dining spaces made the teahouse a good place to arrange meetings and receive both prearranged and unarranged visits. During the course of a morning, people in the Green Bamboo would be visited by friends, family members and business associates. Some regulars would virtually use the room as a morning office, receiving and making calls on their mobile phones.

The informality and openness of *yamchah* as a food event helped to create a space in which people could build up long-term interpersonal *guanxi* relationships. Such relationships, as Charles Stafford (2000) discusses, are often realised precisely through repeated, everyday comings and goings. While such comings and goings are often highlighted through elaborate greetings and farewells in ritualised contexts such as banquets, Stafford argues that close relationships between friends and relatives are by contrast often marked by the absence of attention to formalities (2000: 62-67). Unlike at banquets, in *yamchah* friends could easily dispense with formal greetings and partings. Regulars' arrivals were acknowledged, if at all, with a simple phrase like "(You have) arrived" (C. *faanlaih laak*), using the Cantonese verb *faan*, which means "to return" or to "go someplace to which one habitually goes", as in the composite verb *faangung*, meaning "to go to work". As a person got ready to leave someone might comment "(You are) going" (C. *jaau laak*). As he left the person might say something like "Eat slowly" (C. *maahnmaan sihk*) or simply "Slowly" (C. *maahnmaan*), a casual phrase usually not directed at anyone in particular, meaning something like "take no heed of me". The phrase was frequently used in everyday family meals as a person finished eating and left the table.

When talking about each other, the regulars in the Green Bamboo also referred to each other as "friends" (*pengyou*). This category both deemphasised hierarchical relationships and perhaps also downplayed any instrumental aspects of the relationships forged in the teahouse (cf. G. Wang 2000). This relationship of friendship was reinforced by the terms of address used between most of the regulars. They usually did not use any titles but called each other by informal names. Often, the last or only character of someone's personal name was prefixed by "A", as in A-Biu, A-Leung, A-Kei (Sam), A-Mei (the woman shop owner). Alternatively, people would be referred to by a nickname, as in the case of the office worker who was simply known to by everyone as "Fatty" (C. *Feihlouh*).

Xiguan people

Through repeated practices of *yamchah*, regulars in the Green Bamboo forged relationships with one another and fashioned the teahouse as their own place. As a site of social cohesion, the teahouse was often explicitly articulated with wider social identifications. In particular, drinking tea at the Glorious China was associated with social class and neighbourhood identifications, and the two latter were often conflated.

People in the Green Bamboo - as in Guangzhou more generally - regularly spoke about restaurants and other consumption venues as being high-, middle- or low-grade (*gao-, zhong-, didang*), and often saw a relationship between an establishment's "grade" with the "stratum" (*jieceng*) of its customers. Different "grades" of restaurants were sometimes also associated with particular parts of town. A-Leung, a regular in the Green Bamboo in his forties, had recently been laid off from his job as a businessman for a state company. In one conversation I had with him he highlighted the diversity of eating possibilities in Guangzhou:

> 'There are so many fancy (*haohua*) [eating] places, I go once or twice a year [to a fancy place], with the family. But normally we go to places near home, where we know the people. I know everybody in this room [the Green Bamboo]...Here there are mostly people who do business. This is unique to Guangzhou. At any time [one can] come out to drink tea.'

A-Leung's distinction between the Glorious China and the "fancy" eating places underscores the fact that the management's attempts to raise the status of the teahouse-restaurant by constructing an opulent entrance hall and fancy dining spaces had by and large failed to change the way it was classified by its regular customers. However, A-Leung also seemed to suggest that it was not opulence and "atmosphere" that attracted the Glorious China's customers. Although there were in fact some decidedly up-market restaurants in the area, for A-Leung eating out "near home" above all meant visiting low- and middle-grade establishments. His comment further implied that whereas up-market establishments tended to have large catchment areas, attracting people from all over the city, more simple establishments tended to rely more on a local clientele. Regulars in the Green Bamboo invariably either lived or worked in the neighbourhood. The main catchment area of the Glorious China was the northern part of the former Western Suburb, an area still sometimes referred to as Upper Xiguan (*Shang Xiguan*), today only a small part of Liwan District. As I discussed in chapter one, in late Qing and Republican times Xiguan was the city's foremost centre of trade, finance and retail.[2] It was also home to many handicrafts and some larger industries. During the Mao years, the area was further industrialised. Trade and retail, which were neglected during the Maoist years, were revived during the early reform years, along with the restaurant trade. By 1990, about half of Liwan's workforce was employed in manufacturing industries, while the other half worked in services, trade and government bureaus (Guangzhou Shi Liwan 1998: 69). Despite the revival of trade in the area, including the establishment of several important wholesale and retail markets for foodstuffs, Chinese medicines, jades and textiles, the financial centre of Guangzhou has moved east, to Yuexiu and Dongshan Districts and, in the 1990s, to Tianhe District. Culinary feature reports on Tianhe in the Guangzhou press concentrated exclusively on the district's seafood palaces and other up-market restaurants, with some food reporters claiming that Tianhe's restaurant-goers were "less price conscious than residents in the old parts of town" (Shi 1997a, cf. Guan 1998). In contrast to Tianhe, Liwan District was renowned throughout the city for its concentration of old teahouses and snack shops, in many cases run by failing state companies (Wu et al. 1997; An 1998). Whereas the Glorious China had once been patronised by an elite class of wealthy merchants, now its catchment area was home mostly to workers in industry and services and to small-scale entrepreneurs. Most of the city's "high grade" eating places were to be found in Dongshan and Tianhe and, increasingly, outside the city along the highways that connected Guangzhou with Shenzhen, Hong Kong and the towns of the Pearl River Delta.

Friends in Guangzhou considered Xiguan to be "backward" (*luohou*) in comparison with Dongshan and Tianhe. In particular, people pointed to the poor housing conditions there. Although more and more of the old parts of Xiguan were coming down as a result of massive urban renewal projects begun in the 1980s, housing remained more cramped than elsewhere in the city. One informant who had grown up the area, an entrepreneur around fifty years of age, insisted that this was the main reason that the catering trade was so vibrant in Liwan, despite the fact that people there generally made less money than in other parts of the city. He said:

> 'The fact that Liwan's catering trade is very dynamic both now and before Liberation has two very different reasons. Then, it was because of all the traders, the wealthy people living in the area. Now it is because of the population density. Housing there is so cramped that people do not invite you to their homes. They take you out instead.'

Despite its perceived "backwardness" in contrast to Tianhe, regulars at the Glorious China often identified themselves with their district. In daily speech, they often referred to the district as "Xiguan" (C: *Saigwaan*) and spoke of themselves as "Xiguan people" (*Xiguan ren*). Although today's Liwan District is several times larger than Xiguan was, locals used the names interchangeably. The frequent usage of "Xiguan" evoked the district's historic roots, perhaps as a reminder of the area's former glory. Many regulars in the Green Bamboo insisted that they preferred the teahouses in Xiguan to other parts of town. I once asked Fatty, an office worker, and Mr Zhu, the jade merchant, why they came to the Glorious China every day, when there were so many teahouses in Guangzhou:

> Fatty answered that in the big, fancy places, 'there is nothing to talk about' (C. *mouhdakking, mouhdakgong*). Mr Zhu added they both lived nearby and knew all the people here. 'You never have to look for a seat, people always save one for you.' He then added that some people go to Fangcun, a semi-rural district south of the river, or even further just to drink tea. Both

> Fatty and Mr Zhu disapproved of this, agreeing that for eating it is best to stay in Liwan.

Another time, I was sitting in the Green Bamboo with two retired men and a middle-aged couple.

> Suddenly, one of the old men peeped out from under his newspaper and said to me, 'It is good that you can speak both Cantonese and Mandarin.' I explained that I was trying to learn Cantonese, to which he replied that I would learn it quickly if I visited teahouses often. The other old man entered the conversation, stating that 'We petits bourgeois (*xiao shimin*) like to go to teahouses. With us, you will learn things. Here, there are things to hear and things to talk about (C. *yauhdakting, yauhdakking*). If you go to the White Swan [a famous five-star hotel], there is nothing to hear.' The woman then joined the discussion, explaining to me that, 'There are high-, middle- and low- grade teahouses. This place is low grade. In high grade places people do not sit together, it is one person to a table.' The old man who began the discussion ended it with the assertion, 'In those places they only say nice things, not bad things. There is nothing to hear there.'

In such ways, tea drinkers articulated their practices with wider localities and social identities. They classified themselves as they classified different types of teahouses, identifying themselves as "petit bourgeois" people, who enjoyed to frequent low grade establishments. They did not mention differences in price. (While the price of an ordinary meal with dishes could differ ten times or more between the Glorious China and a hotel restaurant, the price differences between these establishments for tea and dimsum were closer to double.) Instead, what they disliked about "high grade" teahouses was a perceived lack of sociability, similar perhaps to the alienated eating that Finkelstein found in Western restaurants. For these regulars, the point of going to *yamchah* in the Green Bamboo was to meet old friends and acquaintances and make new ones, and talk frankly to people with whom they had things in common. In the face of negative representations of the old parts of town of being "backward", regulars constructed a positive social identity which articulated the local neighbourhood and lower-class status with the casual and intimate sociability and openness of *yamchah* in the older, low-grade teahouses. They contrasted this with what they regarded as the asocial tea drinking of the wealthy customers at the fancy restaurants.

Making distinctions

As in Republican times, social distinctions were made not only between teahouses but also within them. Despite the downplaying of hierarchies between fellow diners in *yamchah* and the articulation of common class and neighbourhood identities, still tea drinking practices in the Glorious China were implicated in social differences to do with age, income and gender. For example, it was relevant where in the teahouse one sat. Tea in the private rooms like the Green Bamboo cost three yuan per person. In the common dining halls it was only one yuan, and free of charge before 8 a.m. Because of this, many pensioners arrived early and avoided the karaoke rooms. During morning tea especially, the ground floor dining room was dominated by elderly men and women.[3] According to Sam, the younger men who sat in the common dining rooms were often workers. By contrast to the common dining rooms, many of the people who sat in the Green Bamboo for tea were in their thirties and forties and were entrepreneurs, office workers or low-level cadres.

In contrast to the sometimes frosty relations between serving staff and the regulars who sat in the ground floor, regulars in the Green Bamboo were often well acquainted with serving staff and even cooks and middle management, who themselves often drank tea in the private dining rooms. As I mentioned earlier, regulars on the ground floor often went straight into the kitchen to make sure they got the freshest rice flour rolls, and certain dimsum such as congee were not wheeled around on trolleys but had to be fetched from open counters. Tea drinkers in the Green Bamboo did not have to leave their room, but could order foods like congee and rice flour rolls directly from serving staff.

Tea drinkers in the Green Bamboo often boasted about their status as regulars and their close relations with the teahouse staff. Two years before I met him, A-Biu had been laid off from his job as a salesperson for a state-owned textile company. When he was working, he told me once after a couple of glasses of rice spirits, he would go on business trips all around the country. At that time, he would often bring his wife and son to the Glorious China. They celebrated important events there, such as Chinese New Year and his son's one-month day (*manyue*) feast. This is why he knew "everybody" at the Glorious China, including cooks and managers. When he was successful, going to the teahouse on a regular basis was a sign of his success. By continuing to frequent the Green Bamboo on a regular basis he kept up relations with his friends, relations which in his case were sometimes quite beneficial. As I mentioned earlier, his friends were sometimes able to arrange jobs for him. Possibly, visiting the Green Bamboo for morning tea was also a way of keeping up appearances as an important person, someone who could afford to sit in the more expensive dining spaces.

The Glorious China teahouse not only provided spaces where social relations could be forged, but also where social capital could be displayed. Regulars displayed their social success in several ways, both verbal and non-verbal. Upon entering the Green Bamboo, men in their thirties and forties would fling themselves down on a chair and immediately take out their mobile phones and put them on the table. Periodically, they would check their phones and beepers. Rather than simply showing off their ability to purchase a phone, I suggest they were displaying their connectedness with the world. Similarly, having "friends" and associates meet one at the teahouse may not have been simply practical - it was also a way of displaying one's personal networks. Mr. Fu, probably the most successful entrepreneur there, always sat at the same chair with his back to the door. If he received a phone call or a message on his beeper, he could easily get up and leave the room in a hurry without having to squeeze past anyone else.

Talk provided another opportunity for displaying one's connectedness and knowledge of the world. Men would often boast about knowing people, about being able to get things done. During the course of a morning, discussions would swing between talk involving only two or three people sitting next to each other, to wider discussions engaging the entire table. These wider talks would always be dominated by the younger men. Topics ranged from the pros and cons of the city's transport system and its new underground railway, to the state of the national soccer team, to the question of who had been the most important Chinese in the twentieth century, Mao Zedong or Sun Yat-sen. On the birth date of the boddhisattva Guanyin it was discussed how people went to pay their respects to the saint (*baishen*). A young colleague of Fatty's claimed that only old people went to worship, a claim which several men in the room vociferously rejected. They insisted that lots of young people went, too, and called the young man a "simpleton" (*shagua*, literally "stupid melon"). In fact, these group discussion were frequently structured in terms of claims and counter claims to factual knowledge. Men would dismiss not only what was said but the person saying it, and often began their statements by shouting things like "you dickhead" (C. *chattau*) or "simpleton". The accused did not show outward signs of anger, but replied with more of the same.

Different food events contributed to the creation of spaces for different kinds of social performance. Banquets, with their marked host-guest relationship, provided opportunities for conspicuous consumption. In the kitchen, the head chef at the Glorious China would often scoff at high-rollers who pre-ordered rare foodstuffs like seal or civet cat, complaining that they knew nothing about eating but simply wanted to "display their status" (*biaoshi ta de shenfen*). By contrast, the more individual-oriented *yamchah* and the relatively evenly priced dimsum provided few opportunities for these kinds of displays. Instead, distinctions were made on the basis of where a person sat and how he acted. *Yamchah* not only helped customers to create a space were alliances could be forged and common identities created, but also allowed people to display their connections, busyness and knowledge of the world.

Gender and teahouse space: questioning the androcentrism of yamchah

In the early 1970s Michelle Rosaldo (1974) claimed that all societies distinguish, albeit to varying degrees, between a "public" world of men and a "domestic" sphere of women, and that this distinction was at the heart women's universal subordination to men. Since then, feminist anthropologists, while often critical of Rosaldo's universalist model, have often focussed on space as a key to understanding gender relations (Lamphere 1997). Some of these scholars have argued that the distinction between a "male public sphere" and a "female public sphere" is much more open to negotiation, contestation and the impact of a wider political economy than Rosaldo had implied. In a Spanish context, for example, Henk Driessen (1997[1983]) has argued that vociferous displays of masculinity in Andalusian cafes were not simply "traditional", but were reaffirmations of ideal gender boundaries that had become blurred by local families' actual growing economic dependency on women's labour. Working in a small town in Greece, Jane K. Cowan (1991) shows that while the traditional local cafes were unambiguously associated with the domain of men, yet following the recent introduction from the cities of a new, cosmopolitan type of cafe, young women had begun to contest the male domination of public leisure spaces.

As may already be apparent from my description of practices in the Green Bamboo, *yamchah* sociality was to no small extent male-centred. Like many eating venues in the contemporary People's Republic, male customers tended to clearly outnumber female customers in the Glorious China. At the same time, as I discuss in chapter five, serving staff were becoming increasingly feminised, part of the attempt to attract greater numbers of more high-spending, male customers. In a recent study of McDonald's and social space in Beijing, Yunxiang Yan (2000) found that many women were uneasy with the androcentric environments of Chinese restaurants. For them, the American chain was a place that they could visit alone or in groups without feeling accused of sexual immorality (Yan 2000: 217-218). For Yan, the androcentric sociality of Chinese restaurants was a reflection of "a clear division between the private (inside) and the public (outside) along gender lines", part of a traditional view "that women's place is in the household and that men should take charge of all public events" (2000: 217). In his analysis, McDonald's provided a space for new consumers like women and children, for whom there existed "no proper place...in the preexisting restaurant system" (2000: 223).

Contrary to Yan's observations, the male-centredness of Chinese restaurants may not simply be a function of "traditional values", but may also have to do with recent social and political developments. As I observed in chapter one, going out to teahouses and restaurants appear to have been virtually exclusive male practices in Republican-era Guangzhou. Elderly informants recalled that women started frequenting teahouses during the Mao years, according to some already in the 1950s, on other accounts not until the Cultural Revolution. Considering the Maoist state's attempts to abolish distinctions between "public" and "private" space and time by politicising both, the shift does not seem to be the result of any conscious effort by the state to achieve gender equality in "bourgeois" sites of public consumption. More likely, it was a consequence of the fact that more women were taking part in the workforce and that teahouses often functioned as supplements to the system of work unit canteens. The male-centredness of *yamchah* in the Glorious China may have to do with a (re)masculinisation of public spaces since the 1980s. Mayfair Yang argues that not only have the "domestic" and "public" spheres become more clearly delineated in the post-Mao era, but the domestic sphere has increasingly come to be gendered female, a result of the partial return of the female workforce to the home and of representations associating women with the home in advertising and other media (1999: 26; cf. Honig and Herschatter 1988).

On the other hand, despite the growing dichotomy in China between a female domestic sphere and a male public sphere, Wang Zheng (2000) argues that women's experiences in the reform era have become ever more diverse. She points out that while women workers have frequently been the first to be laid off by failing state enterprises, women have also taken advantage of the new spaces that have opened up for instance for women entrepreneurs and educated professionals and for young women in the service industries. In Guangzhou in the late 1990s, women's patronage of teahouses was inflected by class, age and context. In the public dining halls of the Glorious China, many elderly women arrived in the teahouse on their own, and drank morning tea with other women or in mixed groups. Young women often went out to drink morning or afternoon tea as members of families, or with mixed groups of youths in the evenings. However, in Xiguan and the other old parts of the city I rarely saw young women in teahouses on their own or in single-sex groups. By contrast, it was not unusual to see groups of young women drinking tea in some of the fancy new restaurants in and around the new shopping centres in Tianhe, a district which attracted hoards of shoppers on weekends and which was home to many middle class people.

A-Leung, one of the laid-off salesmen, once drew my attention both to the androcentric nature of *yamchah* and public life in Guangzhou, and also to the fact that women were challenging this male domination:

> A-Leung: Women like my wife always complain that we spend too much time outside drinking tea, wasting money, and not eating our fill. Very few women go out to drink tea.
>
> J.K. Do you think it strange if they do?
>
> A-Leung: We used to think that it did not look good for women to be out drinking tea. Now women are liberated (*jiefang*). They

> go out with other women, go shopping and drink tea maybe once or twice a week. Still very seldom. Men are different, we have more friends, know more people, so we have to come out more often. Lots of men sit around in the teahouse all day with nothing to do. As soon as they have some money they play [ma-johng] and chase after girls (C. *kauleui*).

A-Mei, a mother in her early thirties, was the only young woman who regularly drank tea in the Green Bamboo. She was also the only non-native Cantonese speaker among the regulars. Originally from Sichuan Province, she was married to a Guangzhounese and had lived in the city for nearly a decade. She and her husband used to frequent the Green Bamboo together, but they had recently moved to another part of town. She still ran a shop not far from the Glorious China, one of a row of shops that specialized in equipment for hairdressers. She would sometimes drop by for tea before opening her shop, but would rarely stay for more than thirty minutes. The men in the room would often flirt with her and ask her to sit next to them when she came in the room. One time, I bumped into her outside on the way to the teahouse. We entered the room together and Mr. Fu seized upon the situation, asking whether we were out on a date. Her answer was equally swift: "Fuck your mother" (C: *Diu leih louhmei*), which was followed by roars of laughter. A young woman socializing in this male-centred environment had to be tough.

In the Glorious China, it was unproblematic for a woman to drink tea together with other members of her family, but a young woman who regularly went out to drink tea on her own would have to put up with sexual innuendoes. Nonetheless, while tea drinking was a male-centred activity, the gendered division of social space between the "inside" of women and the "outside" of men was repeatedly being contested by women like A-Mei and A-Leung's wife.

Conclusion

The recent rebuilding of the Glorious China was not unique. Across the city, old establishments were being refurbished and new ones built up in order to cater to the growing number of families, cadres and business people who were consuming outside of the home or work unit. Through their refurbishment of the restaurant, in particular the building of the private karaoke rooms and the grand entrance hall, managers sought to attract a greater number of banqueters. This attempt was not very successful, however, and the restaurant continued to rely heavily on local residents, who came to the Glorious China for tea and for ordinary rice-meals. Although the restaurant shaped customers' interactions by providing particular kinds of dining spaces and foods at particular prices, customers' power vis-à-vis management was manifested not only in the fact that the managers were unable to transform the restaurant into an "high-grade" establishment, but also through customers' everyday appropriation of the teahouse space.

For the men and women who habitually frequented the Green Bamboo, going to the teahouse was an important part of their lives. For some it was a means of meeting friends and acquaintances. For others the teahouse also played a significant role in their livelihoods. By deemphasising hierarchies and the host-guest relationship, *yamchah* helped them create the kind of place where social ties could be forged and reinforced through everyday sociability and consumption. Through their practices of *yamchah* consumption, customers fashioned a series of dining spaces into a particular kind of place. As a site of social cohesion, the teahouse was also articulated with wider identities of social class and neighbourhood. At the same time, access to the Green Bamboo was regulated by spending ability, and the supposed equality between tea-drinking "friends" was in fact implicated in gender and age inequalities. Social space and talk were dominated by men in their 30s and 40s, who displayed their knowledge of the world and social connections.

How might spatial practices in the Glorious China further our understanding of recent social changes in urban China? Above all, by investigating these practices we can gain insight into how gender relations, local identities and social distinctions were actually being constructed and experienced in everyday contexts. Thus, for example, the interactions between teahouse regulars would suggest that while many "outside" leisure spaces in urban China were strongly male-gendered, many women did not passively accept this gendered division of urban space. With regard to social class, Deborah Davis and her associates found that in the mid-1990s gender and generation were often more important factors than income in explaining consumer behaviour (Davis 2000: 19-20). Thus, as Davis points out, it may be difficult to correlate social class distinctions with lifestyles and taste along the lines of Bourdieu's (1984) study of France in the 1960s and 70s. However, while taste in contemporary China may not be a cornerstone in the reproduction of class inequalities, still it provided an idiom through which growing economic disparities between people and between different parts of the city could be classified and articulated. It may, as Davis points out, be difficult to use consumption as a measure of a person's social position in contemporary urban China. Nevertheless, regulars in the Glorious China clearly identified consumption sites and styles of interaction with a person's social position. Seen from this point of view, going to the Green

Bamboo room for *yamchah* was also about creating identities, positioning oneself with the complex social realities of postsocialist urban China.

As teahouse-goers fashioned the teahouse, so too did they fashion themselves. While the reforming teahouse was attempting to compete with the increasingly opulent private restaurants in Tianhe and elsewhere in the city, many regulars came to the teahouse instead for the kind of milieu which they argued was often found in the more low-grade establishments found in Xiguan and the other old parts of town. Their style was self-consciously informal, and the language they used was explicit. Some teahouse-goers contrasted what they called their own "petit bourgeois" ways of interacting with what they regarded as the sterile atmosphere of the new, "fancy" teahouses, where there was "nothing to hear" and people "said only nice things". In exploring the relationship between space, *yamchah* and social identities at the Glorious China I have left out several important aspects. Most obviously, perhaps, I have not provided a sustained discussion of the food at the Glorious China, and the relationship between eating, memory and place-making. This discussion is pursued in the following two chapters.

CHAPTER 3. CULINARY NOSTALGIA, TRADITION AND THE CATERING TRADE

Locals visiting the Glorious China did not all do so only to meet with people. For some, the food, in particular the dimsum, was an equally important consideration. As an "old name in business" the Glorious China was considered by these customers to serve food that tasted more "traditional" (a term I shall discuss more in this chapter) than that served in the restaurants and teahouses opened in the 1980s and 90s. Food was a crucial part of the construction of the teahouse as place. For some patrons, the food at the Glorious China reminded them of the tastes from their childhood years. Uncle Liu, for example, was a regular visitor to the teahouse who usually sat in the medium-sized dining room on the first floor. On several occasions over tea, he complained that despite the many improvements to the catering trade during the reform years as compared to the Mao years, still most establishments were unable to equal the quality of the dimsum of pre-Liberation Guangzhou. As he put it to me once:

> After Reforms and Opening Up, young people - those who are now in their forties - had never experienced truly good food. For them, anything tastes good. It is different for me. I am 71 years old, I know what things used to taste like. Here at the Glorious China the best things are the steamed rice flour rolls (*changfen*) and the steamed beef dumplings (*niurou shaomai*). They taste just like before the War of Resistance [against the Japanese]; the rice flour rolls are very smooth (*hua*). I haven't been to the Garden Hotel [one of the city's fanciest, built in the 1980s] in a long time, but the last time I was there the rice flour rolls and

steamed dumplings still could not match this quality.

The theme of this chapter is culinary nostalgia. That food figures in nostalgic accounts of childhood and other representations of the self in many cultural contexts can no doubt to some extent be explained by reference to biological and cognitive processes, for example the fact that food and drink are physically incorporated into the body, and the peculiar power of tastes and smells to conjure up distant, childhood memories (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 129-131; Tuan 1993: 55-57; Sperber 1975: 115-119). However, as Uncle Liu's references to the War of Resistance, the reform period and (indirectly) the Mao years suggest, nostalgic memories of food are always part and parcel of wider historical processes. Through the idioms of food and taste, Uncle Liu periodised China's recent history and positioned himself in relation to the present and the past. It is the social and historical significance of food nostalgia rather than the cognitive processes behind it that interest me here. What can culinary nostalgia tell us about the meanings of the past in present-day China?

Uncle Liu's longing for the food of the past, though of course not simply reducible to social trends, was in itself far from unique in Guangzhou at the turn of the twenty-first century. Nostalgia, especially for the "Old Guangzhou" (*Lao Guangzhou*) of the Late Qing and Republican years, was widely written and spoken about, and this nostalgia had significant economic consequences. In November of 1999, after meeting with Assistant Manager Ouyang over lunch to set up my fieldwork at the Glorious China, Mr. Bao, my host in Guangzhou, made the following comment as as we left the restaurant: "As soon as I saw it I knew business was bad. They should refurbish it in the antique style (*fanggu*)," Mr. Bao's suggestion was probably a good one. In the late 1990s

Guangzhou newspapers were reporting on a booming interest among the city's inhabitants for old-fashioned Cantonese foods and eating environments. Several restaurants and teahouses, especially in the older parts of town, were now redecorating their interiors "in the antique style" and vigorously promoting old-style local delicacies (Chen 2000; Yang 2000). There were also reports on the growing popularity of foods from around the Pearl River Delta. Eating places offering "country flavours" (*jiaxiang fengwei*) were opening up in the city, and more and more Guangzhou people were taking trips to seek out for themselves the local specialities in the towns and villages of Guangdong (Guo et al. 2000). Some journalists were calling this trend a nostalgic search for local country styles:

> Clearly, diners in the big city have become used to exquisite delicacies and Western fast food. They are already gradually becoming nostalgic (*huaijiu*) for the unique country flavours of bygone days (Yu 1999).

The search for country-style flavours often overlapped with the interest in the delicacies of late Qing and Republican Guangzhou. Restaurants like Little Sister's Place (*Mei Ji*), which in 1997 already had four branches in the city, explicitly advertised a combination of simple country-style cooking with pre-Liberation Guangzhou chic. In an interview given in a local newspaper, a spokesperson for the chain explains that the Little Sister's Place attempted to create a "nostalgic atmosphere" (*huaijiu qifen*). The characteristic ceiling fans and the square "eight immortals tables" (*baxiantai*) (so called because they sat two people on each side), used instead of the round tables more popular today, were according to the spokesperson designed to conjure up a Guangzhou of the 1930s and 40s. The waitresses were dressed in the style of the "punting girls" (*chengtingmei*) who had once worked on the region's rivers and canals (Ju and Huang 1997).

Food and eating were crucial elements in a larger market for nostalgic goods and images. For example, Guangzhou's bookshops were becoming increasingly filled with popular local histories celebrating the traditional foodways and other customs of the city and its environs (e.g., Deng et al. 1997; Gong 1999; Huang ai dong-xi 1999; Ye 1999; Ye 2000; Zhu 1999-2000). These were often prefaced or endorsed by high-ranking city government officials. In fact, the Guangzhou city government was an important actor in the nostalgia market. As in cities across China in the 1980s and 1990s, the government was instrumental in the rapid destruction and redevelopment of the older parts of town, urban areas which had been neglected during the Maoist decades' disregard for urban planning (Gaubatz 1995; Buck 1984). The state-led development projects also involved the selective restoration of historic sites and neighbourhoods, however, in particular in commercial areas which could attract local shoppers and tourists (Guangzhou Shi Lishi 2000: *passim*; cf. Gaubatz 1995: 59). Projects in Guangzhou included the highly publicised restoration in 1999 of several late Qing and Republican-era trading streets. Among these was an 800-metre long stretch of Shang-Xia Jiu Road in the heart of Old Xiguan which boasted several of the city's most famous historic snack shops and grand teahouses. According to reports, the municipal and Liwan district governments invested over 36 million yuan over a one year period to restore this stretch of 1920s and 30s buildings to their former splendour, complete with the brick carvings, Manchurian windows, and covered walkways typical of the Republican city (Liu 1999).

Famous old teahouses along Shang-Xia Jiu Road, including the Lianxiang, the Taotaoju and the Guangzhou Restaurant, were given complete makeovers.

Against the backdrop of these commodified nostalgia trends, it would appear that the recent "revival" of the Glorious China and other teahouses described in chapter one was not only a response to the changing political economy and the growing demand for venues for sociability and consumption. It was also implicated in discourses of nostalgia and tradition and involved reflexive attempts to seek out and restore culinary traditions that were seen to have been lost or to be in the process of disappearing. My exploration in this chapter of these discourses and practices is partially grounded in my fieldwork at the Glorious China and at other nearby establishments. The exploration will, however, also move out of the Glorious China to discuss the relevance of culinary nostalgia for the city's catering trade and the historical role of the catering trade in the shaping of culinary traditions.

Localising nostalgia

Undeniably, the nostalgic search for local and rural eating traditions was not unique to Guangzhou, but was a phenomenon that would be familiar to urbanites in many parts of the world. Thus, it has been argued that the processes of urbanisation have "created among many city populations a nostalgia for the countryside, and for the 'plain fare' associated with simple rural life" (Bell and Valentine 1997: 142). Not least, the escalating presence in many cities of commodities and styles from around the globe - among them culinary ones - has been said to have triggered reactionary assertions of "place-bound identities", expressed in a growing interest in local tradition (Harvey 1990: 299-303). Furthermore, in Guangzhou as elsewhere, such nostalgic affirmations of local identity have become increasingly commodified, often with the support of governments eager to attract domestic and foreign tourists and promote nationalistic sentiments among their own populations (Robertson 1990; Graburn 1997). The promotion of local distinctiveness have often involved not only the revival but also the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). As the geographer David Harvey writes:

> The irony is that tradition is now often preserved by being commodified and marketed as such. The search for roots ends up at worst being produced and marketed as an image, as a simulacrum or pastiche...(1990: 303).

Clearly, nostalgic eating in Guangzhou should be seen against the backdrop of the city's rapid growth and its position at the forefront of China's rapid integration into the global capitalist economy (Vogel 1989; Ikels 1996). At the same time, despite the apparent familiarity of Guangzhou's commodified nostalgia to Western observers like myself, neither the processes behind it or nor the local understandings of commodified and invented traditions can simply be assumed. As Richard Wilk has recently argued, globalisation can be seen as a homogeneous process to the extent that it entails several common dramatic themes and encounters, for example the "local against the foreign", but the dramas are played out differently in a plurality of specific settings which must be contextualised ethnographically and historically (1999: 248-249; cf. Watson 1997). Kathleen Stewart (1988) makes a similar point about nostalgia in the era of "late capitalism". While many social scientists have regarded nostalgic sentiments for the past and the rural as being intrinsic to the experiences of modernity (see Turner 1987), Stewart argues:

> Nostalgia, like the economy it runs with, is everywhere. But it is a cultural practice, not a given content; its forms, meanings and effects shift with the context - it depends on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present (1988: 227).

One of anthropology's contributions today lies in elucidating the local permutations of these familiar, globalised themes and dramas. Such differences may be significant even between culturally very similar localities. For example, in the 1980s and 90s Hong Kong witnessed a fashion for old-style foods and settings similar to the trend in Guangzhou. Cheng Sea Ling (1997) has recently discussed this in respect specifically to the revival of herbal tea shops. Cheng argues that this revival should be understood as part of a nostalgic reaffirmation of Chinese identity in the face of the widespread feelings of insecurity brought about by the imminent return of the British territory to Chinese sovereignty. The apparently similar trends in Guangzhou need to be seen against a very different set of historical circumstances, even though there certainly have been some economic links between the nostalgia industries in both Cantonese-speaking cities. (For instance, some traditional-style Hong Kong herbal tea shops had set up branches in Guangzhou and were also being emulated by local entrepreneurs.)

In Mainland China, the recent interest in traditional Chinese culture has most often been been understood in relation to the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution. "Cultural craze" (*wenhua re*) was a term used in the Chinese media to refer, on the one hand, to the critical explorations into the past to locate the relationship between China's tradition and its present state of underdevelopment, a task undertaken by many intellectuals in the 1980s; and, on the other hand, to the often more celebratory, popular and increasingly commodified interest in things traditional in the wake of the anti-traditionalism of the Cultural Revolution (Barmé 1999; Wang 1996). Taking a similarly broad view, the anthropologist Mayfair Yang (1996) juxtaposes temple building and the revival of lineages in rural Zhejiang Province in the early 90s with the root-seeking trends in contemporary Chinese literature. She regards both as nostalgic movements aimed at restoring a sense of community and identity in the aftermath of what she describes as the "traumatic" rupture with tradition that occurred during the Maoist period.

In her recent ethnography of a Hui (Chinese Muslim) neighbourhood in the northern city of Xi'an, Maris Gillette makes a similar link between post-Mao identities and tradition, for example in her discussion of the growing popularity of old-style Hui foods in the city (Gillette 2000: 134-145). Gillette notes that Hui restaurateurs in the neighbourhood marketed their foods as "traditional" and "represented themselves as the preservers of an unbroken culinary tradition" (2000: 135). However, some of Gillette's informants challenged these claims, leading her to assert that Hui in Xi'an

> knew as well as other Chinese...that many of their food preparation techniques and other forms of knowledge...had been forgotten or lost during the years of suppression under Mao (2000: 136).

Importantly, Gillette makes the point that the spurious nature of the claims to culinary continuity did not make the consumption of so-called "traditional" foods any less meaningful. She argues, instead, that local Hui consumed these foods in order to reaffirm their sense of identity as Hui:

> Hui who ate foods associated with their forebears forged a strong connection to the past and defined a past that was uniquely Hui. 'Eating Hui' helped residents to constitute and maintain themselves as Hui (2000: 136-137).

Gillette argues further that the state's attacks on a range of traditional practices between 1949 and 1979 produced a stronger attachment to tradition in the 1980s and 1990s, when living standards rose and the state increasingly withdrew from the private sphere. Seen in this context, the Hui consumption of foods labelled as "traditional Hui" overlapped with that of many members of the Han majority, who often came to the neighbourhood to enjoy Hui specialities. Both practices, she contends, were part of a wider "nostalgia for the prerevolutionary past" (2000: 145).[1]

Consuming the past in Guangzhou

Gillette's' description of the loss of local culinary traditions and of the consumption of traditional-style foods to provide a link with a lost past resonates well with some of the accounts that I heard from acquaintances in Guangzhou. I quote from a discussion I had with Uncle Liu in the Glorious China on a different occasion from the previous one:

> During this time [the 1950s-1970s], Guangzhou's restaurants 'lost the tradition' (*shichuan*). When life got better in the 1980s, people thought that anything was good, though it was different for us old people who knew what things had tasted like before

> Liberation, and before the War of Resistance. The Glorious China still get some things right, like the steamed rice flour rolls (*changfen*), the steamed dumplings (*ganzheng shaomai*) and the beef balls (*niurouwan*), which are minced using two cleavers, not in a mincer. But mostly they have lost the tradition, too. Guangzhou used to have a famous congee, called 'the graduate's congee' (*jidizhou*)... It should have three ingredients: pork tripe (*zhufenchang*), pork liver (*zhugan*) and pork balls (*rouwan*). Now it is chaotic (*luan*), they will put anything in it. Beef slices (*niuroupian*), tripe and pork slices (*roupian*) instead of pork balls. Pork balls are much more civilised (*siwen*), they are like eating tiny dumplings (*shaomai*). The same with 'riverboat congee' (*tingzaizhou*). It used to be served off the boats in the canals. Before, it had seven [*sic*] ingredients: jelly fish, roast duck, egg slivers, deep-fried noodles, fish slices, deep-fried peanuts, ground pepper, fresh coriander and spring onions. Now it is all just mixed together at will.

Uncle Liu's narrative both supports and complicates Gillette's claims concerning culinary traditions in urban China. Similar to Gillette's account of practices in Xi'an, for Uncle Liu eating dimsum at an old name in business like the Glorious China also appeared to be a means to connect with the pre-Liberation past of his childhood. For Uncle Liu, however, it was not simply the case that traditional techniques had been lost during the Mao years, but also that they had not been properly restored during the consumerism of the post-Mao years. On his account, the loss of traditional tastes during the revolutionary years resulted in the "chaotic congee" and "uncivilised pork slices" of the reform years, when correct methods have been substituted by gastronomic bricolage. Furthermore, while Gillette argues that Xi'an Hui nostalgically consumed traditional-style commercial foods in spite of the fact that they were dubious about the restaurateurs' claims to authenticity, Uncle Liu by contrast ate with great deliberation, choosing those dimsum which met his standards of correct taste. Significantly, these standards could sometimes still be met; the break with the tastes of the past was not complete. For Uncle Liu the most authentic traditional flavours were to be found in historic, state-run establishments like the Glorious China, rather than in the expensive hotel restaurants, although even in the former establishments one had to know what to order and what to avoid. In the culinary chaos of the reform era, the older establishments seemed to provide at least a degree of certainty and order.

While Uncle Liu was critical of the younger generations' lack of culinary refinement, many acquaintances in their forties similarly regarded some of the old snack shops and teahouses as providing gustatory links to the past, also agreeing with Uncle Liu that even these establishments had lost many traditions. Mr. Chen, the son and grandson of two former managers of the Glorious China, lamented the fact that many of Xiguan's old snack shops had been deteriorating in recent years. According to him this was because the skills had not been handed down properly from master to apprentice. Instead, people were hired in from the outside. They could get away with this because people no longer cared, he added, maintaining that Guangzhou people used to have a very strong "brand consciousness" (*pinpai yishi*) when it came to eating. Everyone knew which shops or teahouses were the best at making a certain snack, and they were loyal to these establishments. I asked him when this "brand consciousness" was the strongest, to which he replied:

> When people were poorest. Then, there were few opportunities to eat out, so everything was regarded more specially. Perhaps

> what is made now is better, but we have a special feeling for what was made them.

As with Uncle Liu, Mr. Chen could no longer entirely rely on the local establishments to prepare foods according to the correct methods. The links to the past were being increasingly attenuated as traditional methods were no longer passed down. For Chen, however, it was not that the foods in themselves were necessarily better than before, but that loyalty to the old was disappearing. People younger than himself, he said, could not remember the brands that had disappeared during the Cultural Revolution and were too "Westernised", he argued, to care about those that had not. The past was a place where consumption was more meaningful precisely because there was less of it. Huang, the head chef at the Glorious China, sometimes expressed similar sentiments. Once, after a New Year's banquet with the Glorious China managers, Huang and I went out for a late-night snack in one of the remaining old congee shops. Still a bit tipsy from the banquet, Huang praised the congee we were eating and explained that when he was a child in the 1960s, tastes were much simpler than now. "Now people want more and more fantastic things", he said, "then every treat was special". He recalled one evening when his father told him he would treat him the following day to an ice cream at a famous sweet shop on Di Shi Pu Road in Xiguan. He lay awake that whole night just thinking about the ice cream he was going to get.

Chen and Huang, who were both born in the 1950s, stressed even more than Huang the changes to culinary traditions that had occurred since the 1980s. Huang claimed that Guangzhou people's tastes (*Guangzhouren de kouwei*) had in fact remained largely "traditional" (*chuantong*) until the mid-80s. According to him, the most significant changes in food culture after the end of the Cultural Revolution had to do with rising living standards and the greater abundance of goods. In particular, he said, people were eating more fresh produce and fewer salted and dried foods (*ganhuo*). Being a chef, Huang unsurprisingly stressed the role of professional cooks in changing tastes. Prior to the mid-1980s, he explained, cooking had been dominated by Republican-era masters and their disciples. With the introduction of new styles of Cantonese cooking by Hong Kong chefs in the 1980s (chapter four), traditional cooking went out of fashion. By now, Huang claimed, "most traditional Guangzhou dishes have become obsolete (*taotai*)." There was no longer much demand for traditional specialities such as the stuffed and roasted "Eight-treasures' duck" (*babaoya*), which people now found too heavy and oily, he claimed. Although it was no longer on the menu even at the Glorious China, according to Huang elderly customers would still occasionally order it in advance from the restaurant for special banquets.

Gillette, Yang and other scholars present nostalgia for Chinese traditions as a reaction against Mao-era anti-traditionalism. For Huang, Chen and Liu, however, the loss of culinary traditions was not simply associated with the anti-traditionalism and anti-consumerism of the Mao years, but was also an ongoing effect of the rapidly rising living standards and Hong Kong and Western influences of the 1980s and 1990s. Their accounts point to the context-specific nature of "tradition" in contemporary urban China. In relation to the Mao years, "tradition" was identified with the time before Liberation. In relation to the urbanisation, globalisation and consumerism it could also include the revolutionary decades. Expressions of nostalgia for the Mao era have been regarded as a longing for a perceived socialist egalitarianism of the early revolutionary years, a longing embedded both in a dominant state discourse which seeks to strengthen support for the post-Mao project and in a popular critique of the inequalities of market reforms (Rofel 1999: 128-149; Feuchtwang 2000: 165-166). In some contexts, despite the Maoist attacks on traditional culture, the revolutionary years were also associated with authentic local traditions, which were seen as rapidly disappearing under the impact of rapid social and economic change in the post-Mao era.

Celebrating Cantonese cuisine: the socialist culinary project

Despite the fact that Liu, Chen and Huang were all critical of the old, state-run businesses, at the same time visiting the "old names" and tasting their goods often evoked memories of their childhood years and provided a link, however tenuous, to what they described as the traditional tastes of Guangzhou. In their accounts, the state-run catering trade established during the Mao years had preserved and brought forward many cooking traditions through the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution and the rapid changes of the reform years. These accounts should not simply be seen as a reinterpretation of the past in the light of contemporary circumstances. They also suggest that the Maoist era should not only be seen as constituting a rupture with the traditional past, but also as being to some extent productive of what is now regarded as traditional culture. In order to explore this relationship between the Mao years and culinary traditions, in this section I take an historical look at the catering trade since the 1950s, an account which takes up aspects not explored in chapter one.

The Maoist project has been described as a "utopian" one, whereas the reforms have been seen in contrast as a shift to gratifying needs in the here and now (Croll 1994). But during the revolutionary period itself policies frequently shifted, as for example with the Great Leap Forward when it was announced that communism was already here and millions of rural inhabitants were urged to eat as much as they could. At other times, for example in the aftermath of the famine, there was more willingness to liberalise marketing systems to improve the supply and circulation of agricultural products (Skinner 1985). There was a tension embedded in the revolutionary project between frugality and sacrifice for the future on the one hand and immediate gratification on the other. If luxury consumption was frowned upon, still an abundance of food was a sign that communism was working.

Seen against this background it becomes less surprising that the Mao era's aversion towards distinctions of taste was not only expressed through the virulent anti-consumerism and extreme frugality that I outlined in chapter one. At other times, local and national culinary traditions were loudly celebrated and avidly researched. Instead of simply abolishing elite cooking and eating practices, the emphasis was on "massification" (*dazhonghua*), which implied "reforming" (*gaige*) these practices in line with socialist ethics and dividing delicacies more equally among the population. "Massification" also involved attempts to improve cooking practices in work unit canteens and in homes. Arguably, one can speak of a socialist "culinary project", in particular after the nationalisation of the catering trade in the 1950s. While my discussion here of this project focusses on Guangzhou, it is important to bear in mind that this enterprise was paralleled in cities across China and was to some extent coordinated at central level. The culinary project was at its zenith in the mid-1950s, although traces of it can be found in the 60s and 70s. It was pursued through various means, in particular through the reorganisation of restaurants, the arrangement of culinary expositions and the production of cookery books. I discuss these here in that order.

Rearranging restaurants

In Guangzhou in the 1950s and and early 60s, despite the overall decrease in the number of eating establishments, many old teahouses were refurbished and expanded and several new ones were built. In fact, several of the city's most famous old names in business in the 80s and 90s had been rather small and insignificant in the Republican era. These included the Panxi Restaurant in the northwest of Xiguan, which was a small-scale establishment when it was founded in 1947. It was converted into a "garden-style" restaurant between 1958 and 1960 and subsequently expanded in 1965 and in the 1970s. It eventually probably became Guangzhou's most famous restaurant and, allegedly, "China's largest garden-style restaurant" (Gao and Gong 1999: 176; Lin 1997: 94). Similarly, the North Garden (*Beiyuan Jiujia*) was founded in the 1920s and was expanded in 1957, redesigned by the same architect who was to redo the Panxi (Gao and Gong 1999: 186-187).

In the now centralised administration of the Guangzhou catering trade, famous chefs working in restaurants and teahouses around the city were allocated to certain prioritised establishments. The famous dimsum master, Luo Kun, who was still a household name when I did my fieldwork in the city, was allocated to the Panxi in 1960 to take charge of the dimsum section, and many of his former apprentices still work there (Li 1996: 12-13). Perhaps the most far-reaching in this respect was the Guangzhou Restaurant (*Guangzhou Jiujia*), which was first opened to the public in 1939. During the 1950s a string of famous chefs were hired to work in the restaurant. These included Xuan Donglin, Wu Luan (who in the 1930s had been known as Guangzhou's "shark's fin king"), and the younger Huang Rui. Huang introduced a string of new dishes in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, including "Maotai chicken" (*maotaiji*) and "Fragrant and smooth perch rolls" (*xiang hua luyuqiu*). The dimsum chef Xuan Dongling was known in the 1930s as one of the "four heavenly kings" of the teahouses of Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macao. Having settled in Hong Kong in the 1940s he was actually enticed to return to Guangzhou in 1956 to take over the dimsum section at the Guangzhou Restaurant. Subsequently, Xuan led the "teaching and research group" set up at the Guangzhou Restaurant by the Guangzhou Food and Drink Service Company. Like the Panxi, the Guangzhou was promoted as something of a showcase establishment and a centre for the advancement of local culinary culture, for example during the culinary exposition of 1956 which I discuss below (Liu 1999: 25-29; Gao and Gong 1999: 198; Lin 1997: 36-37).

As I discussed in the last chapter, many of the these establishments, in particular their banqueting rooms, were by the 1970s reserved for high-ranking cadres and foreign visitors. In the 1950s, however, restaurants like the Guangzhou offered not only tea and dimsum but also set meals and banquets at prices affordable to ordinary residents (Liu 1999: 29). Even more telling of the attempts to popularise and massify cuisine were the "mass" or "common" dining halls (*dazhonghua shitang* or *gonggong shitang*) that were being built in the city already years before the Great Leap Forward. Beginning in 1954, central public dining halls were established in what were then called the West, East, Central and North Districts (Gao and Gong 1999: 60). Several smaller public dining halls were opened up south of the River. According to elderly informants, they were in many ways different from the communal dining halls of the Great Leap Forward, although for instance the West District Dining Hall was in fact used as such a canteen in 1960. The idea was to create the ultimate Cantonese restaurants by moving some of the best cooks from each district into a single establishment. The food was meant to be affordable to ordinary residents who were to be able to enjoy the quintessence of Guangzhou cuisine.

Cuisine on display: the food fair of 1956

The "Guangzhou City Exposition of Famous Dishes and Delicate Dimsum" (*Guangzhou Shi mingcai meidian zhanlanhui*) was held between 1st June and 1st July 1956. According to an announcement printed in May that year, the aims of the Exposition were to "carry forward the historical legacy", facilitate "the exchange of experiences and skills between cooks", "improve skills in foodstuffs production" and "enhance the quality of output and services in the catering trade in accordance with the daily rise in the standard of living" (Anonymous 1956a). The Exposition received huge coverage in the local dailies, where it was described as a major event. Its timing coincided with the acceleration that same year of the "socialist transformation" of urban commerce and industry, i.e. the move to public-private ownership (Vogel 1980: 166-173). It was a celebration of Cantonese cuisine, of the new culinary regime and of the still relatively new government behind it. It was also a display of the state's commitments to levelling culinary distinctions and democratising the access to local delicacies.

The Exposition was comprised of an exhibition hall in the Guangzhou Restaurant and six "tasting shops" (*changshidian*) located in famous teahouses throughout the Central and West districts. Tickets to the main exhibition were limited in number but free of charge. Group tickets were organised through the main office while individuals could collect theirs from the public dining halls of each district. The events were to be interactive. People were encouraged to come and "look, taste, criticize and instruct" (Anonymous 1956a). All were welcome, perhaps in particular "cooks and other employees from offices, military units, organizations, factories, shops and schools", but also "people of all strata (*ge jieceng renmin*) and housewives (*jiating zhufu*)" (1956a).

During the month-long Exposition, a total of around 230,000 recorded visits were made to the exhibition hall. 480,000 visits were recorded at the tasting shops. In addition, delegations arrived from other cities in Guangdong, including Shaoguan, Sanshui, Dongguan and Xinhui, and also from Beijing, Shanghai, Nanning (in Guangxi) and Zhuzhou (in Hunan). Over 70 foreign guests represented foreign countries, including the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Argentina, Japan, Brazil and Great Britain. A total of 121 exchange meetings, lectures and on-the-spot training classes (*xianchang shixi*) were organized for cooks and other members of Guangzhou work units and visiting delegations. At these, the cooking methods of over 200 dishes and dimsum were demonstrated. As a result, according to one report, famous Guangzhou recipes for chicken and duck and methods for making crisp bread which substituted domestic raw materials for imports had already been adopted by restaurants in Shaoguan and Beijing. Moreover, it was claimed that local housewives had begun to copy some of the foods on display, in particular home-style dishes (*jiating xiaocai*) such as "stuffed chillies" (*niang lajiao*) and "oil-steeped shelled prawns" (*youpao xiaren*) (Dai 1956).

In conjunction with the Exposition, knowledge about Cantonese restaurant cuisine was disseminated to the "masses" through a number of feature newspaper articles. For example, an interview conducted at the exhibition with the renowned dimsum master, Lu Zhen, introduces the reader to the variety of the city's dimsum (Lu 1956). Lu had started working in a dimsum kitchen at the age of 13 and was a chef by the time he was 16. He claims that over 600 distinctive kinds of dimsum were currently available in Guangzhou. These could be divided into about 25 categories, usually on the basis of the kind of dough used for the wrapping. One of his own specialities was "egg-fried sticky rice wrap" (*danjian nuomiji*), and he gives detailed instructions on how to prepare it. Other articles, including a special column entitled "For eating, it's Guangzhou" (*Shi zai Guangzhou*), provided histories and recipes for famous dishes like "Jinling sliced-skin roast duck" (*Jinling pianpiya*) and "Smooth perch rolls" (*Hua luyu qiu*). These two dishes had now become specialities of the house at the North District Dining Hall, following the transfer to that establishment of the master chefs Cui Lü and Zhu Nan (Yan Dui 1956a).

The newspaper reports all emphasize that it was "the people", and in particular occupational cooks, who were the true agents behind the development of Cantonese cuisine. One article states that "over the ages the Guangdong people have handed down and amassed a unique set of cooking arts" and goes on to praise in great detail the numerous skills of even ordinary Cantonese cooks (Anonymous 1956b). In his interview Lu Zhen points especially to Cantonese cooks' ability to borrow recipes and techniques from the outside and make improvements to them (Lu 1956), a point which is underscored by other commentators as well (Anonymous 1956b). The influence of the former elites, by contrast, is downplayed. In a recipe for the "Grand historian's frog" (*Taishi tianji*), the journalist writes that it was created in the Qing Dynasty in the private kitchen of a certain Jiang Xia, who "crowned it with the title of his own office in order to display his understanding of the art of cooking, when in fact it was the creation of his household chef" (Yan Dui 1956b).

At the Guangzhou Restaurant the ground floor was designated as the exhibition hall and the first floor was used for sampling (Liu 1999: 29). The exhibitions were presided over by famous chefs and dimsum chefs from around the city, not just the Guangzhou restaurant (Anonymous 1956b). In addition to the main exhibition section, named the "Guangdong food hall" (*Guangdong caiguan*) there was also a smaller section referred to as the "regional food hall" (*waisheng caiguan*). The latter did not exhibit many items, but gave local journalists an opportunity to compare what they described as the "heavy", "rich" and "hearty" non-Cantonese Chinese food to the "light", "dainty" and "refined" cuisine of Guangdong (Anonymous 1956b). Being the provincial capital, the displays included not only Guangzhou foods, but also exemplars of Chaozhou-style and East River cooking. Reports claimed that Cantonese cuisine was "equally appreciative of high and low", and that the exhibits reflected this by displaying delicacies ranging in complexity and opulence from the Guangzhou Restaurant's 108-dish version of the Qing imperial "Manchu-Han banquet" (*Man-Han quanxi*) to popular local specialities like stewed dog and snake soup (Anonymous 1956b).

In total, over 600 dishes and 138 dimsum were put on display (Anonymous 1956a; Lu 1956). Although this is less than one tenth of the total number of foods available in the city, argues one report, still "you could not taste everything even if you ate non-stop for three or four days" (Anonymous 1956b). In fact, it is claimed in the same piece, the Exposition had convened dozens of chefs for deliberation, yet together they could not put together a complete list of Cantonese dishes, even though each of the chefs had mastered several thousand recipes. Nevertheless, in conjunction with the Exposition a count was made of the total number of different dishes and dimsum then currently provided by the city's catering industry; a total of 5,457 dishes and 825 dimsum (Gao and Gong 1999: 6). The 1956 Exposition was permeated with an ambition to compile and compare in order to quantify Cantonese cuisine and delineate its boundaries with other culinary styles. At the same time, one report tells us, a Guangdong recipe book (*Guangdong shipu*) was in the process of being compiled, and the draft was already three inches thick (Anonymous 1956b). It seems thus that there existed certain links between the exposition and the first ever Guangdong cookbook project, which was part of an overarching national project.

Collecting culinary knowledge: the national cookbook projects

The *Cookbook of China's Famous Dishes*, a twelve-volume collection of regional recipes published between 1957 and 1965, is to my knowledge China's first expressly "national" cookbook.[2] It attempts to inscribe the typical, representative dishes of each of the nation's regional cuisines. The recipes are collected from urban restaurant chefs through the new network of nationalised restaurants. The "major cuisines" of Beijing, Guangdong, Shandong, Sichuan, Jiang-Zhe (Jiangsu and Zhejiang) and Shanghai each take up one or more volumes. The southeastern provinces of Fujian, Jiangxi and Anhui take up one volume, as do the southwestern provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou and Guangxi.

Two whole volumes are dedicated to Cantonese cuisine (surpassed only by the nation's capital, which gets three). The volume I have seen (Shangye 1959) contains mostly dishes from the Pearl River Delta region, but also includes recipes representing East River (Hakka) and Chaozhou cooking, the two other prominent culinary regions in the province. There are also Buddhist vegetarian recipes and Cantonese-style Muslim dishes.

All of the recipes are collected from restaurants in the provincial capital, which is taken to represent the whole of the province.

The *Cookbook of China's Famous Dishes* is targetted not at households but at cooks working in the country's canteens and restaurants. According to the preface to the first volume of Cantonese cooking, the publication is aimed at stimulating exchange among establishments. As with the 1956 Exposition, the methods of cooking the house specialities of Guangzhou's famous restaurants, once jealously guarded by the chefs as crucial cultural capital, were now to be shared among all cooks as part of a common culinary heritage. Famous Republican-era dishes such as the Likoufu's "Lucky mouth chicken"(*koufuji*) and the Caigenxiang's "Ding Lake vegetable casserole" (*Dinghu shangsu*) were now to be reproducible in canteens and restaurants throughout the city and even the country.

The Cultural Revolution was not officially over when the Guangdong volume of the *China Cookbook* (Zhongguo 1976) was completed. This second national cookery book, also in twelve-volumes, was published between 1976 and 1981. Like its forerunner, it was collected among occupational cooks and expressly written for members of the catering trade. Its authors are more explicit than *China's Famous Dishes* about their attempts to spread the experience of Cantonese haute cuisine beyond what they describe as the narrow confines of Guangzhou's former elites. As in the newspaper articles published around the time of the 1956 exposition, they emphasise that it is the working people, not the elite diners, who have been the true agents behind the city's historical alimentary achievements:

> [I]n the evil old society, most exquisite delicacies were

> monopolised by the exploitative ruling classes. They were made in order to serve the corrupt life of pleasure led by the bureaucrats, compradors, landlords and capitalists. The great numbers of working people who had created these dishes, by contrast, were never able to enjoy them (Zhongguo 1976: 2).

At the same time, the authors also attempt to reform Cantonese cuisine by removing wasteful or unhealthy dishes, promoting instead the "refinement of coarse ingredients" (*culiao jingzhi*), and by changing the names of dishes that had carried a sense of "feudalism, capitalism and revisionism" (*feng-zi-xiu*) (Zhongguo 1976: 3). For example, the "County magistrate's chicken" (*taiyeji*), had according to tradition been created at the end of the Qing by a magistrate-turned-merchant and became a famous dish in the 1930s at the Six Kingdoms' Restaurant (*Liuguo Fandian*). The dish was now renamed "Tea-fragrance chicken" (*chaxiangji*) (cf. Huacheng 1983: 119). Yet despite these reforms there seems to be little in the way of experimentation with novel flavours or ingredients. There are some post-Liberation novelties, including Huang Rui's "Maotai chicken" (cooked in Maotai, China's "national" spirit) and "Fragrant and smooth perch rolls" from the Guangzhou Restaurant. Nonetheless, most of the recipes would have been recognised without hesitation by a Republican-era restaurant-goer. As in the 1959 cookbook, the majority of the recipes were of well-known specialities from famous Republican houses. In 1976, almost thirty years after the communist victory, Cantonese cuisine, as it was represented in the national cookbook, appeared virtually unchanged.

The culinary project of the Maoist years, I argue, profoundly influenced the ways in which Cantonese food traditions have subsequently been conceptualised and practised in Guangzhou. Prior to the food fairs and cookbook projects of the revolutionary years no coordinated attempts had been made to quantify Cantonese cuisine or delineate its representative dishes. If the opportunities to savour first-rate cuisine in Guangzhou's famous houses were limited in the revolutionary years, still knowledge about professional cooking techniques and the specialities of local restaurants were spread to cooks in households and work unit canteens via the food exposition, newspaper articles and cookery books. Local and "national" cuisines, cleansed of their "feudal" and "capitalist" traits, were to have a part in the new socialist Chinese culture.

At the same time, despite the claims to reforming Cantonese cuisine, the cookbooks and, according to informants, restaurant and teahouse menus, on the whole reproduced pre-Liberation flavours. As Master Huang pointed out, until the 1980s Guangzhou's restaurants were completely dominated by the old Republican-era masters and the disciples they had trained in the 1950s and 60s. Furthermore, with no competition between the centrally planned establishments, no large class of diners demanding novel tastes, and an unreliable access to raw materials there was neither the incentive nor the wherewithal to innovate. By the early 1980s, a small number of state-run teahouses, dining halls and snack shops had been serving virtually the same dishes and snacks, albeit in dwindling numbers, for thirty years. While much less varied and perhaps frequently of poorer quality than in the 1940s, Republican-style cooking practices and the specialities of Republican houses became firmly established as typical Guangzhou-style Cantonese cuisine. And although countless traditions were seen to have been lost through poverty and political campaigns, by the early 80s Guangzhou had preserved a number of practices and tastes that had changed quite dramatically in Hong Kong and elsewhere in the Cantonese-speaking world (Cheung 2002a; Tam 1997). To teahouse and restaurant-goers in the 80s and 90s, cooking styles and menus of the Mao years appeared largely "traditional" by contrast to the many novelties introduced during the reform years. Moreover, these essentially Republican-era traditions had been carried forward through the post-Mao era in the state-run remnants of the socialist culinary project such as the Glorious China and some of the old Xiguan snack shops.

The state retains a guiding role: the 1983 exposition

Although private enterprise and market reforms had been crucial for reinvigorating the catering industry, still the state did not leave the fate of Guangzhou's culinary traditions entirely to the vagaries of private entrepreneurship. In spite of, or perhaps as a corrective to, the reform policies' de facto acceptance of economic inequalities in the name of rapid economic development, in the 1980s the Guangzhou government still appeared to take very seriously its revolutionary commitment to levelling Cantonese cuisine through distributing delicacies to ordinary people. During the first seven or eight years of reform the state-run catering trade on the whole thrived under the new economic policies. Despite the growing competition from privately-run *dapaidang* and up-market joint-venture restaurants, even at the end of the 1980s the majority of large-scale teahouse-restaurants like the Glorious China were still state-owned and state-run. Although overall the state-run eating establishments were few in number (8% of the total in 1987) their size and continued popularity is suggested by the official statistics, according to which the state-run restaurants stood for 52.1% of the catering industry's total turnover for 1989 (Guangzhou Nianjian 1990: 268).

The significance of the state industry enabled the city and district governments to continue to present their culinary institutions as the legitimate heirs and administrators of the Cantonese cooking traditions. From this perspective, the revival of the catering trade was as much about taking up a culinary project from the mid-50s and early 60s that had been suppressed during the Cultural Revolution as it was about reviving traditions from the Republican era. Food fairs, cooking competitions and other culinary events were organised by the city and district governments throughout the decade. The tone was set in October and November 1983 when the Guangzhou Food and Drink Service Company put on the "Guangzhou Famous Dishes and Delicate dimsum Competition and Exposition" (*Guangzhou mingcai meidian pingbi zhanlanhui*). The first food event on that scale since 1956, the twenty-day exposition was formally opened by the erstwhile Guangzhou mayor, Ye Xuanping. The opening ceremony was attended by political dignitaries from municipal, provincial and national levels, as well as by foreign delegations and representatives from Hong Kong's and Macao's catering industries. The event appears to have been named after and closely modelled on the 1956 exposition. Specialities from 121 of the Company's restaurants, teahouses, and snack shops were exhibited in two of its grandest establishments. As in 1956 the exhibits were held in the Panxi and Guangzhou restaurants. The massive, garden-style Panxi Restaurant housed the exhibits of dimsum and other snack foods in its North Building. Not far away, in the heart of Xiguan, dishes and food sculptures were shown off on the ground floor of the Guangzhou Restaurant.[3]

Somewhere around 1,200 dishes and dimsum were put on display. Contributions from over 70 establishments in the Guangzhou Restaurant's exhibition hall for famous dishes were divided into nine sections representing different cuisines and culinary genres: "appreciation of craft" (i.e., food carving and sculpture) "famous Guangzhou dishes". "local specialities", "East River specialities", "Chaozhou specialities", "vegetarian specialities", "*qingzhen* (halal) dishes", "game" and "Western dishes". The dimsum, snacks, and cold drinks on display at the Panxi represented over 100 of the Company's work units and were arranged into similar sections as the dishes.

As the main focus of the exposition was on Cantonese cuisine (*Yuecai*), the sections for "famous Guangzhou dishes" and "Guangzhou-style dimsum" were by far the largest. According to newspaper reports and the official guide to the exposition (Anonymous 1983b), it was hoped that this massive display of culinary skill and variety would not only celebrate the considerable advances that the catering industry had made since the end of the Cultural Revolution and beginning of reforms, but also encourage further developments through the exchange of skills and knowledge between members of the catering industry. Above all, it was hoped that the event would help to "restore Guangzhou's culinary reputation" (*huifu 'shi zai Guangzhou' de meiyu*) both at home and abroad.

The mayor of Guangzhou had insisted in his opening speech for the exposition that the emphasis be on combining "high, middle and low", with a strong commitment to "massification" (Zhang and Situ 1983a). In line with this, visitors were not limited to political elites, foreign dignitaries and employees in the catering industry. As during the 1956 exposition, there was a great emphasis on both education and also feedback from the public. Ordinary citizens were strongly encouraged to participate - not only to admire the displays of cold foods, but also to visit the many "tasting stations" situated in the exhibition halls, and even to write suggestions and criticisms. In addition to group tickets for work units, a number of individual tickets were issued, free of charge, at specific times from eating establishments around the city. According to reports there were far from enough tickets to go around. Some were apparently snapped up by ticket touts who sold them on the streets outside the exhibition halls (Zhang and Situ 1983b). Once inside, many visitors were reported to have spent all day there - some people diligently took notes from the explanations of each dish while others made their own sketches of the exhibited items, transforming the exhibition halls into "study halls" for cooking as the authors of one report put it (Zhang and Situ 1983c). By the end of the twenty days, at least 110,000 people had visited the exposition. Over 1,000 dedications (*tici*), messages (*liuyanshu*) and suggestion cards (*yijianka*) were received from the public. After the exhibitions closed, a group of judges was to distribute awards in consultation with opinions received from the public. In the words of one report, their job was to "choose the Guangzhou menu for the 1980s" (Liang et al. 1983).

The menu of the Reform era was to be a combination of traditional Cantonese specialities and novelties. 35% of the 500-odd dishes on display and 34% of the over 600 dimsum were classified by the organisers as "traditional" (*chuantong*), the remaining 65% and 66%, respectively, as "innovations" (*chuangxin caidian*). Hundreds of the "innovations" were invented specifically for the event, a sure sign that Guangzhou's chefs were able to design new foods for the future. Of the "traditional" dishes and dimsum, many were now being "restored" for the first time, having been "lost" during the Cultural Revolution or even earlier. Oftentimes, "restoration" was not just a simple matter of reintroducing a delicacy into production. Lü Huixian (1983) describes how one shop that used to specialise in "duck liver dumplings" (*yarun shuijiao*) now no longer had any employees who knew how to make them. After many difficulties, the manager was finally able to find the original inventor of the snack, Li Bao.

Master Li was now well into his eighties but apparently was glad to teach the employees his "traditional recipe" (*chuantong peifang*). Like many other restored traditional delicacies (Zhong 1983), the dumplings were not only to be presented at the exposition but were also reinstated onto the snack shop's regular menu (Lü 1983).

Finding a niche: nostalgia and the old names in business

In the late 1990s the situation was very different for the state sector of the catering trade. Following two decades of reforms, privatisation and urban renewal and facing an increasingly competitive market in the economic slump of the second half of the decade, the state sector had completely lost the economic dominance it had had even at the end of the 1980s. Without providing any statistics on this, the Guangzhou Yearbook of 1999 notes that the state-run establishments have been experiencing great difficulties and points out that the private and *geti* restaurants now have by far the largest share of the market (Guangzhou Nianjian 1999: 273). According to managers at the Glorious China, the number of state-run teahouse-restaurants had dwindled from over 100 in the 1980s to fewer than 20 in 1999.

The shift in fortunes was apparent at the Guangzhou International Food Festival, which has been held annually since 1987, a direct descendent of the fairs of 1956 and 1983. However, the festival has now become much more commercial in orientation, with less emphasis on exchanging skills or disseminating cuisine to the masses. In 1999, members of the public had to pay ten yuan each to get in, which outraged many visitors and restaurateurs I met at the exhibition. No longer held at any of the participating restaurants, in 1998 the food festival was moved to the Tianhe Stadium, the largest sport complex in the city. Foodstuffs companies and restaurants hired booths from the organisers, where they exhibited their goods, provided demonstrations and sold their products. In addition to advertising, many of the restaurants also looked to make a profit from the sale of "samples". The proprietors of one stall claimed to have made a net profit of over 30,000 yuan in seven days during the previous year's fair. In contrast to the cooking competitions, the exhibitions were no longer dominated by state firms, although these still made up a significant part of the total number of exhibitors.

However, by the late 90s several managers of the state-run old names in business were realising that latching on to the recent nostalgia trend might be a way out of their economic difficulties. This was reflected in their exhibits at the Food Festival. In 1999, fifteen establishments, including the Guangzhou Restaurant, the Panxi, the Glorious China and the Taotaoju, were displayed together on a "Street for Guangzhou's old names in business". Their booths were decorated with gold-on-black sign boards and couplets in the style of those seen before Liberation, and several displayed photographs of their establishments that had been taken during the Republican era. Whereas in the 1983 exposition the restaurants comprising the Guangzhou Food and Drink Company displayed both their links to the past and their capacity for innovation and leadership for the future, now these same establishments emphasised their roots in the Qing and Republic, and sold samples of their famous old brands.

This repackaging of the old names teahouses and snack shops into vestiges of the pre-Liberation past was especially prevalent in Xiguan, the historical centre of trade and entertainment in Guangzhou and the site of both the 1956 and 1983 exhibitions. In both these exhibitions, over half of the dimsum on display had come from establishments in Liwan District (Lü 1999: 11). However, by the late 90s many snack shops had been unable to keep up with the competition or were torn down as part of urban reconstruction. Even the Jingzhongge, the purveyor of the famous "duck liver dumplings" that had been painstakingly restored in 1983, was no longer in business. More and more state-run establishments were now refurbishing their restaurants in the antique style and presenting their wares as old-fashioned, traditional foods. In 1999, for example, the Glorious China reappropriated three of the snack shops from the private entrepreneurs to whom they had been subcontracted. Previously simple holes-in-the-wall with white-washed walls and foldable tables, they were now refurbished in the "antique style", with imitation mahogany (*hongmu*) tables and chairs, calligraphies on the walls and latticed woodwork at the entrances and windows **(figure 4)**.

The three shops were the Oucheng Ji on Di Shi Pu Road, famous for its wonton noodle soup, the Wuzhan Ji on the corner of Longjin and Huagui Roads, where it sold its renowned "graduate's congee", and the Nanxin Sweet Shop, known for its Shunde-style "double-layered custard". These had all been founded in the 1940s, the latter two by natives of Shunde. Their house specialities had been displayed and received awards at the expositions of 1956 and 1983. A fourth "antique style" shop was opened in May 1999 on Di Shi Pu. This was called the Liwan Famous Foods House (*Liwan Mingshijia*). Here, the specialities of all three shops were available, as were snacks from other establishments associated with the Glorious China. In 1999 and 2000, the snack shops were doing incredibly well and partially compensated for the poor profits made by the company's main teahouse. According to managers, the main reason that the Glorious China had itself not been refurbished in a similar fashion

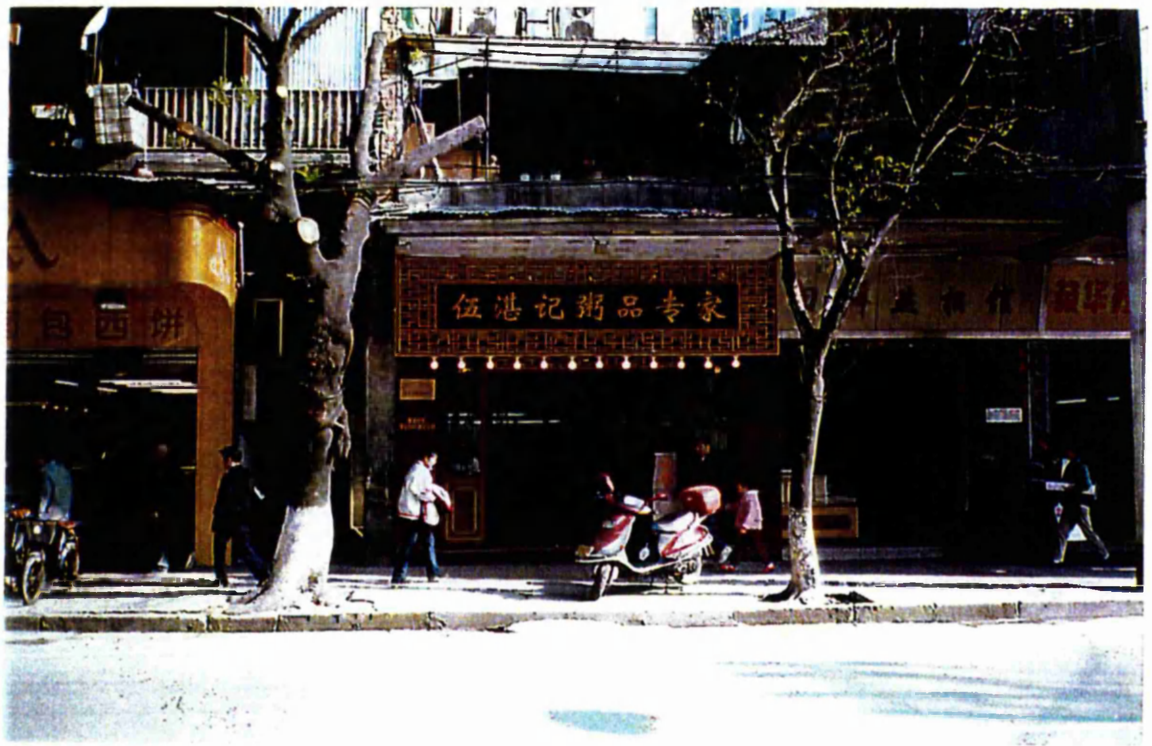

FIGURE 4: AN ANTIQUE-STYLE SNACK SHOP

were the prohibitive costs of redoing the entire restaurant after a different and gradual rebuilding of the restaurant had been going on for a decade. In 2000, a second Wuzhan Ji was opened on the same road as the first one and there were plans to open a Liwan Famous Foods House in the food court of a new shopping mall in Tianhe District in the east of Guangzhou.

The largest enterprise of this kind was the Xiguan People (*Xiguan Renjia*). It was founded jointly by the Glorious China and the Qingping Restaurant (the two largest companies to come out of the Liwan Food and Drink Company) in December 1998, but later forced by the Trade Bureau to form a separate company. The Xiguan People literally gathered all of the most famous Xiguan specialities under a single roof. These included several old brands that had recently gone out of production, such as the Jinzhongge's duck liver dumplings and the Satang Ji's Manchu-style *saqima* biscuits. The interior and exterior decorations were quite extreme. The exterior was in grey brick, with brick carvings and Manchurian windows. A black lacquered sign with gold-painted characters hung over the entrance. There was only one large dining room, separated from the entrance by a large decorated windscreen (*pingfeng*). The five supporting pillars in the room were decorated to look like banyan trees, reminding customers that they were in China's Deep South. The tables were of the square, "eight-immortal" type. One ordered at one's seat from waitresses dressed in the cotton trousers, loose shirt and head scarf once typical of the Pearl River Delta. On three sides the room was bordered by open counters. These were partitioned from each other and had separate signboards, making them look like different shops as if on a crowded market street in Old Guangzhou. Behind each "shop" one could watch the cooks prepare some of the different specialities; the Qingping's cold boiled chicken, the Wuzhan Ji's congees, the Yin Ji's steamed rice flour rolls with beef...The most surprising aspect of the Xiguan People was perhaps its location - indoors, on the first floor in the south tower of the recently completed Liwan Shopping Mall (*Liwan Guangchang*), a massive pinkish complex hovering above the surrounding two- and three-story Republican-era houses!

The question of "authenticity"

The "traditional" decor and service of the Xiguan People was very different from late Qing and Republican era teahouses and obviously involved a great deal of cultural invention. For David Harvey, as we saw in the beginning of the chapter, this kind of commodified tradition is problematic in that it constitutes not true continuity but a simulated past. Guangzhounese I spoke to tended to see things differently, however. Some, like my friend A-Feng, who grew up in Xiguan and was now in his mid-twenties, were highly critical of the restoration work that had been done in the old districts. According to A-Feng, the carving work was sloppy, the materials used were of inferior quality and the exteriors of the buildings were now much more colourful than they had been during the Republican era. A-Feng once treated me to lunch at the Xiguan People, which he had not yet tried out. Far from being critical of the decor as I had expected him to be, A-Feng liked the atmosphere and appreciated the fact that the restaurant was clean and tidy. He was impressed by the popularity of the place (we had to wait over half an hour for seats although it was the middle of the week). He was unimpressed by the food, however, which he found less fresh than at the smaller snack shops, and he was clearly irritated with the slow service.

For A-Feng, the fact that he knew the decor to be "unauthentic" was irrelevant to him, despite his being so scathing of city government's attempts at restoring old buildings. What mattered was the atmosphere, the service and, especially, the food. No one pretended that the interiors of the old-fashioned establishments were authentic. The terms commonly used to describe the decor of the nostalgia restaurants were *fanggu*, literally "to copy the ancient" (what I have translated as "the antique style"), or *guse-guxiang*, literally "ancient colour and fragrance". These expressions drew attention to the constructed nature of the enterprise. Guangzhounese diners were visiting their city's "traditional restaurants" in the full knowledge that what they were visiting was a pastiche of that past, not the real thing. The decor was there to signify the past, not to reproduce it.

However, in Guangzhou the food was a much more delicate and precise matter than the interior decor. Many customers not only demanded freshness but also, as we have seen, that traditional snacks be made according to certain methods and using specific ingredients. Snacks should not only taste and smell right they should also look right and have the correct texture. Eaters demanded that steamed rice flour rolls should be "smooth" (*hua*) and that the noodles used for wonton soup were "chewy" (*tanya*). Two friends in their forties who took me to the Liwan Famous Foods House insisted that I take photographs of the foods we sampled there, explaining that it was important that in making Guangzhou's traditional snacks attention was paid to colour (*se*) and arrangement (*zaoxing*) **(figure 5)**. At the same time, as we have seen, people like Uncle Liu and Mr. Chen were often highly critical of the extent to which the old establishments actually still managed to meet such criteria.

Restaurateurs were well aware that in advertising themselves as the purveyors of well-known traditional foods they were exposing themselves to censure from the city's demanding diners. It was not enough simply to display

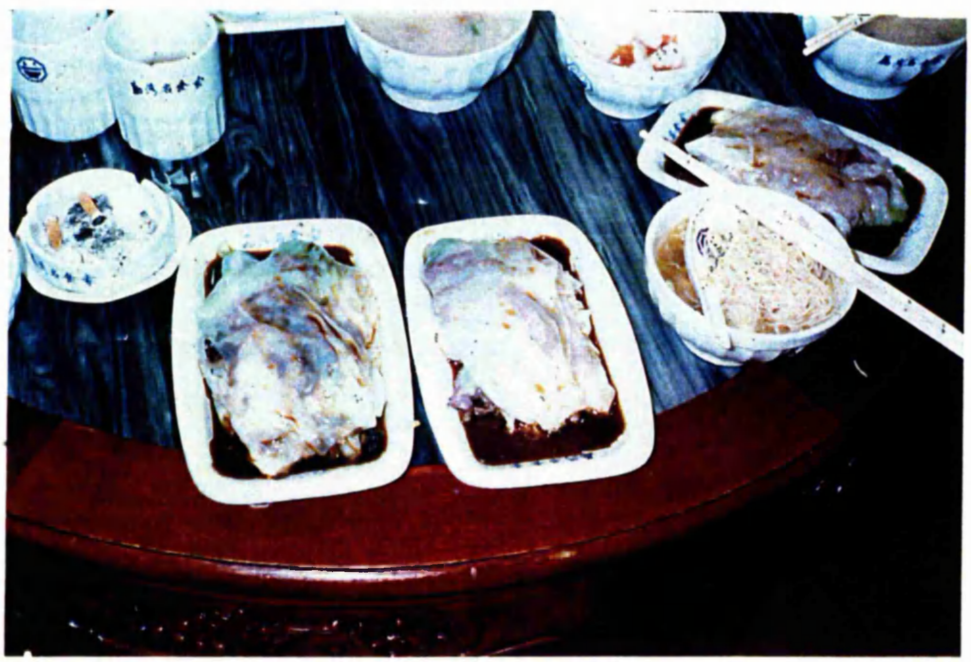

FIGURE 5: TRADITIONAL SNACKS

one's credentials through the use of well-known old brands. A restaurant had to be able to deliver the goods. For this reason, according to Manager Tang at the Wuzhanji, the cooks in charge of particular house specialities at the Liwan Famous Foods House and the Xiguan People had all previously worked in the establishments where these foods had originated. Certain snacks that did not have to be served hot, for example the "Guohua's Lunjiao-style rice cakes" (*Guohua lunjiaogao*) and the "Dechang savoury fried cakes" (*Dechang xianjianbing*), were in fact made at one establishment and then transported to the other eating places, since not enough people knew how to make them.[4] Old-fashioned decor could be appreciated but it was not something people discussed very much. The quality of the food and the extent to which items claimed to be "traditional" actually were created according to traditional methods, on the other hand, were important issues, even to A-Feng and his cohorts who, according to people in their forties like Mr. Chen and seventy year-olds like Uncle Liu, were too young to care or know about such matters.

Conclusion

On the basis of oral accounts of the the recent history of commercial foods in Guangzhou, which I had heard from people whom I met in the Glorious China, I questioned scholarship by anthropologists which presented the recent nostalgia in China for "traditional" foods and other cultural forms to be simply a reaction to the "war on tradition" of the Mao years. The longing for old-style foods was indeed articulated by some with the "loss of tradition" during that time, but also with the recent economic development and with the changing attitudes of the young during the reform years. While elderly customers spoke of the delicacies from before Liberation, middle-aged teahouse-goers longed for the tastes of their childhoods in the

1960s. Clearly, "tradition" could be associated with the Maoist period as well as with the golden years of Guangzhou catering in the late Qing and Republican years.

Assuming that these narratives were not only products of the present but were also shaped by past events, I investigated the history of the catering trade in Guangzhou since the 1950s. I argued that the Maoist state did not only attempt to level differences in consumption by destroying fine cuisine. Through expositions, restaurants and cookbooks projects it also at times sought also to disseminate cuisine to "the masses". After ridding the cuisine of traits of feudalism, the ordinary people were to be able to enjoy the best of Cantonese cuisine, it was hoped. The optimism apparent in accounts of these projects from the mid-1950s undoubtedly received a heavy blow during the campaigns of the Cultural Revolution. Seen from the point-of-view of the catering trade, the restoration of "eating in Guangzhou" in the early reform years was as much about reviving a culinary project begun in the 1950s that had suffered during the Cultural Revolution as it was about restoring traditions from before 1949.

This history had important implications for the state catering trade in the 1990s, which had fallen on hard times since the late 1980s. With the growing nostalgic demand for "traditional" flavours, state caterers were reinventing themselves as the purveyors of "old-fashioned" foods. Well-known historical brands - well-known largely because these were the brands that had been preserved (and sometimes lost and restored) by the state catering trade between the 1950s and the early 1980s - were sold from refurbished or newly built snack shops and restaurants. Though resembling the food courts of the new shopping malls more than the snack shops and teahouses of pre-Liberation times, the "antique style" decoration of these establishments signified that what was being sold was "old-style" foods. Rather than either uncritically embrace these establishments as "traditional" or dismiss them as "unauthentic", acquaintances in Guangzhou judged them above all on culinary grounds. Restaurateurs were aware of this, and some went out of their way to ensure that the "traditional delicacies" they served were prepared and presented according to methods handed down from previous masters. Traditions can always be invented by entrepreneurs and political and social elites, but as Jun Jing has argued in a very different context from that presented here, actually establishing popular legitimacy for an invented tradition is actually quite difficult (Jing 1996: 68). Guangzhounese I knew were ready to accept restaurant refurbishments and decors that merely drew attention the past rather than carefully reproduced older models. Food was another matter.

What emerges from this exploration of culinary nostalgia, alimentary traditions and the catering trade is a picture of an urban culture which cannot be reduced to any straightforward periodisation. The reform era cannot simply be understood as a clear break with the Mao years. Instead, the present was a complex mixture of ruptures, continuities and reinventions. Maoism remains crucial for understanding "tradition" and "nostalgia" in contemporary urban China. In some contexts Maoism was relevant as the opposite of tradition. In other contexts, less frequently observed by scholars, it was a preserver and producer of traditional culture.

The "reform" and "massification" of Cantonese cuisine during the Mao years involved quantifying and categorising the cuisine and comparing it to other cuisines. It also involved transforming the private, often secret recipes of chefs into part of a common heritage. The culinary project and the preservation of older cooking styles in the Mao years has had profound implications for contemporary understandings of Cantonese cuisine and traditional Guangzhou food. These understandings have not remained static, however. In the following chapter I look into how Cantonese cuisine was being redefined by various agents around the turn of the twenty-first century within a complex of global cultural influences, local discourses and political and economic shifts. The establishment of institutions and persons built up from the 1950s in connection with the culinary projects no longer lead the food scene as it had in the 1980s, when the state sector still dominated the catering trade. Yet this establishment had by no means disappeared by the late 90s. As we shall see it continued to attempt to shape eating and local understandings of cuisine.

CHAPTER 4. REWRITING THE CANTONESE MENU: HONG KONG, GUANGZHOU AND CANTONESE NOUVELLE CUISINE

Although many new dimsum were introduced to the Glorious China in the 1980s, in comparison with the main kitchen on the second floor, the dimsum kitchen, situated on the ground floor, had been relatively unaffected by the new business strategies the restaurant had been pursuing during the 1990s. The current head chef of the dimsum section, Master Deng, had worked at the Glorious China throughout his entire career and had learned from the previous masters there. The same was true of most of the other cooks in the section, who tended to be slightly older than the cooks in the main kitchen. In accordance with the Glorious China's status as an old name in business which served snacks that were expected by customers to be prepared according to traditional methods, the emphasis in the dimsum section was more on continuity than innovation.

By contrast, although the kitchen served mostly well-known Guangzhou-style dishes, it was under much more pressure than the dimsum section to introduce novel food items. In addition to rebuilding and redecorating the dining spaces and expanding service facilities, management's attempts to recast the Glorious China as a site of banqueting culture have crucially involved improving the restaurant's main kitchen and upgrading the à la carte menu and the set banquets. A new head chef and several new cooks were hired around 1990, and the turnover of staff in the kitchen has continued to be fast in comparison with the dimsum section. As the key figure in the design of the menus, the head chef was expected to adapt the menu to the changing seasons and to frequently introduce novel dishes to attract new customers to the restaurant, not least during slumps (for example that which occurred annually for about a month after the end of the Chinese New Year). Thus, while in some contexts the restaurant catered to a longing among customers for old-fashioned, traditional delicacies, in other contexts innovation was regarded as the key to success.

New dishes did not, of course, appear out of nowhere. The kinds of dishes introduced by the head chef were shaped by factors such as his own training and occupational background, the cooking skills of his subordinates, the availability and prices of raw materials, the expected demand of customers and, not least, wider culinary trends. Cooks' training and the relationship between chef and cooks will be discussed further in chapter six. Here I am interested in how wider cooking trends were interpreted by cooks and how these were adapted to fit into the Glorious China menu. As Guangzhou reemerges in the post-Mao era as a hub of international trade and foreign investment and a magnet for internal migrants, culinary influences on Cantonese cuisine in the city increasingly come from "outside" cuisines, and trends in Cantonese cooking in Guangzhou are partially shaped by those in Hong Kong.

Cuisines, I argue in this chapter, are not easily definable, stable entities. Rather, regional cuisines, like national cuisines (Appadurai 1988) are historical constructions embedded in wider discourses. This is not to say that people living in a particular geographical area do not in many cases eat similar foods to one another and share some common understandings about food which may transcend class and other social divisions (Mintz 1996: 92-105). However, once these foodways are objectified as a "cuisine", defining them becomes embroiled in questions of boundary-making and political power. The classification and quantification of Cantonese cuisine that began with the nationalisation of the catering trade and Maoist attempts to democratise taste in the 1950s continues, as I argued in the previous chapter, to inform what counts as Cantonese cuisine today. However, in the reform era these definitions are being challenged by the impact of growing social stratification, by new culinary influences and by the rise of Hong Kong as a new, perhaps *the* new, centre of Cantonese culinary culture.

I take cooks in the Glorious China to be active agents who by introducing and adapting flavours and dishes from the outside played an important part in the redefinition of Cantonese cuisine in the post-Mao era. As such, they were also involved in the "localisation" of global food culture (Watson 1997). Cooks were, of course, not the only agents involved in the ongoing development of Cantonese cuisine and the localisation of outside culinary influences. Customers, food journalists, cooking schools and others articulated what could and could not be considered to be Cantonese food. These definitions were by no means homogeneous. In this chapter, in addition to drawing on discussions I had with cooks in the Glorious China, I focus heavily on works produced by Guangzhou's food writers, some of whom could be described as part of the state-centred culinary establishment that had emerged since the 1950s. My broad aims are, first, to shed light on how regional cuisines are redefined in contemporary contexts of globalisation and, second, to explore how foodways are invoked in processes of place-making and discourses of modernity. At the heart of the discussion is an account of how cooks and food writers interpreted and appropriated the Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* that had first been introduced from Hong Kong in the 1980s. A more specific aim is to explore how these culinary discourses can further our understanding of the relationship between Guangzhou and Hong Kong. Before addressing the complex culinary and historical relationship between these two cities, I begin with a brief discussion of how regional cuisines, in particular Cantonese cuisine, have been defined in the recent Chinese food literature, drawing attention to what the sociologists Chua Beng Huat and Ananda Rajah have recently called the "essentialising" of regional cuisines (Chua and Rajah 2001).

Defining Cantonese cuisine

In Arjun Appadurai's (1988) well-known essay on cookbooks and national cuisine he argues that in India, national and regional cuisines have emerged simultaneously and dialectically with one another. This has been a recent, post-Independence development, closely related to the rise of a mobile, urban middle class and expressed primarily in the production of English-language regional cookbooks written by and for middle-class Indian housewives. These cookbooks introduce the cooking of specific regions to urban families in search of greater gastronomic variety. In doing so, they also raise the idea of there being an underlying, Indian cuisine, that binds them all together. Appadurai describes pre-Independence Indian foodways as being regionally extremely diverse, but these cuisines were never codified in cookery books or other media. Indeed, he argues that prior to the twentieth century, there was little in the way of a culinary or gastronomic approach to food that could be separated from medical and moral injunctions. "Recipes, the elementary forms of the culinary life, are missing in the great tradition of Hinduism" (1988: 11).

As I mentioned in chapter three (note 2), although a recognition of "Chinese" foodways seems to have predated the emergence of China as a modern nation-state, and despite China's long history of aesthetic, gastronomic literature including numerous compilations of recipes, still the written discourse on regional cuisines seems not to have been particularly elaborate.[1] Regional differences were recognised in late imperial times, but no attempts were made to systematically codify these differences into distinctive cuisines. Regional cooking styles in late imperial and even Republican times were above all associated with occupational cooks and restaurants from major cities (e.g., Spence 1977: 292; Chang 1977: 14; Wang Xuetai 1993: 3; Ren 1999: 98), rather than with the popular foodways of a wider geographic or political area.

In present-day Mainland China, by contrast, there exists an elaborate written discourse on regional cooking, which is manifested in the regional and national cookbooks that began to be compiled in the 1950s, in the print media and in food scholarship. Whilst some Chinese food scholars have attempted comprehensive surveys of popular foodways divided by province (Lu 1992), most highlight a limited number of regional cuisines, which they call "culinary systems" (*caixi*), a neologism introduced after 1949 to supplant earlier, less precise terms (see, e.g., Ren 1999; Wang Renxiang 1993; Wang Xuetai 1993; Xiao 1992). It is argued that although there is a virtual infinity of "local flavours" (*difang fengwei*), only some of these actually combine into proper "culinary systems". Scholars emphasise that to qualify as a culinary system, there must be distinctive cooking methods and flavourings, a large variety of local ingredients and "a whole series" of regional specialities. On the one hand, these specialities must range from high to low, from popular snacks to elaborate banquets. On the other hand, they must have some underlying commonalities. In order for such a "system" to develop, it is argued, it is necessary for a region to have well-developed urban, commercial centres, with a large number of eating places and occupational cooks specialising in the regional foods. One scholar, Wang Xuetai (1993: 148), adds that in addition to consumers of this fare, there must also be a number of educated local gourmets in order to sustain a culinary system.

The actual number of culinary systems is hotly debated among Chinese food scholars. Most identify a relatively small number of "great culinary systems" (*da caixi*), usually four, five or eight, although ten, twelve and fifteen are not unheard of. One scholar (in Ren 1999: 98) complains that in recent years, a growing number of regions have made claims to having a distinctive "culinary system" or "great culinary system" - claims which according to the writer simply do not reflect the realities of Chinese cooking! Four "greats" are acknowledged across the board, however: Shandongese (*Lucai*), Sichuanese (*Chuancai*), Jiangsu (*Sucai*; sometimes called *Jiang-Zhecai*, i.e. Jiangsu and Zhejiang cooking) and Cantonese (*Yuecai*). These are often described as being epitomised by the specific styles of their major urban centres, a clear indication that understandings of regional cuisines in contemporary China continue to be influenced by earlier conceptualisations. Thus, for example, Wang Renxiang (1993: 32) sees Sichuan cuisine as being comprised of Chengdu, Chongqing and Zigong styles.[2]

As we saw in chapters one and three, Guangzhou was recognised as a major culinary centre by late Qing and Republican times, although "Cantonese cuisine" was not codified in cookbooks until the 1950s. The geographical scope of Cantonese cuisine is oftentimes unclear, however. In line with the Chinese convention to emphasise the culinary importance of urban centres, Guangzhou cooking is not infrequently taken as the nucleus, foremost representative or even quintessence of a wider "Cantonese" regional cuisine. In some texts, Cantonese cuisine (*Yuecai* or *Guangdongcai*) is described as being coextensive with Guangdong Province. These texts often further divide the cooking of Guangdong into "three main schools" (*san da liupai*), corresponding to the province's three principle Chinese dialect areas (*fangyanqu*) (e.g., Han 1992, Li 1995). In these accounts, the cooking of the Cantonese-speakers in central, southern and western Guangdong (and sometimes also including the cooking of Cantonese-speakers in southeastern Guangxi) tends to be described as the "leading" branch. The cooking of the Southern Min-speaking region centring on the city of Chaozhou in coastal northeast Guangdong and of the Hakka-speakers in central, northern and eastern Guangdong and are then seen as important "sub-cuisines". (The towns along the East River are seen by many as the core of the Hakka-speaking world, hence Hakka cooking is often called *Dongjiangcai*, East River cuisine.)[3]

What then is supposed to be typical of Cantonese cuisine defined in the more "narrow sense" of Guangzhou and the Pearl River Delta? Chinese food scholars (e.g., Han 199: 337-341; Li 1995) agree that Cantonese cooks and eaters, by contrast to other neighbouring Chinese cuisines, place a particular emphasis on the importance of adapting to seasonal changes; exhibit a near-total lack of food prohibitions and a strong willingness to experiment with novel ingredients; and insist upon the freshness of the ingredients. Above all, Cantonese cuisine is described as being light, subtle and fresh. Gao and Gong contend that Guangzhou diners seek to "savour food the natural way". In their tastes, they

> emphasise lightness and mildness (*qingdan*), attaching importance to the natural juices and flavours (*yuanzhi yuanwei*). This decidedly does not mean that [the food] is bland as water or light to the point of being tasteless. Instead, it involves seeking savouriness [*xian*][4] in lightness and delicacy in mildness (1999: 38).

However, many of the most common Cantonese dishes, including many of those seen by scholars as being "representative" Cantonese dishes, can hardly be described as "light" and "subtle". These include, for example, the winter-time hotpots of goose, dog or mutton; dimsum like chicken's feet steamed in chillies and black beans, or *nuomiji* - sticky rice steamed in a lotus leaf wrapping with assorted meats (usually chicken, sausage and lard); and taro slices steamed in an earthenware pot with fatty side pork (*yutou kouroubao*). In their essay on food, ethnicity and nation-building in contemporary Singapore, Chua and Rajah argue that such discrepancies between gustatory ideals and actual cooking practices bring into question the coherence and systematicity of the cuisine often posited by food scholars. As Chua and Rajah point out, these inconsistencies reveal the arbitrary and shifting nature of the boundaries between cuisines. On their account, despite the significant overlaps and mutual borrowings between Cantonese, Teochiu (Chaozhou) and Hokkien (southern Fujian) cooking, Singapore's scholars and catering industry attempt to depict these regional cuisines as "pure types", corresponding to the city-state's recognized Chinese dialect groups and each with distinct flavourings that are embodied in separate canons of representative dishes (2001: 168-171). Chua and Rajah contend that these attempts reflect the government's goals of constructing Singapore as a unified nation-state comprised of neatly delineated ethnic groups and their equally well-defined subdivisions, each with its own distinctive culture contributing to Singapore's whole. Clearly, what they call the "essentialisation" of regional cuisines is often to do with the construction of localities and cultural identities.[5] During the reform years, the construction of Guangzhou as the centre of a discrete, systematic Cantonese cuisine has become increasingly problematic with the greater exposure to the outside and, in particular, with the rise of Hong Kong as a competing culinary centre.

Hong Kong and Cantonese nouvelle cuisine

In his discussion of the impact of McDonald's fast food on recent social developments in Hong Kong, James L. Watson concludes with the observation that Hong Kong "has itself become a major center for the *production* of transnational culture, not just a sinkhole for its *consumption*" (Watson 1997: 108, emphases in the original). With the spread of Hong Kong pop music and satellite television programmes throughout China and Asia, he writes, "the postcolonial periphery is fast becoming the metropolitan center" (1997: 108). One of Hong Kong's major cultural exports has been its cuisine. The catering trade has long been important to the Cantonese diaspora (Watson 1977). In recent decades, however, Hong Kong has emerged as the major trend setter in Cantonese cooking. Restaurants serving "Hong Kong style Cantonese cuisine" (*Gangshi Yuecai*), also referred to as Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* (*Xinpai* or *Xinchao Yuecai*), have appeared around the globe, often catering to the tastes of the new groups of middle-class immigrants who left Hong Kong in the 1980s and 90s (Tam 1997; 2002).The cuisine has also been embraced beyond the Cantonese-speaking communities, and has taken on different meanings in specific social and political settings (Cheung 2002b; Wu 2002).

Like other elements of Hong Kong and Taiwan (Gang-Tai) popular culture, Hong Kong style Cantonese cuisine took Mainland China by storm between the mid-80s and the early 90s (Gold 1993). Not surprisingly, the influence of Hong Kong culture was especially great in the Cantonese-speaking Guangzhou and Pearl River Delta areas (Guldin 1992). Beginning in the early 1980s, Hong Kong played a crucial role in revitalising Guangzhou's catering trade, not only through direct investments but also more broadly by providing models for change. These models were emulated by chefs, diners and managers at all levels of Guangzhou's restaurant scene.

The impact of Hong Kong on Guangzhou's catering trade is difficult to refute. At the same time, in a city which prior to the 1950s was one of China's foremost culinary centres the dependence on Hong Kong has sometimes been hard to swallow. Cooks at the Glorious China were reluctant to describe themselves as being in any way inferior to their Hong Kong colleagues, but they did not deny Hong Kong's continued status as the preeminent centre of contemporary Cantonese cuisine. Some cookbook writers and food historians in Guangzhou did just that, however, claiming that Guangzhou no longer needed to look to Hong Kong for inspiration but had in fact developed its own cuisine that was both modern and authentic. In this southern Chinese variation on what Richard Wilk (1999) has recently described as a globalised dramatic theme which places local culture against the impact of a powerful, metropolitan centre, the impact of Hong Kong's popular culture was in some contexts seen as constituting as much or more of a threat to Guangzhou's own Cantonese culture as did that of powerful centres in the Europe or North America (Guldin 1992; 1995). To understand this rivalry, it is important to recognise the intertwined histories of the two cities.

Hong Kong and the Guangzhou catering trade in history

Between the 1920s and the 1940s the catering trades in Guangzhou and Hong Kong became integrated to no small extent. This was part of a broader economic interdependence between the two cities at either end of the Pearl River Delta which emerged in the late Qing and Republic (Chan 1995: 32-42). Branches of famous teahouses like the Lianxiang in Xiguan and of Guangzhou's so-called "four great restaurants" (*si da jiulou*) were set up in Hong Kong and Kowloon in the 20s and 30s (Gao and Gong 1999: 45, 50). The integration was intensified during the Second World War. Many cooks and restaurateurs fled for Hong Kong following the Japanese bombing of Guangzhou in 1937. By the time of the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong in 1942, some Hong Kong caterers moved their businesses to the now more stable provincial capital. Famous chefs of the 30s and 40s frequently moved between teahouses and restaurants in Hong Kong, Guangzhou and, to a lesser extent, Macao (Gao and Gong 1999: 50, 196-197). Although Hong Kong outshone Guangzhou in terms of economic growth and industrialisation, the provincial capital was still considered the foremost centre of Cantonese cuisine. In Republican-era Hong Kong, "Chinese restaurants...claimed in their advertisements that their chefs had made their careers first in Guangzhou" (Faure 1996: 14). Similarly, an advertisement from the early 1930s on the front page of the Hong Kong gossip newspaper, *The China Star*, announces that renowned Guangzhou chefs were to arrive in Hong Kong to cook in the local branches of the "four great restaurants" during the Chinese New Year's celebrations (Anonymous 1931). As we saw in chapter one, during the Republican years Guangzhou wielded considerable culinary clout throughout China, and its vibrant restaurant scene was frequently praised by visitors from cities like Beijing and Shanghai. By contrast, the historian and food writer Tang Zhengchang (1999) recollects that Hong Kong's restaurant scene in the late 1940s paled in comparison to that of Shanghai. Even the Cantonese food was better in Shanghai, he claims!

After 1949 Guangzhou became increasingly isolated from international contacts, although the economic and social links with Hong Kong were never entirely severed (Chan 1995: 48-49). Following the nationalisation of Guangzhou's catering trade in the second half of the 1950s there were few or no economic transactions between caterers in the two cities. However, the huge waves of emigrants from Guangdong in the 50s, 60s and 70s were crucial to Hong Kong's economic boom (Chan 1995: 49), and it is not unlikely that the many Guangzhou cooks and caterers who moved south across the border around the time of the communist victory made important contributions to the rapid development of the catering trade in Hong Kong during the same period. Be that as it may, while the communist government was busy transforming Guangzhou from a city of trade and consumption into a centre of industrial production, Hong Kong had by the late 1970s and early 80s emerged as a major hub of international commerce and consumer culture. By then Hong Kong also had a huge and diverse restaurant scene, including an up-market sector serving to an increasingly cosmopolitan clientele of middle class diners (Cheung 2001: 91-93; Cheung 2002a; Tam 1997).

Following the "renewed partnership" between Hong Kong and Guangzhou after the introduction of reforms in 1979, Hong Kong came to play an early and key role in the "restoration" of Guangzhou's catering trade, as it did in many other industries in Guangdong (Chan 1995: 49-52). During the city-wide food exposition of 1983 (described in chapter three), the opening ceremony was attended by various political dignitaries and also by a group representing Hong Kong's catering trade. In a front-page newspaper interview, members of the Hong Kong delegation offered several suggestions as to how the Guangzhou food world should go about revitalising the industry. They declared to the journalist:

> Long ago [the saying] 'for eating, it's Guangzhou' was spread at home and abroad. During recent decades, for reasons known to all, many traditional cooking skills have been restricted, and some traditions have even been lost. Meanwhile, during the same period Hong Kong's catering world has put a huge effort into developing the traditional arts of Cantonese cuisine...For this reason in recent years the saying has been 'for eating, it's Hong Kong' (Liu and Xu 1983).

Throughout the 1980s, managers and chefs from Guangzhou's old state-owned and new individual and privately-run catering establishments enthusiastically took Hong Kong as their model. Cooks told me how many of the new private restaurants followed the Hong Kong practice of subcontracting the kitchen to a head chef who brought in his own team of cooks, rather than employing all the cooks separately. At the lower end of the market, entrepreneurs introduced localised versions of Hong Kong style establishments like *dapaidang*, which were open-air eating houses serving hearty, heavy foods and alcohol. In the early 90s the first Hong Kong style "tea cafes" (*chacanting*) were opened in Guangzhou, having only emerged in Hong Kong as recently as the 1980s (Wu 2001: 77). However, whereas in Hong Kong tea cafes served an impressive variety of hot and cold drinks, desserts, snacks and meals (2001: 78), many of Guangzhou's tea cafes concentrated on individualised meals of rice with toppings and a soup of the day.

Hong Kong was crucial not only as a model for emulation among Guangzhou restaurateurs but also as a source of capital for the state enterprises. In 1982, the first cooperation agreement was made between a Guangzhou state-run teahouse and Hong Kong investors, and many others followed throughout the 1980s (Gao and Gong 1999: 61-63). A number of Sino-foreign (most of them Guangzhou-Hong Kong) joint venture restaurants and hotels were built in the early and mid-80s, in particular to accommodate foreign investors and their Chinese partners (Vogel 1989: 202-203). The new international hotels virtually without exception hired Hong Kong chefs to manage their Cantonese restaurants. Literally hundreds of new dimsum and dishes were enthusiastically appropriated by Guangzhou chefs, often via the hotel restaurants.

Serving styles, too, emulated those in Hong Kong. Previously, as in Republican times, male waiting staff in the Glorious China and other Guangzhou teahouses would walk around the dining rooms shouting out the wares they had in the huge baskets they held in their hands, supported by straps hanging from their necks. Later, another waiter would add together the empty plates and steamers and then "call out the bill" (*jiaodan*) to the staff at the counter, using a coded language to distinguish different groups of customers. Even during the Cultural Revolution, when at-the-table service was abolished, "calling the bill" was not. From the early 80s, however, the international hotels and establishments that were jointly managed from Hong Kong introduced Hong Kong styles of service. Most other teahouses, including the Glorious China, soon followed suit. Dimsum were now placed on trolleys and wheeled around to customers, often by female waiting staff. Each party received a bill which was stamped by the waitress every time a snack was chosen and quietly added up as one finished.

By the 1990s, the "Hong Kong fever" had cooled down somewhat in Guangzhou (Guldin 1992: 178). The novelty value, according to Thomas Gold an important source of the attraction of Gang-Tai culture in Mainland China (Gold 1993: 913-914), seemed to have worn off as new attractions came on the scene. American fast food chains like Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald's had by then begun to open up in the city, as had a myriad of restaurants serving regional Chinese cuisines that had arrived with the many recent migrants. Food journalists took it upon themselves to help manage the cultural boundaries of taste that these "outside" styles seemed to them to blur. They urged local diners to be cosmopolitan but without losing their Guangzhounese tastes. They introduced readers to the Sichuan, Hunan and other regional Chinese cuisines and urged them to appreciate what they termed "authentic" (*didao*) or "orthodox" (*zhengzong*) Western cuisine instead of bad imitations and fast food (Klein forthcoming). Hong Kong restaurateurs continued to invest in Guangzhou, but by the end of the decade often did not advertise their origins. Some, such as the Hong Kong-backed company which in 2000 acquired the famous turn-of-the-twentieth-century Taotaoju Teahouse, even contributed to the recent nostalgic reconstruction and repackaging of pre-Liberation "Old Guangzhou", which I discussed in chapter three.

The proliferation of new outside styles supplied Guangzhou's caterers of Cantonese food with new ideas and perhaps allowed them to reposition themselves vis-à-vis Hong Kong. With so many regional and foreign styles to choose from, the city's cooks and restaurateurs no longer needed to rely exclusively on Hong Kong for new ideas. For example, cooks at the Glorious China explained to me that Chaozhou cooking had begun to exert a major influence on Cantonese cuisine in Guangzhou, arguing that this had to with the economic ascent of that city. "These days," Master Huang, the head chef at the Glorious China, pointed out, "seafood restaurants calling themselves 'Chaozhou' are all very high class." He then exclaimed, with an exaggeration that seemed calculated for shock value, "It used to be that Cantonese cuisine was the leader of Guangzhou, now it is Chaozhou cuisine!" Recently, the Glorious China had added several of what Huang called "typical Chaozhou dishes" to its menu, such as "eel steamed with pickled mustard greens" (*weicai zheng baishan jia*), a selection of soups in mini-hotpots (C. *wohkjai*) and an assortment of cold meats and fowl boiled in brine (*lushui*). It had also hired a native of Chaozhou to do steamed dishes.

Towards the end of the 90s the newspaper food columnist, Shi Peilin, devoted an article to the newfound self-assurance of local Cantonese cooks and the diminishing pull of Hong Kong on Guangzhou consumers. He writes:

> 'Old gluttons' may recall that years ago in Guangzhou, Cantonese restaurants would take pride in having a Hong Kong master chef. For a time, the sign 'Hong Kong chef in charge' was a common sight. Yet nowadays, Hong Kong has lost much of its former power

to attract customers. The great majority of Guangzhou's first-rate Cantonese restaurants now have local masters as head chefs (Shi 1997b).

Shi argues that Guangzhou's chefs have become increasingly creative in their approach to cooking, no longer simply following Hong Kong innovations. He writes, "There is no longer any great gap between 'Hong Kong cooking' and 'Guangzhou cooking', and Hong Kong chefs no longer necessarily have the advantage of being trend setters" (Shi 1997b). For Shi, it was simply no longer easy to distinguish between Hong Kong style and Guangzhou style Cantonese cuisine. Cooks from both places were, on his account, equal members in a single food world.

Many people working in Guangzhou's (and undoubtedly Hong Kong's) catering trade would have disagreed with several of Shi's points. Cooks at the Glorious China tended to be much more ambivalent about their own national status than Shi's article would suggest. On the one hand, as Guangdong cooks they saw themselves as being a cut above cooks from "the North" (a rather vague category which could mean virtually all of China outside their own province). On the other hand, they also pointed out, if sometimes rather hesitantly, that Hong Kong still called the shots in Guangdong. Once, Master Huang was telling me about his experiences during the late 1980s as a head chef in several establishments in cities outside Guangdong.

JK: Did your experiences in the North influence your cooking?

Huang: Not at all. Cantonese cuisine is the leading regional cuisine (*caixi*), they [i.e., the Northerners] learn from us. Sometimes if I saw a nice dish I would prepare it following Cantonese methods, combining the ingredients in Cantonese style to improve the dish...At the national cooking competition I went to in Tianjin [in 1999], the Northerners all wanted to learn 'Cantonese *nouvelle*

> 1999], the Northerners all wanted to learn 'Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine'* (*Xinpai Yuecai*). They could see from my style of cooking that I was from Guangdong, and wanted to learn. But [Guangdong] cooks who stay in the North fall behind. There are new dishes coming out of Guangdong every year. Now the influences are from 'local snacks' (*difang xiaoshi*) in Guangdong, minority areas in Guangxi and Yunnan's Xishuangbanna, from Southeast Asia, especially Vietnam - all tropical areas. Between '86 and '95 most of the influences came from the West - France, England, the United States. By '96 it had changed. 'Local snacks' became more important. It was the same in Hong Kong. Actually, we follow Hong Kong. Guangdong cooks are influenced by Hong Kong.

If, as Shi argues, the signifier "Hong Kong style" meant less than it once had, still Hong Kong was to some extent still important as a mediator of non-Cantonese foods to cooks working in Guangzhou, despite the fact that Guangzhou cooks now had easy access in their own city to Chaozhou and other outside cuisines. As "Fatty", who was the number three cook at the Glorious China put it, "Hong Kong cooking is more advanced than here. There they combine Chinese and foreign styles much more than we do." Indeed, cooks at the Glorious China claimed that they took no interest in locally published trade journals like *Guide to Delicacy* (*Meishi daobao*) and *Guangdong Cooking* (*Guangdong pengren*), even though copies of the latter were regularly dispatched to the kitchen by the Glorious China office. Instead, they read Hong Kong food magazines such as *Food World* (*Yinshi tiandi*) to keep up with the latest trends and even watched Hong Kong television cooking programmes aimed at domestic cooks, in particular the show that featured Mrs. Fong (C. *Fong Taai*), by far the most popular Hong Kong television chef in Guangzhou. Nevertheless, whereas even five or six years earlier several dishes on the Glorious China menu had had names with the prefix "Hong Kong style" (*Gangshi*), by the late 90s this was no longer the case. Shi Peilin's 1997 article would have been unthinkable ten years earlier. What it suggested was that by the end of the 1990s, both cooks and food writers in Guangzhou were renegotiating their relationship to a Hong Kong which had been such an important model for the "restoration" of their city's gastronomic reputation. This can be illustrated with a look at what Huang in the above quote referred to as Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine*, a style which had become popular in many restaurants and which cookbook writers were now attempting to disseminate to Guangzhou homes.

Localising Cantonese nouvelle cuisine

Among cooks and food writers in Guangzhou Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* was sometimes described as a movement led by specific chefs, akin perhaps to certain textbook definitions of French *nouvelle cuisine* (*Larousse Gastronomique* 1988: 732). More often, though, the term was used in a vaguer sense to sum up what were regarded as the most important trends in up-market Cantonese cooking of the past few decades. Interpretations of the new cuisine in Guangzhou varied a great deal. Some emphasised lightness and freshness as key characteristics, claiming that these were even more important than in "traditional" Cantonese cooking. As in food scholars' general accounts of Cantonese cuisine this ideal was often contradicted. For example, food scholars pointed to the popularity of "mixed sauces" (*fuhejiang*), often of Western origins, like barbecue sauce (*shaokaozhi*) and mayonnaise or salad cream (*salajiang*). Although definitions of the *nouvelle cuisine* varied, all stressed the use of non-Cantonese ingredients and techniques. In this sense it was a typical of Jack Goody's concept of an *haute* *cuisine*, which displays the cosmopolitanism of its elite consumers through the breadth of its influences (Goody 1982: 105; cf. Cheung 2002a: 106).

The names "new wave" (*xinchao*) or "new school" (*xinpai*) Cantonese cuisine, what I translate here as Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine*, first appeared in Hong Kong in the 1970s to refer to the internationalised cooking and serving styles emerging in some of the city's up-market restaurants (Cheung 2002a: 105-106). At the time it was used more or less synonymously with "Hong Kong style Cantonese cuisine" (Gao and Gong 1999: 216). In Guangzhou, however, Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* has become increasingly divorced from its Hong Kong roots, although cooks at the Glorious China were very much aware of these origins. Master Huang explained to me that the style was introduced to Guangzhou in the mid-80s by the Hong Kong chefs who had been hired to run the Cantonese kitchens in the new international joint-venture hotels. By 1986 or 1987, the local cooks that worked under the Hong Kong masters began working in other restaurants and introduced the new techniques there. As I have pointed out, Huang still regarded Hong Kong as a more important culinary centre than Guangzhou. However, he claimed that Guangzhou's cooks had by the late 90s not only mastered the *nouvelle cuisine* but that they had even surpassed their colleagues in Hong Kong in the new styles. This was because the Guangzhou cooks had a much "deeper roots in Chinese traditional cooking methods," he argued.

Guangzhou's food historians and cookbook writers have gone much further than Huang in claiming the new school for Guangzhou. They have deployed "Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine*" in ways that have attempted to overcome Guangzhou's somewhat uneasy status as a mediator of Hong Kong styles to the rest of the country. Like Huang, the local food historians Gao Xuzheng and Gong Bohong credit Hong Kong chefs with the invention of the new school. However, they now see Guangzhou and Hong Kong as equally important culinary centres. By the early 1990s,

> as a result of the hard work of many cooks, Guangzhou's Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* no longer plays second fiddle to that of Hong Kong. Even Hong Kong people who visit Guangzhou's restaurants to try out the Cantonese cuisine find that it is on a par with that of Hong Kong, or that each have their strengths (Gao and Gong 1999: 216).

Ultimately, though, Gao and Gong see the new school as reflecting a deep, common Southern Guangdong (*Lingnan* or *Nanyue*) culture shared in both cities, with the characteristics of "openness, diversity and dynamism" (1999: 216). In the text the scope of the new school subtly shifts from that of a particular "clique" of cooks associated with Hong Kong to a broader notion encompassing all of the latest trends in "Southern Guangdong" cooking.

Two recent cookbooks, *New School Cantonese Cuisine* (Chen Qingqian 1997) and *New Wave Cantonese cuisine* (Liang and Liao 2000) similarly convey an image of a Guangzhou-centred Cantonese culinary world. In their respective prefaces to the works, Chen Ji (1997) and Hu Xueming (2000) both invoke the imagined community of a "Southern Guangdong culinary scene" (*Nanyue shitan*) comprising cooks, food writers and other specialists. Hu writes that the recipes for *New Wave Cantonese Cuisine* were collected from "Guangzhou, Shunde and all around Guangdong, even Hong Kong". Similarly, according to the notes which accompany the recipes in *New School Cantonese Cuisine*, many of the dishes had originated in Hong Kong, often subsequently to be adapted by Guangzhou cooks:

> The dish, "pepper-salt tofu" (*jiaoyan doufu*), has recently been

> introduced in Hong Kong, where it has been well received by gourmets. It has been improved by famous Guangzhou chefs by adding fresh prawns. The taste is now even more delicious (Chen Qingqian 1997: 24).

Shifting the emphasis even further away from Hong Kong and towards Guangzhou, both Hu Xueming and Chen Ji describe the emergence of the new cooking as a reflection of the social changes experienced in Guangzhou and Guangdong since "reforms and opening up to the outside world" began in the late 1970s. Chen points specifically to the development of Guangzhou's international trade, the rise in standards of living and the "sudden competition from the brother cuisines (*xiongdi caixi*)," i.e. other Chinese regional cuisines (Chen Ji 1997: 1). For Hu, the most crucial factor behind the recent trends has been a change in "attitudes toward food" (*yinshi guannian*), in particular a growing curiosity, following economic development and the "improvement in the quality of the citizens (*guomin suzhi de tigao*)." He writes:

> Following the improvement in the quality of life and the advancement of society and civilisation, the Guangdong people have been unflinching in their pursuit of novel delicacies (Hu 2000: 2).[6]

For Hu and Chen, then, the rise of Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* in Guangzhou has little to do with the impact of Hong Kong and is above all a sign of Guangdong's newfound modernity in the post-Mao years.

Cantonese **nouvelle cuisine** *at the Glorious China*

As a marker of distinction, Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* helped rank not only consumers but also establishments and staff. Among cooks in the Glorious China, a Cantonese restaurant and its head chef were described as "high grade" (*gaodang*) only to the extent that they had embraced the new styles. An establishment that served only what in this context were called "traditional" Guangzhou style dishes could never be considered truly high grade. The Glorious China, as we have seen, was a middle range or, on some accounts, lower-middle range restaurant. Its mealtime menu of over 200 different items included cold cuts, soups and broths, casseroles in earthenware pots, and a large number of steamed and stir-fried dishes. As with its dimsum, most of the dishes on the menu were Cantonese standards that could be found at similar establishments throughout the city. Introducing dishes from Chaozhou cuisine and Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* dishes to its menu was an important part of its strategies to become a "high grade" restaurant and attract more customers at mealtimes, in particular more high-paying customers from outside the immediate neighbourhood. At the same time, it was explained to me by managers and the head chef, prices had to be kept low in part not to alienate regular customers and also because even the high rollers were economising in the competitive climate of the slump of the late 1990s.

Master Huang selected techniques and dishes from the new school which could be adapted to the needs of the restaurant. One *nouvelle* introduction to the Glorious China's menu was "country-style dace stuffed with minced pork" (*jiaxiang niang lingyu*), a classic from nearby Shunde which they had "improved" (*gailiang*) by adding Western-style barbecue sauce to the stuffing. Huang explained that this dish reflected the *nouvelle cuisine*'s emphases on local country styles and on mixed sauces. It was a heavy, salty dish. Unlike the cookbooks I discuss below, Huang did not regard the new style as being particularly "light" (*qingdan*). However, he did maintain that like traditional Cantonese cuisine *nouvelle* cooks tried to bring out the "original flavour" (*yuanwei*) of the main ingredient in a dish. But they also used methods that combined the flavours of several ingredients in one dish. One of the most popular methods was *kao* (C. *haau*), a kind of braising that Huang claimed was an adaptation of a French method. It involved precooking two or more main ingredients, layering these in an earthenware pot, and then simmering them under a lid. For Huang, the advantage was that one could combine small quantities of expensive ingredients, such as scallops or shark's fin, with larger quantities of cheap ones, such as radishes, in such a way that they would "mutually absorb each other's flavours," as he put it. This would have been unheard of in the traditional Cantonese kitchen, he argued. However, *kao* has become a popular cooking method since the late 90s, he told me, "now that people don't have so much money".

Cooks at the Glorious China took a very pragmatic approach to the *nouvelle cuisine*, emphasising those aspects which could be useful for the restaurant. Introducing novel methods from the *nouvelle cuisine* or the Chaozhou kitchen was above all a way of not falling too far down in the hierarchy of eating places, and for cooks it was a means of keeping up with colleagues in the more up-scale establishments. For Huang, using methods which allowed one to combine cheap and expensive ingredients in a single dish was a means to allow customers to sample the latest trends at affordable prices.

In the literature on *nouvelle cuisine*, the practice of combining cheap and expensive ingredients in one dish was often referred to as "refining coarse products" (*culiao jingzhi*). This practice was widespread in Guangzhou restaurants, in particular in the city's most expensive seafood palaces, where sweet potato leaves (*fanshuye*) and other foods that were widely regarded as "famine foods" had recently become popular. These dishes did not find their way into the Glorious China, however, whose regulars were mostly of rather modest means and who had presumably not developed a nostalgia for such foods. Huang and the Glorious China managers only introduced those *nouvelle* dishes that they thought would find a market. By contrast, in the food writers' representations of the new cuisine, concepts like "refining coarse products" were particularly stressed and often took on moral overtones of frugality, modesty and civility.

Civilising tastes

Most of the recipes in both *New School Cantonese Cuisine* and *New Wave Cantonese Cuisine* have been collected from among occupational cooks. However, the recipes are not explicitly targetted at other specialists, but are meant to be used by a wider readership of hobby cooks, housewives and the "'soft and sweet school' of apron-clad husbands" as Hu puts it (Hu 2000: 3; cf. Chen Ji 1997: 2). *New Wave* is co-authored by the prolific food scholar, Liao Xixiang and a retired Shunde chef, Liang Chang, who is also the author of several cookbooks. Hu Xueming is a well-known food writer who at the time of publication was also the vice secretary of the Guangzhou Caterers' Trade Association. I have been unable to find out anything about the author of *New School.* The writer of the book's preface, Chen Ji, is the former general manager of the Guangzhou Food and Drink Service Company and a frequent contributor to trade journals like *Guangdong Cooking* and *China Cooking* (*Zhongguo pengren*). Hu and Chen, and possibly the other writers as well, thus had well-established links with the state-centred, official culinary establishment. By prefacing these works they also conferred them with the legitimacy and authority of the official culinary establishments. These men are "gastronomes" in Stephen Mennell's sense of

> a person who not only cultivates his own 'refined taste for the pleasures of the table' but also, by *writing* about it, helps to cultivate other people's too (Mennell 1985: 267, emphasis in the original).

This educational aspect is crucial. The cookbook writers attempted not to introduce one style among many but the main trends in contemporary Cantonese cooking. By their own accounts, their objective was to help shape consumption in ways they regard as being more suited to a modern Chinese society. Hu Xueming describes the cookbook, *New Wave*, as being perfectly suited to the "life of relative comfort" (*xiaokang shenghuo*) (see Lu 2000) that he claims the people of Guangdong had now attained (Hu 2000: 3). Hu and Chen - and also the food historians Gao and Gong - all describe the new cuisine as embodying certain values that are in accordance with the times. These can be summed up as comprising on the one hand, openness and inclusiveness and, on the other, moderation and simplicity. The openness to the outside world and curiosity to try new things must not go too far, but must be adapted to Chinese and Cantonese tastes. Chen Ji writes that the *nouvelle cuisine* borrows the best from Southeast Asian, Western and Chinese regional kitchens, while at the same time

> carrying on the traditional foundation of Cantonese cuisine, with its characteristics of lightness (*qing*), savouriness (*xian*), crispness (*shuang*), tenderness (*nen*) and smoothness (*hua*) (Chen Ji 1997: 1).

As with the "pepper-salt tofu" introduced from Hong Kong, the many recipes of foreign and other non-Cantonese origins are described in both cookbooks as being improved upon or adapted to Guangzhou tastes.

Descriptions of the new cuisine often employ the phrase "refinement of coarse ingredients". People were tired of things like abalone and shark's fin, Gao and Gong tell us (1999: 214), and welcomed the use of simpler ingredients such as tofu and beef. Moderation had also to do with taste, presentation and portions. In a description reminiscent of French *nouvelle cuisine*, Hu Xueming declares that it is because of its small portions, lightness of flavour, sparing use of oil and simplicity that the new style has become the "darling of the times" (Hu 2000: 2). The emphasis on moderation and lightness is evident in many of the recipes. The authors of *New Wave* explain that in compiling the book their priorities included "healthy dishes" (*baojian caishi*) which "accord to the principles of nutrition and hygiene" and recipes that reflected the "new taste" (*xin kouwei*) typified by an "aversion to sweets and disgust with fat" (Liang and Liao 2000: vol. 1, p.231). Vegetables and fruits are promoted as healthy choices for a modern Cantonese lifestyle, as in a recipe for "musk melon and pork leg soup" (*hamigua bao zhuzhan*) whose properties are described with the help of terms drawn from Chinese medicine:

> Following the steadily growing awareness of keeping healthy through foods, it has now become fashionable to use fresh fruit in soups. The meat of the musk melon is thick yet crisp, good for cooking. Its sugar content is 18%. Therefore, the soup is clear, sweet and tasty. It can quench thirst, stimulate salivation, relieve the summer heat and invigorate the spirit (Liang and Liao 2000: vol. 2, p.37).

Other vegetables, in particular many gourds and tubers, are heralded as "coarse ingredients" that formerly would have been shunned at the tables of the refined. According to one such recipe, watermelon peels, referred to as "emerald coverings" (*cuiyi*), can be stir-fried with pork slices and red chillies (Liang and Liao 2000: vol. 1, p.44). Sweet potato vine (*fanshuyuan*) is described as a vegetable once consumed by the poor to stave off hunger, but now sought after by wealthy people who have "tired of exquisite delicacies". By combining it with crab meat, Cantonese cooks have transformed the sweet potato vine into a "high class food" (2000: vol. 1, p.28).

Often the themes of internationalism and health are combined, as in this recipe for stuffed peppers, which uses terms from Western-derived nutrition studies rather than Chinese medicine:

> In the past pork was used for stuffing peppers. To stuff a vegetable with a meat was considered the proper combination. The global trend is now moving towards lightly-flavoured (*qingdan*) foods in pursuit of the 'three lows and one high' (low in sugar, low in salt, low in fat, high in protein). Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* has quickly learned this lesson. In consequence stuffings are made with vegetables instead of meats. 'Peppers stuffed with mashed taro' (*lirong niang qingjiao*) has emerged following the demands of the times (Liang and Liao 2000: vol.1, p.12).

New wave and *New school* are not unique among contemporary Chinese cookbooks in their emphasis for example on healthy foods or on borrowing from foreign culinary styles. They are part of a booming industry of cookery books, health manuals and other household guides (Farquhar 1994). Like cookbooks in for example post-independence India, their recent proliferation may be linked both to the demands of a growing mobile urban middle class and to attempts to shape the consumption of this class (Appadurai 1988). But our Cantonese cookbook writers' attempts to "civilise appetites" (Mennell 1985: 20-39) should be seen within a specific historical context. In some ways they continued the Mao era policies evident in the culinary projects begun in the 50s, which were aimed at levelling culinary distinctions. A tension between the immorality of gluttony and an image of the good life as one where the fruits of the kitchen are shared equally by all persists in post-Mao China, as Judith Farquhar (2002) has recently argued. Farquhar emphasises that "in the reform era food has remained political in China long after the death of the dictum of class struggle" (2002: 162). An unease with inequality and indulgent consumerism persists, according to Farquhar, not only in popular discourse, but also in the "moralistic rhetoric of the Communist Party, which urges collective service, public civility and deferral of selfish aims" (2002: 3).

However, although elements of Maoist discourse persist in the official rhetoric, which I argue is reflected in these cookbooks, still the asceticism and radical egalitarian ethos of the Maoist years has been substituted in that rhetoric by an emphasis on achieving a "life of relative comfort" which, as Hanlong Lu (2000) argues, despite the state's claims to a continued commitment to socialism implies an acceptance of inequality. By disseminating recipes from elite restaurants, the new school cookbooks contribute to the "interpenetration", as E.N. Anderson (1994) calls it, of high and low in Chinese culinary culture, but the aim is not to eradicate these distinctions. Rather, the cookbook should be seen within the context of the post-Mao Chinese state's "civilising project", to which Farquhar alludes. This project is aimed at raising the "quality of the people" and guiding them through the vicissitudes associated with modernisation, including inequality and exposure to the outside world (Anagnost 1997; Bakken 2000). The Guangzhou gastronomes attempt to define the tastes and lifestyles that they deem appropriate to the reform era: Openness to the outside world, but with boundaries maintained between Cantonese and foreign cuisines.

Consumption, but with moderation and deliberation.

As we saw earlier, in the cookbooks and in Gao's and Gong's history Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* is presented not only as a model to emulate but also as a reflection of the social, economic and "civilisational" development already achieved in Guangzhou and Guangdong. This puts the city in the position of being itself a model for the rest of the country. Contrasting the eating habits of Guangzhou with those of the "Northerners", the food historians write:

> [Northerners'] heartiness and hospitality admittedly have their endearing aspects, yet their overelaborate formalities..., this rigid adherence to form, in the final analysis is ill-suited to the demands made by the development of a modern society. By contrast, the moderate, frugal and pragmatic eating habits of the Guangzhounese are truly the necessary products of the development of a modern society. (Gao and Gong 1999: 39).

As Hong Kong became a less visible presence on Guangzhou's food scene, the city's gastronomes were able to appropriate the Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* as their own. For them, Guangzhou was not only *the* place to eat in China but also the vanguard of Chinese modernity.

Conclusion

My discussion in this chapter has centred around the introduction of Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* from Hong Kong to Guangzhou. Viewing Hong Kong as an important producer of transnational culture, I have interpreted the introduction of *nouvelle cuisine* in Guangzhou as part of a process of localisation of global culture. Rather than seeing globalisation as simply leading to increased cultural homogeneity, I have followed recent scholarship which draws attention to how transnational images and practices are interpreted and reshaped in diverse political and cultural context, often resulting in new forms of "local" culture (e.g., Hannerz 1996; Miller 1995; Watson 1997; Wilk 1999).

However, this process of localisation is not homogeneous but reveals social and political divisions. I have argued that during the 1990s, Cantonese cooks in Guangzhou and the city's culinary elite have in their different ways appropriated Hong Kong's *nouvelle* Cantonese cooking as their own. Cooks selectively and pragmatically drew on elements of the *nouvelle cuisine* which could fit into the overall business strategies of the company. They continued to look to Hong Kong for inspiration and guidance and introduced dishes and techniques associated with the *nouvelle cuisine*, rewriting their menus in line with these trends in order to raise their status as chefs and the status of their restaurants. For middle- and low-range restaurants like the Glorious China, techniques from the *nouvelle cuisine* allowed cooks to introduce novel, high-status foods but at a cost which was not prohibitive to their customers. By contrast, food writers associated with the city's culinary establishment sought to spread *nouvelle cuisine* from the elite restaurants to the homes of ordinary Guangzhounese as part of a wider, political project to civilise the tastes and habits of the Chinese population.

Seen against this background, Cantonese cuisine cannot be grasped as a single, definable entity, but can only be partially represented as part of specific discourses and practices. In their different ways, ordinary cooks and elite food writers contributed to the ongoing rewriting of the Cantonese menu in Guangzhou. Their interpretations of *nouvelle cuisine* also reveal a relationship between the discourse on food and the discourse on place. In particular, to the extent that Guangzhou was articulated with Cantonese cuisine and constructed as a city of food, then this can no longer be understood without considering the relationship with its partner and rival, Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's recent culinary impact on Guangzhou has been one aspect of a growing economic and infrastructural integration of the Pearl River Delta region that began in the late 1970's. The region is now being described by some as a southern Chinese "megacity" of perhaps 50 million people, with Hong Kong and its six million inhabitants and Guangzhou with its six and a half million constituting its southern and northern poles, respectively (Castells 1996: 403-410; Guldin 1995: 113-114). Already before the hand over of Hong Kong in 1997, as Gregory Eliyu Guldin (1992; 1995) points out, Cantonese intellectuals were embracing the emergence across a unified *Nanyue* ("southern Guangdong") culture paralleling the economic integration. However, Guldin also notes that this newly integrated, largely Cantonese-speaking "region" also contains substantial social, cultural, economic and political divisions. In Hong Kong, the 1984 Sino-British agreement that the territory would be returned to China and the political turmoil of 1989 brought to the fore issues of cultural identity and political loyalty (Siu 1993; Chun 1996: 57-59). Meanwhile, the "distinctive kind of Hong Kong culture" that began to emerge in the late 1960s (Chun 1996: 58-59) was not accepted uncritically in all quarters of Guangzhou, when it began to arrive there in the 1980s. Hong Kong's developed capitalist economy and "media-oriented popular culture" (Chun 1996: 58) seemed to provide China with a "sinified model of modernity" (Guldin 1992: 178). Yet this model was being "adapted for the PRC" (1992: 177) in socialist Guangzhou. The political and economic elites in the provincial capital were often not content for the city merely to mediate Hong Kong culture, however, but also saw the latter as a threat to "Guangzhou's reputation and clout in both the province and nation" (Guldin 1995: 114).

The tensions between embracing Cantonese cultural integration and fears of Hong Kong domination were evident in Guangzhou's food world. The appropriation in Guangzhou of Hong Kong style Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* signalled an important shift in the culinary relationship between the two cities, however. What had once been termed "Hong Kong style Cantonese cuisine" was now increasingly being referred to as "Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine*". While Hong Kong continued to exert a considerable influence, the signifier "Hong Kong style" had lost some of its former power to attract local customers. Guangzhou's elite gastronomes have gone further than cooks at the Glorious China in downplaying Hong Kong's importance. They have latched on to the state's project to "improve the quality of the people" by presenting Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* as a civilisational ideal for modern Chinese eaters. By presenting Guangzhou rather than Hong Kong as the centre of the new cuisine they have also joined other local intellectuals in celebrating the customs and historical achievements of Guangzhou, defining Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine* in such a way as to present the city as the historical and contemporary centre of *Nanyue* and the vanguard of Chinese modernity.

Cuisine was used to construct Guangzhou as a particular kind of place: a site of modernity. The modernity invoked here, moreover, was part of a particularly Chinese discourse on modernity. As Aihwa Ong (1996; 1997) has argued, modernity in China and Asia needs to be understood not as simply a response to Western imaginaries, but as reworkings in changing geopolitical contexts. Ong argues that two distinct Chinese modernist imaginaries have emerged since the end of the Cold War, one a "post-Mao official state project that is tied to the fixed territory of China" (1996: 64), the other "a coastal phenomenon that envisions Chinese modernity in transnational terms" (1996: 65). While the former emphasises a bounded, essentialised Chinese culture within distinct national boundaries, the latter celebrates Chineseness as hybridity, fluidity and deterritorialisation. In the gastronomic discourses I have discussed in this chapter we see also the negotiation of these two imaginaries of Chinese modernity: as fluidity and openness are embraced, attempts are made to tame these within the statist, territorially fixed imaginary of the post-Mao state.

Finally, cuisine is not a stable given, but is subject to ongoing historical changes and often contradictory interpretations. These complex discourses on Cantonese cuisine can help us understand how Chinese imaginaries of place, social differentiation, culture and modernity are being reconstructed within contexts of globalisation. Conversely, understanding Cantonese cuisine is not only about what certain people eat and drink, but must also be about how food, drink and eating are articulated with wider discourses.

CHAPTER 5. GENDER, NATIVE PLACE AND THE TEAHOUSE WORKFORCE

In the final two chapters of this thesis I focus on the teahouse as a place of work. Managers' attempts to reinvent the traditional teahouse for China's postsocialist urban consumer culture, and the reform of state enterprises in which this reinvention was embedded, have had a profound impact on the composition, working conditions and livelihoods of the teahouse staff. In the present chapter I discuss some of these changing conditions, with an emphasis on what it meant to different groups of workers to be an employee at the teahouse. Among many other changes, during the 1990s the workforce was increasingly feminised, became younger and became increasingly diverse in terms of employees' geographic origins in China. The changes to the composition of the staff effected by management were shaped by government policies on labour migration and employment and by wider discourses on gender, age, migration and native place. These policies and discourses are discussed in the chapter. At the same time, I also take staff to be active agents in the making of their lives and thereby also in the ongoing recreation of the work place. Like the teahouse regulars discussed in chapter two, staff fashioned the teahouse in different ways, under the constraints imposed by management policies and the physical spaces of the teahouse.

The work place in transition

In their sociological survey of work in New York city restaurants, Sharon Zukin and her students (Zukin 1995: 153-185) discuss among other things the relationship between a restaurant's clientele and its social and ethnic division of labour. They found that restaurants that tried to attract middle class customers, with the notable exception of some of the establishments that had a pronounced ethnic profile, often tended to hire staff from among New York's many aspiring young actors and artists. Most often these artists were American-born migrants from out of state with Euro-American backgrounds. In the New York catering trade, waiters and other serving staff were as crucial as food and decor to creating the particular "style" that a restaurant wanted to communicate to its regular and potential customers. "The way they [serving staff] talk and dress shapes a large part of the restaurant's ambiance" (1995: 155). By contrast, restaurant owners viewed "back region" staff such as cleaners, busboys and even some low-level cooks as practically interchangeable. In hiring these staff, New York restaurateurs relied on the city's vast pool of cheap and often vulnerable immigrant labour from outside of Europe and North America. As a result, in many restaurants there existed a palpable hierarchy between staff who interacted with customers and those who toiled behind the scenes. Zukin writes:

> With the exception of high-status chefs, the division of labor in restaurants along ethnic and national lines generally parallels the division into 'front' and 'back' regions with higher social status in the front and lower social status in the back (1995: 157).

In this chapter I will discuss how similar processes to those described by Zukin were evident also in the Glorious China. The leaders' attempts to adapt the teahouse-restaurant to Guangzhou's banqueting culture required them not only to transform menu and decor, but also to increase the number of kitchen, cleaning and waiting staff, and to place a greater emphasis on customer services. Unsurprisingly, as I will discuss below, the kind of "qualities" that were deemed desirable among waiting staff in 1990s

Guangzhou was very different from in New York. Moreover, the political-economic context of changing hiring practices was obviously very different in urban China. Thus, the catering trade in Guangzhou did not draw on a globalised work force to anywhere near the same extent as in New York, although chefs from around the world could now be found in the city's top-level international restaurants. However, as in New York many natives of the city increasingly avoided what they considered to be low-status jobs, not only as cleaners and dish washers, but also as waiting staff in all but top-level restaurants and foreign fast-food chains. The Guangzhou restaurant trade was now dependent on the large number of migrant workers from the countryside. These migrants had entered China's urban labour markets on an increasing scale during the reform era, most numerously in rapidly developing coastal regions such as the Pearl River Delta (e.g., Zhou 1992; Mallee 2000). Since the mid-1980s, the population controls that had kept the cities virtually sealed off from in-migration from the countryside since the late 1950s have been modified in such a way as to make it increasingly possible for migrants to work and settle in the cities. Nonetheless, as Hein Mallee (2000) points out the fundamental division in China's "household registration system" between a rural and an urban population still restricts the rights of rural migrants in the cities, making them vulnerable to exploitation "in ways analogous to the plight of illegal aliens in many other countries" (2000: 84).

The ability of state-owned restaurants such as the Glorious China to hire workers from the countryside was dependent on the reforms of state enterprises, including the transformation of the urban *danwei.* While urban youths have become increasingly responsible for finding their own jobs, state enterprises for their part have been given the possibility to recruit "temporary" peasant labour from the countryside (Solinger 1997). As Dorothy Solinger (1997) points out, as more and more urban youths avoid the heaviest, most labour-intensive and low-status jobs, recruiting rural workers has become crucial to the manufacturing industries, both state-owned and private. In Guangzhou in the 1990s a similar situation was evident in the service sector. Solinger contends that the influx of "outside workers" into urban work places has contributed to the transformation of the urban work unit from a cradle-to-grave provider of social services and goods to a market-oriented enterprise. At the same time, she points out, state enterprises that hired large numbers of peasant workers provided more social benefits and security for these workers than did private and joint-venture enterprises. Evidence from the Glorious China supports both of Solinger's claims.

The approximately 165 employees working at the Glorious China restaurant in 1999 and 2000 were divided into six different sections (*bumen*). The largest was the serving section (*loumianbu*), which employed 65 staff. The kitchen (*chufangbu*) and the dimsum kitchen (*dianxinbu*) were occasionally lumped together as the "first line of production" (*shengchan diyi xian*). As I have mentioned in previous chapters, they were actually quite separate sections occupying different spaces and cooperating very little. These two sections consisted of about 25 people each. The serving section, the kitchen and the dimsum were sometimes collectively referred to as the "three big sections" (*san da bumen*). However, working between the dimsum section and the kitchen on the one hand and the serving section on the other, were the 23 or so runners in a section called in Cantonese the *deihleih.* The cleaning section (*xixiao*) employed 13 dishwashers and cleaners.

The "rear service section" (*houqinbu*) was made up of several sub-sections, with most members working "behind the scenes". These included the manager (*jingli*), two assistant managers (*fu jingli*) and a head of personnel (*renshi*), who together formed the office (*bangongshi*). The office was located on the top floor of the restaurant and was the main link between the restaurant and the head office of the Glorious China Company. The *houqin* also included a "financial affairs section" (*caiwu*), consisting of a cashier (*chunayuan*) and an accountant (*kuaiji*, who actually worked at a desk in the head company office). The four people in the larder (*cangku*), the two security guards (*bao'an*) who worked at the entrance, the workers in the canteen and the "electricians" (*diangong*, who despite the name were actually all round repairmen) all belonged to the *houqinbu*. Finally, the three employees in the "business section" (*yingyebu*), though formally part of the "rear service", sat at the front desk located in the entrance hall. They arranged bookings for banquets, were in charge of informing the public about special offers and were involved in setting prices. Ms. Huang, the head of the *yingye*, described the section as both a "public relations section" (*gongguan bumen*), a "window to the outside", and also a "link" (*niudai*) mediating between the different sections.

Cutting across the division of the workforce into different sections was the distinction between "regular" or "permanent" workers (*zhigong*), on the one hand, and "temporary workers" (*linggong*), on the other. The company began hiring temporary workers on a large scale in the late 80s and early 90s, part and parcel of its efforts to expand and improve the mealtime services and compete with the rising private businesses. By 2000, only 75 employees, or about 45% of the workforce, were regular workers with urban registration in Guangzhou. The distinction between regulars and temporaries contributed to gender divisions in workforce. Most of the men in the company, about 65%, were permanent workers. By contrast, over 60% of the women employed by the Glorious China were temporary workers.

Both temporary and regular workers had fixed contracts, usually five years for the latter and three years for the former. However, as a state firm the Glorious China was still at least nominally committed to creating employment opportunities for the urban population. Temporary workers therefore had less security than regular employees, and were often laid off when business was bad or if the company was dissatisfied with a person's performance. According to A-Ling, who was head of personnel, the company saved between 120 and 150 yuan per month for each temporary worker they hired instead of a permanent worker. This was despite the fact that basic salaries were about the same or in some cases higher for temporary workers. In addition to their basic salaries, unlike temporaries regular workers also received bonuses calculated on the basis of the company's turnover and (at least nominally - see chapter six) individual performance. Moreover, although not as comprehensive as social welfare benefits once had been, regular workers were covered, through payments that the Glorious China made to an insurance company, for partial medical care (up to 80%, but family members were not covered at all), maternity leave, pensions and compensation in case of accidents or in the event that they were laid off. Moreover, regular workers on leave continued to receive these insurance benefits from the company, although they did not receive any salaries, which had been the case in the past. Until the recent China-wide housing reforms, as a result of which the Glorious China was being made to sell out its flats (often cheaply to the occupiers), regular employees had also been eligible for company accommodation, although the Glorious China (or its predecessor, the Liwan Food and Drink Company) had never had enough flats for all of its employees and their families.

Nevertheless, the distinctions between privileged Guangzhou residents on the one hand and disadvantaged migrants on the other were not as clear-cut as it may seem. Despite the apparent "two-tiered system", migrants were not entirely without benefits. Although they did not receive pension payments, maternity leave or compensation for unemployment, the company did provide insurance for them which covered partial medical coverage (around 50%) and compensation for any accidents that occurred on the job. Like regular employees, they were also entitled to two meals per day in the restaurant's canteen (which had a dining hall and kitchen on the top floor of the restaurant near the managers' offices). Some, but not all, temporaries were housed in rooms in the company's dormitory (converted from a former teahouse about five minutes' walk from the restaurant), with eight people to a room. Thus, although migrant labourers in the Glorious China did not receive the same amount of benefits as in some of the large, industrial work units (where regulars also presumably had much better conditions) described by Solinger (1997: 202-206), still they were much better off than migrant workers in many non-state firms, which in some cases provided next to nothing in terms of benefits (1997: 206-212).

Furthermore, at the Glorious China temporary workers were not limited to the unskilled or semi-skilled workers in the cleaning, *deihleih* and serving sections, but were also to be found (though on a smaller scale) among skilled workers and low-level managers. Some of the new cooks and the new section chiefs (*zhuren*) and vice-chiefs (*buzhang*) of the serving section were temporary workers, and these people were among the highest paid employees in the company. They themselves stressed the benefits of simply receiving a flat salary based on what the company thought they were worth and the flexibility of being able to leave whenever they wanted. And in the ongoing restructuring of the economy, being a regular worker no longer guaranteed a person either a job or social benefits for life.

As more and more workers were employed on a temporary rather than regular basis, the gap between the two categories was closing, supporting Solinger's claim that "the presence of peasants in the cities...is gradually chipping away at the identity and the roles of the previous *danwei*" (1997:

213). Nonetheless, the distinction was occasionally highlighted through various practices and social events. For example, regular workers, but not temporary workers, received gifts from the company at Chinese New Year. These *nianhuo* (New Year's goods), as staff called them, included 5-litre containers of peanut oil and a plastic bag full of foodstuffs. This was one of the few occasions during which consumer goods were still distributed to the work unit members. For a week around New Year's time, these goods were stacked in piles in the otherwise immaculately tidy entrance hall, as regular staff exchanged vouchers for gifts from the front desk – an illustration perhaps of the tensions remaining between the redistributive economy of the socialist work unit and the new, profit-oriented restaurant.

A traditional annual festival which stresses family togetherness, the Chinese New Year, in a fashion similar to Charles Stafford's (2000: 52-54) description of the mid-autumn festival in a teacher-training college in north China, had been appropriated by the socialist work unit - itself sometimes described by employees as a "big family" (*da jiating*) - to celebrate the unity of its own members. Once every year, a few days prior to the New Year, the teahouse was closed for the afternoon and employees were invited to what they referred to as a *yingchunhui*, a "welcoming the spring party". The one I went to officially was called the "Tea party to commemorate advancements made in 1999 and to celebrate the millennium". People sat around tables on the second floor, enjoying teas and snacks. A stage was set up at one end of the dining room. Events included the conferring of awards on model employees and managers, and karaoke performances, mostly by managerial-level staff. (Interestingly, the songs were almost exclusively pop versions of Mao-era revolutionary songs, sung for the most part in Mandarin.) The high point of the party was the raffle. Staff had all received a raffle ticket with their invitation. The tickets for the top prizes were drawn from the box and announced by the general manager and assistant general manager of the Glorious China company **(figure 6)**. Prizes could be quite valuable, and included micro-wave ovens, rice cookers and electric fans. As with the distribution of New Year's gifts, however, only regular staff were invited to this celebration of the *danwei* as family. While the company celebrated its unity in this way, the majority of the Glorious China work force was in fact excluded.[1]

The distinction between those who belonged and did not belong to the Glorious China family of regular workers was only one of many uneven divisions within the company. Running through and in some cases reinforced by the distinction between temporaries and regulars were divisions along the lines of native place ethnicity, gender and age. At the heart of these distinctions were the reforms of the enterprise and the attempts to reshape the style of the restaurant. In the following I explore how hierarchical divisions were created and experienced among servers and cleaning staff.

Transforming the face of the house

More than any other workers in the Glorious China, the serving staff were responsible for the teahouse's "impression management" (Goffman 1959). They were part of its "front" and must, from the company's point of view, perform on its behalf in their interactions with customers in order to get the latter to spend more and subsequently return to the restaurant. The Chinese name for the serving section, the *loumian* or "face of the house", was truly an appropriate term considering the "face work" in which servers were involved.

For this reason, managers thought carefully about what "kind" of serving staff they hired. As with decor and menu, managers adapted their hiring practices in order to attract high-paying customers, but had to do so without alienating the regular customers living in the local neighbourhood. During the reform era, the Glorious China not only greatly expanded but also gradually changed the make-up of its serving staff. Increasingly, the face of the house was comprised of young women from the Guangdong countryside. Strictly speaking, however, the *loumian* were not the only serving staff. During meals and banquets, the kitchen runners in the *deihleih* did not come in direct contact with customers. Instead, they mediated between the "back" staff of the kitchen and the "front" staff in the *loumian*, taking customers' orders from servers to the pantry staff in the kitchen (see chapter six) and bringing out dishes from the kitchen to the servers. At the more informal and cheaper teatimes (*chashi*), however, they came into direct contact with customers. They pushed dimsum trolleys and stood at the "open counters" (*mingdang*), where customers went to collect certain foods which were fried or boiled on the spot - fried turnip cakes, taro cakes and dumplings, and different kinds of boiled congees. As we have seen, the teatimes attracted mostly local customers who spent relatively little money. Quite a few of the *deihleih* staff were Guangzhounese women in their thirties and forties and were employed as regular workers. The rest were an even mix of men and women in their teens and early twenties, mostly from the Guangdong countryside.

In contrast to the more mixed staff in the *deihleih* section, by 2000 the majority of the *loumian* staff were women between the ages of 18 and 23. Until the 1980s the Glorious China's serving staff had consisted of a mixture of local men and women. When the number of serving staff was rapidly expanded in the late 1980s, this was done by hiring younger women from the Guangdong countryside. At the same time, the male serving staff were transferred to other sections of the restaurant. This was not only to save money for the company by hiring temporary rather than regular staff. It was also to attract customers, in particular more high-spending business and cadre customers. At important private banquets, waitresses would not only pour drinks and serve food, but would occasionally be expected to drink with the men and flirt with them a bit. In the male-centred banqueting culture that had blossomed since the 1980s, young female waiting staff were an invaluable asset for a restaurant.

These employment practices were part of wider shifts regarding opportunities for women in the reform era. As Wang Zheng (2000) explains, women have been hit particularly hard by layoffs following the restructuring of state enterprises in the 80s and 90s. These laid-off women have often had limited options for reemployment, as the "majority…are middle-aged with few resources to compete in the new job market" (Wang Zheng 2000: 77). On the other hand, she tells us, the number of women employees in China's cities has actually gone up quite drastically in the last twenty years. A number of opportunities have appeared for women in the highly gendered job market that has emerged after "almost two decades of economic boom involving privatization, commodification, and expansion of the service sector" (2000: 71). Wang writes:

> [One] group of women has achieved upward mobility drawing on human capital, specifically their youth and beauty. Replacing the 'iron rice bowl' of job security in urban China in the 1990s is the craze of creating the 'rice bowl of youth' (*qingchunfan*). Everywhere attractive young women have been sought to represent the shining image of 'modernity'….Stylish, elegant, or sexy, young 'Misses' (*xiaojie*) are displayed in remodeled or newly built 'modern' hotels, restaurants, department stores, travel services, night clubs, dance halls, and so on. As older state industries lay off women workers over 35, these 'modern' young Misses, many with no particular education or technical skills, are entering the rising industries (mostly in the private sector, some with foreign investment) where their youth and beauty provide a ticket to incomes several times

higher than those of their older sisters (2000: 72-73).

These young women ranged, according to Wang, from escort girls, "for many the symbol of moral degeneration", to the "[y]oung college-educated women [who] have found clerical and managerial positions in foreign and joint venture companies" (2000: 74). Young women working in the Glorious China, not a particularly glamorous establishment, had limited education or vocational training and were hired in part for their youthful good looks and "gentle" demeanour. Though they were occasionally expected to chat and drink with important customers, "escorting" was not a major part of their job, and waitresses did not to my knowledge offer customers any sexual services. Nonetheless, as women working in a service industry, where youth and beauty were their most important assets, their sexual morality was sometimes questioned and had to be asserted by themselves and others. On one occasion, a new waitress, A-Yih, entered the room where I was having lunch with the managers. She complained to them about some of the customers, who had been hitting on her, saying that she detested all the "bosses" (C. *louhsai*) who wanted her to sit down with them. The manager, Ms. Li, told her not to mind them, reassuring her that they meant nothing by it. After she had left, Ms. Li and the others all praised the girl for being both pretty and "gentle" (*wenrou*).

Many customers and other staff also specifically distinguished the waitresses from the sexual immorality associated with "escort girls", and by the same token disassociated themselves and the Glorious China from that same immorality. As in the rest of Guangzhou, waitresses were rarely referred to by customers as "Miss" (*xiaojie*, C. *siuje*), a term of address that had in recent years become associated with prostitutes and escort girls. The most common form of address, if they did not know the girl's name, was instead *lengleui* (C. "pretty girl") or *leui* (C. "girl" or "daughter"). High-status people in the company would sometimes address them as *guleuhng* or simply *leuhng*, Cantonese terms meaning "young (unmarried) woman". These terms certainly marked an unequal relationship between the speaker and the waitress addressed, but they did not suggest sexual immorality.

Moreover, managerial-level staff at the Glorious China were concerned that the new waitresses performed their jobs in a way that was considered inappropriate to local, urban standards of decency. I once asked the head chef, Huang, what had happened to two young women who had previously worked at a private restaurant in nearby Panyu and who had recently been hired as vice-chiefs in the *loumian*. He replied that the company had let them go.

> J.K.: Why?
>
> Huang: Because their style of running things (*jingying fangshi*) is different. They are used to nouveaux riches peasants (*baofahu*), people with money but little cultivation (*xiuyang*). But here in the city, in Liwan, people have little money but they are cultivated.
>
> J.K.: Could you be more concrete?
>
> Huang: It is hard to explain, but they were too flashy, too sexy, here customers don't go for that.

The head chef may well have been wrong about their reason for leaving. Yet it is significant that he phrased it in terms of morality, class and urban-rural distinctions. He stressed the moral problems involved in transforming the "face of the house", the fine line between attracting customers with youth and good looks on the one hand and being considered "too sexy" for local norms of decency on the other.

On another occasion an elderly gentleman I was talking to in the Green

Bamboo room contrasted the morality of Guangzhou teahouses to the dubiousness of Hong Kong. At the same time he emphasised the local perceptions considering the gendered hierarchy of different kinds of work. A waitress had just entered the room to ask if we wanted anything and began to pour us all tea from our respective tea pots. The man said to me: "In Hong Kong no woman does this work, only men." "Why?" I asked. He replied:

> 'Hong Kong is very complicated (*fuza*), there they try to chase after girls (C. *kauleui*). Here, no one chases [after girls], even if I wanted to I wouldn't succeed.'

The waitress, who was listening to him intently, laughed and asked, "What do women in Hong Kong do?" He answered that they work as teachers and the like, telling us: "Here, men don't want to pour tea, they are bosses or work in McDonald's or in [Western-style] bars."

According to Solinger, and contrary to the expectations of some scholars, in the early 1990s state enterprises did not on the whole solve their economic difficulties by "replac[ing] fired permanent workers in state firms with members of the floating population" (1997: 214). At the Glorious China, however, despite the moral ambiguities involved in staffing the *loumian* with pretty young women, "older" women, even those who were chiefs and vice-chiefs, were increasingly having to make way. A-Ying, the chief (*zhuren*) of the *loumian*, was in her late 30s and had worked in the restaurant since the early 80s. She was a core member of the Glorious China family, having even given a wedding banquet for her colleagues there. Yet now she was thinking of quitting, not because she had recently been married, but because of the impending acceleration of state enterprise reforms. Already, she explained to me, the older waitresses were being substituted with younger ones, because the latter as she put it "make customers happy". Once the restaurant had become a joint-stock company, she said, then all seven of the women in the *loumian* who were around or over 40, including herself, would probably have to go. Rather than wait for this, she was thinking about opening her own noodle shop, near a school if possible. By June, 2000, A-Ying had quit her job as head waitress at the Glorious China. She was replaced by A-Mei, a 22-year old who had already worked in several large, private restaurants around the Pearl River Delta. Hired on a temporary basis, A-Mei had managed to negotiate for herself a monthly salary of 1,800 yuan - about 700 more than A-Ying's average salary had been.

The dishwashers

As with Zukin's New York restaurants, in the Glorious China of the late 1990s many of the high status jobs were in the "front regions", while the jobs with lowest pay, with the notable exception of cooks, tended to be concentrated in the "back regions", beyond the view of customers. Migrants with greater resources of locally viable cultural capital did the more desirable jobs in the service section and those with less cultural capital worked in the cleaning section. Front workers' capital consisted not only of their youth and feminine sexuality, as I pointed out above, but also of their linguistic abilities - their fluency in spoken Cantonese. This was a necessity for interacting with the almost exclusively Guangzhounese customers. A knowledge of Cantonese was also a necessity for those working in the *deihleih*, and also in the kitchen and dimsum, which were presided over by mostly local cooks (chapter six). In both the *deihleih* and *loumian*, almost all the new staff came from the Guangdong countryside. The majority were from villages and towns in the relatively poor North of Guangdong Province. (Many spoke Hakka at home, but had learned Cantonese while growing up through the influence of Guangzhou and Hong Kong media.) In particular, there were a number of workers from Nanxiong Shi and Wengyuan Xian, both counties located in Shaoguan Shi, and from Guangning Xian in Zhaoqing Shi. Some came from villages in the more affluent Pearl River Delta. A few people from Shaoguan and Wengyuan had originally found work at the Glorious China themselves, and then started introducing friends from their home regions. The workers from Guangning had all been recruited via Guangning's Trade Bureau (*Shangye Ju*) in the mid-90s to work for the Great Glorious China Restaurant. This was a branch of the Glorious China that the company opened in 1996 in Nanhai in the Pearl River Delta. When the Nanhai restaurant was closed in 1998, allegedly due to mismanagement, some of its *loumian* and other staff were transferred to Guangzhou.[2]

The difference in desirability between jobs in the front and those in the cleaning section was partially, but not entirely, down to pay. Most servers (*fuwuyuan*) in the *loumian* made 450 yuan per month. Although they did not receive tips from customers, they did receive gift money at Chinese New Year. These were not from the company, but from business associates of the Glorious China and some regular customers, who reaffirmed their relations with the company and its staff in this way. Like kitchen staff, *loumian* staff also received gift money from the head chef. The envelopes of gift money usually contained between two and ten yuan. Popular waitresses, I was told, could receive up to a couple hundred yuan in New Year's gifts. *Deihleih* workers, cleaners and dishwashers were the lowest paid in the restaurant, making only 400 per month. However, while *deihleih* and *loumian* staff from outside Guangzhou were housed in the company's dormitory, workers in the cleaning section had to find and pay for their own accommodation. Moreover, *deihleih* staff could sometimes advance to the *loumian*, and the *loumian* provided opportunities for some advancement, as well as experience and skills that could be viable elsewhere. By contrast, cleaners learned few valuable skills and it was difficult, though not impossible, for them to advance to higher paid jobs in the restaurant.

Dishwashing and cleaning were regarded as the heaviest and dirtiest jobs, and workers in this section were generally looked down upon by those in other sections. Hardly anyone in the other sections ever spoke to the cleaning staff, and when I did so people would stare at me in amazement. One day I was distributing photographs that I had taken of or with people working in different sections of the Glorious China. When staff in both the kitchen and at the front desk saw that I had taken photographs with some of the cleaners **(figure 7)**, I was laughed at and asked "Why did you want to take a photograph with *them*?"

There were thirteen people working in the cleaning section. With one exception, a man from Shaoguan, all came from outside the province. Most were from Sichuan, two were from Hunan and one came from Yunnan. All, except three men in their teens and twenties, were women in their thirties. The segregation of labour along native place lines between the front and back regions was not entirely due to linguistic abilities, but was also related to Guangzhou people's stereotypes about people from different regions. Some of these stereotypes may have had long histories, but at the same time they were part of a reform-era "moral geography" which articulated the "quality" and "character" of regional groups with the degree of wealth and development associated with different parts of the country (Liu 2000: 5-6; Anagnost 1997: 77). I once asked A-Ling, who was in charge of personnel matters, whether there were any people from Chaozhou (on the Northeast Guangdong coast) among the company's temporary staff.

FIGURE 6: GENERAL MANAGER CUI DRAWS THE WINNING NUMBER

FIGURE 7: THE AUTHOR WITH A-HUI, ONE OF THE CLEANERS

A-Ling: Very few. [To my knowledge there was actually only one, a cook in the kitchen].

J.K.: Why is that?

A-Ling: We say that Chaozhou people are very clever (C. *lek*), good at making money. They work mostly in high-grade restaurants, not in low-grade ones like this.

On a separate occasion I asked her why the workers in the cleaning section were all from outside the province. She replied:

> 'This is because they have to speak Cantonese to work in the *loumian* or *deihleih*. Also, they are used to the heavy work. The people from places like Nanxiong [in Northern Guangdong] don't want to do it. This is similar in many restaurants in Guangzhou, the cleaning section people are nearly always from Sichuan and Hunan.'

Such regional stereotypes not only reflected the economic inequalities between regions but also had a particular significance in the context of competition between "migrants" and "natives" over scarce resources in urban Guangzhou. Following the historian Emily Honig's (1992) work on Subei people in twentieth-century Shanghai, arguably such regional stereotypes contributed to a process whereby native place classifications took on "ethnic" overtones. In other words, markers such as speech and dress identified a person as a native of a certain region of China, and this identification and the characteristics attributed by Guangzhounese to a person from this region played a part in his or her access to jobs, housing and other scarce resources. Without denying the importance of native place ties in organising migration and providing support for rural migrants living in the city (e.g., Ma and Xiang 1998), distinctions constructed on the basis of native place origins, as in Honig's Shanghai, also contributed to the economic domination of Guangzhou "natives" over recent migrants from the countryside - in particular over those from outside Guangdong Province. This was evident in the hiring practices and structure of opportunities at the Glorious China.

The cleaning section had its own space in a large room on the top floor of the restaurant, directly above the kitchen. The room was partitioned by a low wall, on the one side of which was the roasting and grilling section (*shaokaobu*), a sub-section of the kitchen. On the other side was the cleaning section. This was where the dishwashing was done, and where mops, buckets and other cleaning equipment was kept. A lift, which was too dangerous for people, was used to send down clean dishes to the kitchen and dirty ones up. Except when accidents occurred, the cleaning of floors in the dining areas and toilets was done after closing hours and when teatimes and mealtimes crossed, when business was usually slow. Staff in the kitchen and dimsum section were themselves responsible for keeping these spaces hygienic.

Cleaners carved out their own space for themselves on the top floor. With few exceptions they rarely ate with other staff in the canteen, but took their food from the canteen and ate together. In an otherwise predominantly Cantonese-speaking environment, here they spoke to each other in their own dialects or in Mandarin, linguistically marking off the space from the rest of the teahouse. Food was also an important means through which cleaners created their own space in the context of a hostile environment from which they were largely marginalised. Not only did they eat together in the work place, but despite the extra costs several of the Sichuanese workers cooked for themselves at home rather than eat two meals a day at the Glorious China canteen. One woman in her thirties, Zhang, usually worked during the early shift (cleaning staff worked nine hours per day, from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. or from 4 p.m. to 1 a.m.). She once explained that she sent all the money she earned in Guangzhou home to pay for her son's schooling. Because she had to pay for her own accommodation she had not been able to go home for Chinese New Year. Nevertheless, she said, "We cannot stand the food here, so we cook evening meals ourselves, that costs at least two to three yuan per person." Zhang went on:

> The food at home is very good. Here it is awful. Cantonese food has no taste, it is just sweet. And the language is easier, if you go to Sichuan, you will pick it up quickly, it is just like Mandarin (*putonghua*). Not like Cantonese (*baihua*), Cantonese is too different.

While Zhang and I were talking, Hu, a nineteen-year old man from Sichuan, came over. Hearing what we are talking about, he joins in, adding that Cantonese sounds awful. We were soon joined by Zhao, a Hakka speaker from Shaoguan in the north of Guangdong, the only worker in the cleaning section who was conversant in Cantonese. Hu turned to speak to Zhao:

> Hu: [Learning] Cantonese (*baihua*) is profitable.
> Zhao: Yes, in Hong Kong they speak Cantonese.
> Hu: Speaking Cantonese is speaking in vain (*Baihua jiu shi bai shuo hua*).

Hu's last, self-contradictory, remark was a pun on the word they were using for "Cantonese" and the expression "to speak in vain". Hu was at the time not working in the cleaning section, but often came to their space on the fourth floor. His aunt was working in the cleaning section, as had his cousin until very recently. Unusually, Hu had been given a chance to work in the serving section, albeit doing the lowest job in the section, for which he did not have to speak much Cantonese or interact much with customers since it involved filling thermoses and tea pots with hot water. However, after a month in the *loumian* he was moved back to the cleaning section. According to the woman in charge serving staff on the floor at which he had worked, Hu's limited Cantonese meant that communication between him and other serving staff was "inconvenient". Hu had few possibilities of upward mobility in the Glorious China. After three months he gave up on Guangzhou and decided to go back to Sichuan.

Zhao, by contrast, seemed to be working his way up through the restaurant. He had lived in Guangzhou for a year, and had previously been employed as a kitchen worker in a *dapaidang*, but his goal, he told me, was to work in a proper restaurant (*jiulou*) and learn to become a cook. He started working in the cleaning section of the Glorious China in December 1999, having been introduced by a friend working in another restaurant who knew one of the cooks at the Glorious China. His eyes were set firmly on the kitchen. Zhao, or A-Hui as his friends called him, was extremely hard-working. He was keen to display his hard-working nature to the cooks, and was often the one to load and unload the lift that carried dishes between the kitchen and the cleaning section above. On one occasion his foot got caught in the lift. Several of us had to help him out. After screaming out in pain and swearing for a couple of minutes, he simply went back to work. According to A-Hui, when he started working in December, the head chef had told him that there might be an opening in the kitchen after the Chinese New Year. This turned out not to be the case. He persevered, however, and by July of 2000 he was cleaning fish in the kitchen (the same job he done in the *dapaidang*). Although he was not making more money than he had in the cleaning section (about 400 per month) and still had to rent his own accommodation, he knew that a job in the kitchen might give him opportunities for upward mobility that were closed off to those who were stuck in the cleaning section.

Conclusion

As a work place, the teahouse was clearly divided along the lines of gender, age and place of origin. By the turn of the twenty-first century, the majority of the teahouse's staff were temporary workers from the countryside. The gap between regular and temporary workers in terms of salaries, benefits, and employment security, was closing. Nevertheless, distinctions between temporary and regular workers were still made by the company and recognised as relevant by staff. These distinctions were reinforced during annual ritual occasions, when events were organised by the company which explicitly excluded temporary workers and defined regular workers as the core of the Glorious China "family".

Temporary workers were not a homogeneous group. Although all were migrants from the countryside, the waitresses came from Guangdong could all speak Cantonese. Many had good relations with regular customers, and received gift money from some of these at Chinese New Year. They also interacted more closely with permanent staff, who were mostly Cantonese speakers from Guangzhou. By contrast, staff in the cleaning section were mostly from outside the province. They had few relations with other staff and none with customers, and found it nearly impossible to advance within the company. Instead, they carved out spaces for themselves within the restaurant where they could eat together and speak in their own dialects, and criticise the wider Cantonese society around them.

It was not only language that divided cleaners from the rest of the Glorious China. Regional stereotypes also worked to keep migrants from outside of Guangdong "in place". By contrast to the quite rigid constraints that native place origins created for some migrant workers, gender was more of a double-edged sword. A young woman from the Guangdong countryside who joined the company could earn more money and had greater opportunities for advancement in the company than did a young man from Sichuan or Hunan. On the other hand, with the demand for "young misses" in Guangzhou's male-centred banqueting culture, a woman approaching forty who had not managed to secure for herself a position in management - not impossible, as proved by the fact that the current manager of the Glorious China restaurant was a Ms. Li - would probably have to start looking for work elsewhere.

CHAPTER 6. THE "NUCLEUS OF THE RESTAURANT": COOKS AT THE GLORIOUS CHINA

The final chapter of this thesis is a portrait of work in the Glorious China kitchen, with a focus on some of its main protagonists, the cooks. Cooks described the kitchen as being the "nucleus" (*hexin*) of the restaurant. More than any other space in the Glorious China, the kitchen was surrounded with an aura of secrecy. Cooks told me that they never entered the kitchen of another restaurant without first asking permission of the Elder Brother (i.e., head chef) of that kitchen. While Master Huang, the Elder Brother at the Glorious China, befriended me pretty much from my first day of fieldwork, it was not until over a month later that he allowed me to conduct research inside the kitchen. The high status of the kitchen in the restaurant was evident in the position of Master Huang. Unlike Master Deng, the Elder Brother of the dimsum, Huang was spoken to as "Elder Brother" by staff in all the sections of the restaurant. Unlike Deng, he was frequently invited to participate in the managers' banquets (despite actually being personally disliked by several members of management). At the same time, Master Huang and his team of cooks were of course also affected by the reforms of China's state enterprises. My main question in this chapter is: How were cooks responding to the ongoing reforms of the state restaurant? I argue that to understand how cooks, and other occupational groups in China, are responding to the state enterprise reforms, it is necessary to look closely at both the work practices, not least the spatial organisation of work, and also at specific occupational identities and the wider discourses that inform them. As it turns out, the food establishment that was built up around the nationalised restaurants in the 1950s and rejuvenated in the 1980s remains important for understanding cooks' occupational identities and their responses to reforms.

Resistance and acquiescence

On the second day of the first Chinese New Year of the new millennium, one of the busiest days of the year at the Glorious China, a rather informal late-night dinner was held at the restaurant for a small group of managers and staff, many of whom had been working since early that morning. After a couple of collective toasts, people started chatting and drinking in smaller groups. "Fatty", one of the cooks I had been talking to earlier in the day, suddenly turned to me and spoke, in a hushed voice, about the latest restructuring of the work unit, which everyone was expecting to take place sometime soon. He argued that if the company downsized, cooks like him would have to do more work for the same pay. "We will have no security left," he continued, "if we cannot keep up we will be made redundant. We will talk more when no managers are around."

Like Fatty, most staff did not know when this latest round of reforms was going to take place or exactly how it was going to affect their lives. Would the company follow the lead of many other state-run restaurants and become fully privatised? If so, who would benefit and who would have to go? Top-level management kept their plans secret to most, and gossip was the main medium of information. One of the rumours was that the Glorious China was going to become a joint-stock company immediately after the New Year. This turned out to be erroneous, and by the time I left Guangzhou seven months later no large-scale layoffs had occurred, and no moves toward privatisation had to my knowledge been made. But cooks like Fatty, who had opted for stable jobs in a state-run restaurant rather than risk the insecurity of the potentially more lucrative private sector, were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the Glorious China and uncertain about their futures.

Dissatisfaction and feelings of insecurity permeated what cooks told me about their work. However, despite the widespread dissatisfaction I heard no reports of worker unrest at the Glorious China, nor for that matter in other state-run restaurants. In the kitchen, the focus of the present chapter, I witnessed several instances of non-compliance with management's regulations and directives, such as smoking and eating on the job. Yet these transgressions seemed to me relatively limited in scope and did not appear to seriously disrupt kitchen work. Instead of resisting reforms cooks at the Glorious China frequently drew on the language of the market economy to criticise the state sector of the restaurant industry in general and the leaders of the Glorious China company in particular. Blaming the economic problems of the Glorious China on the inability of the leaders rather than on the market reforms, cooks characterised private restaurants as being more "realistic" (*shiji*), i.e. in tune with the "realities" of the market. Private restaurants, cooks claimed, rewarded "skills" and respected "economics". The thinking of private managers was "flexible" (*linghuo*), and unlike leaders in state establishments they did not care about "personal connections" (*guanxi*) and "politics".

The mood among kitchen staff in the Glorious China thus differed greatly from that of the women silk factory workers studied by Lisa Rofel (1999) in Hangzhou in the 1980s and early 90s. She demonstrates how some workers in the factory drew on the language and practices of the Cultural Revolution to resist the market-oriented reforms aimed at making workers in the state-owned factory more productive. Similarly, in her study of urban state workers in Guangzhou, Ching Kwan Lee (1998) found that while labour militancy around Guangzhou and other coastal cities "concentrates in foreign-owned enterprises and involves mostly migrant workers" (1998: 5), yet what she calls "collective inaction" and other less quantifiable forms of resistance were rife among local workers in Guangzhou's state enterprises. Moreover, like Rofel, Lee argues that these "everyday forms of resistance" were informed by workers' collective experiences under Maoism as a privileged class, when they were the avowed masters of the "publicly owned" enterprises.

In contrast to the accounts by Lee and Rofel, which highlight workers' resistance to the restructuring of the economy, Marc J. Blecher's findings in his study of workers in Tianjin in some respects resonate more closely with my own findings in the Glorious China. Blecher asks why it is that, despite what he calls "sporadic" instances of protests in the 1980s and 90s, nonetheless the "vast majority of China's workers, including the unemployed, remained politically passive" (2002: 286). While Lee and Rofel assert that Maoist egalitarianism and collective memories of having formerly been considered the vanguard of the revolution provided state workers with alternative, counter-hegemonic sources of values to that of the reform state, Blecher contends instead that "workers have become subject to hegemony of the market and of the state" (2002: 287). He writes:

> Both the state and the market have done measurable net harm, in relative and sometimes even in absolute terms, to much of the Chinese working class. Yet over the past two decades, many - probably most - of China's workers have come to accept the core values of the market and of the state as legitimate (2002: 287-288).

Blecher points out that "market hegemony" and "state hegemony" are intertwined, as the state has "ushered in, legitimated and fostered the market and in turn sought to legitimate and secure itself through the market" (2002: 288). For heuristic purposes, however, he distinguishes between "market hegemony" and "state hegemony". He maintains that there are several reasons why Chinese workers have come to accept the principles of the market, including the comparisons workers made between China and successful capitalist economies as represented in "glittering images of prosperity abroad" (2002: 297); the memories of the havoc caused by activism during the Cultural Revolution; and the "pool of consumer goods" that the markets have made available, producing "a decidedly soporific effect" by persuading workers of the general success of the reforms, even if many of these goods were as yet beyond their own personal means (2002: 296).[1] Another factor he points to, which chimes well with what I heard from cooks at the Glorious China, was the idea that markets

> atomize those they subject, offering the prospect of individual solutions, which in turn undermines the potential for forming collective solidarities that could challenge the market (2002: 295).

Turning to the many factors behind the state's hegemony, Blecher argues that, above all, through the media the state has worked hard to get people to think in terms of "relatively harmless" categories such as ownership forms, the success or failure of particular firms or the quality of leadership of individual state companies, rather than in terms of the market system or state policies themselves (2002: 298). In the same vein, moreover, through positive and negative examples in the media, the state attempts to convince workers that if they have not succeeded during the reforms it is above all down to their own personal failure to adapt to the market, rooted in their own thinking (2002: 298-299).[2]

Although their emphases are different, Blecher's position on the one hand and Lee's and Rofel's on the other are by no means incompatible. For Blecher, who does not seem interested in the more mundane forms of resistance, the social fact that needed explaining was the widespread acceptance he found among Tianjin workers of the regime and of market principles, despite the fact that so many had by their own accounts been faring better under the planned economy. Yet he does not deny the significance of existing workers' protests or the possibilities of more well-organised actions in the future. Similarly, although Lee and Rofel highlight workers' resistance they acknowledge a spectrum of responses to the ongoing restructuring of the economy and the state companies' new productivity regimes. Rofel, who conducted her field research between the mid-1980s and early 90s, emphasises the importance of age cohorts in the factory, arguing that women workers who had come of age during the radicalism of the 1960s continued to define their own positions in Maoist terms and were the most prone to resistance. By contrast, the oldest workers, those who had joined the factory around the time of the communist victory, continued to perceive their own entry into the industrial workforce as a part of the broader emancipation of Chinese women, and confronted the marginalisation of workers, and women workers especially, in the 1980s by

> wrap[ping] themselves in nostalgia for their lost heroism. Their

> response was to perform as the heroic worker-citizen by engaging even more intensely in their job tasks (Rofel 1999: 184).

The youngest workers, those who had been hired during the reform years, had no personal memories and experiences of Maoist antagonistic radicalism or of the ideals of emancipation of women through labour. Like the oldest cohort, they did not challenge the factory authority, if only because for them confronting this authority was meaningless. These young women did not identify themselves through their work, but found

> their greatest struggle elsewhere: in how to be a post-Mao woman, one defined not through concrete activities in labor but through a feminine interiority (1999: 185).

In her Guangzhou study, Ching Kwan Lee suggests that the extent to which a worker consented to the market reforms stood in proportion to how well he or she had fared during the reforms. In contrast to Blecher, who stresses the widespread acceptance of the state and market even among workers who had not done well, Lee found that workers in failing state enterprises often felt that socialism had been betrayed by the reform policies. Nevertheless, for a small minority of workers, China's market socialism "offers both opportunity and security" (Lee 1998: 25):

> Contrary to the image of the market as irrational and immoral held by more disadvantaged workers, the market represents progress and rationality for this group since it rewards individual effort and capability (1998: 25).

Lee also points out an important reason why resistance among state workers in Guangzhou tended to be less vociferous, and acceptance of the reforms more widespread, than in some inland provinces. This had to do with the economic significance of the private sector in Guangzhou compared with other cities in China. The large number of private and individual enterprises in Guangzhou have served as a cushion, she argues, absorbing many unemployed workers, and "provid[ing] alternative, parallel, or alternating employment for state workers" (1998: 8).

What work by Lee and Rofel suggests is that the Chinese "working class" is an extremely heterogeneous group, whose experiences of both Maoism and Dengism have been diverse, as have been their reactions to the introduction of market socialism and the degree of legitimacy they are willing to bestow on the post-Mao party-state. As Blecher stresses, the party-state cannot afford to assume the legitimacy of itself and the market it has ushered in, but must constantly work to establish and maintain its hegemonic position. In explaining the varying degrees of acceptance and resistance among state workers of the reform-era Chinese state and its brand of market socialism, Rofel and Lee have pointed to factors such as regional economic differences, differences in how individual state enterprises and workers have fared under reforms, and how historical experiences have shaped the actions and attitudes of different generational cohorts of workers. In this study of cooks in a state-run restaurant I suggest that it is also important to consider factors to do with the kind work in which workers were engaged. For example, what had been the fate of that particular industry both prior to and during market reforms? How did the organisation of work and relations in the work place affect workers' inclination to resist management decisions? How had workers been defined in wider discourses and how did they perceive themselves as an occupational group?

Regulating kitchen work

In contextualizing cooks' responses to reforms and the market ideology I discuss, first, some aspects of the organisation of work in the kitchen and, second, the changing occupational identities of cooks seen against the background of the broader changes in the restaurant industry and the fate of the state's "culinary establishment". The Glorious China employed a total of twenty-four people in its kitchen. Ten of these people, nine men and one woman, defined themselves as "cooks" (*chushi*). It is these people who are the particular focus of this chapter. I spoke with all of them at some point during my stay at the Glorious China, in particular during the three months in which I most closely observed kitchen work (between January and March 2000). Key informants among cooks were the head chef, Huang (referred to as the "Elder Brother", C. *daaihlouh*, of the kitchen), Master Qiang (the "Second Elder Brother", C. *yihlouh*), "Fatty" (C. *Feihlouh*, ranked third in the kitchen) and the steamer cook, Chen.

Kitchen work was divided into an early shift and a late shift, seven days a week. For cooks and other kitchen staff, this could mean a work day of either 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. or 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., although people were often assigned to more than one shift in a day, and would also sometimes have to do extra work in the mornings. Ordinarily, between twelve and fifteen people worked during a single shift. The kitchen, like that of other large and medium-sized Cantonese restaurants, was characterized by a highly specialised division of labour. Different jobs were referred to as "posts" (*gangwei*), a military metaphor. There were six posts in the kitchen: the woks (*houhuo*)[3], the chopping boards (*zhenban*), the steamer (literally the post for “miscellaneous preparations”, *shangza*), the pantry (*dahe*), the fish cleaning (*shuitai*) post, and the vegetable rinsing (*xicai*) post. There was a clear hierarchy between the posts, reflected in salary differences, with the wok cooks at the top and the fish cleaners and vegetable rinsers at the bottom. Those working at the woks, the chopping boards and the steamer were “cooks” while the others were classed as “kitchen workers” (*chugong*). The wok cooks were also internally ranked, with a “head”, “second”, “third” and “fourth wok” (cook), each of whom worked at his particular wok and no other.

Workers in the different posts stuck to their jobs. Tasks were rarely switched between cooks or other workers in the different posts. The two to four wok cooks who worked during a given shift did not chop and slice ingredients and the two chopping board cooks did not fry dishes. Because of this, the creation of each dish demanded the close cooperation of several posts. The pantry workers, of whom there were two or three at a given shift, mediated between the service section and the kitchen and between the different posts. They took customers’ orders from the kitchen runners, distributed them to the correct post (usually the chopping boards) and took the bowls of chopped ingredients from the chopping board section to the wok cooks. Once a dish had been cooked a pantry worker arranged it neatly on a plate, sometimes adding decorations such as roses made from carrot slices, and then took out the finished dish to the runners.

Much of the everyday resistance among state workers discussed by Lee (1998: 9-11) and Rofel (1999: 257-276) was a response specifically to the new forms of discipline and surveillance that many of China’s state enterprises began to introduce in the 1980s in order to improve productivity. Workers movements in the factory space were more closely monitored and workers were to be made individually responsible for the quantity and quality of what they produced. Similar measures were carried out at the Glorious China in the 80s and 90s, in an attempt to improve both the quality of output and of hygiene standards. For example, workers were now supposed to be fined if they arrived late or if they were caught eating food or smoking while working, or breaking other hygiene regulations such as not wearing their uniform hats or shirts (in the summer months, especially, the kitchen could become unbearably hot). Moreover, the pantry staff were to be fined five yuan for each time they failed to attach a slip of paper to a dish with the number of the cook who had fried the dish. The introduction of cooks' numbers was itself part of the new restaurant regime. If customers were dissatisfied with a dish they could return it to the kitchen and it would be clear who had been responsible for the mistake. The number of complaints a cook received was in turn to help managers make informed decisions when handing out bonuses at the end of each month. The bonus system was the lynch-pin of the new restaurant regime. While all "kitchen workers" received flat salaries (between 400 and 450 yuan/month), "cooks" received a flat salary of around 400 yuan/month and, in addition, made between 300 and 1,000 yuan/month in bonuses, the amount depending on the turnover of the restaurant that month and, in theory, on the work performance of the individual cook.

In practice, at least by the time I conducted my research in the kitchen in 2000, many of the new measures were often ignored, not just by workers but also by management. Fines were rarely meted out except in the case of repeated transgressions. Attitudes toward hygiene regulations among management were particularly lax. Indeed, managers themselves experienced hygiene regulations as something imposed from above, and took measures to resist the surveillance of city government health officials.

Through contacts in government offices, according to the assistant manger, the managers usually knew when inspectors from the city Hygiene Bureau (*Weisheng Ju*) could be expected, and hygiene regulations (the most common transgression being smoking in the kitchen) were only really enforced around those times. According to one cook, kitchen staff were not only warned in advance when inspectors were to arrive, but were also put to work to prepare a banquet in one of the top-floor dining rooms to which Hygiene Bureau officials were treated on these occasions by company leaders. The bonus system had been watered down completely. To begin with, two of the cooks were temporary workers (*lingong*), who received flat salaries only and were not a part of the bonus system. Furthermore, bonuses were awarded to regularly employed (*zhigong*) cooks but, according to both cooks themselves and managers, not actually in relation to individual performance but entirely on the basis of company turnover and an employee's seniority in the company.

In comparison with the strict factory regime described by Rofel, there was little to resist in the Glorious China kitchen. To some extent this had to do with the nature of the product being produced, the quality of which was difficult to standardise. Despite some similarities with factory production lines, the Glorious China kitchen was very different from a fast-food chain. The quality of raw ingredients was much more variable. Moreover, new dishes were frequently introduced and while broad guidelines were given by the head chef as to how the new dish should taste and look, cooks had, as the head chef put it to me, to "follow their own feelings". It was often difficult, moreover, to ascribe blame to a particular person for the failure of a dish, since the dish was to such an extent the product of intense collective work. The outcome of a dish was shaped by many factors, including the experience, skill and aesthetic sensibilities of the person involved at each stage in production, and also by the kitchen's ability to work as a team, to synchronise their work (cf. Fine 1996: *passim*).

Furthermore, surveillance was made difficult by the spatial arrangement of the kitchen. In Rofel's Hangzhou silk factory,

> The machines are evenly spaced so that the shift leader, shop supervisor, or master teacher can readily perceive production problems when walking up and down the central aisle of the shop floor (Rofel 1999: 262).

By contrast, the Glorious China kitchen, situated on the second floor of the restaurant, was a small, rectangular room with an area of something like 5x12 metres. (Some tasks, especially those done in preparation for mealtimes, were conducted in an adjacent storage room, which in addition to freezers, refrigerators and shelves also had a machine for slicing frozen meats and some floor space which could be used for preparing vegetables.) The small size of the kitchen was one of the reasons why the division of labour between posts had to be so discrete. There was one central aisle running through room, dividing the kitchen between the wok post and steamer post on one side and the chopping board post on the other. However, this central aisle could not be used for surveillance, but was used by the pantry workers to coordinate the work of the different posts. At the height of mealtimes, pantry workers constantly ran back and forth through the kitchen with hot plates, soups and earthenware pots, making it difficult for anybody else to move around in the kitchen. Nor was there any practical vantage point from which one could view the entire kitchen. The head chef, who was the main supervisor of the kitchen, often stood by the steamer, near the entrance to the kitchen, where he could at least inspect dishes on their way out. This was where I also most often stood during mealtimes, although even here I often found that I was in the way, in particular of people using the stairs to or from the third floor. Indeed, the head chef himself rarely stood around in the kitchen for more than fifteen minutes at a time, except when he himself cooked at one of the woks.

Finally, surveillance of kitchen work was complicated by the ambivalent role of the head chef, the "elder brother" of the kitchen. Although the assistant manager and manager occasionally dropped in, it was Master Huang who was in charge of supervising the kitchen. Huang usually ate with the managers and also socialised with them outside of the work place. In addition to supervising everyday kitchen work, his main job was to design the menu and devise new dishes for the restaurant in consultation with the managers. This set him apart from the other cooks in their eyes, as Fatty, the second wok cook, explained to me once just after the New Year. He and I were inspecting the list of new dishes which had just been put up near the chopping board post. I asked him whether he had created any of them. He replied: "No, they were all introduced by Elder Brother. He belongs to the administrative level (*xingzhengji*), we are just staff (*yuangong*)." I once asked Huang himself what it was that distinguished a Elder Brother of the kitchen from a regular cook:

> 'First, he has to be good at supervision (*tiaoli*). Second, he has to have a characteristic style and specialities. Third, he has to know what to eat when, depending on the four seasons. Fourth, he has to be aware of food trends, of what is popular this year.' Later, he added, 'We call a lot of cooks "workhorses" (*mazai*), they do their job, do what they are told, but nothing more. Even a very high level cook might be a workhorse, not

> necessarily good at management (*jingying*). On the other hand, many Elder Brothers are not top cooks. They know how to cook, but their main quality is their skill at management.'

At the same time, however, Huang was also a working cook, and like most head chefs when he cooked he fried at the wok, by far the most prestigious post in the kitchen. However, he was not the "head wok", and he claimed that "I only work for special guests, or when it is particularly busy." The head chef would often cook for important banquets or when someone had ordered one of his special creations, such as a cod baked in tinfoil. When he cooked, he would often make a big show of it of it, yelling at people to get this, that or the other for him, and clearing a large part of the long counter for his dish. When preparing an expensive soup, like the "Superior Heavenly Fragrance" (*yipin tianxiang*) which included delicacies like shark's fin and abalone, he often would involve a young cook or novice in his project, combining cooking and training. His extravagant performances stood in sharp contrast to that of other cooks, who usually said very little while cooking and kept strictly to their own cooking area.

The head chef's more conspicuously "creative" role as a designer and prominent position as a "supervisor" not only marked him off from ordinary cooks, but also made him the object of their criticisms and jealousies. When taking with Fatty about the new dishes that Elder Brother had introduced after the Chinese New Year, Fatty remarked:

> 'They are all very simple and low grade.' 'What makes them low-grade,' I asked. 'They are all just chopped here,' he answered, pointing at the chopping board, 'and then fried, there is no emphasis on appearance and form (*zaoxing*).'

On another occasion, I asked Fatty whether Elder Brother would be doing all the frying for a banquet that evening, to which he curtly replied, "Actually we only call him 'Elder Brother' to give him face." I later asked Chen the same question, and was told, "Actually, Elder Brother's skills are not as good as Fatty's. [Elder Brother is] too sloppy, too casual."

Although often the focus of criticisms from the cooks, who saw him more as administrator than a cook, Huang himself identified closely with the kitchen. He often disassociated himself from the managers' of company, whom he felt did not give him enough autonomy over the kitchen. In the American kitchens studied by Gary Alan Fine, head chefs' responsibilities included not only organising kitchen work and devising new dishes, but also managing the kitchen budget, and hiring and firing personnel (1996: 88-92). In the Glorious China, by contrast, a good deal of the fiscal, managerial and personnel-related responsibilities were shared with one or several other people, such as the restaurant managers, the business section and the rear-service department (*houqinbu*). Huang explained that when he had worked in private restaurants in the late 80s he had brought his own group of key staff to the restaurant and was entirely responsible for the kitchen and its budget. In state restaurants like the Glorious China:

> 'The managers want to be in control of everything, they do not give any responsibility to anyone else. They have to know about every single lamp bulb that breaks. In a privately run restaurant, the kitchen is totally independent. The kitchen is the centre of the restaurant. Here [in this restaurant], managers want to decide everything.' [4]

Because of his ambivalent position as both worker and manager and his strong identification with the kitchen, I suggest, Huang was reluctant to mete out punishments and appear too strict. By the same token, he was critical of the bureaucratic nature of state restaurants, and was afraid that although he had previously worked in private restaurants, his decade at the Glorious China would make it difficult to be reemployed in the private sector (a possibility he was now looking into), since his "thinking was not flexible enough" (*sixiang bu gou linghuo*). To the extent that there was resistance to the new restaurant regime, it seems to have been at the level of intermediate management. That is, it was the Elder Brother of the kitchen who himself was reluctant to appear too zealous in his supervision. Compared to the strict production regimes introduced in many manufacturing industries, surveillance over kitchen work was relaxed and piecemeal.

Cooks' occupational identities

To understand cooks' reluctance to resist reforms and their use of market principles to criticise the state company it is also important to explore how cooks perceived themselves as an occupational group. To what extent did cooks agree with the vision of their occupation that was promoted within the state sector of the industry? Exploring this issue moves us beyond the work place itself, to the restaurant industry as a whole and to the changing nature of the state-centred "culinary establishment". As I have discussed earlier in the thesis, by the late 1990s the state sector of Guangzhou's catering trade had become marginalised by the rise of private and individual enterprises. Even until the mid-90s, many restaurants like the Glorious China had been able to compete with the private establishments. Both Fatty and Master Huang had worked in private restaurants before joining the state sector when they were hired by the Glorious China, Huang (who had also begun his career in the state sector) in 1990 and Fatty in 1995. They explained to me that although the salaries were not as high at the Glorious China as in private industry, they were offered more security and stability, with five-year contracts, health care benefits and unemployment guarantees and, most importantly, housing for themselves and their families. For both men, working in the private industry had meant moving around the country, whereas now they were able to settle down with their wife and child in one single place. By 1999, not only had the size of the state sector dwindled, but following the recent China-wide housing reforms, the company no longer had any flats to offer employees. (The Glorious China had never had never had enough housing to go around, but had nonetheless been able to use some flats to attract highly skilled staff. Both Fatty and Huang purchased their flats from the company in 1999 at well below market value). Unlike many manufacturing industries, where the state enterprises were still crucial actors, in Guangzhou only a small minority of cooks were still employed by state restaurants. The Glorious China had not recruited any top-level cooks since the mid-90s, but hired only young, unexperienced cooks, mostly trainees who came directly from cooking school.

Ironically, while the state restaurants have declined, many of the institutions that had been built up since the 1950s (and especially during the flourishing of the state catering trade in the 1980s), including cooking schools, grading systems, competitions, trade associations and trade journals, were still around and in some cases had even been expanded. Since the 80s, this food world has, among other things, been committed to raising the social status of cooks, which has involved promoting specific occupational ideals. As artisans in a service industry, cooks had not enjoyed the same kind of prestige as had workers in the "progressive" manufacturing industries - which in itself may be an important factor in considering why cooks in the Glorious China did not embrace a Maoist alternative to the current reforms. Attempts to redefine cooks as "workers" are suggested in texts from the Maoist years; for example in cookery books from the 60s and 70s the word "cook" (*chushi*), literally "kitchen master", was frequently replaced by the more clinical-sounding "cooking personnel" (*chuishiyuan*), a term which blurs the distinction between "kitchen workers" and "cooks".

From the 1980s, however, efforts were made not to blur boundaries between cooks and other kitchen staff, but to heighten them. Cooks were now presented as skilled craftsmen, who had to go through proper training in order to become acknowledged as such. The apprenticeship system had been regarded as exploitative, and since the late 1950s efforts had been made to substitute it with training in vocational schools, yet it was only in the 1970s and 80s that a substantial number of Guangzhou cooks had received any vocational training (Gao and Gong 1999: 217-218). In the 1980s an elaborate ranking system was added to the vocational programmes, both for Chinese-style and Western-style cooks. Often, state restaurants would send a cook to a vocational school for an intensive course, after which he or she would be tested and a receive a rank. By the 1990s, cooking programmes had been set up in at least three vocational middle schools (*zhongzhuan*) in Guangzhou, and several state and privately run education institutions were now offering cooking courses of various lengths and at several levels. In addition to the training programmes, state restaurants also regularly sent their cooks to competitions, which were held at district and municipal levels. Since the late 80s, these competitions have been held in conjunction with the city's international food fairs.

In the 1990s *China Cooking* (which was founded in 1980 and was the country's leading journal for the restaurant industry) was replete with calls to raise the status of cooks from "mere artisans" to that of "professionals" or "artists", by building on the existing system of examinations and schools. One writer, Dan Shouqing (1997), argues that cooks' certificates and gradings were absolutely crucial in order to raise both the quality of restaurants and the status of cooks in society. However, the author claims that a number of so-called cooking schools now issued certificates for sale, and the reputation of cooks had been seriously damaged as a result. Dan contends that the only way to remedy this was by standardising tests and regulations, through stricter controls of schools and by regularly retesting already certified cooks. For Dan, it is important that these regulations and controls from within the trade itself, through the cooking associations (*pengren xiehui*) on municipal, provincial and national levels. Taking a somewhat different approach to boosting the position of cooks in society, Zhang Zhenmei (1996; 1997) argues that cooking is more than a skill, it is also an art. However, most cooks lacked the inspiration, independence of thought and creativity to become true "culinary artists" (*pengren yishujia*). Zhang's remedy for this was through education, specifically by adding "cookship studies" (*chushixue*) to the obligatory curriculum at cooking schools. By learning from the models of great cooks and food scholars in China's history, he argues, this course would raise the quality of China's cooks by teaching students the proper thinking, morality and actions of a professional cook. "Without cookship studies," Zhang concludes, "our cooks will be merely craftsmen who cook dishes (*shaocai de jiangren*), at the very most culinary workers (*pengren gongzuozhe*)" (1997: 35). These writings in the Chinese trade press bear striking similarities to the calls by elite French chefs around the turn of the twentieth century, who according to Amy Trubek (1995) emphasised the artistic aspects of restaurant cooking and attempted to establish cooks as "professionals" rather than "artisans" by weakening the power of the apprenticeship system and instead establishing general standards for cooks through cooking schools and other institutions. Like the French chefs studied by Trubek, moreover, both Dan and Zhang emphasise the crucial role played by occupational cooks in building up the national culinary culture in the context of international competition. They make the case that raising the status of cooks was both an acknowledgement of their contributions to the China's food culture and necessary for the future development of Chinese cuisine.

Cooks in the Glorious China were ambivalent toward the culinary establishment and its occupational ideals. When I spoke with cooks they would sometimes contrast themselves with me, whom they described as an "intellectual", and defined themselves as workers (*gongren*). They emphasised the importance of physical strength and dexterity in their line of work, especially for those working at the woks. Yet they also stressed the need to be creative, artistic and flexible. Moreover, with two exceptions the Glorious China's cooks had all received at least some formal training in cooking schools and had thus been exposed to the "official" occupational ideals. Chen and the three trainees I met there had all been through two years of full-time vocational middle school before joining the Glorious China. Older cooks' formal schooling tended to be more sporadic and consist of intensive short-term courses. For instance, the second-wok cook, Fatty, first studied his trade in private restaurants for about six years, where he learned from watching other cooks before being allowed to stand behind the wok. Since moving to the Glorious China in 1995 he has been sent by the company to take part in short-term courses and examinations. He now had the third highest ranking in the restaurant, after Elder Brother and the "Second Elder Brother". In fact, all of the older cooks had official rankings. Three cooks, including Master Deng at the chopping board (the only female cook at the Glorious China), were "grade three masters of Chinese-style cooking", on a scale from one to five with one being the highest. Fatty was a grade two cook and Qiang was grade one. The head chef was actually two grades higher than the Second Elder Brother, having passed the exam both for "special level cook" and, most recently, for "master chef". Their formal schooling usually consisted of a couple of months of classes prior to the examinations, which included both written and practical tests. In addition to their rankings, the head and second wok cooks and the head chef regularly represented the Glorious China at the municipal cooking competitions held as part of the Guangzhou International Food Festival. Qiang, Fatty and Huang all expressed pride and pleasure in their theoretical training and accomplishments at rankings and competitions.

On the other hand, cooks often described diplomas and gradings as "superficial things", not "realistic". Cooking schools, cooking competitions and official rankings were often seen as something typical of the state sector, further proof that this sector was hopelessly behind the times. As Master Huang once put it, "What is important is whether customers come or not, not different ranks. It is all about economic relations now." By contrast, they regarded the private sector as being interested only in actual skills and performance:

> Chen: In private restaurants, most cooks do not have documents [from schools or competitions].

> JK: How do they learn?
>
> Chen: They begin in this trade at an early age. I went to school for two years, useless. You learn more in two months in the kitchen than in two years in school. The only thing about school is that you pick up things a bit faster than you would have otherwise.

The Glorious China recruited young labour from cooking schools not only because they were cheap, but also because they had learned basic skills and "picked up things a bit faster". But cooks themselves were suspicious of cooking schools. Language was thought of as an inferior medium of teaching cooking skills. Only through actual practice could one learn the proper "feeling" which cooks were said to follow. Cooking schools were thought, in the words of one trainee, to be "just theory, no practice". In sharp contrast to the ideals put forward by the culinary elite in the state-centred food world, cooks at the Glorious China did not see theoretical training as a necessary prerequisite to good cooking practice. One young cook, Yang, had never been to cooking school:

> J.K. How did you learn to cook?
>
> Yang: With the elder brothers [here referring to all the wok cooks]. I watched and learned. I observed them for one year, and then started at the wok. Some study cooking for four years and never get to fry dishes. In this trade you have to learn quickly, respond quickly.

Although the apprenticeship system had been abolished, cooks who had received formal training were careful to distinguish between their "teachers" (*laoshi*) and their "master". The former referred to their trade school instructors, while the latter term was reserved for the head chef in the first restaurant in which they had worked. Ultimately, the way one cooked was shaped by one's "master". For example, Master Huang claimed that "just by looking at a cook I can tell where he entered the kitchen and learned his art (*ruchu xueyi*), where his master comes from". He explained:

> 'Cooks' techniques (*shoufa*) are all different. I can distinguish between a cook from a *dapaidang,* restaurant (*jiulou*) or hotel (*binguan*) [restaurant] from the way he holds his [wok] cloth. In *dapaidang*, they just fold it [he shows me using piece of paper]. This is very unhygienic, it gets in the dishes. In restaurants they fold it like this [he folds it into an s-shape]. This was introduced from Hong Kong in the 1980s. In hotels they fold it like this [he makes a little pocket on one side], this is the most high-class [method].'

The hierarchy in cooks' accounts between practice and theoretical training was articulated with a distinction they made between state and privately run restaurants, with the latter emphasising practice and the former paying too much attention to theoretical training and written distinctions. Cooks represented the private restaurants as an "other" to the state restaurants - it is important not to interpret cooks' accounts of state restaurants as a straightforward description of of the actual situation in their trade. Indeed, whereas in the 80s and early 90s the food fairs, competitions and trade journals had been entirely dominated by the state restaurants and their cooks, by the late 90s the private sector was taking a greater part in these events. Moreover, the existence of fake certificates would suggest that these were not as "useless" as cooks argued. The possibility, suggested to me by a Cantonese gourmet acquaintance, that in fact many private restaurants in the city benefited greatly from recruiting well-trained yet underpaid young cooks in state restaurants, was not voiced by my cook friends, who insisted on the uselessness of their formal training and distinctions. In the context of a society in general and an industry in particular that were regarded as being increasingly governed by a market economy, theoretical training and awards were described as "unrealistic", "superficial" or simply "useless".

Conclusion

Similar to the industrial workers studied by Blecher, cooks at the Glorious China were reluctant to resist the market reforms, even though their own future security was threatened by the ongoing restructuring of the state-owned company for which they worked. In conversations I had with cooks, they appropriated the language of reform and the critique of "backwards" state enterprises that was disseminated through the media, and used this language to criticise the leaders of their company. This critique was not voiced directly to leaders, however. As in the conversation I had with Fatty which I related at the beginning of this chapter, cooks (and other staff) chose their words carefully when managers were around. Rather than jeopardise their own futures at the company by protesting against management or against the reforms of the company, Huang, Chen, Qiang and Fatty were in fact all keeping an eye out for opportunities in the private sector. Huang was also looking into the possibilities of finding work abroad for a few years. Clearly, as Lee points out, regional economic factors such as the size of Guangzhou's private sector relative to other cities - not to mention the size of the private sector in the restaurant trade - were important in considering why cooks had not resisted reforms.

However, work was hard to come by in the competitive economic climate of the late 90s and 2000. For example, Chen, who had grown up in Chaozhou, had started off at the Glorious China as a trainee for a year and had been receiving a full salary for a year. A talented young cook, and the Elder Brother's favourite, Chen was certain that he, like some of his former classmates from vocational middle school, could make much more than the 700 yuan/month that he received at the Glorious China. With his youth, talent and cultural credentials as a Chaozhou cook, he would ordinarily have few problems in finding a job in the private sector. Nonetheless, because of the economic slump he wanted to hold on to his job as long as he possibly could.

There were many factors involved in cooks' disinclination to resist the company management. That even everyday forms of resistance were limited at the Glorious China had not only to do with the wider economic insecurities, but should, I have argued, also be seen within the context of the nature of kitchen work itself. First, the cramped conditions of the kitchen space made it difficult for management to impose the draconian factory regimes of the kind introduced in many manufacturing industries, such as those researched by Rofel and Lee. Second, the cooperative nature of cooking work and the difficulties involved in standardising the product made it complicated to blame or praise individual kitchen staff for the final outcome of a dish, which made the bonus system hard to implement. Third, surveillance was further complicated by the mixed loyalties of the main supervisor of kitchen work. As part of the "administrative level", the Elder Brother of the kitchen was expected to carry out the wishes of company managers. However, as an occupational cook he identified with the other cooks and valued the autonomy of the kitchen, the "nucleus of the restaurant". This autonomy, he felt, was respected in the private sector, and stood in sharp contrast to the control-freakery of the state restaurant managers.

Cooks' reactions to reforms should also be seen within the context of their occupational identities. Although the state sector of the catering trade was in decline in Guangzhou and throughout China, yet the culinary institutions built up by the state still remained important actors in China's food world. While committed to raising the status of cooks to that of "professionals" and "culinary artists" through education and standardised grading systems, still cooks at the Glorious China described themselves as "workers" and associated the culinary institutions with the failing state sector of the industry. Most of the cooks had received some formal training and several had earned awards at cooking competitions. Nonetheless, they argued that these were now useless, since all that mattered now was whether one's cooking attracted customers or not. This should not simply be seen as a reaction to the rise of the private sector, but as part of a more fundamental opposition cooks drew between cooking theory and cooking practice. Disdainful of theoretical training, they argued that cooking could only truly be learned through working in the kitchen and observing and following the "masters" there. The occupational ideals put forward by cooks in the Glorious China converged with their view of the private sector, which on their accounts embraced the reform-era ideals of "economic realities" and "skill" over "politics" and "bureaucracy".

Although many of my observations in the Glorious China kitchen resonate with Marc Blecher's research workers in Tianjin, I am nonetheless hesitant to embrace Blecher's description of workers as "accepting" market principles and the reform policies and becoming "subjected to" the "hegemony" of the state and the market. As Kevin Latham points out, not showing public dissent is not the same as consenting to the regime (2002: 222). Cooks' reasons for not resisting, even in relatively safe, mundane ways were, as we have seen varied and complex. It is important to emphasise that many of these cooks, most of whom had previously worked in the private sector, had chosen to work in the state sector because of the greater stability, security and social benefits. Their disappointment with the state-run Glorious China should not be divorced from the fact that the safety net was now under growing threat. Furthermore, cooks' ambivalence vis-à-vis the state restaurant and the culinary regime to which it was linked should not only be located in the discourses of the present, but also of the past. It is important to remember that in comparison to the vanguard of the Maoist project, i.e. the industrial workers studied by Rofel, Lee and Blecher, cooks were a rather suspect bunch during the revolutionary years. As mentioned in chapter one, countless chefs and restaurateurs were sent down and changed occupations during the Cultural Revolution. Cooks' uneasiness with the state-run restaurants may actually bespeak a resistance rooted in the Mao years. Thus, in embracing aspects of the officially banned apprenticeship system, stressing the role of "masters" over "teachers", cooks reveal elements of older, pre-Maoist occupational ideals. As with the discourses on food nostalgia and tradition, the past inserts itself into the present of postsocialist China in complex and subtle ways.

CONCLUSION

In this ethnographic portrait of the Glorious China I have approached the teahouse as a complex, shifting social space embedded in wider discourses and historical processes. I have used the ethnographic portrait as a basis for exploration into several themes in the anthropology of urban China. In chapter one I explored the rise, demise and revival of Guangzhou's teahouse culture, emphasising the changing roles of Guangzhou teahouses as sites of sociability and nodal points in the changing urban landscape and political economy of the twentieth century. In chapter two I developed the the focus on space space and place from chapter one. I discussed the recent rebuilding of the teahouse and the everyday practices of *yamchah* sociability among teahouse regulars. I showed that while managers intended for the new dining spaces to attract greater numbers of money-spending banqueters, regular teatime customers appropriated the teahouse spaces as their own. This fashioning of the teahouse was not a single, homogeneous practice but was implicated in the creation of social divisions as much as it was important to the forging of social ties and the construction of common identifications. In my focus on customers' spatial practices I attempted to further our understanding of some of the ways in which gender relations, local identities and social distinctions were being constructed in everyday contexts in contemporary urban China.

In chapter three, the central chapter of the thesis, I considered some of the ways in which the Glorious China teahouse was being constructed as a site of local tradition. I began the chapter by contextualising the recent nostalgic trend in the city for old style foods. On the basis of informants' narratives, I argued that the search for "traditional" cultural forms in post-Mao

China should be regarded not only as a reaction against Mao-era anti-traditionalism, but also as an aspect of more recent changes. Seen from this perspective, it emerged that "tradition" could for contemporary Guangzhounese be just as much about the Mao years as it was about pre-Liberation Old Guangzhou. From here I moved on to the second part of the chapter, an exploration of the history of the catering trade since its nationalisation in the 1950s. I argued that far from the Mao years being simply being destructive of traditional food culture, a "culinary establishment" was built up, which studied, classified and delimited regional cuisines, and sought to level tastes by reforming Cantonese cuisine and disseminating it to the masses. The state sector's history as a preserver of culinary traditions provided the Glorious China and other remaining state caterers with a unique business opportunity to provide Guangzhounese with the tastes of the past, but only under the vigilant palates of local consumers, who while accepting reinventions of tradition when it came to decor and service, made much greater demands on the "authenticity" of the flavours, textures and presentation of the foods. The complex, changing discourses on tradition and nostalgia reveal the extent to which post-socialist China is neither a clean break with the Maoist past or a return to tradition, but the product of multiple breaks, continuities and reinventions of the past.

In chapter four I looked into the reinventions of Cantonese cuisine in an era of globalisation. The Glorious China did not only present itself as a site of "traditional culture", but also as one of change and innovation. Cooks at the Glorious China were involved in the selective introduction into the city of Cantonese *nouvelle cuisine*, a style which had originated in Hong Kong, a major producer of transnational culture. In the chapter I also discussed the works of some of the city's gastronomes, who had links to the culinary establishment. They too were involved in introducing and localising Hong

Kong style Cantonese cuisine in Guangzhou. Both food writers and cooks were involved in the ongoing redefinitions of the relationship between Hong Kong and Guangzhou, and both contributed to redefinitions of Cantonese cuisine. Unlike the cooks, however, food writers articulated the new styles of food with political projects of modernity and civility.

In chapters five and six I illustrated some of the ways in which managers' reinvention of the traditional teahouse and the reform of state enterprises were implicated in alterations to the composition, working conditions and livelihoods of the teahouse staff. Concentrating in particular on cleaners and serving staff, chapter five discussed the significance of gender, native place, age and other identifications for structuring opportunities in the teahouse work force. I suggested that while origins from outside of Guangdong virtually ensured that one would be relegated to the lowest paid and least prestigious jobs in the back regions of the teahouse, being a young woman from Guangdong could be both an asset and a constraint.

Chapter six explored cooks' responses to the ongoing reforms of the teahouse. I argued that cooks, unlike the Chinese state sector workers discussed in some other studies, were disinclined to resist the reforms and even appropriated some of the language of the market economy to criticise the state company in which they worked. Rather than concluding that cooks actively consented to market reforms, however, I maintained that cooks were ambivalent about reforms. I situated cooks' responses within the contexts of their work environment and within the broader discourses and institutions which informed their occupational ideals.

The underlying argument running through the thesis has been that social identifications and cultural discourses in contemporary urban China must be understood not only as grounded in the present, but also as being embedded in complex histories of continuity, rupture and reinvention. In particular, I have argued that there is scope for rethinking Maoism as being not only destructive but also productive of cultural traditions. This is not least apparent in the ongoing relevance of the culinary projects and institutions built up since the 1950s around the nationalised catering trade.

NOTES

Notes to chapter one

1. My information on the history of the Glorious China is based partly on printed materials, including reports from newspapers and trade journals (Lü 1999, Lu and Chen 1983), brochures, and some sections of an internal report on the catering trade in Liwan district (Liwan c.1990). These materials had been collected by the Glorious China office, and were kindly shared with me by the staff there. My account of the establishment's history also draws on conversations with several acquaintances who had close connections with the company. These included Manager Li, Manager Ouyang, Master Huang and Mr. Chen. Manager Li had been working in the teahouses since the early 1970s and became the Glorious China's first female manager in 1997. Manager Ouyang's father had worked as a server in the restaurant and went into early retirement in 1981, upon which Ouyang, then seventeen years of age, inherited his father's job through the so-called substitution (*dingti*) policy (a policy widely employed in Chinese cities in the late 70s and early 80s in an attempt to ease the huge problem of urban youth unemployment, see Ikels 1996: 178-180). Ouyang had worked in nearly every section of the restaurant, and became assistant manager in connection with Ms. Li's promotion to manager. Master Huang had been hired to run the Glorious China kitchen in 1990. Mr. Chen was the son and the grandson of two former owner-managers of the Glorious China. He lived in the neighbourhood and sometimes came around to drink tea at the restaurant. Although he himself had never worked in the catering trade, he had much to tell about the Glorious China based on what he had heard from his father and grandfather.

2. Presumably, these were the successors of what had been known in late Qing and early Republican times as "two penny shops" (*erliguan*) (e.g., Gong 1999: 251).

3. A good indication of the culinary competition was the practice of promoting "weekly dimsum" (*xingqi meidian*). In the 1920's, Guo Xing, a famous dimsum chef who had been trained in a tearoom, began to promote weekly dimsum at the Lu Yu Ju Teahouse. This involved substituting new varieties for old ones every week, a practice which soon spread to several teahouses. There were four main criteria for weekly dimsum: first, they had to suit the season; second, there had to be twelve new varieties each week, six sweet and six savoury; third, the appearance had to change every week, using different colours, shapes and sizes from the previous week; and fourth, the name of each dimsum had to contain five characters (Gao and Gong 1999: 126-127). Presumably, these criteria were not always followed to the letter by teahouses advertising weekly dimsum. According to my informants the Glorious China began to provide weekly dimsum sometime after 1936.

4. The historian Virgil Ho emphasises that "[f]ood played a significant role in Cantonese brothel culture" (Ho 1993: 123). He explains that, as in restaurants, men often went to brothels to eat, drink and meet with business partners (1993: 123). He notes that many of these brothel-restaurants were on boats, "scenically located by the banks of the Pearl River, providing an ideal retreat from the heat of the summer nights" (1993: 123-124). Different sizes of floating brothels and winehouses numbered perhaps in the thousands and were referred to as "flower boats", *huafang*, or "purple cave boats" (*zidongting*). Many were congregated along the Dongdi Road

waterfront and around Shamian (or "Shameen"), a small off-shore island built up after 1860 as a pseudo-concession area for foreigners (Deng et al. 1997: 614-615). The author of the 1919 guidebook opines that while the prostitutes on the boats were of a lower class than on land, the food and service were better and cheaper than in many winehouses. "Therefore, [purple cave boats] are particularly convenient for gourmands (*hao yinshi zhe*)" (Wuxing Cihangshi 1919: *juan* 4:8).

5. By 2000, the Hong Kong Glorious China, which at least until then had never had any business dealings with the Guangzhou establishment, ran several teahouses in Hong Kong and the New Territories. However, it was known there not so much for its teahouses but rather for its ubiquitous cake shops, which sold mooncakes, cured meats and other packaged foods.

6. As in Hong Kong, where this practice had also emerged quite recently, going out for *yamchah* on weekends may have been a way of maintaining togetherness in a context where family members were often dispersed throughout the city (Cheung 2002a).

Notes to chapter two

1. By contrast, many of the eating places specialising in regional Chinese cuisines closed down for the New Year, as the proprietors and customers often went home for the holidays. The most important times of the year for Western-style restaurants and cafes were around Christmas and Valentine's Day, Western holidays which had recently become popular among the city's youth. On Christmas Day many young people also went out to discos.

2. For an overview of the economic development of Liwan since Republican times see Guangzhou Shi Liwan 1998: 181-251.

3. This is not to imply that "the elderly" constituted a homogeneous group with regard to income and social practices. On the contrary, as Li Ruojian demonstrates in his recent study of eldercare in Guangzhou, "there are obvious class differences in today's society among the elderly" (Li 2001-2002: 11).

Notes to chapter three

1. Unlike the Hui, Gillette writes, for many Han in Xi'an the search for tradition in the Hui quarters was also bound up with an "intense interest in minority cultures" (2000: 145), which for them signified the ancient and the exotic.

2. Historians and anthropologists have argued that despite huge regional and other differences Han Chinese have had a set of common, overarching culinary practices and beliefs, and that the consciousness of these common features have long served as a markers of distinction from other peoples both within and outside the empire (Chang 1977; Naquin and Rawski 1987: 91). Appadurai (1988) argues that in India there was no such conception until post-Independence times, when a "national cuisine" was created. There, he contends, the production of regional and national cookbooks were crucial to this creation. In China the early consciousness of having common foodways seems to have been achieved in the absence of cookbooks that explicitly attempted to represent either specific geographical areas or the empire as a whole, although there was of

course a substantial cookbook and gastronomic literature in imperial times, especially from the Song onwards (Anderson 1994: 38; Sabban 1999; Spence 1977: 284-287; Wilkinson 1998: 636) (see chapter four, note 1). The eating customs of different localities were written about in the numerous local gazetteers (Cohen 1991: 121). However, only a few regions were recognised as having a distinctive cuisine in late imperial and even Republican times. These cuisines were associated not so much with everyday or rural foods but rather with the cooking styles of occupational cooks from different cities or provinces who worked in the restaurants and private households of the great cities or at the imperial court (e.g., Anderson 1988: 194-195; Freeman 1977: 168-170; Spence 1977: 292; Wang Xuetai 1993: 3). Although at least one collection of regional recipes appeared in the late eighteenth century (Wilkinson 1998: 633), yet this does not appear to have developed into a genre. It would seem that few attempts were made to compile the quintessential recipes of any regional cuisines, let alone of the entire empire.

I am not aware of any explicitly regional or national cookbooks from the first half of the twentieth century, although some may well have existed. The 20-odd cookbooks I have seen from the Republican period were typically concerned with spreading "modern" concepts of hygiene and nutrition to the growing number of middle class housewives, rather than representing regional styles. (The recipes included do often suggest the author's geographic origins, however.) Representative titles from the period include *The Household Cookbook* (Li 1917), *Food and Health* (Zhang 1936) and *Useful Dietetics* (Gong and Zhou 1939). Publications of this kind continued to be produced throughout the 1950s (and included reprints of Republican-era texts).

3. My description of the 1983 exposition builds on the following sources, in addition to those cited in the text: Anonymous 1983a, Du and Situ 1983, Guan 1983, Liang 1983, Zhang 1983.

4. Lunjiao-style steamed rice cakes originated in the early twentieth century in the town of Lunjiao in Shunde County. The Guohua was founded in Xiguan in the 1940s and closed down in the mid-90s. The Guohua's rice cakes were restored at the Liwan Famous Foods House, which now supplied both the Glorious China and the Xiguan People with the cakes. The slight savouriness of the mostly sweet Dechang cakes came from the fermented tofu (*nanru*) that was added to the batter. These cakes were created in the 1930s by a master dimsum chef at the Dechang Teahouse, which was a five minute walk from the Glorious China. Like the Guohua, the Dechang became part of the Glorious China company when that company was established in 1994. When the Dechang went out of business in the late 90s, the Glorious China took over its "signboard dimsum". It now makes these cakes on behalf of several establishments in the area, including the Xiguan People and the Liwan Famous Foods House.

Notes to chapter four

1. In contrast to India, the importance in China of dietetic and ethical approaches to food did not inhibit the production of collections of recipes and other culinary texts. Food connoisseurship and a literature devoted to the pleasures of the table can be traced to the Warring States period. It was established by the Han dynasty and was further developed among the elites of the early mediaeval period (third to seventh centuries) (Knechtes 1986;

1997). Françoise Sabban (1999) argues that dietetic and gastronomic texts had in early times constituted two separate literary traditions. By the fourteenth century these approaches were being combined in the same texts, as Sabban demonstrates in the case of the *Yinshan zhengyao* or "True principles of eating and drinking", a guide to eating written for a Mongol emperor in 1330 by his chief dietician, Hu Sihui. Scholarly writings on food, including recipe books and treatises on food products flourished from the Tang, but experienced something of an "explosion" in the Song, as did printing more generally (*ibid.*; Anderson 1994: 38). Late imperial China saw a further proliferation of writings on food (Wang Renxiang 1993: 152-155). These included the complex but essentially conservative codifications and regulations for imperial court cuisine and also a wealth of agricultural/medical treatises, some of which were sponsored or promoted by the imperial state (Spence 1977: 280-287). The aesthetics of cooking and eating was further elaborated by what Endymion Wilkinson terms the "literati gourmands", such as Shu Shi (1037-1101), Ni Zan (1301-1374), Xu Wei (1521-1593) and Yuan Mei (1716-1798) (1998: 636). These men "exerted a considerable influence on the development of a higher cuisine, especially when they compiled their own cookbooks as did Ni and Yuan" (*ibid.*).

2. "Culinary systems" thus comprise both what Sidney Mintz (1996: 92-105) would distinguish as the haute cuisine of the urban elites and the more popularly-based regional cuisines. Thus, rather than describing a single, national Chinese haute cuisine to which the elites adhere and a variety of regional traditions below, the "culinary systems" defined by Chinese food scholars include a spectrum of eating and cooking practices, dividing but also cutting across social hierarchies. This is in line with Arjun Appadurai's suggestion that in China (and Italy), "regional cuisines *are* the *haute cuisines*,

and no imperial or metropolitan culinary idiom really appears to have achieved hegemony, even today" (Appadurai 1988: 4, emphasis in the original).

3. The food historians, Gong Bohong and Gao Xuzheng, acknowledge the ambiguities of the term "Cantonese cuisine" whilst emphasizing the centrality of Guangzhou. They write:

> Guangzhou abounds in teahouses and restaurants. It is the centre stage of the birth, formation and expansion of Cantonese cuisine (*Yuecai*). Therefore, the main dishes and quintessential cooking techniques of Guangzhou cuisine are all core dishes and important cooking methods in Cantonese cuisine. Because of the important position and large proportion of Guangzhou dishes in Cantonese cuisine, people usually regard Guangzhou cuisine and Cantonese cuisine as being on a par with one another, and the term 'Cantonese cuisine' is used both in a broad sense, comprising Guangzhou, East River and Chaozhou food, and in a narrow sense, referring exclusively to Guangzhou food (Gao and Gong 1999: 9-10).

4. The word *xian* is difficult to render into English and deserves a bit of commentary. The British gastronomist Fuchsia Dunlop describes it as "one of the most beautiful words in the Chinese culinary language" (Dunlop 2001: xxx). She writes:

> It expresses the indefinable, delicious taste of fresh meat, poultry and seafood, the scrumptious flavours of a pure chicken soup, the subtle magic of freshly-rendered lard. *Xian* describes the most exalted flavours of nature; it is the Chinese cook's muse, the essence of flavour itself....Many English writings on Chinese food translate *xian* as 'fresh', 'natural' or 'savoury',

each of which captures an aspect of the word but not its whole (2001: xxx).

5. Western scholars of Chinese foodways, while often classifying these cuisines in a somewhat different manner to their Chinese counterparts, tend to make similar problematic assumptions regarding the "systematic" nature of Cantonese and other regional cuisines. See, for example, Anderson 1988: 207-217; Anderson and Anderson 1977: 355-356; Simoons 1991: 54-57.

6. Although the new trends are said to reflect the tastes of the Guangdong people, it is evident that both Hu and Chen regard the *Nanyue* culinary scene, in particular cooks working in up-scale restaurants, as the main agents behind the trends. Although most writers and cooks used the terms synonymously, Hu actually makes a distinction between "new school" and "new wave" in order to clarify this relationship. For him, the "new school" refers to the novel dishes created within a specific school of chefs, whether or not these become accepted among diners. "New wave" Cantonese cuisine comprised only those novelties which actually had achieved widespread "circulation among the people" (Hu 2000: 2-3).

Notes to chapter five

1. Another work place event, in this case shared with other restaurants and snack shops that belonged to the Glorious China company, was the "skills competition" (*jishu dasai*) for women workers held annually in conjunction with (but not on) International Women's Day (8 March). Unlike temporary workers, regulars were all automatically members of the worker's union (*gonghui*), which was under the Liwan subsection of the All-China Worker's

Union. On the occasion of the skills competition held in 2000, the company's smaller teahouse, the Yiyuan, was closed for an afternoon. Regular female staff from different sections in all the establishments and from the Glorious China head office competed in the following events: cutting and chopping skills (*daogong*), calculation (*jisuan*, on both abacus and calculator), wonton wrapping (C. *baao wahntan*), flower arrangement (*chahua*), dough modelling (*miansu*) and fruit arrangement (*guopan*). The competition was attended by the head chefs and head dimsum chefs and by several top-level managers, and was documented by an official photographer.

2. As Solinger discusses, recruitment of peasant labour into state and non-state enterprises alike was carried out through "a mixture of personalism and bureaucratism" (1997: 200). Interestingly, while many young women in the service section had been hired via bureaucratic channels (which of course often also involved utilising personal connections), none of the workers in the cleaning section had been hired through local trade bureaus or other government agencies. Instead, the latter had found their jobs either on the basis personal contacts or, in a few cases, by walking in off the street and asking for work.

Notes to chapter six

1. For a critique of the widespread view among scholars that consumerism has produced political docility in China, see Latham 2002.

2. An example of these "ideological appeals", to use Blecher's term, with obvious relevance for my study, is a series of reports published in the *Guangzhou Daily* in the spring of 2000 entitled "Spotlight on the Old

Names in Business" (*Guanzhu laozihao*). One of the articles (Anonymous 2000) is a feature piece on the state-run Taiping Guan, the only remaining Western style restaurant in the city founded before 1949. We are told that the other two "old names" Western restaurants, which had also been state enterprises, had recently gone out of business. In the article, it is made clear that the Taiping Guan was rapidly losing business and was soon to join the same fate as the other two establishments. The failure of these state restaurants is contrasted to the recent successes of certain private and joint-venture Western restaurants. While the latter are lauded for their innovative management and flexible business strategies, the Taiping Guan is criticised for the poor quality of its service staff, its reluctance to introduce new dishes to the menu and above all for its failure to train its personnel and hire new staff. It is pointed out that over 60% of the Taiping Guan's staff are still "old workers" hired before management reforms. The general manager of the Taiping Guan, who is mentioned by name and shown in a photograph accompanying the article, is ridiculed for his conservative way of thinking. The journalist describes how managers of Guangzhou's successful Western restaurants frequently sent their cooks and other staff abroad for skills training and to keep up with the latest trends in Western cooking, and then cites the general manager of the Taiping Guan as explaining that it was not necessary to give their staff any further training, since unlike Chinese cuisine Western cuisine is not a "profound thing" (*gaoshen de dongxi*) and it hardly ever changes. The article on the Taiping Guan was one of many in the Guangzhou press which juxtaposed the ossified management and poor-quality staff of the failing state enterprises with the dynamic management and staff in other sectors and in those state enterprises which had successfully made the transition to profit-making organisations.

3. Cantonese: *hauhwohk*. In Cantonese, the character used in Mandarin for "frying pan" / "wok" (*guo,* Cantonese *wo*) refers to pots used for boiling rice and to hotpots. A separate character is used for "frying pan". The latter is pronounced *wohk* in Cantonese (Mandarin: *huo*), and is most likely the source of the English loan word "wok".

4. Other cooks agreed with Huang that the private restaurants gave more independence to the kitchen and more respect to cooks themselves. On one occasion, for example, Chen and I were watching the third wok cook, Yang, who was cleaning his stove and the wall behind the stove. Chen frowned at the sight of this, and commented that in private restaurants, the 'masters' [*shifu*, referring to the wok cooks] did not have to do any cleaning up. He went on:

> <u>Chen</u>: When they finish work they just put their things in the wok and go, the pantry take care of it.'
> <u>JK</u>: What about 'burning the wok' (C. *siuwohk*)*?
> <u>Chen</u>: Yes, burning the wok, too. All they do is fry (*chao*). If there is nothing to fry, they just stand around... In private restaurants, each cook has his own pantry person.

*Cooks regularly burned off the filth that gathered on the outside of the wok to avoid getting black specks in the dishes.

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