SOMEWHERE SOUTH
with CHEF VIVIAN HOWARD

THE PHOTOJOURNALIST, ANDREW KUNG

In Sally Chow's Clarksdale, Miss. kitchen, framed magazine clippings chronicle the surge of "fame" that the family has garnered over the years. Photos from her son's Chinese wedding made it into a '90s bridal spread for *Southern Living*. A 2003 food article in the *New York Times* food highlights Sally's Crayfish Cantonese recipe.

But a more recent portrait shows Gilroy Chow in front of his collection of NASA badges, taken by photographers Andrew Kung and Emanuel Hahn. The collaborators published their Mississippi Delta Chinese project in 2018 after traveling to the birthplace of blues to explore an Asian American community they had never known existed.

Kung is the son of Chinese immigrants and grew up in San Francisco. Hahn's parents are Korean, and he grew up in Cambodia and Singapore before moving to New York. As Kung told the *New York Times*, the project gave the photographers new ideas of identity to explore even as Asian Americans themselves.

"Oftentimes, as Asian Americans in large cities, we don't have that same level of community or that

same level of ties because there are so many of us in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. that we kind of take that level of community for granted," Kung said. "Seeing that level of intimacy for me, as a young Asian American living in the States, was a very heartwarming thing to see, especially in a place where you wouldn't really imagine there would be tons of Asians or Chinese-Americans."

During the pre-production phase of "Somewhere South," Kung graciously answered our team's research inquiries over email as we researched the Delta. We caught up with him ahead of "Dumpling Dilemma" to learn more about his own personal ties to the South, and what it meant to document his ethnic community in a very different place from where he grew up.

The Mississippi Delta Chinese Project lives at thedeltachinese.com, where you can learn more about the Chows and Frieda Quon from "Dumpling Dilemma," as well as other members of the Mississippi Delta Chinese community. You can find Kung on Instagram at @andrew_kung or contact him at apkung.com.

What drew you to this project in the Mississippi Delta?
My friend Emanuel Hahn and I were tired of shooting commercial projects, so we wanted to do something more personal. I always talked about shooting the ethereal landscapes of the South; Emanuel asked me if there were any Asians in the deep rural South, which got both of us curious. We reached out to more than 50 Asian organizations that served Asian communities in the South, and eventually were connected to the small Delta Chinese community. Once we heard how tightly knit the community was down there, we knew we had a photo story.

Your parents met and married in the South. Tell us more about your personal history to the South and to the Chinese-American experience here.
My mom went to college in South Carolina and my dad was in the U.S. Army based in North Carolina. One summer my mom worked at a friend's restaurant in N.C. and my dad walked in — the rest was history. They got married and eventually moved to the West Coast, where I was eventually born. While my parents didn't experience blatant racism, they did get a lot of questions and stares because of their appearance. I, on the other hand, was fortunate to have grown up in San Francisco, a city defined by its diversity and large Asian American communities.

The New York Times paired your project with the headline "Neither Black Nor White in the Mississippi Delta." What do you think about how this racial dichotomy is used to define the South?
When you think about the South, you often think about the historical racial segregation between the white and black community—because that is often the narrative that surrounds the southern part of the U.S. The immigration story of the Chinese is often overlooked and forgotten. Part of showcasing the Delta Chinese is to go into the rich histories of how they ended up in the South, the struggles and challenges they had in re-building their lives, and ultimately how they've been able to thrive as entrepreneurs and successful, contributing Americans.

Your project features Taylor Pang, a young fourth-generation cotton farmer. As his peer, what parallels and differences did you notice in your experiences? [Producer note: Taylor helped us a lot behind the scenes, navigating the rural roads and guiding us to the best cotton fields and sunset lookout points to launch the drone!]

While we obviously grew up in very different environments — myself, in a large urban metropolitan city, and Taylor, in a more rural farming environment — we both developed a curiosity about our own Asian American identity in our mid-twenties. We didn't ask many questions about what it meant to be Asian, because I was surrounded by so many other Asian Americans and because he saw himself as a white person in an Asian person's body. Being in the South versus the Bay Area, there were obviously more blatant forms of racism that Taylor experienced while growing up, going to school and interacting in many non-Asian environments.

You photographed the grocery store Wong's Foodland, which no longer exists (and closed before we started production on our episode). How does food play a part in the Chinese-American history of the South? How does that differ from this experience in other parts of the country?

It saddens me that a lot of these historically rich grocery stores are now closed — not only because food played a large role in their community, but because the grocery stores also symbolized a community itself: housing families, bringing people together, etc. I'm glad we were able to visually document and capture some of these grocery stores before they closed. Food was an important part of building community in the South — families and friends often gathered on weekends to have potlucks; these potlucks were a way to bring the community together and have a sense of camaraderie, especially when the Chinese first arrived to the South.

Since this episode focuses on dumplings: what's your favorite dumpling?

The classic chive and pork dumplings are my favorite!

Was there something you ate at the Chows that reminded you of home or totally blew you away?

Great question! While I don't remember a specific dish (since it was a few years back now), the potluck, family-style dinner reminded me of my own family — only without the Southern accents. It shows that no matter where in the world, family dinners and potlucks will always ignite a feeling of kinship and belonging.

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THE GROCERY STORY OF THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA CHINESE

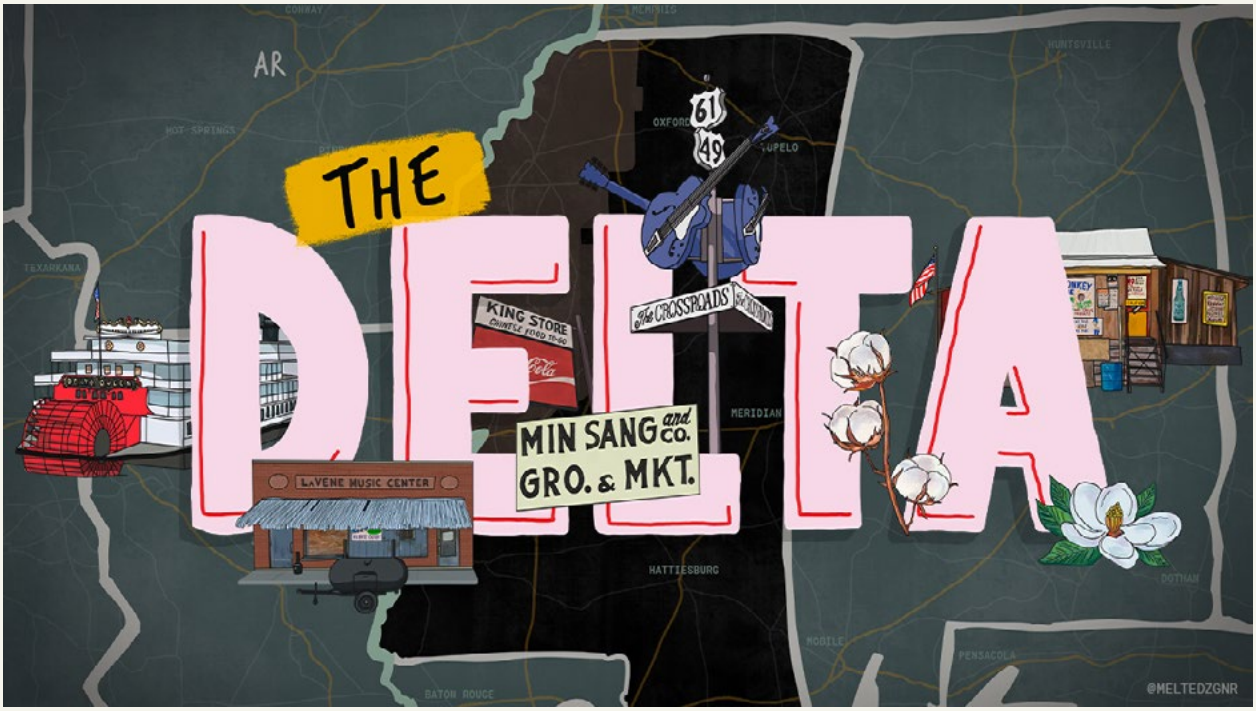

Illustration by Margaret McNealy

In the Mississippi Delta, generations of Chinese Americans have put down roots. Their families first migrated to the Delta after the Civil War to work on cotton plantations, and transitioned into merchant trades soon after. While Chinese Americans' experiences were not that of enslaved African-descended people, Indigenous communities, or African Americans living under Jim Crow, they experienced overt racism and discrimination throughout the US.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the most sweeping federal legislation in the history of the United States to bar a specific ethnic group, race or nationality from entering the country. It was also among the first labor laws to do so, prohibiting Chinese workers from entering and re-entering the U.S. While it was only supposed to last for 10 years, the Chinese Exclusion

Act was made permanent in 1902 and effectively allowed only diplomats, teachers, students and merchants from China into the U.S., and still barred many who fell into those categories from entry. The law was eventually repealed in 1943, but even then only allowed 105 Chinese immigrants entry per year. According to historical anecdotal accounts, that rule was largely evaded.

As Frieda Quon explains in our episode, "Dumpling Dilemma," her parents and their peers of the same generation were among the merchants in the 1900s. The majority of the Chinese immigrants who settled in the Delta came from the Guangdong province of China. They owned food stores in a segregated South, where they sold groceries and prepared food to Black patrons. A look at the population demographics of the Delta in 1940 shows 345,500 Black, 133,500 white and 743 Chinese residents. At a time when Chinese immigrants were still barred from entering the US, the community's perceived foreignness shaped who was willing to patronize their businesses. The stores' majority Black clientele speaks to the persistence of racial segregation in the region and suggest that xenophobia likely kept most white patrons away.

This is also evidenced by the fact that in the 1940s, Chinese immigrants were not allowed to own residences, forcing their families to live in the back of their stores. Given that both daily life and business happened in the same building, the stores were the center of family life. As Sally Chow recalls, "When you were tall enough to reach the counter and count change, you worked. Every one of us can cut up a chicken." By the 1970s, there were as many as 3,000 residents of Chinese descent in the Delta.

Much more than retail businesses, these grocery stores offered social refuge for Chinese families, generations of stories about the illogic of racial segregation, and the persistence of unheralded foodways.

To learn more about the history of the Mississippi Delta Chinese, including the stories of many of the community members featured in "Dumpling Dilemma," check out the AJ+ video "The Untold Story Of America's Southern Chinese." This interview with journalist and filmmaker E. Samantha Cheng is also informative.

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DUMPLING ENCYCLOPEDIA

Illustrations by Teddy Leinbach

After watching "Dumpling Dilemma," we bet you're wrestling with your own questions of "Is this a dumpling or not?" Below are various forms of dough — some filled, some bouncing in broth — that "Somewhere South" defines as dumplings.

GNOCCHI

Pronounced: nyo-kee

What is it: thumb-sized bits of dough, often made with potato and flour

Places where it's popular: Italy, France

Swims in: marinara sauce, cream sauce, butter, herbs and olive oil

MANDU

Pronounced: mahn-doo

What is it: fried or steamed dumplings

Places where it's popular: Korea

Filling: any meat like ground pork or beef, ground tofu, vegetables

GNUDI

Pronounced: nu-dee

What is it: "naked" ricotta dumplings (no dough)

Place where it's popular: Italy

Swims in: pesto, marinara sauce

PORK & CHIVE DUMPLINGS

What is it: steamed or pan-fried dumplings

Places where it's popular: China

Filling: ground pork, chives, water chestnut

JEEN DUY

Pronounced: geen-doo-ee

What is it: fried, sweet dumplings made with glutinous flour

Places where it's popular: China

Filling: ground peanut, coconut, sesame

MATZOH BALL

Pronounced: maht-sah

What is it: matzoh meal (dried, unleavened flatbread) formed into balls of dough with schmaltz, or chicken fat

Places where it's popular: throughout the Jewish diaspora

Swims in: chicken broth

CHICKEN PASTRY

What is it: strips of dough floating in chicken soup

Places where it's popular: eastern North Carolina

Swims in: chicken soup made from an old hen

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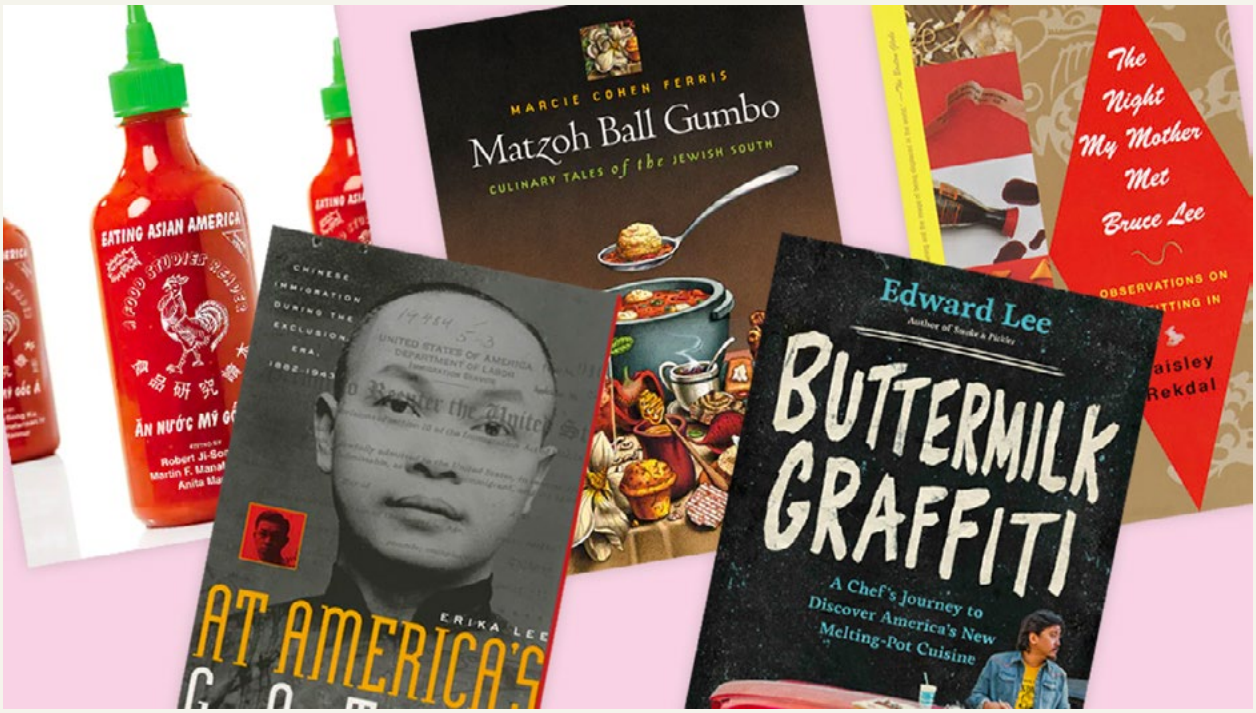
DUMPLING EPISODE READING LIST



With the help of our amazing board of advisors and scholars, we dug into the scholarship related to each of our episode themes. In each newsletter, we'll share a short list of some of the most helpful books and essays we found that helped shape our understanding of the evolution of Southern foodways.

Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South by Marcie Cohen Ferris
(UNC Press 2010)
This beautiful collection of oral histories and extensive research details the Jewish culinary traditions and history found only in the South.

Buttermilk Graffiti: A Chef's Journey to Discover America's New Melting-Pot Cuisine by Edward Lee
(Artisan 2019)
Sixteen essays and forty recipes round out this culinary journey by Kentucky chef Edward Lee (who features in "Dumpling Dilemma").

Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader **Edited by Robert Ji-Song Ku , Martin F. Manalansan and Anita Mannur**
(NYU Press 2013)
A collection of food scholarship that examines the way food imagery and contentious notions of ethnic authenticity are connected to Asian American culture.

At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943 **By Erika Lee**
(UNC Press 2004)
This is the first book to offer comprehensive analysis of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the subsequent laws that affected Chinese immigration to the U.S.

"Traveling to Opal" from the book The Night My Mother Met Bruce Lee **by Paisley Rekdal**
(Penguin Random House 2002)
In this amusing and poignant essay, the writer travels to Natchez, Mississippi to learn more about her great-aunt Opal and her own Chinese-Southern identity.

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JEEN DUY DESSERT DUMPLINGS

This recipe is from Cathy Mai, who owns Mai Little China in Greenwood, Miss., along with her chef husband Matthew Mai. This is how her mother, Lillian Kwong, taught her how to make these dessert dumplings.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 pound glutinous rice flour
1/3 pound tapioca flour
1 pound of Chinese brown sugar, minus 1 slab (try Peony Mark brand or similar)
3 cups boiling water
1 cup unsalted, roasted peanuts
1 cup shredded, unsweetened coconut
1 cup toasted sesame seeds

more ingredients next page >

INGREDIENTS (CONTINUED)

1 cup granulated sugar
Cooking oil (any oil is fine)
½ cup to 1 cup raw sesame seeds

DIRECTIONS

Step 1: Mix rice and tapioca flours in a large bowl, and reserve ½ cup separately.

Melt brown sugar in water. Mix sugar water with the flours until a big ball of dough forms. Place dough on a floured surface and knead in the reserved ½ cup flour.

Step 2: Crush peanuts with a jar or rolling pin. (Mom always used a glass jar.) Mix peanuts, coconut, sesame seeds and granulated sugar together in a bowl. Set aside.

Step 3: After kneading the dough, pinch off a piece about an inch round. Roll it into a ball and press it into a small bowl of raw sesame seeds (only on one side). Continue to flatten a bit with your hands until it is ⅛- to ¼-inch thick.

Place about ½ teaspoon filling in the center of the dough circle. Fold in half to make a crescent shape. Pinch edges to seal. Make as many dumplings as you have filling.

Step 4: If you don't have a deep fryer, heat your preferred cooking oil in a pan deep enough to cover the dumplings. As you place the dumplings into the oil, they will sink. Once they start floating, flip often so they can puff up. Fry until golden brown.

Yield: about 36 dumplings

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