VIETNAMESE CUISINE

BY HUONG NGUYEN

FALL 2021

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VIETNAMESE CUISINE IN VIETNAM & IN AMERICA

HOW POPULAR IS FOOD DELIVERY INDUSTRY IN VIETNAM?

HOW DID VIETNAMESE FOOD "TRAVEL" TO THE UNITED STATES?
TABLE OF CONTENTS

FRAMING THE EXHIBITION

Finalized Topic
Goals and Objectives
Audience Analysis

EXHIBITION

Differences in Flavor
Variety of Dishes
Technology Approach
East-West Interaction

Research Question
Reflection
Beginning in the 16th century, explorers and traders introduced foods such as potatoes, tomatoes, and snow peas. When the French colonized Vietnam (1858 - 1954), they introduced foods such as baguettes (French bread), pâté, coffee with cream, milk, butter, custards, and cakes. In the 1960s and 1970s, during the Vietnam war era, the U.S. military introduced ice cream to Vietnam when it contracted with two U.S. dairies to build dozens of ice cream factories.

Neighbors have influenced the Vietnamese people in regards to what they eat and how they cook. People from Mongolia who invaded Vietnam from the North in the 10th century brought beef with them. This is how beef became part of the Vietnamese diet. Common Vietnamese beef dishes is phở bò (beef noodle soup). The Chinese who dominated Vietnam for 1000 years taught Vietnamese people cooking techniques, such as stir frying and deep drying, as well as the use of chopsticks. In the South, neighboring Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand introduced such ingredients as flat, Cambodian style egg noodles, spices, chili, and coconut milk.
The Vietnam War, which raged on from 1955 to 1975, was a long and devastating conflict between the communist government of North Vietnam, which was backed by allies like the Soviet Union and China, against the government of South Vietnam, which had the support of countries such as the United States, Australia and Thailand. The war came to a head when North Vietnam’s communist regime captured Saigon in the South on April 30, 1975. The U.S. government estimated that in those 20 years of conflict, the war claimed more than 3 million lives, including 2 million civilians and 58,000 U.S. troops. There were 11 million Vietnamese who became refugees and sought a new home in the United States. Vietnamese communities may now seem so entrenched in the fabric of this country, that it’s easy to forget that American opposition to their coming in the 70s was even more virulent than opposition to Syrian asylum-seekers in the U.S. and in much of Europe.

There were several waves of Vietnamese refugees who immigrated to the United States, which impacted their experiences in their new country. The first wave took place right after the fall of Saigon in 1975 with a group comprised mainly the educated and wealthy class, who had ties to the South Vietnamese government or the U.S. military and feared political persecution. The second wave, which took place between 1977 to 1982, brought over refugees who were dubbed “boat people” on account of them desperately traveling by boat through dangerous waters to seek asylum in other countries, while risking the possibility of death, robbery and rape. Many of these people were ethnic Chinese who were fleeing persecution in Vietnam, and also were less educated than the first group and from more rural areas. And the third wave that took place during the 1980s and 1990s consisted mainly of political prisoners and Vietnamese Amerasians.
To illustrate flavor differences, I choose two pieces of data. They are interviews from two completely different perspectives: Vietnamese in Vietnam and Vietnamese-Americans in the United States; and articles/web forums about the differences between the same cuisine in two countries. A friend of mine who had lived in the United States for a few years and had recently moved back to Vietnam, said “When I first move back to Vietnam after many years living in the U.S., I was shocked by how fresh the fish dishes taste in Vietnam. No matter how good a restaurant is in the U.S., the fish served has already been iced for a while, and already lost some of the texture. And of course, some of the vegetables fundamental to Vietnamese cuisine are of much better quality and taste in Vietnam perhaps because they are planted in the right soil and weather condition.” This data is an example of illustrating the differences in flavor because of the difference in cultural tastes between Vietnamese and Americans.
To illustrate the contrary of diversity, I choose two pieces of data. They are also interviews and articles of the same people/topics as the first idea. One of the comments I found on a forum discussion about the differences between Vietnamese food in mainland versus in the West state that “95% of Vietnamese food you find in America is actually Southern food. There is not even a single thing that I eat in Vietnamese restaurants in Dallas that tastes similar to anything that I had ever eaten during my first 18 years in Hanoi. There are a couple of pretty authentic Northern Vietnamese restaurants in San Jose and Orange County, but in general Southern dishes outnumber Northern dishes.” This piece of data illustrates the diversity contrary because of the history of Vietnamese immigrants in the United States. I hope my audience will have a better understanding about authentic Vietnamese culinary after reading this.
What considerations do young Vietnamese people think of when they order food online?

CONVENIENCE + SOCIAL DISTANCING

To illustrate the convenience of online ordering, I choose two pieces of data. They are interviews of young Vietnamese people in Vietnam and Vietnamese articles about the development of food delivery services in Vietnam, such as GrabFood and Bae Min. A Thai article I found that analyzes the statistics of food delivery business in Vietnam states that “99% of Vietnamese people who completed the GCOMM1 questionnaire in 2019 ordered a minimum of two to three online meals per month, and 39% of these people ordered food online via the app two to three times a week.” According to Euromonitor2, a survey that was done in 2018 shows the value of online food purchases that year alone was $33 millions. This piece of data illustrates the benefits of applying technology into daily lives.

To illustrate the restrictions during the global pandemic, I also choose two pieces of data. They are articles about the drastic increase of people ordering take-out food for contactless delivery during quarantine to remain social distancing and interviews of Vietnamese people who have used the service during lockdown. One of the Vietnamese people I interviewed said “I love ordering food on Bae Min. There are so many discounts and sometimes if you find a good code, then it’s a free meal. They deliver so fast, too. I never have to wait more than 30 minutes for my food to be delivered.” This interview illustrates the high demand in consumption, especially young adults nowadays, because the initial purpose of using the service is due to the COVID-19’s social distance policy. I hope my audience will gain some knowledge about how the food industry in Vietnam functions after reading this.
This statement can be applied to how the younger generations in Vietnam use their smartphones to order food online via apps versus older generations who prefer cooking or going to the actual restaurants to dine in. It is more likely that young adults prefer ordering food from specific apps and have it delivered to them. The development of food delivery app usage and the adaptation of change during the global pandemic illustrate the technology aspect of Vietnamese culinary industry because of the convenience in ordering food online and the high demand of consumption nowadays. Meanwhile, older generations. Through the information I have gathered, I hope my audience will recognize the importance of technology in this day and age after reading this.
This quote, along with Jung Sun Park’s “Negotiating Identity and Power in Transnational Cultural Consumption” and Patrick W. Galbraith’s “For Japan Only? Crossing and Re-Inscribing Boundaries in the Circulation of Adult Computer Games,” represent the idea about how Eastern fans brought majority of Asian popular cultures to the West relates to the Vietnamese immigrants who were the first ones to bring Viet culture to not only Western consumers, but also contribute to the diversity of culinary, especially in the United States. This theme illustrates the East-West interaction because after the Vietnam War ended, a large number of Southern Vietnamese at the time immigrated to the United States for a better future, thus they brought Vietnamese culture with them through home-made dishes and family recipes. I hope my audience, especially Asian Americans and Vietnamese Americans who can relate to the representation of their own culture through culinary, can have a deeper appreciation for their cultural background.

"The prevalence of foreign cultural influence is more strongly felt in ethnic spaces and among transnational (im)migrants in metropolitan cities. Historically, (im)migrants’ consumption and retention of their heritage culture are nothing new. But contemporary media capitalism, combined with technological development and individuals’ movements across borders, has enabled extensive and speedy exchanges of cultural information between the countries of origin and transnational (im)migrants. The speed and volume of these exchanges enable simultaneous and almost unlimited cultural consumption, which connects the countries of origin and (im)migrants more immediately. Moreover, since ethnic spaces in the U.S. are no longer enclosed and isolated islands from the larger society as they once were, cultural practices and information available in ethnic spaces are easily transmittable to the larger society. In this sense, urban ethnic spaces and transnational (im)migrant populations are significant nodal points for the circulation of foreign cultures in the U.S. and important sites for examining cultural globalization of the U.S."
Finalized Topic: Vietnamese Cuisine
Vietnam has a rich culture in culinary, from the North to the South with hundreds of types of food that most foreigners do not know of. Through this exhibition, I want to introduce some interesting aspects of how Vietnamese cuisine and its representation has changed in America, and the popularity of online ordering in recent years.

Goals and Objectives:
1. The audience would gain a deeper understanding of authentic Vietnamese culinary. (distinguish the flavor differences and the variety of dishes represented in two countries)
2. The audience would have some knowledge about how the food industry in Vietnam functions. (the convenience of ordering food online and the adjustments to social distancing during the global pandemic).

Audience Analysis: Growing up in Vietnam, I have always been proud of my culture and would love to bring it with me during my study abroad years.

Reflection: I have made a lot of changes from the initial draft to this final version of the exhibition. Originally, I wanted to focus on introducing different types food in Vietnam, as well as recipes and ingredients for some of them. However, I realized my exhibition topic is more than just an introduction to Vietnamese food, it is about how one culture can be represented in different ways when brought to different countries, or how technology nowadays has helped tremendously with the increase of food delivery industry. Therefore, I believe this is the "right" way to showcase Vietnamese cuisine, not only through history but also through modern societal development.