
talk food

What is a minority language?

A minority language is a language that is spoken by the minority population in a geographic area or location. An area may have several minority languages, depending on the constitution or makeup of the population.

How many minority languages are there in the world?

There are maybe 6,000 or 7,000 languages spoken in the world and it is estimated that in a century at least a half of them will have died out. With about 2,300 languages spoken in Asia, it still maintains its linguistic diversity today. In China alone, 81 different languages are spoken, 55 of them are spoken by national minorities daily.
In Europe at the moment 79 indigenous regional and minority languages, spoken by in total 203 national minorities or linguistic groups, have been acknowledged in the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages.

Why do languages die out?

People who speak minority languages often have to learn the majority language in order to function in their society. Because most minority languages are not officially recognized; as such, they cannot be used to communicate with the larger population. And this is due to the fact that there is some stronger language that is spoken in the same area and whose speakers have the political prestige and the power to decide what should be spoken. Processes like urbanisation and migration are also a threat for traditional ways of life which, at least in the past, used to go hand in hand with linguistic diversity.

What is the point in safeguarding languages?

When a language is dying out, a whole world of traditions and concepts and ways of seeing the world dies with it. Languages are the immaterial richness of mankind. And languages are important for the speakers. It's a human right for a person to speak, and transfer to the next generation, their own language.

Is the internet driving out minority languages?

The internet is an extremely important way of supporting the revitalisation of minority languages. New technology makes it possible for speakers of minority languages who live in diaspora, or live scattered over a vast geographical area, to communicate regardless limitations of space or time.
But one problem is that many minority languages have not been standardised, so the algorithms don't even recognise the materials that have been written in a particular language and are available online - simply because people write it in different ways.
Then of course there are no interfaces (such as web browsers) available in many minority languages.

How do you preserve a language?

This has to do with family decisions in passing down a minority language to children. Parents play a crucial role in this decision, as it is connected to their own identity. Leaving the language choice solely to the child is seen as the worst possible decision since they cannot decide if they have never been exposed to the minority language.
Furthermore, merely hearing the language at home is insufficient; children also require language education in kindergartens and schools, ideally delivered in the minority language. Additionally, it is important for the minority language to have a practical purpose beyond family networks, such as being used in religious communities or within mainstream media in the dominant language.

Teochew/ Chaozhou
潮州話/潮汕話/潮語

Chinese is the most widely spoken language in the world. Chinese characters are more than 3,000 years old and Chinese is one of the most complex written languages in the world. However, the spoken language has one major thing in common with many other modern languages – the dialects. Mandarin is the language spoken in the region in and around Beijing, and most Asians speak this form of Chinese. There are nine other dialects such as Min, Yue or Wu in the Chinese language.

Southern Min languages, including Teochew, are spoken by approximately 50 million people worldwide, with most being native speakers. The exact number of Teochew speakers is difficult to determine, but it was estimated to be over 4 million in mainland China and around 2 million in Southeast Asia during the 1950s. Today, the number of Teochew speakers is likely between 5 and 10 million, similar to languages like Swedish and modern Greek.

While Southern Min languages are generally considered "vigorous" in terms of language vitality, with Teochew being actively used across generations in China, there is more concern regarding its status in diaspora communities. Factors contributing to this include language and educational policies in host countries, where the national language is prioritized, leading to the suppression of Teochew. Additionally, language evolution and change occur, with speakers incorporating foreign vocabulary and experiencing phonological shifts. Standardization of pronunciation and orthography is also lacking, even within the Teochew homeland.

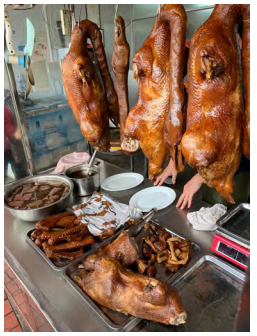
Today, there are large communities of Teochew people in Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, and in other Southeast Asian countries, as well as in the West from secondary migration.

Where do Ethnic Teochew people live today?











Teochew culture is closely tied to the language of the Teochew people. Teochew opera is probably the best known art form that uses the Teochew language. There is also a tradition of folk rhymes and songs that were orally transmitted, usually through women, some of which were recorded in song books.
The coastal environment is also a big part of Teochew life. Many Teochew people are devotees of the goddess Māzǔ (媽祖, T: Ma2(6)zou2), whom they believe protects people at sea. Fishing is an important economic activity, and seafood is important to Teochew cuisine, in condiments such as dried shrimp and in dishes like steamed fish. Teochews have also developed an elaborate ritual around drinking tea, known as gōngfū chá (功夫茶, T: gang1hu1 dê5).
Traditionally Teochew people do not consider a meal without seafood a proper meal, believing that freshness and quality of ingredients determining the taste and flavor. Poaching, braising, and steaming are common techniques, mild flavors and minimal use of food oil are common traits of the cuisine
A popular condiment is shacha sauce (沙茶酱), a paste made from soybean oil, garlic, chili, dried shrimp, and fish sauce. It is commonly used in beef and Chaozhou hotpot.
Another common dish “Lau” is a dark soya-based sauce cooked with pork, tofu and eggs stewed in a mixture of anise, rock sugar, five spices, licorice, and cinnamon. Derivative dishes using this basic soya base sauce are often cooked with Duck, chicken, and Goose as well. is a very popular dish among the Chaozhou people
Teochew oyster omelet is another popular dish found in night markets where Teochew people can be found. Though it varies by region, in general the omelet with oysters, starch, green onions and Cilantro that have been fried with pork lard, giving it a crispy texture and some sticky texture.



From Dumplings to Sriracha: The (In)Visibility of Teochew Food and Culture

By Christine Tran
May 19, 2021

If you're familiar with Sriracha, you know something with Teochew roots. The famous rooster brand chili sauce by Huy Fong Foods was developed by David Tran, a Vietnamese refugee of Teochew descent.

Before he left Vietnam in 1978 around the age of 33, Tran made his own hot sauce, a common practice for many households. During the war, he served as a major in the South Vietnamese army. But in 1978, he fled communist Vietnam with over 3,000 other refugees on a Taiwanese-owned freighter, which eventually inspire the name of his company, Huy Fong. Tran arrived in the United States in 1979, and while looking for a job, he continued to tinker with his hot sauce recipe and eventually began selling it. Today, the sauce is world famous. Although hot sauce isn't uniquely Teochew in origin, what is remarkably Teochew is Tran's journey – cultural survival through food is a recurring theme for our people.

Despite an estimated global population of 25 million, Teochew – sometimes spelled Chiu Chow or Chaozhou – people are invisible to much of the world. Across many generations, our people have migrated and adapted. Even my own identity as Vietnamese and Teochew stems from my grandparents' ability to adapt to Vietnamese culture. The Teochew language is one of over 2,000 Asian languages, yet this diversity is not well-known because there are more dominant cultural categories and labels like Cambodian, Chinese or Taiwanese. Although Teochew people may seem large in number, the price of becoming a globalized people is heavy and was rarely, if ever, by choice. From local to global conflicts, we have survived generations of displacement. But migration, distinctive cuisine and intergenerational storytelling have kept our culture alive for generations.

From Ancestral Home to Global Diaspora

For Teochew people, diaspora fully describes our generational and geographical scatter. The origin story of our people is a complex and challenging one. Our ancestral roots can be traced to the Yellow River Valley in the Central Plains of China. Due to civil wars during the Jin dynasty (265 to 420 A.D.), our people fled and eventually migrated through the mountains of Fujian toward a coastal region of Guangdong, China, called Teoswa (or Chaoshan in Mandarin). This region is considered the Teochew homeland. But despite having a place to call home, over time, more displacement and migration occurred as more local conflicts arose.

Teochew people have been pushed and pulled to the corners of the world. Today, it's estimated that half of all Teochew people live outside of China across countless countries with significant presences in Southeast Asia. As our people migrate, cultural exchange is key to surviving and thriving. "Teochew people, for some reason, speak every language," says Benjamin Tran, a policy advocate in Sacramento, California. "My parents speak Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese and a bit English on top of Teochew." Tran believes the Teochew's diasporic nature allows us to claim many identities, including Cambodian, Vietnamese and Malaysian, to name a few.

In the last half century, by way of South-



east Asia, refugees of Teochew descent arrived to North America, Europe and Australia as the direct consequence of the Vietnam War and the Khmer Rouge genocide. The latter was the systematic persecution and killing of Cambodians under the Pol Pot dictatorship where upward to 2 million people were killed from 1975 to 1979. Those who were ethnically Chinese Cambodians, like Teochew people, were specifically targeted.

These geopolitical movements have influenced how we see ourselves. "I'm Teochew Cambodian and was raised by my maternal grandmother," says Julie Lai, who speaks Teochew and Khmer (Cambodian). "Growing up, I felt like I had an identity crisis. Being Teochew, I felt invisible. Besides my cousins, I didn't know anyone else like me." In fact, while going to school in Central Alberta, Canada, Lai was placed into bilingual Mandarin and English classes. Yet, most of her peers spoke Cantonese. This is a common situation in educational systems not equipped to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of students.

Like many displaced peoples who experience psychological trauma, Teochew people struggle with understanding our identities. Sometimes the past is hard to talk about, or simply there are more dominant languages. Worldwide, Teochew people have very diverse identity experiences. Some are born knowing their Teochew culture, while others, like me, discover it over time. "I was raised Teochew and so were my cousins in America," says G.C., an engineer from New York City. "But my cousins in Germany identify as Vietnamese and don't know the Teochew language."

Despite identity challenges, wonderful new cultures have emerged, particularly through food as Teochew people migrate to other countries and learn new cuisines. Regardless of where we are in the world, Teochew people have a special greeting when we see each other. We say, "Gaginang," meaning, "We are one." Promptly followed by, "Have you eaten yet?" Our food, like our people, has adapted to the cultures around us with local ingredients and techniques. We have interpreted and blended cultures to create unique and popular dishes enjoyed by many worldwide.

Adaptive Teochew Cuisine

There is a reason why the first season of Netflix's "Flavorful Origins" (2019) is focused on Teochew cuisine. The Teoswa (Chaoshan) region is known for its gastronomy, which is characterized by flavorfully balanced and vibrant dishes, free of heavy seasoning. Teochew cooking methods include poaching, steaming, braising and stir-frying. Since Teoswa sits in a coastal region, seafood is a popular hero in a number of dishes. There are well-known Teochew dishes and food items that many people may not know originate from our people. A few dishes include gue diao (Teochew noodle soup), hiam jio iu (Teochew chili oil), hung gue (Teochew dumplings), ghu bhah in (Teochew beef meatballs) and gue (Teochew snacks).

Gue diao, a rice noodle dish, is prepared with a light, clear pork bone broth with minced meat and shrimp. This popular combination originated from Cambodian-Vietnamese Teochew people. In Vietnamese, it's spelled Hủ tiếu Nam Vang, named after the Vietnamese name for Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh (Nam Vang). It's also named for its Teochew long-grain rice flour noodles, called kway teow in Khmer and hủ tiếu in Vietnamese. Since the noodles are not made of glutinous rice flour, this difference gives the noodles a translucent look with a chewy, springy bite to them.

Hiam jio iu is Teochew chili oil, often labeled as such on glass jars, and is a staple pantry item available in most Asian markets under popular brands like Lee Kum Kee. This chili oil packs a punch with umami depth and layered heat. Many enjoy this chili oil on dumplings, vegetables, noodles or rice. In the jar, you'll notice dark pieces of chili and garlic sink and separate from the reddish-golden hues of the floating oil. This chili oil is believed to be inspired by food fusions between the Cantonese and Teochew peoples in the Guangdong province.

Hung gue, Teochew dumplings, are another Cantonese-Teochew hybrid. Known as fun guo in Cantonese, they are translucent tapioca-based dumplings with textured fillings of minced pork, shrimp, peanuts, chives, garlic and water chestnut. Amid bustling dim sum scenes, these dumplings can be found with their popular cuisine cousins, har gow and siu mai.

Ghu bhah in, Teochew beef meatballs, can be found in a number of Asian hot pot spots or in bowls of Vietnamese phở. They are made by pounding meat, which stretches the protein strands. Pieces of tendon are later added to provide a chewy texture. And after rolling out the meatballs and applying some heat, they are soup-ready. A similar process is used for Japanese surimi, a seafood product commonly marketed as imitation crab.

Although a broad term, gue are bite-sized snacking morsels and can be sweet or savory. Popularly known as kueh in Singapore and Malaysia, they usually consist of rice flour or tapioca starches. Due to the global migration of Teochew people and regional differences, gue has been adapted over time to include locally available ingredients. For instance, the migration of Teochew people from China to Southeast Asia has resulted in coconut and pandan as gue flavors.

Sharing Stories, Preserving Culture

With the cost of geographic displacement, the legacy of our culture survives through our food. The global migration of our people has split families and severed connections to our ancestral roots. As our culture is being passed down from generation to generation, Teochew cuisine is our generational wealth. If our food endures, then it should also be accompanied by written and visual narratives, as well as our spoken ancestral language. Inclusive narratives keep cultures alive.

That's why it's so important for Teochew people to tell our stories as much as for non-Teochew people to experience them. Diana Zheng didn't set out to be a Teochew cookbook writer or historian, but she has written one of the very few existing English-language Teochew cookbooks called "Jia! The Food of Swatow and the Teochew Diaspora." "There is not a singular Teochew experience because we're such a global people," Zheng tells me. "It gets confusing because there is no clean narrative of how we made our way across the globe." That's why Teochew authors and creatives like Zheng are so critical. As storytellers, they are documenting our existence through history and cuisine.

Knowledge of Teochew culture isn't just important to our people, but to all people because cultural preservation is interconnected. If you are reading this and you're not Teochew, you might be learning about an entire population for the first time. If you are Teochew, hopefully reading this resonates with you in a way that helps carry on our culture. Preserving culture is our collective responsibility, and it can be a delicious journey.

General Food Vocabs

eat
jiah8
食



drink
jiah8
食



hungry
dou2 kung3
肚餓



cook
jeu6
煮



i'm full
ua2 ba2 ou3
我飽了



breakfast
ja6 chang1/ja6 beung7
早餐/早飯



lunch
dong1 ngou6 chang1/yik4 dao2 beung7
中午餐/日晝飯



dinner
men7 chang1/men7 beung7
暝餐/暝飯





蠔烙

Oyster Pancake

Serves	**04**
baby oysters	190g
potato starch	76g
chicken egg	1
duck egg	1
spring onion	1 stalk
coriander	1 sprig

White pepper powder, fish sauce and chicken sauce to taste

recipe shared by Michelin Plate restaurant Pak Loh Chiu Chow in Hong Kong.

* https://guide.michelin.com/en/article/dining-in/recipe_chiu_chow_oyster_omelette



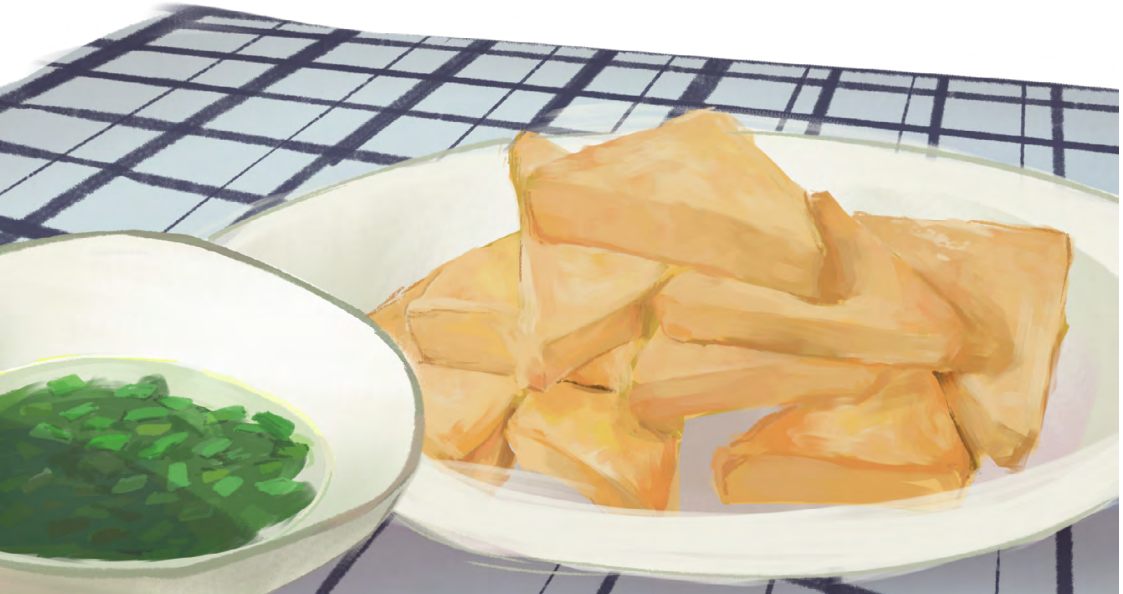
1. Rinse the baby oysters. Put them in a strainer and reserve. 2. Finely chop the spring onion and coriander. 3. Mix the baby oysters, fish sauce, chicken sauce, white pepper powder, spring onion and coriander evenly. 4. Add potato starch and combine. 5. Heat a greased pan and wait for a moment. Pour in the batter and shape it into a flat pancake. 6. When the pancake is 70% to 80% cooked, beat the eggs together and pour the mixture on the outer rim of the pancake. 7. Keep frying the pancake until it is fully cooked.

普寧豆腐

CHIU CHOW FRIED TOFU

Ingredients:
普寧豆腐 Puning tofu or Firm tofu
韭菜 3棵 Garlic chives
鹽1茶匙 Salt
凍滾水半碗 Water

Cut the tofu into several triangular pieces. Place the tofu pieces on a kitchen towel to absorb some of the moisture and set aside. In the meantime, cut the green part of garlic chives into small pieces and place the pieces in a small bowl. Then add salt and hot water to the bowl to make the dip. Fry the tofu over high heat for 2-3 minutes, only turning them over once they start to puff up. They are ready once all sides assume a golder brown color.





dessert

DEEP FRIED TARO TOSSED WITH SUGAR

反沙芋

Ingredients:

芋頭 1/2 (~600g) Taro

水 80g Water

砂糖 100g Sugar

蔥 少許 Green onion

Wash and peel the taro, then remove the smooth edges and cut it into strips.
Fry the taro over medium-low heat until slightly golden in color, crispy on the outside and soft on the inside. Set aside.
(Frying in scallion/shallot-infused oil is reccomended for better flavor and fragrance.)
Chop the spring onions into small pieces and set aside.
Mix sugar with water, and cook until thickened without caramelization.
Add the spring onions and taro, then immediately turn off the heat. Stir-fry continuously until the mixture turns white and sandy. It is now ready.



Thank you for reading!



