

## Who Cooked for Townsend Harris? Chinese and Western Cooking in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Japan

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This presentation argues that Chinese played a role in bringing Western cooking to mid- and late-nineteenth-century Japan. It begins with the story of the arrival in Japan of the first American diplomat Consul-general Townsend Harris. It points out that Harris as well as many of the Westerners who came to the Japanese treaty ports in the following two to three decades typically employed a Chinese cook among other household staff whom they had hired and brought over from such Western-controlled Chinese ports as Hong Kong and Shanghai. It notes that this practice was a continuation of an established employer-employee relation between Westerners and Chinese at the trade ports of East and Southeast Asia. The activity of Chinese cooks in Japan was thus an extension of the domestic service their compatriots provided to Western masters throughout the colonial empires of the West in the East.

Searching for a metaphor for the role played by the Chinese cooks in late-nineteenth-century Japan, this presentation likens their activity to the function of catalyst in chemical reactions. That is, even though Chinese cooks facilitated a radical change in Japanese diet and culinary practice, their contribution did not become a part of the eventual product of those social processes. To illustrate this point, the presentation explains that although Chinese helped bring Western cuisine to the foreign concessions of Bakumatsu and early-Meiji Japan, they left no appreciable traces in the Western cuisine of present-day Japan. Moreover, the activity of these Chinese cooks does not even register on the historical consciousness of contemporary Japanese people. Chinese cooks have been practically left out of all commonly circulating accounts of the early Japanese experience of Westernization.

In addition to recovering this elided episode in the conventional understanding of Japan's encounter with the modern West, this presentation proposes that Chinese cooks and other skilled Chinese workers in nineteenth-century Japan should be seen as "secondary agents of modernity" for their role in bringing into the country mundane but essential skills of Western-style everyday living. In other words, Westerners who came to Meiji Japan were able to maintain their Western lifestyle largely due to the skills (and affordability) of their Chinese servants. Moreover, there is some evidence suggesting that Chinese cooks also passed on their skills to Japanese people employed by the Westerners. This presentation thus proposes that Chinese cooks and artisans were also responsible for Japan's Westernization, although they admittedly played a secondary role to the Westerners.

Finally, this presentation observes that Chinese cooks and tradesmen who were active in nineteenth-century Japan were part of a much larger migration trend in which Chinese skilled in Western trades spread across the world in the wake of Western imperial and colonial expansion. Chinese were to be found in, for example, California and Washington in the United States, Vancouver and adjacent areas in Canada, and Australia from the east coast to the west. This presentation ends with the speculation that it was only in Japan where Chinese tradesmen functioned as "secondary agents of modernity" for their intermediary role between the Westerners and the native population.