



DIM-SUM OVER MILK TEA: TAIWAN'S 21ST CENTURY GASTRODIPLOMACY AND SOME LESSONS FOR THE PHILIPPINES

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Gastrodiplomacy is said to have emerged in Asia as an attempt by an Asian country to differentiate its unique flavor that is often mistaken to be that of a neighboring country. Even before the term gastrodiplomacy was coined, countries have practiced this approach to establish a national identity. Taiwan's Tourism Bureau officially started to emphasize food as a means of attraction in 2009. Although Taiwan's gastrodiplomacy is known as "dim-sum diplomacy," pearl milk tea is also listed under the "snack and beverages" category of Taiwan food for tourists.

Tea, on the other hand, is a pivotal part of Asian history, particularly in its economic aspect. For instance, Taiwan's tropical weather combined with elevated terrains allows the state to produce tea. It was in the early 1980s when the beverage was reinvented - cold and mixed with sweetened tapioca pudding. Thus, the first milk tea was served in Taiwan.

The present generation of Filipinos, through a survey conducted, acknowledged milk tea as a product of Taiwan, as Taiwanese milk tea stores also multiplied in the Philippines. Unlike dim-sum, which the Filipinos attribute as Chinese, Filipinos recognize milk tea as a product of Taiwan.

With this, it is recommended that Taiwan highlights milk tea in its gastrodiplomacy campaign to contribute to the recognition and preservation of "Taiwan cuisine-consciousness." The Philippines can also learn from this diplomatic strategy in hopes of joining its neighboring countries in the great practice of gastrodiplomacy.

Keywords: Taiwan, gastrodiplomacy, bubble tea, milk tea, Philippines

Dates:

Received: July 25, 2020

Accepted: February 26, 2021

Published(Online): March 31, 2021

How to cite this article:

Pascua, Fame, "DIM-SUM Over Milk Tea: Taiwan's 21st Century Gastrodiplomacy and Some Lessons for the Philippines," *Scientia* Vol 10 no. 1. (2021), p. 88-96.

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INTRODUCTION

Gastrodiplomacy, as another branch of Public Diplomacy, is referred to as “Diplomacy through Food.”¹ For others, gastrodiplomacy serves as “the gravy to diplomacy’s rice.”² The term was first used in the *Economist* article on Thailand’s public diplomacy campaign³ dubbed as “Global Thai” which was launched in 2002. The objective was both to increase the number of Thai restaurants around the world and to make dishes like pad thai and pad see eiu internationally recognizable.⁴ From 5,500 in 2002, Thai restaurants grew to 10,000 in 2013, so many agreed that the initiative was successful.⁵

Described as an effective strategy for increasing [public] awareness, attracting the foreign audience, and enhancing the relationship between countries,⁶ since then, the ultimate goal for gastro-diplomats is to emulate the success of Thailand’s “Global Thai” campaign--making pad thai and tom yum just as familiar shorthand for Thailand as the hamburger is for America.⁷ According to Isabelle Niu, Thailand is not a superpower; but when it comes to food, it is one of the most influential countries in the world.⁸

In Taiwan, starting from the 2009 Vanguard Project for Excellence, the Tourism Bureau emphasized food as means for attraction-- a “Specialty of Taiwan.” “Dim-sum” diplomacy was coined as an attempt to create a new brand for Taiwan, for gastrodiplomacy as well as for nation-building.⁹ Years later, Taiwan was featured in the article “Eight Great Gastrodiplomacy Nations” together with Thailand.

“Dim-sum Diplomacy,” a name given to Taiwan gastrodiplomacy, however, is itself confusing;¹⁰ not sure that Taiwan’s most distinctive offer is dim-sum-- which is a native Chinese form of cuisine.¹¹ In the “16 Most Popular Chinese Dishes,” dim-sum is even first on the list. The following explained the Chinese philosophies governing the existence of dim-sum: Chinese food and the way it is prepared is influenced by two major philosophies--Confucianism and Taoism. One of the standards set by Confucius was that food must be cut into bite-sized pieces before being served. Those who follow Taoism focus more on food that promote health and longevity and those that have healing powers.¹² Meanwhile, in the Philippines, it can be said that Filipinos are certain, with no evidence of confusion, that dim-sum is Chinese. According to A. de Leon, as cited in the study of Brandon Lantrip, dim-sum has become staples within Filipino cuisine although they are inherently Chinese.¹³ The researcher now argues that the current Taiwanese gastrodiplomacy strategy, focused on dim-sum diplomacy, is not effective in the case of the Philippines.

¹ Nurul Amalia Immawati, “The Thailand’s Gastrodiplomacy as a Strategy to Develop National Branding (2002-2015),” (Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Undergraduate Thesis, 2017), 13.

² Noor Nirwandy and Ahmad Azran Awang, “Conceptualizing Public Diplomacy Social Convention Culinary: Engaging Gastro Diplomacy Warfare for Economic Branding,” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 130 (2014): 327.

³ Juyan Zhang, “The Foods of the Worlds: Mapping and Comparing Contemporary Gastrodiplomacy Campaigns,” *International Journal of Communication*, 9 (2015): 2.

⁴ “Eight Great Gastrodiplomacy Nations,” 2015. Available in <https://www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org/story/eight-great-gastrodiplomacy-nations> (Accessed 07 November 2019).

⁵ Camille Defrancq, “Taiwan’s Gastrodiplomacy: Strategies of Culinary Nation-Branding and Outreach,” (National Chengchi University, Master’s Thesis, June 2018), 2.

⁶ Defrancq, “Taiwan’s Gastrodiplomacy,” 2; Katarzyna Cwiertka, “Serving the Nation: The Myth of Washoku,” In *Consuming Life of Post-Bubble Japan*, eds. Katarzyna Cwiertka and Ewa Machotka (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 102; Zhang, “The Foods of the Worlds,” 2.

⁷ “Taiwan launches gastro-diplomacy drive,” Available in <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/aug/08/taiwan-launches-gastro-diplomacy-drive> (Accessed 07 November 2019).

⁸ Isabelle Niu, “From government to refugees, food is now diplomacy,” 28 December 2018. Available in <https://qz.com/1496148/from-governments-to-refugees-food-is-now-diplomacy/> (Accessed 07 November 2019).

⁹ Defrancq, “Taiwan’s Gastrodiplomacy,” 41-42.

¹⁰ Defrancq, “Taiwan’s Gastrodiplomacy,” 41-42.

¹¹ “Tasty Taiwan Ties,” 10 August 2010. Available in <https://thediplotat.com/2010/08/tasty-taiwan-ties/> (Accessed 20 February 2021).

¹² “16 Most Popular Chinese Dishes” 24 November 2020. Available in <https://food.ndtv.com/lists/10-most-popular-chinese-dishes-740725> (Accessed 20 February 2021).

¹³ Brandon Chase Lantrip, “The Chinese Cultural Influence on Filipino Cuisine,” (University of San Francisco, Master Thesis, 2017), 16.





Also, as early as the launching of Taiwan's "dim-sum diplomacy" in 2010, Taiwan-based Chinese site editor of *The Diplomat*, Leonard Chien, was asked whether he'd personally add anything to the roster of exclusively Taiwanese foods that ought to be used as culinary ambassadors to the Asian island and he suggested just one-- bubble tea or pearl milk tea (the refreshing drink which comes in dozens of flavor choices with a giant straw for sucking up the tapioca balls inside).¹⁴ Filipinos might not have thought of "pearl milk tea" as equivalent to "Taiwan" in 2010 but now the author may argue that it would be more effective if Taiwan would utilize milk tea for its gastrodiploamacy.

TAIWAN'S GASTRODIPLOMACY

The term 'Taiwanese cuisine' was first coined in 1898 by local newspapers. The recognition of Taiwanese food [cuisine], however, was only re-established in the 1990s.¹⁵ In 2010, under the banner "All in Good Taste: Savor the Flavors of Taiwan," Taiwan hosted international food festivals and competitions and sent its chefs to culinary schools and events overseas. The government invested funds in a Taiwanese food foundation that seeks to both develop and promote Taiwanese restaurants [in overseas shopping malls, department stores, and airports], coffee shops, and ingredients to an international clientele.¹⁶ Initial gastrodiploamacy efforts under the Ma Ying-jeou Administration were funded with NTD \$ 1.1 Billion (\$35.8 M) from 2010-2013 to "internationalize local" and to "localize international" Taiwanese food. It was sponsored by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, but the Taiwan Tourism Bureau, among others, also

participated in the execution of the campaign.¹⁷ Gastrodiploamacy is used [by Taiwan] as a tool to distinguish itself from mainland China. Since the Republic of China [Taiwan] lacks diplomatic recognition because of political differences with the People's Republic of China, it "relies heavily on public diplomacy to bypass its diplomatic isolation and continue to spread its value and culture abroad."¹⁸

Meanwhile, most people associate Chinese food with the heavy, sauce-laden fare that is billed as a typical Middle Kingdom cuisine. For those not of the foodie bent, the notion of Taiwanese food draws a blank that created a tremendous opportunity for the country to conduct gastrodiploamacy to brand its own cuisine as a healthy, light alternative to the heavy image associated with Western versions of Chinese food.¹⁹ Therefore, in the same year, 2010, Taiwan thought of dim-sum.

The word dim-sum, however, is Cantonese [Chinese] and refers to small bite-sized dishes that are served in bamboo steamer baskets or on small plates. The Chinese meaning of dim-sum is commonly translated to "touch the heart."²⁰ That was a good attempt for Taiwan to use the term dim-sum in a way that, gastrodiploamacy, as a term coined by Paul Rockower in 2011, is a "method of reaching *hearts* and minds through people's stomachs"²¹ But Noor Nirwandy and Ahmad Azran Awang claim that food is an insignia of a nation's identity as much as its anthem or flag.²² This means that gastro-diplomats should also have taken into consideration Taiwan's national identity at the time they chose dim-sum as

¹⁴ "Tasty Taiwan Ties."

¹⁵ Defrancq, "Taiwan's Gastrodiploamacy," 38.

¹⁶ "Eight Great Gastrodiploamacy Nations"; Anna Lipscomb, "Culinary Relations: Gastrodiploamacy in Thailand, South Korea, and Taiwan," March 2019. Available in <http://yris.yira.org/essays/3080> (Accessed 04 December 2019).

¹⁷ Lipscomb, "Culinary Relations."

¹⁸ Lipscomb, "Culinary Relations."

¹⁹ "Taiwanese Gastrodiploamacy 2.0," 03 December 2010, Available in <https://taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=2&post=1551> (Accessed 07 November 2019); Lipscomb, "Culinary Relations."

²⁰ Sara Jaaksola, "A Brief History of Dim Sum in China," 01 February 2017. Available in <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/china/articles/a-brief-history-of-dim-sum-in-china/> (Accessed 29 November 2019).

²¹ Nirwandy and Awang, "Conceptualizing Public Diplomacy," 328.

²² Nirwandy and Awang, "Conceptualizing Public Diplomacy," 327.





the flagship among other foodstuff they offer to the public, particularly to the foreigners. As gastrodiplomacy is a public diplomacy strategy, more specifically a cultural diplomacy attempt to communicate culinary culture to foreign publics,²³ gastro-diplomats should ensure the uniqueness of the chosen foodstuff or the term used to identify Taiwan's gastrodiplomacy. After all, gastrodiplomacy is a strategy that has been employed by Asian countries to differentiate their unique flavor that is often mistaken to be that of other neighboring countries.²⁴

From the point of view of the Chinese, Taiwanese gastrodiplomacy efforts struggle in defining 'Taiwanese cuisine.' According to May Chang, a chief executive at the Foundation of Chinese Dietary Culture, "it is hard to find one type of food to represent Taiwan given that a strong sense of a 'Taiwanese' identity started to emerge since 2000, and given that Taiwan's history is closely tied to mainland China and Japan. The socio-political uncertainty can confuse as Taiwanese cuisine seeks to distinguish itself from Chinese cuisine, yet may actually share many similarities with it."²⁵ In a master's thesis in 2018, it was also concluded that its [Taiwan's] strategy failed to identify one particular dish or ingredient that will create a brand for Taiwanese food. This lack of specific identification is damaging to Taiwan and may impact public awareness.²⁶

MILK TEA IN THE PHILIPPINES

As for Taiwan's neighbor, the Philippines, Filipinos are one of the biggest food lovers in the world. They love to eat everywhere, anywhere, and anything. They eat breakfast, with *merienda* at 10 in the morning, then lunch and again

merienda at 3 in the afternoon, then dinner with midnight snacks in the evening...that's how Filipinos love to eat.²⁷ "All must eat to survive, and in this way, food occupies an unrivaled centrality in [people's] life"²⁸ -- this can be said to be very true for the Filipinos.

Furthermore, in Filipino cuisine, sugar is everywhere --not just in halo-halo and leche flan or snacks like turon [banana] and suman [rice cake] -- but also in savory dishes like adobo, tocino, even in the local version of spaghetti. Beverages--from coffee and tea to juices and shakes--rarely go without sugar, and this ubiquity has led people to conclude that Filipinos have an exceptionally sweet tooth.²⁹

Not long before the launch of the "Specialty of Taiwan," Filipinos already enjoyed a local brand of milk tea "Serenitea," which opened its first branch in San Juan, Metro Manila in 2008. The owner Peter Chen opened the shop after having spent time in Taiwan trying bubble tea and thought that Filipinos would love the drink too³⁰ given its sweet taste. But for Kwanyin Lui's³¹ observation, it was only in 2010 when bubble tea shops run by locals emerged in cities where there are no prominent Taiwanese communities like Mumbai, Berlin, Dubai, and Manila. True enough, soon after Serenitea, Taiwanese bubble tea stores opened in the Philippines: Happy Lemon in 2010, Gong Cha, and ChaTime in 2011.³² In early 2019, ChaTime has more than

²³ Defrancq, "Taiwan's Gastrodiplomacy," 14.

²⁴ Defrancq, "Taiwan's Gastrodiplomacy," 25.

²⁵ Lipscomb, "Culinary Relations."

²⁶ Defrancq, "Taiwan's Gastrodiplomacy," 42-43.

²⁷ "Why do Filipino called food lovers," Available in <https://lookupgrade.com/en/blog/english-why-do-filipino-called-food-lover/> (Accessed 03 December 2019).

²⁸ Nirwandy and Awang, "Conceptualizing Public Diplomacy," 331.

²⁹ Gideon Lasco, "Why Filipinos have a sweet tooth," 21 December 2017. Available in <https://opinion.inquirer.net/109639/filipinos-sweet-tooth> (Accessed 03 December 2019).

³⁰ Jasper Castro, "Tracking The Local Milk Tea Trend: How Did This Obsession Start?" 2019. Available in <https://www.yummy.ph/news-trends/milk-tea-trend-history-philippines-a00261-20190307-lfrm2> (Accessed 25 November 2019).

³¹ Kwanyin Lui, "Bubble tea takes Taiwan to the world," 27 May 2011. Available in <https://taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=6,23,45,6,6&post=1028> (Accessed 04 December 2019).

³² Castro, Tracking The Local Milk Tea Trend."



40 stores in Metro Manila only, and more in other parts of Southeast Asia.³³

But before it reached the Philippines, cold tea was first served in Taichung, Taiwan in the 1980s. Liu Han Chieh, founder of Chun Shui Tang teahouse thought of serving cold Chinese tea after visiting Japan where he saw coffee served cold. And not long after it became popular, in 1988, product development manager Lin Hsiu Hui brought a Taiwanese dessert *fen yuan* (sweetened tapioca pudding) to a meeting and poured the tapioca balls into her Assam iced tea just for fun. According to Lin, “everyone in the meeting loved the drink and it quickly outsold all of our other iced teas within a couple of months. Even after 20 years in the menu, bubble tea makes up 80-90% of our sales and Taiwanese are proud of this home-grown drink.”³⁴

From that incidental yet pivotal moment grew the bubble tea’s reputation as an original Taiwanese drink. In the Philippines, the drink has quenched the thirst and satisfied the Filipino’s sweet tooth since 2010. In 2013, a local urban lifestyle website, SPOT.ph, published “Top 10 Milk Tea Places in Manila” as the milk tea trend reached its peak. Four out of the 10 milk tea brands in the list are Taiwanese, with Gong Cha (#1), ChaTime (#4), and Happy Lemon (#8) in it.³⁵ Having “milk tea trouble” in the same year 2013, there was this milk tea revival in 2017 as new milk tea products and new milk tea shops straight from Taiwan arrived (eg. Yi Fang). In 2018, milk tea shops are rising at an unprecedented rate.³⁶

³³ Lipscomb, “Culinary Relations.”

³⁴ Derrick Chang, “Bubble Tea: how did it start?” 12 July 2017. Available in <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/bubble-tea-inventor/index.html> (Accessed 04 December 2019).

³⁵ Another Taiwanese brand: Dakasi at #2. Tiny Ang, “Top 10 Milk Teas Places in Manila (The Ultimate List!)”, 2013. Available in https://www.spot.ph/eatdrink/53213/top-10-milk-teas-the-ultimate-list?_ga=2.212317969409674221.1575507700-1845411473.1575507700 (Accessed 05 December 2019).

³⁶ Castro, “Tracking the Local Milk Tea Trend.”

To know if Filipino consumers associate milk tea with Taiwan, the researcher surveyed 100 Filipinos in Metro Manila, ranging from those born in Generation X (ages 39-54), Millennials (23-38), and Generation Z (ages 7-22).³⁷ According to the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) The World Factbook, as of 2018, 37.11% of the Philippines’ population is comprised of Millennials and Generation X (25-54 years old). They have the biggest number in terms of population, while ages 0-14 come second, at 33%, followed by ages 15-24 at 19.17%.³⁸ These are the same age group where 62% (Millennials) and 34% (Generation Z) of the respondents came from.

The researcher asked Filipinos which country they associate milk tea with. Eighty-three percent (83%) of the respondents answered Taiwan. Interestingly, small percentages show (see Figure 1) that milk tea is also being associated with East Asian countries surrounding Taiwan.

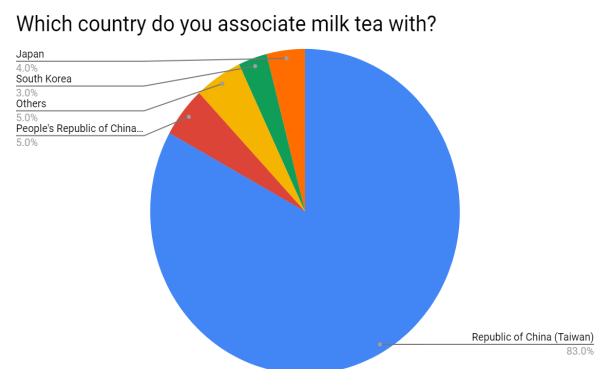


Figure 1: Country where milk tea is associated with

³⁷ “Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins,” 17 January 2019. Available in https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/ft_19-01-17_generations_2019/ (Accessed 25 November 2019).

³⁸ “The World Factbook: Philippines,” 20 November 2019. Available in <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rp.html#field-anchor-people-and-society-age-structure> (Accessed 05 December 2019).



In connection with Taiwan's gastrodiploacy, the "dim-sum diplomacy," the researcher also requested the respondents to match the country with the food or beverage they associate most with it (see Figure 2). Most (92%) respondents associated milk tea with Taiwan, while only 7% said dim-sum reminds them of Taiwan.³⁹ For most of the respondents (98%) dim-sum is associated with China.⁴⁰ For the Filipinos, there is no uncertainty or confusion between Taiwan and China⁴¹ when it comes to milk tea and dim-sum.

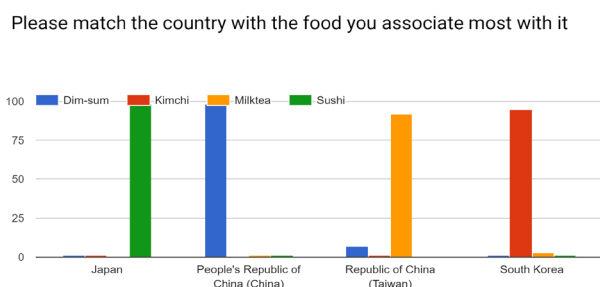


Figure 2: Country where dim-sum is associated with

The researcher also asked the respondents on their major consideration for liking milk tea. Most (77%) of them answered "appealing to my taste bud," some (11%) answered "budget-friendly," (10%) "proximate (to house/ workplace)," (1%) "sugar level," and (1%) "others." How the respondents like the milk tea, meanwhile, was limitedly described on how frequently they drink the milk tea. Less than half (44%) of the respondents drink milk tea once to twice a week.⁴² With these results, it can be said that a sweet drink like milk tea suits the palate of the Filipino's sweet tooth.

³⁹ 1% said kimchi reminds them of Taiwan.

⁴⁰ 1% sushi reminds them of China; 1% milk tea reminds them of China.

⁴¹ Lipscomb, "Culinary Relations."

⁴² Twenty-seven (27%) of the respondents drink milk tea once a week, 17% twice a week; 14% once a month, 9% twice a month, 6% once or twice a month; 7% occasionally, 20% others.

With the aforementioned results, it is now interesting to know how many prefer Taiwanese milk tea brands. In the SPOT.ph's Top Milk Tea places in Manila, the #1 was Gong Cha in 2013. They release another list in 2018 and this time the #1 was already CoCo (see Table 1 for the complete list). Significant changes can be observed after five years. Taiwan milk tea brands Gong Cha, Dakasi, ChaTime, and Happy Lemon managed to remain in the top 10 but all of them ranked down except for Happy Lemon which remained in the 8th spot. Half of those in the 2013 list can no longer be found in 2018's top 10. New milk tea brands emerged and most of them are still Taiwan's, namely: CoCo, Yi Fang, and TenRen.

Out of curiosity, the researcher wondered if there was also a change between 2018 and 2019. Respondents were asked "what milk tea brand do you like the most?" among the milk tea brands present in the 2018 list. But the respondents were also given "other" options so they write down the brand they like the most. The survey obtained interesting results. Although CoCo and Dakasi remained in the 1st and 4th spots respectively, Gong Cha, Happy Lemon, and ChaTime bounced back and landed in the 2nd, 3rd, and 8th spots respectively. This resulted in the domination of these Taiwanese milk tea brands in the first four spots.

	2013 ⁴³	2018 ⁴⁴	2019*
1	Gong Cha	CoCo	CoCo, 26% <input type="checkbox"/>
2	Dakasi	Macao Imperial Tea	Gong Cha, 15% <input type="checkbox"/>
3	Da.u.de	Gong Cha <input type="checkbox"/>	Happy Lemon, 10% <input type="checkbox"/>
4	ChaTime	Dakasi <input type="checkbox"/>	Dakasi, 7% <input type="checkbox"/>
4			Macao Imperial Tea, 7% <input type="checkbox"/>
5	Tokyo Bubble Tea	Serenitea <input type="checkbox"/>	Serenitea, 6% <input type="checkbox"/>
6	Saint's Alp Teahouse	Yi Fang Tea	Tiger Sugar, 5%

⁴³ Ang, "Top 10 Milk Teas."

⁴⁴ Top 10 Milk-Tea Places in Manila (2018 Edition), 24 July 2018, Available in <https://www.spot.ph/catdrink/the-latest-eat-drink/74521/best-milk-tea-manila-2018-a00198-20180724-lfrm2> (Accessed 05 December 2019).



7	Cobo Milktea Shop	TenRen's Tea	Infinitea, 4%
8	Happy Lemon	Happy Lemon <input type="checkbox"/>	ChaTime, 2% ↑
9	Serenitea	D'Cream	--
10	Moonleaf	ChaTime ↓	--
LEGEND:	TAIWAN BRANDS ⁴⁶	↑ - ranked up ↓ - ranked down <input type="checkbox"/> - retained	*based on researcher's survey

Table 1: Comparison of 2013, 2018, and 2019 (top) favorite milk tea brands among Filipinos

And with the write-ups about milk tea in the Philippines, the researcher tried to validate the information by asking the respondents as to what year they start drinking milk tea. In 2010, when milk tea shops were still quite uncommon, only 6% of the respondents drank milk tea. In 2013, when the trend peaked in the Philippines, 16% of the respondents started drinking milk tea; yet the largest number, 18% of the respondents, started drinking milk tea in 2017 when milk tea shops are almost as many as convenience stores. Increasing trends in milk tea consumption, at least on the part of the respondents, may be seen in the years 2011-2013 as well as in years 2015-2017.⁴⁶ While it is yet to be discovered as to what other important events could validate and explain these increasing trends, it is still important to notice that these happened between 2010 & 2013 and 2013 & 2017--years which are historically significant for the milk tea in the Philippines.

⁴⁵ Deneca Ordinanza, "LIST: The Best Milk Teas in the Metro and Where to Get Them," 04 January 2019. Available in <https://primer.com.ph/blog/2019/01/04/list-the-best-milk-teas-in-the-metro-and-where-to-get-them/>. Accessed 05 December 2019; Castro, "Tracking the Local Milk Tea Trend."

⁴⁶ Six percent (6%) of the respondents started drinking milk tea in 2010, 2% in 2011, 6% in 2012, 16% in 2013, 10% in 2014, 6% in 2015, 11% in 2016, 18% in 2017, 14% in 2018, and 11% in 2019.

CONCLUSION

Nirwandy and Awang claim that food is an insignia of a nation's identity.⁴⁷ The survey results echo their claim concerning milk tea being associated with Taiwan. Food can help introduce or promote the current gastrodiploamacy strategy of Taiwan but it does not effectively harness this unique identity in the Philippines. Taiwan's dim-sum diplomacy may not help Taiwan become distinguished from China (like what Taiwan is trying to achieve mainly), as dim-sum is more associated with China by its neighbor, the Philippines.

The researcher posits that Taiwan's dim-sum diplomacy should be transformed into "milk tea diplomacy" for the Philippines. Milk tea could be that particular food item of Taiwan that may create a brand for Taiwanese food. Unlike dim-sum which is tightly linked to mainland China, milk tea can be said to be uniquely Taiwanese, as it was invented by a Taiwanese tea store (Chun Shui Tang) owner and their product development manager.⁴⁸ Though milk tea can also be found in other countries, their nation's identity is not tied with the beverage unlike in the case of Taiwan. Although milk tea is not that much a "healthy-light alternative to the saucy-heavy image associated with Western versions of Chinese food,"⁴⁹ it may still fare better at introducing and promoting Taiwan than dim-sum. Milk tea diplomacy, as a form of gastrodiploamacy, will also reach the "hearts and minds through people's stomach," as phrased by Rockower.⁵⁰ For the foodie, sweet tooth Filipinos who are already addicted to milk tea,⁵¹ milk tea diplomacy would reach their hearts and minds, and invite them to know and explore its origin country. This is

⁴⁷ "Conceptualizing Public Diplomacy," 327.

⁴⁸ Lipscomb, "Culinary Relations."

⁴⁹ "Taiwanese Gastrodiploamacy 2.0"; Lipscomb, "Culinary Relations."

⁵⁰ Nirwandy and Awang, "Conceptualizing Public Diplomacy," 328.

⁵¹ Castro, "Tracking the Local Milk Tea Trend."



what Taiwan can learn from the food-loving neighbor, the Philippines. Taiwan's strategies are already commendable, but this time, they may focus on a single food item that is the insignia of their nation for the recognition and preservation of Taiwan's cuisine-consciousness.

On the other hand, the food-loving country Philippines can also learn from Taiwan's diplomatic strategy, as it is still trying to find its way into the great practice of gastrodiplomacy. It should be kept in mind that while several Chinese food items have been incorporated into Filipino cuisine, these food items still have retained their Chinese identity instead of being indigenized. Even in one of the Philippines' most iconic dishes, adobo, it is claimed in the study of Brandon Lantrip that not only were Chinese ingredients borrowed by Filipinos to create adobo throughout the Philippines but the entire method of preparation as well. This is also beside the idea that the word "adobo" itself may be of Spanish origin.⁵² Therefore, if the Philippines would practice gastrodiplomacy, there should be a thorough study to be conducted on a specific cuisine or food item that would represent the country and its identity.

Since many Filipinos have discovered/rediscovered their passion for cooking during the pandemic, just like what Taiwan did, the Philippine government may also try to invest in sending Filipino cooks to culinary schools and events overseas after the lockdown. This strategy may complement the archival research in discovering the answer on what Filipino cuisine is and what food may represent it. The sincere effort comes with significant budget allocation but cooperation between government departments (e.g. Department of Tourism, National Commission for Culture and the

Arts, National Historical Commission of the Philippines) are also deemed necessary to achieve the best results.

⁵² Lantrip, "The Chinese Cultural Influence on Filipino Cuisine," 76-77.





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