

And this week...

This week I have been trying to resolve the issue of culinary cultural appropriation for myself. I am of two minds on this. While I intellectually understand the argument, I cannot get on board with it from a cook's point of view.

I was brought up in Asia, mostly in Japan and a bit in Hong Kong. I went through the French school system until college and subsequently lived in Paris for a decade, lived three times in New York, nearly two years in London, enough places in Southern California to be firmly convinced that it was not for me, not to mention a myriad of other locations – the list is exceedingly long and I can make my point without enumerating them all. I have been lucky enough to travel extensively as well, all around the world. As could be expected, many of my memories of places – and people – revolve around food and, in the same manner that others bring home trinkets, collectables and postcards to remember their trips, I bring home spices, condiments and cooking utensils.

I have a pretty good palate and cooking skills; if I crave a dish that I have eaten on holiday, I will try to recreate it at home with the ingredients that I have brought back from that dish's origin country. Despite not being French, if I want to eat cassoulet, I will make my former mother-in-law's recipe rather than going to a French restaurant and getting charged for one that will not be as good as the one that I will make. Twenty five years in the Far East have made me exceedingly fond of many Asian cuisines, dishes from which I cook quite often (and adapt to my needs and the contents of my fridge.) Since I am Caucasian, there might be those reading this who might find the idea that I feel that I have a connection to different culinary cultures offensive. Does my actual knowledge of French, Japanese and Chinese cuisines and techniques not give me the right to cook those cuisines, perhaps more so than my taking liberties with the classic Boston baked bean recipe because, though I am Yankee born, I am not New England bred?

If I were to, say, take French fries (actually a Belgian dish, but that's another essay), douse them in soy sauce and call them American potstickers, I could understand a certain degree of annoyance at the minimization of great Chinese culinary traditions. If I take a Chinese classic, understand the history and techniques that are involved in the dish, am aware of the regional subtleties that make it different from a similar dish and cook it appropriately and respectfully (while adding my own touches as any self-respecting cook should), does that not fall under the banner of "imitation is the most sincere form of flattery" and does that make it OK?

All week long I have craved dim sum, especially spring rolls, as well as Cantonese dishes, and Szechuan spiciness, which then translated to a longing for Korean food, and have speculated that my cravings indicated that my subconscious formed from a childhood in Asia knew that Lunar New Year celebrations were right around the corner. Since there are no restaurants of note on the Cape to assuage those cravings, and if I want to eat that food I need to either get on the bus to Boston or get cracking in the kitchen, does necessity get me a get out of jail free card to cook certain dishes from cultures not technically my own despite my personal sense of ownership of them?

When asked to describe my particular brand of cooking I refer to it as borderless cuisine, which I definitely see as one that showcases what I have learned from my immersive experiences of other cultures. I find it significant that we Americans often refer to the United States as a melting pot. Should not the fact that we take various cultures and melt them down into the stronger alloy of joint citizenship not extend to the pots in our kitchens? I can't help but feel that we should all be more open to incorporating dishes and traditions from other cuisines into our repertoires. If cooking is love, perhaps an openness to taste and recreate dishes from other cultures should be seen as a celebration of our fellow man (something strangely lacking in our country today) rather than as a sin of

cultural appropriation. Maybe we can all start to come back together through food.

Whatever your feelings on the matter, the beginning of this week was predominantly Asia week here on the Cape.

[Bibimbap Bowl](#)

[Sweet and Sour Meatballs](#)

[Black Bean Chicken and Vegetable Stir Fry](#)

[Baked Beans](#)

[Boston Brown Bread](#)

[Salt Crust Roasted Turnip](#)