

Chef David Chang Says Americans Are Racist Toward Chinese Food



By Alex Berezow, PhD — March 12, 2018



Credit: Storyblocks [1]

Everything is about racism these days. From politics to sports, somebody, somewhere, wants you to feel bad because something might be racist.

This uniquely American tendency to assign racism where none exists has struck again in yet another bizarre way: Celebrity chef David Chang says that Americans are racist toward Chinese food.

Before we (dumpster) dive into this peculiar accusation, let's first pause to ask whether it might even remotely be true. Consider McDonald's and Starbucks. Nothing is more American than cheap fast food and fancy, overpriced coffee. There are just over [14,000 McDonald's restaurants](#) [2] and just under [14,000 Starbucks locations](#) [3] in the U.S.

How many Chinese restaurants are there? 1,000? 5,000? 10,000? [Try 41,000](#) [4]. It's absurd on its face to make the case that Americans are racist toward Chinese food when the number of Chinese restaurants triples those of American cultural icons such as McDonald's and Starbucks¹.

Yet, Mr. Chang makes precisely that case on *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*². His evidence of "hidden racism" against Chinese food -- or any other food that is "different" -- consists of two claims: (1) Chinese food has never been seen "as cool as other European cuisines"; and (2) the scare over MSG.

Racist Americans Think Chinese Food Is Uncool Because of MSG

Neither of these claims makes any sense. The "coolness" or lack thereof in regard to Chinese food is Mr. Chang's personal opinion, which is unsupported by facts. Up and down the West Coast,

Asian restaurants are extremely popular. In Seattle, [Thai and Chinese food are more popular than pizza and second only to Mexican food](#) [5].

Besides, Americans openly mock British food. Is that because of racism?

The subjectivity of "coolness" is further demonstrated by the following anecdote: Few in America consider McDonald's to be particularly cool. But in Poland, it's very cool to eat at McDonald's. Yes, really. In the small city where my wife grew up, the cool kids hung out at McDonald's after school. Why? Because it was new and different and American. And in Poland, Americans are cool.

Mr. Chang's point about MSG is similarly baseless. Americans have a long history of demonizing their food. At one time, we were (incorrectly) afraid of MSG. At other times, we were afraid of preservatives like BHT and BHA. Another time, we were afraid of fat and cholesterol. Today, we are afraid of GMOs, pesticides, gluten, and BPA. For decades, fearmongers have made money by whipping up phobias over "chemicals." It was just a matter of time before Chinese food would be subjected to America's never-ending series of food paranoias.

All of Our Food Is Racist

At another point in the interview, Mr. Chang leaves us with this thought provoking question: "If we can't talk about fried chicken, how are we supposed to talk about other things that are problematic?"

KFC, you're on notice.

Notes

(1) Mr. Chang is correct that there is a historical link between racism (particularly through the [Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882](#) [6]) and the development of Chinese restaurants. However, the idea that racism plays a role today in how Americans perceive Chinese food is outlandish.

(2) Here is a link to a website that hosts a [video clip](#) [7] of the interview. Skip to the 1:55 mark.

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Links

[1] <https://www.storyblocks.com/stock-image/chinese-spring-rolls-with-sweet-chili-sauce-rmcxdpjdqozj6gtt956>

[2] <https://www.statista.com/statistics/256040/mcdonalds-restaurants-in-north-america/>

[3] <https://www.statista.com/statistics/218366/number-of-international-and-us-starbucks-stores/>

[4] <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/america-best-chinese-restaurants/index.html>

[5] <http://blogs.seattletimes.com/fyi-guy/2014/11/27/thai-food-more-popular-than-pizza-in-seattle/>

[6] <https://www.snopes.com/news/2017/12/25/chinese-restaurants-in-america/>

[7] <http://www.foodandwine.com/news/david-chang-ugly-delicious-daily-show>