

ASIAN FOOD IN HAWAII: THE FILIPINOS AND THEIR FOOD IN THE BIG ISLAND

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Abstract

Hawaii is the most Asian state in the United States of America. The majority of its Asian population is composed of the Filipinos and the Japanese due to their migration history. Since tourism is the number one industry in Hawaii and that the majority of the tourists are from Asia, Asian food is part of the gastronomical space in the archipelago. This paper presents a study on the Asian cuisine and the Filipino food in the Big Island of Hawaii particularly in the city of Hilo. As an interdisciplinary study, this paper analyses the Asian food by using the approaches from the humanities and the social sciences. It aims to provide an analysis on Asian cuisine in Hawaii with a focus on Filipino food and the Filipinos, particularly the young Filipino Americans who are heritage learners. This study makes use of ethnography, experiential approach, and heritage studies to find out the state of Filipino food, and the cultural identity of the young Filipino Americans in Hawaii. Findings show that the majority of the Asian cuisine in Hawaii is represented by the Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, Koreans, and Indians. Filipino food is mostly confined to the home, and it functions as a marker of loyalty, allegiance, and solidarity for the young Filipino Americans, thereby establishing of their Filipino cultural identity.

Keywords: Filipino cuisine, heritage learners, Filipinos in Hawaii, migration, Asian food

Introduction

For people who love to adventure, tour, and travel, the mention of Hawaii conjures the concept of paradise, swaying palm trees, white sand beaches, hula dancers, bright blue skies, and harmonious people living together. Hawaii is an archipelago of seven islands located in the Pacific, and it is one of the 50 states of the United States of America. Living here in Hawaii, one can see that it has become the host to the various cultures, ethnicities, and nationalities from all over the world. In this idyllic group of islands, natural beauty and man-made

facilities are juxtaposed with each other. In exploring the islands, everyone can see that hotels, parks, malls, bars, spas, shops, boutique stores, service centers, markets, and restaurants dot every major location in the cities and towns of the State of Hawaii. Many of these facilities and establishments are just a few meters away from the beaches where tourists swarm, jet ski, snorkel, surf, swim, paddle, or laze under the tropical sun. This postcard type of setting is commonly seen in the beautiful islands of Maui, Kauai, Lanai, Oahu, and Hawaii, which is often called the Big Island by the locals, and the frequent tourists alike. With this photogenic scenery in mind, it is very much expected that tourism is the number one industry as reflected in the arrival data of more than 10 million tourists in the year 2019 (*Quarterly Statistical & Economic Report*, 2020). Among the international tourists from Asia, the Japanese comprise the largest number followed by the Koreans and the Chinese.

Of the 50 states in the USA, Hawaii, whose population is only 1.4 million, has the highest percentage of Asians at 58%, with the Filipinos on top of the list followed by the Japanese. With the migration of Asians to Hawaii, they also brought into the islands their cuisines, traditions, cultures, languages, and other practices. This paper presents a study on the Asian cuisine and the Filipino food in the Big Island of Hawaii particularly in the city of Hilo. As an interdisciplinary study, this paper analyses Asian food by using approaches from the humanities and the social sciences. Many people may be unaware that food is a powerful element in the field of tourism and commerce (Hussin, 2018a). Asian food in Hilo, Hawaii is best represented by the Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Thai, and Vietnamese cuisine. Such presence of Asian food is an indication of the migrant cultures, and it also caters to the various ethnicities and the nationalities that brought the food into Hawaii. It also promotes affinity, solidarity, and identity in the respective Asian communities. These cuisines enter the market and the consciousness of the residents of Hawaii through the presence of the numerous restaurants, linguistic landscape, social media, websites, food deliveries, catering services, food trucks, and family gatherings. Seeing that their cuisine is available, every tourist and migrant from Asia will feel at home in Hawaii.

In the case of Filipino cuisine, the last Filipino restaurant closed in 2015, and only one food truck caters to the Filipinos and other residents in Hilo, Hawaii. However, recently, another Filipino has started operating his own *lechon* business in Hilo and opens on the weekends. These two establishments have gained popularity and filled in the commercial Filipino food gap.

Methodology

Highlighting the case of Filipino cuisine, this paper attempts to answer these questions: (1) How does Asian food fare in the Big Island? (2) Where is the locus of the Filipino food in the Big Island? (3) How do young Filipino Americans relate themselves to their culinary heritage?

To answer the preceding questions, the researcher has made use of ethnography primarily due to his almost a decade of experience in living in Hawaii where the direct participation and interaction with the residents helped in facilitating this study. The years of residence in Hawaii means that the researcher has been patronising Asian restaurants, interacting with customers and consumers, conversing with restaurant workers and engaging with the proprietors. For this part of the study, using informal interviews, recording fieldnotes, observing and participating in the study as one of the customers were employed. For secondary data analysis, this study made use of the Asian population data in Hawaii County from the US Census Bureau.

In relation to the Filipinos, this study made use of both informal and in-depth interviews with local Filipinos. The result of the interviews was recorded in the fieldnotes and encoded using Microsoft WORD. For the Filipino-American heritage learners at the University of Hawaii at Hilo, this study used a questionnaire, formal interview, and the written 500-word essay titled *My Filipino Family and Filipino Cuisine*. The latter was part of the written requirements of the writing-intensive courses, namely, FIL 333 Filipinos in Hawaii and FIL 354 Filipino Culture. As used in this study, the term heritage learner refers to the Filipino-American students at University of Hawaii Hilo who were born to Filipino parents, with zero or very limited proficiency in the Philippine languages, and are members of the second, third, or fourth generations. From the interviews of selected heritage learners, answers to the preceding questions were mostly derived.



Figure 1: Hilo Bay, Hawaii (Source: Fieldwork, 2020)

Asians and the Asian Food in Hilo, Hawaii: An Overview

Discussing Asian food without including the Asian people that brought them into Hawaii is like eating food minus the spices and condiments. Of all the 50 states of the United States of America, Hawaii is the most Asian state in terms of percentage of the population. On March 1, 2012, the US Census Bureau released the summary file that contained the information that included the demographics of Asians in 2010. For the State of Hawaii, the summary showed that “the largest race group (race alone) was White, followed by Filipino, Japanese, Native Hawaiian, and Chinese” (US Census Bureau, 2012). For the purpose of this study that deals with Asian food, the distribution of the Asian communities can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Population of the Selected Asian Groups in Hawaii, 2010

Race Group	State of Hawaii	County of Hawaii (Big Island)
Filipino	197,497	18,086
Japanese	185,502	15,834
Chinese	54,955	1,661
Korean	24,203	1,005
Vietnamese	9,779	317
Asian Indian	2,201	175
Thai	2,006	270

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2012).

Hilo is the largest city of the County of Hawaii. Together with the City of Kona, these are the tourism centers of the Big Island of Hawaii. Just like the rest of the County of Hawaii, the majority of the population of Hilo are Asians as shown in Table 1. Asian food in Hilo is accessible to the public consumers through the various restaurants and other forms of establishments. This food is served either in the form of big and generously portioned plate lunches or a la carte and can be delivered to anywhere within Hilo. Except for the Japanese, the number of the Asian food establishments, mostly restaurants, does not reflect the numerical constituency of the population of Hilo, Hawaii. Numerically, there are 21 for the Japanese, 20 for the Chinese, 16 for the Thai, 10 for the Vietnamese, six for the Koreans, and two for the Indians. The Filipino community has no restaurant, but it does not mean that Filipino food has not entered the commercial space. This part is discussed in the next section.

Japanese Cuisine

Like other culinary traditions, Japanese food can be indigenous, an adaptation, and fusion (Seligman, 1994; Costa & Besio, 2011; Ashkenazi & Jacob, 2000; Burroughs & Burroughs, 2014). The Japanese started coming to Hawaii in the late 1700s, and the labor migrants among them in 1800s. Majority of the Japanese arrived in Hawaii to work in the sugar plantations (Kimura, 1992; Duus, 1999; Fleischman & Tyson, 2000; Okamura, 2014). Today, the Japanese are one of the biggest communities in Hawaii. Logically, Japanese food is also popular and has its own dedicated restaurants and other food establishments. Japanese restaurants in Hilo include Kenichi Restaurant, Genki Sushi, Tetsumen, Daiichi Ramen, Miyo's Restaurant, Kawamoto Store, Restaurant Miwa, Restaurant Osaka, Nori's Saimin and Snacks, Sakura Sushi & Grill, Takenoko Sushi, Dragon Kitchen Sushi, and Ocean Sushi to name a few. Just like the name of the restaurants, sushi is one of the most popular dishes in Hilo. Aside from sushi, the list includes *katsu*, *saimin*, *tempura*, *ramen*, *udon*, *sashimi*, *wagyu*, *miso*, *teriyaki*, *yakitori*, *musubi*, and *mochi*, to name a few. With the adaptation of Japanese cuisine in the Hawaiian culinary landscape, Spam *musubi* is perhaps the most famous that it can be found even in every 7-Eleven, ABC Store, and other convenient stores in Hawaii. The most distinctive ingredient of this type of *musubi* is the Spam, the canned pork product made by Hormel Foods Corporation. Aside from *musubi*, the lunchbox called bento is part of the culinary landscape in Hawaii.

Chinese Cuisine

Chinese food is considered as a “powerful, global force dated hundreds of years before the present time” (Wu & Cheung, 2002, p.1). Chinese cuisine in Hawaii is brought in by the Chinese, particularly the Cantonese. The Chinese started arriving in Hawaii in the late 1700s (McKeown, 2001; Chang, 1988, Glick, 1980; Hsu, 1951). Before 1852, there were Chinese in Hilo who were called “sugar masters” since they were manufacturers of sugar (Kai, 1974, p. 32). It was the Chinese who met the demand for public eating places by opening restaurants in the port towns of Hawaii (Glick, 1980, pp.70-72). Fast forward, the Chinese restaurants are still aplenty in the city of Hilo making it as popular as the Japanese restaurants. Chinese restaurants in Hilo include Sum Leung Chinese Kitchen, New China Restaurant, East Wind Fresh & Healthy Chinese Cuisine, Leung’s Chop Suey House, Cheng’s Chop Suey House, Ling’s Chop Suey House, Panda Express, to name a few. Of the Chinese food served in the named restaurants, the most prominent and always present in the menu is the *chop suey*, and that answers why the proprietors put it in their registered restaurant names. Other popular Chinese dishes include *chow mein*, *dim sum*, lemon chicken, *kung pao* chicken, *char siu*, and Peking duck. Localising the Chinese food has produced the Hawaiian version of *char siu bao* or pork bun called *manapua*, the shortened Hawaiian form *mea ‘ono pua’a* (literally translated ‘delicious pork item’).



Figure 2: New China Restaurant (Source: Fieldwork, 2020)

Thai Cuisine

Thai cuisine is one of the most globalised and popular Asian cuisine due to the support of the Thai government in terms of strategies and initiatives (Sunanta, 2005; Padoongpatt, 2017; Muangasame & Park, 2019). In 2010 census, the Thai population in the State of Hawaii was only 2006, of which only 270 were in the Hawaii County where the city of Hilo is. Although the Thai community is small, this does not mean that the Thai food establishments are few. In fact, there are 16 food establishments offering Thai food in Hilo, and majority of which are restaurants. The list of these Thai restaurants in Hilo includes Naung Mai Thai Kitchen, Hilo Siam Thai Restaurant, Bangkok Villa Hilo, New Chiang Mai Thai Cuisine, and Sombat's Fresh Thai Cuisine, to name a few. The word curry summons to the local minds the Thai food for which it is mostly known for. The curry that comes in many colors, such as green, red, orange, and brown, is associated with tangy spiciness and the use of multiple ingredients to come up with the savory, quintessential, and exotic flavors for which Thai cuisine is deemed synonymous. Aside from the curry dishes, the ever-present wok-fried noodle dish called *Pad Thai* and the fiery, spicy soup *Tom Yum* are essentially top of mind. Their photos appear in every menu splashed in either the colorful, folded reading materials or on the walls of the restaurants.

Vietnamese Cuisine

The Vietnamese people in Hawaii form part of the greater immigrant population of the Vietnamese who started coming in the 1970s to America (Kibria, 1995; Do, 1999; Pham & Harris, 2001; Montero, 2019). The Vietnamese cuisine is known for its "taste, freshness, and nutrition" (Nguyen & Heino, 2017). This Southeast Asian food is also popular in Hawaii even if there are only few Vietnamese residing in the state. The 2010 census showed that there were 9,779 Vietnamese in the state, of which only 317 resided in the county of Hawaii where Hilo is. Just like the Thai, the low population of the Vietnamese residents does not mean meager number of food establishments offering their cuisine. In Hilo, there are 10 food establishments that serve Vietnamese food. Included in this list are Hilo Rice Noodle Soup, New Saigon Restaurant, Lam's Garden Restaurant, Yen's Café, Le Yellow Sub, Pho Viet, King's Vietnamese Cuisine, Lemongrass Restaurant, Pho 99, and 1 Plus 1 Café, to populate the list. Popular Vietnamese food includes varieties of noodles like *pho*, *bun bo Hue*, *bun cha ca*; soup and congees like *bo kho*, *canh chua*, *sup mang cua*; and a host of rice dishes, wraps, and rolls. Its popularity attracts many customers, so that even non-Vietnamese restaurants are offering it, too. It is not surprising that many Asian food establishments offer the Vietnamese *pho* and the spring rolls as well.



Figure 3: Lam's Garden Restaurant (Source: Fieldwork, 2020)

Korean Cuisine

Like the cuisine of the Chinese, Japanese, Thai, and the Vietnamese, Korean cuisine is also popular and globalised (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2008; Pettid, 2008; Lee & Mun, 2012). This cuisine caters primarily to the Koreans here in the US whose population is 1,423,784 according to the census in 2010. In the same census, the Koreans in the State of Hawaii had the total population of 24,203, of which 1,005 were residing in the County of Hawaii. Like the Japanese, Chinese, and the Filipinos, many of the Koreans in the early 1900s arrived in Hawaii to work in the sugar plantations (Gardner, 1970; Yu, 1977; Danico, 2004; Min, 2011). Korean food in Hilo can be seen in these food establishments, namely, Cham Cham Korean BBQ Restaurant, Kalbi Express, Yoon's Kitchen Korean Food & Chicken, Seoul Station, Aunty Yong's Place, and H & K Lunch Shop. Popular Korean dishes include *kalbi*, *bulgogi*, *bibimbap*, *makchang*, *guksu*, *kimchi*, and *banchan*, to name a few. Similar to the other Asian food, the Korean food is part of the Korean identity and the symbol of the Korean culture (Kim, 2005; Chung, Yang, Shin, & Chung, 2016).

Indian Cuisine

The Asian Indians, as the US Census Bureau calls the Indians from the Indian subcontinent, started coming to the US when both India and the US were under the colonial rule of the British Empire in 1700s. The East India Company was responsible in the early migration of the Asian Indians to what is now the United States of America. The Asian Indians are now the third largest Asian community in the US after the Filipinos and the Chinese. In the 2010 census, there were 2,201

Asian Indians in the State of Hawaii, and only 175 lived in the County of Hawaii where Hilo is located. With the arrival of the Asian Indians, they brought with them their culture, language, talents, skills, and cuisine. Distinct from the usual Asian cuisine that includes noodles, rolls, and sticky rice, the Indian food in Hilo, Hawaii is closely related to the Middle Eastern cuisine where flatbread, biryani, kebab, and the absence of pork complete the distinctive features. The popular and global Indian cuisine is known for the use of variety of herbs, dals, oils, condiments, spices, and curry powders to produce masalas, gravies, and all the well-seasoned, aromatic, elegant, exquisite, savory, and exotic dishes that are also known for nutrition and health benefits (Nandy, 2004; Dubey, 2010; Chopra, 2018). In Hilo, there are two food establishments that serve Indian cuisine, namely, Kamana Kitchen and Akmal's Indian Kitchen. With very good reviews from their customers, the residents have enjoyed Indian dishes like the famous chicken *tikka masala*, *paneer*, *tandoori* chicken, *kebab*, lentil soups, and *naan*. Both vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes are served in the typical stainless-steel compartment trays.

The Filipinos and the Filipino Food

Filipino cuisine reflects the history and culture of the Filipino people that include identifiable ethnic origins, major foreign influences, levels of indigenisation, and stages of adaptation (Fernandez, 1988, 1996, 2002, 2019; Dusselier, 2009). With or without the foreign influences, traditional Filipino cuisine signifies the richness of the natural tropical environment and the flora and fauna of the Philippines. From the forests and the mountains, nature provides the Filipinos the variety of plants and animals that constitute their diet. As an archipelago, the abundance of fish and other seafood made the Filipinos experts in the area of marine-oriented cuisine. It is not surprising that the Philippine languages, such as Cebuano, have multiple words related to foodstuffs like rice or coconut, the two universal ingredients in the Filipino cuisine and also in Southeast Asia. Take for example the words related to rice from Cebuano, the language spoken in the regions of Visayas and Mindanao. Cebuano lexicon has the following words related to rice: *amik*, *ampaw*, *bahaw*, *bibingka*, *bicho-bicho*, *biko*, *bilobilo*, *binignit*, *budbud*, *bugas*, *chamorado*, *dukut*, *ginaling*, *humay*, *kan-un*, *kiping*, *kutsinta*, *linung-ag*, *lugaw*, *panyalam*, *pinipig*, *puso*, *puto*, *puto maya*, *sapin-sapin*, *sayongsong*, *sinangag*, *tinagtag*, *arroz caldo*, *arroz valenciana*, and *paella*. The last two are part of the Spanish influenced, rice-based dishes, and it comes in various Philippine style of adaptations. From the same language, we have the following words related to the coconut and coconut-based dishes, namely, *binagul*, *bukayo*, *buko*, *butong*, *gata*, *ginataan*, *kalamay*, *kinagud*, *kinuskus*, *lahing*, *lana*, *lubi*, *lunuk*, *macapuno bola-bola*,

nata de coco, *sapal*, and *ungul*. Many of the preceding elements can form part of the famous Filipino dessert called *halo halo*, a mixture of many sweets with shaved ice. It can be safely concluded that there is no complete list of Filipino food without the necessary inclusion of either rice or coconut. The coconut milk or *gata* is used universally in the Filipino cuisine, so that any dish with the derivative word *ginataan* surely means that the dish is prepared with *gata* as one of its various ingredients.

Seafood is very common in the Filipino diet since the Philippines is an archipelago of 7,641 islands. Fish is the number one source of marine-based protein for Filipinos. The sea gives the Filipinos a huge variety of fish such as milkfish, catfish, goby, triggerfish, sardine, pomfret, tilapia, tuna, mullet, barracuda, anchovies, perch, sailfish, grouper, jack, mackerel, pompano, surgeonfish, pufferfish, snapper, marlin, dorado, flounder, wrasse, and many more. Other types of seafood in the Philippines include shrimps, lobster, shells, snails, oyster, cockles, mussels, scallops, squid, octopus, cuttlefish, eels, urchins, jellyfish, sea cucumbers, crabs, prawns, seaweed, and many more. Since the Philippines is tropical and warm, some of these seafoods must be sun-dried or preserved. In Cebuano, these sun-dried seafoods are called *bulad* 'dried fish', *bagoong* 'shrimp paste', *ginamos* 'fermented anchovies', *dayuk* 'fermented fish innards or shellfish', *tinabal* 'salted fish', *bulad nukus* 'dried squid', to name a few, are part of the preserved marine foodstuffs that can be seen in the Filipino kitchen. The same type of food that gives that distinctive smell emanating from the cupboards of the village households. Frying or grilling dried fish and dried squid is enough to make the Filipinos pinch their noses or run away. It is that peculiar stink of this food that betrays the taste that this food has. Stories among migrant Filipino workers in Europe and America are aplenty about the police coming to their flats, apartments, or condominium units because of the complaints from the neighbors about the peculiar stink.

Meat and poultry are included in the list of ingredients of the Filipino food. It is a common knowledge in the Philippines that the Filipinos eat anything that moves, crawls, swims, and flies. Chicken is the most common poultry included in the diet of the Filipinos. Ducks and geese come next in the list, but not the turkey, which is used rarely and occasionally. Pork comes on top of the list for the meat section for daily consumption. *Lechon*, which is the whole roasted pig, is the most popular Filipino food that is served in many occasions, festivals, and in the holidays of religious obligations. It occupies the central part of the long dining table of the Filipinos, and its presence indicates the affluence and the social standing of the Filipino host. Like the *adobo*, any meat can also be made into *lechon* depending on the regions in the Philippines. It is common to

hear the phrases *lechon baka* 'cow lechon', *lechon manok* 'chicken lechon', *lechon kambing* 'goat lechon', *lechon pabo* 'lechon turkey', and many more. Other pork-based dishes include *bagnet*, *binagoongang baboy*, *dinakdakan humba*, *hamonado*, *pork asado*, *pork menudo*, *chicharron*, *kaldereta*, *longganisa*, *pata tim*, *sisig*, *crispy pata*, *mechado*, *embutido*, *chorizo*, *lechon kawali*, *paklay*, *pork lomi*, *liempo inihaw*, *pork tocino*, *pork chop*, *igado*, *tokwa't baboy*, pork and peas, pork steak, *paksiw na pata*, *pork afritada*, and many more. In some regions, it is either beef or goat meat that forms part of their diet especially among the Muslims of the Southern Philippines due to their religious codes and dietary restrictions. Among the Muslim Tausug people, the beef dish called *tiyula itum* 'black stew' has the dark or greyish color due to the inclusion of the charred coconut meat in the preparation (Quintero, 2017). Other beef dish, available in the Muslim Meranau community, is *rendang*, which is cooked for many hours and with various spices, herbs, and huge quantity of coconut milk. The same dish can be found in the cities of Mindanao such as in Davao and Zamboanga. This beef dish is often considered as an influence brought in by the Filipino Muslim migrant workers based in the neighboring countries of Indonesia and Malaysia.

Completing the list of Filipino food, fruits, vegetables, tubers, herbs, and spices are also provided by the tropical nature in the Philippines. Among the available fruits included in the Filipino diet are bananas, mangoes, rambutan, durian, chico, tisa, avocado, atis, wax apples, guyabano, guava, cacao, jackfruit, star apple, pineapple, orange, plum, bread fruit, star fruit, lanzones, lychee, longan, mangosteen, melon, papaya, tamarind, santol, sineguelas, pomelo, and many more depending on the season. Some of these fruits are not native to the Philippines since they came from Latin America, particularly Mexico, when the Philippines was still part of the Spanish Empire. Of the vegetables, the Filipino diet celebrates the availability of the ever-present moringa, squash, cabbage, eggplants, gourd, string beans, carrots, okra, mung beans, chayote, mushrooms, bottle gourd, bitter melon, water spinach, banana blossom, mustard, spinach, bamboo shoots, potato tops, winged beans, and many more. Tubers are also included in the Philippine diet. Among these tubers are sweet potatoes, cassava, yam, turnip, and taro to name a few. The spices and herbs used in the Filipino cuisine include garlic, onion, black pepper, sesame seeds, anis, ginger, galangal, lime, lemon, laurel, oregano, cilantro, calamansi, lemongrass, parsley, mint, basil leaves, paprika, pandan, tamarind, chilli pepper, turmeric, tomatoes, cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, and nutmeg, to complete the list. These spices and herbs do not only tickle the taste buds but also convert the Filipino food into a nebula of flavors imbued with the property of being delicious, aromatic, well-seasoned, exotic, nutritious, and therapeutic.

Here is a note on the spices and herbs from some food writers and scholars. It is often thought that Filipino food is not comparable to the savory and spicy Asian food due to the absence of the indigenous spices (Fernandez, 2000; Zialcita, 2000). Food writers have the term, *trinity in Filipino cooking*, which means the use of garlic, onions, and tomatoes. It sounds indeed unsavory, like preparing a poor man's food in the arid land, where mother nature does not provide the richness of the flora and fauna. If many food writers, bloggers, and scholars have ventured much further and dwelt longer in Mindanao (where nutmeg, cinnamon and cloves also grow contrary to the popular beliefs [Mallari, 1974]), which is in close proximity culturally, geographically, and gastronomically with Indonesia and Malaysia, they could have discovered the availability and the richness of the herbs and spices, including cloves (*Syzygium aromaticum*), cinnamon (*Cinnamomum mindanensi*) and nutmeg (*Myristica philippensis*) that grow in Mindanao, and the use in cooking and food preparation among the indigenous people and the Muslim Filipinos.

A Filipino dish is not complete without the use of condiments and seasonings that enhance the already explosive and exotic flavors. The Filipino kitchen has the armory of these condiments and seasonings, called *sawsawan*, that include the likes of *asado* sauce, chilli garlic sauce, lechon sauce, fishball sauce, *palapa*, *patis*, vinegar, soy sauce, *sinamak*, *sukang pinakurat*, banana ketchup, tomato ketchup, and the various combinations and permutations thereof that mystify the taste buds. With the abundance of spices, herbs, and condiments in the archipelagic and tropical Philippines, blandness and insipidity in the Filipino cuisine are not an option nor it is the rule.

The Cuisine Heritage of the Filipino Americans in Hawaii

Among the Filipinos in Hawaii, the Ilocanos form the largest group due to their migration history to the islands. It was in 1906 when the first group of Filipino laborers arrived in Hawaii to work in the sugar plantations. Called *Sakada*, their arrival was facilitated by their being US nationals since the Philippines was an American colony from 1898 until 1946 (San Buenaventura, 1996; Okamura, 2011; De Leon, 2019). Aside from the Ilocanos, the Visayans form the second largest group of Filipinos in Hawaii. Other Filipinos have also made Hawaii their home such as those who are from the other regions of the Philippines. After the declaration of the independence of the Philippines from the USA, more Filipinos migrated either through family petitions, military service, or by employment visas, which catered mostly to the highly qualified Filipino professionals. Due to sustained immigration, Filipinos, including part-Filipinos, are the largest ethnicity in Hawaii. Currently, the Filipinos in the State of Hawaii are numbered

at 220,315 as shown in the state government website of Hawaii Census in 2020. The label used in the website is “race alone”, which means full Filipino and not mixed-race. Otherwise, the number is much bigger due to the mixed marriages that are common in Hawaii.



Figure 4: Lechon Kawali and Fried Rice (Fieldwork, 2020)

Location of the Filipino Food in Hilo, Hawaii

Filipino food establishments outside the Philippines are a scarcity, and it contributes to its non-popularity compared to the other Asian cuisines like Thai, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, and the Vietnamese. A study conducted and published by YouGov, a British internet-based market research company, showed that out of 34 national cuisines, the Chinese, Japanese, and Thai cuisines came second, third, and fourth, respectively, after the Italian being the first and most popular cuisine (Smith, 2019). Sadly, the Filipino cuisine placed 31st in the list of unpopular ones with Saudi Arabian (32nd), Finnish (33rd), and Peruvian (34th). On equal footing, CNN has published its own survey with the title, “Which country has the best food?” Italy came first, followed by China as second, Japan (5th), India (6th), and Thailand (8th) (Li, 2019). On the non-popularity of the Filipino cuisine, Malasig (2019) zeroed in on the various reasons why the Filipino cuisine is one of the least preferred worldwide. Among the reasons are (1) least access to the Filipino ingredients, (2) complexity of the cuisine as a whole, (3) the lack of marketing and business acumen, (4) lack of entrepreneurial skills, and (5) shame towards their own cuisine due to colonisation.

In the same light, the Filipino restaurants in Hilo, Hawaii, do not exist at all. Two food establishments fill the gap, namely, Chris’ BBQ & Grill and Bali’z Food Wagon that serve plate lunches and lunchboxes. Chris’ BBQ & Grill, owned and operated by a local Filipino couple, offers lechon, whole roasted

chicken, and seafood to its growing clientele. Its business is open on Fridays till Sundays and advertises using Facebook where the photos of food and plate lunches are posted. On the other hand, Bali'z Food Wagon is a Filipino food truck that operates three times a week, namely, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at Tokunaga Store parking lot from 11:00AM to 1:00PM. Its regular menu offers authentic Filipino food that includes pork adobo, chicken adobo, squid adobo, chicharron, *dinardaraan*, *lechon kawali*, pig feet *lauya* with *rabong*, *ginisa karabasa*, pork and peas, *pinapaitan*, *pansit*, *pinakbet*, *tinono*, mungo beans, pako salad, banana lumpia, and cascaron. This food truck serves its food using lunchbox. It advertises using Facebook and Instagram.



Figure 5: Chris' BBQ & Grill (Photo Credits: Chris')

Aside from Chris' BBQ & Grill and Bali'z Food Wagon, Filipino food is also offered in the restaurants mentioned above. Regular menu items in those non-Filipino restaurants like Hawaiian Style Café, Hiro's Place, Kuhio Grille, Big Island Top Dog, L & L Hawaiian Barbecue, and K's Drive In have lunch specials, lunch plates, and combos that include Filipino dishes like *adobo*, *lechon*, *pansit*, and *pinakbet*. This is an excellent strategy to attract the Filipino customers and others who like the Filipino cuisine to dine in those non-Filipino restaurants knowing that their food is available. Asked if there were Filipino chefs and cooks at the restaurants, the answer came affirmative as expected. Proprietors commented that it made the Filipino food in their restaurants more authentic. Note that adobo is very popular in Hawaii, and anyone can buy this dish in a lunchbox from many stores including 7-11.

Filipino Food and the Young Filipino Americans in Hawaii

Just like in any migrant community, food is a major part of the intangible culture that is comparable to dance, music, and other forms of performing arts (Hussin, 2018b). For food as a heritage among Filipinos, the Filipino family kitchen is the main and straightforward locus of the heritage Filipino cuisine in Hilo, Hawaii. It is from the humble Filipino kitchen that the binding power of food commands for the coming together of family members, relatives, neighbors, friends, and visitors. When a Filipino family can find an excuse to celebrate, like someone arrived from the Philippines, or someone has a birthday to celebrate, and even graduation, a gathering is surely prepared; made known to the community; and food must be prepared in large quantity as expected. Food is a binding cultural material for Filipinos, and it transcends every boundary both physical and spiritual especially in the funeral rites, religious obligations, and other solemn occasions (Hussin, 2019). In the lighter social level, it is through food that news and gossip are exchanged, relationships formed or renewed, checking on the young ones in the clan and the neighborhood, sharing experiences and stories from the recent trips to the Philippines or the US Mainland, imposing authority over the younger generation by the elders, and also just for pure fun as well.

From the Filipino Studies Program at University of Hawaii at Hilo, 100 Filipino heritage students, who registered for the writing intensive classes, namely FIL 354 Filipino Culture and FIL 333 Filipinos in Hawaii from 2015 to 2019 were selected to take part in the survey on Filipino food. It is part of the ongoing study on the heritage education, culture and identity of the young Filipinos in the Big Island. This study is the result of the curriculum expansion of the Filipino Studies Program to fill the gap in the teaching and learning materials suited for this type of learners. From this study, one of the questions was “What Filipino food you can recall easily?” The answer to this question can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Easily Recalled Filipino Food in Hawaii

Number	Filipino Food	Frequency
1	adobo	96
2	bagoong	10
3	bibingka	42
4	bindongo	18
5	budbud	28
6	casaron	34
7	chicken papaya	14
8	dinardaraan	20

9	fried rice	18
10	halo halo	50
11	kare kare	20
12	lechon	90
13	longanisa	28
14	lumpia	60
15	palabok	12
16	pancit	82
17	papaitan	12
18	pinakbet	86
19	pork and peas	25
20	sinigang	12

Looking closely at the list, the easily recalled food reflect the regional origins of the Filipinos in Hawaii. The result shows that these heritage learners are cognisant of their cuisine since most of them can recall the top four Filipino food in the Big Island, namely, *adobo*, *lechon*, *pinakbet*, and *pancit*. The Ilocanos, who are the majority among Filipinos, retained their dishes like *bindongo*, *dinardaraan*, *pinakbet*, and *papaitan*. However, these food names did not matter among the young Filipinos when they were asked if they were aware of the regional origins of the said dishes. Until they registered in the courses of FIL 354 and FIL 333, they were also not aware of the influences of Spain, America, China, and the neighboring countries on the Filipino cuisine. Regarding the desserts, the young Filipinos mentioned *halo halo*, *bibingka*, *budbud* and *cascaron* to top the list. These dishes are also common among the Filipinos in Hawaii and the Philippines, and they transcend the regional boundaries that are mostly observed in the Filipino communities. For the young Filipino Americans, their loyalty and solidarity to their families and their food is marked in their most frequent responses: “My mom’s food is the best”, “My family can cook much better”, “Eating with the family and relatives is culturally correct”, and “Family is everything for any Filipino”. These responses signify affirmatively their very strong Filipino identity. These heritage learners may speak American English, dress in the mainstream American fashion, drive American cars, socialise with the other American youth, but deep in their hearts, they consider themselves Filipinos.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Asian cuisine, such as Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, Korean, and Indian, is popular even in Hawaii. This study confirms

its popularity in a touristy place like Hawaii. It further shows that the respective Asian population in Hilo, Hawaii can be inversely proportional to the number of Asian food establishments such as those of the Thai and the Vietnamese. Moreover, the long existence of the Chinese and the Japanese in Hawaii has produced localised food like *manapua* and Spam *musubi* that are accessible even in the convenient stores just like the *adobo* of the Filipinos. For Filipinos, there are only two establishments that offer Filipino food even if they are the largest Asian community. This means that the Filipino cuisine is mostly confined at home, which is the central locus of the Filipino culture and communal activities. Among the young heritage learners, their collective memory is mostly devoid of the knowledge of the origins and influences of their food similar to their knowledge of the lexicon of their heritage languages. Such conscious, heritage knowledge is formally provided by the Filipino Studies Program at UH Hilo. The heritage learners simply accept the idea that the food they eat at home, cooked by their mothers, is Filipino food with no political or regional connotations. However, the strength of their identity is visible when it comes to their loyalty and consumption of Filipino food and their allegiance and solidarity with their families.

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