Asian Culinary Trends from Symrise

Introduction – Asian Culinary Trends and Drivers

New food trends are first seen in restaurants and popularized by influential chefs. This is nowhere more evident than with Asian culinary innovations.

People are looking for more authenticity and variety in their meals prepared at home. Everyone has less time today to prepare a meal from scratch, but they do not want to compromise the taste experienced at their favorite restaurants or travels abroad.

Therefore, it’s important that food companies are answering this consumer demand and making sure that prepared food flavors are authentic.

So what are the Asian Culinary Trends? There are a variety that are seen both in Asia and the USA.

Food Trends in Asia

**Chinese** - Chinese cuisine uses a wide range of styles and regional flavors and has become the most prominent Asian food nationality. Southern dishes emphasize freshness and tenderness, while Northern dishes are relatively oily and commonly use soy sauce, vinegar and garlic.

Cantonese, Hunan, Shandong and Szechuan are the most popular styles of Chinese food, but Anhui, Fujian, Jiangsu and Zhejiang are also prevalent.

Immigrant Chinese in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Korea, and the Philippines have contributed to the awareness and acceptance of Chinese food in other part of Asia.

Flavorings such as fresh ginger root, garlic, scallion, white pepper, Sichuan peppercorns and chilies are used in a variety of traditional Chinese dishes. Soy sauce is ubiquitous to Chinese cooking, which is primarily fermented soybeans and wheat.

Commonly accepted Chinese dishes like steamed dumplings, handmade noodles, Red Stewed Beef, Chinese Hotpot, Peking Duck and Dong Po Rou (three layer pork).

**Japan** - Japanese cuisine has become much more familiar and appreciated around the world. Fish and other seafood is prepared and eaten in many different ways - raw, dried, boiled, grilled, deep fried or steamed. Meat has only become widespread since the second half of the 19th century.

Japanese cuisine uses the following five basic flavors: salt, sugar, vinegar, soy sauce and miso. Japanese cuisine is known for its fresh and clean flavors. Pickled ginger and wasabi are popular flavorings. Common Japanese dishes include Sashimi, Ramen, Tempura and Teppanyaki.
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Japanese food trends are closely linked with pop culture in Asia. During the 1990’s the popularity of “J-Pop” in Asia kick started Japanese food trends and has now established a foothold in almost all countries in the continent.

**Thai** - Thai cuisine mixes elements of several Southeast Asian traditions and are typically lightly prepared dishes with strong aromatic components. Thai food is known for balancing the fundamental tastes in each dish: sour, sweet, salty and bitter.

Partly due to the tourism boom in Thailand over the last several decades, Thai food spread into the other spice loving countries in Asia.

Common Thai flavorings include Kaffir lime leaves, sweet basil, galangal, ginger, garlic, lemon grass, shrimp paste and bird’s eye chili. A very aromatic and strong tasting fish sauce called nam pla is also found in the majority of Thai dishes and adds a salty flavor.

Popular dishes include Tom Yum, Mango Sticky Rice, Green Curry, Pad Thai, and Beef Noodle.

**Korean**– Korean cuisine has been identified as an up and coming Asian food trend. Like Japanese food, Korean pop culture has had a big influence on this growth. The increase in the popularity of South Korean culture, primarily the explosion of Korean pop music, since the late 1990s has had a big influence on the popularity of all things Korean. This phenomenon has been named the “Korean Wave” or Hallyu, and saw the increasing acceptance of Korean “K-food” in Asia.

So important is this K-food trend to the government, that Suh Kyu-yong, Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Food said, “We have set up five major missions for the rise of ‘K-food’ including the establishment of the necessary infrastructure, expansion of research and nurturing experts. We will put forth strategies for ‘K-food’ to gain wide popularity in the near future.”

Korean restaurants have had an increasing presence in Asia in recent years, especially in the southeast. Popular Korean dishes include: Kimchi, Bulgogi, Korean BBQ (Galbisal), Ginseng Chicken, Bibimbap. A traditional Korean meal will consist of rice accompanied by numerous side dishes, mostly seasoned vegetables, soup, pot stew and meat.

No traditional Korean meal would be complete without Kimchi - a spicy, pungent fermented cabbage dish that is a staple of Korean cuisine. Common seasonings include scallions, ginger, radish, garlic, fermented red chili paste, shrimp sauce, and fish sauce. Kimchi can either be used as an ingredient or as a condiment.

**Vietnamese** - The cuisine of Vietnam has rice appearing at every meal. Vietnamese fish sauce is very pungent with the most regarded fish sauces being made from anchovies. Vietnamese food makes extensive use of herbs and aromatics. Typical ingredients include cilantro, mint, fish mint, basil, lime leaf, lemongrass, ginger, chili, and tamarind.
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With the increased number of Asian travelers to Vietnam and the opening of this market, consumers are becoming more familiar with Vietnamese cuisine.

Asian Food Trends in the USA

Asian cuisine is becoming more popular in the US as more and more people are discovering its exotic tastes from top chefs and food show celebrities. Chinese take-out and sushi bars are nothing new, but today, chefs across the world are creating innovative recipes and dishes that are blurring the line between the US and China.

Chinese – For a long time American Chinese cuisines catered to American tastes and were unlike what was found in homeland China. Examples of popular dishes not found in China include Orange Chicken, Egg Foo Young, and General Tso’s Chicken.

Today’s more authentic Chinese food found in the United States shows increased culinary sophistication. Food from immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China are now represented in the United States. Chinese regional cuisines were most commonly mentioned on US menus, including four of the so-called Eight Culinary Traditions of China - Cantonese, Hunan, Shandong and Szechuan.

Korean Food Goes Global - Korean cuisine began gaining in popularity in the US via street truck vendors across the country. Korean food is now going mainstream and one can expect to see bulgogi, a Korean dish of barbecued beef, chicken or pork, and bibimbap, a mixed bowl of rice, salted vegetables, meat, and egg on menus.

Asian Fusion - Asian fusion restaurants, which combine the various flavors of Asian countries, have become popular in many parts of the United States. Different regions have distinctive styles and are heavily influenced by innovative restaurants and chefs that have had a big impact on Asian culinary trends in the USA.

West Coast Style Fusion The trendy Buddha’s Belly restaurant in Los Angeles, CA typifies the west coast style of Asian fusion food. Restaurateur Jonathon Chu promises a "culinary trip across Asia" in his Feng Shui-designed restaurant. Chu’s eclectic menu includes a fusion of Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, and Korean cuisines.

Another innovative union of flavors can be found at MexicaZn in Fullerton, CA. MexicaZn is an interesting combination of Mexican and Korean flavors where you might be enticed by a Korean BBQ Kimchi Burrito Plate.

Another Asian food trend hitting it big on the West coast is food trucks. Especially innovative is the Nom Nom Food Trunk in Los Angeles serving Vietnamese-inspired sandwiches.
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**Midwest Style Fusion** America’s New Asian movement showcasing Eastern Asian and Southeast Asian regional cuisines has hit Chicago in a big way at *Sunda New Asian* restaurant. Sunda is known for their “East meets West” brunch that includes a Thai Omelet, Tempura French Toast and Tofu Scramble.

Another fusion trend setter in Chicago is Dragonfly Mandarin Restaurant – a popular Chinese/Japanese fusion place that was voted the best Chinese restaurant in Chicago.

**Northeast Style Fusion** V-Cafe serves traditional Vietnamese Food in the heart of Tribeca, New York City and features authentic dishes from every region of Viet Nam. The foods of Viet Nam are prepared with both French and Chinese influences.

Another New York Asian fusion restaurant that thinks outside the box is Taka Taka – a Japanese/Mexican fusion. Clever menu items include Tuna Sashimi Tacos and Guacamole Tuna Taki. The assortment of Mexican sushi includes jalapeño and chipotle flavors.

**South Style Fusion** Houston is home to the 2nd largest concentration of Vietnamese residents outside of California and their influence can be seen in the authentic restaurant in the city, including Mai’s Restaurant.

Atlanta is home to the Korean and Mexican fusion restaurant Takorea – “Where east meet Mex!” and focuses on combining the street food of both countries. Takorea’s tacos combine a flour tortilla with kimchi fried rice, to which you add your choice of meat.

**US Food Service** – All of the above trends in Asian and the regional USA fusion trends can be seen in the product offerings in ready prepared foods in grocery stores and in less expensive Asian chain-type restaurants. Asian foods will enjoy increasing popularity around the world as they’re mixed with local flavors.

**What’s the Next Asian Food Trend?**

ABC-News recently reported that Filipino cuisine is the “next great Asian food trend.” Popular men’s magazine *Details* devoted two pages on Filipino cuisine in its food section, which included a list of recommended Filipino restaurants in the United States. Filipino cuisine is distinguished by its bold combination of sweet, sour, and salty flavors.

“It’s hard to believe that a cuisine eaten by nearly 100 million people could fly under the radar, but that’s exactly what Filipino food has done,” writer Joy Manning said in the article.