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U.S. | NEW YORK | CULTURE

# Columbia's Robust International Student Body Attracts More Asian Restaurants

Many of the new eateries showcase dishes that go beyond cheap Chinese food in cardboard containers



Columbia Student, Puyang Zhang ate at junzi kitchen. PHOTO: BESS ADLER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

*By V.L. Hendrickson*

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From hand-pulled noodles to Chinese crepes, a new wave of Asian food options is spicing up the dining scene near Columbia University in upper Manhattan.

The Asian restaurants are targeting Columbia's international students, who make up 19% of the undergraduate class of 2018. Twenty-nine percent of international students identified as Asian or Asian-American, according to a report from its admissions office. Many come from China, Hong Kong and South Korea.

"Demand is high," said Sarah Lu, a sophomore at Columbia who grew up in Beijing. "I know a lot of Chinese students who come to New York for school."

Many of the new eateries showcase a different kind of Asian fare, one that goes beyond cheap Chinese food in cardboard containers, Ms. Lu said. Even if some of the new additions aren't exactly authentic, they are still welcome.

She rattled off several of her favorite Asian spots, including La Salle Dumpling Room, just north of campus; Legend, a more traditional spot; junzi kitchen; and Xi'an Famous Foods, a New York City chainlet.

International students "are still going to prefer the food they grew up with. It's comfort food for them," said Xi'an co-founder Jason Wang.

Until recently, the Asian options uptown were limited, Mr. Wang noted. Many students ate at Asian food trucks. Xi'an was one of the first brick-and-mortar additions to the neighborhood. Other businesses have taken note, Mr. Wang said.

Asian grocery chain H Mart, based in Lyndhurst, N.J., is planning to open a 7,500-square-foot store at the corner of Broadway and West 110th Street in the next few weeks. Specializing in Korean, Chinese and Japanese products, the market will stock



Orange Chicken, Honey Walnut Shrimp and Shanghai Angus Steak are served at Panda Express. PHOTO: BESS ADLER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

everything from short ribs to Korean radishes, in addition to more than 30 varieties of ramen noodles.

H Mart has more than 60 locations nationwide, although its Koreatown store is currently its only Manhattan market. The company looks to open in areas with large Asian populations, and sees Columbia's diverse student body as a built-in customer base, according to Hmart consultant Kingston Shih.

For some, it is a natural addition to the area.

“The question for me is, ‘Why wasn’t there one before?’ ” asked Mr. Wang. “It really has to do with there being more international students.”

The national chain Panda Express opened in the area in December. The restaurant 108 Food Dried Hot Pot began serving last summer. It features spicy stir-fries with ingredients such as beef tripe, pig kidneys or seaweed knots, with its hottest dishes being seriously spicy.

Junzi kitchen also opened last summer on Broadway between West 112th and West 113th streets. Junzi serves noodle dishes and bings—Chinese crepes stuffed with fillings such as beef and cucumber, or tofu and red cabbage.



Asian grocery chain H Mart is planning to open a 9,000-square-foot store at the corner of Broadway and West 110th Street in Manhattan. PHOTO: BESS ADLER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Junzi is the brainchild of three Yale University students, said co-founder Yong Zhao. The first location opened in 2015 across from the Yale campus in New Haven, Conn., with the hopes of bringing “a new generation of Chinese food” to the area, he said.

The Columbia outpost is only Junzi’s second location, although it is planning another store near New York University in downtown Manhattan. “We’re trying to establish the brand with younger people,” Mr. Zhao said. “Universities are the first step.”

Junzi is another one of Ms. Lu’s go-to-spots, even though she said it is more based on Chinese ideas than the food actually eaten in China. For more authentic fare, she often treks downtown to Chinatown.

“There are a ton of restaurants I like downtown, as opposed to a couple I really like in Morningside Heights,” she said, referring to the upper Manhattan neighborhood where Columbia is located. The competition downtown means the food “has to be really, really good,” she added.

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