

How a Hong Kong Rice Noodle Restaurant Adapts and Grows in London

Interviewer: Your restaurant has been operating in London for many years, combining Hong Kong's traditional food culture while also adapting to the London market. Could you share how you strike a balance between the two?

• **Which traditional Hong Kong dishes are the most popular among your customer base in London?**

Owner: Our Hong Kong-style rice noodles are undoubtedly the most popular signature dish, particularly among Hong Kong immigrants and those who miss the taste of home. Additionally, small dishes like chicken skewers and braised fish chicken are also very well received because they remind people of Hong Kong street food. These traditional dishes are not just items on the menu for us; they are cultural symbols that evoke memories and emotions for our customers about Hong Kong.

• **What innovations have you made to adapt to the local market? Were these innovations based on customer feedback or market research?**

Owner: Stir-fried rice noodles is one of our innovations, and while it's not that common in Hong Kong, we thought it suited the taste preferences of the local market. We also introduced fried items like chicken skewers, which cater to local customer preferences. A lot of our innovations are based on customer feedback; they tell us which dishes appeal to them and what could be improved. We also observe other successful restaurants to understand the demand in the London market, and then we adjust our menu accordingly.

• **How important do you think it is to maintain a balance between tradition and innovation for the long-term success of your restaurant?**

Owner: This balance is very important. If we only offer traditional dishes, we might miss out on the local customer base; but if we only focus on innovation, we could lose our loyal Hong Kong immigrant customers. We hope that through this balance, we can not only satisfy customers who miss the flavors of home but also attract new customers through innovation, thereby sustaining long-term vitality.

Interviewer: What challenges have you faced in running the restaurant? How have these challenges affected your business strategies?

• **How have issues such as cost control, supply chain, and labor shortages impacted your daily operations?**

Owner: Cost control is undoubtedly one of the biggest challenges we face, particularly labour costs, which are very high in London. We also often encounter instability in the supply of ingredients, especially when importing specific items from Hong Kong, like Moonlight Soy Sauce and wontons. Labor shortages are another reality we have to face, especially during the pandemic. These issues have pushed us to become more flexible and efficient in our operations.

• **How have you addressed these issues? Do you have specific strategies to reduce their impact on your restaurant?**

Owner: To tackle these challenges, we've implemented several measures. For instance, we introduced smaller lunch portions, which not only meet the diverse needs of our customers but also help reduce waste and control costs. In terms of ingredient supply, we try to source from multiple suppliers and have built relationships with local Asian food suppliers. To address labor

shortages, we have strengthened staff training to ensure that our existing team members can work more efficiently.

- **What do you think is the biggest difference between running a restaurant in London and in Hong Kong?**

Owner: The biggest difference is in operating costs. Rent and labor costs in London are much higher than in Hong Kong, which means we need to pay closer attention to cost control. In addition, customers in London have more diverse tastes, unlike in Hong Kong where there tends to be more unified dining preferences. This requires us to design a menu with more variety to cater to customers from different cultural backgrounds.

Interviewer: My research highlights how immigrant-owned restaurants adapt to new urban environments by blending localization and globalization. How has your restaurant implemented this strategy?

- **How does your restaurant use both localization and globalization strategies to attract customers from different cultural backgrounds?**

Owner: We want to maintain the essence of Hong Kong cuisine but also realize the need to blend into the local London culture. We offer some fried foods that local customers enjoy while still keeping traditional dishes like rice noodles to appeal to customers from various cultural backgrounds. We also convey Hong Kong's unique culture through the restaurant's design, such as with the Star Ferry motif. This attracts Hong Kong immigrants, while also giving local customers a chance to experience new cultural elements.

- **What are some specific Hong Kong cultural elements incorporated into your restaurant's design? How do they impact both Hong Kong immigrants and local customers?**

Owner: The restaurant's design incorporates many Hong Kong cultural elements, such as the Hong Kong map and Star Ferry motifs. These elements make Hong Kong immigrants feel like they're back home, while local customers are intrigued by these novel decorations. They often ask about the stories behind these motifs, which has become a point of interaction between us and our customers, helping them better understand Hong Kong's culture.

- **Do you think this cultural fusion has helped your restaurant expand its market?**

Owner: This cultural fusion has definitely helped us attract customers from diverse backgrounds. Hong Kong immigrants visit frequently because of the familiar atmosphere and food, while local customers are drawn in by the unique cultural experience and culinary specialties. This balanced strategy has not only helped us establish roots but has also opened up new potential markets.

Interviewer: The dining space plays a crucial role in conveying culture, and your restaurant has a distinctive design. Could you explain why these design elements are so important to you?

- **How do you express Hong Kong culture through the décor and atmosphere in your restaurant's space?**

Owner: We pay special attention to the cultural expression of the space. We want customers to feel the essence of Hong Kong as soon as they walk in. By

using Star Ferry motifs and Hong Kong maps, we aim to provide Hong Kong immigrants with a sense of “home,” while also giving local customers visual elements that introduce them to Hong Kong culture.

- **Have these design elements helped your restaurant establish a brand image among customers?**

Owner: Absolutely. These unique Hong Kong cultural elements make our restaurant stand out from the many other restaurants in London. As soon as customers walk in, they can immediately identify our cultural background through the design. This not only helps us establish a brand image in the market but also leaves a lasting impression on customers.

- **Have you ever adjusted the restaurant’s space or atmosphere based on customer feedback?**

Owner: Yes, we adjust based on customer feedback regularly. For example, customers expressed that they enjoyed listening to Hong Kong-style background music, so we’ve added more Cantonese pop songs to our playlist. We also update the wall decorations from time to time to ensure customers always have a fresh experience when they visit.

Interviewer: Food often carries collective memory and cultural identity for immigrant communities. Has your restaurant fostered this experience for your customers?

- **Have the emotional needs of the Hong Kong immigrant community influenced your menu design and dish choices?**

Owner: Yes, we make a special effort to keep classic Hong Kong dishes like rice noodles and fish ball noodles. Many Hong Kong immigrant customers have told us that eating these dishes reminds them of their life back in Hong Kong, so we take these emotional factors into account when designing the menu, and we strive to preserve the essence of Hong Kong cuisine.

• **How do local customers respond to these dishes that carry strong cultural memories?**

Owner: Local customers show great curiosity about these dishes, especially those that they've never tried before. We explain the background and preparation of the dishes in detail, and many are willing to give them a try, providing positive feedback. Some local customers have even become loyal fans of our "specialty" dishes.

• **Do you have any special menus or events to attract customers and allow them to experience this sense of collective memory and cultural identity?**

Owner: We periodically launch special Hong Kong festive dishes, such as dim sum during the Chinese New Year and desserts for the Lantern Festival. These events attract not only Hong Kong immigrants but also local customers who want to join in and experience the festive cultural atmosphere of Hong Kong.