

## Is It Soup Yet?

By Derrick E. Lim

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If you crave “louhfo tong”, the answer depends on when you ask. If you are impatient and want fast food, the answer is “No, the soup is not ready.” Louhfo tong isn’t something prepackaged you add boiling water to. It is “slow cooking soup” at low heat made from scratch. It takes time to prepare ingredients and hours to concentrate all the flavors. Fast food it is not, but it is worth the wait and infinitely more delicious, healthy, nurturing, and healing. Perhaps this is why Chinese soup is traditionally the first course of the meal.

Teresa m. Chen, PhD, a health educator at the Pacific Complementary Medicine Center in Stockton, initially got interested in food from a college lecture. It wasn’t until 2003 while on the Board of Directors of Jene Wah Inc., that Chen seized the opportunity to capture the essence of louhfo tong. Jene Wah is a multi-service senior center frequented by Stockton Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans with roots to China’s Pearl River Delta.

What started as a collection of traditional Cantonese soup recipes from twelve seniors in their seventies, evolved into an international journey between two deltas, the San Joaquin and Pearl River. Chen did research in Chinese and English. Being bilingual and bi-literate, she elicited pearls of Chinese American oral history from a female perspective. Along the way, Chen immersed herself in making traditional louhfo tong with the seniors. She learned photography under the tutelage of professional photographers to give others a visual taste of po po’s traditional recipes. Chen even wrote successful grant proposals that increased funding to the center.

The similarity between louhfo tong and the stone soup parable is remarkable. The common theme is people with little, or seemingly nothing, only need a little of this and that to make something special. For example, the cuts of meat and bone typically used in louhfo tong are relatively inexpensive and considered as unusable scrap. Meat in China was scarce and costly to produce. When food (animal or vegetable) was available, it was important to use everything (e.g. organs and bones too), preserve it, or find another use for it. All people share this experience to some extent if you go back far enough in history. What makes Chen’s book special are the rich stories, photographs, and uncompromising cross cultural approach.

*A Tradition of Soup* can be purchased online. However, if you want to show your appreciation, and support the non-profit Jene Wah Center, please consider purchasing the book from [www.wuway.com](http://www.wuway.com). Chen is donating proceeds from book sales to Jene Wah as her thanks to the seniors for sharing the louhfo tong tradition.