ABSTRACT

This collaborative cookbook aims to demonstrate how different cultures and their associated diets have a significant influence and role in an individual’s nutrition, health, and health practices through the introduction of recipes and ingredients from each of our own cultures from their respective regions: Cambodia, Vietnam, Kerala, Pakistan, and North India.
INTRODUCTION

When the three of us began our medical school journey, far from home, in the diverse metroplex of Houston, the rigors of medical school were the common obstacles that helped us develop a strong friendship. Soon our conversations about medical school and the challenges of being the first females in our respective families to pursue our professions blended to include more important conversations, meaningful conversations about our families, challenges and joys of our cultures, ruminations of our colorful experiences that blended into the make-up of our lives. Where better to have these conversations than a shared table with delicious food?
“NYAM BAI HOWIE NOV?” (KHMER)

“Nyahm bai howie nov?” translated is “have you eaten yet?” It is a common greeting within the Khmer culture and may stem from the country’s history with famine and food shortage or the importance of food in bringing people together. Regardless, food and eating is an important part of the Khmer culture. Khmer cuisine is greatly based from India with elements incorporated from Thailand, Vietnam, China, and Malaysia. Flavors include hot peppers, lemongrass, mint, and ginger. Staples to the Khmer diet include rice served with fish and vegetables. Fermented fish in the form of sauce or paste, such as prahok, is an important protein source to the Khmer diet, which is especially true for poorer Cambodians. For dessert, tropical fruits such as bananas, mangos, papayas, rambutan, and palm fruit are favorites.
Similar to its neighboring country, Cambodia, Vietnamese people often greet others with the question “Ăn com chửa?” or “have you eaten rice yet?” Vietnamese people believe that consuming good food can bring harmony and affinity to the family. Common ingredients include fish sauce, shrimp paste, soy sauce, rice, fresh herbs, fruit and vegetables. Vietnamese recipes commonly use lemongrass, ginger, mint, Vietnamese mint, long coriander, Saigon cinnamon, bird's eye chili, lime, and Thai basil leaves. Different types of dishes may be prepared to bring good fortune and are usually done so during special holidays such as Tet. Given their long history of political conflict, the majority of people in Vietnam have lived in poverty, and consequently, ingredients remain inexpensive.
“KHANNA TAIYAAR HAI!” (URDU/HINDI)

“Khanna taiyaar hai!” translates to “FOOD IS READY!” Rather than asking if a guest or family member would like to have food, the Pakistani and North Indian cultures expect you to eat - there are no other options. Meals are synonymous with friends and family, so denying food is denying the family table. At the table, the Pakistani cuisine, which overlaps with North Indian cuisine, consists of colorful spices, foods eaten by hand, and endless meat and curries that are clearly meant to be shared. The cuisine is often described as “spicy,” counteracted by a variety of breads and starches - naan, paratha, rice, lentils - the list goes on. Contrasting parts of the Indian diet, Pakistani cuisine includes a greater focus on meats but cooked with the same turmeric, red chili powders, cumin and other spices that are found commonly in both cultures. The food can be made on a spectrum of healthy to cholesterol gouging, but the recipes are meant to quench hunger and feed the soul.
When you visit the coastal state of Kerala, India, your senses are overwhelmed by the smell of diesel and frying spices, the sounds of loud, thick chatter, and the vibrancy of the colors and paints used in reckless abandon. The cuisine of Kerala is much the same way. It is one of the most agriculturally diverse and coastal regions in India, the vegetation and fishing is integral to the state’s livelihood and its cuisine. So much of the food is a direct manifestation of the fruits, vegetables, and spices that are in season or harvested. These foods are then cooked with oil, spices, and coconut to create dishes to eat with rice or breads. This style of cooking has evolved as the culture has, to include variations and influences from around the world. However, the fundamental tenants of utilizing ingredients that are in season to create a variety of shareable dishes can be seen in Kerala cooking in the homes of Malayalee (the community of people from Kerala) families the world over.
LITERATURE REVIEW


SIGNIFICANCE

• Cultural foods play an integral role in an individual’s life – it influences their nutrition status, their overall health, and their sense of community

• Understanding the role that certain food items play can better prepare physicians to provide realistic lifestyle changes and goals with their patients

• While certain cultural diets were previously harmless, transitions to higher-caloric ingredients and sedentary lifestyles as countries became more industrialized or upon immigration to the U.S., obesity, diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol have become more prevalent within some of these cultural groups