Chapter 4

Macaroni: the Making of a Revolution?

"For change to occur, new foods, foods which were previously defined as alien and inedible, must come to represent positive rather than negative values." – Deborah Lupton

In the 1920s, agricultural scientists at Iowa State University in America developed a hybrid-seed corn that increased corn yields, better resisted drought than other varieties and was well-suited to mechanical harvesting. They released the seed to Iowa farmers in 1928. In 1941, Bryce Ryan, a professor of rural sociology at Iowa State, and Neal Gross, a graduate student, decided to investigate the diffusion of the hybrid-seed corn among Iowa farmers. They discovered that thirteen years after the seed’s release, almost 100 percent of farmers had adopted it, though only 10 percent had done so in the first five years while others had waited more than a decade to do so. In a 1943 study, Ryan and Gross tried to determine why this was the case.

Little did they know that their work would give rise to a conceptual paradigm that has been used in many disciplines – most notably in anthropology, sociology, education, public health and marketing – to analyze the adoption or rejection of innovations. It laid the groundwork for thousands of other academic studies and spurred researchers to determine what characteristics of an innovation make it appealing (or not), what sort of people are likely to adopt (or not) and what factors influence adoption.

Applications of the diffusion model have been diverse: an analysis of the use of prepared formula to bottle feed babies in developing countries, an examination of the failure of a plan to convince Peruvian villagers to boil their water, studies of the diffusion of news in America, the adoption of steel axes by Australian aboriginals, the rise of snowmobiles in the Arctic, the spread of organic farming, fax machines, cell phones, 'modern math,' genetically engineered tomatoes and Nintendo game systems. Analyses of diffusion have spanned many academic fields.

Yet while the diffusion of certain foods has received attention, it has mostly been in agricultural or marketing contexts, and has usually focused on a single food product. But what about foreign food in general? In post-war Australia, foreign food was an innovation.

And though it is not within the scope of this thesis to examine all ethnic cuisines that graced Australian shores in that era, this chapter will show that one cuisine – Italian food – was particularly influential, and that its adoption across almost all segments of Anglo-Celtic Australian society paved the way for a broader acceptance of other foreign foods and a subsequent transformation of the Australian diet.

Because there are social consequences involved in every decision to adopt or reject an innovation, an analysis of the diffusion of Italian food in Australia is an excellent tool by which to further understand the country's social history. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, transformations of food habits lead to changes in identity, and, as Mintz suggests, to alterations in people's views of the benefits of tradition versus change. In Australia, as in other western societies in the mid-twentieth century, innovation in food came to be highly

---

valued. Deborah Lupton, who has written about the socio-cultural meaning of food and eating, says that ethnic foods in particular became symbolically good to eat.\(^6\) If eating ethnic foods in a restaurant is an easy and pleasurable way to cross ethnic boundaries, as van den Berghe asserts,\(^7\) then assimilating those foods into one’s culinary repertoire – adopting them – must represent a reshaping of one’s cultural identity and a broadening of one’s cultural awareness, as well as an acknowledgment of the virtue of both. While significant in terms of the individual adopter, this social dynamic is truly profound when it occurs on a national level.

Italian food became an ideal vehicle for cultural change because it was the first foreign food to be adopted across all segments of Australian society in the post-war era. This chapter will describe the characteristics of Italian food that made it so appealing to consumers, and will briefly examine the five phases through which potential adopters must pass when deciding whether or not to adopt an innovation.

**Why Italian food?**

Italian food was the first ethnic cuisine to be cooked in most Australian homes on a regular basis. French food has always been regarded as gourmet and though it was adopted by elite Australians during various periods of gourmet interest,\(^8\) it has never been prepared regularly by the majority of Australians. Curries have enjoyed popularity for quite some time, but they were imported as part of the British food tradition, which itself incorporated

---

\(^6\) D. Lupton, pp. 126-127.
them in the Victorian era⁹ and so were not seen as particularly foreign until they expanded beyond tinned curry powder and leftover diced meat or sausages in the 1970s.

[Mum] used to do a dreadful curry, I remember now. She used to make curried sausages. I used to actually like them, until I learned how to make proper curries.... You’d put the sausages in with, sort of potatoes and carrots and they’d all sort of be boiling together, oh, with a bit of onion, and then they’d throw in that Keen’s Curry Powder, which is sort of the lowest grade you can imagine. And that’s what you’d have.....I think she might have actually had mashed potatoes to go with it. – Jean (1944, Adelaide)

As shall be discussed below, a food not being regarded as foreign can be a positive characteristic when it comes to adoption. But when Australians began to be interested in making curries from scratch, many of the spices were unfamiliar and hard to find, and the dishes themselves were quite labour-intensive. In the 1950s and 1960s, then, Indian food did not meet the requirements for the successful adoption of an innovation.

Another significant contender for the title of most influential foreign food in the post-war era is Chinese food. It was introduced during the gold rush, but was eaten only in restaurants and cafes for more than a century and did not begin to be incorporated into home cooking on a broad scale until the late 1970s.¹⁰ The reasons for this, which have to do with the food’s inherent characteristics and also with external factors, will be discussed below.

---


That leaves Italian food. The following section will use the diffusion of innovations theory to discuss the specific attributes of Italian-style dishes that made them so appealing to Australians in the period from 1950 to 1975. Subsequent chapters will analyse external factors related to the adoption of Italian food in Australia, such as the means by which Australians were exposed to Italian food in the first place – from immigration and overseas travel to the efforts of food companies and the mass media – to determine how each helped dishes like spaghetti bolognaisé become national favourites. As shall be explained throughout this thesis, Italian food was the right food at the right time, in the right place.

**Diffusion of Innovations**

According to Everett Rogers, whose book *Diffusion of Innovations* is a classic in the field, diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through different channels over time among members of a social system. The diffusion model is useful in that it discusses the characteristics of an innovation that determine whether or not it is likely to be adopted, mentions categories of adopters (from the most innovative and cosmopolitan to the least), accounts for interpersonal (face-to-face) channels of communication as well as mass media channels of communication (like women’s magazines and cookbooks) and talks about change agents (like food companies), that are able to influence the process of adoption. This chapter will rely extensively on Rogers’ definitions to determine the characteristics of certain Italian dishes (the innovation) that made them appealing to Australians (the members of a social system) in the years following World War Two, while at the same time showing why Chinese food took longer

---

11 At its most basic, Spaghetti Bolognaisé consists of minced meat (usually beef) in a tomato-based sauce over spaghetti, though it is open to innumerable interpretations. It is an Australianised adaptation of ‘Italian food’ based more on the needs, desires and resources of post-war Australian cooks than on any inherent familiarity with the cuisine of Bologna or any of the other regional cuisines of Italy.

12 E. Rogers, p. 5.
to be adopted. Other aspects of the diffusion model will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

- **The Innovation**

An innovation is an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by the prospective adopter. In the post-war era, most Australians of Anglo-Celtic background would have regarded the preparation of Italian food at home as something new.

The five perceived characteristics of any innovation are its relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability. A closer study of these characteristics reveals that while Chinese cuisine shared some of the perceived positive characteristics attributed to Italian food in the 1950s and 1960s, it also garnered more of the negative attributes, thereby curtailing its adoption in the early post-war years.

**Relative Advantage**

An innovation’s relative advantage is often measured in economic terms, but social prestige is also an important element, as is the innovation’s low initial cost, its convenience of use, and the immediacy of the reward. Incentives also help contribute to an innovation’s relative advantage by attracting people who would have been less likely to adopt. In other words, if having an inexpensive and easy-to-prepare spaghetti bolognaise party in the 1950s would have made you look like a gourmet to your friends, and if spaghetti was also on sale at the local grocery store, then it would definitely have been to your relative advantage to buy some and incorporate spaghetti bolognaise into your cooking repertoire. And the immediate reward: eating your innovative dish.

Very suave, to have spaghetti bolognaise in 1950. – Joyce (1932, Inverell, NSW)
But if a hostess needed something even more sophisticated than spaghetti bolognaise, the *Women's Weekly* had a spaghetti recipe guaranteed to impress even the most discriminating audience. Spaghetti a la Peers appeared in a column called Tony's Luxury Dish and consisted of spaghetti with a sauce made from chopped onions, butter, olive oil, fresh tomatoes, chicken stock, mushrooms, artichoke bottoms, prawns, garlic, chopped parsley, parmesan cheese and salt and pepper. In his introduction, Tony mentioned how popular spaghetti had become in Australia and dedicated his creation to "a very great gourmet and a lover of spaghetti — Donald Peers, the singer." A luxury dish, complete with a bit of name-dropping as well. Spaghetti a la Peers was certain to please.

Food has always been a way to scale the social ladder, and for many Australians in the late 1950s and 1960s, producing an ethnic meal for guests was a sure-fire way to acquire significant prestige. As Deborah Lupton asserts, trying new foods is a sign of sophistication and distinction, of people's desire to be innovative and different from the masses. A similar phenomenon occurred in America around the same time, which the social historian Harvey Levenstein attributes to the rebirth of cooking as a status symbol among an increasingly affluent middle class. "Could there be a more enjoyable way to broaden oneself than by developing an appreciation for — and talent at preparing — exotic foreign cuisines?" Many Australians would have readily answered, "No."

We all married in that '56-'57 type year, and we used to go to one another's places and everybody tried to outdo somebody else. Beef stroganoff was very high on the list.

---

Yes, that was a German dish, we thought. And spaghettis, and I can’t remember much else. We tried things, you know, we really put… well, it was our job, wasn’t it? We were wives. We had to cook. – Joyce (1932, Inverell, NSW)

One Australian cookbook entitled *Exciting Meals Around the World* went straight to the heart of the matter, claiming:

Here is something different, offering you the best of the world recipes and inviting you and your friends along on a unique trip you can take without stepping outside your own front door…. This volume of ‘Cookery in pictures’ is devoted to exotic recipes – a very ‘in’ style of cooking! … Even if you haven’t yet acquired a taste for culinary travels, we think if you want to be ‘with it’ you ought to start straight away…. Do you mean to stick forever to the traditional steak, hamburger, or even the exotic steak Chateaubriant?16

Nancy, one of the interviewees, was certainly in favour of preparing ‘in’ dishes versus traditional dishes; she remembers making lasagna for dinner parties in order to counter the usual fare of chops and baked dinners offered by others:

I can remember doing [lasagna] for parties, when we were young…. When we were first married we had a lot of dinner parties, and you do, I think, when you’re young. [Then] the standard of dinner parties did get to be a bit too hard to keep up with as everyone started getting into these more sort of exotic things. – Nancy (1941, rural Goondiwindi, QLD)

It was quite competitive! You know, the [So-and-so’s] would have a dinner party and that would have to be followed by us having a dinner party. Oh God…. Yes, there was a time when you were trying to be a bit better than everybody. I knew there was no way mine was going to be much better than anybody’s, but I hung in there. – Audrey (1935, Sydney)

---

15 *Exciting Meals Around the World*, Southdown Press (Melbourne) and Crest Books (Rushecutters Bay, NSW), 1968.
All of these women felt compelled to prepare new and unusual dishes for their dinner parties. Deborah Lupton, like other researchers, maintains that an experimental approach to food and cooking is strongly linked to both economic privilege and cultural capital; that is, knowing what is considered to be fine and interesting food and having the money to pay for it.

Some foods widely regarded as sophisticated – caviar, truffles, lobster, fine wines – are indeed expensive. The beauty of Italian-style pasta dishes, however, is that they are not. They allowed post-war consumers to be sophisticated and economically savvy at the same time, and that was (and still is), one of their greatest attractions. The Women's Weekly picked up on these characteristics. In a 1955 food column entitled 'Special Touch,' the food editor stated: "If you sometimes grow weary of your tried and trusted recipes try the simple and inexpensive variations suggested below – and add a touch of glamor to the menu." Neapolitan spaghetti (with sausage, mushrooms and lemon) was one of the two featured dishes. Thus, in one sentence, a pasta dish was described as convenient, economical and elegant. It would be hard to not view such a food favourably.

Margaret Fulton knew about pasta's many positive attributes when she published her Favourite Recipes in 1971, a cookbook devoted to party fare. In the 'Young Fun Parties' section, the Housewarming Party included a lasagna bolognese bake, while the 'Parties for Teenagers' featured a spaghetti party (spaghetti with bolognese sauce and milanese sauce):

---

18 D. Lupton, p. 146.
19 The Women's Weekly still used Americanised spelling in 1955.
Today’s young party givers have one thing in common with their parents – they love giving and going to a spaghetti party.... Four girls or less could make this with ease, each making a sauce or salad or the dessert. This is lots of fun and the cost is shared, important when a little money has to go a long way.21

But Fulton also moved beyond spaghetti and lasagna. Her ‘Sunday Luncheon or Supper’ menu featured pasta with beans, which must be one of the first times the word ‘pasta’ appeared in an Australian cookbook, and her ‘Italian Style Buffet Dinner’ included two cannelloni recipes:

Despite the fact that everyone knows there is more to Italian food than spaghetti, this meal is planned around the choice of two superb pasta dishes. There seems no use avoiding a dish for which Italy has become so justly proud.22

While pasta could certainly impress guests, another aspect of its appeal is that it could also be the basis of nutritious and convenient family meals.

[Spaghetti bolognaise and macaroni cheese] would be sort of like a Sunday evening informal meal, especially when we had the orchard and we had to go and pack fruit and stuff, and we’d come home and [Mum] would not be wanting to really cook anything very much. But we needed something if we’d had, you know, cold stuff at lunch. – Elizabeth (1932 Gosnells, WA)

That pasta was nutritious, convenient and economical had previously been reinforced during the war years when meat was rationed and pasta was billed as an inexpensive but healthy alternative. A 1945 cookery column in the Women’s Weekly entitled ‘Easy on the Ration Book’ advocated serving one meatless dish per week, such as a macaroni dish, and

21 M. Fulton, Margaret Fulton’s Favourite Recipes, Paul Hamlyn, Sydney, 1971, p. 41.
22 ibid., p. 113.
extending meat dishes by adding spaghetti or macaroni to a meat casserole. A Savoy Nutrifoods advertisement in 1946 also extolled the virtues of macaroni and spaghetti:

Savoy Nutrifoods: It’s delicious – it’s nutritious – it’s a Savoy Nutrifood. Macaroni, spaghetti and others. Cooked with onions, tomatoes, and grated cheese, SAVOY Macaroni or Spaghetti is a complete food, full of body-building proteins and energising carbohydrates. When meat coupons run low, don’t despair – prepare a satisfying dish of delicious Savoy Nutrifoods. Be sure you get genuine Savoy – the quality brand.

Such messages were taken to heart:

Mum did come up with spaghetti because she maintained that we needed our carbohydrates.... It was spaghetti and tomato sauce or stewed tomato with spaghetti and things like that. – Susan (1931, rural Armidale, NSW)

So the relative advantage of pasta was high: it was inexpensive and convenient. but could still confer social prestige and like all food, it provided an immediate reward.

Chinese food did not enjoy such relative advantage, despite its long history in Australia. Chinese immigrants arrived during the gold rush, and many of those who stayed in the country afterward worked as market gardeners, grocers, and as cooks on large sheep and cattle stations. Some opened restaurants. However, for a long time, these establishments served standard Australian fare.

23 Australian Women’s Weekly, 11 August, 1945, p. 33.
24 Australian Women’s Weekly, 26 September, 1946, p. 2.
A 7 June 1856 newspaper advertisement for John Alloos' Chinese Restaurant in Ballarat mentioned the following: “Plum Puddings, Jam tarts, Roast and Boiled Joints, all kinds of vegetables and, in short, every other nameable necessary and delicacy the season affords.”

While an immigrant presence can help influence the adoption of ethnic food (see Chapter 5), in this case it did not because nineteenth-century Chinese immigrants rarely exposed their foods to the host population – mainstream Australia.

Though foods that were more Chinese in nature did appear on restaurant menus over time, even a century later Chinese restaurateurs were still reluctant to offer truly authentic dishes to the Australian public. Instead, they opted for the safety of providing a selection of Australian entrees to complement their other offerings.

---

In the 1950s and 1960s, as [Chinese] restaurants moved into the suburbs they continued to compromise to suit the tastes of their Australian customers. Baked beans on toast could be found on the same menu as deep-fried duck or chicken and almonds.27

A century of discrimination had taught the Chinese to be cautious and the Australians to view Chinese food as something less than sophisticated, despite the fact that for many Australians, Chinese restaurant food was not only inexpensive but also exotic — two normally positive values. Paradoxically, its very cheapness seemed to work against it, its role as a convenient take-away food undermined its prestige, and its foreignness was too familiar at a time when such familiarity still smacked of a century’s worth of contempt.

The only alternative food I would ever have had in Ipswich would have been the Chinese shop.... There were no take-away containers — you’d take a saucepan and you’d ask for what you wanted. It was mainly curried prawns or something just terrible, just awful. But I think Mum used to love that. Mainly because then she was let off having to cook, you know. But in Sydney....it was the alternative group [that went], they were all poor. — Peg (1944, Ipswich, QLD)

Sometimes I tried Chinese meals, which we didn’t really consider foreign because it was Chinese: a lot of Australians, older Australians, you will find that they don’t like foreign food except Chinese because it’s not foreign! It’s been here for so long. — Vivian (1930, Melbourne)

We’d always had Chinese restaurants. Always. We’d always go and try that, but Italian was something different. — Audrey (1935, Sydney)

If we did do something when we were at Teacher’s College, that’s what we would do, we’d go to a Chinese restaurant because it was cheap. — Kate (1944, Newcastle, NSW)

Most of these recollections centred around Chinese food in restaurants or as take-away fare. However, adopting a food requires assimilating it into one's own cooking repertoire, and for many cooks in the 1950s and 1960s, preparing Chinese food at home was worlds apart from eating it out. Those who could whip up a nice curried prawns or chicken with almonds accumulated considerable social prestige because of the perceived complexity of the meal and in that respect, the advantage in preparing a Chinese meal was high.

Now, I could do the chicken and almonds, and I could actually prepare that before [the dinner party], but it was never the same as the chicken and almonds that [my] girlfriend [made] – she was quite the opposite of me, she was a fabulous cook – and she could put on a whole banquet and all of the things would be fresh and she’d be cooking at the time she was talking to us and drinking and slurping a bit of wine into the meal. I would make it beforehand and it would never, ever.... I would reheat it and it was never the same. – Audrey (1935, Sydney)

But the advantage was offset by the search costs: the ingredients for a Chinese dish were rarely found at the local grocers and were available only in Chinese stores, most often in large metropolitan areas. Many Australians would not have been able to buy the ingredients even if they wanted to, and those who could would have had to make a special trip to do so. In the 1950s and early 1960s, Chinese food did not enjoy the cost or the convenience of Italian food, the basic ingredients of which were made in Australia and could be easily found.

We bought what was available. We didn’t...we weren’t aware of other things and if there were exotic recipes, you couldn’t get the ingredients. For many years you couldn’t get the ingredients, you just accepted that. – Eileen (1937, Cessnock, NSW)

Once you could buy the sauce [for a Chinese meal], of course, I did have a few goes, but that was later on. – Valerie (1940, Canberra)
Even the *Women's Weekly*, which on the one hand was trying to promote Chinese cookery in the 1950s (see Complexity, below), seemed to sabotage its own efforts by publishing recipes calling for ingredients that would have been almost impossible for the average Australian cook to find. Its helpful note in a 1950s Chinese cookery column, stating that "most of the ingredients mentioned in the recipes are obtainable from stores specialising in Chinese foodstuffs" was not actually that helpful. Australians who did not live near stores specialising in Chinese foodstuffs would hardly be able to obtain the shark fins, bamboo shoots, water chestnuts, dried mushrooms or even green ginger necessary for the column's shark fin soup or chicken rolls. Even adventurous cooks willing to 'tweak' recipes would have been hard-pressed to come up with adequate substitutes for those ingredients: it would be a sorry shark fin soup without the shark fins.

*Compatibility*

Compatibility is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters. Existing Australian values — especially those relating to immigrants — were undergoing a significant change in the decades following World War Two. Though Italian immigration will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5, what is certain is that post-war European immigration challenged the way many Anglo-Celtic Australians viewed immigrants in general. Colonial-era European immigration — of which Germans were the largest non-English-speaking group though they barely comprised one percent of the population — was characterized on the other hand by

---

29 E. Rogers, p. 224.
far more cultural and linguistic assimilation and intermarriage,\textsuperscript{30} as was inter-war German immigration.\textsuperscript{31} It was incumbent on these arrivals, and not the host population, to adjust.

After World War Two, the government sought ways to boost the country's population while at the same time adhering to its White Australia policy. It encouraged Northern European immigration as an alternative to the dwindling supply of British immigrants, but even that was insufficient. Australia then reluctantly opened its doors to large numbers of immigrants from Southern Europe who by virtue of adhering to their cultural traditions, language and food habits began to challenge the status quo and force mainstream Australia to re-evaluate its perceptions and policies.\textsuperscript{32} This change did not occur overnight, but during the course of several decades. During that time, the grudging opening of the country's doors to Italian immigrants was accompanied by a more enthusiastic opening of its cupboards to Italian food.

This was not the case with Chinese immigrants, or their food. Though it had allowed thousands of Chinese labourers to immigrate to Australia between the 1840s and 1890s, the government's subsequent and long-standing Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 – the White Australia policy – ensured that the Chinese who remained in Australia after non-European immigration was halted would always be considered as the 'other' in a land acutely conscious of skin colour. Indeed, the number of Chinese in Australia dwindled from around 30,000 in 1901, when the White Australia policy took effect, to just over


\textsuperscript{32} W. Douglass, \textit{From Italy to Ingham: Italians in North Queensland}, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1995, p. 297.
6,000 in 1947,\textsuperscript{33} around the time the Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, infamously said, "Two Wongs don’t make a White."\textsuperscript{34}

Australian discrimination against the Chinese was apparent even overseas. The \textit{Women’s Weekly}’s roving reporter, Dorothy Drain, reported feeling the brunt of it in Malaya (now Malaysia) in 1950. In one of her weekly columns she wrote:

An Australian doesn’t have to be unduly sensitive to notice that the White Australia Policy, especially some particular instances if its enforcement, has caused a good deal of resentment. In the bank here the Chinese teller asked where I came from and said, ‘You don’t let Chinese into your country.’ I must have looked a little surprised because he added, ‘I don’t have to tell you that.’ It was all on a conversational plane but there was enough in the words to show the edge of bitterness.\textsuperscript{35}

Widespread discrimination against the Chinese meant that they, and their food, could not be held in high esteem by mainstream Australia. Despite a long history of Chinese food in Australia, existing Anglo-Celtic xenophobia, combined with other factors such as search costs and complexity, would not accommodate the wholesale adoption of Chinese cuisine until the 1970s. In this instance, past experience with the Chinese and their food did not equal compatibility.

— \textit{Familiarity}

Although Italian immigration in the 1920s had also generated cultural, economic and politically based discrimination and even violence – leading the 1925 Ferry Commission to

\textsuperscript{34} ibid., p. 306.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Australian Women’s Weekly}, 9 September, 1950, p. 13.
investigate hostilities between Italians who had become successful in Queensland’s sugar industry and their resentful Anglo-Australian neighbours, and culminating in the 1934 Kalgoorlie incident\(^\text{36}\) – post-World War Two Italian immigration, which will be discussed in Chapter 5, forced mainstream Australia to alter its notions of ‘them’ versus ‘us.’ Because of that, and because of a number of other factors, Italian food had some advantages that Chinese food did not. One factor was past experience – a familiarity with and long-term use of at least two of the ingredients essential to many of the most popular Italian dishes: pasta and mince. And it helped that these foods were not consciously identified as Italian until conditions were ripe for ultimately favourable associations.

Whether they realized it or not, most Australians had already eaten pasta, although the term ‘pasta’ would not come into widespread use until the 1970s: until then, ‘macaroni’ not only applied to elbow-shaped pasta but frequently to all pasta in general. English cookery had a long tradition of using macaroni and vermicelli in sweet puddings and of preparing macaroni cheese, and Australian cuisine was nothing if not English until the post-war era. Many Australians were also familiar with tinned spaghetti. Thus, macaroni, vermicelli and spaghetti were not alien foods, even when they started showing up in new guises. That meant even the most conservative eaters could find a link between their past experiences and some of the new foods being presented to them, making it easier for them to adopt some of these new foods.

\(^{36}\) In Kalgoorlie, an altercation between an Italian hotel owner and an Anglo-Australian patron who had been refused credit led to the latter being knocked down, hitting his head and dying the next day. This in turn led to rioting by a mob that was bent on destroying the property of Italian and other non-English-speaking immigrants. See G. Cresciani, ‘Italian Immigrants 1920-1945,’ in \textit{The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, its People and its Origins}, ed. J. Jupp, Angus & Robertson. North Ryde, NSW. 1998, p. 610.
I actually sort of see Italian food as sort of a continuity of Australian food. It's not all that different, really. I mean, it was and it wasn't. When we went to my mother's [foreign] friends' for meals, you know, [there would be] different kinds of pasta. I mean, Australians when they tend to cooked Italian food, tended to do one kind, you know: 'This is Italian!' And then you'd go and you'd find there are lots of different kinds of pastas. – Jean (1944, Adelaide)

Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management (1861) – the font from which many Australian cook books sprung – included recipes for vermicelli soup, a number of macaroni and vermicelli puddings, a steamed minced veal and macaroni loaf and three recipes for macaroni cheese. These dishes must certainly have been regarded as English, yet Isabella Beeton identified macaroni as Italian and commented on its positive attributes, perhaps because it was a time of Grand Tours of the Continent and a fascination with all things Continental, including the food. She urged her readers to eat more pasta:

[Macaroni] is the favourite food of Italy, where, especially among the Neapolitans, it may be regarded as the staff of life.... As it is both wholesome and nutritious, it ought to be much more used by all classes in England than it is. It generally accompanies Parmesan cheese to the tables of the rich, but it is also used for thickening soups and making puddings.37

An examination of long-standing Australian cookbooks shows that by the turn of the century, Australians had heeded Mrs. Beeton’s advice regarding macaroni. The Goulburn Cookery Book, the NSW Presbyterian Women’s Missionary Association’s Cookery Book of Good and Tried Receipts and the Country Women’s Association cook books all included macaroni and vermicelli recipes similar to those in the Book of Household Management,

---

plus a few more. Because many of the recipes in these cookbooks were submitted by the women themselves, it is safe to say that these cookbooks featured foods that had been adopted by mainstream Australia. Macaroni and spaghetti recipes appear in the first editions of the CWA's *Coronation Cookery Book*, for example, and have never left its pages. With the exception of a recipe for oriental ginger bread in the CWA *Coronation Cookery* book, however, none of these early cookbooks included any recipes at all that could be construed as Chinese. Chinese-style recipes would not appear in these cookbooks for a number of decades.

The *Goulburn Cookery Book* – first published in 1899 on behalf of the Anglican Diocese of Goulburn and continually published afterward – was a favourite of country women in New South Wales for years. Already in its twenty-second edition in 1918, the cookbook featured vermicelli soup, macaroni and meat pudding, two macaroni cheese recipes, and mutton and macaroni. But it also included baked macaroni and meat with tomatoes (made with cold meat) and the slightly more exotic-sounding cheese timbales with macaroni, and macaroni au tomate (made with tomato puree and onion, and baked). The tomato-based dishes were the precursors to the more Italian-style recipes that began to appear a few decades later.

The 1927 edition of the NSW Presbyterian Women’s Missionary Association's *Cookery Book of Good and Tried Receipts* features a variety of soups and casseroles that call for macaroni or spaghetti, including ‘timbale of chicken’ with macaroni, and ‘Madame

---


40 ibid., p. 204.

Carreno’s recipe for macaroni au gratin.' Its spaghetti recipe is a simple version of many recipes found today. It says to sauté chopped tomatoes in butter with “a little garlic if liked,” and season with salt and pepper. This sauce is then mixed into boiled and drained spaghetti, placed in a baking dish, topped with grated cheese (no particular type specified) and baked.42

Like the other cookbooks, the *Cookery Book of Good and Tried Receipts* did not forget the tried-and-true macaroni puddings and macaroni cheese.43 So common were these that many of the interviewees remembered having them regularly as children.

[Mum] would do macaroni and cheese in a sauce and she would do a dessert with macaroni. Baked, I guess it was egg in it, I think. Egg and milk base with macaroni. – Rosemary (1938 Armidale, NSW)

We might have had [macaroni cheese], but that would have been not Italian macaroni at all. It was macaroni with a white sauce with cheese in it, and put in the oven. – Carol (1931, Taree, NSW)

Thus, by the 1950s, Australians had become familiar with a basic ingredient of Italian cuisine: pasta. And though spaghetti recipes did not appear in every early Australian cookbook and were less common than macaroni recipes, some of the interviewees did grow up eating home-prepared spaghetti, too.

---

42 *The Cookery Book of Good and Tried Receipts*, 22nd edn, compiled for the Women’s Missionary Association of the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1944, p. 66.
[Spaghetti] was bought in packets, you know, the hard spaghetti, not the fresh pasta and things that we now have, and it was basically boiled, and then served with tomato sauce and a little cheese that [Mum] grated --- not parmesan cheese, we didn’t have choices of cheese. – Elizabeth (1932 Gosnells, WA)

She just boiled up spaghetti and made a sauce of cheese and tomato. I still make it – it’s beautiful, with a bit of onion. – Nancy (1941, rural Goondiwindi, QLD)

But even people who did not have home-prepared spaghetti almost certainly had the tinned version, usually on toast or in sandwiches. Advertisements for tinned spaghetti appeared regularly in the pages of the *Women’s Weekly*, where it was touted as a convenient and versatile food, as in the following 1950 advertisement for ‘Rosella Cooked Spaghetti in Cheese with Tomato Sauce’: “A quick, easy meal. Rosella Spaghetti with tasty Cheese. cooked to perfection, and ready to serve for breakfast, lunch or dinner.”

Helen Townsend, author of a book on the baby boomer generation in Australia, remembers tinned spaghetti with great affection:

The best meals we had were on Sunday nights -- Heinz spaghetti in tomato sauce round the Kero Fyreside. We thought it was the height of sophistication.

Most of the interviewees also ate tinned spaghetti when they were young, frequently for breakfast or for a

---

light meal. Others used it themselves when they were married, albeit with some creative twists.

Sunday night tea was often tinned spaghetti on toast. – Kate (1944, Newcastle, NSW)

I would put pineapple through it, and sausages, through the tinned spaghetti, if we went for a picnic, all in a pot. You could heat it up over a camp fire. – Sarah (1928, rural Armidale, NSW)

There was a meal that I used to conjure up. That was a can of tinned spaghetti thrown in with some mince – it was alright to eat mince at night by that time, you know, we didn’t eat mince at nighttime when I was a kid, you ate it for breakfast – yes, you’d throw a can of spaghetti into this mince, and the kids actually liked that. A lot of people do that. – Audrey (1935, Sydney)

--- The case of spaghetti bolognaise

Audrey’s tinned spaghetti creation was a makeshift version of spaghetti bolognaise, which was nominated by 54 percent of Australians in a 2001 survey as their favourite dish.46 Its enduring attraction is the result of its eminent compatibility with the needs and desires of Australian cooks. Spaghetti bolognaise combined two foods with which Australians were familiar in the post-war years: spaghetti and mince. Mince was used in a number of ways, such as in pies and rissoles, but in one dish in particular it came very close to being a beloved sauce for spaghetti: savoury mince. Savoury mince, a dish that many of the interviewees regularly ate during their childhoods and beyond, was usually made with mince, onion and gravy, although a 1918 Goulburn Cookery Book recipe also calls for

ketchup and some herbs. By substituting the gravy with tomato sauce, tomato soup or plain tomato, savoury mince easily became a simple bolognaise sauce.

She would cook up the spaghetti separately and then put a sauce of some description over it, a meat sauce I suppose, that’s what we would call it now, but she called it savoury mince. — Susan (1931, rural Armidale, NSW)

The Australian Women’s Weekly: The Busy Woman’s Cookbook, published in 1972, included a recipe for savoury mince that is almost identical to its recipe for ‘bolognese sauce,’ except that it substitutes butter for oil, tomato sauce for tomato paste, and includes flour. Side by side, the two dishes would have looked very similar. To many Australians, bolognaise sauce looked like a familiar childhood dish.

Another point in spaghetti bolognaise’s favour is that the sauce is made of meat, and Australians have long been fond of meat (see Chapter 3). Making spaghetti bolognaise at home would have given the cook the flexibility to put in as little or as much meat as desired. In Marion Halligan’s household, the emphasis was on more rather than less:

Spaghetti came, and we were proud we knew not to serve it with mashed potatoes, unlike some people, although I’m not sure we ever got the proportions of pasta to sauce right; we always piled up the meat.

One of the interviewees, Betty, went to Italy in the 1960s and discovered a different proportion of pasta to sauce than what she had been accustomed to:

When we were in Italy we would eat very carefully, and we had bread and cheese, we had probably a pizza or two at the pizzeria, obviously, but there were only two nights, I think in ten days, that we ate out. One [night] it was spaghetti bolognaise and... it was quite a large bowl of spaghetti, with seemingly a very small amount of sauce! But I was amazed. It was so delicious, and it was certainly enough sauce. – Betty (1933, Brisbane)

Spaghetti bolognaise struck a chord with Australian eaters. It was familiar yet different, comforting yet sophisticated, Australian yet Italian, too. It was a recipe for the ages.

--- Convenience

The final element of compatibility is that an innovation should meet the needs of potential adopters. From the 1960s onward, Australian women began entering the workforce in significant numbers. By the mid-1970s, 59 percent of young married women age 20 to 24 were working outside the home, as were 41 percent of women in the 25 to 29 age bracket. Whether they worked outside the home or not, women bore the primary responsibility for cooking and feeding the family, then as now.

I worked three days a week, but the days I worked, I worked a long time. And then I would come home and then I would cook. – Joyce (1932, Inverell, NSW)

---

Cooking was not only regarded as primarily a woman’s job, but also as a primary component of her gender identity. In other words, a nurturing wife and mother is supposed to cook for her family, and cooking is an important part of what it means to be female. Indeed, many consider culinary skill to be one of a woman’s most important assets.

Illustration from an Australian cook book published in Victoria in 1912

That was certainly true in Australia and other Anglophone countries in the 1950s. One American cook book publisher told advertisers that they had to convince women that “a homemaking heart gives her more appeal than cosmetics, that good things baked in the kitchen will keep romance far longer than bright lipstick.” Another 1960s-era cookbook was even more explicit: “A failed company dinner can only lose you a client or a friend. Bad dinners nightly can lose you a good deal more. Your husband.”

---


54 ibid.
My mother, probably one of the main things she did was feed us, and so I did grow up with that, that, you know, I had to be able to cook properly if I was going to have any sort of future, and obviously that included getting married. – Kate (1944, Newcastle, NSW)

While some researchers believe that male-dominated power structures in the home relegate women to preparing food geared to the likes and dislikes of their husbands and/or children,55 and others feel women exert their own power by rationally choosing to give food as a gift to their families,56 the end result is the same: women have traditionally done most of the cooking, though in recent years domestic gender roles and perceptions have begun to change.57 But in Australia in the 1960s and 1970s, as more and more women entered the workforce, they began to look for foods that were convenient, nutritious and easy to prepare, since they were the ones doing the cooking. And this need helped spur a dietary transformation.

Although Sidney Mintz was referring to the adoption of sugar in English diets more than two-hundred years ago, his observations apply very nicely to changes occurring in post-war Australia, too: “The exigencies of work changed where, how, and when ordinary people ate, and how new foods were created, with new virtues.”58 The many virtues of Italian food made it a natural choice for many women entering the workforce, and when the Women’s Weekly decided to publish The Busy Woman’s Cookbook in 1972, it included recipes for Italian onion salad, salami and olive salad, antipasto salad, spaghetti with chicken livers,

58 S. Mintz, p.7.
and a separate section on pasta sauces. Although one of the sauces — a curried steak sauce made with coconut — never captured the nation’s imagination, another one was already a busy woman’s favourite: bolognese sauce.59

Spaghetti bolognese became a basic meal... it was a good quick meal when you came home from work: mince, onion, spaghetti, and lots of tomato sauce. — Kathleen (1932, Tamworth, NSW)

I always found pasta dishes were really good because they’re nice and quick and that was something that I hadn’t grown up with and you can experiment a lot with that. — Linda (1944, Sydney)

Thus, because of their incorporation into English cuisine, their long and relatively unblemished history in Australia and their chameleon-like ability to meet a variety of needs, pasta dishes were imminently compatible with Australian sensibilities in the post-war years. ‘Macaroni,’ the all-encompassing and long-used term for pasta, would serve as the springboard for wide-scale ethnic experimentation because it was both familiar and exotic. It was the basis of a culinary revolution.

Complexity

Complexity means that the harder something is to understand or use, the less likely it is to be adopted. Boiling pasta is easy, and early sauces consisted of butter, tomatoes and onions.

Even a bolognaise sauce could be as simple as combining mince and tomato soup. Almost none of the interviewees considered the preparation of spaghetti to be very complex, although occasionally some family members thought it was a bit tricky to eat.

I can remember when I was in my late teens, [Mum] heard about spaghetti bolognaise, and she thought she would try it, and she sort of did, but my father, you know, ‘What’s this stuff?’ He didn’t like this, you know, he couldn’t handle this noodles, this pasta stuff, so it really didn’t go down very well. – Kate (1944, Newcastle, NSW)

Home-prepared Chinese food didn’t go down very well, either, in the 1950s and early 1960s. It was widely regarded as complex and time-consuming.

I did buy some Chinese cookbooks when we were living at the Gold Coast, but I don’t think I ever really used them. I sort of thought they were too complicated – I didn’t have a lot of time to stand and fiddle with the cooking... I was working such long hours. – Dorothy (1936, Armidale, NSW)

I did a Chinese cooking course... in the 1970s, then I thought, ‘All this hassle. It’s probably easier to go down and do take-away.’ – Grace (1940, Blayney, NSW)

When I was nursing I had Chinese friends who cooked for us and I could see all the chopping and preparation that went on, and I thought, ‘No, I’ll go out to the restaurant for this, thank you.’ – Carol (1931, Taree, NSW)

Chinese at home? No, not in those days. Because we couldn’t do it as well and it was so cheap just to go out and eat... just couldn’t do it. I mean these days we make Vietnamese and try many, many, many different things, but [then], no. – Peg (1944, Ipswich, QLD)
Perhaps recognising that Chinese food had a perception problem, the *Women's Weekly* devoted a cooking column to it in a 1955 featuring Hughie Kin – principal, founder and sole teacher at Sydney's first school of Chinese culinary art:

> “Chinese cooking is easy,” says Hughie Kin. “Some people are put off by printed Chinese recipes because there seem to be a lot of ingredients and a lot of instruction. But it’s not really hard... [and] it isn’t really expensive although many people say it.”

Sixteen years later, Margaret Fulton featured a Chinese Meal in her *Favourite Recipes* cookbook, full of a wide range of interesting dishes. But many of the ingredients – like wonton wrappers, olive nuts and oyster sauce – still required footnotes explaining they could be acquired at Chinese stores. And this sentence in her lengthy introduction may have been the final straw: “Unless you have had a great deal of experience in Chinese cooking, practice or the family first, cooking two or three dishes at a time.”

Clearly, in the 1950s and 1960s, Chinese food failed to meet a number of the criteria necessary for the successful adoption of an innovation. That began to change in the 1970s, however, as Chinese ingredients became more readily available and Australians became more willing to tackle complex dishes. Some observers claim that because there were still relatively few Chinese in Australia at the time, immigration could not have been a factor in the adoption of Chinese food. But immigration is only one of the factors that can influence adoption, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. If the inherent characteristics of an innovation such as Chinese food do not meet the needs of potential adopters, then external factors such

---

61 M. Fulton, p. 115.
as migration cannot help. The only solution is that the innovation be modified or that the needs of potential adopters change. That is what happened with Chinese food in the 1970s.

**Trialability and Observability**

Trialability is the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis. Few things are easier to experiment with than food. You can taste food at restaurants and friends' homes before trying to prepare it yourself, or you can be adventurous and experiment with a single dish or a whole meal. Either way, the risk is relatively low; if you don't like it, you don't adopt it into your cooking repertoire.

[I'd tear recipes] of any *Women's Weekly*, any magazine, out of the newspaper. I experiment. I like to try it. If we liked it, we continued with it, and you'd vary it to suit [your] tastes. Instead of putting tomato in, you might have tried something else in it. — Kathleen (1932, Tamworth, NSW)

I started following different recipe books, and we'd go somewhere and somebody would have something, and you'd think 'Oh, that was nice. I could probably do that.' By that time, in the 60s, food was changing anyway, and people were getting a little bit adventurous. — Grace (1940, Blayney, NSW)

I can remember the very first time I saw cheesecake and that would have been 1961. And the whole thought of having cheese in a cake was completely foreign, and I bought one of these at a cake shop, you know, and I tasted it and it was really quite strange, you know, that sort of flavour, but yes, if I see something I want to know about it. Things like patè. I would never have known what a patè was growing up, but of course, I tried them and now I make them. — Kate (1944, Newcastle, NSW)

---

Observability is the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others. If other people can see that you are being innovative, that will increase the likelihood that you adopt something new. Adding to one’s status is part of the relative advantage of adopting something in the first place. When it comes to food, what you prepare will be highly visible to others unless you are cooking only for yourself. Inviting guests to share the meal increases its visibility, and if the meal is innovative and successful, it can also raise your prestige. Frequently, requests for recipes will be sure to follow. Rogers says that “such visibility stimulates peer discussion of a new idea, as friends and neighbors of an adopter ask him or her for innovation-evaluation information about it.”

I think we probably thought we were fairly sophisticated and we’d try to impress each other and various boyfriends and that sort of thing. We loved to have dinner parties, and when we had dinner parties we never cooked anything we’d cooked before. It was always something new. – Kate (1944, Newcastle, NSW)

Re-invention

Re-invention is the degree to which an innovation is changed or modified by a user in the process of its adoption and implementation. According to Rogers,

The choices available to potential adopters are not just adoption or rejection; modification of the innovation or selective rejection of some components of the innovation may also be options.

---

63 ibid., p. 244.
64 ibid., p. 16.
65 ibid., p. 17.
66 ibid., p. 178.
Just as an innovation is an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by a potential adopter even if it is not necessarily new to others, so too can a food be perceived as Italian even if it may not be authentically so. What has happened is that the innovation has been re-invented. Modification should in this case be seen as an important part of the adoption process: "[Ethnic cuisine does not] remain static in either physical form or symbolism. It constantly gets recreated, transformed, and reinterpreted."67

In 1950, the *Women's Weekly* touted macaroni and spaghetti as ideal candidates for re-invention because of their blandness.

Cheese, tomatoes, garlic, sweet red or green peppers, meat, fish, ham, sausages, sauces, and mushrooms may be added to any macaroni or spaghetti dish. Quantity of flavoring added is largely a matter of taste: don't be afraid to experiment until you arrive at the flavor combination which best suits your taste."68

Australian women were not afraid to experiment, as can be seen in *Women’s Weekly* reader recipes from the 1950s, such as ‘corned beef italienne,’ which consisted of fried apple and corned beef surrounded by a macaroni or spaghetti ring and served with barbecue sauce;69 ‘prawn and macaroni scallops,’70 and ‘sausage and macaroni shape,’ in which sliced cooked sausages are placed in a pan, layered with macaroni and onion, topped with a mixture of bacon, stock, tomatoes, tomato juice and gelatine, and chilled until set.71

---

67 P. van den Berghe, p. 393.
69 ibid., p. 82.
70 *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 13 May, 1950, p. 58.
71 *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 23 September, 1950, p. 82.
Eliminating some ingredients and adding others is also a form of re-invention. With Italian food, a cook could choose one ingredient (spaghetti, for example) and reject another (perhaps olive oil) and yet could still prepare a meal that was significantly Italian in nature. For a long time, Australians preferred to have their spaghetti without garlic, which was often an optional ingredient when it appeared in recipes. It was even longer before many people started using olive oil regularly. Sarah grew up having a bit of spaghetti with tomato and onion, but it was never prepared with any olive oil. She said her mother used dripping or suet instead.

I use olive oil a lot now, but never at Abington, never, because one of the Italian prisoners of war asked for olive oil and the only olive oil my mother had was in the cupboard just in a little bottle. He put it on his bread and we were almost ill! Don’t know if it tasted alright. She might have had it six months, or six years before he ate it. He seemed to [enjoy it]. I was fairly disgusted. – Sarah (1926, rural Armidale, NSW)

At first we would never use olive oil because it was too heavy and too strong, so I don’t know what we were using as a substitute. I can’t recall...but I know olive oil was a no-no. – Eileen (1937, Cessnock, NSW)

**Communication**

Thus far, this chapter has focused on the innovation – Italian food – and the characteristics that made it appealing to Australians in the post-war era. Subsequent chapters will address how that innovation was communicated via interpersonal and mass media channels and how change agents influenced the adoption process. However, one aspect of communication is what Rogers calls the innovation-decision process, and because it focuses on the innovation, it is worth examining in this chapter. The process describes the five phases through which a potential adopter must pass when deciding whether to adopt an
innovation. They are: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation.\textsuperscript{72}

Knowledge occurs when an individual is exposed to the innovation's existence and gains some understanding of how it functions. Persuasion occurs when an individual forms a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the innovation. Decision occurs when an individual engages in activities that lead to a choice to adopt or reject the innovation. Implementation occurs when an individual puts an innovation to use. Re-invention is especially likely to occur at the implementation stage. Confirmation occurs when an individual seeks reinforcement of an innovation decision that has already been made, but he or she may reverse this previous decision if exposed to conflicting messages about the innovation.\textsuperscript{73}

So, knowledge occurs when someone reads about spaghetti bolognese, for example, in a woman’s magazine or cookbook, or tastes it at a friend’s house or restaurant. Persuasion occurs when that person thinks spaghetti bolognese might be something she would try to make at home, or when she remains convinced that spaghetti bolognese is something only Italian immigrants might eat. A decision occurs when the person decides she will buy the ingredients for spaghetti bolognese during her next shopping trip, or when she decides that she will never eat something with a strange name like spaghetti bolognese. Implementation occurs when the person makes spaghetti bolognese at home, even if it is with mince, tomato sauce and no garlic. It is re-invented spaghetti bolognese. Confirmation occurs when the spaghetti bolognese is served to much admiration, and/or when its continual appearance in women’s magazines, cookbooks, or cooking shows leads the person to consider herself innovative for having previously prepared it. If, however, the spaghetti bolognese is met with howls of protest by family members and most of it ends up in the

\textsuperscript{72} E. Rogers, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{73} ibid., pp. 20-21.
rubbish bin, the person may reverse his or her decision to be innovative in so far as spaghetti bolognaise is concerned.

In the case of a critical mass of Australians, spaghetti bolognaise did not end up in the rubbish bin, nor did lasagna or any number of other pasta-based dishes that started showing up after World War Two. Instead, these Italian-style meals were incorporated into the Australian diet. To a large extent, this was due to the fact that in almost every respect, the characteristics of pasta dishes such as spaghetti bolognaise met all of the standards for the adoption of an innovation. In other words, the inherent qualities of Italian dishes (as opposed to those of other cuisines) coincided precisely with the needs and aspirations of Australians leaving behind the war years and entering an era of increasing affluence.

Italian food, was perfectly poised to take advantage of this conglomeration of factors, and it paved the way for the subsequent adoption of other foods, especially Asian ones.

The extraneous factors influencing adoption will be discussed in subsequent chapters, beginning with the impact of post-war Italian immigration, in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5

The Italian Invasion

“Innovations enter a system from external sources; those who adopt first are more likely to
depend on cosmopolite channels. These earlier adopters, in turn, act as interpersonal and
localite channels for their later adopting peers.” — Everett Rogers

New cuisines or changes in existing cuisines arise from outside influences. Though
obvious, it merits a bit of examination. The Irish would never have had the potato if
Spanish conquistadors had not brought it back from the Andes. The Peruvians would never
have had one of their signature dishes – *lomo saltado* – had Europeans not introduced beef
to the continent, and had Chinese labourers not introduced the stir-fry cooking technique to
Peru.

Because outside influences are essential for gastronomic change, the most frequently cited
explanation of Australia’s fascination with ethnic foods is that it was post-World War Two
immigration that brought new ingredients and cooking techniques to Australia. John
Newton, a well-known food writer and author of *Wogfood: An Oral History with Recipes,*
sums it up in his own special way:

However the academics choose to interpret it (and choose they will), there is no doubt that [non-Anglo-Australians] have had a profound influence on the way we eat and live in Australia today....Three cheers for the wogs. Where would we be without them?4

In an article on cappuccino, Sydney Morning Herald writer David Dale goes a step further:

The cap (and its naughty offspring, the latte and the macchiato) became the most obvious symbol of how immigration made everyone’s life more enjoyable -- and of the transformation of Australia, in a single generation, from one of the dullest places on earth to one of the most interesting.5

Undeniably, immigration has had a significant impact on many aspects of Australian society, including the nation’s eating habits, as will be discussed below. Just after World War Two, Australia’s population was about 6.5 million, an amount deemed insufficient to meet Australia’s defence requirements following advances by the Japanese during the war. A policy of sustained immigration seemed to be the answer to both the defence question and to matters of economic development, though when the United Kingdom could not provide the numbers of migrants Australia had hoped for, Displaced Person refugees were recruited, followed by Northern Europeans, and finally, Southern Europeans.6 From 1947 to 1972, net migration was almost 2.5 million, with the Australian-born children of the new settlers adding another 1 million. Half of this net population growth came from non-British European sources, and half of that was Southern European.7 Italians were and still are the

---

largest non-English speaking nationality in Australia; during the 1960s and 1970s, they comprised about 11 percent of the total population.8

Australian immigration history and the role of food

It would be hard to underestimate the impact of more than a million and a half non-English speaking immigrants settling in Australia in the course of just a few decades, and indeed, much has been written on the history of Australia's immigration policies and on the social and economic consequences of the migrant presence.9 Scholarly studies of immigration in the 1950s, 60s and 70s were also preoccupied with measuring levels of assimilation and rarely recognised that acculturation works both ways. Only in the last fifteen to twenty years have scholars of immigration devoted their attention to the cultural impact of immigration on Australia, and even so, food historians would be hard pressed to find even a brief comment in the most of these tomes discussing the effect of immigration on the eating habits of the largely Anglo-Celtic population.

Charles Price, an historian/demographer who authored innumerable works on immigration and the social integration process in Australia, devoted hardly more than a paragraph to the subject, saying only that the great ‘broadening’ of the Australian diet came with the immigrants of 1947 and their successors.10 Helen Ware, in her lengthy section on Australia’s post-war Italian immigrants in Jupp’s The Australian People, touches upon language, religion, work, housing and health, but does not devote any space to Italians and

---

food, except to say that they frequently kept vegetable plots, drank wine and stuck to their own diets.\textsuperscript{11}

However, she did say that it “could be argued that in these two cultural features of diet and drinking habits the Italians have had more impact on Australian culture than vice versa.”\textsuperscript{12} But as is the case with Price, this comment is merely an aside, a passing reference not worthy of much attention in its own right, falling instead, in Ware’s case, under the section on housing.

While Price and Ware’s assumption that immigration influenced Australian eating habits is frequently echoed by other scholars, food writers and legions of ordinary Australians, no one has yet attempted a methodical and empirical analysis devoted solely to the effect of immigration on Australian eating habits. This is an indication, perhaps, that scholars of immigration, like many of their colleagues in other fields, have traditionally favoured the study of high culture over low culture. Jean Martin, for example, briefly acknowledged that immigration led to a greater diversity in Australian cultural life, which she defined as music, ballet, theatre and the arts.\textsuperscript{13} Academics who in the last two decades have been willing to examine the impact of immigration on the arts and language have yet to give the effect of immigration on the nation’s food habits detailed study.

Some immigration scholars have come close. Those who have studied the visibility of the migrant presence, especially of the Italian arrivals, maintain that it was an essential element


\textsuperscript{12} ibid.

in the subsequent transformation of Australian society.\textsuperscript{14} While Robert Pascoe explicitly argues that Italian immigrants exposed Australians to new, pleasurable ways of viewing food, neither he nor most other scholars of immigration offer any specific evidence for a link between the exposure of mainstream Australia to immigrant foods and the subsequent adoption of those foods. The historian Michal Bosworth makes the connection, but mostly to state that Italian immigrants have been making their foods visible in Australia since the nineteenth century, and therefore any claims that gastrodynamism occurred only after World War Two must be taken with a grain of salt.\textsuperscript{15}

**Immigration: a means of communication**

But post-war immigration – more so than any other wave of immigration – has had a significant impact on Australian food habits and specifically on the adoption of ethnic foods; even Michal Bosworth acknowledges that Italians – and therefore their foods – did not enter most Australians' consciousness until the middle of the twentieth century,\textsuperscript{16} when they arrived in far larger numbers than ever before.

These immigrants exposed their foods to a broader segment of the host population and served as interpersonal channels of communication – both as cosmopolite channels, which originate outside the social system being investigated, and as localite ones. As Rogers has made clear, channels of communication are essential to the adoption of any new idea because they inform an audience of potential adopters about the existence of an innovation,


\textsuperscript{16} ibid., p. 295.
that is, they create awareness-knowledge.\textsuperscript{17} After World War Two, Australians were exposed to more and more immigrant foods via restaurants, cafes, food shops and market stalls opened by the newcomers, many of whom entered food-related fields,\textsuperscript{18} and also through direct contact with immigrant neighbours and schoolmates.

Two doors down from us was an Italian family, and they used to make lovely wine. They used to get us, even the kids would go and have lunch or something, and they’d give you a glass of wine, and we used to get drunk! I remember the little boys who lived next door falling over the footpath. But, yeah, I remember having spaghetti and various things like that. But also that family, because they were peasants and I don’t know what part of Italy they came from now, but I do remember they killed pigs in the back yard and all the kids, we’d be lined up looking over the fence to see this gory thing and the poor pig would be chased around screaming. – Jean (1944, Adelaide)

Post-war immigration as a whole can be viewed as a cosmopolite channel of communication in that it came from outside the social system being studied. It served to increase the visibility of new foods as immigrant-owned shops, cafes and restaurants began to open.\textsuperscript{19} Foreign-born neighbours, friends or shop owners who were known to the potential Anglo-Celtic adopters served as localize, interpersonal channels of communication, providing more detailed information on the new foods that were appearing.

\textsuperscript{17} E. Rogers, p. 18.
If communication is how people create and share information with one another, then diffusion is “a particular type of communication in which the information that is exchanged is concerned with new ideas.” This chapter will focus on the different means by which Italian immigrants provided a great deal of information to Australians about one particular new idea, Italian food, and helped encourage its diffusion across Australia. It will also briefly examine why Greek food was not at the forefront of culinary change in Australia, despite the fact that Greeks were the second-largest non-English-speaking immigrant group to arrive in Australia after World War Two.

- **Cosmopolite channels of communication: immigration as a whole**

In his history of food in Australia, the popular food writer and author Richard Beckett (aka Sam Orr) argued that Australia’s adoption of ethnic foods was directly related to the migrant presence and the visibility of their foods.

The reason the immigration wave after World War Two made an impact in the eventual style of food and the style of restaurants was that an enormous number of people of similar tastes arrived within a very short time; and although to some extent they formed communities within the general Australian community, they were virtually spread throughout every city and town in the land. Thus they not only created a ready-made market for, in their case, familiar (and in the case of Australians, alien) food products, but the new products became extremely visible to the community at large.

Beckett was correct in stating that immigrants were spread across Australia. Italian immigrants, for example, settled in almost all parts of the country, beginning with regional areas in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and then largely in metropolitan areas.

---

20 E. Rogers, p.17.
after World War Two. And wherever there were Italians, there was sure to be Italian food. Though the range of food items may have varied considerably from metropolitan to regional areas, by the middle of the twentieth century few Australians could have failed to notice at least some of the Italian foods that were appearing in ever greater numbers, particularly in areas where Italian immigrants had carved out their own particular spaces.

By the early 1960s, the diverse groups of Italian immigrants had coalesced into something that could be considered an Italian ‘community’ – at least by mainstream Australians – and that community was a visible one, especially in areas like Fairfield, Leichhardt, Carlton, Griffith and Fremantle where Italian shops, cafes and clubs provided a distinctly Italo-Australian flavour.

You could see them in the streets. You could hear them speaking Italian, you know. There would be some Italian things in the grocery shops, all that, you know. Gradually you get a bit more variety. More particularly when I was over in the Eastern states, the Greeks and Italians were visible and their restaurants, and that, cause it was also in the grocery shops and things. – Elizabeth (1932, Gosnells, WA)

But why were these foods visible? Traditionally, it has been assumed that immigrants would (and should) assimilate into the host culture. That is, over time their consumption habits and behaviour should become identical to those of the host culture. That this was not an easily obtainable, or even an ideal goal, was commented upon by some observers. The immigration scholar Jean Martin, writing in the early 1950s, said, “Perhaps the Australian

---

way of life that most people want migrants to achieve is one that few Australians can achieve themselves.”

Dorothy Drain, a columnist for the Women's Weekly who frequently spoke out about societal and cultural issues, used one of her columns in 1950 to remonstrate against a movement that would make it illegal for 'alien immigrants', specifically Italians, to speak anything other than English in public. But many members of the non-alien population thought assimilation to Australian cultural norms would be beneficial to the immigrants themselves. Emma Ciccotosto, an Italian immigrant who arrived in Western Australia as a child in 1939, told Michal Bosworth she felt some pressure to conform.

Emma remembers that doctors advised her family against using olive oil, regarding it as unhealthy. Many immigrant families agree with her in recalling the story that olive oil was not good for them, and tell of the difficulties they experienced in acquiring it, especially outside the cities. Among the many prejudices Italian (and other migrants from the Mediterranean region) had to combat in those days was the charge that olive oil made their skin oily – just as garlic made their breath smelly.

Emma’s experience serves to illustrate that in one area at least, immigrants from the Mediterranean actively resisted assimilation into Australian culture. They held on to their food habits despite all attempts to the contrary. Teresa, an Italian immigrant who lived on a farm in the Murray-Goulbourn area, said she probably would always cook 'her' way:

---

26 E. Ciccotosto & M. Bosworth, pp. 228-229.
There's one Australian friend use to come in our house and soon she got in the door she'd sniff and say 'Smells good.' Every time. That's because we still keep our Italian way, we make salami, olives, wine, sauce, bread, just because we like it.28

In a 1978 survey, more than 75 percent of Italian and Greek immigrants reported having no 'Australian' meals. In fact, the survey found that a longer period of residence in Australia led to an even greater retention of traditional cuisine.29 Because Italian family life is predicated around the table, and because Italian identity is very strongly tied to food, it would require far more than a doctor's condescension or the taunts of the uninformed to make Italians give up their food. They held firm.

A similar phenomenon had already occurred in America. Levenstein found that the American-born descendants of nineteenth-century Italian immigrants were still holding on to their food habits instead of adopting 'American' food, and that by the 1930s their steadfastness had paid off:

They not only managed to retain many of their distinctive food tastes, they were able to watch them become part of the mainstream.... Pasta and tomato sauce, originally a symbol of intransigent resistance to Americanization ("Still eating spaghetti, not yet assimilated," noted prewar social workers), was crossing ethnic, regional, and class lines.30

As outlined in Chapter 4, pasta played a similar role in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. It was an ideal vehicle for change. Italian immigrants helped Australians to hop on board by refusing to give up their traditional foods, not only making them visible, but also available,

---

to a wider audience. Even as early as 1970, some commentators believed that the Italian influence on Australian food habits would be profound and permanent:

Fortunately, Italian influence will never disappear. It is now commonplace for Australians to eat pizzas or spaghetti bolognaise for lunch, munch salami before a drink in the evening, buy fennel for a salad, enjoy provolone cheese, begin a meal with melon and Parma ham and even order fried octopus at their favourite Italian restaurants. And to complete the picture, Italians in Australia make some of the world's best spaghetti – it is even exported to Italy.31

By arriving in large numbers after World War Two, settling across all areas of the country, battling the racism of assimilation and safeguarding their own cultural practices, Italian immigrants were able to become an important channel of communication at just the precise time mainstream Australia was ready to listen to a different message.

• Cosmopolite and interpersonal channels of communication: markets and shops

It is an experience repeated daily the world over: window-shopping. How often have we walked by a store window, looked at the displays and become aware of new styles and products? Even if we were to never cross the threshold to investigate further, we would have gained some knowledge that we did not have before – awareness knowledge.

Immigrants who opened shops stocked with new food products provided the host population with awareness knowledge. Given the significant numbers of Southern European immigrants going into the catering industry in the post-war years, it would have been hard to avoid seeing some of their foods. By the late 1970s, for example, nearly one-

---

31 B. Hayes, Two Hundred Years of Australian Cooking, Thomas Nelson Australia, Melbourne, 1970, p.137.
third of all fruit-and-vegetable-shop owners were Italian\textsuperscript{32} and they and other Southern European immigrants helped create a demand for many new fruits and vegetables such as zucchinis, capsicums, eggplants, olives, chillies and artichokes.\textsuperscript{33}

We started getting different kinds of fruit and vegetables: aubergines, eggplant, you know, all that kind of stuff. We'd just grown up with the traditional tropical Australian fruits and stone fruits, but we got all kinds of stuff, which was great. – Linda (1944, Sydney)

Because Italian small-business owners tended to open family-staffed businesses that featured traditional Italian products, such as food, they also were highly represented in cafés, restaurants and delicatessens.\textsuperscript{34} In short, they were well-suited to provide mainstream Australia with lots of awareness about new foods.

We started to get European cheeses, and certainly haven't seen those before. We'd grown up with 'cheese,' block cheese. No other sort. It was just cheese.... But the delicatessens were the eye-openers, because oh, well, besides the cheese of course, now I'm thinking of the salamis, which we hadn't seen before, either. We'd seen devon, which was a meat thing that people sliced, but no, it was an eye-opener. – Joyce (1932, Inverell, NSW)

When I'd go home from school and have to go to the butcher, they were Italian. He was Bolotti, and he was great. I mean, he did have nice cans of different things on his shelves.... He looked Italian and sounded Australian, I imagine he probably came when he was very young, or he was born here, but his parents were definitely Italian.

\textsuperscript{32} S. Castles et al., Working Papers in Multiculturalism No 2 The Global Milkbar and the Local Sweatshop: Ethnic Small Business and the Economic Restructuring of Sydney, published by The Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong, Australia (published for The Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet), Wollongong, 1991, p. 73.

\textsuperscript{33} E. McCaughey & M. Hoban, The Victorian Market, Time and Place Publications, Fitzroy, VIC, 1984, p. 23.

That was what was nice, to go to the shop. There was something different about it. – Peg (1944, Ipswich, QLD)

I can remember that after the war, all the delicatessens started to come. They had salami and they had different cheeses. And they had blood sausage, which even to this day I haven’t eaten. – Carol (1931, Taree, NSW)

Having one’s eyes opened to new foods does not ensure adoption, but it is an extremely important part of the communication-decision process mentioned in Chapter 4, and contributes to three of the five phases through which potential adopters must pass: knowledge, persuasion, and decision. In Carol’s case, she gained knowledge about salami, cheese and blood sausage by visiting a delicatessen. She formed an unfavourable opinion of blood sausage in the persuasion stage, which led to her decision to never eat it or prepare it, thereby canceling out the last two phases of the adoption process: implementation and confirmation. However, Carol did not say she had never had salami and different cheeses. Though we might never know for sure, it is possible that Carol formed a favourable opinion of them in the persuasion stage, decided to serve them at home, received a favourable reaction and confirmed her idea to incorporate them into her cocktail party menu. Or perhaps not. But even if Carol did not try the foods she saw in shops, many other Australians did, even those people who might have made a point of not trying the food of immigrants. Curiosity is a powerful motivator; food breaks down barriers.

Bread changed dramatically when the Greeks and Italians came. It was magnificent. We’d never tasted bread like that before. Crunchy. Dad would bring it home with a really nice bit of cheese and we’d carve off bits. To give Dad credit, despite his racist attitudes, he said that the best thing that ever happened to Australia was this mass immigration and the way that the food improved, and the greater variety of bread and cheese, and everything. – Linda (1944, Sydney)
Immigrant-owned businesses served three functions: they not only helped create general awareness knowledge about the new foods, but they also supplied those foods to people who were interested in trying them, and served as interpersonal channels of communication by providing cooking advice or recipes to customers. Adelaide cooking teacher Rosa Matto believes market stalls, shops and delis had a significant impact:

Our Central Market and our delis have done more to educate Australian palates than all the restaurants put together. We certainly didn’t learn a great deal about Italian food from eating in restaurants. But you can go to your local deli and say my recipes ask for pancetta – what is it? and he’ll cut you a bit off and you’ll say it’s a bit fatty and then he’ll explain you’ve got to have a bit of fat – it’s good for you.\(^{35}\)

An innovation’s trialability, or the degree to which it may be experimented with on a limited basis, is an important determinant of adoption. Food-related change tends to be minimally “trialable” and that trying frequently leads to buying, which is why many grocery stores, fruit and vegetable shops, delicatessens and ice cream parlors offer samples for customers to taste. Even if there are no samples available, consumers know that buying a small amount of a new food as an experiment is not difficult, risky, or usually very expensive. In post-war Australia, many people were willing to try the new foods they saw in delicatessens and fruit and vegetable shops.

We were pretty cheeky nurses. We didn’t have much money, that was our biggest problem, but no, I don’t think any of us were shy [about going into shops]. …Certainly the delicatessen operatives were great, because they wanted to… why they set their shops up, I think, was that they wanted to have the food there for themselves and the people that knew what it was all about. It was an enormous change. – Joyce (1932, Inverell, NSW)

We’ve had all the ethnic people come to our town, it’s been wonderful, access to all these things. And if you’re interested in cooking and you can have access to all these things on the shelves, well, you just try them. I come home, and I think, Oh, gosh, let’s try this. – Kathleen (1932, Tamworth, NSW)

If the sign of an immigrant business’s success is that it has transcended the bounds of its ethnic enclave and begun to attract a wider audience, then many post-war immigrant businesses across Australia were very successful. A history of Victoria Market showed that in post-war Melbourne, Southern European wholesalers and retailers first began to offer new varieties of produce mostly to fellow immigrants, but later to a wide range of shoppers,\textsuperscript{36} many of whom relished the opportunity to ask about the new fruits and vegetables and how to prepare them.

Other Italian-owned businesses had to expand to meet the demand from an ever-increasing customer base. By the 1970s, the Italian-owned D’Orsogna Brothers smallgoods company in Fremantle, “benefiting from the fashion for salami and prosciutto, which was ousting devon and corned beef from Australian tables,”\textsuperscript{37} was giving other producers a run for their money. Successful ethnic food businesses like D’Orsogna Brothers are essential components in the developing foodscape of any country.\textsuperscript{38}

I don’t think we would have changed if we hadn’t had immigration, I’m sure we wouldn’t have. Because there wouldn’t have been the demand for all these foods. There would have been a few people who’d traveled, that were interested. The foods wouldn’t have been so available as they are. – June (1941, Brisbane)

\textsuperscript{36} E. McCaughey & M. Hoban, p.28.
• Localite channels of communication: restaurants and cafes

Vicki Swinbank, a food writer, cookery teacher and Melbourne native, claims in an article for the *Italian Historical Society Journal* that the influence of Italian migration to Australia has been most strongly felt in restaurants. She focuses on Italian restaurants in Melbourne, such as Fasoli’s, the Cafe Latin, the Cafe d’Italia/Molina’s, Florentino and Mario’s, all of which were magnets for the ‘intelligentsia and bohemians’ of the day: artists, musicians, actors, writers and students. Swinbank concludes that these restaurants, dubbed the Melbourne mafia, set the course for the rest of the country.

[They] created a vital and vibrant cafe society where good food, wine, stimulating conversation and entertainment flourished, transforming and enriching Melbourne’s otherwise rather dull and drab restaurant scene at the time...individually and collectively, they helped bring about a massive change in Australian eating habits, a change that was to gain great momentum with the programme of mass migration that took place after the Second World War.39

Vivian, one of the interviewees, said the restaurants in Melbourne certainly changed her eating habits:

We knew the sort of cheap but very good and convivial restaurants around the university. It was not like it is now. The main places people go to are on Lygon St., which are gorgeous now, absolutely gorgeous. But these were quite sort of..., we were all rather poor, and this was back in 1948-1949, and the restaurants were much more workaday and they were not in Lygon Street that I knew of. We just went to these restaurants in Lonsdale Street. So then that’s how my awareness of food broadened.... Spaghetti bolognaise was my idea of paradise at an Italian restaurant. – Vivian (1930, Melbourne)

What is certain is that while shops and markets allowed customers to try and/or buy individual ingredients, restaurants provided many Australians with their first taste of ethnic foods in an already prepared form and gave them something specific they could try to duplicate at home.

Veal was significant because we'd not had veal at home, but as veal came on the market, which of course was the Italian influence, I found it was a meat that didn't have a lot of fat in it, and I used it quite a lot. By [the 1960s] the Italians were in great evidence and they talked about it, and when I went to restaurants run by Italians there would be veal dishes. – Elizabeth (1932, Gosnells, WA)

I think a big influence has been you know, as I said before, you went to Sydney and had the spaghetti bars and then the Italian restaurants or the Greek restaurants and things like that started to crop up more and I think we've changed our eating habits a lot because of that. – Dorothy, 1956, Armidale, NSW

Though perhaps the numbers of immigrant restaurants cropping up in the post-war years led people to believe it was a new phenomenon, immigrant restaurants have had a long history in Australia, as Michael Symons points out in his wide-ranging history of Australian food habits.40 Some of the earliest were founded in the gold rush era of the 1850s, including Italian restaurants in Daylesford catering to a largely Italian immigrant clientele.41 A number of French-style restaurants also arose in the mid-nineteenth century, but were considered to be gourmet and not immigrant, while, for the most part, restaurants established by Chinese proprietors around the same time served Australian food to Australians.42

---

By the turn of the century, Italian restaurants like Fasoli's in Melbourne had begun to attract a more varied clientele, consisting of Australian artists, poets, journalists, politicians, actors and students. Full appreciation of Chinese food took a bit longer, but by 1960, most Australian families would have made a trip to the local Chinese restaurant. However, even then, there was nothing like the number of restaurants that there are today. By the mid-1960s, there were only 342 licensed restaurants in all of New South Wales.

It wasn’t until, I remember, must have been the end of the 1950s, that the first café set up that sold spaghetti, and everybody started buying that – takeaway spaghetti. Up until then there was nothing, a couple of Chinese restaurants, but that was all. – June (1941, Brisbane)

in Adelaide in my day, a Chinese [restaurant] was almost way out. You didn’t get anything like that. When I go to Adelaide now, I tell my students... the beauty of multiculturalism is the food! When I was a kid, there was nothing. I mean, fish and chips and restaurants that had grills: chops and egg, steak and egg, that was standard. Now, it’s the world’s your oyster. It’s terrific. – Alice (1931, Adelaide)

One thing many immigrant restaurateurs said about their Australian customers is that they were always willing to give new foods a go. Michael Platsis was working at the Camellia, one of the first licensed restaurants in Brisbane, in 1965. It was owned by Italians and served Italian food and wine as well as some more typical Australian fare. He remembers the Australian customers asking to try things:

---


We'd serve a glass of wine to the Italians with lunch and sometimes the Australians would say what are they drinking over there, and they'd try it and they'd say awful stuff, I'll have a beer instead. But slowly they'd get more educated, [and] then they might take half a glass.46

Grace drank half a bottle:

I do remember the first time [my husband] and I drank wine and that was back in the '60s and we went out to a restaurant...and there were very few restaurants in Sydney, [but] there was a place called Valentines, and we went there and said, 'Oh, we'll have a bottle of wine.' Well, we'd never drank wine before and we drank this bottle of wine. Goodness me, what a mistake. Well, anyway, we got home okay. — Grace (1940, Blayney, NSW)

Beppi and Norma Polesi opened Beppi's Italian restaurant in Sydney in 1956 and frequently gave food away so that their customers would try it. "The mussels I used to put on the table, the same with the calamari, and say, 'Go on, try them'," said Beppi Polesi.47 Max Lake, a member of the Wine and Food Society that began to frequent Beppi's every Friday, remembers:

Beppi's was the sun coming over the horizon, because although we knew Australian-Greek food and Australian-Chinese food, the first taste of really authentic Italian food we had in Sydney was Beppi's.48

While perhaps not everyone would have tasted mussels in a restaurant in the 1950s and tried to make them at home, there were certainly other dishes that inspired people. Restaurants were, and are, important channels of communication.

---

47 ibid., p. 198.
48 ibid.
As far as going to the nice restaurant, you'd have beautiful, oh I can remember, lovely fillet steak, or beef wellington. So I would come home and then I would do beef wellington. You would have lovely sauces over your asparagus. You know, so that's how you start then to look up your recipes in books, and you do that at home, then. – Kathleen (1932, Tamworth, NSW)

You go out you experience something and you discover you like it and you come home and you cook it. – June (1941, Brisbane)

Shortly after her arrival in Australia in the 1950s, Lucia Rosella opened a pizza bar in Adelaide’s Central Market that is now the oldest surviving Italian pizza bar and café in Adelaide. Lucia said her pizza made an impression on the Australians.

One day, my Australian next-door neighbour smell my cooking and said, ‘Lucia, what are you cooking?’ I couldn't explain it to her, so I gave her a taste. She loved it. It was a pizza. She kept saying, ‘Start up a pizza bar! Start up a pizza bar!’ That was in 1957. I found a little place in the market and I said, ‘That’s the one for me.’ It wasn’t a very big place. I served pizza, spaghetti, cakes and sandwiches. Lots of people used to come in after the football for a pizza. They all enjoyed it and some wanted to cook it at home. That made me very happy because I enjoy my food and I like everybody else to enjoy it too.49

Restaurants like Lucia’s helped changed Australian eating habits because they provided customers with information about certain foods, allowed them to try those foods, and gave them ideas for dishes they might want to replicate at home, thereby facilitating the adoption of some of those dishes. In the post-war years, if Anglo-Celtic Australians wanted to try ethnic food, they usually had to go to immigrant-owned restaurants.

• **Interpersonal channels of communication: friends, neighbours, and prisoners of war**

The post-war years were a period of significant cultural adjustment, both for the immigrants and for Australia itself. Australians who might have been willing to taste Italian food in a restaurant might not necessarily have wanted to have an Italian move in next door. Discrimination was rampant and 'wog' was not the term of affection then that John Newton and others who claim it best stands for “wine, olive oil and garlic”\(^\text{50}\) think it is now. It is hardly surprising, then, that the reaction to 'wog food' was frequently negative, as will be discussed below.

**Friends and neighbours**

But despite seemingly insurmountable barriers, many Anglo-Celtic Australians did come into close contact with the immigrants' foods via school yards and neighbours' homes and gardens, as is clear in the many accounts of such encounters described in immigrant histories and the autobiographical reminiscences of Anglo-Australians.\(^\text{51}\) Even the most cynical observer must suspect that such encounters occurred frequently enough to have an impact, and that they did not occur in a vacuum.

Maria Mantello, in her study of the Sicilian farming community in Werribee Park, makes clear that Australian friends or schoolmates of the Italian immigrants were frequently eager to try their foods: "Lena Burgio recalled her Australian classmates jumping at the

---

\(^{50}\) Newton, p. 3.

opportunity to swap a jam sandwich for a spinach pastie or homemade bread with chives and salami.”

Warren Fahey, the author of a book on Australian eating habits, can relate. He vividly recalls his introduction to new taste sensations, an experience that has remained indelibly imprinted on his gastronomic conscious:

I remember my first encounter with salami. It was in the early 1950s and coincided with the first Maltese and Italian students who came to our primary school. There we were in the playground eating our sandwiches of devon, peanut butter, vegemite, soggy tomato and cold lamb, and there they were with these whopping huge sandwiches stuffed with what looked like half a block of cheese and an equally large chunk of salami. Kids being adventurous eventually decided to swap sandwiches and one day I got my mouth around one of these amazing sandwiches and it was delicious. It was ‘no more devon for me’ and I never looked back.

Former Chief Justice Elizabeth Evatt’s first encounter with tortellini around 1950 was also memorable enough for her to describe it in an autobiographical essay that formed part of an encyclopedic collection entitled Australians From 1939. Her double bass instructor, Mr. Ricci Bitti, taught the family how to make tortellini from scratch one Sunday afternoon. The experience was a turning point for Evatt; until then, she writes, spaghetti either came in tins or was cooked in tomato soup.

Australian children of the early post-war years seemed to be particularly adventurous, tasting things that their parents might never have dreamed of preparing, and those foods

often stayed with them. Kate remembers a Polish family that moved in across the road with a daughter her age, whom she would accompany to school.

So I had to take her to school, which meant I had to go in there every morning and collect her, and the smells, you know. I remember thinking how different the smells in her house [were] to the smells in our house, and of course, they were food smells. ... I loved what I ate over there. My mother would have been absolutely mortified, I think, if she’d known what I was eating, because I love those things. – Kate (1944, Newcastle, NSW)

As a kid growing up, apart from the influence of my Latvian friends, I had a lot of Italian and Greek friends, too, and they were a big influence, especially the Italian friends, yeah, cause Mamma was always making something that I thought was fabulous. So I guess I always leaned towards that sort of food. I always favoured it. — MELI Y.

In many cases, the mothers of these children were also able to bridge the cultural divide with food. Scholars who interviewed Italian immigrants about their experiences found that often, Italian women were able to connect with Australian women over cooking.55

When we moved to the more working class area, we were mostly amongst immigrant families in the street. I think there were about three Australian families in the entire street, and my mother was a very gregarious person, so we had a lot of people who came in, and she would start cooking things, and they'd bring things, and there was a lot of food sharing. In particular Italian and Polish people.... Spaghetti we used to have in the Australian style. [It]was sort of pretty much the stuff out of the tin, you know, that sort of Heinz type thing.... and you’d have that for breakfast. Whereas when [Mum] got to know Italian friends, she would then cook proper Italian spaghetti. They would often give her the sauces, the tomato sauces, with basil and things like that, and

---

the cheese and so on. So she started making things like more like that, with olives. She loved olives. She started to make her own olives. – Jean (1944, Adelaide)

We had Italian friends and she showed me how to make spaghetti and how to make sauce and how to make pumpkin flour into scones. – Sarah (1928, rural Armidale, NSW)

*Italian prisoners of war*

Some Australians, especially those in regional areas, were also exposed to Italian food by Italian prisoners of war; many of the women interviewed for this thesis who grew up in rural areas remembered the prisoners, some with great affection and sympathy.

Between 1941 and 1947 almost 18,500 Italian men who had been captured in the war were relocated to Australia and were sent to thirty POW camps spread across the country.⁵⁶ The government then sent many of these POWs to local farms to do the work normally done by Australian men who had enlisted.⁵⁷ Bill Bunbury, the author of a book on Italian prisoners of war in Australia, says that more than any other aspect of country life in wartime Australia, food and the preparation of meals provided farming families and prisoners with the best opportunities for meaningful interaction. Here is an account:

In the Marsh home Giuseppe Varone and fellow prisoners taught Doreen Marsh how to make meals using spaghetti. It was not a food [the Marsh family] had thought of eating before they acquired POWs. Using materials from the regular army canteen visits, such

---


as tomato sauce and vermicelli, often available when spaghetti was not, they began to change the way dishes smelled and tasted.\textsuperscript{58}

The food habits of the prisoners of war even made it into the local papers. The 20 March 1944 edition of the \textit{Inverell Times} reported that some of the Italians liked to eat rabbits and considered them a delicacy, and concluded that the prisoners were generally very easy to please in regard to food and were not very big eaters. “If given the ingredients, mainly flour and water, they loved to make their own spaghetti.”\textsuperscript{59}

Other prisoners were able to buy spaghetti occasionally. Guerino, an Italian prisoner of war whose experiences appear in Morag Loh’s study of Italians in Australia, remembered that the spaghetti was okay, but the sauce wasn’t the best.

We don’t eat Italian food too often because we have to cook for the boss too, but sometimes we ask and at nighttime have spaghetti. There was a store there, Miss Walton’s, and the boss used to send me with the horse, give me a little note and the lady would give spaghetti to me…. For sauce we use Rosella. That sauce was not much good, mixed with sugar, not very tasty, but better than nothing.\textsuperscript{60}

Guerino said his boss, Mr. McGinnis, used to take him and the other prisoners into Warrnambool once a month for haircut and errands, and that occasionally, they and Mr. McGinnis would have dinner with one of the two Italian families living there. Because of the Italian prisoners of war living on his farm, Mr. McGinnis learned a thing or two about spaghetti. He was not alone. Many rural families who did not have the benefit of Italian

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Inverell Times}, 20 March 1944.
\textsuperscript{60} Quoted in \textit{With Courage in Their Cases}, ed M. Loh, FILEF, Melbourne, 1980, p. 29.
restaurants, cafés and shops acquired their awareness knowledge about Italian food from an unlikely source – prisoners of war.

**Negative exposure is still exposure**

Though many innovative Anglo-Celtic Australians were willing to try Italian foods at the hands of immigrants – friends, neighbours, classmates, prisoners of war, restaurant and shop owners – resentment toward and discrimination against immigrants ran high in the early post-war years.

It was very, looking back, sort of xenophobic. A fear of being taking over, you know, by all these new people coming in who spoke different languages. My mother used to complain because we used to travel on the buses a lot about the B.O. .... They were the Great Unwashed as far as my parents were concerned. – Linda (1944, Sydney)

A lot of these people came out and made a lot of money and did very, very well, and that was enough reason, if you weren’t doing as well as they were doing and they’d only just got here. It’s not right thinking, but that’s the way I think a lot of people felt. – Audrey (1935, Sydney)

I remember my father, he was a little bit, you know ‘They could be taking our jobs’ type of attitude and also a bit resentful because my father had never – we lived with my mother’s father – my father had never provided a house in that way, and here were these people only just arrived and working very, very hard, and I think to a certain extent, they showed people like my father up. – Kate (1944, Newcastle, NSW)

A negative view of immigrants is usually accompanied by a negative view of their foods, as was the long-standing case with Chinese food. ‘Wogfood’ received a similar, albeit shorter, reception in Australia in the early post-war years, because food ridicule can be considered as one of the criteria determining the boundaries of a culture, and Australian culture was in
a state of turmoil. Because food and identity are intermingled, exposure to unfamiliar food habits is almost guaranteed to bring national chauvinism to the fore.

One of the greatest pains to human nature is the pain of a new idea. It... makes you think that after all, your favorite notions may be wrong, your firmest beliefs ill-founded.... Naturally, therefore, common men hate a new idea, and are disposed more or less to ill-treat the original man who brings it.61

Emma Ciccotosto felt some of that ill treatment and related it to Michal Bosworth. “In common with thousands of migrant children [Emma] suffered the distinction and pain of being ‘different’ at school when packed lunched were compared in the playground.”62

Some members of the interviewees’ families resisted foods they viewed as ‘immigrant.’

My husband didn’t like that sort of thing.... Pizzas, he didn’t like pizzas. He used to call pizza a ‘pih-za’ and one time my daughter, we were staying up there with them, and my husband had gone down to the pub for a six o’clock drink and Sandra made this pizza and she said, ‘Well, we’ll tell Dad it’s a savoury slice.’ So Dad got home a bit later after we’d finished and we’d put that in front of him and Sandra said, “It’s a savoury slice,” and he looked at it and said ‘Hmmm. It looks like pih-za to me.’ – Edith (1924, Orroroo, SA)

But just as it is said that any publicity is good publicity, so too may it be said that any exposure to something new, whether it evokes a positive or negative reaction, will have an impact merely by placing the idea (or food) into a person’s consciousness and making it

more familiar. Exposure is merely the first step in the adoption process; acceptance or rejection comes later. From the 1950s onward, Australians were exposed – in a significant and far-reaching manner – to an innovation that upon further examination met the needs of many post-war cooks: Italian food. As a result, Australians coming of age in the 1950s and afterward chose to adopt the innovation en masse. In the space of one generation, the benefits of adopting Italian food overcame any prejudice against eating it.

Garlic was viewed, I think, with a lot of derision from a lot of Australians who just couldn’t stand the smell and they associated it with ‘dagos,’ as they used to call the Italians in those days. Whereas now, I just couldn’t do without garlic. I just love garlic. I put in just about everything I can possibly think of. And we know it’s good for the gut and that sort of stuff. – Linda (1944, Sydney)

(Garlic) always had a very bad reputation when we were children. You associated garlic…I mean I remember traveling on the bus to university and you could smell garlic on the overseas students and that was the attitude to garlic during my childhood, so I can’t remember when we first started using…it must have been in the 60s, early 70s. And I was slower to use it than a lot of other people, I think. I suspect we learnt to like it when suddenly garlic bread became fashionable. I think that might have been the thing that changed people’s ideas as far as garlic was concerned. – June (1941, Brisbane)

Susan Kalcik discovered a similar resistance to and then acceptance of an ethnic food when she studied Vietnamese food in America in the 1970s and 1980s. She describes the two phases through which the host population passes when confronted with food from another culture:

In the first a food stereotype is used as a weapon against an intruder: the formula appears to be ‘strange people equals strange food.’ In the second process the new group presents its food in acceptable, safe arenas where some members of the host population] try it out and learn to like it and perhaps even learn to cook it themselves.
The formula here seems to be: ‘not-so-strange food equals not-so-strange people’ or perhaps, ‘strange people but they sure can cook.’

In early post-war Australia, prejudice against Italian immigrants led to prejudice against some of their foods. But Italians made the new foods more visible, provided safe arenas where it could be tasted (shops, cafes and restaurants) and also invited Anglo-Celtic neighbours into their own homes. Ultimately, this contributed to a wide-scale adoption of Italian food, which was inherently well-suited to Australian tastes, and to the designation of spaghetti bolognaise as the nation’s favourite dish. Coincidentally (or not), this adoption process occurred over the same period of time as mainstream Australia began to accept that Italian immigrants could, indeed, make significant contributions to Australian society.

There can be no doubt that Italian immigrants played a vital role in changing Australian food habits. But can the “assimilation of foreign flavours into one’s own cuisine... perhaps be seen as signifying an acceptance of cultural pluralism,” as at least one commentator has suggested? It is a question that will be discussed in Chapter 9.

The anti-immigration argument

Though he acknowledges that Australia’s three main periods of interest in food (the 1850s, the late 1800s and the post-war years) coincided with three main periods of immigration, Australian food historian Michael Symons rejects the idea that immigration has played any role in altering Australia’s food habits. That view, he says, has become cliché.

---


The immigrants really only provided long hours, skills and colour in a dietary revolution which was created by other causes. For how can we explain why we went crazy about French food when relatively few French arrived? 65

He also points out that despite an historical ‘Continental’ presence in Australia that included locally owned olive oil and macaroni companies established in the early 1900s and a variety of Italian restaurants in Melbourne, Australians did not adopt Italian food then. And he cites the example of the Chinese as the most telling:

Perhaps the most irksome obstacle for the immigration argument was the Chinese, whose food was gracelessly snubbed until their numbers had fallen to a ‘safe’ low. For other reasons than [the immigrant] presence, ordinary Australians sought the novelty of odd ingredients, mysterious sauces and ritualistic chopsticks. Something more fundamental had also occurred. 66

With respect to French food, it has rarely been considered an ethnic or immigrant food, but rather a gourmet food. And by ‘going crazy’ about French food, Symons must mean that a certain class of Australians has periodically enjoyed eating it in restaurants, because Escoffier hardly affected the food habits of the bulk of the population. 67 That is because French food has always been regarded as a food for the elites, and has never been incorporated into the cooking repertoires of all segments of Australian society. Thus, it has not been adopted and cannot have played a significant role in altering the nation’s food habits. To use French food to counter the immigration argument, therefore, is nonsensical.

Symons’ other arguments are more on the mark, but he does not consider an important factor: time. The characteristics of an innovation and the needs and desires of an adopter

65 M. Symons, p. 223.
66 ibid., p. 224.
must be compatible at a specific point in time. Sometimes the innovation is ready, but the society is not. Sometimes society is ready, but the innovation is not. The timing has to be right. For a number of reasons mentioned in Chapter 4, Chinese food could not be adopted in the immediate post-war years: neither the innovation nor the society was ready. Chinese food had to become more widely available and less seemingly complex, and Australians had to become more open-minded with respect to Asians. The timing was not right for the wide-scale adoption of Italian dishes in the 1850s either, or even in the 1930s, though the Italian presence at that time helped lay the foundation for the adoption of Italian food a generation later. Italian food had to become far more visible (beyond Melbourne, for example) and the benefits of adopting it had to become more tangible, which they did after World War Two.

Contrary to what Symons says, post-war immigration did help to alter Australian food habits because it greatly increased the visibility of new foods: this visibility was the ‘colour’ he mentions but neglects to investigate further. It would have been hard for most Australians in the 1960s and 1970s – especially those living in urban areas – to avoid seeing some of these new foods and wondering what they were. This exposure served as a cosmopolite channel of communication. And for many Australians, the interpersonal communication involved in having an immigrant friend or neighbour show them how to make a new dish was invaluable. As more immigrants arrived, more of this one-on-one interaction became possible.

But Australians specifically chose to adopt Italian food before they adopted other immigrant or ethnic cuisines that were also visible at the same time. That is because the characteristics of the innovation itself are the key component in adoption. Had Italian food not met all of the prerequisites for the adoption of an innovation at the specific point in
time when conditions in Australia were favourable, namely, in the post-war years, Australians would never have brought it into their homes.

However, if people do not ever hear about or see an innovation, or have some means of acquiring it, then they cannot adopt it. That is why post-war Italian immigration to Australia was important. It helped Australians to see, taste and acquire Italian food via Italian-owned shops, cafes and restaurants in a way that had not been possible before. Exposure to new foods can also occur via different means, as we shall see in subsequent chapters. But immigration is a factor that cannot be discounted.

• \textit{The Greek question}

Symons asked why Australians did not adopt Italian or 'Continental' food in the early twentieth century, or Chinese food until the 1970s, or French food ever. The previous sections have explained why. But what about Greek food? Greeks arrived in significant numbers between 1947 and 1972, comprised about 5 percent of the country's population during the 1960s and 1970s, and also strongly maintained their food habits. Why then, has there not been a wholesale adoption of Greek food in Australia?

One reason is that for a very long time, Greek food was not only not publicly visible, but not available, either. Many of the women interviewed for this thesis remembered the Greek-owned cafes in their towns serving fish and chips or other similar Australian dishes; not once did they mention seeing any Greek food being served.

\footnote{Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'The social characteristics of immigrants in Australia,' Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1994, Table 2.5.}
Always of course, in the country towns, when I was growing up, there were always the Greeks who had the cafes, and that was a big deal when you were little, to go to the cafes. [You] would have steak and eggs, or something like that, and they really did a good job. — Joyce (1932, Inverell, NSW)

Though Greek immigrants, like Italians, held on to their own food habits at home, they did not seem to offer those foods to a mainstream public until much later than the Italians did. Instead, they took over milk bars, cafes, and fish and chip shops that served traditional fare. Today one-third of all fish and chips shops and milk bars are owned by Greeks.\textsuperscript{69} Italian food was somehow more visible to the general public because the foods in their shops and restaurants were usually Italian, or at least co-existed alongside Australian food instead of being completely supplanted by them:

The Greeks particularly went into milk bars, and fish and chip shops…. The Italians went into delicatessens and restaurants. We started to see the first Italian restaurants around our way probably in the 60s. But more so in inner Sydney. That’s where you really noticed, particularly those inner Sydney suburbs. — Linda (1944, Sydney)

So in the early post-war years, Australians may not have had much of an opportunity to see, taste or acquire Greek food. But there was a more fundamental reason than a lack of visibility to explain why Australians did not really begin to prepare any Greek dishes at home for a long time: Greek food did not yet meet all the requirements necessary for successful adoption (see Chapter 4), the main one being past experience. Because Australians had not had past experience with Greek food or ingredients, they considered it to be wholly unfamiliar.

The first Greek meal I had back in the early ‘70s had little baby octopus and I nearly
freaked. I didn’t, I couldn’t...their legs were flying everywhere. I didn’t take easily to
them. – Eileen (1937 Cessnock, NSW)

Italian cuisine features calamari, which frequently met with a similar reaction. But the
advantage Italian food had that Greek did not was the fact that Australians had had more
than a century to become familiar with one of the foundations of Italian cuisine: pasta. This
bland, versatile, cheap, nutritious food that was Anglo-Australian and yet also Italian was
the ideal vehicle for change. Greek food did not have a similar entrée into Australian
cuisine; early CWA Coronation Cookery Books and the Presbyterian Women’s Missionary
Association cook books, for example, did not feature any Greek recipes at all. 70

Thus, Anglo-Celtic Australians did not have any past experience that might have tempered
their reaction to Greek food. Yoghurt is a good example. George Alexopoulos began
producing the Attiki brand of yoghurt in 1959 for fellow Greeks. Australians did not know
what to make of yoghurt, as Alexopoulos discovered when a dairy inspector told him he
could kill people with it.71

Some things take time, but even in 1981, Greek recipes had yet to appear in the CWA
Coronation Cookery Book, although significant Chinese recipes had long been in its
pages.72 By the 1980s, then, Chinese food had gained more adherents than had Greek food,
if the CWA cookbooks of New South Wales are any guide. It might be surmised that urban

70 The Coronation Cookery Book, 4th edn, Compiled by the Country Women’s Association of New South
Wales, 1945; The Cookery Book of Good and Tried Receipts, 22nd edn, Compiled for the Women’s
Missionary Association of the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales, Angus & Robertson, Sydney,
1944.


72 The Coronation Cookery Book, 15th edn, Compiled by the Country Women’s Association of New South
Wales, Australia, 1981.
areas with large concentrations of Greek immigrants, such as Melbourne, would tell a different story, but that was not the case. The Presbyterian Women’s Missionary Union of Victoria produced a cookery book in 1961, which was published in Melbourne. It did not include a single recipe that could in any way be construed as Greek — with the possible exception of kebabs, which could also be Middle Eastern — although it did include recipes for minestrone, cassata, ‘moka milano,’ an extremely modified ravioli, sweet and sour pork, chicken and pineapple, chop suey, chow mein, lamb cassoulet, and numerous macaroni recipes. What is clear is that recipes for Greek dishes were not being recommended by the members of urban women’s organizations in the 1960s, nor had they been adopted yet by country women in the 1970s.

It could be that some Greek ingredients, such as filo dough or grape leaves, were difficult to find or were thought to be too complex to use. Other ingredients might not have easily fit into familiar patterns of food consumption like those mentioned by Douglas & Nicod, which consisted of primary meals that featured a centerpiece, a staple and several trimmings and secondary meals that combined some of those elements. Take yogurt, for example. Even if the taste had been immediately agreeable to everyone, the question remained of how to serve it, and when. It certainly could not be served as a main meal, or even a light meal. Today, flavoured yoghurt is used as a breakfast, lunch or snack food, but flavoured yoghurt did not exist in the 1950s and the idea of eating such a thing for breakfast would have been completely alien. It was a food that did not immediately, or easily, fit into the structure of Australian meals until several decades later. In the 1950s and 1960s, Greek food had yet to meet all the requirements for the successful adoption of an innovation. Australians were not quite ready for it yet.

But as has been demonstrated, Australians were ready for Italian food. And without a doubt, immigration helped bring this particular innovation to the attention of mainstream Australia at just the right time. Via their shops, markets, restaurants and cafes, and their one-on-one interaction with many Australians, Italian immigrants served as a significant channel of communication at a time when many Australians were eager to learn more about spaghetti, lasagna, salami, new cheeses, wine and coffee. That is not to say that without Italian immigration Australians would not have adopted Italian food, but rather that Italian immigration certainly helped make the adoption process far easier and far more pleasurable. Chapter 6 will examine some of the other factors that must also be considered.