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Filipino food is a vibrant melting pot of flavors, cultures, and traditions. Yet, despite its richness and variety, it has often struggled to gain the same level of popularity as other cuisines, such as Italian, Chinese, or Mexican. This article delves into the multifaceted reasons behind the underappreciation of Filipino food and what can be done to elevate its status not only in the West but worldwide. A Cultural Tapestry of Filipino Food To understand the challenges faced by Filipino cuisine, it's essential to appreciate its roots. Filipino food is a unique blend influenced by various cultures, including Malay, Spanish, Chinese, and American. This convergence has resulted in dishes that not only satisfy but also tell the stories of the Philippines' historical and social evolution. The Fusion of Flavors Filipino cuisine is characterized by its bold and comforting flavors. Common ingredients include rice, fish, pork, and vegetables, combined with unique sauces and spices like vinegar, soy sauce, and garlic. Signature dishes like adobo, sinigang, and lechon showcase this fusion beautifully. Despite this rich tapestry, Filipino food is often perceived as overwhelming or exotic by those unfamiliar with it. The flavors, while delicious, can seem daunting to the uninitiated. Barriers to Popularity Despite countless delicious offerings, a variety of cultural and logistical factors contribute to the relative underappreciation of Filipino cuisine globally. 1. Lack of Global Exposure One significant factor affecting the popularity of Filipino food is limited global exposure. Unlike Thai or Indian food, which have established fan bases and dining establishments worldwide, Filipino cuisine has often been relegated to small, family-run eateries. Cultural Insularity Filipino immigrants tend to open restaurants that cater primarily to their communities. This insularity means that the broader population may not be aware of the culinary richness that the Philippines has to offer. Increasing the number of mainstream restaurants showcasing traditional Filipino cuisine could help bridge this gap. 2. Misconceptions About Filipino Food Many people approach unfamiliar cuisines with preconceived notions based on stereotypes. Filipino food is often mistakenly categorized as either too greasy or excessively simplistic, which neglects the culinary techniques and flavors that give these dishes their depth. Perception vs. Reality The perception of Filipino food can also be shaped by individuals' experiences in the Philippines. Travelers may have experienced less gastronomically refined meals, which can lead to generalized negative perceptions. By focusing on high-quality ingredients and culinary techniques in mainstream marketing, we can reshape these stereotypes. 3. Competing with Established Cuisines Filipino food is up against some tough competition. Global palates are already familiar with other Asian cuisines that have been popularized and commercialized effectively. Japanese sushi, Chinese dim sum, and Indian curry are widely celebrated, giving them an edge. The "Trendiness" Factor Food trends often dominate dining choices. For example, the rise of the ramen culture or the popularity of poke bowls often leads food enthusiasts to overlook Filipino cuisine. Without the backing of culinary influencers or extensive media exposure, it is challenging for Filipino food to break into the mainstream consciousness. 4. Ingredients and Accessibility Another significant barrier is the accessibility of ingredients. Many traditional Filipino dishes rely on ingredients that may not be readily available outside of the Philippines. This makes it difficult for chefs and home cooks in different countries to replicate authentic flavors. Limited Ingredient Marco Dishes like dinuguan, a savory stew made from pork and blood, and certain fish dishes that utilize local catch may be hard to find in grocery stores outside of Southeast Asian districts, exacerbating the disconnect between potential diners and the cuisine. Strategies to Popularize Filipino Cuisine Recognizing the barriers is the first step toward popularizing Filipino food. With targeted strategies, it is entirely feasible to elevate this vibrant cuisine on the global stage. 1. Culinary Education and Innovation Culinary schools and institutions can play a pivotal role in promoting Filipino cuisine. By incorporating traditional Filipino cooking techniques into curricula, students could gain a deeper understanding of these flavors, leading to innovative interpretations that appeal to modern diners. Expanding the Culinary Canvas Innovative chefs can bridge tradition and modernity by incorporating Filipino ingredients into fusion dishes. For instance, an artisan pizza topped with adobo chicken or even a craft cocktail that features calamansi can captivate diverse palates while paying homage to traditional flavors. 2. Utilizing Social Media and Influencers Social media is a potent tool for promoting culinary experiences. Filipino chefs and food enthusiasts can leverage platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to showcase recipes, share cooking techniques, and tell compelling stories about the cultural significance of the dishes. Engaging Content Create engaging content that highlights not just the food but the stories behind them. This includes the farmer who grows the ingredients, the significance of the dish within Filipino culture, and the love that goes into every meal. 3. Collaborations with Established Cuisines Possibly one of the most effective methods to raise the profile of Filipino food is through collaboration. Partnering with popular food genres could introduce Filipino dishes to broader audiences. Pop-up Events Hosting pop-up dining events in collaboration with well-known chefs can create buzz and intrigue. This experiential marketing allows people to engage with Filipino food in a fun, interactive setting. 4. Local Adaptations of Filipino Dishes Local adaptations of traditional Filipino dishes that take regional ingredients into consideration can help meet the tastes of different culinary cultures while keeping the essence of the dish intact. Experimentation with Accessibility For example, creating a vegan version of kaldereta using local vegetables or proteins can attract health-conscious diners without alienating traditionalists. The Future of Filipino Cuisine Despite the challenges, the future of Filipino cuisine is promising. With growing interest in global culinary arts and an appetite for diverse experiences, Filipino food has the potential to carve out its niche. A Growing Diaspora The Filipino diaspora continues to grow, bringing the flavors of the Philippines to new parts of the globe. As second and third generations seek to understand their heritage, there's likely to be a rise in interest in traditional Filipino dishes, both through family recipes and dining experiences. Conclusion: Breaking Through the Barriers While Filipino cuisine may currently be overshadowed by more widely recognized food cultures, its potential for growth is immense. Through education, innovation, and effective promotion, we can dismantle the barriers limiting the rise of Filipino food. The journey to recognize and appreciate Filipino cuisine is not impossible. With a blend of understanding, creativity, and exposure, we can ensure that Filipino food takes its rightful place on the global culinary map. In summary, by focusing on accessible culinary education, leveraging social media, engaging with established food cultures, and adapting dishes to local preferences, Filipino food can prosper and gain the recognition it truly deserves. Let us embrace the challenge and become advocates for a cuisine that is rich in history, flavor, and culture. Why is Filipino cuisine often considered underappreciated? Filipino cuisine is frequently overshadowed by other Asian culinary traditions, such as Thai or Japanese, which have gained widespread popularity and recognition in the global food scene. This lack of representation can result in many people being unaware of the unique flavors and diverse dishes that characterize Filipino cooking. Cultural stereotypes and misconceptions about the Philippines also contribute to this underappreciation, making it challenging for Filipino cuisine to reach a broader audience. Additionally, the way Filipino food is presented and marketed often falls short compared to its counterparts. Many dishes are deeply rooted in tradition and family recipes but may not be promoted effectively in restaurants or culinary events. This results in a limited understanding of the complexity and richness of flavors found in Filipino cuisine, creating an impression that it is less sophisticated compared to other global cuisines. What are some defining features of Filipino cuisine? Filipino cuisine is characterized by a blend of indigenous, Spanish, Chinese, and American influences, resulting in a rich tapestry of flavors and textures. Key ingredients include rice, pork, chicken, seafood, and various vegetables, often seasoned with unique sauces such as soy sauce, vinegar, and annatto. The use of fresh herbs and spices, like garlic, ginger, and lemongrass, further enhances the dishes, making them vibrant and flavorful. Another defining feature is the way Filipino meals are typically served and enjoyed. Meals often include a variety of dishes meant to be shared among family and friends, fostering a strong sense of community. The communal approach to dining highlights the importance of food as a medium for connection and celebration within Filipino culture, making it distinct and special. How does culture influence Filipino cuisine? Culture plays a significant role in shaping Filipino cuisine, as it reflects the country's history and diverse influences. With centuries of colonization, trade, and migration, Filipino food has absorbed various culinary techniques and ingredients from around the world. This fusion is evident in dishes like adobo, which showcases Spanish influence, and lumpia, highlighting Chinese culinary traditions. Such blending of flavors is a testament to the adaptability and creativity of Filipino cooks. Additionally, cultural practices and local customs directly impact how food is prepared and consumed. Festivals and religious events often feature traditional dishes that have deep personal and communal significance. These celebrations emphasize the importance of food as a cultural identity, and they allow Filipinos to share their culinary heritage with others. Consequently, the cultural context adds layers of meaning to Filipino cuisine, making it more than just sustenance but rather an expression of identity and tradition. What are some popular Filipino dishes that deserve more recognition? There are numerous Filipino dishes that deserve more recognition for their unique flavors and cultural significance. One example is sinigang, a sour soup typically made with tamarind and assorted vegetables, which offers an intriguing balance of flavors that many diners may not have experienced. Another dish is kare-kare, an oxtail stew with a rich peanut sauce, served with bagoong (fermented shrimp paste) that adds depth and flavor. Both of these dishes exemplify the culinary creativity found in Filipino cooking. Other beloved culinary treasures include lechon, a whole roasted pig celebrated at festivities, and pancit, a noodle dish with various local ingredients showcasing the versatility of Filipino cuisine. These dishes, often enjoyed during communal gatherings, can help introduce newcomers to the delightful flavors and textures of Filipino food. Promoting these classics can contribute to a greater appreciation of the rich culinary landscape within the Philippines. How can individuals support the appreciation of Filipino cuisine? Individuals interested in supporting the appreciation of Filipino cuisine can start by exploring and sharing the diverse dishes available at local Filipino restaurants. By dining out and enjoying authentic meals, they can help promote these establishments and encourage the use of local ingredients and traditional cooking methods. Engaging with Filipino culinary content online—such as food blogs, social media pages, and cooking channels—can also help amplify the voices of Filipino cooks and chefs who are passionate about their heritage. Another way to support the appreciation of Filipino cuisine is to learn how to prepare traditional dishes at home. By showcasing recipes, preparing meals for friends and family, and hosting Filipino food-themed gatherings, individuals can introduce others to this vibrant culinary tradition. Sharing personal stories and cultural significance behind each dish can also foster greater understanding and appreciation, ultimately helping Filipino cuisine to gain the recognition it deserves on a larger scale. What are some resources for learning more about Filipino cuisine? There are numerous resources available for those looking to deepen their knowledge of Filipino cuisine. Cookbooks that focus on traditional recipes or contemporary takes on Filipino dishes can be valuable tools for both novice and experienced cooks. Notable authors like Maria Clara B. Sison and Amy Besa create authentic and approachable representations of Filipino food, making it easier for readers to cook and appreciate these recipes at home. Online platforms are also rich with information about Filipino cuisine. Websites and YouTube channels dedicated to Filipino cooking provide step-by-step tutorials, tips for ingredient sourcing, and cultural insights that enhance the learning experience. Additionally, food blogs by Filipino chefs and home cooks often highlight personal stories and the significance of family recipes, creating a more personal connection to the cuisine. Engaging with these resources can help increase awareness and inspire a deeper appreciation for the culinary treasures that the Philippines has to offer. Filipino Foods by Grace Banal RNDDo you believe our traditional dishes are "unhealthy"?If so, you're not alone – but that belief might be influenced by our colonial mentality.Colonial mentality is a legacy of centuries of colonization by Spain, the United States, and others. Over time, we've unconsciously learned to favor anything foreign and undervalue what's local. This mindset has shaped how many of us see the food we grew up with. It's not just about food, but the way it affects what we eat and how we think about health is undeniable.This plays out in several ways when it comes to food:We Often Prefer Imported FoodsBe honest – how many times have you thought that imported foods are "better" or "healthier"? Quinoa and kale get marketed as must-have superfoods, while local options like kangkong, kamote, and saba sit on the sidelines, despite being just as nutritious (if not more).We Label Traditional Dishes as UnhealthyLechon, sisig, adobo – these beloved dishes often get dismissed as "unhealthy" because they're rich in flavor or fat. But this narrative ignores the diversity of Filipino cuisine. For every indulgent dish, we also have nutrient-packed options like pinakbet, sinigang, or laing.We Chase After Western Diet TrendsThink about it: keto, paleo, Mediterranean – these diets get all the hype, while our traditional eating habits, like pairing rice with vegetables and fish, get criticized for being "too carb-heavy." The irony? Those trendy diets often don't consider what's culturally sustainable for us.Our food isn't inherently unhealthy.What's unhealthy is how it's misunderstood and misrepresented. When prepared thoughtfully, Filipino dishes are perfectly aligned with balanced nutrition. Let me break it down:Our Traditional Diet Is BalancedSinigang and tinola are great examples of meals with lean proteins and vegetables. Pairing rice with viands ensures you're getting carbs, protein, and fiber in one plate. And let's not forget tropical fruits like mango and papaya, which are nutrient powerhouses.Cooking Methods, Not Culture, Matter MostIt's not the dishes themselves that cause problems – it's how we prepare them. Deep-frying everything or using too much salt and oil are modern habits, not essential to Filipino cooking.Local Foods Rival Imported SuperfoodsMalunggay leaves? Packed with calcium. Kamote? A complex carb that provides lasting energy. These local staples often match or surpass the nutritional value of expensive, imported alternatives.If you've been caught in the mindset that Filipino food is "bad" for you, here's how we can start shifting that belief:Keep LearningUnderstand that colonial mentality has shaped these biases. Filipino food has stood the test of time because it's diverse, delicious, and adaptable.Modernize Without Losing What MattersYou don't need to overhaul your meals – just tweak them. Grill instead of fry, use less salt and oil, and add more vegetables to your plate. Small changes can make a big difference.Support and Celebrate Local IngredientsChoosing local produce isn't just good for you; it supports Filipino farmers and reduces our dependence on imported goods. Sitaw, Saba, and Santol deserve a place on your plate just as much as kale or chia seeds.This idea that Filipino food is unhealthy? It's not just about the food – it's about the mindset. When we undervalue what's inherently ours, we lose the opportunity to celebrate our culture and take advantage of the nutritious, delicious options it offers.You don't need to abandon Filipino food to be healthy. Instead, rediscover its richness, modernize it where necessary, and embrace it as a source of strength and nourishment. Health doesn't mean rejecting your roots – it means working with them.So, next time you sit down to a plate of sinigang or tinola, remember:Our food is not the problem. It's part of the solution. Reddit and its partners use cookies and similar technologies to provide you with a better experience. By accepting all cookies, you agree to our use of cookies to deliver and maintain our services and site, improve the quality of Reddit, personalize Reddit content and advertising, and measure the effectiveness of advertising. By rejecting non-essential cookies, Reddit may still use certain cookies to ensure the proper functionality of our platform. For more information, please see our Cookie Notice and our Privacy Policy. Filipino food is renowned for its robust flavors, but it's often criticized for its perceived lack of healthiness. A YouTube video featuring an American cook in Southern California explored this perception, prompting us to reexamine our biases. So, in this article, let's dive into the complexities of Filipino cuisine, considering its deliciousness alongside concerns about its impact on health. The Allure of Filipino Flavors Filipino cuisine is an enticing medley of sweet, salty, and savory notes that captivate the taste buds. From Adobo's rich soy sauce and vinegar-infused meats to the indulgent Lechon's crispy skin, it's a flavor journey like no other. However, beneath the mouthwatering surface lies a nuanced story. A Deeper Look Many might describe Filipino dishes as "fatty, salty, overcooked, and fried to perfection," leading to their reputation as unhealthy Filipino food. While these elements contribute to the tantalizing taste, they also raise eyebrows regarding health. In the United States, where Filipino communities thrive, health issues like high blood pressure and gout are common. The American Filipino Dilemma It's puzzling that despite health concerns, Filipinos in the U.S. often crave these rich and savory dishes. The struggle between cultural nostalgia and health consciousness plays out on their dinner plates. Yet, during a trip to the Philippines with non-Filipino companions, something intriguing unfolded. READ: Exploring the Rich Diversity of Philippine Herbs A Healthy Twist in the Homeland Foreign visitors to the Philippines often opt for fruit-based meals, reflecting a striking difference in dietary preferences. Ordering a salad or a plate of veggies is not as straightforward as one might think, indicating a need for more vegetable-centric options in Filipino cuisine. The Verdict So, is Filipino cuisine healthy or not? The answer, like the cuisine itself, is multifaceted. While it's undeniable that Filipino dishes burst with flavor, the heavy reliance on fatty and salty ingredients can pose health risks. However, as the global culinary landscape evolves, so too does Filipino cuisine. Ultimately, the choice between savoring these delectable dishes and prioritizing health is a personal one. Filipino cuisine offers an array of flavors and experiences, and the final judgment rests on individual preferences and priorities. Filipino cuisine is an intricate tapestry of taste that beckons food lovers from around the world, even as it grapples with its reputation for unhealthy Filipino food. It may not always align with modern health standards, but its allure is undeniable. As Filipino chefs and food enthusiasts continue to explore healthier preparations, the future of this cuisine is evolving, offering both tradition and wellness on a single plate. Whether you indulge in its flavors or opt for a more health-conscious path, Filipino cuisine remains a captivating culinary journey. Is Filipino Food Healthy? Filipino cuisine is renowned for its flavorful dishes that reflect its rich history and diverse cultural influences. From adobo to sinigang, Filipino food offers a unique blend of sweet, savory, and sometimes tangy flavors. However, when it comes to assessing the healthiness of Filipino cuisine, opinions can vary. In order to determine whether Filipino food is truly healthy, it's important to take a closer look at the ingredients, cooking methods, and overall nutritional value of some popular dishes. While there are undoubtedly nutritious Filipino dishes available, it should be noted that not all traditional Filipino foods are inherently healthy. Like any other cuisine, Filipino food has its fair share of both nutritious and indulgent options. One might ask if the heavy use of rice in Filipino cuisine affects its healthiness. Is rice a healthy component of Filipino food? Rice is a staple in Filipino cuisine and provides essential carbohydrates. However, consuming excessive amounts of white rice, often found in Filipino dishes, can contribute to a higher glycemic index and affect blood sugar levels. Moderation is key to enjoying rice in a healthy manner. Are Filipino dishes high in fat? Some Filipino dishes can be high in fat, particularly those that include deep-frying or the use of fatty meats. However, there are many Filipino dishes that utilize lean proteins, seafood, and healthy cooking techniques, making them lower in fat and overall healthier options. Is Filipino cuisine rich in vegetables? Filipino cuisine features a variety of vegetables, but their consumption can vary depending on the dish. Some Filipino dishes incorporate generous portions of vegetables, while others may have fewer or none at all. However, vegetarian Filipino dishes, such as pinakbet or ginisang gulay, are packed with vegetables and offer a healthy choice. Is Filipino food high in sodium? Some Filipino dishes, particularly those that use fermented sauces like bagoong or patis, can be high in sodium. However, not all Filipino dishes are heavily salted. By making mindful choices and controlling the amount of sauce or condiments added, it is possible to enjoy Filipino food with reduced sodium intake. Is Filipino cuisine nutritious overall? Filipino cuisine has a diverse range of dishes, so it is difficult to make a blanket statement about its overall nutritional value. Some Filipino dishes are rich in nutrients, incorporating lean proteins, vegetables, and whole grains. However, others may be high in fat, sodium, or sugar. The key to enjoying a nutritious Filipino diet is to incorporate balanced meals and make mindful choices. Are Filipino desserts healthy? Filipino desserts, such as halo-halo and bibingka, are known for their indulgent flavors and ingredients like coconut milk and sugar. While these desserts may be delicious, they are not considered healthy due to their high sugar and calorie content. It is advisable to consume them in moderation as occasional treats. Is it possible to find healthy Filipino options when eating out? Yes, it is possible to find healthier Filipino options when eating out. Many Filipino restaurants offer menu items that cater to health-conscious individuals. Look for dishes that incorporate lean proteins, vegetables, and those prepared using healthier cooking methods like grilling or steaming. Can Filipino food be modified to be healthier? Absolutely! Traditional Filipino recipes can be modified to make them healthier. Reduce the amount of oil used in cooking, opt for leaner protein sources like chicken or fish, increase vegetable content, and incorporate whole grains instead of refined grains to improve the nutritional profile of Filipino dishes. Are there any healthy Filipino snacks? Yes, there are several healthy Filipino snack options available. Fresh tropical fruits like mangoes, pineapples, and bananas make for nutritious snacks. Other options include boiled sweet potatoes, roasted nuts, or grilled skewers of chicken or fish. Can Filipino cuisine be part of a balanced diet? Absolutely! Filipino cuisine can certainly be part of a balanced diet. By incorporating a variety of Filipino dishes that include lean proteins, ample vegetables, and controlled portions, it is possible to enjoy the flavors of Filipino cuisine while maintaining a balanced and healthy eating pattern. What are some healthy Filipino dishes to try? Some healthy Filipino dishes to try include tinola (ginger-based chicken soup), sinigang (tamarind-based soup with vegetables and protein), and pinakbet (a vegetable stir-fry dish). These dishes are packed with nutrients and offer a delicious taste of Filipino cuisine. What are common unhealthy ingredients in Filipino cooking? Unhealthy ingredients that are sometimes used in Filipino cooking include processed meats, excessive amounts of oil, refined sugars, and high-sodium sauces. Being mindful of ingredient choices and quantity can help make Filipino dishes healthier. In conclusion, Filipino food, like any other cuisine, can be both healthy and indulgent. The answer to the question "Is Filipino food healthy?" depends on the specific dishes and choices made. By selecting nutrient-rich ingredients, practicing portion control, and being aware of cooking methods, it is possible to enjoy a wholesome and balanced Filipino diet. So, embrace the flavors of Filipino cuisine while making mindful choices for a healthier dining experience. Reddit and its partners use cookies and similar technologies to provide you with a better experience. By accepting all cookies, you agree to our use of cookies to deliver and maintain our services and site, improve the quality of Reddit, personalize Reddit content and advertising, and measure the effectiveness of advertising. By rejecting non-essential cookies, Reddit may still use certain cookies to ensure the proper functionality of our platform. For more information, please see our Cookie Notice and our Privacy Policy. Aside from music, food is a distinctive part of the Filipino's identity! Why do you think we love hosting parties so much? And while fusion foods today are considered "trendy", the Philippines has been doing it for years with each dish representing the different influences we got from our history of trades, colonization and imperialism. Our Leche Flan came from the Spaniards and our Lumpia originated from Chinese settlers. As for our love for fried food, we can thank the Americans for that. And along with the Americans also came influences of canned food, processed meat and soft drinks which are all now a staple in our food culture. Reddit and its partners use cookies and similar technologies to provide you with a better experience. By accepting all cookies, you agree to our use of cookies to deliver and maintain our services and site, improve the quality of Reddit, personalize Reddit content and advertising, and measure the effectiveness of advertising. By rejecting non-essential cookies, Reddit may still use certain cookies to ensure the proper functionality of our platform. For more information, please see our Cookie Notice and our Privacy Policy. January 2, 2025MANILA – Is Filipino food unhealthy?It's easy to think so, given how it's popularly served. Even the foreign branches of Filipino and other food chains and brands come with vegetable dishes.While our food is gaining more recognition internationally, it's admittedly the food commonly served at fiestas and special occasions: rich, savory, flavored, and based on red meat and highly processed.The unhealthiness of Filipino food has become an internet meme at this point. But we have reasons to believe it's just that.(Un)changing timesThere's a hidden gem tucked away along Xavierville Avenue, Quezon City. It's been around for some time now. I've been going for more than a decade. A more senior writer actually covered it way, way back: I bumped into her once while dining in, and she raved like the place just opened yesterday.Blissful Belly, owned by Omar Arabia, MD, puts a vegan spin on the Filipino carinderia, offering staples like nilaga, pancit, kare-kare (complete with vegan bagoong!), okoy, lumpia, and more, all displayed in a turo-turo setup as his staff prepare plates of red rice and glasses of tamarind, dalandan, and more juices.Behind the restaurant, inside Arabia's office, I remember seeing a broadsheet clipping, framed, browned on the edges (this was in 2015, mind you) but with the text still clear, that described how Filipino non-communicable ("lifestyle") diseases were on the rise while diseases like polio and cholera, which are less influenced by diet and lifestyle and treated by modern vaccines, have been steadily on the downtrend.The article concluded that aspirational dining, eating more "fiesta food" during more days of the year, instead of the traditional diet of fish and vegetables, was influencing a rising trend in high blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes among Filipinos, enamored as we are by the growing ubiquity both Spanish-era fiesta food and American fast food.Clearly, Dr. Arabia, whose treatments also include lifestyle and mindset changes aside from pharmaceutical cures, had reasons for keeping that perennial, if dog-eared, story.On one hand, that old article could argue that Filipino food in recent years, rather, the food more Filipinos prefer to consume in recent years has become unhealthy.On the other hand, that same article could argue that traditional Filipino food is healthy.Doreen Fernandez, for one, agrees with both readings above. In "Ang Mahiwagang Nilaga," a 1991 essay of hers republished in a recent anthology, the professor, historian, and degustadora writes "Filipino cooking has, at its base, a simplicity of method that comes from earth wisdom," referencing the "agricultural cycle that we live by (compare it to the industrial cycle."She continues: "Our Indigenous cuisine is very often grilled, steamed, and boiled," cooking methods that doctors largely agree are the healthiest among others. "Only much later did we learn to sauté, fry, and bake," she concludes, noting how the latter methods were imported from contact with foreigners including through colonization.It's interconnectedAnother post by citizen-scientist and social media personality Lokalpedia (John Sherwin Felix) seems to align with Fernandez's observation. After reading historian E. Alexander Orquiza Jr's "Taste of Control: Food and the Filipino Colonial Mentality Under American Rule" (2020), the blogger was moved to write:"One thing I've learned from this is how our colonizers vilified our traditional food systems. They propagated the idea that our food was unhygienic, non-nutritious, and backward—a "damsel in distress" that needed saving. They did this to assert control, making us believe we needed them to "improve" our way of life.While the colonizers are long gone, the effects of their propaganda remain. And colonization continues today, albeit in different forms, through the dominance of corporate food systems over our local ones."I scrolled through some comments (maybe next time, we can all talk about how quality content creators bring together quality conversations and a quality community) and remembered my own childhood as an aging millennial where the first half of my life was in the analog era all as the current chunk of life tries to navigate the digital era.Lokalpedia recently stirred conversation anew for a series of posts critiquing a popular fast food giant (and the bigger phenomenon of the corporate takeover of small, local businesses) and how it seems to have skewed notions of progress and development.Aside from dial-up internet, landlines, playing on the street, yellow pages, cassette tapes, and VCD players, the ubiquity (versus today's atomization) of pop culture interests, I also recalled, thanks to Lokalpedia and the netizens drawn to it, that popular snacks in the late 1990s and early 2000s such as plantains, root crops, and cold dessert stews like bilu-bilo have largely been replaced by fast food-analogous snacks and soda.I asked around: Friends, co-workers, and family also recalled local fruits (sineguelas, binukaw, katmon, etc.), food preparation methods (Bicol Express the Bikol way, inabraw, pakbet, without pork), and snacks from their hometowns and childhood, which seem to be disappearing today.So is Filipino food really unhealthy?This seems to ultimately be not just a lifestyle but also a political question. What market forces and power brokers and vested interests are using their amassed capital to influence consumer preferences? Why does the burden of guilt fall on you, dear reader, enjoying another helping of lechon (minsan lang talaga 'to!), and not the institutionalized greed attempting to control our consumption habits? Veggie dishes by Aileen Suzara | Photo by Sana Javeri Kadri Chef, food educator and advocate Aileen Suzara aims to promote sustainable and healthy Pinoy food practices WITH Filipino food's presence increasing in the mainstream, it is also hard to ignore that Filipinos and Filipino-Americans have high rates of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. Because of this, some people tend to take a step back on Filipino cuisine, as they perceive it to be one of the main causes of these diseases. Food educator and chef Aileen Suzara | Photo by Sana Javeri Kadri Chef, food educator and advocate Aileen Suzara begs to disagree, explaining that these perceptions are "relatively recent." "Digging into the roots of Filipino food culture reveals how closely our foods were — and are — tied to the land, sea, and seasons. Traditional methods focused on boiling, steaming, grilling, and naturally fermenting or preserving foods — or serving them fresh as can be, like kinilaw. Meats we consider trademarks today (like pork) could not be staples for most people, given how costly and labor intensive hunting or raising animals used to be," she explained. "Meats were precious — used more like a flavoring for ulam, in smaller portions than we see today, and for special occasions. Fish and seafood would be more abundant, especially in coastal regions." Suzara even points out that our idea of rice — which is a staple in Filipinos' diets — has changed. "I grew up thinking [that] eating a Filipino diet meant eating only white rice and that brown rice was 'White people health food,' and had my mind blown realizing there are thousands of varieties of rice, in a rainbow of colors," she said. Recognizing history and finding connections to health A lot of people have reasoned and acknowledged that Filipino dishes, such as lechon (roasted pig) are greasy and unhealthy. Suzara, however, explained that there are better — and healthier ways to make Filipino food. A start is to look into our history to find the connections to the way we eat and how it has changed. "It's essential to recognize history, especially as our community faces an epidemic of diet-related chronic diseases like type II diabetes, heart disease and hypertension. I know how frustrating it can be to look for resources on 'healthy eating' and not see yourself reflected — the nutrition field is still largely Eurocentric, and has a long way to go in better representing the wisdom of many food traditions found in the U.S. These stereotypes do a disservice when they pose a false choice of culture vs health," she stressed. During her research into food during World War II and the American colonial period, Suzara learned that the colonial system not only enforced the English language to Filipinos, but also home economics classes tapered to the "American nutrition" at the time. This introduced processed and imported food from brands like Hershey's and Hormel. "A more common diet — such as munggo (mung beans), fish, vegetables, and colorful rice — would have been considered nutritionally inferior, and we now know is the opposite," she explained. Suzara believes that we can be healthy without leaving our food culture behind by getting inspiration from a wealth of foods that are both traditional and contemporary. "There are certainly foods that are fatty, sweet and salty — party foods and treats exist in any culture," she said. "We don't need to throw these away, either. Instead, we can make more room in our plates and palates for foods that keep us healthy and strong." Growing up in Hawai'i, Suzara also noted that she was surrounded by markets that are full of produce, such as long beans, bittermelon, eggplants, banana hearts and more, all planted by longtime Filipino farmers. "In CA (California), earlier generations shaped the farmworker and labor movement, and there are still farmers both new and old who carry on these traditions. Elders have [been] practicing 'urban gardening' before it became trendy again," Suzara said. Raising the flavor profile of vegan/vegetarian dishes "Our people were among the world's most skillful vegetable farmers, and our traditional foods reflect this agrarian heritage. I think of this when I hear comments that 'Filipinos don't eat vegetables'" she said. For those who are thinking of going meatless (or at least plan to eat more vegetables) but are scared of how it will taste like, Suzara has a few ideas. "If people are unfamiliar with ingredients, or have had them poorly prepared, it can seem like these foods must be bland or boring. Luckily, vegetables can be just as — and sometimes even more than — flavorful and creatively prepared as meat. I'd recommend people try an approach of 'more' vs 'elimination,' she said and continued, "For example, 'how can I focus on bringing in more colors, textures, and varieties of vegetables into my daily meals, vs focusing on what to take away?'" She suggests dark leafy greens, like kamote greens, kangkong and bok choy, because of the taste, nutritional value and can cook quickly. Adding seasonings like calamansi or lemon, chilis and garlic help add to its flavor profile. "Making small steps is [the] important thing to getting started! Having a buddy system — a friend or family members — can be motivating and make the process fun," Suzara said. "For parents who worry they may have the added labor of cooking different foods for themselves and their kids, I'd encourage them to involve kids with cooking 'new' foods as much as possible and incorporating it into their diet as well. Easier said than done, for sure, but as I've found while cooking and teaching children and youth, kids are more likely to try new foods when they have an active role in preparing it, and also try it multiple times. Some families might opt to make it a weekly tradition and do 'Meatless Mondays,' then go from there." At present, Suzara is also busy with her food business, Sariwa (Tagalog for "fresh"), which she started when she reconnected with her Filipino roots. "I was inspired by flavors tasted while visiting rural areas of the Philippines, in Hawai'i, and while reconstructing dishes found in old cookbooks. When I spent two years as an organic farmer in coastal California, I was immersed in agriculture and was able to grow, taste and cook with some of the freshest and most delicious ingredients, and I wanted to find out how to make them more accessible," she shared. Sariwa had its first big pop-up in Oakland in 2011, with the support of the Peoples Kitchen Collective and as a benefit for Filipino/American Coalition for Environmental Solidarity's (FACES) typhoon relief efforts. "It took more years of experimentation and work in the public health world before I decided to return to the kitchen. I was concern about the growing chronic disease epidemic our community faced, and also disturbed by the times I'd heard friends or community members share that they were instructed to 'stop eating Filipino food before it kills you,'" she said. "I realized the most direct way of touching people's palates was through our tastebuds, and to show how eating for health could also taste good and celebrate culture. I wanted to find ways to make health more celebratory, and to find a practical way to support local farmers who are growing heritage crops." Sariwa has grown as a food business since 2016, with the support of La Cocina, a nonprofit that supports low-income women, people of color and immigrants. Aside from this, Sariwa brings workshops and food demos to schools, clinics and public events, as well as collaborates with community organizations. "Health and wellness are already within our roots. We have a wealth of practices that we can now bring forward to fit our 21st-century lives, and have the tools to feed ourselves in ways that honor our ancestors, heals our bodies, and takes care of the earth," she said. A podcast featuring Sariwa and healing within Filipino-American foods will soon be posted on . Is Filipino food unhealthy? It's easy to think so, given how it's popularly served. Even the foreign branches of Filipino and other food chains and brands come with vegetable dishes. While our food is gaining more recognition internationally, it's admittedly the food commonly served at fiestas and special occasions: rich, savory, flavored, and based on red meat and highly processed. The unhealthiness of Filipino food has become an internet meme at this point. But we have reasons to believe it's just that. (Un)changing times Tortang talong | Photo by Amanda Lim/Unsplash There's a hidden gem tucked away along Xavierville Avenue, Quezon City. It's been around for some time now. I've been going for more than a decade. A more senior writer actually covered it way, way back: I bumped into her once while dining in, and she raved like the place just opened yesterday. Blissful Belly, owned by Omar Arabia, MD, puts a vegan spin on the Filipino carinderia, offering staples like nilaga, pancit, kare-kare (complete with vegan bagoong!), okoy, lumpia, and more, all displayed in a turo-turo setup as his staff prepare plates of red rice and glasses of tamarind, dalandan, and more juices. Behind the restaurant, inside Arabia's office, I remember seeing a broadsheet clipping, framed, browned on the edges (this was in 2015, mind you) but with the text still clear, that described how Filipino non-communicable ("lifestyle") diseases were on the rise while diseases like polio and cholera, which are less influenced by diet and lifestyle and treated by modern vaccines, have been steadily on the downtrend. The article concluded that aspirational dining, eating more "fiesta food" during more days of the year, instead of the traditional diet of fish and vegetables, was influencing a rising trend in high blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes among Filipinos, enamored as we are by the growing ubiquity both Spanish-era fiesta food and American fast food. Clearly, Dr. Arabia, whose treatments also include lifestyle and mindset changes aside from pharmaceutical cures, had reasons for keeping that perennial, if dog-eared, story. On one hand, that old article could argue that Filipino food in recent years, rather, the food more Filipinos prefer to consume in recent years has become unhealthy. On the other hand, that same article could argue that traditional Filipino food is healthy. Pancit palabok | Photo by Airam Dato-on/Unsplash Doreen Fernandez, for one, agrees with both readings above. In "Ang Mahiwagang Nilaga," a 1991 essay of hers republished in a recent anthology, the professor, historian, and degustadora writes "Filipino cooking has, at its base, a simplicity of method that comes from earth wisdom," referencing the "agricultural cycle that we live by (compare it to the industrial cycle." She continues: "Our Indigenous cuisine is very often grilled, steamed, and boiled," cooking methods that doctors largely agree are the healthiest among others. "Only much later did we learn to sauté, fry, and bake," she concludes, noting how the latter methods were imported from contact with foreigners including through colonization. It's interconnected Another post by citizen-scientist and social media personality Lokalpedia (John Sherwin Felix) seems to align with Fernandez's observation. After reading historian E. Alexander Orquiza Jr's "Taste of Control: Food and the Filipino Colonial Mentality Under American Rule" (2020), the blogger was moved to write: "One thing I've learned from this is how our colonizers vilified our traditional food systems. They propagated the idea that our food was unhygienic, non-nutritious, and backward—a "damsel in distress" that needed saving. They did this to assert control, making us believe we needed them to "improve" our way of life. While the colonizers are long gone, the effects of their propaganda remain. And colonization continues today, albeit in different forms, through the dominance of corporate food systems over our local ones." I scrolled through some comments (maybe next time, we can all talk about how quality content creators bring together quality conversations and a quality community) and remembered my own childhood as an aging millennial where the first half of my life was in the analog era all as the current chunk of life tries to navigate the digital era. Lokalpedia recently stirred conversation anew for a series of posts critiquing a popular fast food giant (and the bigger phenomenon of the corporate takeover of small, local businesses) and how it seems to have skewed notions of progress and development. Aside from dial-up internet, landlines, playing on the street, yellow pages, cassette tapes, and VCD players, the ubiquity (versus today's atomization) of pop culture interests, I also recalled, thanks to Lokalpedia and the netizens drawn to it, that popular snacks in the late 1990s and early 2000s such as plantains, root crops, and cold dessert stews like bilu-bilo have largely been replaced by fast food-analogous snacks and soda. I asked around: Friends, co-workers, and family also recalled local fruits (sineguelas, binukaw, katmon, etc.), food preparation methods (Bicol Express the Bikol way, inabraw, pakbet, without pork), and snacks from their hometowns and childhood, which seem to be disappearing today. Contrary to what is usually portrayed in mainstream media, Filipino cuisine is more than just deep-fried meats and oily food | Photo by Christian Dala So is Filipino food really unhealthy? This seems to ultimately be not just a lifestyle but also a political question. What market forces and power brokers and vested interests are using their amassed capital to influence consumer preferences? Why does the burden of guilt fall on you, dear reader, enjoying another helping of lechon (minsan lang talaga 'to!), and not the institutionalized greed attempting to control our consumption habits? Reddit and its partners use cookies and similar technologies to provide you with a better experience. By accepting all cookies, you agree to our use of cookies to deliver and maintain our services and site, improve the quality of Reddit, personalize Reddit content and advertising, and measure the effectiveness of advertising. By rejecting non-essential cookies, Reddit may still use certain cookies to ensure the proper functionality of our platform. For more information, please see our Cookie Notice and our Privacy Policy.