

The Choice of a Noodle: An Examination of Pasta and its Feng Shui Potential

Sergei Rzhechnyik

Abstract

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in the ancient art of feng shui, along with an increasing number of advocates emerging to offer various suggestions on improving daily life. This study attempts to empirically support one respected author's theories, by using a blind placebo trial to determine the influence of noodle variety on healthy and happy living.

Introduction

The past two decades have witnessed the remarkable spread of Chinese influence in the West, sparked by an interest in alternative medicines, vegetarian lifestyles, and bubble teas. Meanwhile, the typical North American's desire for self-improvement has never been higher, with a myriad of advice columns and self-help books gaining huge followings among the general public. Cashing in on this combined surge in fascination with all things Chinese and the average Joe's long-held dream of self-betterment, in recent years the Chinese geomancer art of *feng shui* has taken the Western world by storm.

Feng shui, at least in its modern, market-oriented reinterpretation, can be described vaguely as "an ancient Chinese earth science developed to bring people into harmony with nature, time and space" (Indawind, 1987). Put in more concrete terms, modern feng

shui—or at least, the aspect thereof that we are concerned with here—is a system of exploiting the physical characteristics of objects, such as their shape, colour, placement, or very existence, for one's own personal gain in areas such as health, happiness, financial well-being, job satisfaction, and human relations. No item too big or too small will escape the watchful eye of the feng shui "master." From the selection of knick-knacks we choose to display, to the firmness and direction of the pillow we sleep on, to the very colour of our bath towels, all can have a crucial influence on the overall quality of the lives we live.

Recent Literature

At the forefront of this American feng shui invasion is the famous Chicago feng shui adept Mofa "Clifford" Chen. His books *The Lotus and the Layaway Plan* (1994) and *Find Your Fortune Cookie Future through Fine Furnishings* (1997) offer a well-crafted mixture of

Oriental wisdom and Western practicality. In these guides, Master Chen gives frank advice and explains the basics of how simple changes to home décor can bring about an influx of wealth, spark a budding romance, or cure even the most complicated of diseases.

In his latest offering, Master Chen tackles a subject that is very close to the hearts—and stomachs—of most families: the American homestyle Italian meal. In *Noodle Your Way to Health and Happiness* (2004) Master Chen provides a detailed guide to pasta noodle varieties and explains some of the beneficial effects that various pasta selections can have, based entirely on the feng shui properties of their shape. From tiny,

lentil-sized cochiglie to thick-ridged, tubular rigatoni, the benefits and characteristics of a wide assortment of pasta are explained in clear detail for pasta lovers and students of feng shui alike.

This paper, therefore, attempts to scientifically verify some of the claims put forth in Master Chen's most recent work, by examining the question of whether pasta variety can in fact influence success in or quality of life. The method used is described below, with the results and conclusions discussed thereafter.

Method

Four female participants were selected from a pool of 104 survey-takers at the Willowbrook Mall in Wayne, New

Table 1. Survey Questions

1. Since the beginning of the experiment, how would you describe your level of physical health?
2. Since the beginning of the experiment, how would you describe your ability to concentrate?
3. Since the beginning of the experiment, how would you describe your relations with your family and close friends?
4. Since the beginning of the experiment, how would you describe your level of job satisfaction?
5. Since the beginning of the experiment, how would you describe your financial situation?
6. Since the beginning of the experiment, how would you describe your romantic and/or sexual satisfaction?
7. Since the beginning of the experiment, how would you describe your luck at cards, bingo, or other forms of gambling?
8. Since the beginning of the experiment, how would you describe the changes to your complexion?
9. (Only for those applicable) Since the beginning of the experiment, how would you describe your success at conceiving a child?
10. Since the beginning of the experiment, how would you describe your overall level of happiness?

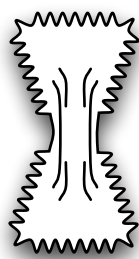
Jersey. All participants were determined to be between the ages of 20 and 35, and of “average” health, happiness, and financial standing, based on self-assessment. The chosen participants were instructed to follow a strict dietary regimen consisting of two pasta meals per day, for a span of 21 days. Each meal was to comprise of 125 grams of dried pasta accompanied by either a basic tomato or cream sauce, with sauce to be alternated between even and odd days. Participants were free, however, to adjust the volume of sauce to their liking, as well as free to supplement their diet with fruit and/or vegetables. No bread was allowed.

Each participant was assigned, through a random drawing, one of the following four “pasta” varieties, consisting of three genuine durum wheat-based pasta noodle types, and one rice-based pasta placebo. Subject

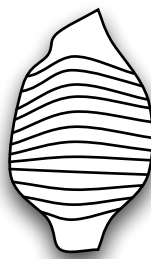
1 was assigned to eat *farfalle*, a bow tie or butterfly-shaped pasta variety. Subject 2 was given *lumache*, a snail-shaped pasta noodle variation. Subject 3 was assigned *fusilli*, consisting of long, corkscrew-like twists. Subject 4, meanwhile, was assigned “perengellio,” a fictitious pasta variety described as being of the Northern Italy style, and actually consisting of *tteokbokki*, a popular Korean dish made of glutinous rice cakes cut into finger-length sticks (figure 1). Note that in order to avoid any preconceived outcomes, neither the participants nor the researcher were permitted to read in advance Master Chen’s 2004 publication, nor were they in any way familiar with the notions perpetrated therein.

Participants were instructed to keep a daily journal, in which they were asked to regularly describe their mental,

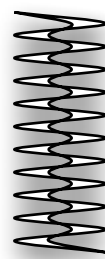
Figure 1. Pasta Varieties



farfalle



lumache



fusilli



perengellio
(tteokbokki)

physical, and emotional state, as well as their overall well-being. In addition, on the last day of the experiment, they were asked to complete a brief survey (shown in table 1) regarding all aspects of their lives, and to rate the various aspects using the following scale: a) worsened greatly, b) worsened somewhat, c) neither worsened nor improved, d) improved somewhat, e) improved greatly.

Results

Results varied between all four participants, with no clear patterns emerging. As an indication of overall change, the level of happiness from the beginning to the end of the experiment for subjects 2 and 4 was found to have “improved somewhat”; that for subject 3, “worsened somewhat”; and that for subject 1, “neither worsened nor improved.”

In viewing answers to specific topics, we saw that the health of three of the four subjects “neither worsened nor improved” throughout the duration of the experiment, while that of one subject (subject 3) “worsened somewhat.” Review of this subject’s journal revealed that in the last week of the experiment she had caught a bad cold.

Concentration ability for all participants remained constant, as did financial situation, child-bearing success, and luck at cards. Complexion “worsened somewhat” for subject 1, and “improved somewhat” for subject 2, with no clear cause and effect able to be identified. Job satisfaction “improved somewhat” for subject 4,

after she was complimented by her boss.

The most drastic changes were seen in the aspect of family relations, which for subject 3 “worsened greatly” after an argument with her brother. Other major changes were noted for subject 2, who claimed that her romantic and/or sexual satisfaction “improved greatly”; her journal entries indicate that she had experienced a very successful date.

Conclusions

Based on the above results, it can be concluded that no clear lines of cause and effect can be drawn between specific pasta varieties and improvements to particular aspects of physical, mental, or emotion health, career success, luck, or general happiness. Similarly, no clear distinction can be made between the effects of a diet rich in flour-based pasta and one primarily consisting of rice or other carbohydrates. Further studies are recommended to establish a possible link between sexual gratification and consumption of lumache.

References

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