

# For Thanksgiving, Immigrant Families Blend Cultures and Traditions

By Ksenia Novikova



Crystal Cho's family celebrates Thanksgiving in New York in November 2019. (Crystal Cho/AP)

Every Thanksgiving, Crystal Cho eats turkey and mashed potatoes.

Along with grilled duck, rice noodles and scallion pancakes.

“I love mixing Chinese and American foods on Thanksgiving,” Cho said. “It makes the day so special.”

Cho is one of the many Americans who celebrate Thanksgiving by blending cultures, traditions and foods. For immigrant families and first-generation Americans, Thanksgiving is a way to celebrate an American holiday while maintaining their cultural connections and traditions.

Cho, a Fordham University senior, is a first-generation Chinese American. Cho was born in Brooklyn, New York, but spent most of her childhood in Shanghai and Hong Kong. When she was 14, she returned to New York.

Her family loves celebrating Thanksgiving. Cho has celebrated Thanksgiving every year since 2013, which is the year she came to America.

“When I first came to America and we celebrated with family, it was so heartwarming. I immediately loved it,” Cho said.

On Thanksgiving, her family starts cooking in the early afternoon. Throughout the day, they play games, spend time together, and prepare for the big dinner. Blending American and Chinese cuisine, they make turkey and gravy with special Chinese seasonings and traditional Chinese dishes like fried rice and Peking duck.

After dinner, her family plays a game of Mahjong, a popular Chinese tile-based game.

“We think of Thanksgiving as more of a family reunion rather than a Western holiday,” Cho said. “It’s all about family.”

For most Americans, Thanksgiving is all about family. More than nine out of 10 Americans celebrate the holiday with family and friends, [according to a 2000 Gallup poll](#).



Zoya Binyaminov and her family celebrate Thanksgiving in New York in November 2019. (Zoya Binyaminov/AP)

Zoya Binyaminov, an American University senior, is a first-generation Bukharian American. She was born in Westchester, New York, but her parents are from Tashkent, Uzbekistan. They moved to New York in 1991.

On Thanksgiving, Binyaminov’s family makes Uzbek dishes, such as dumplings stuffed with minced meat and beef rice pilaf.

“Eating Uzbek food makes Thanksgiving more special and personal for us,” Binyaminov said.

Some immigrant families focus only on traditional Thanksgiving foods for the holiday.

Lawrence Oberemok, an American University senior, is a first-generation American. His parents emigrated from Moldova after the Soviet Union fell.

Oberemok’s family stays connected to their Russian heritage by speaking Russian, celebrating Russian New Year and eating Russian foods. But for Thanksgiving, they stick to American traditions, said Oberemok.

“We love spending time with friends and family and eating roasted turkey,” Oberemok said.



Lawrence Oberemok’s Thanksgiving dinner in California in November 2019. (Lawrence Oberemok/AP)

Oberemok is not alone. Nearly half of Americans said that turkey is the food they most look forward to eating on Thanksgiving, [according to a Gallup poll](#).

This November, Thanksgiving may look different for all American families.

With a rise of COVID-19 cases and social distancing rules, big family gatherings may not be possible.

Oberemok plans to celebrate Thanksgiving, but not all of his family will be there.

“I’m honestly devastated. I have family across the country that I haven’t seen in over a year,” Oberemok said.

For Cho, Thanksgiving this year will be especially difficult. Her parents left to visit family in Shanghai last December. Cho has not seen them since. Cho’s parents are still in China now. Because of travel restrictions and the risk of taking a plane, Cho is not sure when her parents will be back.

Cho plans to celebrate Thanksgiving with some family in Brooklyn, New York.

“It won’t be the same without them there,” said Cho, referring to her parents.