

Goldfish in China and Hong Kong
Address by Jackie Chan to the GFSA, August, 1995
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Following is the full text of a presentation that Mr. Jackie Chan, of the Tung Hoi Aquarium Company, gave at the GFSA annual convention held in Akron In August, 1995.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It is really my pleasure to be here with all of you, and to talk about the origins of the goldfish. The goldfish we are now familiar with does not exist in the wild, but was bred by the Chinese from natural mutations of the wild Crucian Carp (*Carassius Auratus*). The wild Crucian Carp is a native freshwater food fish of China which inhabits rivers, lakes, ponds and ditches. At approximately 250 A.D., golden Crucian Carp were rare in the wild state and therefore were a mystery to people and were believed to be sacred. The earliest historical records of the golden Crucian Carp originated in the Jin dynasty, which lasted from 254 to 420 A.D.

When Buddhism was introduced into China in the Tang Dynasty (618 to 907 A.D.), the Buddhist monks built many ponds for the express purpose of holding aquatic animals. Among the animals displayed in this manner were the golden Crucian Carp. It was during this period in Chinese history that goldfish were domesticated and raised for viewing.

In the Nan Song Dynasty (1127 to 1279 A.D.), the emperor of Gao Zong was very fond of goldfish and kept many fish in his palace. The keeping of goldfish generated a new industry – that of caring for and maintaining these beautiful fish. Eventually, goldfish experts evolved, and selective breeding began to occur. In time, many high ranking officials followed the lead of the Emperor, and goldfish keeping became popular with the ruling classes, as well as those wealthy enough to afford these luxuries.

The art of selective breeding was developed so that many new varieties flourished. As China established trading ties with other countries, exports of goldfish grew. Japan was one of the first countries to import goldfish, with the earliest known records of imported goldfish dating back to circa 1600 A.D.

In present-day China, Chinese biologists have conducted scientific research into the origins of the common goldfish. These scientists believe that the common goldfish and the Crucian Carp belong to the same genus and species, for the following reasons:

1. Goldfish of any variety can be cross-bred with wild Crucian Carp and produce offspring with normal reproductive capacity.
2. Goldfish and wild Crucian Carp have the same serum reaction.
3. Cytologically, goldfish and Crucian Carp are different only in color and in their behavior towards humans. The two are very similar in shape in their embryonic and early periods.

This modern scientific research, combined with detailed historical records, strongly indicates that the wild Crucian Carp is the ancestor of the present-day goldfish, and that the origins of the goldfish were in China.

The development of the goldfish in China did not consist of one unbroken chain of events. In recent times, during the People's Revolution in China, the goldfish was regarded as a symbol of luxury and attempts were made to destroy these fish as reminders of the decadent past. During the time of the People's Revolution, goldfish breeding and raising underwent a period of stagnation. As China has embraced a series of reforms, the art of goldfish keeping has expanded and enjoyed a rebirth. Indeed, over the last several years, the number of new goldfish varieties has increased dramatically, maybe as a result of the earlier pent-up demand. The Chinese government has helped fuel this rebirth in the culture of goldfish, and has allocated funds for the development of goldfish parks, research facilities and grounds for the raising of these creatures.

Until now, we have concentrated mainly on the development of goldfish on mainland China. Approximately 30 years ago, people coming from southern China introduced goldfish into the city of Hong Kong. Among the first fish brought to Hong Kong were the Oranda and Lionhead. These early fish were of excellent quality, although the varieties raised were rather limited. At about the same time as the introduction of Chinese varieties into Hong Kong, fish of Japanese heritage, including Ranchus and Ryukins, were introduced into Hong Kong. Because of the relatively higher land and labor costs in Hong Kong, as compared with mainland China, the development of large-scale fish farms is not as common. Hong Kong's primary role is that of an exporter of goldfish to the rest of the world.

At the present time, there are six factors which are important in the raising and breeding of goldfish in Hong Kong and China.

The first factor is the development of new varieties in China and Hong Kong. Although these fish are relatively new, they are relatively fixed in terms of space and heredity (ability to transmit their special characteristics onto their progeny). A trip to Ocean Park in Hong Kong will reveal these new varieties in a very peaceful setting.

The second point to consider is that over the years, the raising of goldfish has undergone some profound changes. In ancient China, goldfish breeding was a pass-time for members of the royalty or the very rich. As mentioned earlier, these fish were raised in large ponds, for the enjoyment and viewing of only a few people. As time passed, goldfish became available to the general populace. Goldfish keeping was done in earthen vessels or pottery, as fewer people were able to maintain large special-built ponds. As more time passed, the raising of goldfish took on aspects of commercialism, with the breeding and development of goldfish occurring on a very large scale. Recently, the raising of goldfish has taken on a professionalism that was lacking in the past. Modern facilities often employ many ponds, often exceeding several thousand square feet in space. In addition to the larger sizes used to house fish, modern quality control methods are employed, and modern veterinary practices have been adopted.

As China's reforms have expanded and foreign trade encouraged, the goldfish business has entered a growth period. In the past, trade in goldfish was handled by the Foreign Trade Department, which was run by the State. Today, independent businessmen have been encouraged to raise and export goldfish. In addition to the favorable business climate, China has relatively cheap land and labor, as well as good water quality, which allows for wide-spread commercialization of the industry to occur.

The third point to consider is the importance of Hong Kong to the development of the goldfish industry. Hong Kong is a prosperous city which has thrived on its development of a mercantile – that is- trade economy. This emphasis on trading has led to the development of an efficient export business, and a world-class port. This combination of mercantilism, export facilities and readily-available goldfish (from mainland China) has led Hong Kong to become the world-wide trading center for goldfish.

The fourth point to consider is that different parts of the world place greater or lesser emphasis on certain characteristics of goldfish. In Japan, the main criteria for judging and choosing goldfish are color and shape. In the U.S. and Europe, emphasis is placed on finnage, especially on the development of the caudal fin. In China and Hong Kong, emphasis is placed on the development of the entire fish – that is, the overall appearance of the fish. As an example, if there were two fish which were identical except in one the caudal fin was double, and in the other, the caudal fin was single; to a Chinese person looking at these fish, they would be equally appreciated. The presence or absence of a second caudal fin would not add or detract from the beauty of the fish. In general, the presence or absence of a particular characteristic is a personal matter and does not add to or detract from the health or beauty of a fish.

The fifth point to consider is the general trend of the goldfish industry in China and Hong Kong. As people become more interested in and purchase more goldfish, the supplies of fish coming from China and Hong Kong have been unable to meet the demand for these fish. With increased demand comes better fish, better methods of growing and raising them, and more efficient means of exporting them.

Finally, several factors must be considered which hamper the rapid expansion of additional fish raising facilities. As farms locate farther from the coastal areas in an effort to obtain lower-cost land, new types of parasites are introduced into fish ponds. Developing reliable means of eliminating these parasites requires time – time to formulate effective treatment methods – and patience. As farms move to remote locales, shipping becomes more important. There is a time delay in getting from the fish farms to the export ports, and then from the export ports to a trans-shipper in the importing country. This time factor can have serious effects on the health of the fish; more work is needed to improve shipping conditions and timeliness. The final factor to consider is the use of methods other than size, to grade fish. As more farms adopt quality control measures, size will become less important than the overall quality of the fish.

What is the future of the goldfish industry in China and Hong Kong? As we've seen from this speech, several trends have developed over the past few years, and will continue to play-out in the future. One trend that will continue is the increasing professionalism of the goldfish industry in China and Hong Kong. Breeding and raising conditions will improve, and modern quality control measures will continue to be developed. Shipment methods will improve, and more efficient means

of shipping from the inland areas of China to the coastal areas will be devised. Some sort of grading system will be developed for world-wide use; this system will help in selecting the types of fish breeders will produce. Finally, the quality and quantity of fish coming from China and Hong Kong will continue to improve as the above-mentioned changes take effect.

In closing, I hope that you learned something about the state of the goldfish in China and Hong Kong. I am sure that these beloved creatures of China and Hong Kong will help forge a more beautiful world for us. If you can, please visit us in China at the Tung Hoi Aquarium Company.