

Introduction

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This is a very fine collection of articles on Chinese food, and it is a great honour to have been asked to serve as editor of this volume in the new series by the Foundation for Chinese Dietary Culture. The various contributions were selected from among the many outstanding papers presented at biannual conferences organised by the Foundation over the last twenty years, chosen so as to fit in with the general theme of Regionalism and Globalism in Chinese Culinary Traditions.

It needs to be said that choosing papers for inclusion in the present volume was very difficult. There was quite a bewildering variety of possible selections, and many of the conference papers not chosen were of equal quality and could have made to speak with equal effectiveness on the central themes of this volume. As it happens, the articles chosen here include contributions by eminent senior scholars, by scholars in mid-career with established reputations in the study of culinary cultures, and by scholars who are either younger or yet to come to the notice of the international scholarly community. It is a great tribute to the work of the Foundation over the last two decades that scholars of this quality have been brought together, year

after year, and produced such insightful contributions to scholarship.

I will first summarise the main themes highlighted by each chapter, say something about how they are interrelated, and then go on to consider what they say in aggregate about Chinese culinary culture and future prospects for scholarship in this field.

This volume begins with a contribution by Sidney Mintz, whose essay on “Core, Fringe and Legume” puts forward a general argument about food into which discussions about Chinese cuisine and its globalisation may be situated. Basically, Mintz argues that there has been a general pattern among settled agricultural societies worldwide, according to which food served on any particular occasion (a mealtime) will include core cereal foods, a secondary set of “fringe” elements that provide flavour and interest, including spices, seasonings and (occasionally) meats; and finally beans, peas, and other food products produced from legumes. In China’s case, it is soya beans that provide the protein-rich legume component of the diet. Mintz’s other main theme is the concept of the “meal.” Cross-culturally, this turns out to be less simple than it might first appear. Concepts of the meal are tied up partly with ideas of what makes people feel most satisfied, and these usually turn on having an adequate portion of food derived from grains. Mintz points out that in traditional societies it is the crops that form the core element of the diet that most often attract feelings of sacredness or are hedged around with religious rituals or constraints. On the other hand, modern societies that have made the most thoroughgoing departures from traditional food practices, such as the United States, are precisely the societies in which there is a high level anxiety about the disappearance of

“mealtimes” and the replacement of meals with “snacking.” Finally, Mintz notes two contrary trends within current globalisation: the slow penetration of East Asian societies by Western fast foods, and the spread of non-Western cuisines like Chinese food to the rest of the world. The latter trend, he suggests, may prove an antidote to current worries about the loss of balance in modernised diets.

Jack Goody’s chapter on “The Globalisation of Chinese Food” takes an equally broad-ranging view of globalisation and Chinese cuisine. Starting with personal reminiscences of Chinese restaurants in Cambridge before the outbreak of World War II, Goody gives a broad-brush picture of the slow development of the Chinese and Indian restaurant trades in post-war Britain. He points out that Chinese food was often more popular with ordinary people than with the elites, providing relief from the blandness of most ordinary restaurant fare at reasonable cost. Goody points out that globalisation has been a very selective process, and one that has given rise to diversity as well as uniformity. Among world cuisines, Chinese is one that has spread most successfully worldwide. Goody’s discussion provides some very thoughtful discussion on the question of why this is so.

With Anderson’s chapter on “Northwest Chinese Cuisine and the Central Asian Connection” the discussion of Chinese cuisine and its international dimension is explored in considerable historical depth. Anderson ranges widely, bringing into the discussion the earliest known evidence about the crops, the cuisines, and the peoples of the Central Asian region bordering Northwest China. However, he concentrates his discussion on the Yuan dynasty, and demonstrates that the cuisine at Court was very

profoundly influenced by a general Central Asian pattern. This pattern was one that placed emphasis on meat (pre-eminently lamb), together with wheaten noodles and breads and a narrow range of vegetables such as onions and cabbage. Anderson notes that with their access to resources from far-flung places, the Mongol court was truly internationalist; as he puts it, “no court or government in all human history has gone to such lengths to establish themselves as a truly international, or, rather, a truly world regime.” (pp. 63) Splendid feasts were part of the display of power and wealth that accompanied this effort. By the same token, it is clear that at this time Chinese cuisine, at least in the north, was itself highly internationalised. Detailed discussion of breads and cakes in the northwest shows that even to this day, Central Asian influence extends across a wide gradient in Xinjiang, Ningxia, Shaanxi and other provinces. On the other hand, Anderson points to specific elements in the cuisine—pilaf versus plain boiled rice—where there is a sharp distinction between East Asian and Central Asian cuisines. The pattern is not simple.

If Anderson’s paper examines the international dimension to a regional cuisine, Françoise Sabban’s chapter on “Chinese Regional Cuisine” looks for historical mechanisms within China itself to explain the diversity of regional cuisines in China. She notes in passing that there are commonalities the length and breadth of the empire—in the overall meal pattern, in basic preparation techniques, in the universal use of soy sauce, ginger and onion. Within these parameters, writers have long noted that food and tastes are influenced by environmental conditions, sometimes attempting to break Chinese culinary space into geographical zones strictly correlated with the

five directions and their correlative tastes. Another traditional form of discourse centers on regional “specialties” that were either sent as tribute to the court or held in special esteem by travellers. Sabban herself argues that the development of regional cuisines took place during the development of urban life during the Song period, ample evidence for which is found in the reminiscences of the Northern Capital Kaifeng and contemporary descriptions of life in Hangzhou. Movement of people from one region to another led to a situation in the capital in which three of the great regional cuisines took shape, cheek by jowl, the fourth—that of Canton—being added during the Ming. Sabban closes with a discussion of various recent attempts to define what might be meant by a “culinary system” (*caixi* 菜系).

Erhard Rosner in his chapter on “Regional Food Cultures in China” covers some of the same ground, in a way that complements Sabban’s discussion. He points to the difficulty in moving beyond colourful generalities to arrive at any more satisfactory way of defining regional cultures. Through a detailed discussion of the Ming writer Xie Zhaozhe and his famous work the *Wuzazu*, Rosner notes that there are actually three strands in the discussion about local eating habits: a recognition that there are natural conditions and that what people eat will vary in accordance with these; an insight that within these variations, some foods may be appreciated locally but be unpalatable to outsiders; and finally, the observation that there are certain food habits that lie outside the norms established in Chinese civilisation, and should not be tolerated. Rosner points out that the first line of discourse is related to discussion about diet in Chinese medical writing, a tradition that dates as far back as the *Huangdi neijing* and was considerably

augmented in later times, with growing detailed knowledge of the importance of local foods in balancing human physiology with local climatic conditions. As he puts it, “The regional character of food within this set of explanations ... is not only a matter of course, but an indispensable source of inspiration.” (p. 101) Rosner then turns his attention to the rules and practices of the capital, and asks about the political dimension to this regionalism: to what extent were foods specific to certain regions present in the capital? One mechanism leading to the diversity described in sources such as the *Dongjing menghua lu* is the circulation of high officials to postings in various parts of the empire, but more important still was the imperial palace itself. The court served to attract and incorporate regional foods, either by local tribute or by other mechanisms. Not only were ingredients thus incorporated, but also knowledge about preparation techniques. This in turn provided officials in the imperial administration with ample reason to take note of local and regional food habits and ingredients. The strong reaction against food habits that were seen to be uncivilised, however, was not linked with any yardstick in court ritual or sumptuary laws, but rather from history and historical precedent. Rosner ends with a plea to investigate the centripetal and centrifugal forces in Chinese culture as they affect the problem of regionalism in their entirety across the system and in full historical detail.

We then pass to Sidney Cheung’s chapter on “Chinese Food in Japanese Society,” the first in a series of chapters devoted to Chinese cuisine in various environments outside China. Here we begin to discover not only the ways in which Chinese cooking was adapted to all manner of different,

non-Chinese environments, but also the ways in which regional specialities were differentially introduced to these overseas places. Chinese cuisine, in other words, was not spread to other parts of the world holus-bolus, or as some kind of generic abstraction, but as a set of specific dishes from specific regions and localities. Cheung moreover argues that in Japan, Chinese-style food prepared by non-Chinese chefs also become part of the mix of offerings, and contrasted with “authentic” restaurants advertising their Hong Kong chefs. The main focus of Cheung’s chapter is to trace the historical development of Chinese food in Japan, asking what forms it took and why it was able to survive in an urban environment subjected to continuous outside influences over the last century. Cheung concentrates on the post-war period, and sees the development of Chinese food as falling into four stages: an immediate post-war period, in which high-class restaurants catered for high society people and foreigners, while cheaper food catered primarily to Chinese residents in places like the Yokohama Chinatown; in the second stage, from the mid-60s to the mid-70s, Japan’s economic growth led to substantial increases in the standard of living, and family restaurants and a modified form of Chinese cuisine catered to middle class tastes; in the third phase in the 1980s, when increasing numbers of Japanese travelled overseas, new styles of Chinese food such as Cantonese dim sum were introduced; and finally, in the period since the 1990s, there has been increasing recognition of the finer points of Chinese cooking both for enjoyment and for health. A key feature of Cheung’s paper is his fascinating analysis of how individuals in Japanese society make use of Chinese cuisine and Hong Kong style in their construction of a personal cultural identity that is

“minor”—that is, outside the Japanese mainstream culture but nevertheless aesthetically and personally satisfying.

Then follow two chapters on the basic ingredients, grain and salt. The chapters by Trombert and Vogel are both the fruits of specialist research on these topics. Eric Trombert, in his analysis of Grain Processing in Dunhuang, combines research on original Dunhuang documents with his expertise on the processing and milling of grain products found in the Northwestern area, pre-eminently wheat and barley. He shows that the main grain crops at Dunhuang from the 8th to the 10th century were the same as those cultivated in North China at the time: wheat, dressed barley, naked barley, panicked and unpanicked millet, several different kinds of beans, and hemp seed. He shows further that wheat and barley were usually ground fairly coarsely, and were well bolted—that is, they had the fibre and germ removed—so as to produce groats, and that this white flour in turn had just the right qualities for making “cakes” (*bing*) and noodles. In Dunhuang high-ranking persons and guests received white flour, skilled workers and artisans received some white flour and some coarse flour and millet; Buddhist priests received white flour but only on feast days; while the poorest rations were reserved for women and (cooks and labourers). In fact the coarser flour had better nutritional content, so the refined tastes of the upper echelons did not actually work to their advantage.

Hans Vogel’s chapter on Salt and Chinese Culture is an erudite and wide-ranging study on the cultural aspects of salt and salt production in China. Vogel draws quite detailed comparisons with salt in Western Europe and the Christian tradition to show that the complex of cultural associations

surrounding salt in China has parallels elsewhere. He begins his discussion with a review of the major traditional types of salt and production methods, noting that the very long-term trend to replace sea salt with well salt and rock salt has been a worldwide phenomenon, made possible by what was originally a Chinese technological breakthrough in deep-drilling that made it possible to exploit salt deposits far underground. He then goes on to look at the uses of salt in medicine and the place taken by salt in the Chinese materia medica, comparing theories and practices with those that obtained in pre-modern Europe. A related topic is the use of salt in alchemy. Vogel here compares the use of salt in elixirs in Taoist texts with the theories of Paracelsus and others in the West. Subsequent sections deal with salt in nutrition, culture, religion and cosmology, in each case bringing forth a wealth of fascinating material on salt in China and comparing it with similar traditions in Europe with meticulous care. In his conclusion the author comments that salt lends itself as an ideal subject for comparative research. The fact that people everywhere must consume a certain amount makes salt a kind of human universal, with broadly similar values and cultural associations being attached to it cross-culturally.

The remainder of this volume is taken up with a series of chapters devoted to Chinese cuisine outside China. In the first of these, Mike Featherstone and Tomoko Tamari's chapter on Chinese Food in Britain, the authors present a cogent and theoretically informed analysis of the contemporary consumer culture lifestyle in Britain, which they use to frame their subsequent discussion on the ways in which Chinese food in Britain has become a normal part of the British diet. They note that there has been a

dynamic of de-exoticisation at work, but at the same time, for at least certain strata, a contrary dynamic of re-exoticisation, as the new middle class branches out to experiment with regional cuisines, new dishes, and so forth. Featherstone and Tamari also provide an historical overview of the development of the Chinese restaurant trade in Britain, citing Woody Watson's pathbreaking research on the Man clan and their role in the proliferation of Cantonese cuisine throughout the British isles. Finally, the authors turn their attention to the development of Chinese *haute cuisine* in Britain through the efforts of Kenneth Lo and the Chinese Gourmet Club.

Kim Bok-rae's chapter on Chinese Cuisine and Eating Out in Korea provides another case in the acculturation of Chinese food overseas, but also in addition a fascinating glimpse into native Korean traditions in cooking and eating out. The traditional Korean place to eat out was the *jumak* (a combination of restaurant and inn), which ordinarily served boiled rice with beef broth (*jangguk bap*). Noodles made their introduction during the late Chosun dynasty (late 19th century). The Japanese colonial period saw an overall decline in restaurants and inns, with the exception of Japanese and Western restaurants catering for the authorities and high-level collaborators. Chinese restaurants really only became part of the scene in the post-war period. What is particularly interesting is the very specific pathways through which certain items on the menu in Chinese restaurants came to be an integral part of Korean food consciousness, but at the same time took on new flavours and a different place in the hierarchy of tastes. Most influential was the cuisine of Shandong, since many of the Chinese merchants in Korea came from there. The author discusses a number of examples, including

jajangmyon (*zhajiangmian*); *tchampong*, a peppery soup with seafood; *yaki mandu*, roasted dumplings; and *tangsuyuk* (Ch. *tangcurou*), sweet and sour pork. In each case the dish has undergone quite a profound transformation in Korea and may taste quite different from its Chinese counterpart. The political importance of these dishes in Korea is also an important and fascinating part of the story.

The chapter by Fernando Sales Lopes on Chinese Food Culture in Macau presents a fascinating glimpse of both the Portuguese and the Chinese contributions to a very sophisticated blended culture. Lopes' chapter situates the development of Macanese cuisine in the history of the Portuguese expansion in the East from the fifteenth century onwards. In passing he points to the Portuguese contribution to the introduction of New World crops in China, such as corn, peanuts, sweet potato, tomatoes, manioc, guavas and so on. The methodology that lies behind this chapter, and informs Lopes' research more broadly, is one in which he determines the origin of names for various ingredients, seasonings and spices, and the methods of preparation described in a large and varied collection of recipes. Particular attention is paid to the names in Portuguese, Chinese (Cantonese), and other relevant languages. This chapter gives simply a brief overview of this project. Given that the Portuguese contribution to East-West relations tends to be overlooked in comparison with the Dutch, English or even Spanish, this chapter presents information that will be new to many readers.

Josephine Smart's chapter on Cognac and *Poon-choi* takes us across to Hong Kong, on the other side of the Pearl River Delta. As indicated in her subtitle, "A Social History of the Invention of Hong Kong Traditions,"

Smart is concerned at least partly with food traditions that are the result of recent attempts to promote a Hong Kong identity. *Poon-choi* is a festive dish made in a large bowl, consisting of layered ingredients including cabbage, seafood, noodles and mushrooms, with the most costly ingredients put in the top layers. It is said to have come from the Hong Kong New Territories, and has been promoted since just before 1997 as a symbol of Hong Kong identity. Originally the intent of the backers of this project was political, but Smart shows how any political significance has been whittled away by the subsequent pattern of commercialisation and the integration of *poon-choi* into take-away menus. The other theme, cognac, is one which combines a cosmopolitan theme with the specificity of market place and cultural significance in Hong Kong. Cognac is the drink par excellence of weddings in Hong Kong, and Smart explores the history of this particular arrangement and the resulting market share of various grades of cognac.

Finally, Françoise Sabban's chapter on Chinese Cuisine in France reviews the history and development of Chinese food. Here, too, we find that the transmission of Chinese food and the character it took on in French society was through specific pathways. In the case of France the cuisine has been strongly shaped by the wave of immigration from French Indochina after 1954. Many of the immigrants from Vietnam who had acquired French nationality were Chinese. In more recent decades the majority of Chinese immigrants have come from the People's Republic of China. What is particularly interesting is that everything happened so late, by comparison with many other Western countries. The Chinatown in Paris dates only from the late 1970s. Even so, Chinese culture has now become an integral part of

Parisian life, with the celebration of Chinese New Year one of the major events in the calendar. As for the food and the restaurants, Sabban describes a situation in which there are a small number of restaurants (half a dozen) serving quality food, but most Chinese restaurants serve food with the menu arranged as for French cuisine, with starters, mains and desserts. Soup is served at the start of the meal, and dishes on the menu tend to be consumed individually by each diner; commensality and variety thus disappear. Sabban also discusses the issue of wine with Chinese meals, noting that rosé—ordinarily not a serious wine—has become the wine of choice for Chinese food. The author in conclusion speculates on the reasons for this relative under-development, noting that the original clientele for Chinese restaurants were people of modest income, and that the chefs in Chinese restaurants were very often people who lacked adequate training. Paradoxically, the strong position of French cuisine in France seems to have left little room for anything else at the same level of sophistication.

The overall impression given by these chapters is that Chinese cuisine outside China is indeed very different from place to place and from time to time. Readers from the USA or from Britain might be forgiven for assuming that Chinese food, in the main, meant Cantonese food, at least until fairly recently. Korea, however, has drawn most of its Chinese cuisine from Shandong, and France from the Chinese in Vietnam. In many ways, the globalisation of Chinese food has resulted in a situation in which the variety of Chinese food outside China mirrors the variety of Chinese food in Chinese regional cuisines. It would be easy to make too much of this linkage. Chinese communities along the Southeast coast and Shandong have been

engaged in world trade networks for many centuries, and have been active in promoting out-migration. Inland provinces have until very recently been less involved. Another kind of mobility is in evidence in the Northwest, at the eastern end of the Silk Road. Here, the linkages in foodways and foodstuffs are overland, rather than overseas, but as E.N. Anderson points out, these land-bound trade routes for most of the history of the last three thousand years have been much more important than the sea routes.

Another theme is the cultural and political logic behind the development of regional cuisines within China. Both Sabban and Rosner, in different ways, date this development in its modern form to the Song dynasty. The development of these regional culinary systems, as *hautes cuisines*, also can be seen as an effect of movement and juxtaposition, rather than stasis and uniformity. As a great agrarian empire, China of course aspired to be a stable society, but the conditions for stability included circulation. Not only did scholar-officials circulate throughout the empire, going from official post to official post and thereby accumulating knowledge of local foodways that was seen as of benefit to good governance, but they also promoted local specialties. The imperial court served to draw in ingredients, local specialties and preparation techniques from the provinces, either as tribute or curiosities, and then through imperial patronage promoted favoured ingredients and recipes throughout the empire.

Finally, there is a great deal of information in this volume about the important role that Chinese diet and cuisine have in traditions of preventative medicine. Chinese medicine, like culinary traditions, varied from place to place in accordance with what the Greek medical tradition

called “airs, waters, and places.”

The studies included in this volume cover a great deal of ground, but they also point indirectly to what might be done in the future. A number of the studies here state quite explicitly that they are exploratory and preliminary. Hans Vogel’s chapter on salt shows what can be done by undertaking a thorough comparative study of one ingredient; there remain many more ingredients—sauces, spices, crops, and so on—yet to be explored with the same care. Eric Trombert’s study on grain crops and milling techniques, similarly, shows the kind of technical and sociological detail that can be derived from technically well-informed research.

Much of what remains to be done is quite challenging. E.N. Anderson’s chapter and many others remind us that ideally, the scholar of cuisines will need to draw on a very wide range of disciplines, from archaeology to soil science to local and regional history, philosophy and cultural studies, languages, and so forth. Situated as it is at the cusp between material and non-material culture, research on food is bound to be challenging. For the very same reason, however, it is bound to be a very satisfying endeavour, not least because the re-creation of sustainable foodways will be part of the challenges facing humankind in the decades ahead.

