

## A Lesson from Asian Foodways

This book arose from an international conference, held in Jan 2013, on ‘Foodways and Heritage: A Perspective of Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage’ which was jointly organized by the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, Department of Anthropology in The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and with a delegation from the UNESCO Chair Project on Safeguarding and Promoting Cultural Food Heritage of the University of Tours, France. With original data and new findings of scholars from different disciplines, the publication of selected and revised papers from this conference serves to broaden our knowledge of Asian food heritage in relation to the circumstances on which they are inherited, safeguarded, and developed in various ways. The thirteen chapters in this book provide rich ethnographic description and analysis on food as a kind of intangible cultural heritage as it interacts with social and political complexities in Asia’s diverse cultures.

During the last two decades, the studies of Asian foodways have achieved major contributions to the understanding of cultural changes in the local dynamics of transnational production, consumption and social identity (Watson 1997; Cwiertka and Walraven 2000; Wu and

Tan 2001; Wu and Cheung 2002; Cheung and Tan 2007). In particular, anthropologists and food experts have interpreted both the reinvention of traditional regional cooking and localization of foreign global foodways from a socio-political perspective, for examples, Appadurai's (1988) research on how local foodways have been altered and selected, and how national cuisine was invented within the colonial context. With the authorization of printed cookbooks, local foodways were upgraded as a kind of national representation for its political usage (Appadurai 1988); on the other hand, the situation of re-inventing Macanese foodways based on the diversified experiences through the migration history from Portugal to Macau for many families show a different character of regional cuisine (Jackson 2003). Mamak's (2007) study on Macanese cuisine by searching the family recipes in Macau explained to us another alternate of social development for local foodways. Therefore, through the standardized Indian cuisine and undocumented Macanese cuisine, we are reminded that there is a diversified development of food heritage. Between the obvious different socio-historical construction along the invention of Indian cuisine and undocumented Macanese cuisine, heritage experts might find the Macanese cuisine more authentic and criticized the Indian cuisine as a cultural construction in the context of post-colonialism, while common people might evaluate differently.

Foodways is an important cultural marker of identity in many globalizing Asian societies, and provides insight to not only social changes, cultural nationalism, and traditional values, but also cultural inheritance in the context of political economy. In this special issue, I would like to consider the foodways as also a kind of intangible heritage that we would like to preserve and pass down to our future generations in various levels. In order to help enrich or enhance our understanding of foodways as intangible heritage, we provide cases in various East Asia countries in relation to the heritage preservation of

foodways regarding state policy, institutional monitoring, communal tradition, and individual commitment, representing a spectrum having the state and individual on both ends, together with institution such as association close to the state/government side while the community close to the individual side. Even though the thirteen chapters we have for this edited volume might not fall equally into the four categories, we still hope our readers can find these four basic agents as well as role players in food heritage safeguarding useful for building up a kind of matrix for a better understanding of intangible heritage around the world.

With the three sections in this book, we have a group of four papers looking into the definitions of food as a kind of heritage regarding its local meanings and social significances. In the second section, the four papers demonstrated the changing traditions of food production and eating practices from a local perspectives and showed us the importance of cultural and historical backgrounds in relation to heritage studies. Last but not least, the five chapters in the last section remind us the ambivalent characters of local food when it transforms from local to a global representation carrying complicated national as well political messages.

Sidney C. H. CHEUNG

*The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR*

---

## References

- Appadurai, A., 1988. How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India. *Comparative Study of Society and History*, 30, 3-24.
- Cheung, S.C.H., and Tan, C.B. eds., 2007. *Food and Foodways in Asia: Resource, Tradition and Cooking*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Cwierka, K., and Walraven, B. eds., 2000. *Asian Food: The Global and the Local*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon.
- Jackson, A., 2003. Taste of Macau: Portuguese Cuisine on the China Coast. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Mamak, A., 2007. In Search of a Macanese Cookbook. In: S.C.H. Cheung and Tan, C.B. eds., *Food and Foodways in Asia: Resource, Tradition and Cooking*, London and New York: Routledge, 159-170.
- Watson, J.L. ed., 1997. *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Wu, D.Y.H., and Cheung, S.C.H. eds., 2002. *The Globalization of Chinese Food*. Surrey: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Wu, D.Y.H., and Tan, C.B. eds., 2001. *Changing Chinese Foodways in Asia*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.