

David Y. H. Wu and Tan Chee-beng (eds.), *Changing Chinese Foodways in Asia*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2001. xv, 304 pp.

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With food an inexorable necessity, and with China poised to become an economic powerhouse in this century, the central topic of *Changing Chinese Foodways in Asia* unquestionably merits careful attention. What the Chinese eat has major impacts on trade, on the health of over a billion people, and on the evolution of cuisines both within and outside of China. Wu and Tan have prepared a book that tackles this complex subject.

The chapters in *Changing Chinese Foodways in Asia* provide an ethnographic view of eating habits from a wide variety of people labelled “Chinese”—ethnically Han, ethnically minority Chinese, rural, urban, northern, southern, humble, wealthy, living in China, immigrants elsewhere (whether recently so or not), young, old, male, female. In addition, some of the articles address the ways that non-Chinese Asian people consume and borrow from Chinese cuisines (Malays, Singaporeans, Koreans, and Japanese). Yet although taken as a whole the book is broad in scope, individual articles explain local particularities. This combination of breadth and ethnographic detail gives the reader the sensation of sampling the history of many varied Asian folkways through the lens of food. We are given many different little “tastes” of the overall topic.

Thus we learn of changing foodways in rural south China (articles by Chen and Su), evolving restaurant culture in Hong Kong (Tam, Wu, and Cheung), food restrictions among pregnant Hong Kongers (Martin), food as a complex marker of ethnicity among various kinds of Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore (Tan, and Chua and Rajah), the adoption of Chinese food in Korea and Japan (Kim and Aoki), the interplay between Asian and Western styles of breakfasting in Taiwan (Tsui), and the patterning of pork consumption throughout East Asia (Zhou). A foreword by Yih-yuan Li, an introduction by the editors, and a concluding commentary by Sidney Mintz raise valuable questions and provide an eagle-eye view of dietary shifts among the Chinese.

Most of the chapters discuss ways that food is used to construct and symbolize ethnic, religious, or localized identities; herein lies the book’s strength. Tan’s finely detailed ethnography demonstrates how very many ways there are to be “Chinese” in Malaysia and to express nuanced identities through cuisine. Here food serves as a marker of subtle as well as more obvious group differences. By

contrast, Chua and Rajah show how the actual complexity and hybridization of cuisines is often glossed over in Singapore, and food is used to bolster essentialist ideas about a limited number of ethnic groups. Kim's fascinating article shows yet another way that food can reinforce group boundaries: Certain intra-Korean identities—and a kind of nostalgic Korean nationalism—can be marked through the consumption of *Chinese* restaurant foods!

A few of the articles touch briefly on the effects of changing technology on people's diets. For example, Cheung's article notes that technical improvements in poultry breeding and disease control led to the flourishing of Hakka restaurants in the 1950s and early 1960s in Hong Kong. These restaurants particularly benefited from the new technologies because their menus emphasized meats, including chicken. The increase in light industry in Hong Kong during this period also had an impact, as it provided the working class with more disposable income with which to eat outside the home.

Folk medical beliefs also appear in this volume, here and there within several of the articles, and squarely as the focus of attention in Martin's article on pregnancy in Hong Kong. Interviews with midwives, doctors, husbands, and especially pregnant women of various socio-economic backgrounds revealed that all of these groups adhere not only to the dietary recommendations for pregnancy of Western medical science, but also to older "folk" beliefs about how to protect the foetus. Martin characterizes these traditions as oral, anecdotal, and shaped by the shifting patterns of authority within the extended family.

The book is somewhat uneven. In some articles the writing could have been more concise. In addition, Zhou's article belabours points unnecessarily for an educated readership—for instance, by insisting that the reader must not conclude that because the Japanese do not eat pork as the Chinese do, Chinese food culture "is therefore superior to that of Japan." In Aoki's article, there are overgeneralizations and omissions. For example, in a discussion of Japan's adoption of China's ramen noodles, we find the assertion that "The only other instance of foreign food taking root in Japan and being Japanized is curry ...". But what about tofu? Surely if any foreign food has become truly Japanese, it is tofu.

Still, the volume is a valuable addition to Asian studies. Its commitment to an ethnographic focus, and its eschewing of unneeded jargon, are refreshing. The book would be of particular interest to readers wishing to explore foodways, ethnic boundaries, folk beliefs, modernization, migration, or globalization.