

## **FOOD IN CHINESE CULTURE**

### **ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES**

To say that the consumption of food is a vital part of the chemical process of life is to state the obvious, but sometimes we fail to realize that food is more than just vital. The only other activity that we engage in that is of comparable importance to our lives and to the life of our species is sex. As Kao Tzu, a Warring States-period philosopher and keen observer of human nature, said, "Appetite for food and sex is nature" (trans. Lau 1970, p. 161). But these two activities are quite different. We are, I believe, much closer to our animal base in our sexual endeavors than we are in our eating habits. Too, the range of variations is infinitely wider in food than in sex. In fact, the importance of food in understanding human culture lies precisely in its infinite variability-variability that is not essential for species survival. For survival needs, all men everywhere could eat the same food, to be measured only in calories, fats, carbohydrates, proteins, and vitamins (Pike 1970, pp. 7-12). But no, people of different backgrounds eat very differently. The basic stuffs from which food is prepared; the ways in which it is preserved, cut up, cooked (if at all); the amount and variety at each meal; the tastes that are liked and disliked; the customs of serving food; the utensils; the beliefs about the food's properties-these all vary. The number of such "food variables" is great.

An anthropological approach to the study of food would be to isolate and identify the food variables, arrange these variables systemically, and explain why some of these variables go together or do not go together.

For convenience, we may use culture as a divider in relating food variables hierarchically. I am using the word culture here in a classificatory sense implying the pattern or style of behavior of a group of people who share it. Food habits may be used as an important, or even determining, criterion in this connection. People who have the same culture share the same food habits, that is, they share the same assemblage of food variables. Peoples of different cultures share different assemblages of food variables. We might say that different cultures have different food choices. (The word choices is used here not necessarily in an active sense, granting the possibility that some choices could be imposed rather than selected.) Why these choices? What determines them? These are among the first questions in any study of food habits.

Within the same culture, the food habits are not at all necessarily homogeneous. In fact, as a rule they are not. Within the same general food style, there are different manifestations of food variables of a smaller range, for different social situations. People of different social classes or occupations eat differently. People on festive occasions, in mourning, or on a daily routine eat again differently. Different religious sects have different eating codes. Men and women, in various stages of their lives, eat differently. Different individuals have different tastes. Some of these differences are ones of preference, but others may be downright proscribed. Identifying these differences, explaining them, and relating them to other facets of social life are again among the tasks of a serious scholar of food.

Finally, systemically articulated food variables can be laid out in a time perspective, as in historical periods of varying lengths. We see how food habits change and seek to explore the reasons and consequences.

These observations provide some simple and practical clues for the beginning of a theoretical and methodological framework for the study of food as a cultural, rather than chemical, process. Strange as it may seem, considering the obvious importance of food in the life of every human being, every culture, every society, such a framework is not available in anthropological literature. Such a framework would comprise theoretically defensible borders of the field, commonly recognized, but not often resolved, problems, and accepted procedures for tackling issues within them. The studies of kinship, government, economy, and religion have such frameworks. The studies of food and a few other categories of daily life,

such as clothing, do not have them. I believe the study of food has defensible borders, is centrally involved with problems of vital interest, and can be tackled by means of logical and generally practical procedures. To transform such beliefs into practice, and to explore the profitability of various approaches, we need a test case. What could be a better case than the Chinese?

Chinese food certainly has variety, and it also has a long documented history, probably longer than any other food tradition of comparable variety. Such, at least, are the assumptions that underlay my thoughts of using Chinese food as a test case in the development of "food-in-culture" studies.

My academic, aside from my gastronomic, interest in Chinese food came originally from a study of Shang and Chou bronzes. The use of the ritual vessels was related to the preparation and serving of food and drink, but without an understanding of the essential food variables I found it hard to understand the bronze vessels in their original context. My pertinent research (Chang 1973) convinced me that at least one of the best ways of getting to a culture's heart would be through its stomach. In the fall of 1972, two of my colleagues at Yale, professors Emily M. Ahern and Alison Richard, joined me in offering a graduate seminar on the anthropology of food and eating. Among my findings was that a rigorous methodology for the study of food and eating must still be developed. In late spring of 1973, I invited the collaborators of this volume to join with me in taking a first look at the facts and the significance of food making and food use throughout Chinese history. This would be a relatively detailed study of the food variables within a single culture, and our conclusions and observations could contribute to an understanding of the change and interrelationship of food variables and the rest of culture over a time span of several thousand years. Our efforts should, of course, be of interest to scholars of China, but they should also serve to demonstrate some fruitful approaches to the study of food in general.

I said a "first look" above, but that is not strictly correct. Shinoda Osamu has almost singlehandedly carved out the field of Chinese food studies through a series of learned articles, culminating in the collection of "Food Canons" (Shinoda and Tanaka 1970) and the monograph on the history of food in China (Shinoda 1974). But his emphasis and ours are quite different. Shinoda's studies are focused on descriptive history, ours on analysis and interpretation. The latter two are not possible without the former, but because of his works we have been spared the necessary task of compiling a lot of facts as a first step. Therefore, one may say that this volume has gone a step further.

It may be an indication of something profound and significant-though I don't know what-that my invitation was accepted by every one of my colleagues on my first approach. My request was a simple one: present the essential facts for your period, and discuss them with regard to topics that loom large in your data or in your mind. In methodology, the authors used no single preconceived framework, and their chapters demonstrate what seem to them to be the most fruitful approaches for their respective data. In terms of patterns of continuity and change of the food variables within the tradition of the Chinese culture, each author is responsible for his period, and the overall effect is plain as their chapters are read in the proper sequence. Since our efforts are exploratory, both in methodology and in regard to the history of Chinese food, there will not be a concluding chapter.

This book serves three purposes. It is a "case study," in which scholars of food-in-culture can see the ways in which ten of their colleagues have analyzed and interpreted their data. It is a descriptive history of food habits in China, where one should find facts both trivial (when *tou fu* began, when the Chinese first used chopsticks, and the like) and profound (the adoption of American food plants-sweet potato and maize, in particular which had a large effect upon Chinese population). Finally, the book makes a significant contribution to Chinese cultural history, in which food and food habits played multifarious roles. Since this is a relatively new field, the multiple authorship better ensures exploratory breadth and creativity, but it makes it harder for the reader to detect common patterns and to draw generalizations.

My own generalizations pertain above all to the question, What characterizes Chinese food? This question could, of course, be answered at several levels. A patron at a restaurant in any Chinese city could point to a list of specific dishes on the menu. A cookbook catering to the needs of contemporary families lists all the essential ingredients, utensils, and recipes. A student of modern Chinese culture makes learned generalizations about the common denominators and regional varieties. All of these characterizations are evidently correct, but they serve very different purposes. The data and studies in this book provide the basis for a characterization of a food style over a period of thousands of years, during which time some variables persisted, some died out, some were modified, and some new ones came to be added. Accordingly, I see the following common themes that run through the whole body of our data.

1. The food style of a culture is certainly first of all determined by the natural resources that are available for its use. Palaeolithic hunters the world over relied heavily on animal flesh, which was cooked by a very small number of techniques, among them broiling, drying, pickling, and stone-boiling. The range of variations was probably limited, both for foodstuffs and for cooking methods, during substantial parts of the earliest segments of hominid prehistory. But from an early time, gathering-of fruits, nuts, berries, grubs, seeds, and other edible materials provided by nature-had assumed an important role in supplying human diet. These provisions varied from area to area depending on the natural distribution patterns of the pertinent plants and animals. Therefore, Early Man's diet especially toward the Upper Palaeolithic period when a more diversified use of the many local food resources became prevailing-was already a link in the food chains of local ecosystems. When cultivated plants and domesticated animals began to provide the bulk of the foodstuff among many peoples, the local pattern of food habits became increasingly pronounced because the first plants and the first animals that were placed under domestic use could only be those that were naturally grown in or readily adaptable to specific regions.

It is thus not surprising that Chinese food is above all characterized by an assemblage of plants and animals that grew prosperously in the Chinese land for a long time. A detailed list would be out of place here, and quantitative data are not available. The following enumeration is highly impressionistic:

*Starch Staples:* millet, rice, kao-liang, wheat, maize, buckwheat, yam, sweet potato.

*Legumes:* soybean, broad bean, peanut, mung bean.

*Vegetables:* malva, amaranth, Chinese cabbage, mustard green, turnip, radish, mushroom.

*Fruits:* peach, apricot, plum, apple, jujube date, pear, crab apple, mountain haw, longan, litchi, orange.

*Meats :* pork, dog, beef, mutton, venison, chicken, duck, goose, pheasant, many fishes.

*Spices :* red pepper, ginger, garlic, spring onion, cinnamon.

Chinese cooking is, in this sense, the manipulation of these foodstuffs as basic ingredients. Since ingredients are not the same everywhere, Chinese food begins to assume a local character simply by virtue of the ingredients it uses. Obviously ingredients are not sufficient for characterization, but they are a good beginning. Compare, for example, the above list with one in which dairy products occupy a prominent place, and one immediately comes upon a significant contrast between the two food traditions.

One important point about the distinctive assemblage of ingredients is its change through history. Concerning food, the Chinese are not nationalistic to the point of resisting imports. In fact, foreign foodstuffs have been readily adopted since the dawn of history. Wheat and sheep and goat were possibly introduced from western Asia in prehistoric times, many fruits and vegetables came in from central Asia during the Han and the T'ang periods, and peanuts and sweet potatoes from coastal traders during the Ming period. These all became integral ingredients of Chinese food. At the same time, despite the continuous introduction of dairy products and processes throughout the early historical periods, and despite the adoption of some dairy delicacies by the upper strata of society during the T'ang period, milk and dairy products, to this date, have not taken a prominent place in Chinese cuisine. This selectivity can be accounted for only in terms of the indigenous cultural base which absorbs or rejects foreign imports according to their structural or stylistic compatibility. It also relates to the internal divisions of the Chinese food traditions, to be commented on later.

2. In the Chinese culture, the whole process of preparing food from raw ingredients to morsels ready for the mouth involves a complex of interrelated variables that is highly distinctive when compared with other food traditions of major magnitude. At the base of this complex is the division between fan, grains and other starch foods, and ts'ai, vegetable and meat dishes. To prepare a balanced meal, it must have an appropriate amount of both fan and ts'ai, and ingredients are readied along both tracks. Grains are cooked whole or as flour, making up the fan half of the meal in various forms: fan (in the narrow sense, "cooked rice"), steamed wheat-, millet-, or corn-flour bread, ping ("pancakes"), and noodles. Vegetables and meats are cut up and mixed in various ways into individual dishes to constitute the ts'ai half. Even in meals in which the staple starch portion and the meat-and-vegetable portion are apparently joined together, such as in *chiao-tzu* ("Chinese ravioli" or "dumplings"), *pao-tzu* ("steamed bun with fillings"), *hun-t'un* ("wonton"), and *hsien ping* ("pan-fried bun with fillings"), they are in fact put together but not mixed up, and each still retains its due proportion and own distinction (*p'i* ["skin"] = fan; *hsien* ["filling"] = ts'ai).

For the preparation of ts'ai, the use of multiple ingredients and the mixing of flavors are the rules, which above all means that ingredients are usually cut up and not done whole, and that they are variously combined into individual dishes of vastly differing flavors. Pork, for example, may be diced, sliced, shredded, or ground, and when combined with other meats and with various vegetable ingredients and spices produces dishes of utterly divergent shapes, flavors, colors, tastes, and aromas.

The parallelism of fan and ts'ai and the above-described principles of ts'ai preparation account for a number of other features of the Chinese food culture, especially in the area of utensils. To begin with, there are fan utensils and ts'ai utensils, both for cooking and for serving. In the modern kitchen, fan kuo ("rice cooker") and ts'ai kuo ("wok") are very different and as a rule not interchangeable utensils. The same contrast is seen in Shang bronze vessels between kui ("rice servers") and tou ("meat platters"). To prepare the kind of ts'ai that we have characterized, the chopping knife or cleaver and the chopping anvil are standard equipment in every Chinese kitchen, ancient and modern. To sweep the cooked grains into the mouth, and to serve the cut-up morsels of the meat-and-vegetable dishes, chopsticks have proved more serviceable than hands or other instruments (such as spoons and forks, the former being used in China alongside the chopsticks).

This complex of interrelated features of Chinese food may be described, for the purpose of shorthand reference, as the Chinese fan-ts'ai principle. Send a Chinese cook into an American kitchen, given Chinese or American ingredients, and he or she will (a) prepare an adequate amount of fan, (b) cut up the ingredients and mix them up in various combinations, and (c) cook the ingredients into several dishes and, perhaps, a soup. Given the right ingredients, the "Chineseness" of the meal would increase, but even with entirely native American ingredients and cooked in American utensils, it is still a Chinese meal.

3. The above example shows that the Chinese way of eating is characterized by a notable flexibility and adaptability. Since a ts'ai dish is made of a mixture of ingredients, its distinctive appearance, taste, and flavor do not depend on the exact number of ingredients, nor, in most cases, on any single item. The same is true for a meal, made up of a combination of dishes. In times of affluence, a few more expensive items may be added, but if the times are hard they may be omitted without doing irreparable damage. If the season is not quite right, substitutes may be used. With the basic principles, a Chinese cook can prepare "Chinese" dishes for the poor as well as the rich, in times of scarcity as well as abundance, and even in a foreign country without many familiar ingredients. The Chinese way of cooking must have helped the Chinese people through some hard times throughout their history. And, of course, one may also say that the Chinese cook the way they do because of their need and desire for adaptability. This adaptability is shown in at least two other features. The first is the amazing knowledge the Chinese have acquired about their wild plant resources. Thousands of plants are listed in the encyclopedic *Pen ts'ao kang mu* (S. C. Li 1930 ed.), and the notations about each plant include a statement concerning its edibility. The Chinese peasants apparently know every edible plant in their environment, and plants there are many. Most do not ordinarily belong on the dinner table, but they may be easily adapted for consumption in time of famine (*chiu huang*). Here again is this flexibility: A smaller number of familiar foodstuffs are used ordinarily, but, if needed, a greater variety of wild plants would be made use of. The knowledge of these "famine plants" was carefully handed down as a living culture apparently this knowledge was not placed in dead storage too long or too often.

Another feature of Chinese food habits that contributed to their notable adaptability is the large number and great variety of preserved foods. Data are lacking for quantified comparison, but one has the distinct impression that the Chinese preserve their food in many more ways and in greater quantities than most other peoples. Food is preserved by smoking, salting, sugaring, steeping, pickling, drying, soaking in many kinds of soy sauces, and so forth, and the whole range of foodstuffs is involved—grains, meat, fruit, eggs, vegetables, and everything else. Again, with preserved food, the Chinese people were ever ready in the event of hardship or scarcity.

4. The Chinese way of eating is further characterized by the ideas and beliefs about food, which actively affect the ways and manners in which food is prepared and taken. The overriding idea about food in China—in all likelihood an idea with solid, but as yet unrevealed, scientific backing—is that the kind and the amount of food one takes is intimately relevant to one's health. Food not only affects health as a matter of general principle, the selection of the right food at any particular time must also be dependant upon one's health condition at that time. Food, therefore, is also medicine.

The regulation of diet as a disease preventive or cure is certainly as Western as it is Chinese. Common Western examples are the diet for arthritics and the recent organic food craze. But the Chinese case is distinctive for its underlying principles. The bodily functions, in the Chinese view, follow the basic yin-yang principles. Many foods are also classifiable into those that possess the yin quality and those of the yang quality. When yin and yang forces in the body are not balanced, problems result. Proper amounts of food of one kind or the other may then be administered (i.e., eaten) to counterbalance the yin and yang disequilibrium. If the body is normal, overeating of one kind of food would result in an excess of that force in the body, causing diseases. This belief is documented for the Chou period, several centuries before Christ, and it is still a dominant concept in Chinese culture. Eugene and Marja Anderson's chapter discusses this in detail for the southern Chinese. Emily Ahern (1973) has discussed similar concepts for the Taiwanese. In parts of North China, the same contrast of *liang* ("cool") food and *jê* ("hot") food occurs, sometimes taking the form of *pai huo* ("quelling the heat") and *shang huo* ("raising the heat"). In this latter pair, *huo*, or "heat," is regarded almost a priori as something undesirable, but in the "cold-hot" contrast neither is necessarily more beneficial or harmful in itself. Almost universally, within the Chinese tradition, oily and fried food, pepper hot flavoring, fatty meat and oily plant food (such as peanuts) are "hot," whereas most water plants, most crustaceans (especially crabs), and certain beans (such as mung beans) are "cold." A body sore, for example, or an inexplicable fever, could be due to overeating hot foods; and a man with a common cold could get into a lot worse shape by eating additional "cold" foods, such as crabs, and thus overloading the "cold" forces in his body.

But the yin-yang, cold-hot equilibrium is not the only guide to dietary health. At least two other concepts belong to the native Chinese food tradition. One is that, in consuming a meal, appropriate amounts of both fan and ts'ai should be taken. In fact, of the two, fan is the more fundamental and indispensable. In mess halls throughout the country, fan is called chu ship, the main or primary food, and ts'ai, fu shih, the supplementary or secondary food. Without fan one cannot be full, but without ts'ai the meal is merely less tasteful. The other concept is frugality. Overindulgence in food and drink is a sin of such proportions that dynasties could fall on its account. At the individual level, the ideal amount for every meal, as every Chinese parent would say, is only ch'i fen pao ("seventy percent full"). Related to this, is the almost sacred nature of grains in Chinese folk thought grains are not something to play with or waste, and any child who does not finish the grains in his or her bowl is told that his or her future mate would be one with a pockmarked face (Liu 1974, pp. 146-48). These last facts make it clear that, although both the fan-ts'ai and the frugality considerations are health based, at least in part they are related to China's traditional poverty in food resources.

5. Finally, perhaps the most important aspect of the Chinese food culture is the importance of food itself in Chinese culture. That Chinese cuisine is the greatest in the world is highly debatable and is essentially irrelevant. But few can take exception to the statement that few other cultures are as food oriented as the Chinese. And this orientation appears to be as ancient as Chinese culture itself. According to *Lun yü* (*Confucian Analects*, chap.

"Wei Ling Kung"), when the duke Ling of Wei asked Confucius (551-479 B.c.) about military tactics, Confucius replied, "I have indeed heard about matters pertaining to *tsu* (meat stand) and *tou* (meat platter), but I have not learned military matters" (cf. trans. Legge 1893). Indeed, perhaps one of the most important qualifications of a Chinese gentleman was his knowledge and skill pertaining to food and drink. According to *Shih chi* and *Mo Tzu*, I Yin, the prime minister of King T'ang of Shang, the dynasty's founder, was originally a cook. In fact, some sources say it was I Yin's cooking skills that first brought him into T'ang's favor.

The importance of the kitchen in the king's palace is amply shown in the personnel roster recorded in *Chou li*. Out of the almost four thousand persons who had the responsibility of running the king's residential quarters, 2,271, or almost 60 percent, of them handled food and wine. These included 162 master "dieticians" in charge of the daily menus of the king, his queen, and the crown prince; 70 meat specialists; 128 chefs for "internal" (family) consumption; 128 chefs for "external" (guest) consumption; 62 assistant chefs; 335 specialists in grains, vegetables, and fruits; 62 specialists of game; 342 fish specialists; 24 turtle and shellfish specialists; 28 meat dryers; 110 wine officers; 340 wine servers; 170 specialists in the "six drinks"; 94 ice men; 31 bamboo-tray servers; 61 meat-platter servers; 62 pickle and sauce specialists; and 62 salt men.

What these specialists tended to were not just the king's palate pleasures eating was also very serious business. In *I li*, the book that describes various ceremonies, food cannot be separated from ritual

(see Steele 1917). *Li chi*, the book that has been called "the most exact and complete monography which the Chinese nation has been able to give of itself to the rest of the human race" (Legge 1885, p. 12), is full of references to the right kinds of food for various occasions and the right table manners, and it contains some of the earliest recipes of Chinese dishes. In *Tso chuan* and *Mo Tzu*, authentic Chou texts, references were made of the use of the ting cauldron, a cooking vessel, as the prime symbol of the state. I cannot feel more confident to say that the ancient Chinese were among the peoples of the world who have been particularly preoccupied with food and eating.

Furthermore, as Jacques Gernet (1962, p. 135) has stated, "there is no doubt that in this sphere China has shown a greater inventiveness than any other civilization."

Objective criteria may be used to measure the relative inventiveness in, and the degree of preoccupation with, food and eating among the peoples of different cultures and civilizations. What peoples are more so preoccupied? Were the Chinese among them? How do we measure their degree of preoccupation against other peoples'? Perhaps the following criteria may be used: quantitative, structural, symbolic, and psychological.

1. Quantitatively, the most direct measure may be taken of the food itself. How elaborately is it prepared? The absolute number of dishes that a people is capable of cooking is probably a direct indication of the elaborateness of their cuisine. Too, the percentage of income spent on food may be used as another quantitative standard of measurement. Between the contemporary Americans and the contemporary Chinese, for example, it is known that the Chinese spend more of their income on food than do the Americans, and in this sense the former is more preoccupied with eating than the latter. Surely this has a lot to do with a people's wealth. But it does mean that poor peoples require a greater percentage of their total time and energy to obtain and consume food than rich peoples, and this difference must make a significant difference in their relative cultural makeups. Furthermore, although there is an absolute maximum one needs to spend on food, there is no limit of how much one actually wants to. Two peoples may be coequals in terms of wealth, but they may differ vastly in regard to the percentage of their income devoted actually to eating as a matter of choice.

2. Structurally, what different kinds of foods do different cultures use on various occasions or in distinctive social or ritual contexts? One people may use a very small variety of foods and drinks for many different contexts, while another may require distinct varieties for each context. Also significant are the utensils, beliefs, taboos, and etiquettes associated with specific kinds of foods and drinks. All of this may be approached by a study of the people's terminological system for their foods and for behavior and other things related to food. The greater the number of terms used to designate foods and related matters, and the more hierarchically this terminological system is arranged, the more a people may be said to be preoccupied with food.

3. A third criterion is a symbolic one. Since foods and drinks are often used as media of communication, one could also attempt to ascertain the extent to which they are so used among the various peoples. The extent and the elaborateness of the use of food in rituals should give an excellent indication. The terminological system is again relevant here in accordance with Charles Frake's folk taxonomy hypothesis: "The greater the number of distinct social contexts in which information about a particular phenomenon must be communicated, the greater the number of different levels of contrast into which that phenomenon is categorized" (Frake 1961, p. 121).

4. The fourth criterion is psychological. How much do the people think about eating in their daily life, or, stated differently, how much is the anticipation of eating a factor in regulating an individual's behavior in the short in the same way that the anticipation of death, for example, serves as powerful factor in regulating his behavior in the long run? As Firth (1939, p. 38) says of the Tikopia, "To get a meal is the principal work on; most days, and the meal itself is not merely an interval in work but an aim in itself." Another example of psychological preoccupation may be seen in this passage of Lin Yutang (1935, p. 338): "No food is really enjoyed unless it is, keenly anticipated, discussed, eaten and then commented upon.... Long before we have any special food, we think about it, rotate it in our minds, anticipate it as a secret pleasure to be shared with some of our closest friends, and write notes about it in our invitation letters." Lin Yutang's favorite Chinese gourmet is a gentleman who lived about two hundred fifty years ago, by the name of Li Yü (or Li Li-weng). Li was fond of crabs, and he wrote in one of his literary works (Li 1730, vol. 15, sec. "Crabs") that "as far as crabs are concerned, my mind is addicted to them, my mouth enjoys the taste of them, and not a single day in my life have I ever forgotten about them."

This brings us back to the observation that the Chinese are probably among the peoples of the world most preoccupied with eating. In a number of recent publications, Lévi-Strauss (1964, 1965, 1966, 1968) seeks to establish some universal expressions of humanity through foods, cooking, table manners, and people's concepts about them. But these are all among the sharpest symbols of cultures, and to understand them one must first of all understand their uniqueness and the way in which they uniquely symbolize their cultures. In this sense, the Chinese preoccupation with food and eating provides its own explanation. There has been much attempt to see Chinese poverty as a culinary virtue. Gernet (1962, p. 135) explains the inventiveness of Chinese cooking in terms of "undernourishment, drought and famines," which compelled the Chinese people to "make judicious use of every possible kind of edible vegetable and insect, as well as of offal." This is certainly a useful explanation for some aspects of the Chinese food habits, as discussed above, but poverty and the consequent exhaustive search for resources provide only a favorable environment for culinary inventiveness and cannot be said to be its cause. If so, there would have been as many culinary giants as there are poor peoples. Besides, the Chinese may be poor, but, as Mote points out, by and large they have been well fed. The Chinese have shown inventiveness in this area perhaps for the simple reason that food and eating are among things central to the Chinese way of life and part of the Chinese ethos.

As characterized above, the Chinese food tradition is one with a distinctive assemblage of ingredients, prepared and served in accordance with the fan-ts'ai principle, typified by several features of adaptability, and associated with a cluster of beliefs concerning the health properties of various foods. Further, it is a tradition that occupies a special place in the total realm of culture. This tradition can be documented for at least three thousand years, during which changes surely occurred but without altering its fundamental character. This, at least, is the conclusion that I see emerge from the various chapters of this volume.

Within this tradition, countless food variables are articulated in countless ways by subsegments of the Chinese culture and in various social situations. By the differential manifestations of food in kind, quantity, and manner of service, the Chinese use or view food as symbols for the subsegment or for the situation.

The most obvious subsegments are the regional styles of cooking. There are various ways of regionally subdividing the Chinese cooking style, but they are all based on the major schools of restaurants in major cosmopolitan centers like Peking, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Taipei. We hear about Ching ts'ai ("Peking dishes"), Shansi ts'ai, Shantung ts'ai, Honan ts'ai, Hupei ts'ai, Ning-p'o ts'ai, Ch'uan (Szechwan) ts'ai, Fu-chou ts'ai, Ch'aouchou ts'ai, Kuang-chou ts'ai, and so forth—each ts'ai style being characterized by the province or city in which it is represented. But this is more a classification of restaurants than regional styles. For example, any Pekinese can tell you there is no such thing as Peking ts'ai in Peking itself; Peking ts'ai as served in restaurants outside Peking is really a ts'ai style combining many local specialities throughout North China. A thorough investigation of the regional cooking styles—and there certainly are major differences among them—can only be undertaken by means of China-wide field research, perhaps supplemented by studies of recipes collected from all over China, from villages as well as big cities.

Another set of subsegments concerns the food styles of different economic classes. Food is traditionally regarded as an economic index, as, for example, in the official dynastic annals where the volume on economy is often titled *shih huo*, "Food and Money." In the Peking dialect, to have a job is to have *chiao ku* ("the grains to chew"), and to have lost one is to have to *ta p'o le fan wan* ("broken the rice bowl"). It is small wonder that the Chinese way of contrasting economic classes is to contrast their food styles. A common complaint is *chu men chiu jou ch'ou lu yu tung ssu ku*, or "while the wine and the meat have spoiled behind the red doors [of rich households], on the road there are skeletons of those who died of exposure." Similar contrasts were made by Mencius (fourth century B.c.): "There is fat meat in your kitchen and there are well-fed horses in your stables, yet the people look hungry and in the outskirts of cities men drop dead from starvation" (Lau 1970, p. 52). No wonder that John Barrow, as quoted by Jonathan Spence in his chapter on the Ch'ing period, made the observation that "in the assortments of food there was a wider disparity in China between rich and poor than in any other country of the world."

The belief in the desirability of frugality concerning food must be reviewed in the light of economic strata. For the peasants, frugality is a necessity, but for the elite it is a pronounced virtue that could be observed or disregarded at will. In revolutionary ideology, food style is often chosen as one of

the symbols marking off the exploited from the exploiter. In their Hunan base in the 1920s, the Communist-led Peasants Association made the following rules about banquets:

Sumptuous feasts are generally forbidden. In Shao-shan, Hsiang-t'an county, it has been decided that guests are to be served with only three kinds of animal food, namely, chicken, fish and pork. It is also forbidden to serve bamboo shoots, kelp and lentil noodles. In Hengshan county it has been resolved that eight dishes and no more may be served at a banquet. Only five dishes are allowed in the East Three District in Li-ling county, and only meat and three vegetable dishes in the North Second District, while in the West Third District New Year feasts are forbidden entirely. In Hsiang-hsiang county, there is a ban on all "egg-cake feasts," which are by no means sumptuous.... In the town of Chia-mo, Hsianghsiang county, people have refrained from eating expensive foods and use only fruit when offering ancestral sacrifices [Mao 1927, p. 50].

In addition to the amount and the degree of luxury permitted, the different systems of meals are also characterizable in ideological terms (e.g., H. Kao 1974). Other subsegments associated with distinctive food variables include the various religious orders, each with its taboos and preferences, the various ethnic groups within the area of China, and the various occupational groups with their respective eating styles appropriate to the convenience of each.

I have pointed out earlier that the Chinese people are especially preoccupied with food, and that food is at the center of, or at least it accompanies or symbolizes, many social interactions. The Chinese recognize, in their social interactions, minute and precise distinctions, and nuances of distinctions, in regard to the relative statuses of the interacting parties and the nature of the interaction. Consequently, they inevitably use food-of which there are countless variations, many more subtle and more expressive than the tongue can convey-to help speak the language that constitutes a part of every social interaction. Within each subsegment of the Chinese food culture, food is used again differentially to express the precise social distinctions involved in the interaction.

The role of food as social language is determined by an interplay of the status of the interacting parties and the occasion of the act. Some examples will show the principal types of the situation. A meal is a common occasion for getting together with family, relatives, and friends, but the food that is served can define the precise distance between the participants. Francis and Vera Hsu, in their chapter, describe the use of *chiao tzu* for New Year festivities. There are many reasons why *chiao tzu* is suitable for New Year consumption, but one of the reasons is that *chiao tzu* is something that family members and close relatives, who may not see and talk to each other often in their busy lives, can cook and consume together without having too much of their attention diverted by complicated cooking steps.

However, *chiao tzu*, intimate but simple, would not usually be suitable for entertaining friends. If the host has a family cook and a maid, they could easily prepare and serve a sumptuous meal. But if then the host himself, or the hostess herself, goes to the kitchen to cook up some specialty of the house, and if the hostess serves the dishes (that is, brings them from the kitchen to the table) in person, then these must be very special guests indeed-the cooking skills and the flavor of the food, be they better or worse than the cook's fare, becoming more or less beside the point. When a mother cooks the favorite dishes of a home-coming child, or a maiden prepares her specialties for a suitor, or a husband makes wine-chicken for his wife who has just given birth, words of affection are being delivered and consumed along with the food. In this regard the Chinese are no different from any other people, but it is the specific words that are used (food variables) that distinctively characterize the Chinese food language.

If the occasions are formal and the statuses socially prescribed, appropriate food must be served since the parties involved know exactly what is being said-be it correct, showing extraordinary effort, or insulting-from the kinds and the amount of food that is served. Spence's examples illustrate this well: Nagasaki's Chinese merchants' first-class meal of sixteen dishes, second-class meal of ten dishes, and third-class meal of eight dishes, and the Imperial Courts' six basic grades of Manchu banquets and five of Chinese. In Republican China we see that grades of restaurant banquets are rated according to purchase price: 500 *k'uai* banquets, 1,000 *k'uai* banquets, 10,000 *k'uai* banquets, and the like. The grade must be geared to the occasion and to the importance of the guests being entertained. Too high for the occasion or for the status of the party, and it is branded a vulgar overkill engaged in only by the uncultured new rich; too low, you become a tightwad and get contemptuously laughed at. It is extremely important to know



what ' exactly appropriate because the range of variation is so very large, and the language of food takes many years to learn.

The range of variation differs with economic class. The expectation varies ?with economic capability and with the presumed knowledge-linguistic –linguistic code– that goes with it. The awkward situation *Pao-Yü* encountered in *Hung-lou meng*, as Jonathan Spence so aptly relates, is an eloquent testimonial to the class barriers of food: During a rare visit by Pao-yü to the home of one of his maid-servants, "after surveying the carefully arrayed dishes of cakes, dried fruits, and nuts, the best that [she and her family] could offer to their young master, Pao-yü's maid realized sadly `that there was nothing there which *Pao-yü* could possibly be expected to eat.' "Master and maid do not interact at meals, and food language appropriate for the occasion is hard to find.

Food linguistics suggests to us that the economic barrier is harder to cross than that between life and death, or that between the secular and the divine. The Chinese have clear mourning food prescriptions and elaborate customs for the ritual use of food. The various ways in which food may be used in a ritual context are again directly related to the status of the interacting parties (who on ritual occasions include both living and dead, and both human and divine). Emily Ahern's studies of the varying uses of food for hall worship and grave worship in a Taiwan Chinese village are particularly illuminating and are quoted below at some length:

Grave worship on the whole differs radically from hall worship. The most obvious difference is the sort of food that is offered at the grave as opposed to that presented in the hall. The food offered for ordinary death-day sacrifices before the tablets in the lineage hall or on a domestic altar is essentially the same as the common fare of the villagers though it may be richer in meat and other delicacies.... Chopsticks and bowls are always provided. After these offerings are made, the food is eaten without further cooking by the members of the family and their guests.

In stark contrast, foods presented at the graves, though potentially edible, are not soaked, seasoned, or cooked; most of them are dry and unpalatable. These offerings, consisting basically of 12 small bowls of foodstuffs, commonly include dried mushrooms of various sorts, dried fish and meat, dried noodles, and dried bean curd.

The difference between these offerings, taken together with other data about the kinds of food offered to the gods, leads me to suggest that the kind of food offered to a supernatural being is an index of the difference between that being and the living beings making the offerings. The scale along which the offerings differ is one of transformation from potential food in its natural state to edible food....

Supernatural beings are offered food that is less transformed, and therefore less like human food, according to their difference from the humans making the offerings. For example, of all the supernaturals, the ancestors are probably the most like those who offer them food. As ancestors in halls or domestic shrines, they are well-known kinsmen with distinctive, individual identities; they can be spoken to, apologized to, thanked, and so on. They are generally accessible and familiar beings. Consequently, they are offered food that is precisely like the food consumed by those who offer it....

The gods, on a more distant level, receive different offerings according to their rank. The lowest god in the supernatural hierarchy, Tho-te-kong, the earth god, receives food like the fare of humans except that it is unseasoned and uncut.... Tho-te-kong is only somewhat different from humans....

Moving to the top of the hierarchy, the highest god, Thi-kong, receives the most untransformed food on the occasion of elaborate *pai-pais*: raw fowl with a few tail feathers left unplucked and the entrails hanging about their necks; a live fish; a whole raw pig with its entrails hanging about its neck; and sometimes two stalks of sugarcane, uprooted whole from the ground with roots and leaves still intact, constituting the vegetable equivalent of the whole, raw animal offerings. ... I suggest Thi-kong is offered food that differs markedly from human food because he himself is so different from human beings and humanlike beings such as the hall and domestic ancestors....

Looking at the difference between the offerings to the ancestors in the hall and the offerings to them at the grave in the light of the scaling of the offerings to the gods, ... we are led to investigate the nature of the difference between the ancestors in those two locations. The raw, live or dry food offered to Thi-kong marks distance in power and accessibility from human beings; the dry food offered at the grave may mark an equally great distance between the ancestor as resident of the hall and the ancestor as resident of the grave....

In sum, the grave, located outside of the settlement, is very different ;: from the hall in that access to it cannot be controlled; it is freely haunted by the souls of the dead. These dead persons, like the ancestor buried there, are living but are no longer part of the familiar, observable living world. When someone visits the grave he is exposing himself to one s .,of the gates of the im world and must deal with dangerous ghosts on `` their terms. In contrast, when the souls of the ancestors visit the hall they rejoin the living world; living people can relate to them as known, familiar ascendants. This difference ... begins to make the contrast between edible food offered in the hall and inedible substances offered at the grave intelligible. [Ahern 1973, pp. 166-74]

In the above discussion, the spectrum of variability consists of different degrees of "cookedness." As such, it is a relatively simple and stark example .:among many variables in an area where the supernatural interacting partners ate numerous, the distinctions complex, and the nuances of the food language particularly refined. From the earliest ritual records of China, the oracle ,bone inscriptions of the Shang, one finds that kings planning ancestral sacrificial rituals would, by divination, consult with the receiver of the offerings about the kind and number of sacrificial animals desired: cattle? sheep? kid? humans? how many-one? five? forty? In later times and at present such questions are no longer asked, presumably because both the variety and the quantity have been conventionalized, that is, clearly understood between giver and particular receiver. Consequently, from the ritual food that is being offered, the ethnographer can determine the social distance to the receiver and also his or her placement in the social hierarchy in the sacred world.

From the above it becomes obvious that food semantics offers a potentially fruitful area of inquiry into the Chinese social system, or any social system in which food plays a significant part in social interactions. By food semantics I refer to the terminological systems (i.e., hierarchical classifications), and the functional relevance of such systems, of food, drinks, preserving and cooking processes, cooking utensils, serving utensils, food personnel, and the behaviors and beliefs associated with all of the above.

I have discussed, here, the following issues concerning the study of Chinese food from an anthropological perspective : the characterization of a Chinese food culture tradition, the segmentation of this food culture within the Chinese tradition, and the minute study of food variables that could eventually lead to food semantics as an approach to Chinese systems of social interaction.

One advantage offered studies like these by a long historical civilization such as the Chinese, is the opportunity to make such studies in a historical perspective. To be sure, a descriptive history of food in China, such as Shinoda's work, is of interest in itself and is a requisite for analytic history. But we are interested in food in Chinese history for two other, interrelated reasons. The first is to see to what extent historical dimension is significant for an analytic framework for food-in-culture studies. The second is to find out if food history can be used-and if so, to what extent-as an approach to add a new dimension to Chinese cultural and social histories.

This book can only be said to mark a beginning in such efforts. What are my own immediate thoughts after reading the various chapters in the book? I have two such thoughts. First, continuity vastly outweighs change in this aspect of Chinese history. Second, there are enough changes to warrant some preliminary efforts to give the periodization of Chinese history a new perspective. The former is self-explanatory, is another proof of the change-within-tradition pattern of Chinese cultural history, and requires no further comment. As far as the changes are concerned, the various chapters of this volume trace the changing history of the Chinese food culture from the beginning to the present day, and I will let my authors speak for themselves in regard to the major events in each of the periods. Allow me, however, to point out just one thing: Most changes involved the geographic movements of peoples with their particular food habits, but truly important changes having to do with the total alignment of the society are very rare.

In the food history of China I recognize at least two and probably three first-order thresholds, which mark changes in certain food variables that significantly affected the alignment, or realignment, of most if not all other variables. The first such threshold is the beginning of farming-that of millets and other cereals in the north and of rice and other plants in the south-which alone could possibly have established the fan-ts'ai principle of Chinese cooking. Undoubtedly, the preagricultural knowledge of wild plants and animals was carried over, contributing to the characteristic Chinese inventory of foodstuffs.

Also, in cooking and preserving methods and in ideas about food and health, the transformation to agriculture was presumably cumulative and gradual. But the Chinese food style is simply unimaginable without Chinese agriculture.

The second threshold that I recognize is the beginning of a highly stratified society, possibly in the Hsia dynastic period and certainly by the Shang period of the eighteenth century B.c. The new societal realignment was essentially one based on the distribution of food resources. On one side were the food-producers who tilled the land but had to submit much of what they produced to the state, and on the other stood the food-consumers who administered instead of toiled, which gave them the leisure and the incentive to build up an elaborate cuisine style. Small wonder that such a stratified, exploiter-exploited society is in China considered, in traditional popular phraseology, a "man-eats-man" society. It was this event-the split of the Chinese population along food lines-that created the economic subsegmentation of the Chinese food culture. The great Chinese cuisine was based the wisdoms of vast ages and vast areas but was made possible in part through the efforts of the leisurely gourmets of means, and by the complicated and exacting food etiquette befitting a complex and multistratified pattern of social relationships.

The historical segment initiated by this second threshold comprises practically the entire span of Chinese history, from Hsia and Shang through last decades. What we know to be the traditional Chinese food culture -the food culture of this segment.

The third threshold is-if the information proves to be correct-happening right in our own time. In the People's Republic of China, the food-based social polarization has apparently given way to a truly national distribution of the food resources. I don't know very much about the events associated with this, nor do I have data on how other aspects of the Chinese food culture-such as the health aspect, the status of gourmets, and the socially differential use of food-are changing, or have changed, with this fundamental alteration in food distribution. But the potentials are clearly present.