

Sidney C. H. Cheung

Hong Kong Foodways

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Sidney C. H. Cheung's concise and evocative book about the political stories of the production and consumption of ethnic and foreign cuisines in Hong Kong provides a delightful provocation for anthropologists and those who are interested in the cultural meanings and social significance of food in Hong Kong. Cheung covers various domains: migration, agricultural practices, globalization, gourmet eating, and heritage conservation. These changes in food production and consumption practices have become the object of the most important discourse in Hong Kong in the postwar and post-handover periods. Cheung has focused precisely on the changes in foodways since the postwar era and analyzed how people shift their patterns of consumption and identity politics with dramatic social and political transformation (6).

The book consists of five content chapters based on different periods in the postwar era and loosely different themes. Chapter 1, "Local Food Production," is purely historical. It sets the stage nicely by explaining how the ecological character and geographical location of Hong Kong gave rise to the local production and consumption of indigenous oysters since 977 BCE. Yet, large-scale fishpond farming and cultivation of *gei wai* shrimp began only after the 1950s due to British governance and the changing Hong Kong-China relationship (23–26). Chapter 2, "The Arrival of Migrants' Food in the Post-War Era," deftly explains how different groups of migrants have changed the foodscapes of Hong Kong, reflecting the evolvement of the economy from being an entrepot trading center for China during the immediate postwar period into an export-oriented light manufacturing industrial city during the 1950s and 1960s. On the one hand, many rich Shanghainese came to Hong Kong with capital, bringing in Shanghainese food ingredients and cuisines for self-consumption, business development, and identity expression. On the other hand, Hakka food was particularly popular among the workers of the light industries, due to the large amount of strongly favored meat, which provides the highest sources of energy.

Chapter 3, "The Rise of Nouvelle Cantonese and International Cuisines," carefully traces the different trends of the incoming Western-style restaurants. In addition, the study of the emergence of deluxe, hybrid Cantonese nouvelle cuisine, and that of Japanese cuisine and international cuisines, beautifully links the analysis of the forces of globalization and consumerism, such as tourism and the global food supply system, to social value, social class, and identity construction among the middle class in the postwar

era under the transformation of Hong Kong from an industrial economy to its successful development into a financial center.

Chapter 4, “In Search of Nostalgic Food,” uses *puhn choi* and private kitchen food as examples to illustrate the new meanings of a marginalized village food and everyday home-cooking that have played upon people’s nostalgia for tradition and remembrance of the “good old days,” as a reflection of the ambiguous emotion of the local people since the handover of Hong Kong to China. Chapter 5, “The Awareness of Food Heritage,” provokes readers to understand the importance of the systematic aspects of food heritage. By showing the ecological role of polyculture freshwater fish farming, the retail network of snakes, and family recipes with details, Cheung illuminates their connection with the transcended values embedded in the local social context for the benefits of global humanity (79), while at the same time raising important questions like the paradox of defining food heritage and the ways to preserve it.

The political stories of food production in this book are interesting. Throughout, Cheung convincingly argues that these consumption practices are intimately connected with the politics of production and consumption, not simply ecological or nutrition factors. Cheung effectively uses historical records to show deeper patterns that lie behind immediate change. Cheung draws on a trove of archive collection, ethnographic data, and personal reminiscences to explain the impact of geopolitics upon food production, the internationalization of Hong Kong foodways and the performance of identity, and the emergence of nostalgia under the context of rapid political change during the post-handover period.

As to the description of food, identity, migration, consumerism, globalization, and reinvention of tradition, this book is useful for non-Hong Kong specialists who are not familiar with these topics. For Hong Kong specialists and those who are familiar with recent developments in Hong Kong, there is hardly anything new. However, Sidney Cheung has done a fine job in showing chronologically how the popularity and decline of certain food practices are related to the changing food system, tastes, and social values that are connected with the rapid social change, economic development, and government policy in the postwar era of Hong Kong (79).

Veronica Sau-wa Mak
Hong Kong Shue Yan University