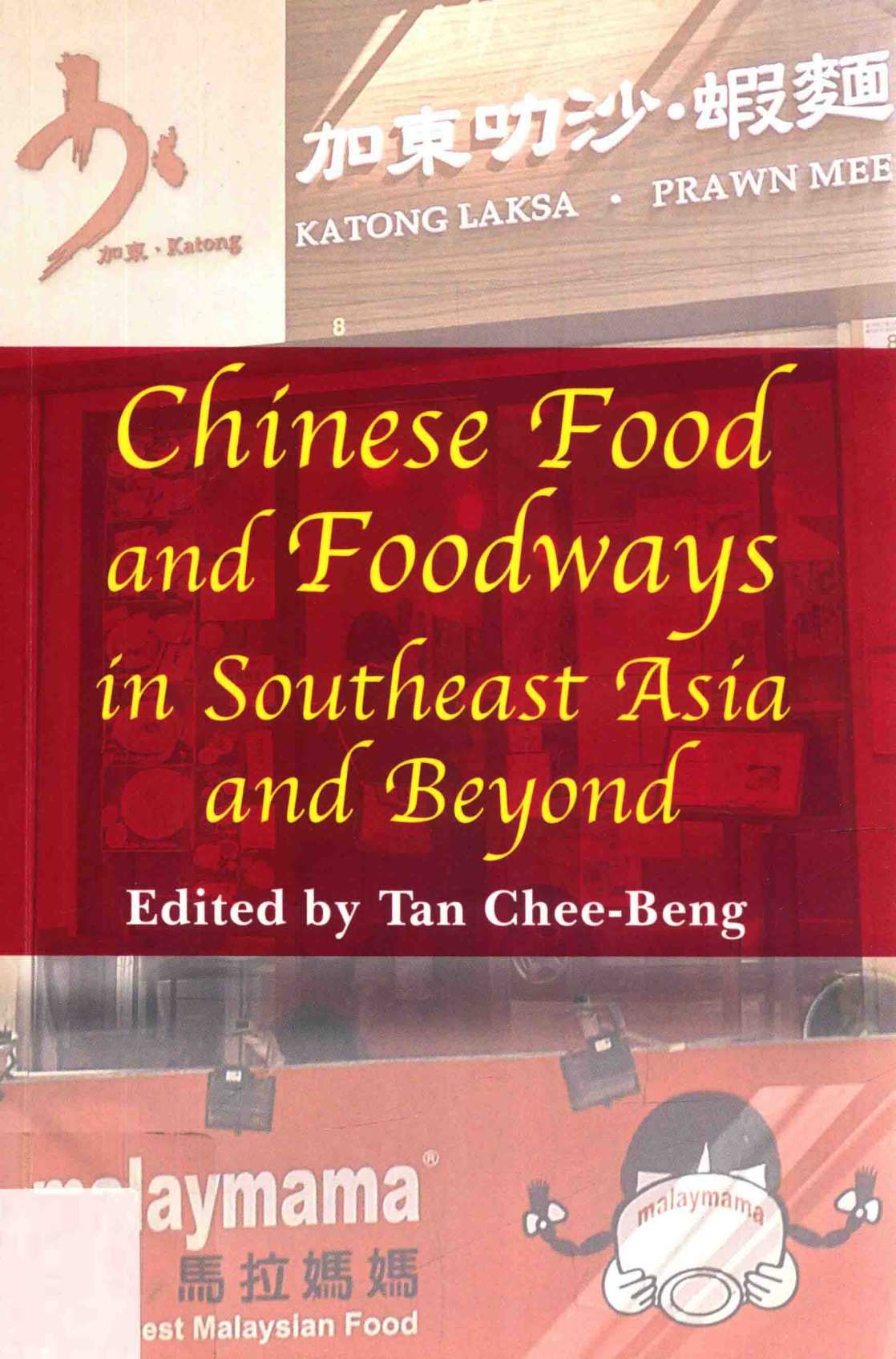

Chinese Food and Foodways in Southeast Asia and Beyond

Edited by Tan Chee-Beng

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Introduction

Tan Chee-Beng

Chinese Migration and Chinese Food

In writing about Chinese food in southern China, E.N. Anderson and Marja Anderson (1977: 319) write: "The food of contemporary southern China is, in the opinion of many, the finest in the world. It combines quality, variety, and a nutritional effectiveness that allows it to sustain more people per acre than any other diet on earth except modern laboratory creations that demand a major industrial input." The Chinese in Southeast Asia and in Taiwan are predominantly people whose migrant ancestors came from South China, who brought the food traditions from Fujian and Guangdong (then including Hainan Island) to these regions. The diverse Chinese foods in Southeast Asia — the Minnan (Southern Fujian) food, Fuzhou food, Chaozhou food, Cantonese food, Hakka food, Hainanese food, and others — and their influence in the region had their origin in Chinese migration. And the culinary inventions of the Chinese in different Southeast Asian countries have added to the rich heritage of the Chinese food.

Chinese cookbook writers often classify Chinese regional food into eight main types (*ba da caixi*), namely, Lucai (Shandong cuisine), Sucai (Suzhou cuisine), Chuancai (Sichuan cuisine), Yuecai (Guangdong cuisine), Zhecai (Zhejiang cuisine), Mincai (Fujian cuisine), Xiangcai (Hunan cuisine), and Huicai, also called Wancai (Anhui cuisine). Each of these eight major cuisines actually comprises various regional cuisines in the respective province. For example, Sucai comprises Nanjing cuisine, Yangzhou cuisine, Suzhou City cuisine and others, while the Chaozhou food of Guangdong cuisine is actually closer to that of the Minnan of Fujian cuisine. In addition there are eight well-known cuisines, namely Jingcai (Beijing cuisine), Hucai (Shanghai cuisine), Qincai (Shaanxi cuisine), Ecai (Hubei cuisine), Yucai (Henan cuisine), Jincai (Tianjing cuisine), Dongbeicai (Northeast cuisine covering liaoning, Heilongjiang and Jilin) and Diancai (Yunnan cuisine). Of these Beijing, Shanghai, and increasingly Yunnan cuisines are known to most Chinese.[1] The detailed classification of regional cuisines is actually quite recent since the Qing dynasty. For a long time in Chinese history the culinary distinction had been between the north and the south, and as Sabban (2000: 201) points out, it was during the development of the urban civilization in the Song dynasty that local food traditions became "systematized and recognized as constitutive elements of a genuine culinary style."

Simoons (1991: 44–57), like some other writers on Chinese food in English, classifies Chinese regional cuisines into "northern" (Beijing, Shandong, Henan, Hebei, Shanxi and Shaanxi), "eastern" (Jiangsu, Anhui, Jiangxi, Zhejiang and Fujian), "western" (Sichuan, Yunnan, Hunan, Hubei and Guizhou) and "southern" (Guangdong and Guangxi). Newman (2004) classifies the regional Chinese cuisines into Cantonese and Other Southern Foods; Beijing, Shandong and Other Northern Foods; Sichuan, Hunan and Other Western Foods; Shanghai and Other Eastern Cuisines; and Lesser-Known Culinary Styles. Actually the lesser-known styles may be quite known, too. For example, the Hakka cuisine is well known in Malaysia, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Even when the regional classification is comprehensive, we must remember that each locality in a particular region in China may have its own famous tradition. For example, Shunde cuisine is quite well known in Hong Kong, this being the cuisine from Shunde in Guangdong, known for its fresh water fish cuisine and the use of milk for cooking. While Chinese foods in Southeast Asia are mainly derived from Fujian and Guangdong regional cuisines, those from other parts of China can also be found in established restaurants, especially

since the 1990s with the greater globalization of Chinese food due to the migration or hiring of chefs from China.

Migration involves carrying along cultural traditions and adaptation. Migrants can reterritorialize many if not most of their food traditions, but the lack of some traditional ingredients or the change in taste as a result of localization mean that reproduction of food heritage also involves reinvention; and the use of local ingredients as well as exposure to new culinary knowledge facilitate innovation and the acquisition of new cuisine. The Chinese migrants in Southeast Asia were also exposed to the cuisines of the Chinese from different parts of China. Chinese food heritage in Southeast Asia is thus enriched by both diverse Chinese regional cuisines as well as locally developed Chinese cuisines. It has also influenced indigenous Southeast Asian cuisines.

Anderson (1988: 258) observes that "Chinese overseas retain their diet longer and more faithfully than do many immigrant groups." This is especially so in Southeast Asia, where there are relatively more Chinese outside the Chinese land than in other parts of the world. Southeast Asia is also the crossroads of many civilizations, Chinese, Indian and European in particular, and so the Chinese in the region have developed their distinct Chinese cuisines that may be described as Chinese Malaysian and Singaporean cuisine, Chinese Indonesian cuisine, Chinese Filipino cuisine, and so on. With re-migration to other parts of the world, especially America, Europe and Australasia, and also "back" to Hong Kong, Macao, mainland China and Taiwan, the Chinese cuisines from Southeast Asia have also spread and globalized.

The book is an attempt to examine the diversity and contribution of the Chinese culinary heritage in Southeast Asia as a result of migration from China and localization in Southeast Asia. It also describes the globalization of Chinese food beyond China and Southeast Asia, in particular that which has been reinvented or innovated in Southeast Asia. While we are not able to cover all the countries in Southeast Asia — it will be nice, for instance, to have chapters on the Chinese food and foodways in Cambodia and Laos — nevertheless this volume highlights the culinary contribution of the Chinese in diaspora, Southeast Asia in particular. The proportional greater number of Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore has resulted in the development of a great many local Chinese foods for the local Chinese populations, and these have also become significant nowadays for tourism and globalization. Also significant is the spread of Southeast Asian Chinese foods via Thai, Indonesian, Malaysian

and other Southeast Asian restaurants. Of the indigenous Southeast Asian food, Thai food is perhaps the most globalized cuisine from Southeast Asia. There are in fact around 20,000 Thai restaurants outside Thailand (see Van Esterik 2008: 92). And in the Netherlands, as anyone who has been there soon learn, many Chinese restaurants in fact serve Indonesian Chinese food.

I shall now introduce the chapters in this book, and then I will discuss a few themes that run throughout it.

Chapters in this Book

The papers in this volume are revised versions of the papers of the conference project "Chinese Foodways in Multicultural Southeast Asia," of which I was the principal investigator, and the project was sponsored by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange. The papers were presented at The 10th Symposium on Chinese Dietary Culture: Chinese Food in Southeast Asia, organized by the Foundation of Chinese Dietary Culture and the Department of Anthropology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and held in Penang, Malaysia, on 12–14 November 2007. The symposium papers, including eight of the chapters in this book, can be found in *The 10th Symposium on Chinese Dietary Culture* (2008). I have invited Dr Jiemin Bao and Dr Jean Duruz to write about their study in Las Vegas and Adelaide, respectively, and I believe they add to the strength of the book.

This book is divided into three parts. Part 1 is Overview and Chinese Food in Diaspora. The three chapters give an overview of Chinese food in Southeast Asia and its globalization, as well as the diffusion of food from China and the accessibility of Chinese food in restaurants worldwide. In Chapter 1, Tan Chee-Beng uses the examples of Chinese Malayan food — Chinese foods in Malaysia and Singapore — to describe Chinese diasporic food as developed from culinary reproduction, localization and local culinary invention. The chapter also discusses the globalization of Chinese foods from Southeast Asia. It gives various examples of the diasporic Chinese food, some of which are referred to by a number of contributors in this book. Tan points out that the development of a great variety of local Chinese foods in Southeast Asia is made possible by the existence of "an internal market that facilitates the commercialization and innovation of Chinese foods to cater to the taste of the local Chinese population."

Chapter 2 on "Gastronomic Influences on the Pacific from China and Southeast Asia" by Nancy Pollock compares Chinese foodways with that of the Pacific. The author describes the historical background of food in China and its diffusion to the rest of the world. This appropriately provides a background to readers of this book. The author is a well-known anthropologist who studies food and foodways in the Oceania. Thus her chapter also gives the readers an enlightening glimpse of "Chinese gastronomic globalization across Oceania." Thus far the Chinese significant gastronomic contribution is via the market gardens which produce vegetables and the restaurants that cater to "different types of Pacific feasting and sharing." Nancy Pollock points out that "Chinese food in the Pacific is seen as cheap, filling, tasty, and cosmopolitan." The chapter provides a wider perspective for the understanding of the globalization of Chinese food.

In Chapter 3 entitled "Global Encounter of Diaspora Chinese Restaurant Food," David Wu uses his life-long experiences from research and travels, especially in East and Southeast Asia, Papua New Guinea and USA to discuss the complexity of Chinese cuisines in the context of global cultural influences. In particular, he describes Chinese food and foodways in Papua New Guinea and Chinese restaurants in USA. Ethnicity, global capitalism and mass media "have played an important role in shaping new developments in the diasporic Chinese cuisines." There are "authentic" Chinese cuisines, and there are localized Chinese cuisines as well as fusion Chinese cuisines. His experiences reveal "complicated stories of food as cultural commodities that routinely undergo a process of globalization, adaptation, heterogeneity, hybridization, internationalization and complete transformation."

The four chapters in Part 2 describe Chinese food and foodways in Southeast Asia. In Chapter 4 Myra Sidharta writes about Chinese food and foodways in Indonesia, which has some similar characteristics with Malaysia in that Indonesia is also predominantly Muslim and uses Malay as national language. However the size as well as the ecological and cultural diversities of Indonesia offer more diversified environments in which Chinese migrants have adapted to. There is also much more culinary interaction between the populations in Indonesia, and as Myra Sidharta has pointed out, the influence of the Chinese foodways is evident everywhere in Indonesia; and the Chinese Indonesian cuisine is "a hybrid menu with the style of Chinese cuisine and the taste of the native Indonesian foodways." At the same time the opening of many new Chinese restaurants continue to introduce "genuine" Chinese food.

In Chapter 5 Carmelea Ang See, who is a Chinese Filipino very familiar with the food scene in the Philippines, provides us with interesting examples of localization and innovation of Chinese foods in the country. Like most Chinese in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, most Chinese in the Philippines are Hokkiens, i.e., they are Minnan people, descendants of migrants from southern Fujian. Yet they have developed different localized Chinese foods while passing on similar food from southern Fujian. This only shows that cultural interaction enriches culinary heritage. At the same time, the Chinese Filipino food and foodways have "influenced and is enhanced" by Filipino cuisines. Compared to Malaysia and Indonesia, Chinese Filipino foods are most localized and integrated into the local cuisines; and in fact the Filipinos, who are mainly Catholics, have adopted many aspects of Chinese foods and foodways. Of the three countries, Malays in Malaysia have a stricter observation of culinary boundary between the Chinese and themselves who are Muslims, and it is only since the 1980s that some items of Chinese cooked food are adopted by the Malays, and there remain rather few *halal* Chinese restaurants.[2] Of course food ingredients like bean curd and soy sauce have long been adopted by the Malays, as do the other populations in Southeast Asia.

Chapter 6 on "The Chinese Foodways in Mandalay" is written by Duan Ying who had conducted his doctoral research in Burma. The Chinese in the Burmese city are mostly Yunnanese. The chapter informs us about a different kind of Chinese cuisine than those found elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Like the Chinese elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the Yunnanese in Mandalay have also innovated local Chinese dishes. Duan Ying, who is from Kunming, Yunnan, finds that the Yunnanese there like a sour and spicy soup which they claim is Yunnanese but he has not seen this dish in Yunnan. The Yunnanese have also inherited many dishes which are similar to those in Yunnan. Duan Ying shows the significance of foods in relation to regional Chinese identities in year-round rituals. At the same time the popular teashops are important venues where the people exchange information, including sharing views about their common fate in a country dictated by a military regime.

In the case of the southern Chinese and the Vietnamese, historically they share so much not only in Confucian traditions but also in food. Chan Yuk Wah in Chapter 7 uses the examples of the popular Cantonese and Vietnamese breakfast called *cheung fan* in Cantonese and *banh cuon* in Vietnamese, to show how originally a similar dish of rice-flour rolls is

today influenced by national boundaries and nationalism to become distinct national traditions, being Cantonese/Chinese or Vietnamese. She argues that there are in fact two local traditions of one dish type. Using her analysis of the rice-flour rolls, she points out the problem of lining cultural boundaries with geographical boundaries. "Cultures do not stop at border crossings," Chan Yuk Wah puts it very well.

In Part 3: Beyond Southeast Asia, we have three chapters. Jiemin Bao, who has done research among the Chinese Thais in Thailand and USA, writes about Southeast Asian Chinese food in Las Vegas. She emphasizes the agency of restaurants and chefs in the making and remaking of Southeast Asian Chinese foods. Jiemin Bao points out that Southeast Asian Chinese food in Las Vegas has gone through "de/reterritorialization" twice, once in Southeast Asia and again in USA. Like Chan Yuk Wah, Bao emphasizes that "cuisine is neither bounded by ethnicity nor national boundaries," and so she prefers not to describe the Southeast Asian Chinese food in Las Vegas as "ethnic." Instead of "ethnic food" Jiemin Bao introduces the term "transnational cuisine."

By describing a famous chef of Malaysian Chinese origin in Adelaide, Jean Duruz in Chapter 9 discusses the "embedding and fusing of foods," in particular how Chinese food, Southeast Asian elements included, is implicated in the production of hybrid forms of "Asian-Australian culinary citizenship." Chef Cheong Liew's nostalgic memory of food and foodways in Malaysia is part of his experience as chef in Australia. Another part of this experience is Cheong Liew's connection to local sites, such as Adelaide's Central market. Through descriptions of the chef's market visits — his purchases, interactions, rituals and attachments — we are given a picture of the foods and life there. Foods, of course, include Southeast Asian food, such as Laksa, that is so popular in Malaysia and Singapore, and indeed in Adelaide, too.

Laksa is becoming popular in Hong Kong, too. In Chapter 10 Veronica Mak describes the popularity of Southeast Asian Chinese food in tea café and noodle shops in Hong Kong. She describes the diffusion of Southeast Asian foods to Hong Kong and how these have been transformed to suit Hong Kong taste as well as the need of convenience and easy preparation in cafés and noodle shops. The spicy taste is kept to the minimum and this is helped by the use of more coconut milk to curry dishes. The media also play a major role in popularizing Southeast Asian foods. She concludes that Southeast Asian Chinese food provides a novel taste, at the same time its underlying culinary culture is still Chinese, and such foods like

Laksa, Fried Kway Teow and Curry Mee are becoming part of the Hong Kong food scene.

Migration, Localization and Innovation

A prominent theme that runs throughout this book is the localization of food. The concept of localization is most relevant to the discussion of migration, local adaptation and cultural production. Localization may be understood as "the process of becoming local, which involves cultural adjustment to a local geographical and social environment, and identifying with the locality" (Tan 1997: 103, see also Tan 2004: 23). In the case of culinary localization, this involves change in cooking to suit the changing taste of the migrants and their descendants as a result of their localization to the local living (such as the acquisition of spicy taste) or to suit the taste of the non-Chinese local population, as in the evolution of Chinese food in America to cater to the taste of the majority non-Chinese population. Localization may involve borrowing culinary ideas from the local population as well as the innovative use of local ingredients for the cooking of Chinese food. All these inevitably involve re-creation and creation of new dishes. We thus find in this book many examples of distinctive Malaysian, Indonesian, Filipino, and other Southeast Asian Chinese foods. Indeed Carmelea Ang See makes a very appropriate comment about Chinese Filipino food: "Everyone knows that the noodles are Chinese in origin, however, everyone also acknowledges that these food items are also truly Filipino." Indeed noodles can be cooked in different ways to produce distinctive noodle dishes, and even in China people in different regions make their distinctive style of local noodle dishes. Chinese migrants in Southeast Asia further created their own style of noodle dishes, taking advantage of local culinary knowledge, the use of local ingredients as well as the culinary styles of the other Chinese populations. The well-known Penang Hokkien Mee (*mee* is the Malaysian English version of the Hokkien word *mi* for noodle) is an example. Also called *hemi* or "prawn noodle," this is a Chinese Malaysian invention that uses prawn-based soup and prawns.

Such adaptation and transformation of cuisines is common of migrants, as Bao also notes in her study of Southeast Asian Chinese food in Las Vegas. Migration and re-migration not only contribute to the diffusion and globalization of cuisines, they also contribute to the re-creation of cuisines. Myra Sidharta in this book mentions about the re-migration of