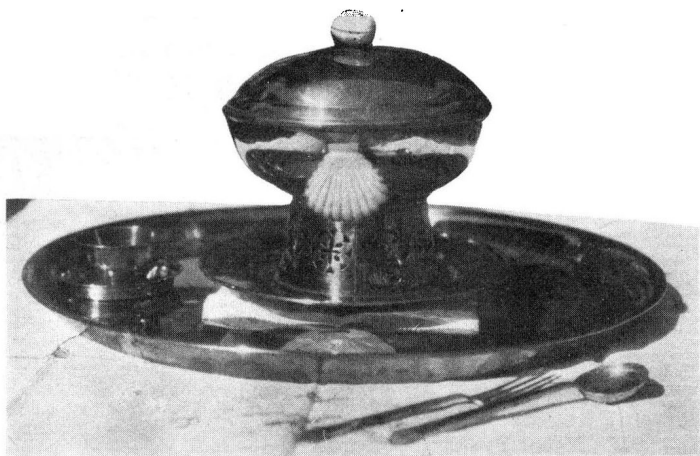
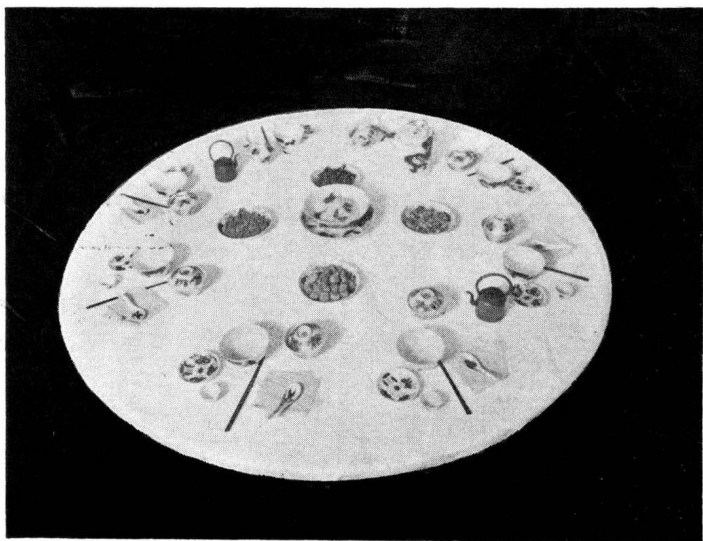


THE
CHINESE FESTIVE BOARD

**THE
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Chafing Dish



The Table is Laid

The Chinese Festive Board

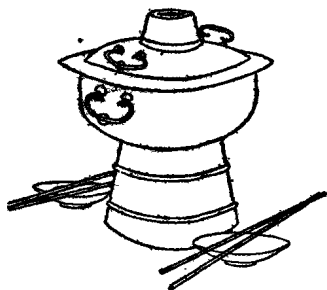
By

CORRINNE LAMB

Line-drawings and paper-ends

by

JOHN KIRK SEWALL



PEIPING

HENRI VETCH

THE FRENCH BOOKSTORE

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INTRODUCTION

IN no other country does the matter of eating present such serious problems as in China. For the masses it represents a daily struggle against overwhelming odds to obtain food enough to keep body and soul together. To those Chinese, on the other hand, who are more fortunately situated, eating takes on a serious aspect in a different sense. With them it is an affair involving pleasant anticipation, careful thought, meticulous selection, and, finally, a wholehearted if somewhat noisy gusto during the process itself.

Over a period of twenty years it has been my pleasure to partake frequently of Chinese hospitality, not only in the gay Treaty Ports, but more often in the distant reaches of China's vast interior. The honors have been equally divided between princes, governors, generals, peasants, inn-keepers and yea, camelteers. In this way I have learned that Chinese cooks possess that rare ability to work the same marvels with the lowly cabbage purchased for a string of cash that they do with birds'-nests at sixteen dollars an ounce.

Happy memories of mine hosts are inseparably linked to lingering thoughts of their abundant hospitality and the delicious food which graced

their tables. With the object of making at least some of these dishes available to others I have compiled this little book. The several chapters on the amenities of eating I have introduced in order that the uninitiated may learn some of the conventionalities of the Chinese festive board. I hope that the strangers to this land may find them interesting; to the foreign guests within its borders may they succeed in being both enlightening and helpful.

To Messrs. H. J. Timperley and Henri Vetch I owe a debt of gratitude for their generous assistance in my work, as well as their constant encouragement.

The Proverbs which precede the chapters of this book have been taken from various sources, particularly from *A Collection of Chinese Proverbs*, by Scarborough and Allan.

CORRINNE LAMB.

Peiping. August 1934.

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PROVERBS

When you put on your clothes, remember the weaver's labor; when you take your daily food, remember the husbandman's hard work.

身披一縷常思織女之勞
日食三餐每念農夫之苦

Feed moderately on wholesome food; garden herbs surpass rich viands.

飲食約而精園蔬逾珍饈

With three good meals a day be content; take in your sail after a good run before the wind.

飽餐三飯常知足得一帆風便可收

Talk to those who understand, and give food to those who are hungry.

說話說與知音送飯送與饑人

A man won't pine on three meals a day, or go in rags if he has three suits.

飯有三餐不饑衣有三件不破

CHAPTER I

Dinner is Served

It would be well perhaps if we first altered some of our preconceived notions regarding the Chinese diet. Many people think that the Chinese live entirely on rice; some believe that rats also occupy an important place on the daily menu. Both ideas are mistaken and should be discarded. Rice does form a staple in the diet of approximately two-fifths of the Chinese people, but the majority of the five hundred millions depend upon wheat, barley and *kaoliang*, the last mentioned being a sort of Chinese millet. As for rats—such things are never heard of, though it is true that snakes are eaten in South China.

With the Chinese coolie, eating is a precarious business. Gnawing hunger supplants the dinner gong, and the destitute seek food wherever it may be found at the time. The peasant, the shop-keeper, the artisan, the small manufacturer—these and certain others abide by a more regular schedule. Two meals a day is their lot, with a *petit déjeuner* shortly after rising, if so inclined.

In countries where the *petit déjeuner* is favored it is usually a very slight meal indeed and falls far short of a British or American breakfast. China is no exception to this rule. A cup of tea, accompanied by a ring of light batter fried in deep fat, is the universally accepted thing in Cathay, and I warn you, you would not like it. It is a sort of prehistoric doughnut. Cold, limp, insipid, and shining in its coat of cooled grease, it is not at all the sort of thing which would appeal to one at

seven o'clock in the morning. We can safely and speedily pass over this business of a Chinese breakfast. It leaves much to be desired.

At about 10 a.m., however, the thoughts of the nation turn to food. Much work has already been done, the appetite has become keen, and for a long time already the restaurants and teashops have been bestirring themselves in the interests of supply and demand. With people of the lower classes the main and most substantial part of this first meal is a basis of either rice or flour. The rice is invariably steamed, and even in the humblest Chinese home it is better by far than the sticky, glutinous mess which is prepared so poorly abroad.

Flour is prepared in many forms. There are neat little round cakes, baked to a brown in a mud oven; pale woe-begone little doughballs, which have been steamed over a huge boiling pot in a mesh basket woven from split bamboo; huge cart-wheels of *man t'ou* or native bread, baked and cut in slices; *mien t'iao erh* (spaghetti); *yu ping* (oil cakes), round biscuits fried in deep sesame oil; *pao tzu* (steamed rolls with a filling of ground meat and vegetable); and occasionally some sweet condiment.

These are the important members of the family. There are also cousins, aunts and uncles and even little step-children, but these can be ignored. Rice and flour are the basis of the meal. With the better class Chinese from one to four dishes are usually served with the staples. These are called *ch'ao t'sai* (炒菜) and it is here that the Chinese chef shows wonderful versatility.

You can *ch'ao* practically anything from a marsh shrimp to a buffalo steak, providing you have the

proper imagination. The essentials to the accomplishment of this feat are threefold: oil, soya sauce and vegetables. Needless to say there are certain combinations which have become standardized and have endured throughout the centuries. Thus, one may take a very small quantity of minced mutton, cabbage cut fine, oil, soya sauce, give a twist of the wrist and—*voilà!* Or, a very small quantity of minced pork, small celery shoots cut fine, oil, soya sauce and again—*voilà!* Occasionally a mushroom or two conceals itself in the mixture, or a bit of ginger-root cut very fine. There are myriads of combinations and the chef is governed by what he finds available in the market. Only the better class Chinese find it financially possible to acquire vegetables, fruits and edibles not in season.

To many hundreds of thousands even one *ch'ao t'sai* is denied and some simple alternative is resorted to. This may be a bowl of noodles, meagerly covered with a hot red-pepper sauce, or a bowl of rice with a few minced salt turnips. Such simple additions relieve the monotony of rice or flour eaten alone and give a bit of zest to the simplest meal.

The better class Chinese are more self-indulgent. Perhaps one can illustrate the point better by giving a simple menu for the average family residing at home:

M E N U

炒 韭 菜

ch'ao chow t'sai

(sautéed leeks and pork)

炸 丸 子

cha wan tzu

(fried meat balls)

榨菜湯

cha t'sai t'ang

(thin vegetable soup)

炒扁豆

ch'ao pien tou

(sautéd string-beans and pork)

炒木蠟肉

ch'ao mu hsü jou

(eggs and mushrooms)

花捲合大米飯

hua chuan ho ta mi fan

(wheat bread with or without rice)

The evening meal is taken between four-thirty and six o'clock. In all cases this is slightly more elaborate than the morning repast, but this probably is governed to a very great extent by the state of the purse.

An element of great importance and one which has a great bearing on this engaging matter of eating in China is the widespread habit of nibbling at food between the regular meals. Throughout the day everyone indulges in titbits of food according to his fancy in the matter. Fruits, candies, cakes, nuts, and biscuits are offered for sale by itinerant vendors and small shops. Every railway train, theater, teashop, bath-house and bazaar has its allurements for those feeling the first twinges of appetite. From this has resulted a pronounced irregularity in meal hours, consistent with the irregularity characterizing most other Chinese activities.

PROVERBS

In dress and food do not break rules.

穿衣吃飯不犯條律

*If you rattle your chopsticks against the bowl, you
and your descendants will always be poor.*

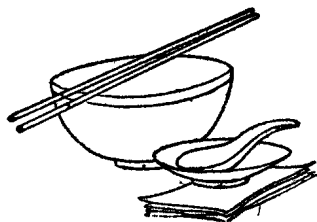
敲碗敲筷窮死萬代

Better slight a guest than starve him.

寧可慢客不可餓客

Hurry men at work, not at meat.

催工莫催食



CHAPTER II

Table Etiquette

ALTHOUGH it is undeniably true that there are certain advantages in the niceties and refinements of Western table manners, still, many of our conventions, carried out in their most rigid form, do not permit of a full enjoyment of food. Whoever has freely gnawed his chicken bone, buried his face in a slice of juicy watermelon, or dipped his bread in the gravy will know exactly what this means.

The Chinese have developed a multitude of conventions which are concerned with the matter of eating. But few of them govern the actual consumption of food, and the diner in China feels almost complete liberty to indulge as he thinks best. *Sui pien!* 'Suit yourself' is the golden rule of eating.

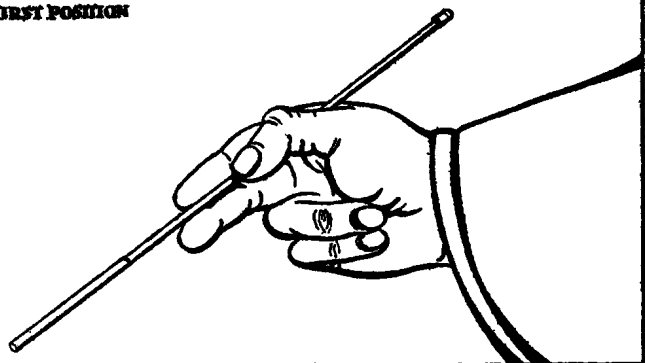
In the first instance, the service of food involves none of the complications of foreign table etiquette. What we know as chopsticks are really called in China *k'uai tzu*, which, in turn, may be freely translated as "quick little boys." This term is applied to them on account of their nimbleness and speed when once in action and it is a most appropriate name. One pair of *k'uai tzu* constitutes the entire cutlery equipment per person, unless by some chance a small porcelain spoon is available or called for to contend with a soup or other thin liquid. One bowl per person completes the table service. Many weary American housewives might well wish that their dishwashing worries could be reduced to such

a minimum. Table linen there is none, thus eliminating another unnecessary item.

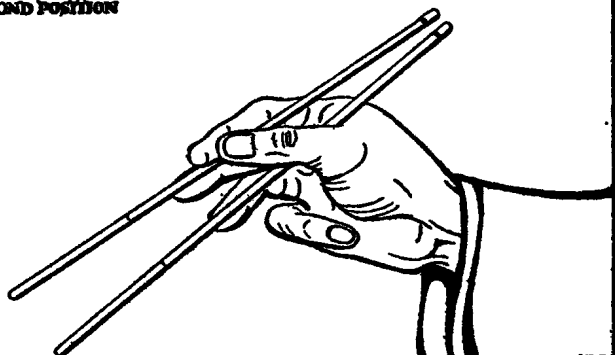
Nearly all Chinese food, when served, has been previously sliced, carved, minced or reduced in some manner to proportions which need no further dissection, and when once placed upon the table it is fair prey to all present. Let us assume that four or five hot *ch'ao t'sai* have been placed upon the table, each diner having been served a bowl of rice beforehand. There is no awkward hesitation and no waiting. Life is serious and food is life. There ensues a simultaneous dive of chopsticks into the various dishes, the diners suiting their own fancy as to what they desire to concentrate upon after liberal sampling of the various offerings. Food is never passed. A certain priority is accorded the elders for the first few moments but after that it is a matter of every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. As all the food is served in one course, there is ample opportunity to gauge one's capacity. One is never left to wonder whether there may not soon appear some delicious unknown dish which must be passed ~~up with regret~~ due to previous over-indulgence. There is no element of mystery in a Chinese meal.

Tea is served immediately before the meal and immediately after. No napkins are provided but several times during the meal a servant will enter with an adequate number of small rough towels which have been wrung out in boiling water. Each diner accepts one, wipes his face and hands, and, thus refreshed, settles back to his task with new vigor and enthusiasm. Of all Chinese customs I know none so luxurious as this, and my undying

FIRST POSITION



SECOND POSITION



APPROACHING

