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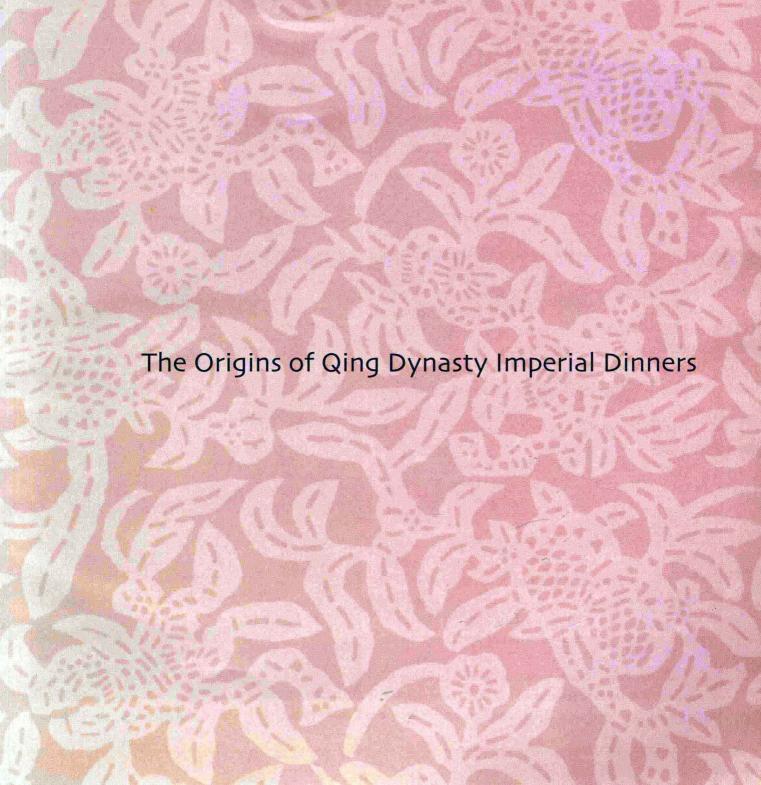
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Kangxi's Autumn Hunts and the Birth of the Manchu-Han Banquet

Kangxi [r. 1662-1722] was the most accomplished emperor of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). He was a keen hunter, an excellent bowman and rider. He often taught his children and theirs, "The Manchu took the nation by means of bows and horses. You must never forget that fact." Every autumn, he took his children, grandchildren, children of the royal families, ministers and high-ranking officials for a hunting trip to enclosed hunting grounds where Hebei borders Inner Mongolia. These famous expeditions, called "Autumn Hunting in Mulan" became an institution within Qing imperial families from that time on. It did not stop even when Kangxi was ill at the age of 69. He told his officials, "Since my childhood, I've caught 135 tigers, 20 bears, 25 leopards, 10 lynxes, 96 wolves, 132 wild boars and countless deer with my hunting gun and bows...." All those who took part in the autumn hunting activity in Mulan caught animals or birds. Even the teenagers did not return empty-handed as long as they could draw a bow.

Before returning to the palace in Beijing, the emperor would host a grand feast in his summer resort at Chengde to celebrate the hunting party. Bonfires were lit on the grasslands, and the animals that had been killed were roasted over the fires whilst people ate. The menu of the autumn hunt feast of that time is still kept in the Fangshan Restaurant in Beijing's Beihai Park today.

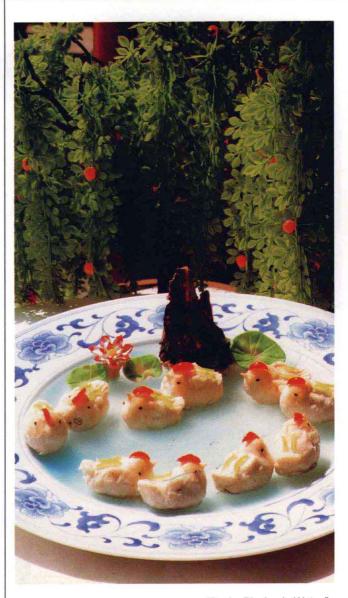
In the Qing Dynasty people had a special liking for venison. It is no exaggeration to say that eating venison was a fad 350 years ago. In winter the streets by the



Emperor Kangxi

Zhengyang Gate (today's Qianmen) bustled with carts coming to the capital from Northeast China. The carts were fully loaded with different kinds of deer meat and other game. Wang Qishu, writing at the time, noted in his Records of Leisures of the Official in Charge of Waters, "There were many delicacies among the goods from the Northeast, including wild ducks, sturgeons, air-dried venison, air-dried mutton, air-dried rabbit meat, pheasants, toads ...when seasoned and cooked by chefs they make delicious eating." It is said that venison was the favorite food of all and that the tail part was the most expensive part of the deer, costing as much as a whole deer. But all these were air-dried; it was very difficult to get fresh meat. No wonder that when Kangxi returned from the hunting grounds every year, he would use his fresh wild deer, pheasants, wild ducks, wild boars to entertain foreign guests. In those days it was a very rare feast indeed.

Clearly, when coming to Beijing from Northeast China, the Manchu found it hard to change from eating game as their staple food. After they established the capital in Beijing and became the rulers of China, they found that the southern provinces had also many dishes with special flavors. Therefore, Kangxi commanded that each part of the country send their best specialty dishes, which led to the birth of the "Manchu-Han Banquet" in Imperial Palace Cuisine. But since the Manchu-Han Banquet also included dishes from Mongol, Hui, Tibetan and other ethnic groups, it actually represented the essence of all Chinese cuisine.



"Ducks Playing in Water," palace-style sweetmeats



Deer's blood and venison are thought pretty by the Chinese tonic.

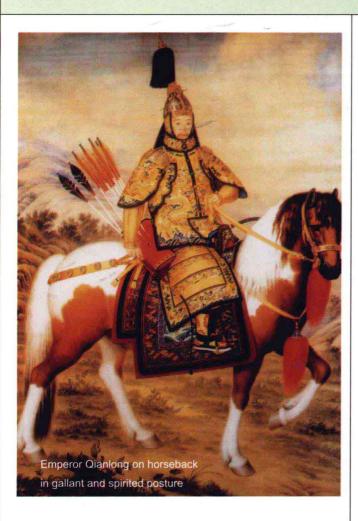


"Two Dragons," hors d'oeuvre



A spread of palace-style sweetmeats

Qianlong's Inspection Tours of South China and Southern Influence on Qing Palace Cuisine



The successive reigns of the Qing emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong were the heyday of the dynasty — a century or more of brilliant administrative and mi-

litary achievements. Under Qianlong in particular, there were huge successes in the political, economic, military and cultural arenas. The Manchu, Han, and other ethnic groups of China wove into, crossed and blended with each other to form the great tapestry that is China's multi-ethnic family, entering a golden age of stability and prosperity.

On six occasions Qianlong traveled south to make inspection tours of provinces south of the Yangtze River. His first intention was to put an end to disaffection among the different ethnic groups and to wave the flag of Great Qing culture in the place of traditional Chinese civilization. Contrary to his expectations, however, it was the Manchu themselves that were assimilated.

One only has to look at their food and drink to see this.

For generation after generation, the Manchu had lived mainly by hunting in the cold mountainous areas of the north. Their way of life involved eating the meat of animals, wearing the skins and furs of animals, sheltering in yurts, or felt tents, and traveling on horseback. Even after taking over China, they still fed mainly on meat and milk. In the first years of the dynasty, the way food was cooked in the palace kitchens was very simple—things were either roasted or braised. They cared little about food that involved lots of ingredients and many stages of subtle processing. On Qianlong's first tour of the beautiful southern provinces and their abundance of products, the first thing he encountered was food prepared

in southern styles. The gastronomic styles of north China and south China were in head-on collision. Having initially been vey averse to southern foods, Qianlong first grew to like them, and finally became a virtual addict. It was the most natural thing in the world for him to be attracted to, influenced by and to indulge in the food of the south, with its refined preparation, its succession of seasonal products, and its diversity of cooking methods. There are many legends and stories illustrating this.

It is recorded in the archives of the Imperial Kitchen in the Palace Museum that, prior to his first tour of the south, Emperor Qianlong had never liked fish. During his first tour of the south, he refused fish at first, but later he developed a particular liking for it, and his meals had to include fish every day. The Imperial Tea and Food Kitchen records that in the last ten-day period of a certain month in 1781, the Emperor "had fish cooked in hot sauce once, fish cooked with fermented soy beans twice, fish cooked with shallot and pepper once, and quick-stirred fish with vinegar six times." The emperor had a special liking for "pickled fish," "fish with bone softened in vinegar," "quick-stirred pastecoated fish," and "quick-stirred whitebait," all of which were delicacies from the southern watertowns of Jiangnan (south of the Yantgtze River).

He brought back with him to Beijing several highlyskilled chefs from the south, and one of them — Zhang Dongguan — became the emperor's favorite. Zhang had been official chef at the Suzhou Weaving Bureau and had been asked to prepare the meals for the emperor when he visited the city. Zhang's speciality was Suzhou-style dishes and all kinds of southern sweetmeats. When a meal was made ready for the emperor in the Qing Palace, each dish or pastry was tabled with a wooden placard with the name of the chef responsible. In this way the emperor could also choose foods from the chefs he liked. Once when Zhang Dongguan was old and ill, he showed his apprentice how to cook a dish for the emperor according to his instructions. Although the name card by the dish still bore the name of Zhang Dongguan, the emperor was immediately aware that the dish tasted different, commanding a eunuch to have the dish removed and prepared again. Zhang Dongguan was frightened into a cold sweat, and only just escaped being punished on the charge of cheating the emperor.

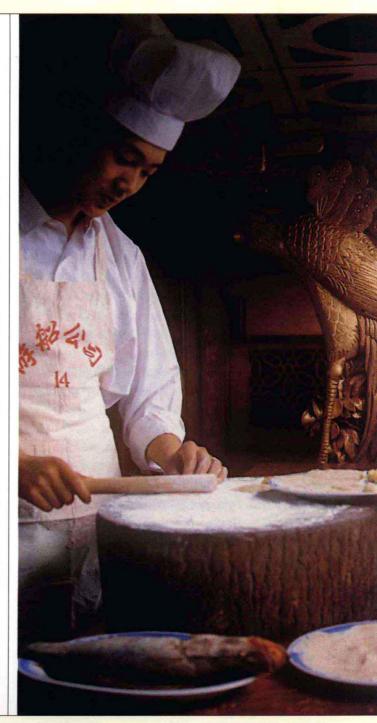
Qianlong's liking for southern foods meant that soon his empress and concubines were also eating southern-style sweets and pastries. The adoption of Jiangnan food by the imperial family prompted a "Jiangnan food craze." Not only did southern cooking predominate on imperial tables; the craze soon swept through the nobility and even the ordinary populace of the capital.

The story of Qianlong's liking for "quick-stirred spinach with quick-fried bean curd" has been recounted widely and often. When he ate this dish for the first time in Yangzhou, he liked it for its lightness, good taste and pleasant colors. The emperor, a lover of elegant

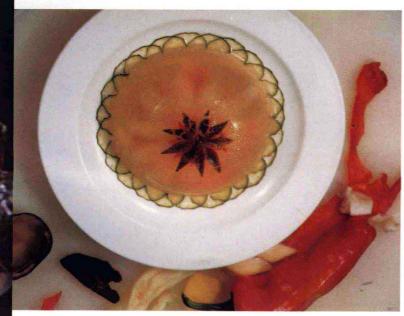
phraseology, improvised a quatrain in praise of this dish, "White jade inset on gold, the red-billed parrot sings." The emperor asked: "How much does the dish cost?" A local official replied: "Just a dozen coins." Qianlong liked it even better because of its low price and tastiness. After he returned to the palace, he ordered the Imperial Kitchen to cook the dish for him again. Qianlong was very observant. He asked an official of the Office of the Imperial Household about the price. The answer was one thousand coins. The emperor blanched, questioning why the price of the same dish should go up one hundredfold between Yangzhou and Beijing. The sly official defended the price thus, "This dish is produced in the south, and it is not easy to prepare here in the capital. So it is expensive." Qianlong sighed, "If it is really so, I shall remember Yangzhou at every meal!"

In the last years of the Qing Dynasty, not only did many restaurants serving southern cooking open up in the capital, but most of the chefs came from the southern city Suzhou as well (See the *Incidents of the Past in the Old Capital*). The Beijing Fangshan, the Tingliguan Restaurant in the Summer Palace and the Fangshan Restaurant in Beihai Park opened during the Republic of China period specializing in palace cuisine, and these three restaurants are still internationally famous.

Using mandarin fish skin as the wrap and its flesh as the filling to make dumplings







Duck-tongue jelly