 Sharing the Beauty of China

|| 中华优秀传统文化传承发展工程支持项目 ||

# CHINESE FOODS




Liu Junru

---



China Intercontinental Press

 Sharing the Beauty of China

# CHINESE FOODS



Liu Junru

---



China Intercontinental Press

## 图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

中国饮食：英文 / 刘军茹著；创思拓益译. —北京：五洲传播出版社，2018.8  
(“中华之美”丛书)  
ISBN 978-7-5085-4023-8

I. ①中… II. ①刘… ②创… III. ①饮食—文化—中国—英文 IV. ①TS971.22

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2018)第191912号

## “中华之美”丛书

主 编：陈陆军  
出 版 人：荆孝敏

## 中国饮食

---

著 者：刘军茹  
译 者：创思拓益  
责任编辑：高 磊  
封面设计：谢金宝  
内文设计：北京本一缘文化传播有限公司  
出版发行：五洲传播出版社  
地 址：北京市海淀区北三环中路31号生产力大楼B座7层  
邮 编：100088  
发行电话：010-82005927，82007837  
网 址：<http://www.cicc.org.cn> <http://www.thatsbooks.com>  
承 印 者：北京利丰雅高长城印刷有限公司  
版 次：2018年8月第1版第1次印刷  
开 本：650×960mm 1/16  
印 张：13  
定 价：160.00元

# Contents

---

**Foreword** 1

**Origins of Foods** 9

Traditional Foods 10

Foreign Foods 23

**Eating Utensils and Eating Systems** 29

Art of Chopsticks 30

Warm Dinner Parties 39

Eating Etiquettes 45

**Foods and Eating Customs** 53

Taste of Home Dishes 54

Eating during Festivals 64

Minority Ethnic Groups' Eating Habits 72

**Drinking Tea and Drinking Wine** 83

Chinese People's Fondness of Tea Drinking 84

Joy of Wine Drinking 105



**Delicacies and Health** 123

Harmony of Five Flavors 124

Culinary Art 135

Ways of Health Preservation 146

Eating Taboos 155



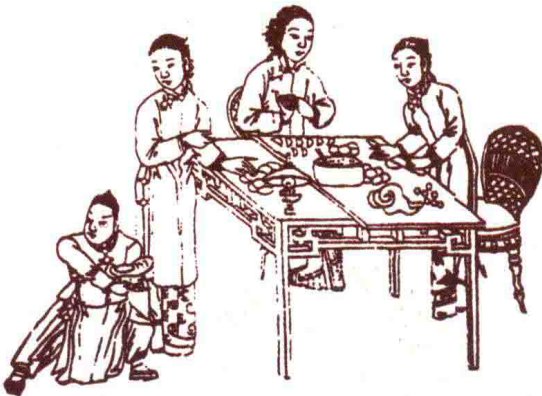
**Eating around China** 163

Local Dishes with Distinct Flavors 164

Snacks in the South, North, West and East 182

Comparison of Restaurants in Various Regions 191

**Postscript: My Meal in a US Cafeteria** 202



# Foreword

There is a widespread saying about foods and drinks in China – “food is the first necessity of the people.” It shows the important place of “eating” in Chinese people’s life. Eating is not just for elimination of hunger. The availability of foods, eating ability and eating skill are deemed as a kind of “good fortune.” In later ages, advocates of eating culture often cited the Chinese ancient thinker Confucius’ words “food and sex are basic human desires” as a positive ideological basis of



On October 18, 2013, dishes were evaluated on the site of the Foods and Drinks Exposition during the Nanjing Gourmet Festival.

this attitude of enjoying life. “Eating” is people’s basic desire and instinct. The neutral thought of enjoying life moderately instead of excessively and being ordinary and harmonic instead of going to the extreme is deemed as the core of Confucianism; meanwhile, the Taoist philosophy of pursuing nature and unity of man and nature also deeply influences and integrates with Chinese people’s daily life. Confucius said, “If we don’t know life, how can we know death?” This clearly shows Chinese people’s specific and pragmatic attitude towards philosophical issues such as life, which is different from Westerners’ purely metaphysical speculation. In other words, Chinese people’s spirit and philosophy are often integrated with material life, and their understanding of the world and life is manifested in specific matters in life. The most specific one in life is perhaps none other than eating.

Chinese people pay attention to eating and know how to eat. Thanks to their culinary skills, many raw materials that seem inedible to foreigners become delicious delicacies after Chinese cooks’ work. Here the key is the art of preparing delicacies. Chinese people cook foodstuffs with different tastes together to produce different tastes. They add various seasonings and auxiliary materials, keep mixing them, and let them supplement and penetrate each other to prepare various delicious foods. Isn’t such highly imaginative blending a kind of art? Chinese philosophy holds that there is no absolute and single thing and emphasizes blending dynamically before reaching balance at last. The changes in them are judged mainly relying on intuition instead of reason. The secret of Chinese delicious foods is that such art of blending featuring highly individual comprehension emphasizes measures, local changes and overall coordination. This is the essence of China’s culinary art, the most elusive and indescribable aspect, and of course the reason why Chinese foods are wonderful.

Like in many countries with vast territories, the greatest division of local flavors of Chinese foods and drinks is south-north division. Though the best rice in China is produced in the northeast, residents



On the evening of November 12, 2013, the “Chinese Food Festival in UN” activity sponsored by the China Cuisine Association began in the UN headquarters. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon talked about how he felt about China’s eating culture in the evening activity freely, and said “food is the first necessity of the people” and “have a good appetite” in Chinese.

in the north still like wheaten food best. The most classic dishes in the north are Beijing’s instant-boiled mutton and roast duck and Shandong dishes; in the south, the staple food is rice and dishes are relatively diverse, including both spicy Sichuan dishes and Hunan dishes, sweet and fresh Huaiyang dishes and Guangdong dishes mainly consisting of seafood and soup. Therefore, foreigners who have been to China not only marvel at the numerous types of Chinese local foods, but also admire the changeful tastes of Chinese dishes.

Though dishes in various areas have different tastes, “good colors, smells and tastes” are pursued for all dishes. Dishes’ shapes and colors are external aspects, but their tastes are internal. Giving emphasis to both the inside and the external appearance is also an important facet of the Chinese view on eating. Therefore, eating Chinese dishes not

only satisfies people's gustatory needs, but also is a kind of visual enjoyment. To improve foods' colors, cooks usually choose proper meat and vegetable foods, including one main material and three auxiliary materials of two or three different colors, mix the colors of blue, green, red, yellow, white, black and brown, and use appropriate culinary techniques to improve the colors of dishes. "Smells" refers to adding appropriate flavorings such as onions, ginger, garlic, wine, anise seeds, cinnamon, pepper, sesame oil and mushrooms to make cooked or boiled foods smell delicious and stimulate eaters' appetite. While cooking various foods, several techniques are used including frying in shallow oil, stir-frying, braising, steaming, frying, quick-frying and stewing. Attention is paid to preserving foods' original tastes, and various seasonings can be added appropriately to make dishes taste salty, sweet, sour and spicy. Some cooks also prepare various dish flowers made of tomatoes, radishes and cucumbers and put them on exquisite porcelain dishware, making eating in China the real art of foods with good colors, smells and tastes.

In comparison with American people who maintain physical health or great figures by calculating foods' heat quantity and cholesterol level and Japanese people engrossed in trying various health foods to stay young, Chinese people's health awareness is manifested in the diet balance theory that "medicine and food have the same origin." Because they firmly believe that foods have the effect of physical recuperation and curing of illnesses, many edible plants with the functions of disease prevention and health protection have become Chinese people's home dishes. Meanwhile, Chinese cuisine emphasizes "eating no rice but is of the finest quality, nor meat but is finely minced," much attention is paid to dish quantity adjustment and matching of meat foods and vegetable foods, and various nutrients are proportioned appropriately for both dishes and soup to achieve the purpose of alimentation and health preservation. With respect to capacity for eating, one secret of longevity passed on from generation to generation of Chinese people is to stop

eating when 70% to 80% full.

Chinese people's eating customs in festivals epitomize people's prayer for safety and good wishes. In particular, in the Spring Festival, the most important traditional festival in China, the reunion dinner of the Lunar New Year's Eve, dinner invitations in the 1<sup>st</sup> lunar month, fresh fish symbolizing annual surplus and auspicious dumplings are all full of people's good wishes for their family members and friends. Besides, many rites of Chinese people such as eating wedding candies and eating longevity noodles on birthdays are tied to foods and drinks. Chinese people are most particular about table manners and have a strict set of rules – for example, while eating, people must be seated; when people of different ages are at the same table, the oldest person



On October 17, 2013, at the opening ceremony of the China Gourmet Week in Paris, France, a Chinese cook performed preparation of dragon whiskers noodles.

should take a seat first; while eating dishes, one must use chopsticks; while drinking soup, one must use a spoon; while eating, nobody should talk loudly. Today, the greatest change in these traditional manners is that while eating, more and more people actively abandon the ancient precept that “no one should talk while eating.” Indeed, while eating together with Chinese people, one often finds the eating environment very noisy and that many people with their mouths full still whisper to each other. This situation occurs mainly because modern Chinese people take the dinner as an important social intercourse opportunity. They need to discuss easy and pleasant topics at this moment of relaxation and harmonious atmosphere to enhance mutual understanding and emotional ties.

Chinese eating culture also extends “eating” to other fields, which can be seen from the popular vocabulary’s composition – for example, the Chinese equivalent of getting a slap in the face is “eating a slap in the face,” the Chinese equivalent of being left out in the cold is “eating close door soup,” the Chinese equivalent of suffering losses is “eating losses,” the Chinese equivalent of being very popular is “eating delicacies,” and the Chinese phrase “packing excessive food” describes severe situations. When people meet and greet each other, Westerners say good morning and Chinese people say “have you eaten dinner”... “Eating” is everywhere. This also shows the influence of “eating” on Chinese people’s deep ideology and culture from one aspect.

Chinese people set great store by enjoyment of good foods, demonstrating joyful and leisurely eating in all aspects of daily life and pursuing their own “art of eating.” Whether they live happily or sadly and whether they are rich or poor, Chinese people are content with their lots, enjoy life and love life. The leisurely enjoyment of a pot of light-scented tea and a cup of turbid wine fully reflects Chinese people’s philosophical thought and aesthetic pursuit of neutralization, inclusiveness, emphasis on comprehension and on nature, unity of man and nature and balance of yin and yang. This eating culture’s influence

on the world's diversified cultures is far beyond eating itself.

Chinese people spread the old and unique eating culture around the world. Its contribution to the world is not less than that of the Four Great Inventions: by planting soybeans, Chinese people develop an important source of vegetable protein for the world; tea leaves provide a refreshing, thirst-quenching, convenient and cheap drink for the world; Chinese chopsticks and porcelain tableware popular in the world for more than 1,000 years have become exemplary practical artistic utensils; perhaps there is no other country like China in the world with so many delicacies and consummate culinary skills... At present, Chinese dishes are available almost everywhere in the world. Many foreigners not only like eating Chinese dishes, but also want to study Chinese cuisine. "Learning to cook Chinese dishes"



On May 16, 2010, some participants in the 35<sup>th</sup> Miss Bikini International World Final learned to cook Chinese dishes in Beijing to experience China's eating culture.

has also become a fad among young people of many countries. All foreigners traveling in China think it the greatest joy and gain to eat authentic Chinese delicacies. Of course, with China's opening up, foods and drinks of various countries in the world also emerge in Chinese metropolises successively, including all kinds of food such as Italian pizzas, French dinners, Japanese dishes, American hamburgers, German beer, Brazilian roast meat, Indian curry and Swiss cheese, so the phrase "eating in China" is more veritable.

# ORIGINS OF FOODS



The reason for great differences among the eating habits of various regions in the world should be attributed to the synergy of several factors including ecological limitations, population sizes and productivity levels. Experience from long-term farming lets Chinese people recognize many edible plants not known by many Westerners and discover that most nutrients necessary to man's survival can be obtained from plants. From the pre-Qin period, Chinese people mainly ate cereals, taking in more grain than meat. In comparison with the food structure of Westerners eating animal foods excessively, Chinese people's eating habits of taking grain as the staple food and taking fish, meat, eggs, milk and vegetables as non-staple ones, to many nutritionists, are not only conducive to nutrition and health, but also in conformity with the concept of energy conservation and environmental protection advocated in the world today.

## **Traditional Foods**

As one saying goes, the reason for great differences among the eating habits of various regions in the world should be attributed to the synergy of several factors including ecological limitations, population sizes and productivity levels. Most meat recipes are found in regions where population density is relatively low, farmland is not needed or land is not suitable for use as farmland. Reliance on meat perhaps promotes economic activities such as sharing and exchange in these regions. In contrast, the habits of eating less meat and taking cereals and plant roots, stems and leaves as main foods are always associated with environments of huge population pressure, limited arable land area and insufficient meat supply. Food supply there relies more on self-sufficient production modes. Of course, there is no distinction between good and bad eating habits, and they do not remain the same forever. With population flow in the world, eating traditions that used to be limited to one area might



Farmers in Anren County, Hunan Province tilled land at the annual tilling commencement ceremony to thank the Yan Emperor (Holy Farmer) for “tasting all herbs and teaching farmers to cultivate the five cereals” in the county and pray for favorable weather and bumper grain harvests in the year. This ceremony has a history of thousands of years.

also be accepted by more and more people and become more and more inclusive. Perhaps people can see man’s common footsteps of development from China’s eating culture with a long history.

As one origin of agriculture in the world, China invented farming modes such as water diversion, canal construction and development of irrigation agriculture on mountain slopes. Around 5400 BC, millet was planted in the Yellow River basin, and loess caves were used to store grain; around 4800 BC, rice was planted in the Yangtze River basin. After entering the agricultural society, Chinese people formed the food structure with grain as stable food supplemented by meat, which has continued till today.

*The Yellow Emperor’s Internal Classic*, an ancient Chinese work, describes Chinese people’s food structure as follows: “The five cereals are staple food, the five fruits are auxiliary food, the five meats are beneficial, and the five vegetables should be taken in abundance.” Cereals, fruits and vegetables are all plant foods. Grain crops were called “five cereals” or “six cereals” in ancient times, including



Villagers in Doilungdeqen County, Tibet are performing Tibetan opera to usher in the Ongkor Festival prevalent in Tibetan agricultural areas. Every year, before yellow crops are reaped, Tibetan farmers in festive clothes, holding "chiema" (five-cereal containers) and highland barley wine cups symbolizing bumper harvests in their hands, sing and dance to celebrate the Ongkor Festival heralding bumper harvests.

glutinous millet, broomcorn millet, wheat, beans, fiber crops and rice. Glutinous millet is also called yellow rice with tiny, yellow and glutinous grains. Broomcorn millet is today's millet called "the head of the five cereals." Both glutinous millet and broomcorn millet originated in China and spread to Europe in the prehistoric period. They were main grain crops in the north of China in ancient times. Beans are Chinese people's main source of edible protein. Wheat and rice did not originate in China. It is generally thought that rice originated in India and Southeast Asia. The earliest cultivated rice in the world was discovered on the site of the Hemudu culture of the early neolith period (c. 5000-3000 BC) in China. Wheat originated in Central Asia and West Asia, and spread to China from the northwest around the neolith period. Besides, sorghum also originated in China, and spread to India and Persia (today's Iran) in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.