

BOOK REVIEW

Shuenn-Der Yu ed., *Food Cultures and Technologies*. Taipei: The Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 2022. 297 pp.

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This book further expands the burgeoning work in the anthropological study of food vis-à-vis technology and globalization, aiming to better understand the role of the skills, knowledge, and material devices in creating and reproducing textures, flavors, and appearances of food that represent identities or facilitate social connections among people. Specifically, the chapters in this volume examine different food-related technologies applied in various stages of food production and consumption. These include soy sauce brewing technology, changing norms of rice quality and sensory evaluation, rice gifts, aquaculture science, the co-evolution of taste and technologies in the case of cabbage, French-pastry making related technologies, wine-making technology, social media, and globalization/localization of food and cuisines.

The book originated from a conference on the same topic, Food Cultures, and Technologies which took place in 2018 in Taipei at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, in collaboration with the University of Strasbourg, France. Editor Shuenn-Der Yu is a Full Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethnology of Academia Sinica, with main research interests in economic anthropology, historical anthropology, and the anthropology of the senses.

The book consists of 12 chapters, which can be grouped into two parts. One part focuses on food culture and technology in Taiwan, while the other part comprises chapters that explore the globalization of food cultures, sense-making, and technology. In this book, the term "technology" extends beyond technoscience and encompasses cultural knowledge, techniques, strategies, and practices that contribute to the palatability and significance of food.

In terms of the role of technoscience, several chapters of the book explore various aspects. They delve into how food is reproduced (Chia-Ling Hsu, Yujen Chen, and

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Shuenn-Der Yu); how new technologies influence the perception and presentation of foods and cuisines (Hino Midori), how new technologies have brought significant changes to food culture (Allen Chun), how new taste standards have co-evolved with technology (Eric Siu-kei Cheng, Chienyuan Chen, Yujen Chen, and Shuenn-Der Yu); and how contemporary technologies are utilized to recreate traditional flavors (Chienyuan Chen).

The book also addresses other anthropological concerns, covering a range of topics. For instance, it examines the connection between cosmology and the taste of a meal, as well as other cultural realms (Padonou Assomption). It explores the relationship between kinship and food preparation and presentation (Mei-Ling Chien). Additionally, it delves into how actors have redesigned recipes and transformed culinary skills in the global food industry (David Y.H. Wu). Certain chapters in the book discuss the development of new skills, concepts, and values in the exploration of novel food products (Eric Siu-kei Cheng and Fong-Ming Yang). On the other hand, a few chapters provide context for how the market, environment, and tourism have influenced contemporary food cultures and food production technology (De-boos Salomé and Chienyuan Chen).

Chapter 1 is titled “From Digital Cameras to Social Media: How Food Photo-Taking Behavior Spread and is Shared in Cyberspace.” As the title suggests, this chapter examines the impact of internet technology on people’s knowledge and attitudes toward food cultures. The author draws on one’s own 20 years of experience in digital photography practices, the creation of a personal website, and interaction with other online users. The chapter also utilizes data from the NHK Survey of Japanese dietary habits to highlight the significant role of digital media in relation to food. Food photo-taking behaviors not only serve as a means of acquiring social status but also as a way to document personal memories.

Chapter 2, titled “Making “Good” Rice: Changing Norms of Rice Quality and Sensory Evaluation in Twentieth-Century Taiwan,” explores the transition in rice preference from indica to japonica and the development of a sensory evaluation system in Taiwan during the twentieth century. Chen highlights the significant role played by the colonial government in shaping taste preferences. The government mobilized scientists and farmers to align with its objectives and meet market demand, leading to the establishment of a system for sensory and equality evaluation. The transformation had a profound impact on various aspects of rice production, including technological aspects, which were heavily influenced by the standard and tastes of Japan. Consequently, consumer tastes were shaped not only by personal preferences but also by commercial and political factors.

Chapter 3, titled “Making Taiwanese Tilapia: Categories of Embodied Experience, Market and Aquaculture Science,” enhances our understanding of how cultural factors, such as market expectations and local knowledge, influence various stages of food production. This includes species selection, taste cultivation, branding, and market differentiation. The chapter sheds light on how these factors drive changes

in the production process and ultimately shape the characteristics of Taiwanese tilapia.

Chapter 4, titled “The Coevolution of Taste and Technologies: Cabbage in Taiwan’s Gastronomy” examines the consumption patterns of cabbage since 1989 and explores the reasons behind the popularity of fried cabbage as a staple dish in everyday life. The author traces the historical origins of cabbage in Europe and its introduction to Taiwan by both the Dutch East India Company and Chinese from mainland China during the Qing Dynasty. Throughout the 20th century, Taiwanese technicians and Japanese breeding companies collaborated to develop new cabbage varieties, with the dominant cultivar being *Hatsuaki* (Early Autumn), which currently constitute 70-80 percent of cabbage production in Taiwan. Over the past two decades, cabbage consumption has significantly increased, and this can be attributed to changes in consumption trends, such as the rise of Japanese-style (*shabu shabu*) hot pot restaurants, cafeterias, *bento* (lunch box) businesses, and the growing reliance on catering services in elementary and middle schools.

Chapter 5, titled “Producing Modern Taste: Kikkoman and Soy Sauce Brewing Technology,” employs a case study of Kikkoman to discuss soy sauce brewing technology in Japan and Taiwan. Kikkoman is a big player in the soy sauce brewing industry from Japan, and it is also the biggest foreign investor in Taiwan’s soy sauce industry. The author identified two traditions of brewing soy sauce in Taiwan, which tie to the immigrant and colonial history. The two methods and their associated technologies are used to draw a line between what is considered a traditional brewing method and the modernized one. On the contrary, in Japan, brewing technology is seen as connecting tradition and modernity. This case study explains why there is a more complex scene of soy sauce brewing in Taiwan. It also explains how the Japanese brewing company Kikkoman uses different metaphors, such as steelmaking, sumo wrestling, and ancient biotechnology in the corporate stories to help convey a sense that the company carried a mission to transform while preserving the dietary tradition.

Chapter 6, titled “Invention of Pan-China Cuisine in American Chinese Restaurants,” traces the stories of significant individuals, namely restaurant owners, in the United States to highlight the patterns and transformations within Chinese restaurants during the Cold War Era.

In Chapter 7, titled “Cooking at the Core: Regimes of Taste in the Formation of Cuisines,” Chun examines the changes in Chinese cuisine prior to and following the introduction of the chain restaurant brand McDonald’s appeared in the American then global food scene and brought new trends in the food industry. The author utilizes examples from various Chinese cuisines to illustrate the intricate relationship between taste, authenticity, and branding.

In Chapter 8, titled “The Globalization of New Technology: How Taiwan Came to Embrace French Pastry,” Hsu provides a comprehensive account of the baking industry’s development in Taiwan. The author conducts interviews with pastry chefs

trained in Taiwan and France, comparing their perspectives and experiences. This analysis sheds light on how new products and technologies were introduced to Taiwan to overcome environmental factors such as high temperatures and humidity levels in the air.

In Chapter 9, titled “New Latitude Garage Wine: Taste Transition in Taiwan’s Local Winemaking,” Yang highlights the challenge posed by Taiwan’s hot and humid climate to grape cultivation and the production of high-quality wine. The chapter traces the history of winemaking in Taiwan back to the period of Japanese occupation (1895-1945), during which Japanese agronomists utilized sugar in fermentation to produce alcohol and enhance the aroma. With Taiwan’s entry into the World Trade Organization, the introduction of foreign wines further motivated local winegrowers to embrace new technologies. These included the implementation of traceability systems and the development of unique approaches to viticulture and winemaking.

Chapter 10, titled “Old People Eat (S)nganphe Rice or Barley: A Question of Modernity,” offers a meticulous and vibrant depiction of the usage of barley and rice during various occasions and seasons in Zangskar Valley. The chapter also explores the differing preferences for rice or barley among different generations, as rice is often associated with modernity and experiences in India.

Chapter 11, titled “The Taste of Life”: Eating and Discovering Taste in the Gun Community in Porto-Novo (Benin),” provides ethnographic observations and examples showcasing how the evolution of taste can catalyze the manifestation of other aesthetic expressions, including dance, within the Gun Community in Porto-Novo, Benin. The chapter emphasizes that eating is not solely a means of sustenance but also an avenue for experiencing the world, love, and deriving pleasure.

Chapter 12, titled “Technology of Making Kinship and Gender Through Rice Gift among the Hmub in Eastern Guizhou,” delves into the knowledge, techniques, and practices involved in the preparation and presentation of rice gifts, highlighting how they embody kinship and gender relations within the Hmub community in Eastern Guizhou, China. The chapter provides a comprehensive examination of the relationships between the gift-givers and the host family, along with detailed descriptions of the gift contents and various classifications of ceremonial gifts. In addition to its role in consumption and nourishment, rice is presented as a gift for public display, and the exchange of rice gifts also involves the transmission of genealogical knowledge.

The book’s editor, Shuenn-Der Yu, emphasizes that this book does not center around the marketing of specialty commodities as artisanal or traditional. Instead, it places a strong emphasis on the crucial concept of multisensory taste, encompassing texture, flavors, images, and texts, and how they evoke cultural memory, values, aesthetics, and cosmology. This book will prove valuable to individuals interested in studying or teaching about the anthropology of food culture or global food history, particularly with a focus on Asia.