

## A Chinese Culinary History

### Description

To many, Chinese cuisine is synonymous with spicy food. Did you know that the Chile peppers now widely used in Chinese cooking were introduced in the region only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century? This course introduces social and historical developments using culinary history as a prism. What do cooking and food habits tell us of Chinese culture? We will explore these topics through a variety of media – primary sources, newspapers, photographs, paintings, and movies. The course is divided into sections on the history of food; primary sources and representations of food; and Chinese food outside China. In the last weeks, we will concentrate on food culture in Shanghai in the last century.

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### Structure of the course

With a couple of exceptions marked below, from week #2 to week #10 we will follow the same structure: on M and W, I lecture, introducing the historical context and the background of sources, highlighting the topic. On Fridays, we will discuss the readings and the topics for that week, following some prompt that I will give you on Sakai. You are encouraged to answer these questions in writing in the forum, having a first go at formulating ideas in your mind and organizing your thoughts. I will review these submissions.

The in-class discussion is a weekly occasion to develop your oral skills. There will be also possibilities to have extra-credit assignments (e.g., leading a in-class discussion; attending events related to Chinese studies that took place at Pomona and submitting a 2 page write up on them. These events will be advertised on Sakai).

For weeks #10 to #13, we will work with Mark Swislocki's *Culinary Nostalgia*. You will be guided to write a book review. This assignment develops ability to summarize lengthy arguments, critical engagement, and writing skills. This first paper will then become the basis for

the final paper, where you take one aspect of interested to you discussing in Swislocki's book and develop it further. This final written project will allow you to review course material, develop critical skills and research skills. I will guide you in learning how to use library resources.

Students are also warmly invited to use resources available on campus, especially the [CSWIM](#). Sakai has a page with all available resources.

### Textbooks and readings

Since we will work a lot with it, you are welcome to purchase Mark Swislocki's *Culinary Nostalgia*. However, note that the library [has digital access to it](#), if you work well with PDFs.

Other books that may be helpful to consult are

- Patricia Ebrey. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*. 2nd ed. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Conrad Schirokauer and Miranda Brown, *A Brief History of Chinese Civilization* ISBN-13: 978- 0495913238

There are copies in the Claremont Libraries put on course reserve, as well as in my office. You can consult these at any point.

There are several online resources too. You find a list in my PressBook linked on Sakai.

### A note on resource sharing

Whenever possible, I will ask you to download from the library electronic resources available. There is a guide on Sakai that shows you how to do so if you do not know already.

**Why do I not just share PDFs in a folder?** Because every resource comes at a cost. After talking with librarians who work for the Claremont Colleges, I realized how much their budget is continuously trimmed and cut down, year after year after year. Libraries are very important for education and the communities that can benefit from accessing them. Perhaps right now you do not make a large use of the library resources - but you may need them in two years' time, during a summer project, etc. Libraries also have **so much more** than just books for class! You can have access to magazines, newspapers, etc. You may find yourself using their website more than you think.

The more we click, the more we borrow books, and the more we download material, the easier it is for librarians to avoid getting their funds cut off. So... let's give them some data.

### Grading and assignments

The grade is divided into two large areas: oral performance and written performance. Each is 50% of the grade.

**Oral performance** is based on in-class participation (discussions on Fridays and engagement with Mondays and Wednesdays lectures). Starting with week 3, students will be divided in groups and each group will act as discussion leaders in Friday sessions, following questions that I will put on Sakai (but you can also develop your own questions).

**Written performance** is based on the following assignments:

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- Weekly written responses (15%). This is a low-stake assignment. For almost every week, I will post questions for Friday's discussions. You can engage with these questions in writing, as indicated in Sakai, responding to what is raised by your peers. By the end of the course, you will need to have 6 weekly assignments in writing on Sakai besides the mandatory ones noted below. You are free to choose when do to them, according to your own schedule.
- book review of *Culinary Nostalgia* (15%). This is an exercise in summarizing and critical reading.
- Two mini-papers (10 % each). The following list gives an overview of the themes covered in this class: food is political; food is cultural; food is ritual; food is history; food is identity. For each mini-paper, identify one theme that you want to focus on. Identify readings that relate to the theme you want to write about, and use them as your sources. Write up around 3,000 words reviewing the readings and based on this, build a narrative. You do not have to formulate an argument; you should identify 1) what is stated in each reading; 2) how it relates to other readings; 3) your take on it. You can be critical and disagree with what is stated in the readings. The weekly work will build up to this.

Writing is a slower activity than on-the-spot production. It gives you a chance to refine and reformulate what is being written, and critically engage not just with the material of this course but also *your own* assessments of the readings, and change your ideas as you learn more. Refer to my rubric "Writing Skills in Pills" linked in Sakai to have some guidance.

You also have the possibility to add to your grade by going to events promoted on Sakai and do a 2 page write-up about it (summarize + share your ideas).

### Course policies

Syllabi are live entities. It should work for all of us – students and instructors. We can modify it if we realize that what is tabled below does not work for us. If you have comments, you should share them. It may not be possible to accommodate all of them, but this should not prevent us from talking about what does and does not work.

Being in college can be intense, for different reasons. As an instructor, I want to balance flexibility with commitment. There are three deadlines for the written assignments in this class, but there is some flexibility: submissions that come within 36 hrs from the deadline are perfectly fine (but please check each assignment instruction anyways). If you need a longer extension, contact me.

You have two "bonus cards" – you can use these if you do not have time to do the readings, but are coming to class. Let me know at the beginning of class if you are using a bonus card. No questions asked!

Electronic devices: I do not object to using laptops or other electronic devices to take notes, check dates and information being discussed in class, but please make sure to mute you're your devices. You should also note that research has shown the use of note-writing more efficient to learning.

AI writing tools: tools such as [Chat GPT](#) and [Writefull](#) can be useful, and even fun. Play with them, by all means, but remember that anything they can do relies on the fact that it has already been done. While they may help with the writing, they do not produce anything original, and while you are not asked to come up with new arguments, you do have to give your input. Furthermore, because of the redundant wordings of these tools, it is fairly easy to spot them in written assignments. Use them at your own risk. Nondisclosure of their usage may result in plagiarism.

Accommodations: please reach out to me via email if you want to discuss any accommodations you require, and check the College's [accessibility resources](#). Information on wellness at Pomona is listed here, <https://www.pomona.edu/students/wellness>

### It's movie night!

I organized a small movie series! These are the dates and what we will watch:

- Feb 7th *Eat Drink Man Woman*
- Feb 21th *In the Mood for Love*
- March 7th *Ocean Heaven*
- Mark 21st *Happy Together*

Where: Oldenborg International Theater, 7PM

Why: movies are educational! On March 27th (week 10), there will be a guest talk by Hangping Xu from Santa Barbara on *Happy Together*, and we will have a reading on *In the Mood for Love*. I think watching movies together may be more fun to prepare for these! You can bring your friends, as long as they are students!

1. **Do not post your event on Facebook** or any other social media. Oldenborg is a Residence Hall and therefore external guests (Non-7C students/faculty/staff) are not allowed. CHIRPS is ok.
2. No food/drink allowed.

Participation is not mandatory, but encouraged. There are two movies that you have to watch since they will be part of class discussions too, these are *Happy Together* and *In the Mood for Love*. Please watch them by yourself in preparation to the course events cited above.

### Schedule

Class meets MWF, 11:00 – 11:60 AM. Crookshank 2.

#### Week #1 Jan 18<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> Course Introduction

W Jan 18<sup>th</sup> overview of course.

F Jan 20<sup>th</sup> Why a course on food?

Readings: “Why is Chinese Food so popular?” and “why Study Food?” in CHEN, YONG. *Chop Suey, USA: The Story of Chinese Food in America*. Columbia University Press, 2014.

No written assignment. After the readings, think about what food represents to you, and (if you eat it), what Chinese food represents. We will discuss it in class.

**Week #2 Jan 23<sup>rd</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> the History of Food Production in China**

- M Jan 23<sup>rd</sup> Liu, Fuller, and Jones, “Early Agriculture in China”, in Barker, Graeme, and Candice Goucher, eds. *The Cambridge World History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- W Jan 25<sup>th</sup> “Why chopsticks? Their origin and original function”, from Wang, Q. Edward. 2015. *Chopsticks: A Cultural and Culinary History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- F Jan 27<sup>th</sup> Look at the picture of this [ritual vessel](#), [this wine vessel](#), [this jar](#), and read [this overview](#). How do you imagine these to have been used? In what context?

**Week #3 Jan 30<sup>th</sup> – Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> Food Production in China**

Columbian exchanges & the Chinese area within them

- M Jan 30<sup>th</sup> Sections “Chinese Food Meets Western Food on the Silk Road,” and “China after Tang,” in chapter three of *Crossroads of Cuisine: The Eurasian Heartland, the Silk Roads and Food*, pages 95-110.
- W Feb 1<sup>st</sup> Nathan Nunn and Nancy Qian, “The Columbian Exchange: A History of Disease, Food, and Ideas,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 24.2 (2010): 163-188.
- F Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> “Mao’s Little Red Spice,” from Brian Russell Dott. 2020. *The Chile Pepper in China: A Cultural Biography*. New York: Columbia University Press.

**Assignment:** using a tool of your own choice (a screenshot of a world map + your drawings, [MapHub](#), Adobe programs of your choice, or a piece of paper if you feel like going analog), draw a map of what was exchanged where. You can do it for the reading for Monday, Wed, or both. Submit as JPEG or PNG by Thursday midday. And Yes - you can be creative!

Extra readings: “[All the Lunar Year dishes that will bring you the best luck](#),” online magazine article  
“[China’s hottest woman](#),” The Guardian  
“[Exploring Laoganma](#),” Yicai Global

**Week #4 Feb 6<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> Food and History in China**

Ancient China

- M Feb 6<sup>th</sup> R. Sterckx, *Food, Sacrifice and Sagehood in early China*, “Cooking the World” pp. 49-82.
- T Feb 7<sup>th</sup> movie night! “Eat Drink Man Woman,” @ Oldenborg International Theater, 7PM.
- W Feb 9<sup>th</sup> Ancient narratives about Cook Ding 丁, Taihegong 太和公, Yi Yin 伊尹. **Discussion session moved to this class.**

**Assignment:** in reading Sterckx's chapter, you may have noticed a pattern. Quotations from primary sources (those parts of texts that appear to be indented differently) are preceded and followed by paragraphs that unpack the context. For example, right at the beginning Sterckx wants to tell you about the story of Cook Ding. He does not simply quote the Chinese text and let the reader understand its meaning.

Instead, Sterckx starts by telling you about how famous the tale is ("the famous tale... one of the most quoted passages..."), where it comes from, and a key to interpret the main protagonists: Duke Wenhui asks his cook for advice, and this is also strange, since usually dukes are in charge.

Then Sterckx cites the narrative. After it, there are 2 more paragraphs that explain how the narrative has been interpreted. He then moves on to the figure of the butcher ("let's turn to the butters first"). So you have a structure that more or less goes as follows: "introductions + quote + explanation / interpretation".

Now, your assignment is that of using this structure to discuss a passage from the texts you have to read for Wed. Naturally, you are not scholars of early Chinese intellectual history - don't know how these metaphors have been interpreted by others. But sometimes we scholars work with texts that were discovered only recently, so we cannot turn to other scholars (contemporary or from the past). We just have to interpret it ourselves.

Find one / two paragraphs from the texts for Wed that you find struck you as interesting. Those paragraphs will be your quotes. Then mimic the structure in Sterckx's chapter: introduce the text where the quote is from to the best of your knowledge, what the quote is about, insert the quote, and then write up another paragraph or two where you interpret the passage, again, to the best of your knowledge. Write around 800 words including the quote (but don't have a quote of 700 words...).

This assignment targets close-reading ability. Think about every word, what it could mean, the metaphor presented in the texts, who the characters are and their relationship. **Submit by Feb 8th 8AM** so that I have time to look before class.

F Feb 10<sup>th</sup> NO CLASS. Instructor at a conference. Read ahead!

### **Week #5 Feb 13<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> Food and History in China**

Cheese and wine in Chinese history

M Feb 13<sup>th</sup> Miranda Brown, "Mr. Song's Cheeses: Southern China, 1368-1644," *Gastronomica*, 2019

**Mandatory assignment for all:** write a two-page summary of this reading. See my rubric "Writing Skills in Pills" on how to summarize.

W Feb 15<sup>th</sup> *Drunk in China* (selections)

**Mandatory assignment for all:** go back to the summary you did for Monday. Make a copy, and turn it into a one page summary.

F Feb 17<sup>th</sup> Su Shi, "Mysterious are the Eternal Verities that Lie in Thick Wine." + pomes by alcoholic authors

Submit both your summaries in Sakai.

**Week #6 Feb 20<sup>th</sup> –24<sup>th</sup> Food and History in China**

- M Feb 20<sup>th</sup> Guest lecture by Dr. Sarah Yu, Desales University, Zoom lecture.  
T Feb 21<sup>st</sup>, movie night! “In the Mood for Love,” @ Oldenborg International Theater, 7PM.  
W Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> “The Mongol melting pot,” in *The Emperor’s Feast, a history of China in twelve meals*, J. Clements.  
F Feb 24<sup>th</sup> “Revolution is not a dinner party,” in *The Emperor’s Feast, a history of China in twelve meals*, J. Clements.

**Week #7 Feb 27<sup>th</sup> – March 3<sup>rd</sup> Food and History in China**

When food gets political

- M Feb 27<sup>th</sup> The power of the Mango.  
Readings: [Chairman Mao’s Mangoes](#), [China’s curious cult of the mango](#), [The Mango Cult Of Mao](#).  
W March 1<sup>st</sup> 1972 Nixon banquet with Zhou Enlai. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/nixons-1972-visit-china-50>  
<https://www.gettyimages.com.au/photos/en-lai-chou>  
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/jan/19/from-the-classical-archive-nixon-in-china-john-adams-premiere-oct-1987>  
TR March 2<sup>nd</sup> Guest talk by Mark Csikszentmihalyi, “Who is Confucius?” Pearsons 101, 4:15PM. Counts as extra credit  
F March 3<sup>rd</sup> Michelle T. King (2020) What Is “Chinese” Food? Historicizing the Concept of Culinary Regionalism,” *Global Food History*, 6:2, 89-109.

**Saturday 4<sup>th</sup>**: trip to LA Chinatown + lunch!

**Week #8 March 6<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> Chinese Food outside China**

History of Chinatowns, Chinatowns in LA, food & identity

- M March 6<sup>th</sup> “The Globalization of Chinese Food. The Early Stages,” in *China to Chinatown*, J/ A. G. Roberts, 2004  
“[Chinese Immigration and the Chinese Exclusion Acts](#)” Office of the Historian  
T March 7<sup>th</sup>, movie night! “Ocean Heaven,” @ Oldenborg International Theater, 7PM.  
W March 8<sup>th</sup> “[History of New Chinatown](#),” on LA Chinatown.  
The case of Mexicali: “[The Chinese-Mexican Cuisine you will find only along the border](#),” and “[The Chinese-Mexican Cuisine Born Of U.S. Prejudice](#).”  
F March 10<sup>th</sup> “[Eating Chinese Food in South Africa](#)”

**March 13<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>**

SPRING BREAK. No class.

**Week #9 March 20<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> Chinese Food outside China**

- M March 20<sup>th</sup> visit to Scripps’ collection of Chinese art  
T March 21<sup>st</sup>, movie night! “Happy together,” @ Oldenborg International Theater, 7PM.  
W March 22<sup>nd</sup> Guest Lecture by Sam Yamahista on East Asian Food in and outside Asia.

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F March 24<sup>th</sup> Alfred Yee, *Shopping at Gian Food*, “Introduction and Golden Times”

**March 26 first mini-paper due. Submit as Word doc or rtf.**

**Week #10 March 27<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> Culinary Nostalgia**

M March 27<sup>th</sup> Writing Skills in Pills – working on paragraphs. We will review together some paragraphs from your papers, an exercise to improve our writing.

3:30 PM guest lecture by Xu Hangping. Founders Room (In the library). This counts as class, please try to be there.

W March 29<sup>th</sup> Mark Swislocki’s *Culinary Nostalgia* – “Introduction”

F March 31<sup>st</sup> No class. César Chávez Day observed.

**Week #11 April 3<sup>rd</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> Culinary Nostalgia**

M April 3<sup>rd</sup> Mark Swislocki’s *Culinary Nostalgia* – “Only Available in Shanghai”

W April 5<sup>th</sup> Mark Swislocki’s *Culinary Nostalgia* – “A Tale of two Cities”

F April 7<sup>th</sup> Mark Swislocki’s *Culinary Nostalgia* – “Where the five directions come together”

**Week #12 April 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> Culinary Nostalgia**

M April 10<sup>th</sup> Mark Swislocki’s *Culinary Nostalgia* – “Where the five directions come together”

W April 12<sup>th</sup> Mark Swislocki’s *Culinary Nostalgia* – “Serve the People”

F April 14<sup>th</sup> Mark Swislocki’s *Culinary Nostalgia* – “Epilogue”

**Week #13 April 17<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> Culinary Nostalgia**

We continue to discuss and read *Culinary Nostalgia*, focusing on some specific themes. Detailed scheduled TBD according to what we decide to return to. We can also include a session to review writing skills, or decide to review other aspects covered in the previous weeks.

M April 17<sup>th</sup>

W April 19<sup>th</sup>

F April 21<sup>st</sup>

**April 23: book review is due. Submit as Word doc or rtf.**

**Week #14 April 24<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> Food and culture**

M April 24<sup>th</sup> Ingham, Michael Anthony and Matthew Fung Kwok Kin. “In the mood for food: Wong Kar-wai's culinary imaginary” (2016).

W April 26<sup>th</sup> “The man from a peddler’s family,” in *The Gourmet and Other Stories* by Wenfu Lu.

F April 28<sup>th</sup> Readings from *Appetites. Food and Sex in post-socialist China*

**Week #15 May 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> Course review**

M May 1<sup>st</sup> teaching evaluation. Bring your pen! End of class on May 1<sup>st</sup>.



**May 13: second mini-paper is due. If you want feedback, submit as Word doc or .rft.  
Otherwise, PDF is fine.**

**Please note that this deadline is close to grade submission. If you need a few more hours, by all means send it in on the 14<sup>th</sup> – but grades must be in by the 18<sup>th</sup>, so it would be great to have all the papers in in a timely fashion.**