

IKEYA, KAZUNOBU (ed.). *The spread of food cultures in Asia*. 238 pp., maps, figs, tables, illus., bibliogr. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2019.

That food remains a pivotal hub around which so much human social organization and interaction revolves is surely nothing revelatory. The ample body of work compiled by anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, and others over the years attests to this fact, documenting how the practices, technologies, and meanings surrounding food production and consumption give shape and significance to what it means to be human across both time and geography. With food and foodways so centrally foregrounded in the human experience, it remains difficult to parse out fully all of the historical and contemporary commonalities, much less the heterogeneities, that characterize an entire region's food heritage. Such efforts become doubly complicated when food scholars train their focus on the earth's largest continental landmass, Eurasia, home to some of the world's most enduring polities and civilizations, not to mention today's largest and most densely populated megacities, particularly those found throughout mainland East Asia.

Against this backdrop, the fourteen individual pieces included in *The spread of food cultures in Asia* – edited by Kazunobu Ikeya and mostly written by Asian scholars – largely succeed in addressing the complexities and contradictions that characterize Asian food cultures nowadays and in the more distant past. For what must be the first time, food scholars in majority English-speaking countries can read the work of their predominantly Asian counterparts in one printed collection. The volume's authors document in often granular detail the various

inflows and outflows of particular crops, cuisines, and foodways, dating back to the 1500s, which collectively shape the Asian foodscape, however real or ideational.

The multiscalar influence of institutions, communities, and individuals alongside the historical processes, contacts, and technologies both expedited and exacerbated by Western trade and colonialism looms large over all of the chapters spread across the volume's four main sections, as do themes of food resistance and indigenization. Covering everything from Caribbean turtle meat consumption in Bali (see Hitoshi Takagi's 'Comparison of overseas influence within historical formation of mass green turtle consumption in Mosquito Coast, Nicaragua and Bali, Indonesia') to the introduction of European hams into Japanese cuisine (see Naoto Minami's 'German influence on Japanese food culture'), readers will come away from this collection with a newfound appreciation of the variegated breadth of Asian foodways

Organizationally, the volume divides papers into: (1) 'Historical approaches to food cultures'; (2) 'Chinese food culture in transition'; (3) 'The influence of European food culture in East Asia and the world'; and (4) 'Food culture, identity, and landscapes in Asia'. Pairing historical work with contemporary research adds an interesting comparative slant to its stated purview of elucidating 'the spread and changes of local food cultures, primarily targeting the Eurasian continent from the 16th century to the present day' (p. 3), but also somehow detracts from its overall impact. Making the perhaps tenuous connection between something like, say, branded gastronomic representations of contemporary Malay cuisine (see Hanadi Hussin's 'Branding Malaysia as truly Asia through gastronomic representation') and historical Asian/European diplomatic food impressions (see Françoise Sabban's 'An experience of otherness: conceptions of Chinese and European diplomats about foreign food practices [eighteenth-nineteenth century]') proves no easy feat in practice.

Like many edited volumes produced from individual papers delivered at face-to-face scholarly meetings, *The spread of food cultures in Asia* reads to some degree like a hodgepodge collection of interesting contributions that never fully coalesce into a cohesive account of the stated topic, as meeting organizers and volume editors are effectively at the mercy of whoever submits papers for presentation and print. The volume makes its most valuable scholarly contributions in those papers that use historical

and ethnographic findings to demonstrate convincingly the interpenetrative linkages between global and local foodways in both the past and present (see Zhengyu Liu's 'Western cuisine culture in contemporary China: a case study on haute french cuisine in high-class hotels and restaurants in urban Tianjin' and Nan Zheng's 'American crops into China: discourse on influences of corn, sweet potato, and potato').

The inclusion of numerous visual aids like colour and black-and-white photos, maps, charts, and tables helps to situate geographically, and structurally convey, many of the research findings contained in the volume. Undergraduates, graduate students, and other emerging scholars interested in the cultural and socioeconomic implications of food consumption and production can find much here that is relevant to their studies. Similarly, those whose work is geographically focused on mainland Asia, particularly East Asia, would find much that is worthwhile within these pages.

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