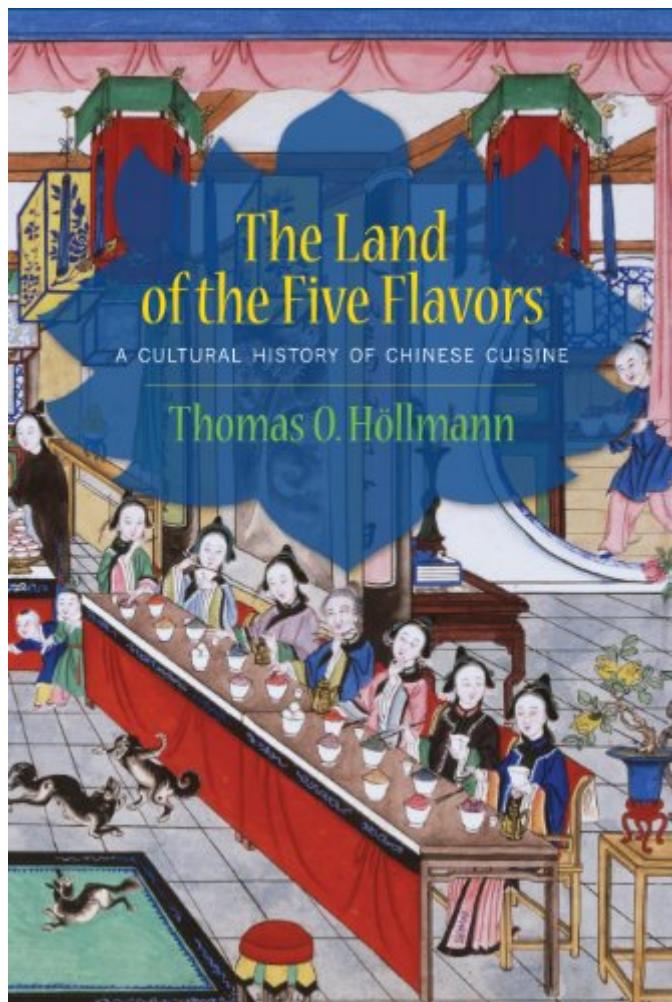


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The Land Of The Five Flavors: A Cultural History Of Chinese Cuisine (Arts And Traditions Of The Table: Perspectives On Culinary History)



Synopsis

World-renowned sinologist Thomas O. Häfllmann tracks the growth of Chinese food culture from the earliest burial rituals to today's Western fast food restaurants, detailing the cuisine's geographical variations and local customs, indigenous factors and foreign influences, trade routes, and ethnic associations. Häfllmann describes the food rituals of major Chinese religions and the significance of eating and drinking in rites of passage and popular culture. He also enriches his narrative with thirty of his favorite recipes and a selection of photographs, posters, paintings, sketches, and images of clay figurines and other objects excavated from tombs. This history recounts the cultivation of what are probably the earliest grape wines, the invention of noodles, the role of butchers and cooks in Chinese politics, and the recent issue of food contamination. It discusses local crop production, the use of herbs and spices, the relationship between Chinese food and economics, the import of Chinese philosophy, and traditional dietary concepts and superstitions. Häfllmann cites original Chinese sources, revealing fascinating aspects of daily Chinese life. His multifaceted compendium inspires a rich appreciation of Chinese arts and culture.

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Customer Reviews

The Land of the Five Flavors is a curious cross-cultural text: this edition is an English translation of a German text that speaks about the social history of Chinese food. I'm still wrapping my head around this language puzzle. How far removed is the translation from the culture being discussed? Did they use existing English translations of ancient Chinese sources, which are quoted in sidebars throughout the book? Did they translate everything afresh? I wish the publishers reassured readers like me with a note on their translation process. Setting aside these questions though, this book provides an amazing analysis of China's culinary obsessions. With regional recipes interspersed with illustrations and the occasional statistical chart, Chinese food is put under a microscope. Everything from noodle production, historical food prices, and cannibalism is covered. My favorite chapter is the one on alcohol. Booze and its effect on Tang period literature made me laugh. It's all heady, heavy stuff. Since it's an academic text, the book is occasionally bogged down with its precise and pedantic language. This isn't easy-to-read nonfiction. For those who are up to the challenge, though, The Land of the Five Flavors is both rewarding and illuminating. (This review previously appeared in the San Francisco Book Review.)

Amazing book. You'll hate it if you're looking for yet another "food journey" book about personal experiences of eating food while traveling or whatever... but if you want a rigorous (if spastic) academic survey of EVERYTHING ever written historically about Chinese food as relates to economics, culture, and agriculture... then you'll probably like it. And if anyone knows of any other books about any cuisine that are at all similar, please let me know by commenting on this review! I would love to read dozens of books like this one....

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My Rating: 3 1/2 Stars
The rating makes it look like this book was not interesting but it was. It was just not what I was expecting. I was thinking more of the various food styles, such as Cantonese, Mandarin, Sichuan, Hunan and Beijing etc. How the different provinces developed the flavors in that region. That being said I did enjoy reading the cultural and economic history of the people, nation and agricultural development. I should love to learn more of the background on Chinese food production, but would like to be better informed on the subject matter. If I ever do get a historical book on the development of the various provinces' food tastes, then count me in to read it as soon as it is off the

presses. My rating for the misnomer of The Land of Five Flavors Title is 3 1/2 out of 5 stars.

Absolutely misleading title. This book has ALMOST NOTHING to do with Chinese cuisine and everything to do with Chinese agriculture. We learn about grain production, alcohol production, but zilch about the various cuisines of China. I thought, from the title, that the book would address how, say, Szechuan cuisine evolved into the wonder we know today, or about the crucial differences between Hunan and Szechuan foods. Terrible book if this is what you're hoping for, AS THE TITLE SEEMS TO PROMISE.

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