

Family Meals in Rural Fujian: Aspects of Yongchun Village Life

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This article describes family meals observed in Beautiful Jade, a Yongchun County farming village in Fujian Province, China. The villagers are engaged in the commercial planting of mandarin oranges and the subsistence farming of rice and vegetables. Family meals reflect the subsistence nature of the people's farming life as well as the influence of commercialization. On one hand, food consumption is still largely derived from local production—no McDonald's or sushi outlets have opened in the nearby township. On the other hand, there is increasing influence of new experiences brought back by workers who have gone to coastal cities to earn a living. This paper describes life in a Chinese village through the lens of family meals.

Keywords: family meals, rural Fujian life, Chinese food culture, rice porridge in Chinese culture

Introduction¹

Most anthropologists live and eat with their informants; they partake in their informants' family meals. Yet how families eat is sometimes one of the most neglected aspects of their fieldwork, taken for granted or overlooked. In the anthropological study of China, too, there is very little attention paid to family meals. Of the handful of important general works on food in China such as Anderson (1988) and Simoons (1991), the volume edited by K. C. Chang (1977) is most significant. Cooper's paper on Chinese table manners (1986) does not focus on family meals, while two recent edited books deal with various aspects of Chinese food in Asia (Wu and Tan 2001; Wu and Cheung 2002). With the recently revived interest in the study of food in anthropology (e.g., Goody 1982; Mintz 1985, 1996; Watson 1997), the family meal may become an important topic of study. It can enlighten us about food culture and also such critical issues as gender roles and relations, social life, the interaction between subsistence and commercialization, and social change in general.

In this paper I report on the family meal as observed in a village in Fujian, China. This village, which I will call Beautiful Jade, is one of many villages in the township (*zhen*) of Huyang in Yongchun County (*xian*). Yongchun is located interior to Quanzhou in southern Fujian. Beautiful Jade is one of the "natural villages" (*zirancun*) of a large administrative village. It is a Chen lineage village and in 1998 included 341 Chen (locally called Tan) households making up a population of 1,238 persons, along with twenty-six people of the Zhu lineage. The village is divided into six sections, each occupied for the most part by a branch of the Chen lineage. I concentrated my research in the section from which my grandfather had migrated—Half Moon Hill.

My grandfather migrated from this village to Malaysia (then called Malaya) in Southeast Asia. When I decided to take up research in Yongchun, I chose this village expecting that I would get ready cooperation, and indeed when I first arrived in June of 1998, the villagers were quite excited. The older

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people still remember my grandfather's name even though he had passed away in Malaysia in 1957. I established myself within the kinship network almost instantly, becoming "uncle" to many younger villagers and even some older ones. As expected, my research was easy to pursue, although I had to put up with a sudden increase in the number of relatives in my life. The villagers are engaged in commercial agriculture—planting mandarin oranges, and in subsistence farming—raising their own rice and vegetables. Family meals reflect both the subsistence farming life as well as the growing influence of commercialization. Food consumption is largely based on local produce, but increasingly, new foodways are brought back by workers who have gone to the coastal towns to earn cash.

My description of family meals here aims to highlight changes in the life of an interior Fujian village. Beautiful Jade has benefited somewhat from economic liberalization since 1979, as can be seen in the improvement in foods regularly served in family meals. However, it has not benefited as much as villages close to the coastal towns and cities of Fujian, where factories and various kinds of industrial and commercial development have taken hold. The paper will begin with an overall description of family meals as observed in 1998 and 1999. The tradition of eating rice and rice porridge is described. Following this, the symbolic significance of rice and foods for family meals during the Chinese New Year is discussed. Lastly, the paper describes aspects of family meals that have been transformed by socio-economic changes.

Foodways in Beautiful Jade: Background

Rice is the staple crop of South China and the villagers of Beautiful Jade raise their own. The villagers eat three meals a day: rice porridge (Mandarin: *zhou*) for breakfast and dinner, and rice (Mandarin: *fan*) for lunch. *Fan* (*png* in the Yongchun dialect) is eaten at lunchtime because it is more filling. Rice porridge or *be* digests easily and would not carry working farmers through to dinner. When porridge is eaten for lunch, the farmers need to have another light meal, such as fried rice noodle (*bi-hun*) or cooked vermicelli (*mi-suā*); if *png* is eaten at lunch, one can continue to work until the evening without needing a light meal in between.

Rice porridge is important in South China, and is certainly so in Yongchun. A good porridge requires the right balance of water and rice to give it the appropriate texture. One often comments that the porridge has too much or too little water. When served to a visitor, the host is particularly concerned about the right texture. Often the host apologetically tells the visitor that the porridge is too *kou*, too "thick" (not enough water), or too *ka*, too "thin" (too watery), and the visitor will reply, "it's just right." A close friend or relative

would often express his or her true opinion. He or she may even tease the host about cooking such “thin” porridge, implying that she wanted to save on rice, and the cook will reply with her explanations or excuses. In the “rice culture” of South China, there is an ideal standard of good rice porridge, even among peasants. Yuan Mei, a renowned scholar of the Qing Dynasty, stated this standard in a very simple way: “seeing water and not rice, this is not *zhou*; seeing rice and not water, this is not *zhou*” (*jian shui bu jian mi, fei zhou ye; jian mi bu jian shui, fei zhou ye*) (Yuan 1984[1972]:142). This need to have a nice balance of water and rice is very much in the mind of the people, and guides the discourse on rice porridge, even though the “right” balance is really quite arbitrary.

Other than the plain porridge which is eaten with vegetable or meat dishes (*chai*)², sweet potato rice porridge, locally called *huan-zi be*, is also quite popular. Like plain porridge, it is eaten with other dishes. Sweet potato rice porridge, a peasant food, is now served in respectable restaurants in Quanzhou, and indeed in Taiwan, too. In 1998 the restaurant at the Wantong Quanzhou Donghu Hotel in Quanzhou, for instance, offered both plain and sweet potato rice porridge at its sumptuous buffet breakfast. This elevation of peasant food to a respectable restaurant level clearly reflects people’s interest in indigenous meals. Rice porridge culture is important in South China, not only among the Minnan (South Fujian) but also among Chaozhou people, (Chen 2001). Chaozhou people use more preserved vegetables and fish than people in Yongchun. Sweet potato rice porridge is also popular in Chaozhou, although as Chen (2001) reports, sweet potato cultivation has become rare. In Yongchun, the sweet potato, which in the past served as a dire substitute for rice, is no longer produced in abundance, due to the shortage of arable land for its cultivation. Some villagers plant it as an inter-crop between the first and second crops of rice. Today the shortage of sweet potatoes makes them more valuable.

The villagers also often eat “salty porridge” (*kiam be*), rice porridge cooked with peanuts and bean curd and flavored with soy sauce. This porridge can be eaten on its own without any other dishes. Indeed this is a convenient meal to serve to workers or farm hands at “tea-time,” i.e., around 3 p.m.

It is now common to have three dishes with rice or rice porridge. Breakfast dishes comprise mostly vegetables and bean curd. The villagers say that in the morning people prefer to eat light (*ching*) types of dishes, normally vegetarian dishes. This habit of eating mainly vegetarian dishes in the morning may have arisen because they are easier to cook. I recorded most of the

² *Chai* or *cai* in Mandarin means both vegetables and cooked dishes, including meat, for eating with rice or rice porridge.

dishes I ate with one family from 13 February to 19 February 1999. Because I am a newly returned relative from Southeast Asia as well as a researcher, even had I told the family that I wanted to eat the dishes they normally ate, the food prepared during my stay was undoubtedly better than usual. On 13 February 1999, our breakfast consisted of plain rice porridge, fried cauliflower, fried bean curd with soy sauce, and bell peppers (*tī-chiou*) cooked with pork. The next day we had plain rice porridge, boiled soybeans seasoned with salt and soy sauce, cauliflower, and mackerel (*be-ka hi*). The mackerel was not a normal food item, but something the wife had brought back from the coastal town Shishi where she worked as a maid. I had requested the boiled soybean after learning the villagers often ate them. The day 19 February 1999 was the fourth day of the Chinese New Year, and for breakfast we had sweet potato rice porridge, a vegetable dish and fried salted dried eel (*tua-hi*).

These examples show the kinds of breakfast eaten, although those served during the period of my stay were slightly better than usual, since some animal protein was regularly included. To try to get a clearer impression of the kinds of breakfast regularly eaten, I recorded a few of the breakfasts eaten by the same family with whom I stayed during my third field trip in August 1999. The breakfast items on the following three days provide a sample:

Date	Breakfast Items
26 August 1999	sweet potato rice porridge, preserved long beans, tomatoes cooked with eggs, bell peppers cooked with pork, and fried bean curd flavored with soy sauce
27 August 1999	rice porridge cooked with dried sweet potatoes, preserved long beans, preserved cucumbers, bell peppers cooked with pork, and fried bean curd
28 August 1999	plain rice porridge, cooked long beans, fried Chinese flowering cabbage (<i>chai-sim</i>), and fermented bean curd or beancurd cheese (<i>tau-kiam</i>)

Of these, tomatoes cooked with egg and bell peppers cooked with pork are the regular better dishes.

Still, it was not easy to get a representative survey of what people actually have for breakfast. On 14 February, I found that in one family the breakfast comprised plain rice porridge with fried eggs and a vegetable. In another family, it was plain rice porridge with fried bean curd and a vegetable. In fact, a breakfast could be even simpler than that. One morning I asked a woman I knew quite well (my newly reestablished kinship status made me her husband's uncle) about her breakfast. With much embarrassment and reluc-

tance she disclosed that she had had only plain rice porridge with a leftover vegetable dish from the previous night's dinner.

Lunch and dinner usually feature some meat (usually pork), often cooked with vegetables or bean curd. The villagers rear a few chickens and/or ducks, but these are usually reserved for special occasions or for visitors like myself, a kinsman returning from afar. Only rarely does someone take a wild animal (very few are left in the region) and this meat is much desired. On 16 February 1999, we had river deer (*suā-kiū*) meat for dinner, provided by a family friend who had shot the animal. Overall the villagers eat more vegetables, eggs, bean curd, and pork; the first two come from their own farms, while the latter two are bought. Two families in the village make soybean milk and bean curd, and they carry them to sell house-to-house in the early morning. They also sell them to village shops. Compared to meat, bean curd is inexpensive, costing only 35 cents (Chinese currency) a piece or 70 cents for one *lian* (two pieces together). It can be cooked as a dish by itself or with either pork or fish.

As stated above, vegetables come from people's own farms, and the types available depend on the season. In winter, cauliflower (locally called *hua-chai* which literally means "flower vegetable"), a type of lettuce (locally called *ē chai*), leaf mustard (*kua-chai*), spinach (*po-lun-chai*), and another type of green whose stem is eaten (*sun-ē*) are common. Spring and summer vegetables include water spinach (*ying-chai*), long beans, eggplants, pumpkin and others. I should also mention that various types of bamboo shoots are consumed throughout the year. Each family raises a number of bamboo plants, mainly for their shoots. In winter, the shoots are collected while still underground, and these are called *tang-sun*, winter bamboo shoots. Bamboo shoots are also sun-dried to become *sun-kuā*, which can be kept for a long time. These must be soaked for one or two days before cooking. The villagers also sundry leaf mustard to make the well-known local dried vegetable called *jiao-chai*. Dried properly, it will keep for over ten years.

With improved incomes, villagers are able to buy more meat than before, especially for hosting visitors and for special occasions. While I lived in the village, pig's trotters were bought quite often for cooking soup. Most families now own motorbikes, and villagers are able to go to the nearby market town Huyang, about a kilometer away, to buy cooked noodles or other food for the evening meal. It is still not common to buy supper, however. Those who gather together in the evening for beers may buy supper, that is, if they do not wish to bother their womenfolk with extra cooking. The ease with which villagers can go to town and buy cooked food marks a major change in village life; it may well become a common practice in time, as young people become more and more socialized into the urban life-style.

Occasionally, a vendor will come to the village to sell cooked meat. One

evening, I was treated to *tim zio bah*, “urine-cooked pork,” sold by a man from the back of his bicycle. He had killed his sow to cook this rare dish, which is pork cooked in a sealed container heated in human urine. Of course the urine does not get into the pork, only the steam. Villagers told me that in theory the urine used is collected from the roadside to ensure that it is male urine. Although the idea sounded awful, the meat was delicious.

To honor special visitors, eggs may be served as a light repast at any time between meals. This simple yet delicious food can be prepared quickly. I have observed two types of dishes: a soup of stirred eggs cooked with mushrooms (hence called *hiū-ko leng* or “mushroom eggs”), and a sweet soup of poached eggs, usually two in a bowl. On the second day of the Chinese New Year in 1999 (February 17), an informant’s two sisters and their husbands came to visit. The informant’s family served mushroom egg soup to their visitors. Later they had lunch together. On another occasion, when the chairman of the Returned Overseas Chinese Association, returned to the village to visit family, he was served sweet poached egg soup, much to his delight. When I first visited my maternal grandmother’s younger sister who lived in the same village, she quickly asked her daughter-in-law to cook a bowl of mushroom egg soup for me. Eggs are obviously an important food item and another common dish is eggs cooked with tomato pieces.

Most adult males smoke cigarettes, though women and children generally do not. The villagers drink locally produced tea, which they concede is not as good as the famous tea from Anxi, also in Fujian. A gift of Anxi tea is highly appreciated. Tea is consumed from breakfast to evening. Whenever people gather, even just two or three persons, the host serves tea. This is especially so during the planting off-season in June and July. Since the village houses are built close to one another, people pass by all the time, and often one stops at a house to have tea and a chat. During his fieldwork, this researcher consumed more tea than he ever had in his life. Serving tea is generally the host’s role, and here it requires a bit of skill, since the tea is not brewed in a teapot. Instead, it is brewed in a large teacup with a lid. To serve, one has to hold the hot teacup in a particular position and control the lid in such a way that only the tea, and not the leaves, is poured into smaller cups for serving. One such brewing is sufficient to serve four or five persons, and if there are more people, water is added for another brewing. If the gathering goes on for some time, fresh tea is made after a few servings. Occasionally a friend or relative in the group may help to brew and serve. If present, a teenage boy or girl is allowed to play this role; in this way young people are socialized into the culture of tea serving.

Many men also drink beer and hard liquor. In fact, Half Moon Hill is known for the highest beer consumption in all of Beautiful Jade. With new

opportunities to earn cash, some men spend a lot of their money on the alcoholic drinks that can be bought at the village stores. Young men who have worked away from home have acquired the habit of drinking more beer, perhaps in response to boredom and the stress of work. Peer influence also contributes to drinking, as young people seek a meaningful way to socialize. To them this often involves an assertion of manhood, of “being somebody,” especially if they can out-drink others. Thus the increase in village beer consumption is bound up with earning cash outside, and meeting other young men who are experiencing the same frustrations as they try to earn a steady income and make their mark among their peers. When they return to the village, they continue to drink, and encourage others to do as well.

Women cook the family meals. In this village, as is true of other villages in the region, cooking and washing clothes are women’s jobs. However, changes are on the horizon as married women go to coastal towns to work in factories or as housemaids. In the absence of the wife, the husband has to take care of his own meals, but where there are older children (for instance around 12 years old), the children are often asked to cook in their mother’s absence. In a family I know quite well, whenever the mother was away working in town, the fourteen-year-old son and his twelve-year-old sister took turns cooking breakfast for their father before he went out to the farm. But when the wife stays at home, she decides what to cook and what food to buy. As the men put it, since the women cook, they should decide what to cook and what to buy.

Generally the whole family eats together. Certainly this is convenient for the sharing of dishes. However, it is usually at lunch and dinnertime that the family gathers to eat. Farms are not far from home and those who do farm work are able to return home for lunch. Not all family members eat breakfast together, since some may wake up late, while children who go to school early have their breakfast earlier. What is at first amusing to an outsider is that it is not only common for children to take their bowls of porridge or rice outside to eat, some adults do so, too. Thus “eating together” actually entails eating at the same time, but not necessary at the same table. People may eat at the front entrance to the house, or while walking about, or going to a nearby house to chat, often standing. Now and again one goes back to the dining table to take more food. This kind of “roaming eating” is easier to do if the meal is a one-dish affair such as salty rice porridge (mentioned earlier) or long-bean rice (*chai-tau png*, rice cooked with long beans) or taro rice (*o png*, rice cooked with taro). These three kinds of rice are regularly cooked for lunch, and may be eaten with a common bowl of soup. Usually the soup is one cooked with bean curd and vegetables.

This roaming eating culture may be seen as part of the peasant life-style,

arising from the condition of not having much to share at the table. It is a carefree style of meal taking, characteristic of both peasants and workers. Using chopsticks and a bowl makes carrying a meal around easy. The hot summers also encourage some people to carry their meals outside to catch the breeze. Peasants have little use for elaborate table manners marking class status, and children are often allowed to take their meals from the table, to eat with their friends or while playing with friends. This kind of socialization seems to allow the habit to continue into adulthood. Once, I went to a nearby school to interview the headmaster. To my horror, a schoolboy followed me to the school, bringing along his bowl of rice and eating as he went along. All during my meeting with the headmaster, he stood nearby to listen and continued with his meal. Roaming eating is thus a common sight in rural China. Even in towns one can see some workers eating from a bowl of rice while walking about. Chen (2001) has also reported about this kind of eating among the farmers in Chaoshan. There the farmers are even more adept at it, for they can carry a small plate of food on the left palm while the bowl of rice porridge is propped up with the fingers of the left hand; the right hand, of course, holds the chopsticks.

Chinese New Year and Family Meals

Rice and rice porridge play an interesting role during the Chinese New Year. Porridge is normally eaten for breakfast, but not on the first day (*chuyi* in Mandarin) of the New Year. For the first breakfast of the New Year, rice (*png*) rather than rice porridge is eaten to symbolize prosperity. Eating the thinner rice porridge on this special occasion would be symbolically unfortunate.

Another “must have” dish for the New Year’s breakfast is “long-life vegetable” (*teng-miā chai*). This is *kua-chai*, the leaf mustard that is used for making the dried version *jiao-chai*. Its large long green leaves provide the symbolism for “long life,” and thus its name as a New Year’s dish.

Symbolism of family unity is also seen during the New Year season. The head of the household with whom I stayed and his younger brother, together with their families and their old mother, have a dinner together once a year at each other’s home. In 1999 the elder brother hosted the New Year’s Eve dinner, while the younger brother did so on New Year’s Day. These dinners were eaten without rice, but the dishes were sumptuous, with meats (chicken, duck, pork, pork spare-ribs), fish, vegetables, bean curd, *lo leng* (hard-boiled chicken or duck eggs cooked with soy sauce pork), and of course soups, as well. Eating sumptuous meals without rice marks the special occasion, in which the symbolism of having so much food that one need not eat rice is central. The habit

of eating rich foods with no rice in a restaurant must also have its origin in this contrast to ordinary peasant meals.

Cultural rules may be seen as guiding principles, rather than rules that mechanically determine people's behavior. The family I stayed with did not serve the "long-life vegetable" dish for the New Year breakfast because it did not have the vegetable that morning and so had to substitute spinach (which also has long but smaller green leaves). This is an example of how individuals interpret a cultural rule according to the practical situation. It goes without saying that the family eats together for this ritually significant breakfast. The breakfast we ate comprised rice with spinach, bean curd and fried mackerel. This was preceded by glutinous rice balls called *ke-kiā* served in cooked sweetened water.

Social Change and Family Meals

While both rice and rice porridge are daily staples, in difficult times, only rice porridge is eaten. During times of extreme rice shortage, it may not be possible to eat even rice porridge regularly. Eating "thin" rice porridge reflects the shortage of rice or general poverty. Informants told me that "in the past" they regularly ate "thin" porridge and enjoyed rice (*png*) only on special occasion such as the New Year. This was in the period before 1979. According to the villagers, the most difficult time was during the period of *jin-min kong-sia* 人民公社, when communes were established, specifically the period of the Great Leap from 1958 to 1960. People had very little to eat, each person was allocated eight *jī* (*qian* in Mandarin), or about 40 grams, of rice a day, and so they were entitled to only very thin rice porridge at the communal eating hall. There was so little rice in the porridge that it comprised mainly *am*, the cooked rice water. Not only was it rare to have a little meat, it was rare to have bean curd—for even at the modest price of ten cents a piece, people could not often afford it. It was in fact around 1965 that bean curd was again sold in Huyang. From the perspective of the villagers, the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was not as bad as the Great Leap for they had food to eat then. Their suffering during the Cultural Revolution was rather political and ideological. After economic liberalization (*kai-hong* or *kaifang* in Mandarin), that is, after 1979, the villagers were finally able to buy and eat bean curd regularly.

Today each family is able to earn money for itself. Each family is allocated a plot of rice land, which is generally sufficient to produce enough rice for its own use. The allocation is based on the number of persons in the household. Each person is allocated two *hun*, and ten *hun* make up one *mo* (*mu* in Mandarin), equivalent to 0.0667 hectares. Generally there are four or five persons per

household, and so each household gets one *mu* or slightly less, while some get more than one *mu*. In addition, land is allocated for commercial farming, and at present, the villagers in Huyang township, and indeed in the rest of Yongchun, plant the famed *lo gā* (*lugan*) oranges, the sale of which yields cash income according to the market price of oranges and the expenditure incurred in production (mainly fertilizer and insecticide). Not many opportunities in the village allow residents to earn sufficient cash to ensure a more comfortable standard of living and accumulate savings. Certainly the people eat better food than before 1979; they eat regularly and can afford to buy pork now and then. But they want to have more money to equip their homes with modern facilities, not just a television, but also a video cassette recorder, a good motorbike, and so on. Above all, they want to prepare for their sons' and daughters' expensive weddings, the cost of which has become inflated since economic liberalization. Thus many people try to get jobs in the coastal towns, especially in Shishi and Chendai, where shop and factory work is available and women can also find work as housemaids.

Working in the coastal towns has brought about social changes in the village. We have seen that the absence of working wives has forced some men to take up domestic duties. In the long run this will undoubtedly lead to changes in the attitude towards traditional gender roles. When those who work in towns return home, certainly on the occasion of festivals, they bring foods that are not commonly eaten in the village. The most obvious category of food being introduced is seafood, such as ocean fish, squid, and prawns. Huyang sits in the interior, and seafood is not readily available there. In this local market town, one can occasionally buy fresh water fish such as grass carp and prawns, but the intensive cultivation of land and use of local resources means a shortage of local fresh water fish, too. Thus villagers do not normally eat fish, although salted-dried eel (*tua-hi*) is cheap and eaten occasionally. Thus when family members return from coastal towns, they often take the opportunity to bring home fresh seafood. Women who work as maids in the towns have learned new styles of cooking. In fact one way of praising a woman, often playfully and in jest, is to say that her cooking has improved since working in town. Such women often talk about the new foods they have eaten and the new styles of cooking they have observed or learned. Women move frequently between towns and the village, when they either get leave or give up their jobs as house-maids to return to the village during peak farming seasons, and then leave for town again once the season's work is done to look for new employers. In a sense, the women's influence on innovation in village food consumption is more significant than that of the men. Furthermore, they tend to bring more savings home than do unmarried sons and married men. The unmarried sons tend to spend most of their earnings on

clothes and urban pastimes, including beer drinking as we have noted. Married men, if they are lucky enough to get jobs as laborers or use their motorbikes to carry passengers (illegally), often spend a lot on alcoholic drinks and cigarettes.

Other than external influences brought back by returned villagers, there is little global-style food consumption in the village. Few children know about McDonald's, because no Western fast food outlets have been opened in the nearby market town or in the Yongchun district town. Bread is not normally eaten, although older people are familiar with the Southeast Asian term *roti* for Western-style bread. However the flavoring agent monosodium glutamate (locally called *bi-jing*) is now popularly used in cooking. In fact the villagers began using this even before the economic liberation, around 1975. Surprisingly there is not much consumption of canned food. I say "surprisingly," because the indigenous people of Borneo with whom I am familiar spend quite a bit of their cash on canned food as they become more involved in the commercial economy. For example, canned sardines and instant noodles are popular among the interior indigenous people in Sarawak, but this is not so in Yongchun villages, even though local fish is not easily available. Perhaps the Yongchun villagers have different priorities in managing their limited cash. They do not see the need to buy canned and imported food. Their main reason for saving is to build a brick house equipped with modern facilities, and of course for their son or daughter's wedding expenses.

As we have seen, the villagers depend largely on their farm products for their daily diet. It is interesting that they are not often tempted to buy new food items available in the supermarkets in Yongchun county seat. These new items tend to be more expensive than local foodstuffs, but many are not too expensive, for example, instant noodles. This phenomenon may be explained by the villagers' saving strategy. Furthermore, while people continue to observe their "traditional" style of food consumption, new food items may not be considered appealing. While Yongchun villagers are familiar with coffee, an important beverage for the Chinese in Southeast Asia, they do not enjoy drinking it. During Chinese New Year I gave certain families Belgian chocolate I had brought along from Hong Kong. A teenage boy told me very frankly that he thought it tasted awful (*bo hou chia*). I decided to tell him how much a box of the chocolate cost. On hearing it, he said, "How could you be so stupid as to waste money on this?" In fact, the lack of interest in non-local foodstuff is a blessing, for the villagers' own meals are nutritious and healthy, definitely not "junk" food. It suggests that the adoption of modern fast food is a matter of market promotion, which still has had no significant impact on the villagers. Earning cash now allows the villagers to buy gas stoves, although most of the cooking is still done on the traditional stoves—a raised clay platform

with holes on top for holding a wok, pot, or kettle for cooking. Coal is the fuel used, and since it is mined in Yongchun, it is not expensive. The only inconvenience is that one has to keep some coal burning all the time, to avoid having to start the fire each time one wants to boil water or cook. Electricity was first supplied to the village in 1970, and today it is supplied to all houses. More recently in 1998 the villagers cooperated to introduce piped water from a mountain spring, which makes cooking much more convenient.

Conclusion

We have seen that in Beautiful Jade, villagers still eat porridge for breakfast with simple but healthy dishes. The older people of Fujianese and Guangdong origin in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia remember eating porridge for breakfast, too. In the fifties and early sixties, I too had porridge for breakfast. The eating habits of Beautiful Jade reflect what was once common for the people of South China. The change in eating habits among the Chinese in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia has to do not just with Western influences (such as the adoption of bread), but also with the changes in gender role expectations, as women go out to work. It was the women who woke up very early to cook—as those in Beautiful Jade still do. Urban living and an office working life encourage eating a breakfast that can be prepared and eaten quickly. The data from Beautiful Jade provide information about people who still follow the tradition of eating rice porridge for breakfast and dinner. That they do so is due to their farming life and the subsistence nature of most of their economy, as well as the limited opportunities for men and women to be employed in salaried jobs or to engage in business.

The nature of the family meal is closely linked to the economy. Since economic liberalization, villagers have been able to eat better and maintain a more balanced diet. Today each family, generally nuclear though perhaps with a grandparent too, produces its own food and eats together. Older widows and widowers live and eat with one of their married sons' families. Even when brothers live with their parents under one roof in a large ancestral house, each married family cooks and eats separately. On special occasions, extended families eat together in symbolic solidarity. However, the New Year's worship of ancestors in the sublineage hall at Half Moon Hill is no longer done collectively by all the families of the sublineage. Instead, each family or the families of brothers only, worship together. In the latter case, the food is prepared separately at each home and brought to the sublineage hall for collective worship. After the ceremony, each family takes its own food home.

With commercialization, some foods labeled as Yongchun or Minnan

(South Fujian) are now served in restaurants. Sweet potato porridge and plain porridge with dishes are available in restaurants in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore. In Southeast Asia, rice porridge is promoted as a Chaozhou specialty, hence Chaozhou *zhou*. In Yongchun, restaurants serve bamboo shoots and *jiao-chai* dishes as Yongchun specialties. The sweet bean-paste pastry called *pong-sia ku* has also become a Yongchun breakfast specialty in local restaurants and has become associated with Yongchun identity. As to the origin of its name, informants think that it might have to do with a person call "Pong Ah," "Ah" being the affective Yongchun suffix to a personal name, and *sia* is the polite reference to a person's residence. Thus *pong-sia ku* was perhaps derived from "the *ku* of the Pong house," as Pong was known for his *ku* pastry. *Ku* is commonly made by Yongchun people for various kinds of celebration and for worshipping ancestors. The sweet variety is called *tī-ku* or "sweet *ku*." Local cadres fondly and proudly relate that even the late Hu Yaobang liked this pastry very much when he got to taste it during his visit to Yongchun. This association of peasant food with a prominent person (in the past it was often the emperor) to raise its status is quite common. In Kunming, Yunnan, a certain stir-fried rice noodle dish is associated with a legend of saving an emperor from hunger, hence its name *da jiujiu*, or "saving the emperor."

The daily core meals of Beautiful Jade villagers comprise homegrown vegetables, bean curd, eggs and some pork. Bean curd and eggs are often cooked with meat or vegetables, like bean curd with pork, and tomatoes with eggs. Overall this diet is nutritious and healthy. Of the protein foods, bean curd is eaten most frequently. It is inexpensive and can be bought daily. It is the major source of protein for Chinese peasants. Yet, like rice porridge and sweet potatoes, it is also a poor people's food, for these are the hardship foods. Indeed as the villagers say, "If there is no *chai* [here refers to dishes available], then eat *chai po* [preserved dried radish], *jiao-chai* [preserved dried leaf mustard], and *tau-hu* [bean curd]." In other words, bean curd, the regular protein food, is the minimum that one still expects to have in times of poverty. When one cannot get even bean curd regularly, then the situation is dire. It is this traditional source of protein that has saved Chinese peasants from protein deficiency since ancient times. The inability of Chinese farmers to include bean curd in their meals regularly during the Great Leap Forward represented the greatest failure of the central planning system and the ideological political economy. Thus the presence or absence of this simple food item in family meals reveals much about the changing fortunes of Chinese farmers.

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福建農民的日常飲食： 永春農村生活的個案研究

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家庭中如何用餐，經常被人類學家忽視、臆斷或疏漏。而日常飲食可以啓發我們關於飲食文化的認識，並關注性別角色與性別關係、社會生活、生計與商業化之間的互動，以及一般意義上的社會變遷。本文描述了在福建省永春農村所觀察到的日常飲食情況，村民以種植蘆柑、稻米和蔬菜爲生，而對於日常飲食的描述則爲理解 1979 年經濟改革後的農村生活提供了一個視角。

村民們通常一日三餐：早餐和晚飯吃粥，中午吃飯。中午吃飯是因爲可以吃飽，這對於下午在田間勞動的村民而言是非常的重要。在中國南方，吃粥是一種重要的飲食方式。佐粥和飯的配菜主要是蔬菜、豆腐、雞蛋和適量豬肉。蔬菜均爲各家自己栽種，隨著收入漸增，村民們可以比以前買到更多的肉，特別是在一些特殊的場合或招待客人的時候。大多數男人都抽煙，婦女和小孩一般不吸。許多男人喝啤酒和白酒，但日常飲料則以當地所生產的茶爲主。

一般而言，家庭中多半是由婦女主廚，但隨著越來越多的已婚婦女到城鎮做女傭或在工廠打工，男人甚至小孩逐漸替代了婦女在家中做飯的角色。平日對於整個家庭來說，如果所有成員都在周圍，就一起吃飯。而一起吃飯實際上是指在同一時間吃，而不是在一張桌子上——即人們可以將菜夾到自己的飯碗或粥碗中，然後四處遊走，需要的話再回來加菜。這也許可以稱爲「遊食」，在中國農村中極爲常見。

在大年初一時，早餐一般都不吃粥，而是以飯取而代之，以象徵「富貴」，在這種特殊的場合吃粥則意味著不幸。另外一道春節必備的菜是「長命菜」，即芥菜，有長而大的葉，因而象徵著長命。不同房的兄弟在除夕時會聚到一起吃飯，象徵著家庭的團結。年夜飯與日常飲食不同，通常會出現更多的肉類，例如雞、鴨、豬肉和排骨等等。

村民的飲食雖然比 1979 年前有所改善，但他們的農產品仍無法（爲他們）提供足夠的現金以購買其他的物品。因此，許多村民外出到沿海的市鎮，尤其是石獅和陳埭，在那裡的工廠打工或去做女傭。這些移居的工人爲村子帶來了一些新的經驗，其中也包括了新的烹飪風格和新的食品。例如，村內很少吃到魚產品，而現在婦女在回村時總會帶些海魚回來。總之，婦女對村中食品消費革新的影響較男性更爲重要，而她們同時也爲家庭帶回更多的積蓄。

村民們日常所用的食物大部分都是自家生產的農產品，主要包括了蔬菜、豆腐、雞蛋和些許的豬肉。豆腐和雞蛋一般會加入其他肉類或蔬菜同時烹調，如豆腐

炒肉、番茄炒雞蛋等。這些菜肴都是營養而健康的，在蛋白質食物中，豆腐可以說是物美價廉，人們也經常食用，而且平常就可以買得到，其烹飪方式簡單，遂成爲中國農民蛋白質的主要來源。如同粥和番薯一樣，豆腐同樣也是窮人食物的象徵，是貧窮或食物短缺的困難時期最常見的食物。

關鍵詞：日常飲食，福建農民生活，華人飲食文化，華人文化的粥
