

ditions not only to world history but also to scholarly knowledge in general.

Cuisine and Empire: Cooking in World History

By Rachel LAUDAN

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Laudan's work on the world history of cooking is not only a thought provoking book on the relations between acts of ruling and eating, but also a welcome addition to the literature of macro-leveled cultural history. Even with growing interest in world history, there are still few scholarly works on daily practices which all humans share regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, and gender. Eating is one of the many inevitable aspects of human life, but has been hardly discussed by historians. In this book, Laudan presents to us a rare scholarly treatise on the long-term historical evolution of culinary practice and philosophy. In particular, the book persuasively identifies the influences of multi-ethnic dominions over how and what to eat. The author often links the formation of new cuisines to the effects of "new culinary philosophies" which "came from new ideas about politics and economics, religion, the human body, and the environment" (p. 6). This approach remains central throughout the book, giving us an intriguing account that the kitchen is a space where politics, philosophies, and religions are processed for digestion.

The strength of the book is its full coverage of culinary history from 20,000 BCE to present. Although it sounds ambitious to write

the history of an entire millennium in one chapter (for example, 500 BCE-400 CE in chapter 2), the author courageously explores possibilities in understanding the *long durée*. The author does not engage her work with the French Annales School, but the book keeps reminding me of the school and its study of material culture and mentalities. At the same time, she shows her indebtedness to the Anglo school of world history led by Alfred W. Crosby. In chapter 5, for instance, she describes the spread of Christian cuisines to the New Continent. In doing so, she doubts whether the “fusion” or “exchange” in the Crosby’s terms can properly explain the confrontation of two different cuisines: one is based on wheat and the other on maize. In that regard, the book can be listed for college student readers with other world history books, such as Crosby’s *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, Kenneth Pomeranz’s *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Richard H. Grove’s *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*, Michael Adas’ *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* and so on.

I am sure that some readers may wonder how the 464-page book can cover world history from 20,000 BCE to the twentieth first century. To be honest, I did. Once I finished reading, however, I found it persuasive and eye-opening, for it uncovers many historical transformations which can be seen only from such a satellite view. In chapter 1 and 2, the author argues that world civilizations were constructed by those who successfully secured enough calories to labor, fight, travel and rule. The essential source of calories came from grains: wheat, millet, barley or maize. Since ancient times, the grains or staples have given basic energy to human beings. As the author points out in chapter 3, the spread of rice in East and South-east Asia is a unique phenomenon in the sense that other regions maintained wheat-barley cuisines. “Buddhist cuisines,” according to the author, transformed the culinary cultures of China, Korea, and Japan as the wave of Buddhist expansion arrived. The spread of rice-eating practice coincided with the arrival of Buddhism in East Asia,

but it is too simplistic to claim that rice completely replaced millet or barley in the region. Similar to the cuisines of the Middle East and Europe, perhaps, it may be more correct to describe East Asian cuisine as rice-barley cuisine or rice-millet cuisine. In other words, the book seems to overemphasize the impact of Buddhism on the daily practices of “humble” people because Buddhism itself belonged to high culture. The same problem may be found regarding “Christian” and “Islamic” cuisines in chapter four and five.

In addition, the most controversial issue of the book must be its definition of “modern cuisines.” She describes “modern” elements of cooking and eating as follows: “rich in wheat bread or other preferred carbohydrate staples, beef and other meats, and fats and sugars” (p. 248). It was specifically the urban bourgeoisie who adopted this particular culture. The modern cuisines differentiated themselves from pre-modern high and humble cuisines mostly by denying hierarchical political and religious power in diet. It is interesting that the bourgeoisie applied their revolutionary philosophy to food culture. Regarding this, however, the book seems to retain the Euro-centrism which world history has struggled to overcome for many years. If racism has replaced religions in the hierarchical order of food culture, certain diets such as beef and white bread still symbolize the dominance of those who eat them (pp. 268-270). In addition, her analysis of “modern nutritional theory” reminds me of the Foucaultian notions of knowledge, power and “biopolitics.” It will be more interesting if she can link modern cuisines to the new regimes of knowledge-power which disciplines gender and sexuality. Therefore, a deeper engagement with critical theories may enrich her interesting discussions on the pros and cons of industrialized kitchens and the food industry (chapter 8).

Still, despite its weakness, the book gives us a rare viewpoint on the world history of cooking and eating. The book not only makes a great contribution on our understanding of culinary history, but also urges us to a greater study of the global history of daily practices and their long duration.