

# *Chinese Cultural Logic and Practices in Medicine & Food*

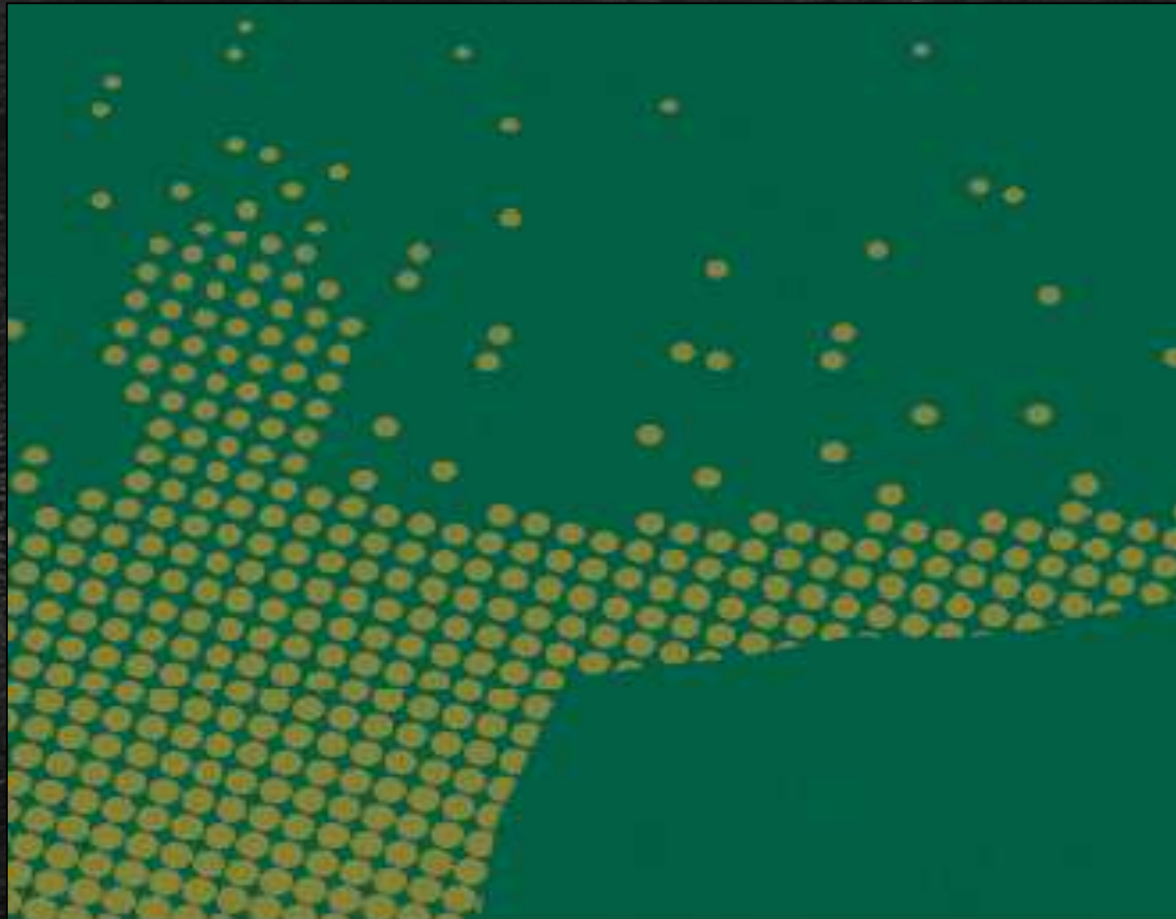
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Professor Emerita of Anthropology, University of Calgary

Invited Lecture, UNAM, Mexico City

October 16, 2019



POSTHUMANISM

Alain Smart and Josephine Smart

ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

**A. Smart and J. Smart**  
**2017**  
**U of Toronto Press**



Josephine Smart and Alan Smart  
Food, Borders and Diseases.

In Jakob A. Klein and James L. Watson  
(eds.), *The Handbook of Food and  
Anthropology*, pp. 406-428.

London: Bloomsbury Pub. 2016

**THE HANDBOOK OF  
FOOD AND ANTHROPOLOGY**

EDITED BY  
JAKOB A. KLEIN AND  
JAMES L. WATSON

WILEY-BLUMSBURY



WILEY  
A COMPANION TO  
BORDER STUDIES



A Companion to  
**Border Studies**

Edited by Thomas M. Wilson  
and Hastings Donnan



WILEY-BLACKWELL

CHAPTER **20** **Biosecurity,  
Quarantine and  
Life across the  
Border**

*Alan Smart and  
Josephine Smart*

**2012 Blackwell Pub. Ltd.**

# (Im)mobilizing Technology: Slow Science, Food Safety, and Borders

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Calgary, Alberta, Canada

**Identities: Global Studies in  
Culture and Power** **2012**

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<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gide20>

# How I got into “food and disease” studies:

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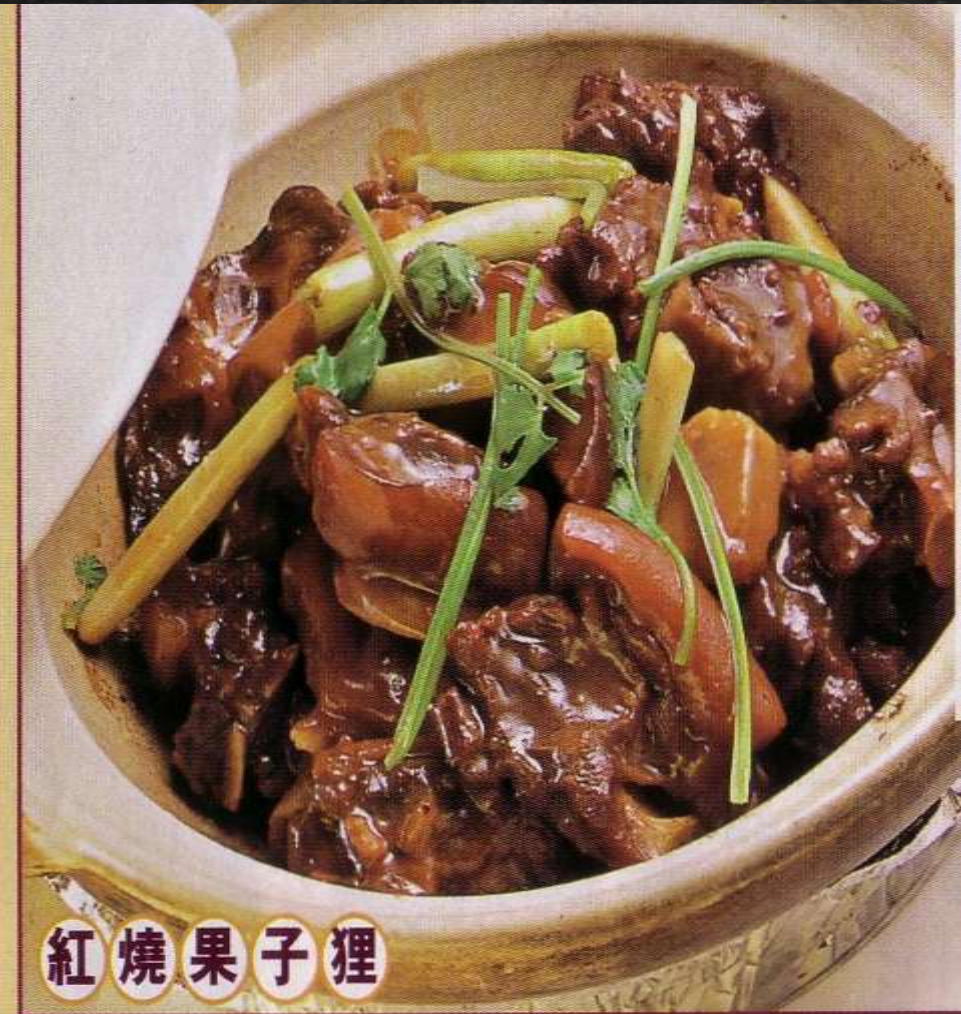
- 2000-2004 SSHRC funded project “*Chop Suey and Egg Roll – Chinese Immigrant Cuisine in Canada*”
- 2004 invited presentation at Centre for Disease Control (CDC) annual meeting in a panel on SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome)
- 2006-2008 APRI funded project “*Social and Economic Impact of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) in Canada*”

# Countries affected by SARS in 2003 (total infected cases)

(Source: WHO [http://www.who.int/csr/sars/country/table2004\\_04\\_21/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/csr/sars/country/table2004_04_21/en/index.html))

- 
- Australia (6)
  - Canada (251)
  - **China (5327)**
  - France (7)
  - Germany (9)
  - **Hong Kong (1755)**
  - India (3)
  - Indonesia (2)
  - Italy (4)
  - Kuwait (1)
  - Macao (1)
  - Malaysia (5)
  - Mongolia (9)
  - New Zealand (1)
  - Philippines (14)
  - Ireland (1)
  - South Korea (3)
  - Romania (1)
  - Russian Federation (1)
  - Singapore (238)
  - South Africa (1)
  - Spain (1)
  - Sweden (5)
  - Switzerland (1)
  - Thailand (9)
  - United Kingdom (4)

# A restaurant advertisement in Shenzhen, Guangdong – civet cat



**紅燒果子狸**

▲福建野生果子狸，皮軟而肉質很彈牙，肥而不膩。（¥238一隻）



## 陽光海港

地址：深圳市嘉賓路1號陽光酒店3樓

電話：86-755-2233888

交通：由火車站乘的士前往只需五分鐘，車費¥12.5。





# Food safety, emergent infectious disease risks, & food choices

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- SARS in 2003, extensive culling of civet cats in China
- An underground trade of civet cats emerged
- “It is good for you.”
- Tonic food (*bu pin* 補品) – food as medicine in daily practices, folk medicine intended to restore balance
- “I have reliable sources; these are caught in the wild, the best.”
- wild animals = safe, pure, virile
- rare and exotic animals considered particularly potent & desirable (= more expensive)

# CDC invited presentation conclusion:

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- Biomedical interventions (e.g. vaccination, surgery, drugs, dietary restrictions) and biosecurity protocols cannot always solve all biomedical problems perfectly.
- Human behaviour is governed to a large extent by cultural logics that may be incompatible with the western centric approach to medicine and biosecurity.
- Effective biomedical interventions must include a sound knowledge of context-specific cultural foundations and practices.

# Chinese humoral theory of health

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- The human body contains *yin-yang* forces (*qi*)
- Imbalance → illness
- To remain healthy is to maintain the balance
- The optimal balance varies from person to person
- All elements have specific attributes which can be utilized to enhance or restore the humoral balance within one's system.
- Food, like everything, is defined as *yin*, *yang* or neutral. Food can enhance or disrupt one's humoral balance.

	<b>Western</b>	<b>Chinese</b>
<b>worldview</b>	Binary opposition Good–bad; healthy-sick	<i>Yin-yang</i> complementarity (humoral theory)
<b>causes of illness</b>	External pathogens	Imbalance of <i>yin-yang</i> forces within one's system
<b>treatment</b>	Pathogen specific interventions – drugs, surgery	Restoration of balance via food, lifestyle

# “Doing the Month”\*

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- ethnomedicine, Taiwanese Chinese in USA
- *man yue* 满月 (full month) – banquet, boiled eggs dyed red, ginger & pork hock cooked in dark vinegar
- post-partum rules regarding food & behaviour
- to restore balance : birthing is **depleting** and **polluting**

\* Pillsbury, Barbara. 1978. “Doing the Month” – Confinement and Convalescence of Chinese Women after Childbirth. *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 12, pp. 11-22.

# Chinese post-partum rules (pp. 13-14) :

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1. Do not wash yourself ...for the entire month.
2. Do not go outside for the entire month.
3. Do not eat any raw or ...cold food.
4. Eat chicken.
5. Do not be blown on by the wind.
6. Do not walk and move around.
7. Do not go to other person's homes.
8. Do not get sick during the month.
9. Do not read or cry.
10. Do not have sexual intercourse.
11. Do not eat at the table with family/guests.
12. Do not burn incense.

# Chinese post-partum food rules

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- Birthing is depleting due to the loss of blood and fluids, and all the energy involved in the making of a child. There is a loss of “*yang*” (hot) energy from the female body.
- A woman after giving birth is in a state of “*yin*” dominance (cold) – this creates an imbalance which can be and should be corrected by ingesting lots of “hot” food during the month of recovery.
- Eating “cold” food further aggravates *yin* dominance – not recommended.

Chicken cooked in sesame oil (“hot” food)  
chicken, lots of sesame oil, rice wine & seasoning





# Hot or Cold? Food or Medicine?

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- Banana – cold attributes, good for people suffering from high blood pressure & chronic constipation.
- Banana cooked with alcohol neutralizes its “cold” attribute because alcohol is “hot”; banana cooked in alcohol is a cure for head cold.
- Food as medicine / medicine in food.
- (Tacit) knowledge.

# The highly open and inclusive food choices in Chinese culture

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- Explanation 1 – poverty and necessity driven culinary inventiveness and inclusiveness
- Explanation 2 – the Chinese worldview based on yin-yang complementarity (humoral theory) regarding health; everything (including food sources) has these attributes (yin-yang) and can be utilized to restore health (balance)

# Cured field rodents, 38 RMB yuan each

Photo by Josephine Smart, 2009, Guangzhou



# Soup menu at a Guangzhou restaurant

Photo by Josephine Smart, 2009



# Restaurant menu in Guangzhou - chameleon

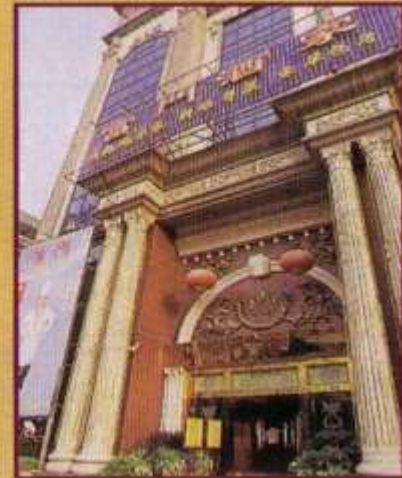


▲ 來自廣西梧州的變色龍，秋天食就最啱，每次入貨都會入二十條有多，次次隔幾日就清貨。

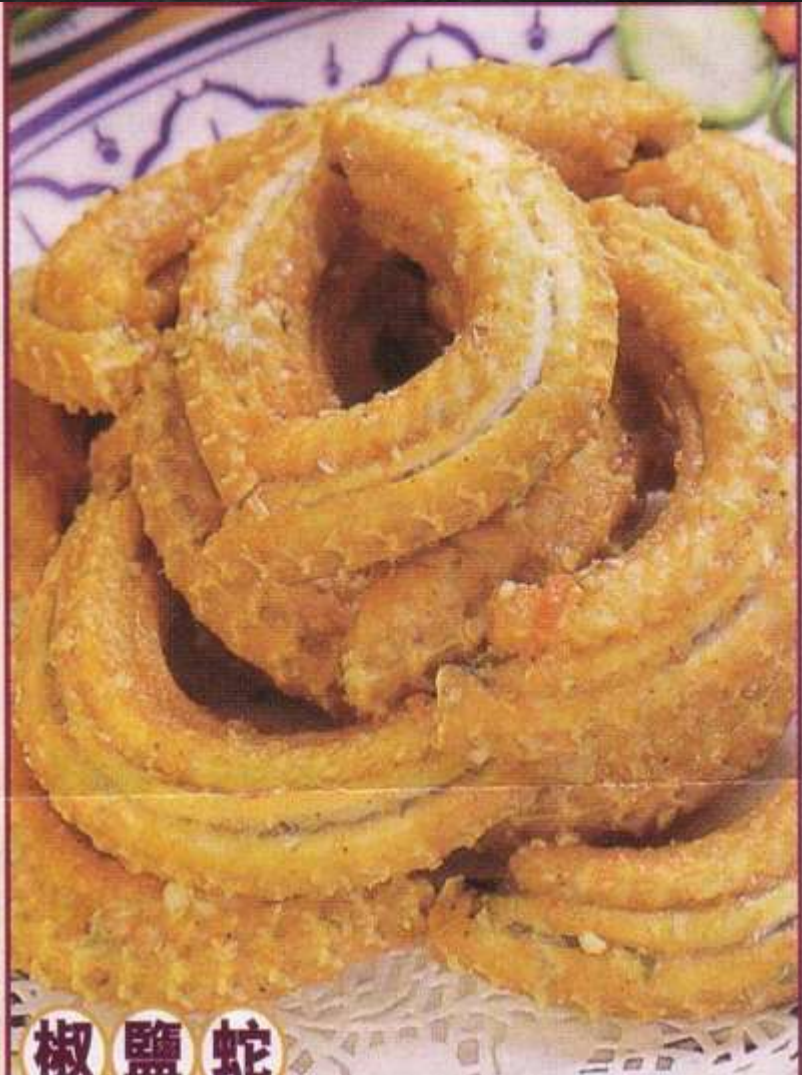
## 蒸變色龍

◀ 變色龍的食法可燉可清蒸，如要清蒸的話就加上紅棗、冬菇、火腿和薑絲一起清蒸。變色龍的口感似食鱷魚肉，又比田雞肉爽口，而變色龍有滋陰養顏功效，女士們啱晒。

(¥ 168 / 一隻)

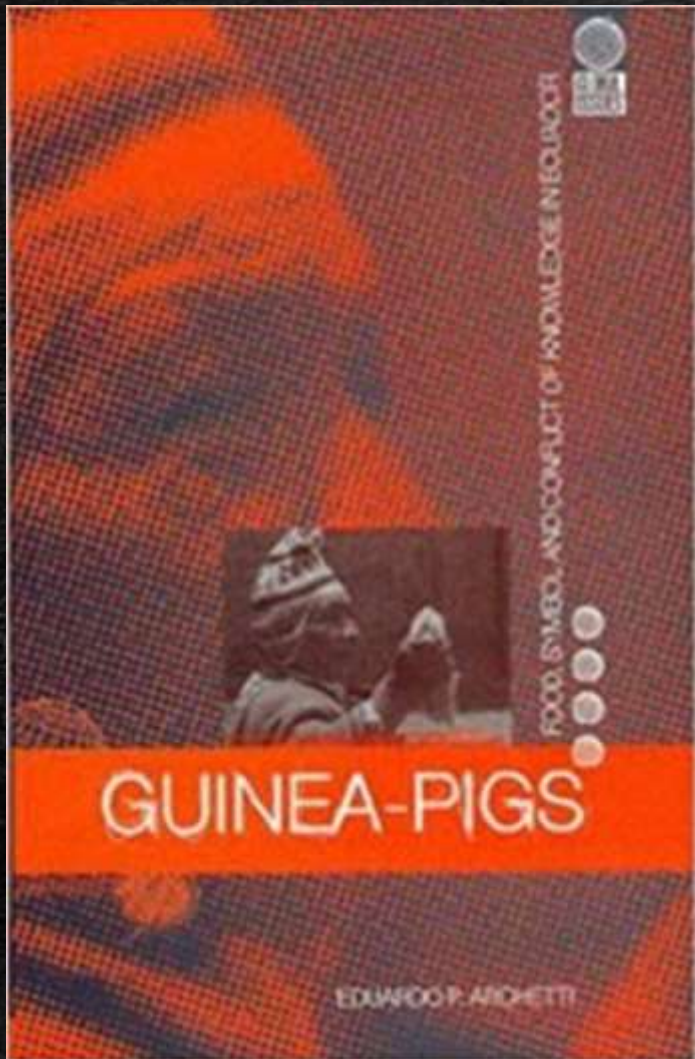


# Restaurant menu in Guangzhou – water snake



Marchetti, Eduardo P. (1997) *Guinea-pigs: Food Symbol and Conflict of Knowledge in Ecuador*. Translated by V. Napolitano and P. Worsley. New York: Berg.

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Ch.2 The Cultural Complexity of the G-P

Ch.3 The Meat Produced

Ch.4 The Meat Transformed

**Ch.5 The Healing Meat**

Ch.6 The Meat as Commodity

**Ch.7 Social and Cultural Logics**