For Chinese Daoists, a *Triple Burner* in the stomach and intestines cooked foods into sweat, saliva, gastric juices, and finally blood. For them, fermentation is just another form of cooking. Pregnant Chinese women had to stay away from fermenting foods for fear that the seed cooking in the womb would interfere with the ferment cooking in the jar.

Food, like everything in the cosmos, was made of 4 or 5 basic elements (wood, fire earth, metal, water, air) that could be combined in adequate proportions.
Oil, water, salt, air, spices, aromatic, colored foods each have special significance and properties. Oil, congealed fire, contains the spark of life. Water—like fire—is at once an agent and an element; the ultimate element, tasteless but able to combine other flavors into a harmonious blend. Pure sweet air is therapeutic, while foul air is poisonous. *Eat breath, not grains* say the Daoists. Qi whose character is made of components that read as *vapors arising from rice or millet* (foods!) suffuses the universe; linked with semen, it is the essence, energy, strength derived from food that allows the body to grow, develop and act. Salt is a panacea, effective against the plague of worms; a little revealed the flavors of bland food without displaying its presence.
Energy in the Dao

Dao can be roughly thought of as the flow of the Universe, or as some essence or pattern behind the natural world that keeps the Universe balanced and ordered. It is related to the idea of qi, the essential energy of action and existence. Dao is a non-dual concept – it is the greater whole from which all the individual elements of the Universe derive. Dao is more commonly expressed in the relationship between wu (void or emptiness, in the sense of wuji) and yinyang (the natural dynamic balance between opposites), leading to its central principle of wu wei (non-action, or action without force).

Dao is usually described in terms of elements of nature, and in particular as similar to water. Like water it is undifferentiated, endlessly self-replenishing, soft and quiet but immensely powerful, and impassively generous.
Physical energy as we know it is not part of Chinese tradition. *Qi* encompasses all forms—physical, chemical, biological—of energy.

In traditional Chinese culture, *qi* or *ch’i*, also known as *gi* in Korean culture, *ki* in Japanese culture, is an active principle forming part of any living thing. *Qi* literally translates as "breath", "air", or "gas", and figuratively as "material energy", "life force", or "energy flow". Some elements of *qi* can be understood in the term *energy* when used by writers and practitioners of various esoteric forms of spirituality and alternative medicine. Elements of the *qi* concept can also be found in Western popular culture, for example "The Force" in *Star Wars* and Jediism. Notions in the West of *energeia*, *élan vital*, or "vitalism" are purported to be similar.

The ancient Chinese described it as "life force". They believed *qi* permeated everything and linked their surroundings together. They likened it to the flow of energy around and through the body, forming a cohesive and functioning unit. By understanding its rhythm and flow they believed they could guide exercises and treatments to provide stability and longevity.

Although the concept of *qi* has been important within many Chinese philosophies, over the centuries the descriptions of *qi* have varied and have sometimes been in conflict. Until China came into contact with Western scientific and philosophical ideas, they had not categorized all things in terms of matter and energy. *Qi* and *li*（理: "pattern") were ‘fundamental’ categories similar to matter and energy. Fairly early on, some Chinese thinkers began to believe that there were different fractions of *qi* and that the coarsest and heaviest fractions of *qi* formed solids, lighter fractions formed liquids, and the most ethereal fractions were the "lifebreath" that animates living beings. Not only human beings and animals were believed to have *qi*. *Zhuangzi* indicated that wind is the *qi* of the Earth. Moreover,
cosmic yin and yang "are the greatest of qi." He described qi as "issuing forth" and creating profound effects. He said "Human beings are born [because of] the accumulation of qi. When it accumulates there is life. When it dissipates there is death... There is one qi that connects and pervades everything in the world."

"Heaven (seen here as the ultimate source of all being) falls (duo 墮, i.e., descends into proto-immanence) as the formless. Fleeting, fluttering, penetrating, amorphous it is, and so it is called the Supreme Luminary. The dao begins in the Void Brightening. The Void Brightening produces the universe (yu-zhou). The universe produces qi. Qi has bounds. The clear, yang [qi] was ethereal and so formed heaven. The heavy, turbid [qi] was congealed and impeded and so formed earth. The conjunction of the clear, yang [qi] was fluid and easy. The conjunction of the heavy, turbid [qi] was strained and difficult. So heaven was formed first and earth was made fast later. The pervading essence (xi-jing) of heaven and earth becomes yin and yang. The concentrated (zhuan) essences of yin and yang become the four seasons. The dispersed (san) essences of the four seasons become the myriad creatures. The hot qi of yang in accumulating produces fire. The essence (jing) of the fire-qi becomes the sun. The cold qi of yin in accumulating produces water. The essence of the water-qi becomes the moon. The essences produced by coitus (yin) of the sun and moon become the stars and celestial markpoints (chen, planets)."

— Huai-nan-zi, 3:1a/19

The concept of Qi bears no resemblance to the concept as used by physicists. Qi is a non-scientific, unverifiable concept. And this remains one of the major challenges for communication between Western (science-based) and Chinese scholars.[2]

The Kitchen God and his Two Wives

In Chinese popular beliefs, there are three domains in the cosmos - Heaven, Earth, and the Underworld - and each domain is populated by a host of important gods and goddesses.
One of the most important deities of the Earthly Domain was the Kitchen God (or Zao Jun, also known as the Hearth God or the Stove God). Every family had its own Kitchen God, who was considered to be that particular family’s guardian. The Kitchen God was an important intermediary between a family and other important gods since the stove was thought to represent the unity of the family. In late-imperial China there was a process known as “family division,” in which two brothers who were both married and had children could decide that they can no longer live together practically as one family and want to split up into two families. When this happened, at least
one of the brothers had to dedicate a new Kitchen God, for two families could not share one Kitchen God.

The Kitchen God was often represented with his wife, or sometimes with his two wives.

It was widely held that once a year, just before the Lunar New Year, the Kitchen God went to Heaven to report to the Jade Emperor on his family’s activities during the year. The family “sent” its Kitchen God to Heaven to make his report by burning the paper image that had hung over the stove for the entire year. But in order to ensure a good report before the Jade Emperor, a bit of honey would first be rubbed on the lips of the paper god, so that he would have only sweet things to say to the Jade Emperor (or so that the sticky honey would prevent him from opening his mouth, and no bad news would get out) [5].

**Chinese Cuisines**

Chinese cuisine includes styles originating from the diverse regions of China, as well as from Chinese people in other parts of the world including most Asian nations. The history of Chinese cuisine in China stretches back for thousands of years and has changed from period to period and in each region according to climate, imperial fashions, and local preferences. Over time, techniques and ingredients from the cuisines of other cultures were integrated into the cuisine of the Chinese people due both to imperial expansion and from the trade with nearby regions in pre-modern times, and from Europe and the New World in the modern period.
Classically the “Eight Culinary Cuisines” of China are Anhui, Cantonese, Fujian, Hunan, Jiangsu, Shandong, Sichuan, and Zhejiang cuisines.

To illustrate in one map the real diversity and complexity of China’s culinary diversity here’s the one published recently in the MIT Technology Review:

The colors of the different cuisines are superimposed on the provinces. Many cuisines cover more than one province, and some provinces offer diverse cuisines.

These results threw up a couple of surprises. First the research team found two regional cuisines that differed substantially from each other and from everything else: the cuisines associated with Hong Kong and YunGui. This may reflect the facts that ethnic minorities have historically resided in the YunGui region and that Hong Kong was ruled by the British Empire and Japan for more than 100 years. They also found that the geographical proximity, rather than climate proximity, is a crucial factor that determines the similarity of regional cuisines.

That also provides an interesting insight into the way food cultures evolve. Clearly, Chinese people move(d) from one region to another, taking their recipes with them, where they can modify them as they
wish. Obviously, that happens more often between regions that are geographically close.

Historically, Chinese society greatly valued gastronomy and developed an extensive study of the subject based on its traditional medical beliefs. Chinese culture initially centered around the North China Plain. The first domesticated crops seem to have been the foxtail and broomcorn varieties of millet, while rice was cultivated in the south. By 2000 BC, wheat had arrived from western Asia.

However, these grains were typically served as warm noodle soups instead of baked into bread as in Europe. Nobles hunted various wild game and consumed mutton, pork, dog, and beef as these animals were domesticated. Grain was stored against famine and flood and meat was preserved with salt, vinegar, curing, and fermenting.

By the time of Confucius in the late Zhou, gastronomy was becoming a high art. He was recorded discussing one such picky eater: "For him, the rice could never be white enough. When it was not cooked right, he would not eat. When it was out of season, he would not eat. When the meat was not cut properly, he would not eat. When the food was not prepared with the right sauce, he would not eat."

During Shi Huangdi’s Qin dynasty, the empire expanded into the south. By the time of the Han Dynasty, the different regions and cuisines of China’s peoples were linked by major canals and leading to greater complexity in the different regional cuisines. Not only is food seen as giving "qi", energy, but food is also about maintaining yin and yang. The philosophy behind it was rooted in the I Ching and Chinese traditional medicine: food was judged for color, aroma, taste, and texture and a good meal was expected to balance the Four Natures (‘hot’, warm, cool, and ‘cold’) and the Five Tastes (pungent, sweet, sour, bitter, and salty). Salt was used as a preservative from early times, but in cooking was added in the form of soy sauce, and not at the table. The predominance of chopsticks and spoons as eating utensils also necessitated that most food be prepared in bite-sized pieces or (as with fish) be so tender that it could be easily picked apart.

During the Han dynasty, Chinese developed methods of food preservation for military rations during campaigns such as drying meat into jerky and cooking, roasting, and drying grain. Chinese
legends claim that the roasted flatbread Shaobing (shao-ping) was brought back from the Xiyu (the Western Regions, known as Central Asia) by the Han dynasty General Ban Chao, and that it was originally known as Hubing 胡餅 (barbarian pastry). The shao-ping is believed to be descended from the Hu-ping (Hubing) and to be related to the Persian and Central Asian Naan bread and the Near Eastern Pita bread. Foreign westerners made and sold sesame cakes in China during the Tang dynasty.

During the Southern and Northern Dynasties non-Han people like the Xianbei of Northern Wei introduced their cuisine to northern China, and these influences continued up to the Tang dynasty, popularizing meat like mutton and dairy products like goat milk, yogurts, and Kumis among even Han people. It was during the Song dynasty that Han Chinese developed an aversion to dairy products (or an intolerance to lactose) and abandoned the dairy foods introduced earlier. The Han Chinese rebel Wang Su who received asylum in the Xianbei Northern Wei after fleeing from Southern Qi, at first could not stand eating dairy products like goat’s milk and meat like mutton and had to consume tea and fish instead, but after a few years he was able to eat yogurt and lamb, and the Xianbei Emperor could ask him which of the foods of China (Zhongguo) he preferred, fish vs. mutton and tea vs. yogurt.

The great migration of Chinese people south during the invasions preceding and during the Song dynasty increased the relative importance of southern Chinese staples such as rice and congee. The Yuan and Qing dynasties introduced Mongolian and Manchu cuisine, warm northern dishes which popularized hot pot cooking. During the Yuan dynasty many Muslim communities emerged in China, who practiced a porkless cuisine now preserved by Hui restaurants throughout the country. Yunnan cuisine is unique in China for its cheeses like Rubing and Rushan cheese made by the Bai people, and its yogurt that may have been due to a combination of Mongolian influence during the Yuan dynasty, the Central Asian settlement in Yunnan, and the proximity and influence of India and Tibet on Yunnan.

As part of the last leg of the Columbian Exchange, Spanish and Portuguese traders began introducing foods from the New World to China through the port cities of Canton and Macao. Mexican chili peppers became essential ingredients in Sichuan cuisine and
calorically-dense potatoes and corn became staple foods across the northern plains.

During the Qing Dynasty, Chinese gastronomes such as Yuan Mei focused upon a primary goal of extracting the maximum flavor of each ingredient. However, as noted in his culinary work the *Suiyuan shidan*, the fashions of cuisine at the time were quite varied and in some cases were flamboyantly ostentatious, especially when the display served also a formal ceremonial purpose, as in the case of the Manchu Han Imperial Feast.

Manchu Han Imperial Feast

Simulated in the Tao Heung Museum of Food Culture, Fo Tan, Hong Kong

The People's Republic of China, amid numerous false starts, has largely industrialized food production. A side effect of this process was the introduction of American poultry-rearing techniques, which has greatly increased the relative consumption of eggs and chicken in various Chinese cuisines.
Chinese Cooking Techniques

**Chinese cooking techniques** (Chinese: 中餐烹調法) are a set of methods and techniques traditionally used in Chinese cuisines. These date back millennia but have been –and are- constantly adapted by Chinese chefs, with regional variations due to diverse opportunities, constraints or limitations.

The cooking techniques can either be grouped into ones that use a single cooking method or a combination of wet and dry cooking methods.

**Single**

Many cooking techniques involve a singular type of heated cooking or action.

**Wet**

Wet-heat, immersion-based cooking methods are the predominate class of cooking techniques in Chinese cuisine and are usually referred to as "zhǔ" (煮). In fact the term (zhǔ, 煮) is commonly used to denote cooking in general...

**Quick**

Fast wet-heat based cooking methods include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Equivalent</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Braising</td>
<td>simplified Chinese: 烧; traditional Chinese: 燒</td>
<td>Shāo</td>
<td>Braising ingredients over medium heat in a small amount of sauce or broth and simmering for a short period of time until completion. Known as hongshao (红烧, lit. red cooked) when the sauce or broth is soy sauce based.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick\ Boiling</td>
<td>汆 or 燙</td>
<td>Dùn or Zhá</td>
<td>Adding ingredients and seasonings to boiling water or broth and immediately serving the dish with the cooking liquid when everything has come back to a boil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scalding</td>
<td>熬 or simplified Chinese: 燙; traditional Chinese: 讚</td>
<td>Chāo or Tàng</td>
<td>Par cooking through quick immersion of raw ingredients in boiling water or broth one-time followed by immersion in cold water.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prolonged

Prolonged wet-heat based cooking methods include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Equivalent</th>
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<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bake stewing</td>
<td>培</td>
<td>Wēi</td>
<td>Slowly cooking a ceramic vessel of broth and other ingredients by placing it in or close to hot embers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gradual simmering</td>
<td>simplified Chinese: 燉</td>
<td>Dùn</td>
<td>Adding ingredients to cold water along with seasonings and allowing the contents to slowly come to a prolonged simmering boil. This is known in English as double steaming due to the vessels commonly used for this cooking method. The term is also used in Chinese for the Western cooking technique of stewing and brewing herbal remedies of Traditional Chinese medicine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow red cooking</td>
<td>simplified Chinese: 醸</td>
<td>Lǔ</td>
<td>Cooking over prolonged and constant heat with the ingredients completely immersed in a strongly flavoured soy sauce based broth. This technique, along with hongshao (红烧, lit), is known in English as red cooking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steaming</td>
<td>蒸 or 蒸</td>
<td>Zhēng or Xún</td>
<td>Steaming food to completion over boiling water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decoction</td>
<td>熬</td>
<td>Áo</td>
<td>Cooking slowly to extract nutrients into the simmering liquid, used to describe the brewing process in Chinese herbology with the intention of using only the decocted brew.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dry

Air-based

Food preparation in hot dry vessels such as an oven or a heated empty wok include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Equivalent</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baking or Roasting</td>
<td>烤</td>
<td>Kǎo</td>
<td>Cooking by hot air through convection or broiling in an enclosed space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking</td>
<td>熏</td>
<td>Xūn</td>
<td>Cooking in direct heat with Smoke. The source of the smoke is typically sugar or tea.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Oil-based cooking methods are one of the most common in Chinese cuisine and include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Equivalent</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep frying or Frying</td>
<td>炸</td>
<td>Zhá</td>
<td>Full or partial immersion cooking in hot oil or fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pan frying</td>
<td>煎</td>
<td>Jiān</td>
<td>Cooking in a pan with a light coating of oil or liquid and allowing the food to brown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stir frying or high heat Sauêting</td>
<td>炒</td>
<td>Chǎo</td>
<td>Cooking ingredients at hot oil and stirring quickly to completion. This technique—as well as bao (爆炒, 油爆)—is known in English as stir frying. This technique uses higher heat than that of Sauêting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flash-frying or High heat Stir frying</td>
<td>[油]爆</td>
<td>[Yóu]Bào</td>
<td>Cooking with large amounts hot oil (油爆), sauces (酱爆), or broth (汤爆) at very high heat and tossing the ingredients in the wok to completion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stir frying (爆 bào) is a Chinese cooking technique involving relatively large amounts of oil.

Kian Lam Kho identifies five distinct techniques of stir frying [2]:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Equivalent</th>
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<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plain stir-fry or Simple stir-fry</td>
<td>清炒</td>
<td>qīngchǎo</td>
<td>To stir-fry a single ingredient (with aromatics and sauces). A plain stir-fry using garlic is known as 蒜炒, suànchǎo.[3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry stir-fry or Dry wok stir-fry</td>
<td>煸炒</td>
<td>biānchǎo</td>
<td>To stir-fry a combination of protein and vegetable ingredients (with a small amount of liquid).[4]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moist stir-fry  滑炒  huáchāo  To stir-fry a combination of protein and vegetable ingredients (with a Gravy-like sauce)[5]

Dry-fry or Extreme-heat stir-fry  干煸  gānbiān  To scorch in oil before stir-frying (with no addition of water)[6]

Scramble stir-fry  软炒  ruānchāo  A technique for making egg custard.

**Without heat**

Food preparation techniques not involving the heating of ingredients include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Equivalent</th>
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<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dressing</td>
<td>拌</td>
<td>Bàn</td>
<td>Mixing raw or unflavoured cooked ingredients with seasonings and served immediately. Similar to tossing a dressing into salad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinating or pickling</td>
<td>腌</td>
<td>Yān</td>
<td>To pickle or marinade ingredients in salt, soy sauce or soy pastes. Use for making pickles or preparing ingredients for addition cooking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jellifying</td>
<td>凍</td>
<td>Dòng</td>
<td>To quickly cool a gelatin or agarose containing broth to make aspic or agar jelly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Combination**

The chicken in General Tso's chicken has been fried and lightly braised in sauce (Liu, 潘)
Several techniques in Chinese involve more than one stage of cooking and have their own terms to describe the process. They include:

- **Dòng (凍)**: The technique is used for making aspic but also used to describe making of various gelatin desserts
  1. Simmering meat for a prolonged period in a broth (Lu, 滷) or (Dun, 炖)
  2. Chilling the resulting meat and broth until the mixture gels

- **Hùi (煨)**: The dishes made using this technique is usually finished by thickening with starch (勾芡)
  1. Quick precooking in hot water (Tang, 燙)
  2. Finished by stir-frying (爆, 炒) or Shao (燒)

- **Liū (溜)**: This technique is commonly used for meat and fish. Pre-fried tofu is made expressly for this purpose.
  1. Deep frying (Zha, 炸) the ingredients until partially cooked
  2. Finishing the ingredients lightly braising (Shao, 燒) it to acquired a soft "skin"

- **Mēn (燜)**:
  1. Stir-frying (爆, 炒) the ingredients until partially cooked
  2. Cover and simmer (Shao, 燒) with broth until broth is fully reduced and ingredients are fully cooked.
Chinese Food Therapy

**Chinese food therapy** (traditional Chinese: 食療) is a mode of dieting rooted in Chinese understandings of the effects of food on the human organism, and centered on concepts such as eating in moderation. Its basic precepts are a mix of folk views and concepts drawn from traditional Chinese medicine. They describe the effect of each kind of meat, grain, herb, or vegetable on the human body, how the body operates, and gave suggestions about what to prepare to stay healthy or cure disease. *It was the prescientific analog of modern medical nutrition therapy;* that is, it was a state-of-the-art version of dietary therapy before the sciences of biology and chemistry allowed the discovery of present physiological knowledge. It now qualifies in the West as alternative medicine.

A Chinese medicinal diet is not a simple combination of food and herbs, but a specially prepared dish made from Chinese herbs, food and condiments according to the theoretical guidelines of diet preparation. Such a diet is in response to the different symptoms of a disease and its diagnosis according to TCM, and used to prevent and treat diseases, improve fitness, and/or slow down the aging process.

Over the centuries, Chinese cuisine has developed into a remarkably varied one, using far more vegetables and meats than available in the West. One factor behind this development is the link between diet and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Food is considered more than just sustenance; it contains therapeutic properties and is prescribed by TCM doctors. While acupuncture and massage may be used to treat an ailment, and herbal mixtures infused to make teas, the first line of treatment is usually diet itself. Consider the fact that although China suffers from air, water, and soil pollution, life expectancy in the country has grown to 71 years which rivals that of the West. This is a remarkable achievement given its extremely low per capita income, shortage of medical services, and levels of pollution.

Food therapy has long been a common approach to health among Chinese people both in China and overseas, and was popularized for western readers in the 1990s with the publication of books like Bob Flaws’ *The Tao of Healthy Eating* and Grace Young’s *The Wisdom of the Chinese Kitchen*. 
A number of ancient Chinese cookbooks and treatises on food (now lost) display an early Chinese interest in food, but no focus on its medical value. The literature on “nourishing life” (yangsheng 養生) integrated advice on food within broader advice on how to attain immortality. Such books, however, are only precursors of “dietary therapy”, because they did not systematically describe the effect of individual food items. The characteristics of using Chinese medicinal foods for health and healing are:

1. **Synergy of food and medicine**
   Medicine and food function as supplements and complement each other. Medicinal food is rendered with medicinal properties, and the effects of medicine become stronger with the combination of food.

2. **Applied by differentiation of symptoms and signs**
   TCM diagnosis and therapy are based on differentiating symptoms and signs, and this is incorporated into the selection of functional foods. Specific groups of signs and symptoms indicate specific treatment protocols. For example in spleen deficiency which is diagnosed by low spirits, weakness of limb, loss of appetite and abdominal distension - foods like Chinese date, ginger, Chinese yam and ginseng are added in order to invigorate functioning of the spleen.

3. **Unique cooking techniques and procedures**
   In order to ensure the desired result of a medicinal diet, herbs and foods should be specially processed such as cutting it into pieces, parching or grinding. Besides, cooking techniques are considered for retaining the effective constituents of food and bringing to bear its full effects on treatment and health care. Proper techniques also help to preserve the original juice and flavor of the ingredients so that it results in attractive colors, aroma, flavor and texture, thus arousing the appetite. Usual cooking methods are steaming, stewing, boiling or making soup while those of deep-fry or roasting are rarely used (see sections below).

4. **For enhancement and treatment**
   Chinese medicinal foods are a milder course of treatment and can be used either to treat disease, or to help healthy people build
stamina and prevent disease. This is one of the characteristics in which medicinal diet is different from drugs.\textsuperscript{[7]}

The earliest work on these various topics dates from the early Han Dynasty era (206 BCE-220 CE) and is called the *Huangdi Neijing* (The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine). It contains the basic ideas of Chinese food therapy. The text gave recommendations on what to eat for different health conditions and different environmental conditions. However, the earliest extant Chinese dietary text is a chapter of Sun Simiao's *Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold* (*Qianjin Fang 千金方*), which was completed in the 650s during the Tang dynasty. Sun's work contains the earliest known use of the term "food (or dietary) therapy" (*shiliao*). Sun stated that he wanted to present current knowledge about food so that people would first turn to food rather than drugs when suffering from an ailment. His chapter contains 154 entries divided into four sections – on fruits, vegetables, cereals, and meat – in which Sun explains the properties of individual foodstuffs with concepts borrowed from the *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon*: *qi*, the *viscera*, vital essence (*jing* 精), and correspondences between the *Five Phases*, the "five flavors" (sour, bitter, sweet, pungent, and salty), and the five grains. He also set a large number of "dietary interdictions" (*shijin* 食禁), some based on calendrical notions (no water chestnuts in the 7th month), others on purported interactions between foods (no clear wine with horse meat) or between different flavors.

Sun Simiao’s disciple Meng Shen (孟詵; 621–713) compiled the first work entirely devoted to the therapeutic value of food: the *Materia Dietetica* (*Shiliao bencao* 食療本草; "food therapy *materia medica*”). This work has not survived, but it is quoted in later texts – like the 10th-century Japanese text *Ishinpō* – and a fragment of it has been found among the Dunhuang manuscripts. Surviving excerpts show that Meng gave less importance to dietary prohibitions than Sun, and that he provided information on how to prepare foodstuffs rather than just describe their properties. The works of Sun Simiao and Meng Shen established the genre of *materia dietetica* and shaped its development in the following centuries.

Although the precepts of Chinese food therapy are neither systematic nor identical in all times and places, some basic concepts can be isolated. Food items are classified as "heating" (*re* 熱; "hot") or
"cooling" (liang 涼; "cool"). Heating food is typically "high-calorie, subjected to high heat in cooking, spicy or bitter, or ‘hot’ in color (red, orange)", and includes red meat, innards, baked and deep-fried goods, and alcohol. They are to be avoided in the summer and can be used to treat "cold" illnesses like excessive pallor, watery feces, fatigue, chills, and low body temperature caused by a number of possible causes, including anemia. Green vegetables are the most typical cooling food, which is "low-calorie, watery, soothing or sour in taste, or 'cool' in color (whitish, green)". They are recommended for "hot" conditions: rashes, dryness or redness of skin, heartburns, and other "symptoms similar to those of a burn", but also sore throat, swollen gums, and constipation.

Ancient Chinese medical books list hundreds of plant, animal, and chemical ingredients and tell their specific effects on the human body. These books give ideas about the physical principals involved in human health, and they describe how herbs or special foods help, along with TCM techniques such as moxibustion and acupuncture. Currently, there is a wide choice of foods that are used in many different ways to promote health and wellbeing. It is estimated that there are more than 600 different kinds of resource ranging from cereals, fruits, vegetables, meats and marine products. Many of these may be unfamiliar to foreigners who may be reluctant to try them; however all are quite precious and effective in the field of medicinal food. Many different ingredients are used to add to the appeal as well as to strengthen effects of the cuisine. Wine, sugar, oil, salt, vinegar and honey, and other commonly available items such as almonds, mandarin orange, or peanuts, all are utilized in the cooking process.\[8\]

The basic idea is to balance the qi and the body fluids — the fundamentals of Chinese traditional medicine. It is thought that a healthy body or organ has a proper balance of these things. When they are out of balance, there is disease or sickness. The environment or physical injury disrupts the balance. For example, cold weather causes a lack of qi or high yin in the body. So high yang foods are eaten. In hot weather when there is naturally too much yang, high yin foods are eaten. Healing herbs or animal parts can be added to the diet to heal disease. Interestingly, any of the same herbs are used by Western herbalists and herbalists in other parts of the world for the same conditions.
All foods are categorized by qi temperature, ranging from high yang to high yin, and one of the five food flavors (sour, sweet, bitter, hot and salty). A food item’s qi temperature and specific flavor influences the body in its own way. It is thought that people should generally include all the flavors in every meal and balance the "heat". Most Chinese people think that if too much of one type of food is consumed, it can cause an imbalance in the body.

The ancient texts described not only what to prepare for meals, but also how to eat meals. These Chinese customs about eating meals have been part of the culture for hundreds of years:

- Try to avoid overly processed food. Eat naturally.
- Eat seasonal vegetables and fruits.
- Always make sure the vegetables are cooked.
- Sit down to eat at a quiet place.
- Chew the food well.
- Eat slowly. (慢吃 mànchī ‘eat slowly’ means "bon appétit!" in China)
• Pay attention to your eating, and get away from distractions. In TCM your mind plays a part in how well you digest food, so pay attention to the tastes of the food.

• Do not skip meals.

• After lunch, take a nap or rest for a while.

Chinese believe that eating seasonal food is generally best. For example, in summer yin foods like melons and cucumber are available, and in winter high yang foods like garlic and onions are available for consumption as well as easily stored red pepper and other high yang herbs. It is as if nature produces the right healing foods for each season for people. During cold and flu season in the late fall and winter, Chinese would refrain from eating melons, especially if they had a cold. If Chinese get sunstroke (from hot Chinese summer days) they avoid garlic and onions.

A Few Seasonal Recipes:

Winter: Chicken & Ginger Soup

Chinese people like to drink lots of hot soup on cold winter days. But their idea is to make soups with high yang vegetables and herbs, and include meat to balance the dish. A favorite winter soup, just like in the West, is chicken soup.
Directions:

Take chicken portions and boil them with 2 chopped potatoes, half a white Chinese turnip and a tablespoon of mined Ginger. When the potatoes and chicken pieces are almost cooked, add diced vegetables and spices. The diced vegetables should include 3 minced cloves of garlic and 1 chopped onion, essential for adding yang. You can also include a cup of carrots, one of mushrooms, one of zucchini and/or bok choy, or other winter vegetables.

Seasonings: To the mix add a teaspoon of sea salt, and thin slices of Astragalus 黄芪 (vetch root) and pinches of turmeric; also red chili pepper flakes will help.

Spring: Asparagus and Vinegar Recipe

In the spring, plants come alive and start growing. It is important for living things to get more yang for growth. Since liver and gallbladder are especially important at this time, eat the green seasonal vegetables that sprout out since they supply the necessary yang and help to nourish the liver. Green is the color of the liver and of spring is a saying. Drink fresh sour juices: these stimulate the qi.

It is also a time when the body does “spring cleaning” on itself by getting rid of stored fats and meat, so eating less meat and fat is
better for health.

**Directions:**

Wash a bunch of asparagus and a carrot in clean water. Chop up the vegetables and lightly steam them until the asparagus is slightly tender and bright green.

Prepare a dressing with 2 parts of virgin olive oil to one part of plum vinegar (or apple cider vinegar). Pour the dressing on the vegetables and enjoy the dish with some lemonade: squeeze a fresh lemon and add the juice to water.

**Summer: Tomato and Cucumber Salad Recipe**

A favorite dish for summer when the *yang* is naturally high, and you need to cool down a bit. Tomato and cucumber are high *yin* vegetables that are readily available.

**Directions:**

Use ripe ingredients. Dice a red onion, and slice tomatoes (peeled if possible) and Chinese or Persian cucumbers partly peeled. Mix with olive oil, dill, salt and pepper to taste.
Autumn: Butternut Squash Soup Recipe

In the fall, life ebbs away and the *qi* returns to the earth. In TCM, the *qi* goes inwards into the body’s core.

Eating the vegetables and fruits that are seasonal helps your body to transition and stay healthy.

**Directions:**

Take a large butternut squash, a medium onion, 2 cloves of garlic, a stalk of celery, a large carrot, some boiled chicken meat; add salt, pepper, cinnamon and nutmeg to taste.

Chop up and dice all ingredients, but first boil the squash in water in a large pot. When the squash is almost cooked, add all the other ingredients (except the spices) and simmer for a few minutes; then add the spices and mix well. It will be fragrant and chunky; if you prefer it smooth, just blend in a food processor. Can be reheated.
The Special Niche of Cantonese Cuisine

Since I made, for many decades, Hong Kong my 'home away from home', I want to detail somewhat the cuisine of the area, i.e. Cantonese Cuisine.\(^2\)

Cantonese cuisine (traditional Chinese: 廣東菜) comes from Guangdong province and is one of the Eight Culinary Traditions of Chinese cuisine. Its prominence outside China is due the numbers of emigrants from Guangdong. Chefs trained in Cantonese cuisine are highly sought after throughout China. When Westerners speak of Chinese food they usually refer to Cantonese cuisine.

Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province, has long been a trading port and many imported foods and ingredients are used in Cantonese cuisine. Besides pork, beef and chicken, Cantonese cuisine incorporates almost all edible meats, including offal, chicken feet, duck's tongue, snakes, and snails. However, lamb and goat are rarely eaten, unlike in the cuisines of northern or western China. Many cooking methods are used, with steaming and stir-frying being the most favored due to their convenience and rapidity. Other techniques include shallow frying, double steaming, braising, and deep-frying.

For many traditional Cantonese cooks, the flavors of a finished dish should be well balanced and not greasy. Apart from that, spices should be used in modest amounts to avoid overwhelming the flavors of the primary ingredients, and these ingredients in turn should be at the peak of their freshness and quality. There is no widespread use of fresh herbs in Cantonese cooking, in contrast with their liberal use in other cuisines such as Sichuan, European, Thai or Vietnamese. Garlic chives and coriander leaves are notable exceptions, although the latter are usually used as mere garnish in most dishes. In Cantonese cuisine, a number of ingredients such as spring onion, sugar, salt, soy sauce, rice wine, cornstarch, vinegar, scallion oil, and sesame oil, suffice to enhance flavor, although garlic is heavily used in some dishes, especially those in which internal organs, such as entrails, may emit unpleasant odors. Ginger, chili peppers, five-spice powder, powdered black pepper, star anise and a few other spices are also used, but often sparingly.
Although Cantonese cooks pay much attention to the freshness of their primary ingredients, Cantonese cuisine also uses a long list of preserved food items to add flavor to a dish. This may be influenced by Hakka cuisine, since the Hakkas were once (Ming Dynasty) a dominant group occupying imperial Hong Kong and other southern territories.

Some items gain very intense flavors during the drying / preservation / oxidation process and some foods are preserved to increase their shelf life. Some chefs combine both dried and fresh varieties of the same items in a dish. Dried items are usually soaked in water to rehydrate before cooking. These ingredients are generally not served a la carte, but rather go with vegetables or other Cantonese dishes.

There are a small number of deep-fried dishes in Cantonese cuisine, which can often be found as street food. They have been extensively documented in colonial Hong Kong records of the 19th and 20th centuries. A few are synonymous with Cantonese breakfast and lunch, even though these are also part of other cuisines. Slow-cooked soup, or lou fo tong (traditional Chinese: 老火湯) in the Cantonese dialect (literally meaning old fire-cooked soup) is usually a clear broth prepared by simmering meat and other ingredients over a low heat for several hours. Chinese herbs are often used as ingredients. Soup chain stores or delivery outlets in Cantonese-dominated cities such as Hong Kong serve this dish due to the long preparation time of slow-cooked soup.

Due to Guangdong’s location on the southern coast of China, fresh seafood is prominent in Cantonese cuisine, and many Cantonese restaurants keep aquariums or seafood tanks on the premises. In Cantonese cuisine, as in cuisines from other parts of Asia, if seafood has a repugnant odor strong spices are added; the freshest seafood is odorless and, in Cantonese culinary arts, is best cooked by steaming. For instance, in some recipes, only a small amount of soy sauce, ginger, and spring onion is added to steamed fish. According to Cantonese cuisine, the light seasoning is used only to bring out the natural sweetness of the seafood. As a rule of thumb, the spiciness of a dish is usually inversely proportionate to the freshness of the ingredients.
Noodles are served either in soup broth or fried. These are available as home-cooked meals, on dim sum side menus, or as street food at dai pai dongs, where they can be served with a variety of toppings such as fish balls, beef balls, or fish slices. Little pot rice (simplified Chinese: 煲仔饭; traditional Chinese: 煲仔飯) are dishes cooked and served in a flat-bottomed pot (as opposed to a round-bottomed wok). Usually this is a saucepan or braising pan. Such dishes are cooked by covering and steaming, making the rice and ingredients very hot and soft. Usually the ingredients are layered on top of the rice with little or no mixing in between. Many standard combinations exist.

After the evening meal, most Cantonese restaurants offer tong sui (Chinese: 糖水; literally: "sugar water"), a sweet soup. Many varieties of tong sui are also found in other Chinese cuisines. Some desserts are traditional, while others are recent innovations. The more expensive restaurants usually offer their specialty desserts.

But since Southern China –essentially the Cantonese Cuisine cradle–has a long, respected tradition of healthy cooking, it also has a wealth of medicinal foods and recipes. Many are common to other parts, provinces, cuisines or traditions of China, but a number are specific, widely prescribed and used, and the population has faith in them. Cantonese cooks have classified the most important ones.

### Cantonese Medicinal Cooking Techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rough translation</th>
<th>Related symptoms/effects</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Cures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dry fire (yang)</td>
<td>Causes dryness of skin, chapped lips, nose bleed etc</td>
<td>Chili pepper, deep fried food, beef jerky, lychee</td>
<td>Any yin or cooling food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wet heat (yang)</td>
<td>Causes mouth core, urinary burning etc. probably due to acidity or alkalinity</td>
<td>Mango, pineapple, cherry</td>
<td>Chrysanthemum, sugar cane, (竹蔗), imperata arundinacea (茅根), Prunella vulgaris L. (夏枯草)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold cooling (yin)</td>
<td>Causes dizziness, weakness, pale or green face (low oxygen level in blood) etc</td>
<td>Watermelon, cantelope, honeydew and certain kinds of melon-type fruits or vegetables, green tea. All fibrous food, e.g. yam, chestnuts</td>
<td>Any boosting or dry fire food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocking</td>
<td>Cause indigestion, stomach gas etc.</td>
<td>Haw (fruit 山楂), malt (麥芽)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Precautions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poisoning</td>
<td>Causes pus or swelling in wound, outbreak of acnes, hemorrhoid etc.</td>
<td>Duck, goose, bamboo shoot, all shellfish</td>
<td>Abstinence at outbreak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greasy</td>
<td>Causes gastric upset, runny stool, outbreak of acnes</td>
<td>All greasy food, e.g. bacon etc</td>
<td>Not needed if not overused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear cooling</td>
<td>Mild yin type that counteract the dry fire type. Also listed as yin when overdosed</td>
<td>Beer, lettuce, sugar cane, (竹蔗), imperata arundinacea (茅根), American ginseng</td>
<td>Not needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nourishing</td>
<td>Moisturizing, soothing</td>
<td>Apple, pear, fig, winter melon, longan, Dioscorea opposite (淮山), lotus seed, lili bulb etc</td>
<td>Not needed if not overused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boosting</td>
<td>Replenishes blood and Qi. Also listed as dry fire when overdosed</td>
<td>Mutton, snake, wild games, beef, red dates (紅棗)</td>
<td>Not needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigorating</td>
<td>Circulating blood and Qi</td>
<td>Red wine, Korean ginseng</td>
<td>Not needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating, strengthening</td>
<td>Improves various internal functions</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This superficial survey of some aspects of Chinese cuisines (and culture) should make you hungry for more food—including for thought!