

This is an original accepted manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Global Food History* (2020) available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/20549547.2020.1771064>

**Ambivalent Regionalism and the Promotion of a New National Staple Food: Reimagining
Potatoes in Inner Mongolia and Yunnan**

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Abstract

This article addresses the relationship between national, regional and local dimensions of Chinese culinary cultures and identities through the prism of the potato. Specifically, I explore how the central government's strategy to transform the potato from a marginal food into a Chinese national staple opened new possibilities for actors in some marginalized inland regions to reimagine their potato foods as recognized elements of local and wider regional cuisines and culinary identities. In doing so, I also draw attention to the constraints that actors faced in their attempts to reimagine local potato foods, including the sense of ambivalence that continued to surround foods once widely associated with poverty. I discuss these processes of culinary reimagining with reference to potato-growing areas in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in north China and Yunnan Province in the southwest.

Keywords

China, Inner Mongolia, Yunnan, potatoes, marginal foods, local foods, regional cuisines

Introduction¹

Scholars have long taken an interest in the formation of local and regional culinary practices and their significance for Chinese attachments to place.² Until recently, however, little attention has been paid to the relationship between different scales of food and identity. Why do certain local foods and foodways in China come to be taken up at wider scales as emblems of regional or even national culture and identity, while others are unnoticed or even marginalized? Under what circumstances might marginal local foods become reimagined as symbols of regional or national cuisine?³

Recent research points to several, interrelated factors at play in the dynamics of locality, region, and nation in modern Chinese foodways. These include the translocal mobilities of foods and people; the cultural labor of scholars, restaurateurs, and chefs; consumerism, tourism, and commodified nostalgia; media and advertising; and state projects of region- and nation-building.⁴

Taking my cue from this emerging body of work, in this article I discuss how shifts in national-level food and agriculture policy in the People's Republic of China (PRC) may come to affect local and regional culinary practices and identities. Specifically, I explore how the central government's strategy to transform the potato into a Chinese national staple food has opened new possibilities for actors in marginalized inland regions to reimagine their potato foods as recognized elements of local and wider regional cuisines and culinary identities. I also pay attention to the constraints that actors face in their attempts to

reimagine the potato, including the sense of ambivalence that may continue to surround foods once widely associated with poverty.

This study compliments previous work on the role of the state in the development of Chinese regional cuisines, which has highlighted attempts by provincial governments to construct and promote provincial cuisines at home and abroad as a vehicle for strengthening provincial economies, reputations, and identities.⁵ Rather than focus directly on the culinary projects of provincial governments, here I emphasize instead how national-level agriculture and food strategies were creatively taken up by sub-provincial state and non-state actors in their efforts to cultivate new markets for their local products and promote local economies, food cultures, and culinary reputations. In doing so, my study chimes with recent scholarship that emphasizes the multiplicity of actors and agendas involved in the reinvention of Chinese local foods and drinks as commodified markers of “local culture” and “heritage.”⁶

This includes work by Chan who, on the basis of findings from a tea-growing village in Zhejiang province, argues that while government bodies set the stage for transformation of the village into a tourist-attracting, “tea culture village,” they actually took a hands-off approach to what Chan calls “cultural governance.” Rather than getting involved in the day-to-day management of local cultural production, officials encouraged competition between local businesses and allowed these to creatively commodify local culture in ways that officials hoped would contribute to local economic development.⁷ In the examples I discuss here, a similarly distanced approach is apparent in the relationship between provincial and sub-provincial culinary projects. Promotions of potato-eating customs mobilized by actors

operating at a sub-provincial scale not only were not orchestrated or managed by provincial government bodies, to varying degrees they also deviated from versions of regional cuisine endorsed by officials at the provincial level. My preliminary findings also suggest, in line with Chan's argument, that while local governments supported and even initiated some potato-promotion activities, they did little to regulate or coordinate the specific ways in which potatoes and potato foods were being represented and sold as elements of local cuisine and culture.

As I elaborate in later sections, some previously marginalized foods associated with "ethnic minority distinctiveness" (*minzu tese*) have in recent decades been celebrated as core elements of both "Yunnan" and "Inner Mongolian" cuisines. Yet potato cookery, despite being deeply embedded in many local foodways in both Yunnan and Inner Mongolia, have been excluded from these celebrations. This is because, as I argue in this article, in China's southwest and northwest potato-eating has been widely associated with poverty and hardship – but not especially with ethnic minority distinctiveness. Recent central government potato promotion strategies have not only created incentives for farmers in inland regions to grow potatoes and agri-food businesses to develop new potato varieties, products and processing plants. They have also created a positive buzz around potato foods, endorsed from the highest levels of government, enabling some local actors to attempt to raise the status of local potatoes and potato foods and, with them, the localities themselves.

Regional Cuisines and Local Foods in the PRC

The nearest equivalent in PRC culinary discourse to the English-language “regional cuisine” is *caixi* or “culinary system,” a term which implies a coherent set of typical dishes, flavours, cooking methods, and ingredients. Among Chinese food scholars, in culinary institutions, and in media and popular discourse, these “regional” culinary systems are typically equated with “provincial” ones. Not all provinces (or provincial-level autonomous regions) are recognized nationally as having a culinary system. However, all provinces have the potential to become cuisine-bearing units, and some (by many accounts, eight) provincial cuisines have become established as “great” ones (*dacaixi*). By contrast, sub-provincial administrative units such as counties and prefectures may be acknowledged for the excellence of their “local flavours” (*difang fengwei*) and “local speciality foods” (*techan*), but these foods are rarely described as forming their own culinary system. By the same token, while scholars and ordinary eaters do recognize similarities and interaction across provincial borders, the dominant discourse on provincial-level culinary systems presents culinary boundaries as being coterminous with administrative-political ones.⁸

This dominant approach to spatializing culinary culture in the PRC has been contested by some scholars in the country.⁹ Nevertheless, the concept of provincial culinary systems has proven irresistible to provincial governments, who see in the construction and celebration of such cuisines the potential to build regional pride, create regional brands, and promote their restaurant, food, and tourism industries. This includes some inland provinces, which have sought to use their economic underdevelopment relative to the affluent coastal regions to their advantage, attracting tourists and investors by branding their foods as traditional, exotic, and ecologically pure.¹⁰

As Ayora-Diaz points out with reference to Mexico, constructions of regional cuisines suppress certain local foodways in the same way that national cuisines celebrate some regional foods while excluding others.¹¹ So too in China, provincial cuisines tend to become known by a small set of typical foods, flavor combinations, and iconic dishes. Thus, Sichuan is recognized for its “numbing and spicy” (*mala*) flavors, Shanxi for its “vinegar” and “wheat noodles,” Guangdong for its “clear and light” (*qingdan*) flavors and delicate dim sum (*dianxin*), and so on. This process of distillation allows the province to stand out within a national culinary mosaic but does little justice to the diversities of its foodways, particularly those aspects that may not fit easily into the provincial culinary brand.¹²

That said, some foods that have received little attention in provincial-level accounts of cuisine have been promoted by local-level governments, producers, and scholars. If China’s culinary discourse in the 1990s and 2000s was dominated by competition between provincial-level regional cuisines, more recent years have also seen the proliferation of interest in sub-provincial “local foods.”¹³ Still, as we will see in this article, provincial-level narratives remain important, hegemonic even – promoters of local foods tend not to challenge the idea of provincial cuisines, but rather to seek greater recognition within them.

But there can be no doubt that more space has been created in Chinese food discourses and markets for local foods, including for foods that have previously been little known or celebrated outside of their areas of production. Central government has played a part in this, for example through media such as the China Central Television documentary, *A Bite of China*,¹⁴ and the development of Geographical Indication (*dili biao zhi*) regimes designed to protect Chinese local food products on national and international markets. As pointed out

by Zader with reference to rice from northeast China, in the era of market reforms the Communist Party-State continues to play an active part in China's food system. She argues that state subsidies and state-backed research and development were crucial to establishing "Northeast Rice" as a "quality" product among the urban middle class.¹⁵

As I will argue here, central government food policy has also played a part in the reimagining of marginalized local potato foods. My discussion relies on library and internet research and a three-week field trip in the summer of 2019 to Inner Mongolia and Yunnan. In the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, I conducted most of my research in and around the city of Ulanqab, which dubs itself China's "potato capital." I also spent two days in the Autonomous Region's capital, Hohhot. My time in Yunnan was divided between the provincial capital Kunming and a rural, potato-growing area in Xundian County, Kunming Municipality. I also spent two days in the city of Qujing, which lies to the northeast of Kunming. During this trip to Inner Mongolia and Yunnan, I documented local potato foods in restaurants and homes, attended a food festival, toured agribusinesses and a potato museum, visited markets, spoke with vendors, wholesalers, and farmers, and met with restaurateurs, food writers, and members of restaurant trade associations.¹⁴ The 2019 fieldtrip was a preliminary one, in which I set out to document local discourses, culinary practices and promotional activities surrounding potatoes and potato foods. Subsequent research will involve a more systematic investigation of these local potato cultures and economies, including how the practices and values surrounding potatoes may be inflected by factors such as social status, urban-rural divisions, ethnicity, age, and gender. In the article I also occasionally draw on six months of food-focused field research carried out in Yunnan between 2006 and 2012.

Potatoes in China – a marginal food?

In her introduction to *Reimagining Marginalized Foods*, anthropologist Elizabeth Finnis defines “marginal foods” as “distinct foods and culinary practices that have tended to be associated with peripheral or non-elite populations and ethnic groups.”¹⁷ Is the potato a “marginal food” in China?

In certain respects, the potato is not “marginal” at all. The white potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) was brought to China via several routes. One source was the Dutch, who in the seventeenth century introduced the potato into Taiwan, from where it spread to the Chinese mainland. European missionaries brought potatoes to southwest China in the nineteenth century, but it may already have arrived there a couple of centuries earlier via overland trade routes from India, where potatoes, chillies and other New World crops had been first introduced by Portuguese traders as early as the sixteenth century. Popular among farmers because of its relatively low labor requirements and its ability to thrive in drought- and frost-prone conditions, by the nineteenth century the Andean tuber had become a common food crop in cold, dry parts of northwest and north China, and in highland areas of the southwest. Similar to the way in which farmers in coastal southeast China often planted sweet potatoes on marginal lands for their own consumption while devoting more labour to rice and other cash crops, many inland farmers grew white potatoes at higher altitudes and as a supplement to more resource-intensive grain crops such as wheat, rice, and maize. Thus, like sweet potatoes and other New World crops in late imperial China, white potatoes may have facilitated population growth and the settlement of agriculturalists into new lands.¹⁸

Still, the potato's position in the foodways of inland China has in some ways been peripheral. First, it is not usually eaten as the core carbohydrate of a meal (*zhushi*). Chinese meals are typically made up of a combination of cooked grain (*fan*) and supplementary side dishes (*cai*), a dualism the archaeologist K. C. Chang described as one of the basic principles of Chinese food.¹⁹ The potato tends to fall into the category of *cai* or, alternatively, it is eaten between meals as a snack food (*xiaochi*). Second, historically potatoes have featured very little in elite banquets or high-end restaurant cuisine. Third, potato-eating has often been regarded as a sign of poverty.

It is, especially, in the last sense that the potato fits Finnis' definition of a "marginal food." During field trips in Kunming, people have told me that they "were raised on maize and potatoes" as a way of explaining that they had grown up in a poor, mountainous rural area. The association of potato-eating with poverty was, if anything, exacerbated by the experiences of radical socialism, particularly the Great Leap Forward famine of the early 1960s. During the famine, grains such as rice and wheat were appropriated by the state to supply the cities and military. Many rural communities were, at best, left with tubers.²⁰ In 2019 two interlocutors, one in Inner Mongolia and one in Yunnan, told me of an elderly parent who had lived through the famine and now refused to eat potatoes because they had once had to rely on them for survival.

Finnis and her colleagues are particularly interested in moments when attempts are made to reimagine marginal foods and "symbolically repackage" them for mainstream markets. Recent attempts to move the potato from the periphery of China's culinary culture to the

centre of its food markets and restaurants constitute one such moment. These attempts have been driven by national-level food policy. State interest in the potato has been on the rise since the 1990s, and in 2015 the Ministry of Agriculture announced a strategy to transform the potato into a national staple grain (*zhuliang*) and staple food (*zhushi*). Policy documents and promotional literature produced by the Ministry of Agriculture highlight enhanced “grain security” (*liangshi anquan*), i.e. national self-sufficiency in grain, as a key reason for promoting the potato as a staple to complement rice, wheat, and maize. According to these texts, the tuber will enhance environmentally sustainable agriculture, as it is less dependent on water and chemical fertilizers than other grains and more able to resist drought and frost. Additionally, the potato is lauded by the Ministry of Agriculture for its potential to improve national dietary health and to alleviate poverty in China’s inland by creating new markets for farmers and developing processing industries for potato-based foods.²¹

A core mission of the Ministry of Agriculture’s potato strategy is to modernize, scale up and vertically integrate production.²² Government support has thus often gone to processing companies such as the Kaidai company, which I visited in Ulanqab. Designated by the government as a “dragon head enterprise,” it was tasked with “incentivizing” (*daidong*) local, impoverished farmers, providing them with seeds and technical support and purchasing their potatoes, and offering off-farm employment opportunities in the processing plant. In Xundian County, Yunnan, however, there were no significant processing companies, and farmers I spoke with bought subsidized seed potatoes directly from a government agricultural station. Thus, while the potato strategy appears to tie in with a wider policy of agrarian capitalization and de-peasantization,²³ its actual forms and effects

on livelihoods and power relations may vary from place to place – an important topic that will require further investigation and analysis.

The state also tasks some state-owned enterprises and government work units with buying locally produced potatoes for their canteens and encourages consumers to embrace the tuber in their daily diets.²⁴ At the national level, the state promotes the potato to Chinese consumers chiefly along two lines. The first is nutritional. In cookery books, pamphlets, and other materials disseminated by the Ministry of Agriculture, the potato is presented as a kind of superfood. It is at once a “grain, fruit, vegetable, and medicine,” a source of protein, fibre, minerals, and vitamins, with alleged health properties ranging from the ability to keep you slim to protecting you from certain cancers references.²⁵ The second is gastronomic. The 2015 CCTV program, *A Bite of Potato (Shejian shang de malingshu)*, made by a production company operating under the Ministry of Agriculture and obviously modelled on the successful *A Bite of China* series, presents the potato both as a feature of cosmopolitan, upmarket restaurants, where chefs combine Chinese and Western cuisines, and as being deeply embedded in Chinese local foodways, with examples of traditional local potato foods drawn from towns and villages of the southwest and northwest of the country.

Consumer-oriented potato promotions that I observed in Yunnan and Inner Mongolia were not coordinated by the central Ministry of Agriculture or by the provincial-level agricultural departments. They did, however, often invoke the national-level potato drive and echo some of its messages. While maximizing the nation’s grain security did not play a prominent part in the promotions I witnessed, other Ministry of Agriculture messages including poverty alleviation, health, ecology, and, especially, the celebration of local foodways, did. As I

demonstrate below, the idea that the potato was an integral part of China's local culinary heritage, furthered in *A Bite of Potato*, was being advanced in inland, potato-growing regions, in ways that complicated dominant representations of provincial cuisine.

In the following two sections I discuss potato customs and promotion in central Inner Mongolia and northern Yunnan. Both Yunnan Province and the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (IMAR) are landlocked, multi-ethnic regions that are economically weaker and until recently gastronomically less well-recognized than much of China's eastern seaboard. In several other respects, the two are quite different. Inner Mongolia has a continental climate with severe, dry winters. Its landscape includes extensive grasslands long devoted to transhumant pastoralism. Wedged between northern Chinese provinces on the one side and (Outer) Mongolia on the other, an ethnic-ecological opposition between "Mongol" pastoralism and "Han" agriculturalism is a central trope in accounts of Inner Mongolia's modern history. State-sanctioned settlement of Han farmers from adjacent provinces began during the late Qing and intensified in the late 1950s and 1960s as people sought refuge from the even more severe famine conditions of northern Chinese provinces during the Great Leap Forward and as the communist central government encouraged the reclamation of grasslands for grain farming in order to maximize the country's grain base. More numerous than ethnic Mongols already by the beginning of the last century, today Han comprise over 80% of Inner Mongolia's population.²⁶

While potatoes may have a long history in Inner Mongolia – a display in Ulanqab's Potato Museum (discussed below) suggests that they were introduced from Russia through longstanding Central Asian trade routes – today their production is most closely associated

with Han-dominated areas with vast areas devoted to arable farming, such as Wuchuan County in Hohhot Municipality and parts of Ulanqab Municipality. Here, potatoes are increasingly grown on vast fields by specialized producers with the help of new technologies and sold to industrial processors or for export to other provinces, as well as on local markets.

Although Han settlement is an important aspect of ethnic relations and ecological change in many parts of Yunnan Province in China's southwest, the province's ethnic-ecological relations are difficult to reduce to a core opposition akin to Inner Mongolia's discourse of "Mongol vs. Han." Today, one-third of Yunnan's population is registered as belonging to a minority nationality and twenty-four such groups have populations of over four thousand.²⁷ The province's ethnic complexity is paralleled by a geography that includes subtropical rainforests, highland grasslands, mountain pine forests, and Himalayan peaks. Paddy rice is typical in the lower valleys and dry crops including maize, buckwheat, barley, and tubers at higher altitudes. After it was introduced, the potato – a root crop that can be left untended and unharvested in the ground for extended periods – was as elsewhere in mainland Southeast Asia adopted by mobile highland groups as one of several "escape crops" that helped them to evade state control and taxation.²⁸ Yet the tuber may also have helped Han and other lowland farmers to expand into the highlands.²⁹ Today, potatoes are typically grown as part of mixed farming systems in highland areas by farmers of Han, Yi, Tibetan, Miao, Bai, and many other ethnicities.

Inner Mongolia

Despite the decline of transhumant pastoralism in favour of sedentary livestock and arable farming, since the 1990s the Inner Mongolian grasslands and pastoralist ways of life have been reimagined in official discourse and development schemes. They are now presented as material and symbolic sources of strength for IMAR and even China, crucial to the development of “ecological tourism” in the borderlands and to ensuring the supply of dairy and meat to satisfy the nation’s growing hunger for animal foods.³⁰

Food plays an important part in reimagining Inner Mongolia. Milk, yoghurt and mutton are now appropriated by members of the ethnic Han majority in the autonomous region as markers of their “Inner Mongolian” regional identity.³¹ Images of the grasslands and ethnic Mongol herders are used to guarantee the “purity” of Inner Mongolian dairy products on national markets.³² Dairy, mutton, and beef take centre stage in the three-volume 2018 work on the foods of the autonomous region, published as part of a campaign spearheaded by the Inner Mongolia Catering and Hotel Trade Association to establish Inner Mongolian foods – which they tellingly call “Mongol cuisine” (*mengcan*) – as China’s “ninth great regional cuisine” (*dijiu dachaixi*).³³ In the process of celebrating and identifying Inner Mongolia and its cuisine with pastoralist Mongols, many of the foodways of urban residents, agriculturalists, and agro-pastoralists – be they of Han, Mongol, or other ethnicity – become symbolically marginalized as “inauthentic” or “non-native” to the autonomous region.

The use of dairy and meat to stand for Inner Mongolian foodways is true not only of culinary compilations, tourism brochures, and other media but was also evident in the cityscapes of Inner Mongolia, when I visited in 2019. Ulanqab’s urban area, also called Jining District, has a population of around 300,000. Ubiquitous shops specializing in “Inner Mongolian

specialties” (*Neimeng techan*) sold packaged, dried milk tea, curd cheeses, dried beef, and fermented mare’s milk. A hotel restaurant advertised a “whole mutton banquet.” A smaller restaurant that attracted groups of hard-drinking, Han and Mongol men advertised “twin delicacies of the grasslands” (*caoyuan shuangpin*) – sheep sausage and sheep’s blood sausage – as its signature dish. Breakfast shops and other eateries served pots of milk tea (*naicha*) as a matter of course. A lunch I attended, hosted in a neighborhood restaurant by employees from a local government office, featured boiled mutton, mutton tripe, beef ribs, and *guocha*, a hotpot of milk tea with curd cheese, beef jerky, and broomcorn millet (*chaomi*). Meat and dairy foods from the steppes were clearly an important part of the public foodways of the overwhelmingly Han city of Jining. A woman working in a shop specializing in Buddhist paraphernalia lamented the absence of a vegetarian restaurant in the city and explained: “People here are used to eating foods from the grasslands – beef, lamb.” As Billé observes of the IMAR capital, Hohhot, “the dietary frontier did not follow a clear ethnic line.”³⁴

However, as suggested by the inclusion of broomcorn millet (*chaomi*) in the above description, the significance of arable farming and mixed agro-pastoralism in this part of Inner Mongolia was also apparent in the city’s foodways. Oats (a local variety known as *youmian*) and potatoes (called *tudou* or *shanyao*) were especially prominent in urban Ulanqabians’ descriptions of their food habits. As one young man, a native of Ulanqab who worked as a tour guide on the nearby grasslands, put it to me succinctly when I asked him what typified the foods of his hometown: “Potatoes, oats, mutton.”

As elsewhere in north China, potatoes often featured in the form of side dishes, for example as stir-fried potato slivers, or sliced and fried with pork, or in mixed stews (*huicai*). More unusually for China, in Ulanqab the tuber was also often eaten as a staple, typically in combination with oats. Oat noodles filled with grated potatoes was a popular food served in homes and in inexpensive oat noodle shops. Other popular staple foods, mostly made in homes but also served in a few restaurants, were steamed dumplings made from a mix of oat flour and mashed potato, called *shanyaoyu* (“potato fish”) or *shanyu* (“mountain fish”), and *caca* – steamed lumps of grated potato, potato flour, and oats.

According to several residents, potato noodles made from potato flour (*tudou fentiao*) were a must-have food at the Chinese New Year. I was told that many households in the area made potato noodles for the festivities. Some shops now sold packets of ready-made potato noodles produced in a locally based factory, available at any time of the year. There were also popular eateries in the city specializing in potato noodles. However, the latter did not serve Ulanqab-style potato noodles. Instead, these places were outlets of chains originating and supplied from outside Inner Mongolia.

Potato foods did not feature in most local speciality shops or as a signature dish in Jining’s restaurants. Yet several people I spoke with expressed a deep attachment to potatoes. One woman I met in a neighborhood oat noodle shop told me: “If I don’t eat potatoes for a long time, I miss them.” The proprietor of an eatery specializing in stewed mutton bones told me: “It does not feel right if I don’t eat potatoes and oats every day.” A shopkeeper in Hohhot, who hailed from Ulanqab, lamented that people no longer have the time to make foods like “potato fish” and that restaurants do not serve them, either. He told me that since moving

to the city (Hohhot), he eats any staple, including wheat foods and rice. He spoke fondly of the potato foods his mother used to make when they were growing up, and of the home-made potato noodles that he still enjoys when he visits Ulanqab for the Chinese New Year.

In the last few years, attempts were being made by local government and restaurateurs to make the potato more central to public representations of Ulanqab foodways. Local officials have sought to rebrand the city as China's "potato capital" (*shudu*) – thereby differentiating it from Hohhot, which styles itself as the country's "milk capital" (*rudu*).³⁵ This rebranding was materialized through restaurants, festivals, museums, and gift shops, which celebrated Ulanqab's potato foods and potato varieties. Some high-end restaurants in the city now offer "potato banquets" (*tudou yan*). I attended one such banquet in the Jinxingyuan restaurant, hosted in the "Potato 2" banqueting room by the restaurant's general manager, Mr. Feng. Dishes included upscale versions of local potato dishes, including pounded potato dumplings served in a vinegar sauce (*tudou jingjing*), pounded potato balls with pork and oats (*jing wanzi*), "big mix" (*dabancai*) – a Chinese New Year's dish made with potato noodles and bean sprouts, Western-inspired dishes like mashed potato covered with cheese, and newly created potato foods such as a sweetened potato cake (*tudoubing*) that included oats and sesame seeds.

Mr. Feng was also involved in organizing Ulanqab's Culinary Culture Festival (*Wulanchabu Meishi Wenhua Jie*), held in July 2019. This was the third such festival. The opening ceremony included speeches from the Ulanqab mayor and party secretary and was attended by autonomous region-level dignitaries. In the presence of these powerful personages, the local festival organizers subtly pushed the boundaries of the dominant,

pastoralist representation of Inner Mongolian cuisine. The 2019 festival of course displayed milk teas, lamb, beef, curd cheeses, and broomcorn millet, but it also celebrated oat noodles and – especially – potatoes. An international potato cooking competition was held at the festival, with chefs from countries including Pakistan, South Korea, Japan, and Belarus. A massive structure in the shape of a Mongolian ger served as an exhibition hall, where Ulanqab’s high end restaurants displayed replicas of their delicacies. Most of these exhibits included potato dishes. Some were traditional local potato foods. Others were playful innovations, such as “Auspicious Chrysanthemum Potatoes” (*Jixiang Juhua Tudou*) – deep-fried potatoes cut in the shape of chrysanthemums and covered in a red sauce. A dish of steamed oats and potatoes was shaped in the form of abalone. Carrying the name “Oats and Potatoes Surpass Abalone” (*youmian tudou sai bayou*), the dish suggested that coarse grain (*culiang*) dishes from the inland could compete with an expensive seafood delicacy from China’s affluent eastern seaboard. The Jinxingyuan Restaurant displayed their entire potato banquet and had the characters for “China’s Potato Capital” (*Zhongguo Shudu*) sticking out of a giant imitation spud. [Figure 1]

The festival was held in a newly built plaza in the city’s sprawling New District south of central Jining. There was a row of shops at the north end of the square, just outside the festival area, each selling local specialties from several of Ulanqab’s counties and banners.³⁶ Potatoes were sold in several of these, most prominently in the shop selling goods from the Qahar Right Rear Banner (*Chaha’er Youyi Houqi*). The centrepiece in this shop was the “Rear Banner Red” (*Houqi Hong*), a red-skinned potato variety liked for its floury (*mian*) texture. The Rear Banner Red was sold in gift boxes and advertised as an “ecological food from the volcanic grasslands.”

In 2019, the China Potato Capital Potato Museum was completed, at a cost of over RMB 30 million. The ground floor tells the story of the potato's domestication in the Andes and its spread to Europe, North America, China, and Inner Mongolia, describes advances in Chinese potato crop science, and depicts the emergence of Ulanqab as a center of production. The top floor includes displays on the government-led strategy to transform the potato into a staple food, on the tuber's environmental and nutritional advantages, and on the industrialization and standardization of potato production, processing, and storage.

As in the case of Hohhot, whose "milk capital" moniker emerged from the city's ties to Inner Mongolia's dairy industry,³⁷ the Potato Museum highlights the fact that the rebranding of Ulanqab as China's "potato capital" has to do with the area's long-standing significance as a potato-growing region and a center for potato science and research – and, more recently, with its role in forwarding the central government's strategy to transform the potato into a staple crop, not least as a means of addressing rural poverty in China's inland. Ulanqab Municipality is one of if not the poorest municipalities in Inner Mongolia – 10 of its 11 counties and banners are officially designated as poverty counties. Once important textile and leather industries have largely disappeared. Potatoes account for around 50% of Ulanqab's agricultural output in terms of economic value.³⁸

Corporations play a key part in developing Ulanqab into a potato capital, an epithet first used in 2009. For example, the Potato Museum was built and paid for by Kaida, a Beijing-based food- and agribusiness that arrived in Ulanqab in 2016. It grows potatoes in Ulanqab through collaborations with farmer cooperatives and processes them into chips, fries, and

other foods. On entering the Potato Museum, the visitor is confronted by a huge, illuminated billboard with information on the company's role as a "dragonhead enterprise" committed to working with the government to raise the living standards of local farmers, create employment opportunities, and industrialize and standardize production.

If potatoes were now hailed by government and corporations as a way out of poverty, popular attitudes toward the tuber appeared more ambivalent. While people I met expressed a sentimental attachment to the potato, this attachment was not necessarily one that could easily be publicly expressed. In some contexts, the potato could signify a conservatism or inertia often associated with the landlocked region. One middle-aged male academic from Hohhot explained how his friends teased him for being an "Inner Mongolian potato" (*Neimeng tudou*) as he had never lived outside the autonomous region – the opposite of a "sea turtle" (*haigui*), a person who returns to their native land after experiencing life overseas.

In other contexts, people's reliance on potatoes drew attention to the region's poverty. This was even expressed while potato foods were being celebrated. At the potato banquet I attended at the Junxingyuan Restaurant, I was seated next to our host, Mr. Feng, who was in his sixties. As the dishes were brought out, he described them to me, often with stories that highlighted the importance of the potato as a food that helped people survive in times of need. On the arrival of a dish of "frozen potatoes" (*dong tudou*), a stew made with sheep's tail, Mr. Feng emphasized that Inner Mongolia was poor and nothing was ever wasted, explaining that this was a way of cooking shallow-growing tubers that had been frozen by a heavy frost. When "big mix" – potato noodles with bean sprouts – was served, Feng told me

that when he was young this dish and filled dumplings (*jiaozi*) were often the *only* foods served at the Chinese New Year. The arrival of “pounded potato dumplings” (*tudou jingjing*) prompted him to explain that just forty years ago, people in the area had been very poor. If a woman had no milk for her baby, the child would be fed pounded potatoes as most people did not have access to milk or milk powder.

Ulanqabians such as Mr. Feng had developed a strong emotional attachment to potatoes in part precisely because they were a food of poverty. By the same token, the potato had the potential to continue to mark its eaters as inward-looking, earthbound natives of a still-impooverished, marginalized part of the autonomous region and country. Even the recent celebrations of local potatoes were half-baked. The food festival was held in the New District, with its wide avenues, exhibition and sports halls, and government buildings – far from the residential center of Jining. On the day that I was there the festival appeared to attract more media, VIPs, and security than it did either local Ulanqabians or tourists. The Potato Museum was not open to the public at all and was so far mostly being used to host high-level officials and, occasionally, visiting academics. The only explanation I was given by our guide from the Kaida company was that government had not yet given its permission. She did not know if it ever would open.

In contrast to the potato, meat and dairy foods continued to play a more central role in representations of Inner Mongolian cuisine, including in Ulanqab. These were nationally recognized, high-protein and high-status foods which allowed people to imagine themselves attached to a “Mongolian” life on the open plains, a life which most had never experienced. Nevertheless, the central state’s potato strategy was perhaps beginning to create a space

for the potato to be reimagined as a distinctive element in Ulanqab's local foods and "Inner Mongolian" cuisine.

Yunnan

Despite numerous regional specialties and several commercial urban centers with longstanding traditions of sophisticated cooking, until recently there was little recognition in China of a distinct, "Yunnan cuisine" and only a few of its local foods were known outside the province. However, promotions of Yunnan's foodways have proliferated since the 1990s in tandem with the province's tourism-led development and received a strong push from the provincial government beginning in 2009. In contrast to Inner Mongolia, where culinary constructions have centered on one ethnic category and its iconic mode of livelihood and associated ecotype (Mongol pastoralism on the grasslands), recent accounts of Yunnan cuisine have tended to define the province's culinary distinctiveness in terms of its diversities – ethnic, ecological, and regional. They emphasize the province's abundance of "wild foods" (*yewei*) such as fungi, insects, wildflowers, and wild vegetables, and of the allegedly "strange" (*guai*) foods of the minority nationalities, including ant eggs, raw pig skins, and dried cheeses or "milk fans" (*rushan*). The very elements that once marked this borderland region as backward and primitive are now used to brand its foodways as uniquely suited to the modern Chinese and international consumer's search for healthy foods, natural flavors, and biodiversity.³⁹

Although they have not been touted in Yunnan cuisine promotions to the same extent as local craft foods like hams and "milk fans" or wild foods like fungi and flowers, some Yunnan

food writers have lauded potatoes as examples of the province's "authentic flavors" (*yuanwei*) and "gifts from the mountains and plains" (*shanye de kuizeng*).⁴⁰ Potatoes are widely grown and consumed in the central and northern parts of the province, not least in highland regions (*shanqu*). They are also popular in the towns, cities, and villages on the plains (*bazi*). Known mostly as *yangyu* ("foreign tubers"), potatoes are eaten as street foods, in restaurants, and in homes.

In the provincial capital, Kunming, potatoes figure in locals' notions of their typical foods. In 2019, one shopkeeper who had grown up in the city lit up when I told him about my research and exclaimed: "Out of every four meals, we [Kunmingers] eat potatoes at three!" A well-known ditty in the Kunming dialect goes "Eating potatoes makes you handsome" (*Chi yangyu, zhang zidi*) and was repeated to me countless times. A local brand of potato chips, *Zidi* (Handsome), even takes its name from the saying. Mr. Guan Ming, a Kunming native and renowned food scholar, told me over lunch in July 2019: "Yunnan people have a lot of affection (*qinggan*) for potatoes." He went on to explain that he *had* to eat them every day, qualifying this by adding that potatoes could sometimes be substituted by other tubers: "If I don't eat potatoes, then sweet potatoes (*hongshu*), if I don't eat sweet potatoes, then taro (*yutou*) or yams (*shanyao*)."

Seemingly, in Yunnan the potato is less of a marginalized food than it is in Inner Mongolia. In his essay, "Potato, potato, I love you," Kunming writer Lao Kai claims that the potato appeals to people precisely because it can be eaten either as an ordinary snack or at high-end banquets.⁴¹ To be sure, one Yunnan potato dish has received recognition at the highest level. "Gold coin potato cakes" (*jinqian yangyu bing*) were invented by the famous Yunnan

chef, Jie Dekun, who from the 1950s cooked for Chairman Mao and other state leaders. The dish was even served at state banquets. However, “gold coin potato cakes” are also suggestive of the complexities of using potatoes in Chinese high-end dining. It came to national prominence in a context of food shortages and radical socialism when chefs were lauded for their ability to “make delicate creations from coarse ingredients” (*culiao jingzhi*).⁴² *The Quintessence of Yunnan Cooking*, a cookbook compiled by the state-owned Yunnan Province Food and Drink Service Company, includes a recipe for the dish.⁴³ The book was published in 1988, in the early reform years, but nonetheless praises the dish as an example of a chef’s ability to refine a “coarse” ingredient. However, not only does the recipe call for Yunnan ham – hardly a “coarse ingredient” – in fact it is the only potato-based recipe included in this volume of over 400 recipes collected from across the province’s most prominent, state-owned restaurants and chefs. This suggests that, at least until recently, Yunnan’s potato foods may not be quite as embraced in high cuisine contexts as Lao Kai suggests. Indeed, despite the popularity of the tuber in Kunming, its consumption is also widely associated with poverty and impoverished areas, particularly the northeast of the province.

Northeast Yunnan (*Dian dongbei*) is the name given to the region to the north and east of the provincial capital. It includes the counties of Xundian and Dongchuan in Kunming Municipality, and the municipalities of Qujing and Zhaotong. A mountainous area, historically it has been dependent on mining and mixed farming, with tobacco as a major cash crop. Han and Muslim Hui populations predominate on the plains and in the larger towns and cities, joined at higher altitudes by peoples classified as Yi, Miao, Zhuang, and others. Outside the province, Northeast Yunnan is known for its cured meats, especially ham

(*huotui*) and cured beef (*niu ganba*). Another famous food product of the region, particularly associated with Zhaotong, is *tianma* (the rhizome of the *Gastrodia elata* orchid), a medicinal tuber which, like ham from the region, is often used in “steam pot chicken” (*qiguoji*), one of the signature dishes of “Yunnan cuisine.”

In Kunming and in northeast Yunnan itself, the region is equally renowned for its potato foods. Mr. Mao Jiawei, Chair of Qujing’s Catering Trade Association, explained to me that in his hometown of Xuanwei, in Qujing Municipality, people feel that if someone treats you to a meal and there is no potato dish, “it’s like they haven’t treated you to a meal at all.” At a home-cooked meal I enjoyed with a family in rural Xundian, two of the four dishes were of sliced potatoes – one with pickled greens (*yancai*) and one with ham. The *fan* staple was rice steamed with potatoes (*yangyufan*). Some popular dishes in the region’s eateries combine *fan* and *cai*: rice cooked with potatoes and ham (*yangyu huotui menfan*) or – in Muslim establishments – rice cooked with potatoes and cured beef (*yangyu ganba menfan*). Vendors serving deep-fried potatoes or barbecued potatoes with a choice of sauces, many of them home-made, are ubiquitous in the market towns and cities of the northeast.

Although urban Kunmingers see potato-eating as part of their own foodways, too, many associate the practice even more with the province’s northeast. Several Kunmingers have told me that “in Zhaotong” or “in northeast Yunnan,” people eat whole boiled or barbecued potatoes as a staple, together with “Zhaotong sauce” (*Zhaotong jiang*) made from fermented soybeans and chillies. While this alleged dedication to potato-eating reinforces Kunmingers’ perception of the northeast as poor, some north-easterners in Kunming use this association with potatoes to their advantage. Vendors of deep-fried or barbecued

potatoes advertise their origins in, for example, Huize or Zhaotong on their signboards. Kunmingers are convinced that the most floury (*mian*) and fragrant (*xiang*) potatoes are from the northeast, although they may disagree about which locality within the region is superior. Fresh potatoes from the northeast often fetch a premium price in Kunming, and vendors proudly announce that they and their potatoes are from Xundian, Huize, or Dongchuan.

According to one couple, native Kunmingers in their forties who ran a barbecued potato shop, the places of origin of potatoes were talked about when they were younger, but “they weren’t as hyped as they are now.” As I have discussed elsewhere, a growing attachment in Kunming to provenance and local foods can be connected to recent concerns around food safety and quality.⁴⁴ In the case of potatoes, the importance of provenance may also have to do with government potato promotion. Since the national potato strategy was launched in 2015, several county-level governments in Yunnan’s potato-growing areas, including Xundian and Donchuan, have held their own potato festivals.

As suggested in local media reports, festival organizers have sought to boost the “brand” (*pinpai*) of the potatoes of these localities by attracting tourists from Kunming and other urban areas to potato-growing villages to enjoy potato foods and experience the fresh air and mountain scenery. Both Xundian and Dongchuan counties have organized potato banquets (*yangyu quanxi*), potato digging competitions, and cultural performances. One report suggested that prices for Dongchuan potatoes had skyrocketed in Kunming markets as a direct result of the county’s festivals.⁴⁵ In Xundian, organizers have combined their potato festival with Yi ethnic tourism, one year even merging it with celebrations for the “torch

festival” (*huobajie*) a festival associated throughout Yunnan with the Yi ethnic group and in some places held specifically to attract tourists.⁴⁶

As in Inner Mongolia, poverty alleviation is a core message conveyed by potato-promoters in northeast Yunnan. Reports claimed that for local officials, the point of improving the brand recognition of local potatoes in outside markets was to “spur on” (*daidong*) local farmers to specialize in potatoes. Auctions have been held at Dongchuan’s potato festivals. Local entrepreneurs and outside visitors are encouraged to bid on the largest and best-looking potatoes, with the proceeds going to schools and other charities in an impoverished, potato-growing village.⁴⁷ According to people I met in Liushao in Xundian, a similar auction had been held there in 2018 and a second was planned for later in 2019.

Whether or not the festivals have encouraged more farmers in these areas to specialize in potatoes – I have yet to explore this in my research – in Xundian I did find examples of businesses that were seeking to build on the growing attention paid to local potatoes. One restaurant – the most upscale in Liushao Township – had begun to offer a “potato banquet” even outside of festival time. A local entrepreneur, Mr. Liu, was developing an “ecological potato” (*shengtai yangyu*) project. He was setting up a farmers’ cooperative that would grow chemical-free potatoes, initially on a small scale. Liu did not expect they would earn much from selling eco-potatoes in the beginning. Rather, his idea was to attract tourists from Kunming to enjoy the pure water and fresh air and eat local foods, earning money from tourism whilst increasing the name recognition of Liushao’s potatoes. He was particularly interested in promoting “old varieties” such as *ma’erke*. These were no longer grown much commercially but were liked locally for their flavour and texture and might

fetch a high price in Kunming. He wanted to encourage other farmers in the area to grow potatoes ecologically and hoped that eventually they could get a government-recognized geographical indication (*dibiao*) for “Liushao potatoes.”

According to Mao Jiawei in nearby Qujing, the city’s government had not held a food festival in many years. However, other local actors such as the Catering Trade Association had been promoting the region’s urban restaurants and cuisine, including its potato foods. Some of these potato foods were included in works on Qujing specialties compiled by Mao and the local branch of the association.⁴⁸ In July 2019, I spent a couple of days following Mr. Mao and his colleagues in the Qujing and provincial branches of the trade association as they documented representative dishes and restaurants of the city for a photo book project on the 100 “must-visit” eating establishments in Yunnan province – as in Inner Mongolia, the promotion of local foods was carried out within a provincial framework. Several potato dishes were included in the photoshoots. Some were recent innovations, such as “chrysanthemum potatoes” (*juhua yangyu*), which was very similar to the eponymous dish I had seen on display in Inner Mongolia. Others, such as deep-fried potatoes served with ham (*huotui yangyu*), were upmarket versions of more traditional local dishes. One restaurant we visited, officially designated a place of provincial-level “intangible cultural heritage,” offered a beautified and heritage-marked version of barbecued potatoes: perfectly golden and served in a basket that mimicked the kind used by farmers in the area for harvesting potatoes. **[Figure 2]**

Despite recent attempts to raise the status of the potato in rural and urban parts of northeast Yunnan, for many people from the area a sense of ambivalence lingers around the

tuber. According to one young academic from Zhaotong now living in Kunming, potatoes were well-liked but also represented the bare minimum of survival. Her grandparents, who survived the famine of the early 1960s, described it to her as a time when “people did not even have potatoes to eat.” She explained that people in Zhaotong had often had to rely on potatoes to eat their fill, and elderly people felt a sense of gratitude toward the tuber. However, she insisted that Zhaotongers resisted *regarding* it as their “staple food” (*zhushi*) – rice or rice cooked with maize (*baogufan*) were proper staples, not potatoes, she told me.

As in Ulanqab, even some of the most vocal advocates for the regional foods of northeast Yunnan were conflicted about potatoes. The cover image of Mao Jiawei’s recent ruminations on food culture, principally of Qujing and his native Xuanwei, depicts the two perhaps most iconic foods of the region: a joint of ham and a basket of potatoes. However, the essay on potatoes stands out in that it does not celebrate local foodways. Rather, Mao emphasizes the ubiquity of potatoes growing up in Xuanwei – children would carry potatoes in their pockets on their way to school, farmers would barbecue potatoes on open coals to feed themselves when out chopping firewood or herding cattle. He explains how for years he tried to avoid potatoes, not least because of the flatulence they caused him. He concludes his essay with the following reflection: “‘Potatoes are Xuanwei peoples’ lifeblood.’ They can’t cast them off even if they want to.”⁴⁹

Conclusion

Central government potato promotions, particularly following the introduction of a state strategy to transform the marginalized tuber into a national staple food, have created new

opportunities for local governments, entrepreneurs, and other actors in potato-growing areas to promote their potatoes and potato foods and to use these to brand their localities. This has empowered certain sub-provincial regions to increase their recognition within provincial foodways, and even to complicate dominant, provincial-level narratives of regional cuisine.

However, there are limitations to this. In Inner Mongolia, potato-eating sits awkwardly within a version of a “Mongolian cuisine” conceived around grasslands foods. Some potato-producing localities in Ulanqab, reflecting the agriculturalist expansion into Inner Mongolia’s steppes, have sought to present their spuds as unique, ecological products of the “volcanic grasslands,” but this does not appear to have been taken up at provincial levels.

By comparison, there may be more space in Yunnan for promoting potatoes as one of the ecologically and culturally diverse province’s many “healthy” and “natural” foods. There is a tension between those who advocate for a “Yunnan cuisine” (*Diancai*), the distinctiveness of which emerges partly from the ability of occupational chefs in often Han-dominated urban centers to appropriate elements of minority nationality and “wild” foods, and those who prefer to speak of Yunnan’s “food culture(s)” (*yinshi wenhua*) and argue that the province’s regional and ethnic culinary complexities cannot be reduced to or amalgamated into a conventional Chinese “culinary system”.⁵⁰ Opportunities to promote local potato foods within the former version of Yunnan cuisine may be limited to a few “improved” or “refined” dishes. Within the latter version, there may be more scope for promoting a range of potato-based foods, for example as part of a Northeast Yunnan “food culture area.”⁵¹

But the potential to reimagine potatoes and potato foods as public symbols of localities at different scales may also be limited by the dispositions of locals themselves. Much of the literature on “local foods,” particularly in contexts of heritage-making and tourism, assumes that locals are keen to publicize these foods to outsiders.⁵² But this is not always true, as Claus has demonstrated with reference to the giant *geera* clams, which native Okinawans have sought to protect for their own consumption, away from the gaze of tourists and settlers from mainland Japan.⁵³ With potatoes, it is not the case that Ulanqabians or northeast Yunnanese seek to restrict outsiders’ access to “their” potatoes. Rather, the ambivalence people may feel about promoting their native place through potatoes has to do with the discomfort of being perceived by outsiders as potato-eaters. Despite the central state’s strategy to raise the status of the potato as a Chinese staple food, eating potatoes, particularly as a staple, continues to mark people and places as poor and backward.

This does not mean that people in these areas do not feel attachments to the tuber or see themselves as potato-eaters. Clearly, many do, in some cases (like Mao Jiawei) even if they do not particularly enjoy eating potatoes. But the potato is cherished not despite its associations with poverty, but in part because of people’s current or past dependence on it. In this sense, potato-eating in these regions often belongs to the domain that Herzfeld calls “cultural intimacy”: “those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality.”⁵⁴ At play in the current reimaging of potatoes as elements of regional cuisines in Inner Mongolia and Yunnan are not just the challenges of expanding scales of culinary identities, for example from the level of the municipality to that of the province, but also the complexities of transforming cultural intimacies into public celebrations.

Notes

1. The article has benefited from comments from Michelle King and an anonymous reviewer and from discussions in the Nkumi writing group with Lizzie Hull, Harry West, Anne Murcott, Sami Zubaida, Nora Faltmann, and James Staples. Naturally, I take full responsibility for its mistakes and shortcomings. In the text, I put Chinese family names before given names.
2. See, for example, Anderson, *The Food of China*, 194-228; Klein, "Redefining;" Wu, "'Ethnic Foods';" Swislocki, *Culinary Nostalgia*.
3. See Finnis, "Introduction."
4. Swislocki, *Culinary Nostalgia*; Wank, "Knife-Shaved Noodles Go Global;" Yang "A Bite of China;" Mak, "Revival."
5. Wank, "Knife-Shaved Noodles Go Global;" Oakes, "China's Provincial;" Klein, "There is No Such Thing."
6. Mak, "Revival;" Galipeau, "Tibetan;" Klein, "Heritagizing."
7. Chan, "Cultural Governance."
8. Wang, *Hua-Xia Yinshi Wenhua*, 146-161; Wang, *Yinshi*, 30-39.
9. Wu, "'Ethnic foods';" Zhao, *Zhongguo Yinshi*.
10. Wank, "Knife-Shaved Noodles Go Global;" Klein, "'There is No Such Thing';" Oakes, "China's Provincial."
11. Ayora-Diaz, "Regionalism."
12. Klein, "Redefining."
13. Mak, "Revival;" Galipeau, "Tibetan;" Klein, "Heritagizing."
14. Yang, "A Bite of China."
15. Zader, "Technologies."

16. Fieldwork in 2019 was supported by a grant from the Sino-British Fellowship Trust. I am deeply grateful for the hospitality, introductions, and guidance I received during fieldwork from scholars in China, in particular Dong Jie, Zhou Hongcheng, Wang Si, Ma Jia, Mao Jiawei, Guan Ming, and Zhao Rongguang.

17. Finnis, "Introduction," 1.

18. On the introduction, spread, and adoption of the potato in late imperial China see Anderson, *Food and Environment*, 247-248; Mazumdar, "Impact;" Zhou and Li, "Qingdai."

19. Chang, "Introduction."

20. Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine*, 136.

21. Li, Li, and Tang, *Zhuliang*; Zhongguo, "Nongye Bu."

22. Zhongguo, "Nongye Bu."

23. Yan and Chen, "Agrarian Capitalization."

24. Hornby and Zhang, "China Puts Potatoes."

25. Li, Li, and Tang, *Zhuliang*.

26. Bulag, "Inner Mongolia."

27. McCarthy, *Communist Multiculturalism*, 16.

28. Scott, *Art*, 178-219.

29. Anderson, *Food and Environment*, 248; Zhou and Li, "Qingdai."

30. Billé, "Cooking;" Bulag, "Inner Mongolia."

31. Billé, "Cooking."

32. Tracy, "Pasteurizing."

33. Nei Menggu Zhijianju, *Mengcan*.

34. Billé, "Cooking," 212.

35. Billé, "Cooking," 213.

36. A banner (*qi*) is a county-level administrative unit in Inner Mongolia.
37. Billé, "Cooking," 213.
38. Wulanchabu, *Wulanchabu*, 2-16.
39. Klein, "There is No."
40. Zhang, *Yuanwei Yunnan*, 161-165.
41. Lao Kai, *Xiangtu Xiangqing*, 65.
42. See Klein, "Redefining."
43. Yunnan Sheng, *Yunnan Pengren*, 287.
44. Klein, "Everyday Approaches."
45. Zhao, "Kunming Dongchuan Yangyujie."
46. Yang, "Xundian."
47. Zhao, "Kunming Dongchuan Yangyujie."
48. Mao, *Qujing*.
49. Mao, *Xun Shi Zhui Wei*, 233-234.
50. Klein, "'There is No'," 213.
51. See Jin and Gao, *Yunnan Ming Chi*; cf. Zhao, *Zhongguo Yinshi*.
52. See West, "Artisanal Foods."
53. Claus, "Beyond *Merroir*."
54. Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*, 3.

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Figure 2



Figure captions

Figure 1. “China’s Potato Capital.” Potato banquet on display at food festival in Ulanqab.

Photograph by the author.

Figure 2. Barbecued potatoes in a heritage-designated restaurant in Qujing. Photograph by the author.

