



Gourmets in the Land of Famine: The Culture and Politics of Rice in Modern Canton

Seung-Joon Lee

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A study of the politics of rice in Canton, this book sheds new light on the local history of the city and illuminates how China's struggles with food shortages in the early twentieth century unfolded and the ways in which they were affected by the rise of nationalism and the fluctuation of global commerce.

Author Seung-joon Lee profiles Canton as an exemplary site of provisioning, a critical gateway for foreign rice importation and distribution through the Pearl River Delta, which found its prized import, and thus its food security, threatened by the rise of Chinese nationalism. Lee argues that the modern Chinese state's attempts to promote domestically-produced "national rice" and to tax rice imported through the transnational trade networks were doomed to failure, as a focus on rice production ignored the influential factor of rice quality. Indeed, China's domestic rice promotion program resulted in an unprecedented famine in Canton in 1936. This book contends that the ways in which the Guomindang government dealt with the issue of food security, and rice in particular, is best understood in the context of its preoccupation with science, technology, and progressivism, a departure from the conventional explanations that cite governmental incompetence.

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