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Pepper to sea cucumbers: Chinese gustatory revolution in global history, 900-1840

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Propositions

- I. Pepper and sea cucumbers were two of the most important exotica in Chinese food history.
- II. Pepper and sea cucumbers represent two distinct food cultures, one favouring spices and aromatics and the other favouring broths with a subtle flavour (*xian* 鮮).
- III. Pepper and sea cucumbers arrived in China not only from Southeast Asia but from further afield: via the trans-Indian Ocean trade routes and from across the China Seas.
- IV. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, a transformation of Chinese medical and culinary culture took place, which meant that pepper declined in Chinese high cuisine and sea cucumbers became important.
- V. I call that transformation a gustatory revolution, which had a significant impact on the emergence of the modern world as we know today, particularly for its close connections with the expansions of global empires and trading networks in the Trans-Indian Ocean World of pepper and the Cross-China Seas World of sea cucumbers.
- VI. The disciplinary gap between Southeast Asian and East Asian studies continues to contribute to misunderstandings and theoretical fallacies.
- VII. The Chinese-ness of Chinese foodways should be critically revisited.

- VIII. The main issues debated in Chinese medical history should be situated in a global context.
- IX. Taste is a coded language to approach global history and not only European taste matters.
- X. A student of global history should follow a question, instead of an archive, a region, a language, a discipline, a theory, a paradigm, or a school.