

Essay IV | Chinese Culinary Aesthetics in a Modern Context

第四篇 | 现代语境下的中式美学：当古老智慧遇见当代生活

Author: Zhenjiang Zhi

Affiliation: HanFlow Initiative

ORCID: 0009-0004-3176-4764

作者: 智振江

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Abstract

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The HanFlow Food Culture Series examines Chinese culinary aesthetics as living intelligence. This essay contrasts modern food media's visual logic—plating for cameras—with traditional relational aesthetics, where beauty lies in appropriateness: to season, body, and company. Key principles include five tastes for balance, seasonal eating aligned with natural rhythms, and the meal as an ecosystem. In a processed-food, nutrient-obsessed world, these principles provide a quiet alternative: trusting the senses, eating with the year, and cultivating balance through attention. Chinese culinary aesthetics is presented not as cuisine but as a way of regulating life through food.

摘要

HanFlow 美食系列探讨中式烹饪美学作为活生生的智慧。本文将现代食物媒体的视觉逻辑——为镜头摆盘——与传统中式餐食的关系美学对比，传统美学强调适宜性：适宜季节、身体、陪伴。核心原则包括：五味平衡、与自然节律协调的季节饮食、餐食作为生态系统。在加工食品和营养痴迷的世界里，这些原则提供安静替代方案：相信感官、与年共食、通过注意力培养平衡。中式烹饪美学不是菜系，而是通过食物调节生活的方式。

Introduction

引言

What makes a meal beautiful? Is it the arrangement on the plate? The balance of colors? The harmony of flavors? Or something deeper — a quality that speaks not just to the eye, but to the whole body, to memory, to a sense of being alive?

是什么让一餐饭变得美好？是盘中的摆盘？是色彩的平衡？是味道的和谐？还是更深层的东西——一种不仅对眼睛说话，而且对整个身体、对记忆、对活着的感觉说话的特质？

Consider a Friday evening in any modern city. A young professional comes home after ten hours of screen time. She opens a delivery app, scrolls for three minutes, and taps "order." Twenty minutes later, she eats from a plastic container — alone, in front of another screen. The food is warm, maybe tasty, but by the time the container is empty, she barely remembers what she ate.

想象任何一个现代城市的周五晚上。一个年轻职场人在屏幕前工作十小时后回到家。她打开外卖应用，滑动三分钟，点击“下单”。二十分钟后，她从一个塑料餐盒里吃饭——独自一人，在另一个屏幕前。食物是热的，也许味道不错，但当餐盒空了的时候，她几乎不记得自己吃了什么。

This scene repeats millions of times every day. Meals are assembled, not cooked. Flavor is engineered by food scientists, not cultivated by hands. Nutrition is reduced to numbers on an app, while the felt experience of eating — the texture, the temperature, the slow unfolding of taste — fades into background noise.

这个场景每天重复数百万次。餐食是被组装出来的，而不是被烹饪出来的。风味是由食品科学家设计的，而不是由双手培育的。营养被简化为应用程序上的数字，而进食的被感知的体验——质地、温度、味道的缓慢展开——却消退为背景噪音。

This is not just busyness. It is disconnection — from food, from body, from the ancient intelligence of eating well. We have more food choices than ever, yet less sense of what truly nourishes us. We track every nutrient, yet cannot name what our bodies are asking for.

这不只是忙碌。这是脱节——与食物脱节，与身体脱节，与好好吃饭的古老智慧脱节。我们的食物选择比以往任何时候都多，却对什么真正滋养我们知之甚少。我们追踪每一种营养，却说不清身体在要求什么。

In the West, culinary aesthetics often follow a visual logic: plating as art, presentation as spectacle. This has its place. But **Chinese culinary aesthetics** operates on a different set of principles — ones less concerned with how food looks in isolation, and more with how it feels in relation: to the season, to the body, to the people at the table.

在西方，烹饪美学常常遵循一种视觉逻辑：摆盘作为艺术，呈现作为景观。这有其位置。但**中式烹饪美学**遵循一套不同的原则——它不那么关心食物孤立地看起来如何，而更关心它在关系中的感觉：与季节的关系，与身体的关系，与餐桌旁的人的关系。

These principles are not ancient relics. They are not museum pieces. They are living intelligences — adaptable, resilient, and urgently relevant in a world of processed food domination, nutrient

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obsession, and seasonal disconnection.

这些原则不是古老的遗物。它们不是博物馆的藏品。它们是活生生的智慧——可适应、有韧性，并且在一个加工食品主导、营养痴迷、与季节脱节的世界里，具有紧迫的现实意义。

Modern lifestyle culture asks: How can we make Chinese food Instagrammable?

现代生活方式文化问：我们如何让中餐变得适合拍照分享？

Chinese food philosophy asks: How can a meal make us feel more alive, more connected, more present — regardless of how it photographs?

中华饮食哲学问：一餐饭如何能让我们感觉更有活力、更连接、更临在——无论它拍出来好看与否？

Section I | Beyond the Plate — The Relational Aesthetics of Chinese Food

第一节 | 超越餐盘——中式食物的关系美学

Western plating often treats the plate as a canvas. The chef is an artist, the food is the medium, and the diner is a viewer. The goal is visual impact — a moment of appreciation before the eating begins.

西方的摆盘常把餐盘当作画布。厨师是艺术家，食物是媒介，食客是观众。目标是视觉冲击——在进食开始前的一个欣赏时刻。

Chinese culinary aesthetics is less about the plate as canvas and more about the meal as ecosystem. A dish is not meant to be admired in isolation. It is meant to be experienced in relation — to the other dishes on the table, to the season in which it is served, to the bodies that will receive it.

中式烹饪美学更少关于作为画布的餐盘，而更多关于作为生态系统的餐食。一道菜不是为了被孤立地欣赏。它是在关系中被体验的——与餐桌上的其他菜肴的关系，与它被端上的季节的关系，与将要接收它的身体的关系。

This is why a traditional Chinese meal is never a single dish. It is always a constellation: something stir-fried and something steamed, something crispy and something soft, something cool in nature and something warm. The aesthetics is not in the individual plate, but in the **dynamic harmony** of the whole.

这就是为什么传统的中国餐从来不是单一的一道菜。它总是一个星群：炒的和蒸的，脆的和软的，凉性的和温性的。美学不在于单独的盘子，而在于整体的**动态和谐**。

And this harmony extends beyond the table. In **Chinese food philosophy**, a meal is beautiful when it is appropriate — to the season (eating cooling foods in summer, warming foods in winter), to the occasion (festive foods for celebration, simple foods for quiet days), to the people (considering their age, their health, their preferences).

而这种和谐延伸到餐桌之外。在**中华饮食哲学**中，一餐饭是美好的，当它是适宜的——适应季节（夏天吃

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凉性食物，冬天吃温性食物），适应场合（庆祝时吃节日食物，安静的日子吃简单的食物），适应人（考虑他们的年龄、健康、偏好）。

This is a relational aesthetics — one that fast casual takeout culture, with its isolated meals eaten alone in front of screens, has largely forgotten.

这是一种关系美学——而速食外卖文化，以其孤立地在屏幕前独自进食的餐食，在很大程度上已经忘记了这种美学。

Modern food media asks: Does this dish look good on camera?

现代食物媒体问：这道菜在镜头里好看吗？

Chinese food philosophy asks: Does this meal feel good in the body? Does it belong here, now, with these people?

中华饮食哲学问：这餐饭在身体里感觉好吗？它属于这里、现在、与这些人在一起吗？

Section II | The Five Tastes as a Map, Not a Rule

第二节 | 五味作为地图，而非规则

One of the most distinctive features of **Chinese culinary aesthetics** is the attention to taste balance — not just flavor, but the five tastes: sour, sweet, bitter, pungent, salty. Each taste is understood to have a specific effect on the body's energy, on the organs, on the overall sense of well-being.

中式烹饪美学最独特的特征之一是对味道平衡的关注——不仅仅是风味，而是五味：酸、甜、苦、辣、咸。每一种味道都被理解为对身体能量、对器官、对整体福祉感有特定的影响。

In traditional practice, a well-composed meal includes all five tastes — not in every dish, but across the meal. The sour awakens. The sweet harmonizes. The bitter clears. The pungent moves. The salty grounds.

在传统实践中，一餐构成良好的餐食包括所有五味——不是每道菜都有，而是在整餐中。酸唤醒。甜调和。苦清理。辣推动。咸扎根。

This is not a rigid rule. It is a **map** — a way of thinking about balance that can adapt to any ingredient, any cuisine, any context. You don't need a wok or a cleaver to apply it. You just need to pay attention: What tastes are present in this meal? What's missing? How does each taste land in the body?

这不是一个僵化的规则。它是一个**地图**——一种思考平衡的方式，可以适应任何食材、任何菜系、任何语境。你不需要炒锅或菜刀来应用它。你只需要注意：这餐饭中有什么味道？缺少什么？每种味道在身体里是如何落地的？

In a world where flavor is increasingly engineered by food corporations — optimized for shelf life and addictive potential, not for the body's needs — this ancient map becomes a quiet act
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of resistance. It returns discernment to the eater. It says: you can know, through taste itself, whether a meal is balanced. You don't need an app to tell you.

在一个风味日益被食品公司设计——为保质期和成瘾性优化，而非为身体需求优化——的世界里，这个古老的地图成为一种安静的抵抗。它将辨别力归还给食客。它在说：你可以通过味道本身，知道一餐饭是否平衡。你不需要应用程序来告诉你。

Imagine a young professional in New York, cooking once a week. She doesn't have time for elaborate meals. But she can ask: in this simple stir-fry, what tastes are present? Is there something sour to wake up the digestion? Something bitter to balance the sweet? The five tastes become a tool for **intuitive nutrition** — not more rules, but more awareness.

想象一个在纽约的年轻职场人，每周做一次饭。她没有时间做精致的餐食。但她可以问：在这个简单的炒菜里，有什么味道？有没有酸的东西来唤醒消化？有没有苦的东西来平衡甜？五味成为一种**直觉营养**的工具——不是更多的规则，而是更多的觉察。

Modern nutrition asks: Are you getting enough of each nutrient?

现代营养学问：你是否摄入了足够的每种营养？

Chinese food philosophy asks: Are you tasting enough of each taste? And how does each taste make you feel?

中华饮食哲学问：你是否品尝到了足够的每种味道？每种味道让你感觉如何？

Section III | Seasonal Intelligence — Eating with the Year

第三节 | 季节智慧——与年共食

Perhaps the most profound contribution of **Chinese culinary aesthetics** to modern life is its **seasonal intelligence** — the practice of eating with the rhythms of the year, not against them.

也许**中式烹饪美学**对现代生活最深刻的贡献是其**季节智慧**——与一年的节律共食，而非对抗它们的实践。

In traditional Chinese thought, each season has a characteristic energy. Spring is wood — upward, expanding, fresh. Summer is fire — peak, vibrant, outward. Late summer is earth — harvesting, grounding, sweet. Autumn is metal — contracting, drying, sharp. Winter is water — deep, storing, salty.

在中国传统思想中，每个季节都有特征性的能量。春属木——向上、生发、新鲜。夏属火——鼎盛、充满活力、外向。长夏属土——收获、扎根、甘。秋属金——收敛、干燥、锐利。冬属水——深沉、储藏、咸。

Foods, too, have seasonal affinities. Eating asparagus in spring is not just about freshness — it's about aligning with spring's upward energy. Eating root vegetables in winter is not just about storage — it's about grounding, about drawing inward, about matching the body's needs with what the earth provides.

食物，同样有季节的亲和性。春天吃芦笋不仅仅是关于新鲜——它是关于与春天的向上能量对齐。冬天吃

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根茎类蔬菜不仅仅是关于储藏——它是关于扎根、关于向内收、关于将身体的需求与大地提供的相匹配。

In a world of global supply chains and year-round availability, this wisdom could easily seem outdated. But the body still runs on ancient rhythms. The body still responds to light, to temperature, to the subtle shifts of the year. And when we eat against those rhythms — consuming cooling foods in winter, heavy foods in summer — we pay a quiet price.

在一个全球供应链和全年可得的时代，这种智慧很容易显得过时。但身体仍然遵循古老的节律。身体仍然对光、对温度、对一年的微妙变化做出反应。当我们对抗这些节律进食——冬天吃凉性食物，夏天吃厚重食物——我们付出了一种静默的代价。

For a remote worker eating alone, disconnected from the outdoors, seasonal eating becomes a way back — a way to feel connected to something larger than the screen. For a parent cooking for a family, it becomes a gentle education: this is what spring tastes like; this is what autumn feels like in the body.

对于一个独自进食、与户外脱节的远程工作者来说，季节饮食成为一条回归之路——一种感觉与比屏幕更大的事物连接的方式。对于一个为家庭做饭的父母来说，它成为一种温和的教育：这就是春天的味道；这就是秋天在身体里的感觉。

Chinese food philosophy doesn't ask you to become a seasonal purist. It simply invites you to notice — to pay attention to what's growing near you, to what your body craves as the weather shifts, to the quiet intelligence of eating with the year, not just with the clock.

中华饮食哲学不要求你成为一个季节纯粹主义者。它只是邀请你注意——注意你附近在生长什么，注意随着天气变化你的身体渴望什么，注意与年共食、而不仅仅是与时钟共食的安静智慧。

Just as paying attention to your breath anchors you in the present moment, eating with the seasons anchors you in the larger rhythms of life — a practice of belonging to the world, not just passing through it.

正如关注呼吸让你锚定于当下，与季节共食让你锚定于生命更大的节律之中——一种归属于世界、而不仅仅是穿行于世界的练习。

Section IV | Bringing Chinese Culinary Aesthetics Home

第四节 | 将中式烹饪美学带回家

How do we translate these principles into a modern kitchen, a modern life, a modern self?

我们如何将这些原则转化到现代厨房、现代生活、现代自我中？

It does not require a wok. It does not require exotic ingredients. It does not require hours of preparation. It requires only a shift in attention — a willingness to see cooking and eating through a different lens.

它不需要炒锅。它不需要异国情调的食材。它不需要数小时的准备。它只需要注意力的转变——一种愿意

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通过不同的视角看待烹饪和饮食的意愿。

Here are three simple invitations, grounded in real life:

这里有三个简单的邀请，扎根于现实生活：

For the young professional with limited time:

Next time you order takeout, pause before eating. Notice the colors, the aromas. Ask yourself: what tastes are here? What's missing? Even a single moment of attention can transform a solitary meal from fuel to felt experience. You don't need to cook to practice this philosophy. You just need to show up.

给时间有限的年轻职场人：

下次你点外卖时，吃之前暂停一下。注意颜色、香气。问自己：这里有什么味道？缺少什么？即使只是一个片刻的注意力，也能将一餐独自的饭从燃料转化为被感知的体验。你不需要烹饪来实践这种哲学。你只需要出现。

For the remote worker eating alone:

Once a week, cook one thing from scratch — not for efficiency, but for the experience. Feel the vegetable under running water. Listen to the sound of chopping. Taste as you go. Let the kitchen become a sanctuary, not just an appliance room. This is not about making a perfect meal. It's about remembering that you are alive, here, now.

给独自进食的远程工作者：

每周一次，从零开始做一样东西——不是为了效率，而是为了体验。感受流水下的蔬菜。听切菜的声音。一边做一边品尝。让厨房成为庇护所，而不仅仅是一个电器房间。这不是关于做一顿完美的饭。这是关于记起你活着，在这里，此刻。

For the parent cooking for family:

Involve the children in one small way — washing the vegetables, setting the table, naming the tastes on their plate. This is not about teaching culture. It's about passing on the felt sense that a meal is a relationship, not just a refueling stop. A child who learns to taste will carry that attention into everything.

给为家庭做饭的父母：

让孩子以一个小方式参与——洗菜、摆桌、说出他们盘子里的味道。这不是关于教文化。这是关于传递一种被感知的感觉：一餐饭是一种关系，而不仅仅是一个加油站。一个学会品尝的孩子，会把那种注意力带入一切。

These are not techniques. They are ways of paying attention — ways of bringing **Chinese culinary aesthetics** into a modern context without museumifying it, without diluting it, without turning it into a performance.

这些不是技术。它们是投入注意力的方式——是将中式烹饪美学带入现代语境而不将其博物馆化、不稀释它、不将其变成表演的方式。

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Conclusion | Not a Cuisine, But a Way of Regulating Life Through Food

结语 | 不是一种菜系，而是一种通过食物调节生活的方式

Let us be clear about what this is and what it is not.

让我们清楚这是什么，不是什么。

Chinese culinary aesthetics is not about authenticity. It is not about preserving tradition for tradition's sake. It is not about making food beautiful for the camera. It is not a set of rules to follow or a standard to meet.

中式烹饪美学不是关于正宗。它不是关于为了传统而保存传统。它不是为了让食物在镜头前美丽。它不是一套需要遵循的规则，也不是一个需要达到的标准。

It is about restoring **relational intelligence** to eating — the ability to experience food not as isolated fuel, but as something that connects us: to our bodies, to the seasons, to the people we share it with.

它是关于恢复饮食的**关系智慧**——将食物体验为不是孤立的燃料，而是连接我们的事物：连接我们的身体，连接季节，连接我们与之分享的人。

In a world of processed food domination, where flavor is engineered and nutrition is obsessively tracked, this ancient aesthetics offers a quiet alternative. It says: you can trust your senses. You can eat with the year. You can find balance not through more rules, but through more attention.

在一个加工食品主导、风味被设计、营养被痴迷追踪的世界里，这种古老的美学提供了一个安静的替代方案。它在说：你可以相信你的感官。你可以与年共食。你可以通过更多的注意力，而不是更多的规则，来找到平衡。

Chinese Culinary Aesthetics is not a cuisine. It is a way of regulating life through food.

中式烹饪美学不是一种菜系。它是一种通过食物调节生活的方式。

It is for the New York professional cooking once a week. It is for the remote worker eating alone. It is for the parent passing something deeper to their children. It is for anyone who suspects that eating could be more than fuel — and that beauty, real beauty, is not in how food looks, but in how it helps us feel alive.

它属于每周做一次饭的纽约职场人。它属于独自进食的远程工作者。它属于将更深层的东西传递给孩子的父母。它属于任何怀疑吃饭可以不仅仅是燃料的人——并且美，真正的美，不在于食物看起来如何，而在乎它如何帮助我们感觉活着。

This is not about what you eat. It is about how you relate to what you eat. And how you relate to food is how you relate to the world.

这不是关于你吃什么。这是关于你如何与你吃的东西建立关系。而你与食物的关系，就是你与世界的关系。