

Becoming an everyday food: changing technology and values of modern Chinese soy sauce 1750-1950

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This presentation is to show how a traditional artefact (soy sauce) can inform us on changing social fabrics in modern China. Even though the technology of soy sauce was recorded in print not later than the 14th century, the condiment did not become a popular food until the late 18th century and a global commodity in the early 20th century. The technological transformation of modern soy sauce and its commodification reveals profound changes in agricultural resources, socio-political landscape, and the China market in a period of competitive industrialization and intense globalization. “Scientific” technology also generated new values to this old artefact for a nation in quest of modernity.