

Chinese Fairy Tale Feasts: A Literary Cookbook

Paul Yee.

Recipes by Judy Chan.

Illustrated by Shaoli Wang.

Tradewind Books, 2014.

160 pp., paperback, \$24.95.

ISBN 978-1-896580-68-5.

Subject Headings:

Tales-China

Cooking, Chinese-Juvenile Literature

Cookbooks

Grades 2-7/Ages 7-12.

Review by Carmelita Cechetto-Shea.

Chinese Fairy Tale Feasts: A Literary Cookbook is an enchanting and quirky collection of fairy tales with original stories and interpretations of Chinese folklore told by Canadian historian and author Paul Yee. Paul Yee is well known in the world of Canadian children's literature and is the recipient of many awards for his books. He is also known as an experienced storyteller and an expert in the culture and history of China and its people.

Each story ends with a Chinese proverb and a thematically linked recipe by Judy Chan, also a Canadian home economics teacher from Vancouver. The stories and the recipes are adorned with dazzling illustrations from a traditional folk-art perspective. The primary English text is enriched with Chinese characters, providing context and connection between the fables and Buddhism, Taoism, and Chinese mythology. The recipes highlight the importance of cooking and storytelling for Chinese culture and provide a gentler introduction to the readers. Each story allows readers to be engaged in Chinese culture in a fun and well-organized approach.

A table of contents, forward note to readers, note from the cook, and notes on the sources provided important back information. Each story takes only about 15-20 minutes for a read aloud. The pairing of a recipe with a traditional tale and a proverb in this collection makes the book more than a storybook, more than a cookbook, brings together people to share food and stories embodying the generosity of the tales within.

One drawback to this book is in the actual recipes themselves. Ingredients and equipment lists are supplied, but there are no cooking and preparation times given. This can be problematic for those unfamiliar with the cooking of Chinese food. Careful reading of each recipe is needed, and some further research/investigation

may be needed to utilize each recipe properly. Vegetarians will like the recipe since many are without meat as an ingredient.

Shaoli Wang's illustrations are fun, colourful, clear, beautiful, and culturally authentic, complementing the text superbly. Wang's illustrations add the "spice to both meals-story and food", as stated in the foreword by renowned American author Jane Yolen. Readers will discover a visual picture in each story, and in each recipe too!

Part of a series, *Chinese Fairy Tale Feasts: A Literary Cookbook* will provide much needed stories on Chinese culture; the addition of the recipes is certainly a wonderful aspect and can act as a tool to bring the book alive in the classroom. This book educates all who are looking for a cultural introduction to China, as well as allowing the discovery of simple, authentic Chinese recipes. The foreword notes parental guidance and safety in the kitchen, an important aspect of children's cookbooks in general.

