

Great taste in a bowl

Mrs Jo Seow's omelette soup, which is from a family heritage recipe, is easy to cook



ST PHOTOS: LAU FOOK KONG
Preparing the dish (above) is a breeze, as Mrs Jo Seow (below) also shows in her book *Soya & Spice*.

Singapore Cooks

Huang Lijie

Mrs Jo Seow, 47, a Teochew, was bewildered the first time she was offered rice for lunch.

She was then a teenager and had been invited to a Cantonese friend's home for a meal.

She says: "My family had porridge for lunch every day and rice for dinner. Until then, I thought everyone ate the same way my family did."

Indeed, porridge is to Teochews what laksa is to Peranakans, and having grown up in a traditional Teochew family, much of her childhood dining experiences centred around classic Teochew fare such as braised duck, steamed fish and soon kueh (steamed rice flour dumplings).

The eldest of six children born to a car mechanic father and housewife mother, she was often roped in to help cook these family meals as well.

Was she bored of eating porridge daily? "Yes. I grew sick of eating it repeatedly with the same side dishes such as steamed fish, pickled vegetables and preserved beancurd," says the part-time home economics teacher.

So when she moved out and started a family with her businessman husband, she began experimenting with different types of cuisines, such as Western food, which her two sons, who are now teenagers, enjoy eating.

She would borrow cookbooks from the library and search for recipes on the Internet to learn to make new dishes such as squid ink pasta and hearty meat stews. She also took an interest in baking and learnt to make everything from focaccia and onion dinner rolls to chocolate chunk cinnamon rolls and sweet pizzas topped with chocolate, marshmallows and caramel.

However, one day about five years ago, she



had a sudden craving for pork porridge. She used to eat it as a child but had not eaten it for decades. That prompted her to rediscover her culinary roots.

She says: "I realised I had stopped cooking and eating many Teochew dishes which I had eaten as a child. My mother had also stopped making them because she was busy trying out new cuisines, baking shepherd's pie and pizzas."

"And I thought it would be a pity if these recipes were lost."

So she asked her maternal grandmother, mother and aunt for family recipes, which resulted in her cookbook, *Soya & Spice*,

published recently by Landmark Books.

It features Teochew recipes such as her late paternal grandmother's soon kueh and uncle's fish ball soup with tang hoon (mung bean vermicelli).

It also includes non-Teochew family favourites such as her late father's lor mee (stewed noodles) and Malay-inspired dishes such as assam sotong and chilli belacan selar (fried horse mackerel stuffed with chilli and belacan), which her maternal grandmother learnt from her mother-in-law, who lived in a Malay kampung.

Among the recipes is an unusual dish, omelette soup, where a fried omelette, mixed with dried shrimps and tang hoon is boiled in soup.

She says: "The soup might sound strange because you don't usually boil a fried omelette, but the women in my mother's family have been cooking it for generations."

While she is uncertain if the soup is a traditional Teochew dish, she likes that it is simple to cook and flavourful.

Besides giving a new lease on life to her family's heritage recipes, writing the book has also helped her learn more about her family's history. For example, her late paternal grandmother's chinchalok (fermented prawn dipping sauce) recipe came about because she was trying to make ends meet after the war.

According to Mrs Seow's aunt, she lived in a still house near a shore then but could not afford to buy fishing nets. So, she sewed mosquito nets together and used it to catch baby shrimps, which she then cured to make chinchalok and exchanged with fruit plantation owners for fruit to sell.

Mrs Seow says: "I hope that people who buy the book will be inspired to find out their own culinary roots and talk to relatives who are still around. I am sure they will have stories and recipes to share and pass down to their children."

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Soya & Spice is available at major bookstores, including Kinokuniya, for \$26.75 (inclusive of GST).

MAKE IT YOURSELF: OMELETTE SOUP



INGREDIENTS

- 2 heaped Tbs dried shrimps
- 40g tang hoon (mung bean vermicelli)
- 4 tsp oil
- 4 eggs
- 2 tsp light soya sauce
- 1/4 tsp ground white pepper
- 500ml chicken stock
- 750ml water
- 1 stalk coriander leaf

METHOD

1. Wash, drain and coarsely pound the dried shrimps. Set aside.
2. Soak the tang hoon in hot water for about five minutes until soft. Drain, cut into 3cm-long strands and set aside.
3. Heat 1 tsp of oil in a pan, add the dried

shrimps and stir-fry over a gentle flame until it is fragrant and crispy.

4. Place the fried shrimps, tang hoon, eggs, light soya sauce and white pepper in a bowl and mix well. Set aside.

5. Heat the chicken stock and water in a pot on medium flame.

6. Add the remaining oil to a heated pan and fry the egg mixture to a deep golden brown. Cut the omelette into bite-sized pieces with a spatula.

7. Add the omelette pieces to the soup. Allow the soup to come to a boil before lowering the heat and leaving it to simmer with the lid on for two minutes.

8. Top with sprigs of coriander leaf and a dash of white pepper if you like.

Serves four



Eater's Digest

Tan Hsueh Yun

Asian food is in the spotlight this week.

Intellectually, I can wrap my mind around the concept of a healthy recipe. Flavour and a luxurious mouth feel do not always have to come from lavish use of butter, cream or oil.

In practice, though, so many of them are earnest and dull, dull, dull. There are exceptions and I am glad to say the recipes I tried from food writer Sylvia Tan's new book turned out to be flavourful and anything but dull. I have attended her cooking classes, cooked from her books, sampled her cooking, and her food never tastes like anything the doctor recommended.

The recipes in the book are simple and fuss free, the sort you can easily tackle on a weeknight. Flavour comes from spices, herbs and umami rich ingredients such as shiitake mushrooms and fish sauce.

Asian Pork Terrine, a meatloaf made with lean ground pork, was easy to put together and very aromatic from the basil, mint, laksa and coriander leaves. Chilli added a spicy kick and an egg made it taste a little more luxurious.

I will make Healthy Orh Nee again too, even though a friend asked: "What's the point?" The mashed yam dessert is made with light olive oil instead of lard, and sweetened with a simple sugar syrup flavoured with vanilla and rum.

The result wasn't quite like the rich, unctuous versions served in Teochew restaurants, but it tasted good and did not sit in the belly all night. That, I think, is the point.

California-based food writer and cooking teacher Andrea Nguyen interprets dumplings very broadly.

Her new book covers everything from gyoza and siew mai to samosas and pineapple tarts, but does not, for some reason, contain any recipes for zongzi (Chinese rice dumpling).

Still, there is much to explore in this detailed, well-written book, which gathers recipes from the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, among other places.

The instructions, for the most part, are clear and direct. Nguyen gives those all-important visual cues most recipe writers leave out – how to judge when the oil is hot enough for deep frying, what the consistency of the dough should be. These tips make it easy for a novice to tackle the recipes, some of which are quite challenging.

I decided to tackle the Basic Dumpling Dough and use that to make goatie, or potstickers. On my first try, I produced ugly but perfectly delicious dumplings. My wrapping techniques need work but I will be cooking from this book again.

You know a cookbook is going to be well-used when you run out of Post-it notes flagging recipes in it.

Lee Geok Boi's book is full of tempting pictures and easy recipes for making salads with vibrant hot, sour, salty and sweet flavours. Crunchy peanuts and vegetables, tender greens and juicy fruit make the Asian salad a textural delight too.

Among the countries represented are China, Japan, Laos, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Turkey and Afghanistan. It is interesting to see how differently they use the same vegetables in salads.

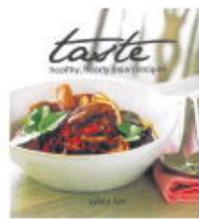
Badhapu Vambotu Sambola, a fried eggplant salad from Sri Lanka, was simple to make and delicious. The turmeric-rubbed, pan-fried slices of eggplant were drizzled with a tangy coconut cream dressing and topped with pungent sliced onions and red and green chillies.

Winged beans, a very underrated vegetable, were used to marvellous effect in the Thai salad Yam Tua Poo. Okay, to make it, I needed to refer to five other recipes – for fried garlic, fried shallots, toasted grated coconut, palm sugar syrup and nam prik pao (a chilli paste).

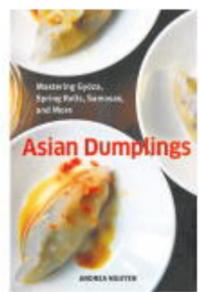
But when it all came together, I polished off half the salad, relishing every earthy, spicy and crunchy mouthful.

Where has this book been all my life?

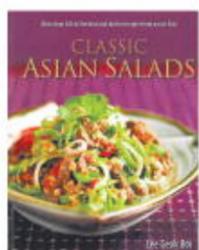
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Taste – Healthy, Hearty Asian Recipes
By Sylvia Tan
Marshall Cavendish
Cuisine/2009/Paperback/
144 pages/\$29.96/
Books Kinokuniya



Asian Dumplings
By Andrea Nguyen
Ten Speed Press/2009/
Hardcover/234 pages/
\$52.85/Books Kinokuniya



Classic Asian Salads
By Lee Geok Boi
Marshall Cavendish
Cuisine/2009/Paperback/
224 pages/\$34.24/
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Seafood, beef binge

Tidbits

Eunice Quek

Stuff yourself with oysters, sashimi, mussels and clams at Barossa on weekends for \$49++ a person.

Or if red meat is your thing, opt for the beef buffet available on Wednesdays. On offer is Australian beef in prime cuts of black Angus rib eye, wagyu prime rib and King Island T-bone for \$39++ a person.

The Aussie-inspired bar and eatery at the Esplanade launched the all-you-can-eat promotion late last month and it ends on Dec 23. Children under the age of five dine for free at both buffets. Both sets come with complimentary salad, vegetable sticks, fries and garlic bread.

Where: 8 Raffles Avenue, Esplanade Mall, 01-11, tel: 6534-5188
Open: noon to 1am (Sun to Thu), noon to 2am (Fri and Sat)



PHOTOS: BAROSSA, YWCA, PANTRY PURSUITS
Eat your fill of steak at Barossa's beef buffet on Wednesdays.

Festive recipes

If you are hunting for traditional recipes for the holidays, check out YWCA's food diary.

The diary has write-ups and recipes for 12 dishes commonly associated with festive occasions, such as sugee cookies (right) for Chinese New Year, beef rendang for Hari Raya and roast turkey for Christmas.

Priced at \$8 a copy, the publication in commemoration of YWCA's 135th anniversary next year is available at 254 Outram Road or Fort Canning Lodge. Sales proceeds will support the organisation's charity work.

Info: Call 6223-1227 or download an order form from www.ywca.org.sg

La Petite Barbecue opens

French bistro La Petite Cuisine in Serene Centre has opened a new outlet, La Petite Barbecue a few doors from the original outlet. The new eatery offers meats, air-flown from Australia, simply grilled and seasoned with salt and pepper. Side dishes



include fries and a salad, with prices ranging from \$12 to \$15 for a set.

Where: 551 Bukit Timah Road, tel: 6466-9066
Open: 11.30am to 2.30pm, 5.30 to 9.30pm (Mon to Sat, closed on Sun)

Get Piazza online

You can now buy that Piazza pot or Giesser Messer knife from Singapore-based website Pantry Pursuits.

The retailer sells cookware that cannot be found in retail stores, such as Italian brand Piazza's pots and pans, and German maker Giesser Messer's knives, which cost from US\$25 (S\$35).

The site also stocks familiar American brands such as KitchenAid, Cuisinart and QT (below). Delivery is free for purchases above US\$150.

Info: Go to www.pantrypursuits.com

