In *The Edible Tao* Ruth Pennington Paget recounts her experiences with many of the world's cuisines in short, unrelated, one-to-eleven-page snippets—a bathroom reader of food writing.

One is pulled between the author's disarming tone and passion for food and her pat, too-cute food journalism. Paget opens the book's main section with "The Angst of Beginner's Luck," where she colorfully portrays the insecurities she faced as a new food writer. She disarmingly invites us behind the articles into her world of baby jostling, deadlines, adapting (or stealing?) recipes, and battling the challenges of working abroad. Thus starts a career where the author, as her subtitle indicates, “munches her way toward enlightenment.” Paget's omnivorousness and curiosity serve her well. She later explains that “For twelve years, I have been practicing what Raymond Sokolov calls gastro ethnography, learning about a culture by studying its food, meal rituals, and history of the cuisine’s dishes” (p.18).

Practicing is one thing; learning, another. Ethnography necessitates rich description and deep analysis. Paget asks ethnographers’ questions, “I wondered when and how New World food products like corn and chilies arrived in Korea” (p.18), and puts world cuisines into analytical terms that, however reductionist, are accessible. “I like to think of *nuoc mam* [Vietnamese fermented fish sauce] as salt with protein added to it” (p.105). But these gastronomic snippets go unanswered and unchallenged. Others, such as “I could easily make a meal of cabbage *kimchi* and rice like many poor Koreans have done” (p.19), are sufficiently sentimentalized as to be offensive to those who think more carefully about food.

*The Edible Tao* is an amusement. Paget's charm and candor mitigate the blatant errors, such as calling couscous (Moroccan semolina pasta) a “grain”; the superficial cultural and historical descriptions; and some puzzling editorial decisions in the transition from newspaper articles to collection, such as noting an upcoming event for “11 AM on Sunday, September 3 [2000]…” (p. 22). Read the book on the beach or the airplane, and take it in the light spirit in which it is written—flavorful bites of world cuisines.

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