chapter explores the family’s food culture, and all of the stories are fascinating. Written with imagination, they capture the powerful significance of eating. Most end with a recipe or two that provide irresistible, if overly simplified, home-style Chinese dishes as prepared by Nai-nai.

The gustatory experiences of this cross-cultural family help both reader and author understand what it means to be Chinese American. They expose the heritage the author rejected until after Nai-nai had returned to China alone. It is only then that Li begins to question her birthright, wondering whether she is Chinese or American. Some resolution occurs when she visits Nai-nai in China. When she returns home, she realizes that she is more Chinese than she had imagined, and she is finally ready for more input from Grandma. But unfortunately, Nai-nai is already in her celestial garden. Would that Li had come to her realization earlier.

At the end of this personal saga, Li explores the growing pains of an ABC, an American-born Chinese. In doing so, she concentrates on her Chinese heritage and finds that her roots need continual watering. Her book captures the liveliness of her life, exploring through a series of beautiful scenes what it means to be Chinese American.

For instance, during the Moon Festival, Nai-nai and her family buy yuebing, which the family knows as moon cakes. They “ate them at home washed down with glasses of chrysanthemum tea” (p.140). Li admits that she “wasn’t terribly fond of moon cakes—round pastries stuffed with various fillings: orange peel, red-bean paste, date paste, egg yolk, coconut, lotus-seed paste—until I stopped eating them like cookies and began nibbling at them like cake—fruit-cake, Chinese style…cut in very thin slices, [only then] moon cakes become the satisfying and substantial delicacy they are” (p.140). In a similar vignette, about buying flutes in Chinatown, Li shares Chinese metaphors for life that help her figure out who she really is. A Chinese merchant compares the flutes to the person she is, “with nothing inside…no culture inside” (p.180). Though this comment hits a sour note with Li, it encourages her to learn more about her Chineseness.

Daughter of Heaven is satisfying and substantial, filled with cultural know-how and Chinese-American sentiments. Enjoy its Breakfast Noodles, Pigs Feet with Ginger and Sweet Rice Vinegar, and sixteen other recipes. Read them; then make them to taste this culture. By writing this book, Li has finally understood her grandmother and shares her delight in Nai-nai and the heritage she conveyed to her granddaughter through food.

—Jacqueline M. Newman, editor, Flavor and Fortune

Washoku: Recipes from the Japanese Home Kitchen
Elizabeth Andoh
Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2005
328 pp. Photographs. $35.00 (cloth)

While culinary principles make for interesting reading, few people cook by them. I find myself incanting “fresh, local, and seasonal” when I think about a menu, and Chinese theories of correspondence between food and health make tremendous sense, but nothing is framed on my kitchen wall. Most Americans, when faced with Japanese cuisine, seem to think that they are about to engage in a philosophico-spiritual-aesthetic exercise, with codes that need to be explained. Many Japanese cookbooks, trying to bring Japanese food within range of the home cook, go too far the other way, using words like “simple” or “for the American kitchen,” which seem to patronize the reader or promise only a diluted, inauthentic experience. This is unfair to the cook, who could indeed produce palatable and interesting food, and unfair to the tremendously exciting menus and dishes that make up the vast cultural menus of Japan.

To correct these problems, and to reduce the distance between the home cook overseas and the home cook in Japan, Elizabeth Andoh has undertaken the difficult tasks of balancing principles and the details of provisioning and preparation. In her new book, Washoku: Recipes from the Japanese Home Kitchen, Andoh presents us with encyclopedic references and definitions but, in the end, brings you into her own Japanese kitchen, where you can all but taste the results. The book is a treasure trove of detail and will be a permanent reference work in my library. Andoh’s heart is in the minutiae not in the conceptual framing, and her joy is in instructing the reader in delicious home cooking far from the highfalutin aesthetics of the kaiséki (tea ceremony) meal or the predictable sushi, sukiyaki, and tempura template of most overseas Japanese restaurants.

Andoh juggles correct cooking (as her Japanese mother-in-law, who seems always to be just over her shoulder, had taught her) with the need for flexibility and the tricks of the kitchen of the novice Japanese cook. To her credit, she does not dwell on the authentic, allowing for the commonsense adjustments anyone, including her mother-in-law, would make. But the way she frames her recipes—the analytical asides—are much less convincing. This reader, at any rate, perceived an attempt to create a model of what is special about the Japanese kitchen, to construct a vision of what constitutes the washoku principles and practices. What washoku means to most Japanese is not the wonderful smells and tastes of the home kitchen of an ordinary good cook.
but “our” food in the national sense, a construction of what is more political and ideological (as in “our unique Japanese culture”) and much less the stuff of “peace and harmony,” which is the reading Andoh uses. *Washoku* is used most often in Japan to contrast with *yooshoku*, or Western foods, such as spaghetti, pilaf, or sponge cake—or a Big Mac. It is almost never used on its own, only in opposition to a foodway that is not Japanese. *Washoku* implies, moreover, a pan-Japanese cuisine, which almost everyone would deny exists. It also may imply that there is a “right way” or an “authentic way” of making specific dishes. My own years of cooking in Japan and in Japanese cooking schools have taught me that some people want to instill in me a right way of doing things, while others will remind me we do not live in textbooks. And in the end, I take Andoh’s meaning of *washoku* here to be common sense in a Japanese kitchen, and thus I take away with me transferable, not unique, ways of cooking.

The commonsense details are wonderful. I will pore over the making of pickles, both slow and “impatient.” I will use dried sardines to make stock, and I will be alert for the glazed-over eyeball of a fish when I shop. I will rush out to get a jar of black sesame paste for an intense sorbet. (Andoh doesn’t mention it, but a tablespoon of this paste, mixed with a little honey and a cup of rich yogurt, makes a wonderful, nutritious breakfast.) And my rice-making techniques can always be improved.

I might quibble about the use of sidebars, recurrent ones called “Kitchen Harmony” or “Harmony at Table,” which occasionally seem excessive. Do you need to be told, if your hands get greasy from squeezing fried tofu, to wash them in warm water with soap? And I might ask for more discussion of the regional aspects of Japanese foods. But as a fine reference to a foodway that is not Japanese, *Washoku* implies, moreover, a pan-Japanese cuisine, which almost everyone would deny exists. It also may imply that there is a “right way” or an “authentic way” of making specific dishes. My own years of cooking in Japan and in Japanese cooking schools have taught me that some people want to instill in me a right way of doing things, while others will remind me we do not live in textbooks. And in the end, I take Andoh’s meaning of *washoku* here to be common sense in a Japanese kitchen, and thus I take away with me transferable, not unique, ways of cooking.

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—Corky White, Boston University

**Will Write for Food: The Complete Guide to Writing Cookbooks, Restaurant Reviews, Articles, Memoir, Fiction and More…**

Dianne Jacob

New York: Marlowe and Company, 2005

306 pp. $15.95 (paper)

The perfect rose is given a blue ribbon and proclaimed best in show. This excellent reference book deserves a similar prize because it, too, is in a class of its own. Dianne Jacob anticipates and answers questions for food writers of every level of accomplishment. She is a patient tutor who knows her stuff. She has also invited many of her luminary pals to share their knowledge: Calvin Trillin, Judith Jones, David Leite, Deborah Madison, Jeffrey Steingarten, Alan Richman, and Colman Andrews are among the stars offering wise counsel and useful tips.

Few contemplate the evening when they will walk onto the stage at Carnegie Hall and toss off a violin concerto or strut onto the center court at Wimbledon, vanquish the opponent, and blow kisses to the throng of wildly cheering spectators. Yet many firmly believe all that is needed to transform themselves into esteemed persons of letters is a pocketful of recipes and a little time. Indeed, you might think it would be a piece of cake to write a good recipe. After all, if you want to roast a chicken, you need only remember where and when you put it in—but good cooking involves the skill of rescue and retrieval, and good writing is an art as well as a craft. To achieve success, a recipe must be compiled with impeccable accuracy and unambiguous clarity—and simultaneously inspire the anticipation of pleasure. Jacob says, “A well-written recipe is poetry, like beautiful writing” (p.166). She notes, too, that “writing about food isn’t just about describing flavor and smell, anyway. Food may be the subject of a story, but the point of the story can reside in recounting, reporting, and finding the right details, as well as in history, associations, implications, and, of course, the context of the story itself” (p.35).

*Will Write for Food* strikes an exquisite balance between issuing cautionary warnings and encouraging the novice to take up her mouse and start typing. Jacob tells the beginner how to get started and reminds old pros of things they have forgotten or never knew. Best of all, she tells the truth. Food writing is not an easy field to get into. It is tough and getting tougher. Even so, there are always new opportunities for writing recipes or a memoir. Jacob explains the steps necessary to land a job as a restaurant critic or a book reviewer. She shows the reader how to compose a query letter and a book proposal. She lays out the reader’s feet a tapestry of food writing opportunities that may not have previously been considered—how, for instance, to write about food in history, how to write a food reference book, or how to explore issues related to food and health.

Dianne Jacob describes adventures in food journalism and lets the reader know how to set about finding a literary agent and getting work published in the fields of kitchen science, biography, autobiography, and even mystery writing. As she herself explains, “The variety [of areas to explore]