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# Home Economics Journeys From Iowa State to China

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# Home Economics Journeys

## From Iowa State to China

*Jean Ory interviews Dr. Florence Pen Ho, one of China's leaders in the field of nutrition*

**W**HEN Dr. Florence Pen Ho returned to China in 1941 the war in the Pacific was just 2 months off. She had to travel by plane and could not carry much teaching material or many textbooks. After her current year at Iowa State Dr. Ho hopes to take back to China much more material to help in teaching the Chinese women how to build a healthier nation.

Over 60 students enrolled in Dr. Ho's first home economics class at West China Union University. There were 12 in her first graduation class.

In addition to her work as one of China's leaders in the nutrition field, Dr. Ho is a director of her provincial experimental nursery school. But her main work is helping her people understand and overcome the difficult food problem which exists.

Even before wartime food shortages the general Chinese diet was inadequate, states Dr. Ho. Studies made in cities proved this to be true. And in the country, home of the lowest economic group, diets were undoubtedly even poorer.

A Chinese likes to start his day with a hearty breakfast. This would include porridge, preserved vegetables such as white beets or pickles and soybeans or a steamed bread with soybean milk. However, as income decreases, meals become simpler until many of the poorer people eat only porridge for breakfast. The Chinese are fond of soups and serve them several times a day. One of their favorite kinds is made with the water drained from cooked rice. Along the coast, seafoods also are used widely.

In different parts of the country this basic diet varies greatly, says Dr. Ho. In south China rice is the staple. Some animal protein such as pork, eggs, fish, fruits and vegetables supplement it. Poorer people eat only rice with a few vegetables. Meat is a rare treat served on special occasions.



In north China wheat is the staple food. Wealthy people add rice, pork, eggs, fruits and vegetables to their menus. The poor live on millet, corn, soybeans and some vegetables. People living in the mountains also eat a large quantity of corn. Theirs is usually a vegetarian diet.

In west China, where Dr. Ho lived, the climate is so mild that three and four crops can be grown each

year. Therefore the people have fresh fruits and green vegetables all year round. Fruit trees are abundant; the people also grow rice, wheat and corn. However, at present high prices few Chinese can afford to buy fruit or meat. These are luxuries. And because the Chinese do not have a cold storage system or method of keeping fresh foods, staples must make up a large part of their diets even in this western part of China.



At present the Chinese diet is much lower in calories than it was before the war, and it was below standard then. Cereals provide more than 80 percent of the calories. The wealthy generally ate enough protein, but the poor could not afford to do so unless soybean products were used. Also below the optimum were fat, calcium and vitamin C. In places where there is little sunshine, the vitamin D deficiency is significant.

**S**OYBEANS and their products play an important part in the Chinese diet. They are the most important source of protein, calcium and thiamin. People often make soybeans into a milk drink by grinding the beans with water to form a white liquid. This is strained and the liquid boiled. The solid residue is fed to pigs or chickens. Sometimes this soybean milk is made in a powdered form to preserve it. Its calcium content can be increased by addition of bone meal. In the south, poor people use soybean mixtures as staples, but not often enough or in large enough quantities to insure balanced diets.

During the war the government issued unpolished rice, which contains the thiamin and iron lost in polishing off the outer coating. There was no labor in the country to do the hand polishing. Polished rice and wheat have been used in the cities particularly.

Through Chinese history the emphasis in regard to foods has been on the dishes and flavors themselves. The relation of food to health has received little attention.

Education in nutrition and food preparation, believes Dr. Ho, can improve Chinese diets at no extra cost. She makes several suggestions. Educators can stress using more soybean products to supply protein and calcium. More vegetables and fruits should be used in place of rice. Potatoes and whole grain cereals such as millet, kaoling and corn should substitute for highly polished rice and wheat. Eggs and other animal foods should be used whenever possible. Proper cooking methods should be taught to avoid possible destruction of vitamins and minerals.