



# Food and Love: A Cultural History of East and West

*Jack Goody*

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Jack Goody is a thinker who enjoys subverting neat simplifications and rigid preconceptions. A leading anthropologist and comparative sociologist, he is perhaps best known for his acclaimed critique of crude historical distinctions between “West” and “East” and overblown claims for the uniqueness of the West. In *Food and Love*, Goody pursues his argument into the sphere of culture.

The development of romantic love, the evolution of national and regional cuisines, the globalisation of Chinese food, and the histories of various taboos on certain types of food and drink, the uniqueness of the European family—such are the fascinating and diverse themes Goody addresses effortlessly ranging from Europe to Asia and to Africa.

Starting with a sustained discussion of the context of such debates in the thought of classic theorists as well as contemporary historical and sociological notions of modernisation, Goody goes on to use his skill and knowledge as an anthropologist and comparative sociologist to tease out the general historical processes embedded in the most intimate recesses of our lives. In a final bracing section challenging dominant relativist conceptions, Goody considers the difficulties and complexities of cross-cultural and comparative analysis, and he picks apart the doubts involved in the very process of representation and symbolic communication.

Throughout the book, Goody demonstrates that the ethnocentricity of much of Western scholarship has distorted not only the comprehension of the East but also developments in Europe’s past and present. FOOD “The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the birth of a ‘courtly’ ideology of food parallel to that of courtly love (*fin ‘amor*). What one ate became seen as constitutive of the very quality of persons, giving rise to sumptuary legislation which saw to it that people consumed the foods appropriate to their status and not those of higher groups.” AND LOVE “In writing a love poem one is rarely addressing directly the loved object ... for the troubadours, courtly love, in retrospect called ‘romantic’, was ‘l’amoor de lonh’, distant love in both a physical and social sense ... one quotes rather than invents the discourse of love.”

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