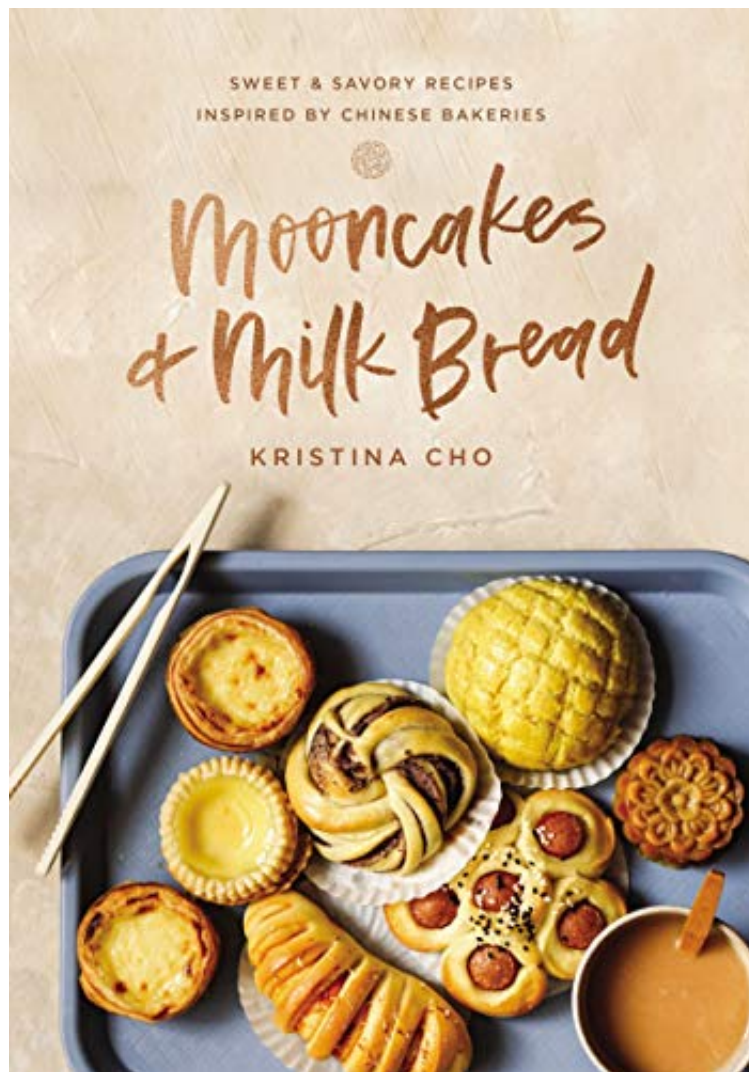


Mooncakes and Milk Bread: Sweet and Savory Recipes Inspired by Chinese Bakeries

by

Kristina Cho



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Synopsis

JAMES BEARD NOMINATED COOKBOOK • Best Baking and Dessert Book of the Year 2022
ONE OF THE TEN BEST COOKBOOKS OF THE YEAR: The New Yorker Magazine, The New York Times
ONE OF THE BEST COOKBOOKS OF THE YEAR: Time Out, Glamour, Taste of Home
In *Mooncakes & Milk Bread*, food blogger Kristina Cho (eatchofood.com) introduces readers to Chinese bakery cooking with fresh, uncomplicated interpretations of classic recipes for the modern baker. Inside, you'll find sweet and savory baked buns, steamed buns, Chinese breads, unique cookies, whimsical cakes, juicy dumplings, Chinese breakfast dishes, and drinks. Recipes for steamed BBQ pork buns, pineapple buns with a thick slice of butter, silky smooth milk tea, and chocolate Swiss rolls all make an appearance--because a book about Chinese bakeries wouldn't be complete without them! Kristina teaches you to whip up these delicacies like a pro, including how to: Knead dough without a stand mixer Avoid collapsed steamed buns Infuse creams and custards with aromatic tea flavors Mix the most workable dumpling dough Pleat dumplings like an Asian grandma This is the first book to exclusively focus on Chinese bakeries and cafés, but it isn't just for those nostalgic for Chinese bakeshop foods--it's for all home bakers who want exciting new recipes to add to their repertoires.

Look inside the book

Praise for *Mooncakes and Milk Bread* “Kristina’s book is a trip down memory lane, an evocative look at the foods that made me happy as a child and that are laced with nostalgia for me as an adult. Every page of *Mooncakes and Milk Bread* is a treat, with beloved cakes and not-too-sweet favorites that felt unattainable to create myself at home, until now. Kristina’s stories about growing up in her family’s Chinese restaurant and greeting her ‘aunties and uncles’ at dim sum are full of heart and soul, providing a window into a vibrant part of American culture that has brought joy to so many. And joy is a good word to sum up Kristina’s book. It is more than a Chinese baking book—it is a triumphant celebration of how food brings people from different generations and cultures together. I’ve never been so excited to bake and steam!”—HETTY MCKINNON, FOOD WRITER, AUTHOR OF FOUR BESTSELLING COOK BOOKS INCLUDING *TO ASIA, WITH LOVE*, AND EDITOR OF *PEDDLER JOURNAL* “This book brought tears to my eyes. Some of my tastiest childhood memories were at Chinese bakeries, and these photos, stories, and recipes have both transported me back in time and provided fresh inspiration to recreate these memories at home. I am truly in awe of Kristina’s ability to evoke nostalgia while also infusing new life into this genre of food that hasn’t, until now, gotten the attention it deserves. *Mooncakes and Milk Bread* is a stunning, thorough, delicious, and important piece of work.”—MOLLY YEH, COOKBOOK AUTHOR AND FOOD NETWORK HOST “Kristina Cho’s book is a long overdue collection of the artistry and sweet and savory flavors of Chinese baking. I can’t think of another book that made me want to make every single thing! Delving into the history of Chinese bakeries, visits to and recipes from popular traditional Chinese bakeries, including her grandfather’s own almond cookie recipe, Kristina makes everything accessible—no easy feat for pastries that always leave me in awe, wondering, How do they make that?! This book is an absolute treasure.”—LIZ PRUEITT, FOUNDER, TARTINE “*Mooncakes and Milk Bread* serves as a love letter to the Chinese bakeries of our childhoods but also as a guide for a new generation of fans, who can now bake their own pineapple buns (always with a slice of cold butter), the most perfect Chinese sponge cake, and everything else on the bakery rack—all from the comfort of their own homes.”—BIN CHEN AND ANDREW CHAU, COFOUNDERS OF BOBA GUYS AND AUTHORS OF *THE BOBA BOOK* “You can almost smell the magical aroma of freshly baked buns and steamed dumplings through the pages as you thumb through *Mooncakes and Milk Bread*. Kristina takes readers on a journey from Hong Kong to Cleveland to San Francisco and beyond, guiding us through the many typologies of Chinese American bakeries, like grab-and-go and takeaway. This book is filled with a beautiful blend of traditional recipes and new takes and twists on nostalgic classics. Ready your heart and belly for what’s sure to be an instant favorite.”—ALANA KYSAR, AUTHOR OF *ALOHA KITCHEN*

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Introduction
From Hong Kong to Cleveland
Nestled along Payne Avenue, between the East 20th and East 40th Street blocks of downtown, is Cleveland's Chinatown. Compared with the densely packed streets and alleys of New York City's and San Francisco's Chinatowns, the Cleveland Chinatown feels teeny-tiny, but for my family, it was home. Our family lived right in the very heart of it for fifty years. When I was growing up, though I wasn't raised in Chinatown, I spent almost every weekend there visiting my grandparents. It was the home of our go-to dim sum spot, where my family gathered around large, round tables full of steamers every Sunday, and frequented the few Asian grocery stores, to pick up vegetables and ingredients we couldn't find at the local Giant Eagle. My grandparents first moved to Cleveland from Hong Kong in the late 1960s. A lot has changed since then. Cleveland's little Chinatown transitioned from few Asian-owned businesses to an ever-growing number of Chinese restaurants and grocery stores. But what we lacked for many years was a stand-alone bakery. All we had was a bakery case the size of a small closet, in one of the local Asian markets. It was enough for us—most of the time. Each year we'd pack up the minivan for our annual road trip to Chicago. The Chinatown there was more robust, and its bakeries indulged our cravings for baked buns and rolled cakes. Trips to the local bakery case and vacation visits to Chinatown bakeries in other cities are some of my favorite childhood memories. It was exhilarating, getting the chance to pick out a new, shiny baked good or crisp cookie, each bite connecting me a little more to my family's culture. Sipping on tea and pulling apart our haul of treats bit by bit, my parents and grandparents would regale us with their own memories of living in Hong Kong or even older stories of my grandparents in Taishan, China. Maybe that's why Hong Kong has always felt like a second home to me. Both my parents are originally from Hong Kong and grew up in the same apartment complex. The food I ate while growing up is firmly rooted in Cantonese flavors and techniques, and the unique Western influences found only in Hong Kong. My maternal grandfather, Goong Goong, was a schoolteacher and calligrapher, but when he decided to move his entire family, including his mother, wife, and five young children, to the United States, he knew he needed another plan, so he learned to cook. He learned to do more than just cook, though. When he arrived in the States

and started working in kitchens, his first job was baking endless trays of almond cookies. He had an incredible work ethic (having seven mouths to feed will do that to you) and worked his way up in restaurant kitchens until he had saved up enough money to open his own restaurant. One restaurant turned into several more. Working in the restaurant became the family business. My maternal grandmother, Pau Pau, washed dishes and helped cook, and my mom and her siblings were the waiters, carry-out runners, prep cooks, and bartenders, when they weren't studying, at college, or working another full-time job in a completely different field. We were, and still are, a Chinese American restaurant family blessed with masterful cooks. I grew up watching my goong goong roast huge slabs of pork and wield a giant, fiery wok. I spent hours making dumplings with my pau pau and studying the way she formed her joong—a sticky rice tamale wrapped in bamboo leaves—to celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival. Evenings at the restaurant meant huge staff dinners in the kitchen. During holidays, I was inspired by my mom's ability to single-handedly whip up a feast featuring more than a dozen dishes for the entire family. I may have missed making traditional all-American memories—baking homemade brownies with my grandma, say, or baking a pumpkin pie to celebrate Thanksgiving. Nonetheless, my Chinese American upbringing in the Midwest was filled with an abundance of incredible food made with care and lovingly tied to tradition. For a long time I wanted to be a chef just like my goong goong, but when it came to choosing a college major, architecture felt like the right path for me. I have always loved art and creating beautiful things with my hands. While I was in architecture school, food and cooking for others still took up every spare moment I had. Between all-nighters building models in the studio and struggling through structures homework, I fed my friends at weekly dinner parties with minimal ingredients, baked midnight blueberry muffins to de-stress, started an embarrassingly hipster supper club in my professor's artist studio, and attempted to skew every architecture assignment into a project that involved making, growing, or dispensing food. You could say I was mildly obsessed with food. After college, I moved to foggy San Francisco to become a "real" architect. I met my partner, Reuben (also an architect), soon after I arrived, on a rainy morning over dim sum (naturally). For a few years, I worked as a designer at a couple of firms in the Bay Area. I tried to give architecture my all, but spending my days tweaking construction drawings and coordinating with engineers didn't satisfy me creatively. I was still cooking and baking regularly. I was the girl who brought in baked goods for my coworkers on a weekly basis or volunteered to make waffles for the whole office on Bike to Work Day. At the peak of my creative frustration, I started a food blog to document my ongoing kitchen adventures (and prove to my mom that I was able to properly cook for myself). Eat Cho Food started off mainly as a way to channel all the creative energy, which wasn't being utilized at work, into noodles, dumplings, and baked goods. At the same time, Reuben and I moved to the Inner Richmond neighborhood, one block north of Clement Street. Inner Richmond is San Francisco's unofficial second Chinatown, and Clement Street, the main drag, is packed with restaurants, bars, markets, and bakeries. It was the first time I'd ever lived anywhere most of the people walking up and down the street looked like me! I heard Cantonese more frequently than English, and all my

favorite Asian foods and ingredients were minutes from our door. Years later, I'd realize what a profound effect this environment had on me and my cooking. I found so much joy exploring the aisles of the local Asian markets and figuring innovative ways to use the ingredients in my recipes. A lot of these recipes were inspired by my family's classic Cantonese cooking, while others are completely unique twists on my favorite foods. When I'm cooking, I'm often inspired by what's in season, memorable meals from my travels, and memories of growing up in the Midwest. On my blog, I shared recipes and snippets of our life each week, even if the only people reading it were my mom and Reuben's mom. I transferred my design approach from architecture to photography, food styling, and dumpling pleats. What was most helpful in the transition from architecture to food was the unrelenting process of iteration and development. Architecture gave me the discipline to continually test and create recipes that are efficient, thoughtful, flavorful, and workable. It also taught me to balance artistry with precision when explaining techniques, presenting dishes, and writing recipes. I was amazed when more and more people started visiting EatChoFood.com and following me on social media. What started off as a hobby soon became my full-time dream job. I discovered that the recipes that resonated most with my readers were the ones that connected them to a flavor from their childhood. This became super clear when I shared a recipe for Chinese Bakery-Style Hot Dog Flower Buns. Hot dog flower buns were one of my favorite Chinese bakery treats growing up—the flower shape alone evokes pure childhood nostalgia—so I made them on a whim. Apparently, a lot of other people love them too, as I was inundated with requests for more Chinese bakery bun recipes. That's when the wheels started turning on this cookbook. Cookbook sections in bookstores are packed with dessert books, like cookie tomes with recipes for shortbread and the absolute best chocolate chip cookies. But you likely won't find a recipe for Chocolate-Hazelnut Macau-Style Cookies, tender, beautifully pressed cookies that melt in your mouth, in any American cookbook. I spent years searching for recipes for the perfect Chinese Sponge Cake, for Shao Bing—a small bread encrusted with sesame seeds and filled with either sweet or savory options—and for crispy yet fluffy Sheng Jian Bao, pan-fried steamed buns filled with juicy pork. These recipes are hard to come by, and if anything exists, it's via a few untrustworthy web links. I wanted to change that and share a collection of thoughtful, well-tested recipes dedicated to my beloved Chinese bakeries and cafes. Between recipes for the more iconic mooncakes and milk bread loaves, you'll find specialties of my pau pau that are near and dear to my heart: playful dumplings, clever ways to fold and twist buns, new ingredients to stock your pantry, and stories from growing up in my family's kitchen. I'm grateful for the opportunity to share these recipes, flavors, and stories. Whether Chinese baking is new or familiar to you, you'll find plenty of recipes that feel nostalgic, comforting, adventurous, and even whimsical. Maybe you'll find the inspiration to bake egg tarts with your own grandparents (and finally get them to turn on their oven) or introduce the gloriousness of pork floss to your family. I hope some of the recipes find a tender spot in your heart and even become baking traditions for years to come. I treat these recipes with endless respect toward my heritage but also apply my own perspective, as a first-generation Chinese

American from the Midwest who now lives in California. So you know it's going to get interesting. Cafe Culture

If you walk through the main drag of any Chinatown in the United States, you'll see bright-colored awnings and neon signs with the word BAKERY in large, bold lettering. Instead of buttery croissants, baguettes, and cupcakes, you'll find buns filled with taro, coconut, and red bean paste. The air is thick with the aroma of strongly brewed tea. Crisp cookies are chock full of seeds and nuts, and cakes are slathered with light-as-air whipped cream and glossy fruit that looks so perfect you might think it's fake. Most Chinese bakeries offer savory foods along with sweet treats. Some shops sell dim sum favorites like siu mai, har gow, and lo bak gao. Bakeries might also serve classic Chinese breakfast staples like jook, a creamy, slow-cooked rice porridge made by stirring rice in chicken or pork stock for hours. It's typically served with fried dough called youtiao—think of it as a savory Chinese doughnut to dip in your jook. Not all the food offered at bakeries is even baked at all. The art of baking and using ovens is only a recent cooking method in Chinese culture; most households were without ovens for the longest time. This is because in Hong Kong, where apartments are compact, large appliances like ovens are typically omitted from the floorplan. It's a running joke in my family that Pau Pau's oven is just an elaborate storage cabinet (I don't think she's ever turned the thing on). Steaming, frying, and boiling are more widely used cooking methods. This might explain why Chinese bakeries became so popular in Hong Kong, and ultimately that popularity traveled over to the States. Since families lacked ovens to make baked goods, going to the bakery became a special treat, offering indulgences they couldn't make at home. Chinese bakeries first gained popularity in Hong Kong, which absorbed a hefty dose of Western culture during 150 years of British rule. Chinese bakers adapted recipes brought over from European bakers for brioche, custard pies, biscuits, and cakes, using the ingredients they had access to and incorporated flavors and ingredients more aligned with the Asian palate. Sugar levels were reduced, cakes became lighter, and ingredients like black sesame seeds and mango worked their way into everything. Thus, the classic Chinese bakery style is a quirky melding of Western and Eastern cultures. It's interesting that my dad and other Hong Kongers still refer to Chinese bakeries as "Western bakeries."

Aside from copious amounts of food, you'll also find community in a Chinese bakery. Asian Americans and immigrants flock to bakeries for treats that taste like home and invoke nostalgia. In the early hours of the day, groups of uncles and aunties sit gossiping. A lot of times you'll hear the happy chatter in a bakery or cafe before you see it. Mornings are when Chinese bakeries really buzz with energy, but they're also a perfect stop for an afternoon treat or a great place to pick up dessert for later.

Sharing Chinese American Stories through a Chinese American Lens

It wouldn't be right to introduce the magical world of Chinese bakeries without also highlighting the stories of the bakers, owners, and families that bring these bakeries to life. The spotlight and culinary accolades have primarily been focused on European and traditional American bakeries, but the professionals in Chinese bakeries deserve a round of applause for perfecting the softest buns, twisting dough into the most ingenious shapes, decorating the most whimsical cakes, and brewing the best cup of milk tea. There are dozens of Chinatowns across

the United States. Some, like San Francisco's, stretch on for blocks and blocks and make you feel as though you've been transported to another country. Other, smaller Chinatowns, like the one in Cleveland where my family lived, may have only a handful of restaurants and groceries. But even small towns have become part of the Chinese diaspora, where a lone grocery might include a bakery counter tucked into the corner. What all these Chinatowns and communities provide is a sense of familiarity for those far from home—and a connection with kindred spirits. I've had the honor of speaking with bakery professionals from across the country, in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia, and my hometown of Cleveland. They were all vastly different: Different origins. Different career paths. Different business styles. What connected them was a true passion for feeding people exceptional food and a dedication to wholesome ingredients and the virtues of making dishes from scratch and skipping shortcuts. In return, each has built a loyal customer base spanning generations. Even though my family never owned a bakery, I felt a kinship with those who did. We're all part of an enormous restaurant family club. The fervor and joy these bakers expressed for their businesses reminded me of my goong goong's love for his restaurants and his journey from immigrant to business owner. When I spoke with the bakers' children, who are now adults helping run the family business, I could relate to their afternoons and weekends spent at the bakery—it was their form of daycare. And like the recipes in this book, their approach to products and recipe development deftly balances Western and Eastern influences. It was important for me that their stories be shared through a lens similar to their own. Chinese bakeries are not something to be “discovered.” They are not something new and trendy, but a beautiful facet of Chinese American life. Chinese bakeries have been around for a long time and deserve time in the spotlight.

Typologies

The term “Chinese bakery” can be very specific, but it's also broad in the sense that a number of different establishments provide bakery fare. Of course, some bakeries and cafes fall somewhere between these types, because just like buns, each one is unique.

Grab and go

This is the most common style of Chinese bakery. Rows of acrylic display cases are filled with every bun and pastry you can imagine. The first thing you do is grab a cafeteria tray and a pair of tongs and start browsing the cases. As you make your way past each one, you slowly fill up your tray, until you're ready to check out or you can't carry any more—whichever comes first.

Specialty shops

Instead of a one-stop-shop model, some bakeries specialize in only one item or a handful of items. A specialty bakeshop could be dedicated to elaborately decorated fruit and cream cakes, say, or offer the best cocktail bun in the city, or simply open for a few months out of the year, perhaps making mooncakes for Mid-Autumn Festival.

Takeaway

Takeaway restaurants are hybrids of bakeries and dim sum parlors. My favorites in San Francisco are Good Luck Dim Sum and Xiao Long Bao, both on Clement Street. In the mornings, it's worth waiting in the long lines for your pick of steamed buns, flaky egg tarts, juicy soup dumplings, and noodles, all sold in a tight space.

Sit-down cafes

Taking inspiration from cha chaan tengs, or Hong Kong-style diners, in these often bustling cafes you can sit down and enjoy a warm pastry and a spot of tea. Menus are generally more robust than what you find at traditional bakeries or takeaway

restaurants. Ingredients for a Better Bake

Coming from a background in architecture, I like to geek out and learn how each component of a recipe works together. Understanding why and how ingredients react to others helps me figure out how to make the best bread, cookie, and cake. Here, I've broken down the standard ingredients I use in my recipes, including why, how, and when to use them. Note that most of the recipes in this book feature everyday ingredients that most home cooks and bakers already have in the kitchen or can find in the neighborhood grocery store.

Flour Flour is the building block of many recipes in this book. Each flour variety contributes inherent properties that allow you to create a successful baked good. The type of flour specified in each recipe is intentional and cannot be swapped out for another without some compromise in the results.

Bread flour is a wheat-based flour with a high protein content (11 to 14 percent). Higher protein content produces more gluten, which in turn gives bread chewiness and a strong structure. It has a higher absorption rate, which makes it ideal for breads that need a lot of milk, butter, and eggs.

All-purpose flour is another wheat-based flour with a slightly lower protein content (9 to 10 percent) than bread flour. It's wonderful for dumpling dough, green onion pancakes, puff pastry, steamed buns, and cookies. As the name implies, it works in almost any recipe.

Cake flour is on the lower end of the protein content spectrum (7 to 8 percent), which makes it ideal for airy sponge cakes and soufflés. I also prefer to use cake flour in my waffles and crepes because the batter hydrates much better and yields a more delicate texture.

Rice flour is made from finely milling grains of rice. It lends crispy and chewy textural notes, depending on how you cook it. Rice flour is often used for making bouncy rice noodles and as a breading for crispy fried tofu. When combined with water, it creates a batter for White Sugar Cake and for suspending savory bits of Chinese sausage and green onions in a Turnip Cake. When buying rice flour, I recommend sticking with brands found in Asian markets; these tend to be ground to a finer, almost powdery consistency that works better in the recipes in this book than rice flours that are sold in American supermarket sections of "alt ingredients."

Glutinous rice flour is made from milling short-grain sticky rice. It behaves much differently than regular rice flour and is sometimes labeled as "mochiko" or "sweet rice flour." Glutinous rice flour is the base for Japanese mochi and other chewy treats. Koda Farms is my favorite brand because it delivers the best and most consistent results.

Sugar **Granulated sugar** is white cane sugar with a neutral sweetness. It obviously sweetens recipes, but it also helps cookies spread in the oven, incorporates air into butter and egg whites, and caramelizes into beautiful shades of amber. As with every other ingredient in this book, the amount of sugar specified is intentional, so resist the urge to reduce the amount of sugar because you think it might be a little too sweet—trust me, it's not.

Brown sugar is cane sugar that has been combined with molasses. I typically use dark brown sugar for its deeper color and stronger flavor, but light brown sugar works fine as a substitute. When measuring brown sugar, you want to make sure to firmly pack it into the measuring cup.

Dairy and Eggs **Whole milk** is what I typically use when a recipe calls for milk. However, 2% usually works as a substitute. Avoid skim or 1% milk in recipes because the fat content is too low. The higher fat content is necessary for the recipe's success. **Heavy cream** is

essential for whipped creams and is also my preferred liquid for egg washes—the fat from the heavy cream caramelizes into a beautiful dark-brown color in the oven. Evaporated milk has about 60 percent of the water removed. It is sold in cans, and though it may feel like a slightly antiquated baking ingredient, it still gets heavy use in Chinese bakeries and cafes. It has an inherent caramelized flavor and extra-silky texture from the evaporation process, which makes it essential for Hong Kong Milk Tea and to enhance the caramel flavors in Malay Cake. Sweetened condensed milk is often confused with evaporated milk. It also has about 60 percent of its water content removed, but it has added sugar. The result is a rich, super creamy, and very sweet mixture. I look for any and every opportunity to drizzle it onto something. Coconut milk is made from the pulp of mature coconuts. It is rich and creamy, with a strong coconut flavor. Full-fat coconut milk is the only coconut milk you should ever buy; avoid those marked “lite” or “reduced fat” or any that contain additives (the only ingredients on the label should be coconut and water). My favorite brands, Aroy-D and Chaokoh, are typically found in Asian grocery stores. Butter for baking should be unsalted. I use salted butter when I’m sandwiching a patty inside a warm pineapple bun or spreading it over a piece of bread, but not for baking. Unsalted butter in a recipe allows you to control exactly how much salt goes into it. Temperature is also incredibly important to a recipe’s success—some call for chilled, softened, or melted butter. Be sure to allow your butter to soften at room temperature in advance (an hour or so in a warm spot is a good general rule), rather than trying to soften it in the microwave at the last minute. Once butter has melted, it doesn’t quite behave the same way again, even if you let it firm back up. Eggs should always be large and fresh. These recipes are designed with large eggs in mind. Save the beautiful heirloom eggs for brunch. Oil Canola oil is what I reach for again and again in the kitchen. It is often used to create crispier and more supple bread, brushed onto cutting boards and in between layers of dough for thin and flaky pancakes, and added to cakes for moisture. In most baking scenarios, stick with canola oil or another neutral-flavored oil, like vegetable or grapeseed, so it doesn’t interfere with the flavors of your bake. Reserve more robust olive oil for savory cooking or dipping crusty bread in. Sesame oil is nutty and aromatic. It’s one of my favorite ingredients to incorporate into marinades, sauces, dressings, and dumpling fillings. A little sesame oil goes a long way in flavoring your food. Other Yeast is a nonchemical leavening agent (unlike baking soda or baking powder) that helps breads rise. Active dry yeast and instant yeast are the most commonly available types. Active dry yeast needs to be activated in warm water or liquid before it’s combined with other ingredients, while instant yeast can be added directly to dry ingredients without any initial activation. In most cases, the types of yeast can be substituted without any problems. I typically use active dry yeast because when added to water and sugar (known as “proofing” the yeast), you can see bubbles popping up, indicating that it’s alive and well. But every so often a recipe (like the steamed bun dough) calls for instant yeast because it works better for that specific method and recipe. I prefer to buy jars of yeast (both active dry and instant) instead of individual packets and refrigerate them for freshness. I’ve been burned numerous times when packets of yeast have gone bad well before their expiration date.

You can end up wasting an entire batch of bread if your yeast isn't doing its job. Salt comes in many shapes and sizes. I exclusively use coarse salt for cooking, specifically Diamond Crystal kosher salt. The large, coarse grains dissolve quickly. Table salt is finer in texture, so if that's all you have, use a little less than the recipe calls for, to avoid the risk of oversalting (more grains of table salt can fit into a measuring spoon than the coarser kosher salt grains). Save flaky sea salt for finishing touches, like sprinkling over a batch of salty-sweet cookies or topping buttery buns. White pepper is more prevalent in my cooking than black pepper—purely based, I believe, on watching my mom cook with it my entire life. White pepper is more common than black pepper in Chinese cooking. It's a little spicier, and it's also ground into a fine powder, which makes it ultra-airborne when you sprinkle it. (I always sneeze when I cook with white pepper.) Cornstarch is ubiquitous in Cantonese cooking. It's often used as a sauce thickener for glossy stir-fries, in marinades to help tenderize tough cuts of meat, and in batters for fried foods to produce extra-crunchy coatings. In baking, cornstarch acts as a stabilizer and thickener. It gives cakes an extra-tender crumb and custards their thick and creamy consistencies.

How to Shop at an Asian Grocery Store

On occasion, a recipe will call for some ingredient that can only be found at an Asian grocery store, but that's part of the fun in learning about Chinese baking. As a kid, I was obsessed with going to the Chinese grocery store near my grandparents' house because it was where all my favorite snacks and candies lived. I realize that not every town has an Asian grocery store. Not to mention that "Asian grocery store" is a broad term; you might find a Korean, Japanese, or Cambodian grocery closer to you than a Chinese one. You'll be able to find many of the same ingredients you need across all the store varieties, plus everyday groceries. These stores usually carry all the essentials, like eggs, butter, milk, and regular flour. I frequent Asian grocery stores and love to explore new ones when I travel. Once you arrive, give yourself some time to get the lay of the land, especially if this is your first time shopping there. Remember: this is still a grocery store, although the products and labels may look different to you. If you can't find something, ask an employee for help or show them a photo of the product you're looking for. Some Asian grocery stores are huge and vast, while others are small and compact. Just remember to take your time and enjoy the opportunity to explore—meandering around the store has its own pleasures. Keep an open mind and try to shake any preconceived notions of what defines "weird" or "exotic" (my least favorite word) flavors and foods. They might be new to you but considered a kitchen staple for many other home cooks and are absolutely deserving of space in your kitchen.

Produce

Let's start with my favorite area (sorry, instant ramen aisle—I still love you!), the produce section. I love the vast variety of fruits and vegetables sold in Chinese groceries. You'll likely find all the conventional varieties of broccoli and oranges, but in the bin right next to sweet potatoes will be lotus root and taro. The leafy green section holds rows and rows of bok choy, yu choy, gai lan (Chinese broccoli), cabbages, amaranth, pea shoots, and mustard greens. In the fruit area, the most delicious mangos, crisp and juicy Asian pears, spiky rambutan, and neat bundles of lychee are yours for the choosing. Take your time scanning the bins, grab bundles that look fresh and crisp, and pick up a few new-to-you fruits and vegetables

to experiment with. Also, for the record, green onions and scallions are the same thing. I grew up calling them green onions and will continue to do so throughout the book!

Tea

Making and enjoying tea is a beloved practice in Asian cultures, and the tea section has options for every occasion. You'll need Ceylon tea to make a strong cup of Hong Kong Milk Tea. Jasmine and hojicha are beautiful blends for steeping in heavy cream to whip for desserts. Matcha is one of my favorites—for an occasional matcha latte, naturally, but also for adding to dough or batter to make bright emerald-hued buns and sponge-cake layers. With the exception of matcha (which is stone ground), I prefer to buy loose-leaf teas, which let me scoop up as much as I need and not have to deal with individual bags. If you can only find varieties in individual tea bags, that's fine—snip the tea bags and measure out as much tea as you need for your recipe.

Sauces

I like to take my time exploring the sauce aisle. The savory, salty, funky, sweet, and sour notes of sauces instantly elevate your cooking. I always keep light and dark soy sauce, oyster sauce, sriracha, fish sauce, hoisin sauce, chili crisp, and spicy bean paste (doubanjiang) in my fridge. With those staple sauces, I feel like I can cook anything. I also like to pick up the occasional shrimp paste or a jar of something I haven't tried before. I'm a big fan of Lee Kum Kee and Koon Chun for sauces and pastes, and Lo Gan Ma for chili crisp.

Starches

Starches play an important role in Chinese cooking and baking. They're used to make noodles, dumpling wrappers, and shiny sauces. They bind fillings together and lend a chewy texture to cookies and breads. Cornstarch is easily found in most grocery stores, but it's not the only starch in town. Wheat starch, tapioca starch, and sweet potato starch are always in my pantry. You will find all three in the same section, most likely adjacent to wheat-based flours.

Dried Foods

The practice of preserving and drying food has been a part of Chinese culture for centuries, so it's no surprise that the aisle of dried beans, seeds, nuts, vegetables, and medicinal herbs is expansive. If you can preserve or dry it, you'll most likely find it here, in a vacuum-sealed bag. I use dried red or aduki beans, black and white sesame seeds, and white lotus seeds to make all the sweet pastes for buns and mooncakes. Look for dried mushrooms close to the medicinal herbs section. Expect to see lots of varieties, from wood ear and white fungus to the more commonly used dried shiitake.

Cured and Salted Meats

Along the same line as dried foods, Asian grocery stores offer plenty of cured and salted meats. Pork floss is one of my absolute favorite toppings for jook, salads, and buns. Think of it as fluffy dried pork that is salty and a little sweet. It's much like crumbled bacon bits, offering a salty bite but with a softer, more airy texture. Pork floss is normally stored in a plastic tub, probably sold closer to the dried foods. (I like to keep a tub in the pantry for sneaky snack breaks.) Also in the cold cases are more substantial salted meats like dried shrimp and Chinese sausage (lap cheong). Add either to soups, rice dishes, and stir-fries for a kick of savory, salty flavor. Kam Yen Jan is my preferred brand for Chinese sausage. Both dried shrimp and Chinese sausage keep well in the refrigerator.

Oh! Don't forget to check out the instant ramen aisle to stock your pantry with quick meals and the snack aisle to load up for the drive home!

Essential Equipment

Aside from standard mixing bowls, a whisk, and measuring cups, I keep a collection of tools I consider essential for a well-equipped baker. Some are tools all bakers have on hand, and others are

more specific for the Chinese bakery–inspired recipes in this book. I try to run a lean kitchen, without extraneous tools taking up space in my limited drawers and cabinets. Each of the tools listed here is well used and beloved.

Digital scaleThis is the tool I use most in my kitchen. I wasn't always a devoted digital scale user. Before I got seriously into baking, I was a proud cook-by-feel type. I still very much am, except when it comes to baking, and especially when it comes to making pastry. I toggle between cooking by feel and with precision, depending on what I'm making. If a recipe provides weighted measurements, you'll get the most accurate and consistent results if you bake by weight. That mainly comes down to how people measure their ingredients like flour, of which any variance will start to change the consistency of the end result. One baker's cup of all-purpose flour might weigh 125g, while another cup might weigh 150g, if it wasn't aerated and spooned into the measuring cup (see below). That 25g variance will make a difference and also adds up if a recipe calls for more than 1 cup of flour. Once you start baking by weight, it's hard to go back. You're rewarded with dependable results, and cleanup is so much quicker without using all the extra measuring cups and spoons.

Measure your flour correctly: If you don't have a digital scale, the best practice for measuring flour is to aerate the flour with a fork or a whisk, spoon the flour into the measuring cup, and then level the flour with a straightedge (like a metal spatula or back edge of a butter knife). Scooping flour directly into the cup measure will pack in too much. And be sure to measure using a set of graduated measuring cups designed specifically for this purpose; never use a liquid measuring cup for dry ingredients.

RulerI still have my metal ruler from architecture school. It lives right above my spice rack, and I use it all the time to check for dough thickness and to guide straight, even cuts when working with pastry. I find straight lines, right angles, and consistently sized multiples incredibly satisfying.

Dowel rolling pinI frequently use my dowel rolling pin for dumpling wrappers, but it comes in handy for many other kitchen tasks. This small rolling pin is the same thickness from end to end (not tapered) and measures about 12 inches long and about 1 inch in diameter. It's the perfect size for most of my kitchen projects, fitting my hand comfortably when rolling out dough for buns, mochi, cookies, and green onion pancakes. If you only have a larger rolling pin (designed for pastry and pie dough, primarily), you can certainly use it, but I highly recommend adding a dowel rolling pin to your kitchen arsenal.

Bench scraperA bench scraper will become your best friend in the kitchen, helping you transfer chopped vegetables into a fry pan, divide dough into equal portions, lift pastry dough from your work surface, and clean up the floury mess left at the end of a big baking project.

Cookie scoop/dishersI constantly use my 1-tablespoon and 1 ½-tablespoon cookie scoops for effortlessly portioning the filling for buns and dumplings and, of course, for scooping cookie dough. It's not a completely necessary tool to have when you have regular old spoons at your disposal, but I appreciate how much cleaner and more efficient the process is when I use my cookie scoops.

Offset spatulasMy mini offset spatula is perfect for helping to release cakes from pans and spreading red bean paste onto dough. Its big brother, the full-size offset spatula, is excellent for smoothing out whipped cream for cakes and spreading cake batter into a level surface for Swiss rolls.

Bamboo steamerA sturdy steamer is

vital for making traditional Chinese steamed buns and cakes. Although I prefer to use bamboo steamers over metal steamers (the bamboo steamer doesn't condensate on the interior like metal steamers), either will work. When steaming food, you want to make sure there's some sort of nonstick barrier between the surface of the steamer and the food—cabbage leaves, small squares of parchment paper, reusable silicone steamer sheets, or a light spritz of nonstick spray. Otherwise, your buns or dumplings will securely stick to the steamer, and that's no fun. When setting up a bamboo steamer, there's always the question of how far away the water should be from the steamer. The answer is: it doesn't matter, as long as the bottom of the steamer has enough water that it will boil continuously for as long you need to steam your food, whether that's 5 minutes or 45 minutes. The amount of water is more dependent on the type and size of the vessel. My typical steamer setup: I set bamboo steamers over a heavy-bottomed pot that's the same diameter as the steamer (about 10 inches for both, in my case). It's simple and straightforward, and it prevents the bamboo steamer from burning or catching on fire. A tight seal between the steamer and the pot traps the steam, to cook the food inside. I normally fill the pot with 3 to 4 inches of water, which should allow for continuous steaming for 10 to 30 minutes. You can always refill the water between batches, if needed. If you don't have this exact setup, don't worry. Some pots come with a metal steamer insert, and those work perfectly fine. If you have large pots and a steamer, but they aren't the same diameter, that's okay too. Some home cooks use woks, which are tapered with a wider mouth and narrower base, to boil water (although that will remove the seasoning on a steel wok) and snugly place the steamer inside the mouth of the wok. You can create this same setup even if you don't have a wok. Find a pot that's slightly bigger than your steamer, and it should work in much the same way.

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What people say about this book

Georgia, "Just like visiting a Chinatown Bakery!. I love everything about this book. The recipes are thorough and well written. I too love visiting chinatowns wherever I go and have tasted many buns and mooncakes...the moon cake recipe in this book tasted better than the mooncakes I purchased during this years Mid Autumn Festival. I look forward to baking my way through the whole book!"

Mac, "What I've been looking for. Overall this book has beautiful pictures, and is very well laid out and easy to understand! It had a good amount of recipes that all look very tasty. I will definitely be baking some of these very soon as I have most all the ingredients for these recipes. I live near a huge asian market area in Texas and love spending time at the bakeries trying out all their pastries. I've been waiting for a book like this for a while and this definitely scratches the itch I had for learning some of these types of bakery recipes. I'm really excited to see this book succeed as I wish for there to be more books on this subject. Overall very happy with this purchase!"

dsjsws, "This is a fabulous cookbook! Outstanding for the experienced, or beginner baker and cook.. If you bake bread, you need it. It will improve your skills even if you have been baking for decades.If you want to improve your Asian cooking skills, it is a great step by step teacher.The recipes for Mo and Xi'an-Style Braised Lamb Ro Jia Mao (Chinese Hamburgers) are worth the cost of the cookbook alone.Mo is basically a Chinese hamburger bun. The Rou jia mo is basically a sloppy joe filling made with lamb stew meat. (Anything that makes lamb super tasty is great in my opinion. I am not a big lamb fan.)I plan to try the Ro jia mo recipe with pork and with beef also.I have tried about half a dozen of the recipes so far. They all have been absolutely delicious and easy to execute if you follow the directions.They are plenty of illustrations to show you what the finished dish should look like and how it should be folded, tucked, rolled, etc. during the process.Normally, if I find one or two recipes that interest me in a cookbook, I am happy.I have so many recipes bookmarked to try I am going to have to just work my way through the cookbook one recipe at a time.I highly recommend you try the Crispy Chinese Sausage and Cilantro Pancakes. Yum! I did not have any Chinese Sausage, but I suspect just about any sausage will work. The four or five kinds I have tried so far using this recipe have made for outstanding pancakes. Just drizzle or dip them in a tiny bit of chili oil. Delicious.I love the recipe for Moo Shu Wrappers. Easy and delicious thin little wrappers (tortilla like wrappers) are the end result.Fabulous cookbook. Try it!"

Jim, "A Baking Original. Mooncakes and Milk Bread is an introduction to the world of Chinese baking as seen through the eyes of a first generation Chinese-American whose family has strong ties to Hong Kong and the Chinese restaurant business. This book should inspire both novice and seasoned bakers. The author describes both essential equipment and ingredients,

as well as how to shop for these essentials in Asian markets. Her detailed recipes are illustrated with beautiful photographs of the final products and, when necessary, accompanied by step-by-step pictures of more complicated processes. Storage suggestions are often provided as well. Introductions to recipes and other topics allow the author to reflect on the history of Chinese baking, Chinese-American culture, and her own personal experiences.”

Y. Wang, “Looking forward to baking all the things!. I've been a long time follower of Kristina on IG & her recipes are always so approachable & easy to follow. This book is no different, other than being able to access all the delicious recipes in one spot and having her family story and the history of the food weaved in there to bring it all together. It was a highly anticipated cookbook for me, having grown up eating many of these foods, and it's gone above & beyond my expectations.”

Leather and Lace, “Beautifully put together book. I just received this book and sat down to check it out. It is printed on good quality paper and there are lots of pictures to show you what you are working to achieve. Instruction are very clear. I have never made any of these recipes, however, I am an accomplished baker and cook. I know it will be fun to work thru these recipes and at that time, I will update this initial review.”

Gyqncb, “The Milk Bread is better than Wonder bread. With this book I made the best white bread ever. Hamburger rolls came out so good. I am going to work my way through this book from the beginning to the end. Every recipe has a picture of the finished product. I can't wait to make just about everything in here. You don't need to buy a lot of expensive equipment, I did get a Pullman pan to make a perfectly square loaf of bread, moon cake molds, a Bamboo steamer and a nice rolling pin. The ingredients for these recipes are not hard to find anywhere. I can't wait to try making dumpling's, Pau Pau's steamed cupcakes, Bao's, Red Bean Swirl Buns, Mo, Fluffy Steamed Buns and so much more. This book is so well written and worth every penny.”

Betty Boom, “Recipes seem fun, but poor production. With all the supply issues over the holidays I don't fault them much for the lateness in receiving it (took about three weeks but considering everything that wasn't too bad; I expected it). The recipes look good and fun to try. Unfortunately, the printer lobbed off the top inch or so of the pages so that the text butts up against to edge. I looked at the pages and none of the text appears to have been cut off but looks terrible and this is a gift. Printer just needs better quality control. I hope the publisher was alerted and were able to get a refund. I realize this tells you nothing about the contents. Haven't had a chance to try it out yet but recipes look good and easy to follow and, hey, that's the point of a cookbook! Just know that they must have had some quality control issues at the printer.”

Ryan F., “This will become your go-to baking companion. This book is full of post-it notes. It's also covered in flour, and probably has a buttery fingerprint (or two, or five), since I received it a

few short weeks ago. None of these are bad things - and speak to how much I've used it in such a short time. The book is beautiful - both the photographs, the anecdotes, the memories that the writing elicits. Then you get to the recipes, and everything is just wow. I'm transported to days of my past, eating these goodies as a kid, and then also perusing the many Chinese bakeries as a teen. The recipes are spot on. The Mother of all Milk Bread recipe has replaced my own beloved milk bread recipe that I've used for years. The variations of recipes and flavours using her core milk bread recipe is genius, and makes these recipes so accessible. I've managed to try out 8 recipes in two weeks, and each one has been a hit. The recipes are streamlined, well organized and thoughtful. Get yourself a copy. Then gift your friends and family a copy. You won't regret it."

BettyFang, "Instantly obsessed. The first recipe in the book is the mother of all milk breads, and as far as I'm concerned it alone is worth the price of the book! Really nicely laid out but best of all is fantastic recipes. We moved to a small town with no access to Chinese bakeries and now I can satisfy my cravings at home!!"

Beryl, "Love it. I just received my copy of this book and I flipping through it right now and I love it. The pictures are so beautiful and the recipes are so detailed with pictures as well. I can't wait to try some of these recipes. I love bread in all forms, so, I am very excited about this book. PS: Please, I would love some great recommendations for more bread making books with well detailed instructions. Please and thank you "

Brittany, "I finally found it!. So there use to be a Chinese bakery and meat shop that had these amazing pork filled buns. Bakery ended up closing and the meat shop got new owners. I've been looking for a new place but now that I've got this book I am set!! I'm so happy. Just tried making the "char siu pork" and it's exactly how I remember! absolutely recommend this book! Next is the curry chicken puffs ☺ "

The book by Kristina Cho has a rating of 5 out of 4.8. 555 people have provided feedback.

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Book Information

Language: English

File size: 242581 KB

Simultaneous device usage: Up to 5 simultaneous devices, per publisher limits

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced typesetting: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Print length: 304 pages

Lending: Not Enabled

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