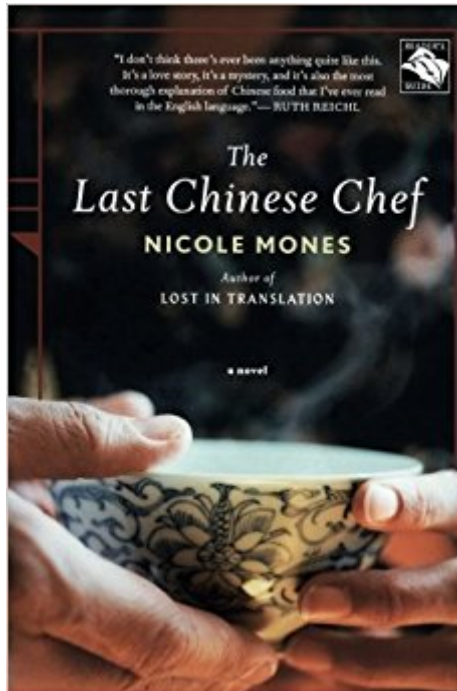




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# The Last Chinese Chef: A Novel



## Synopsis

This alluring novel of friendship, love, and cuisine brings the best-selling author of *Lost in Translation* and *A Cup of Light* to one of the great Chinese subjects: food. As in her previous novels, Mones's captivating story also brings into focus a changing China -- this time the hidden world of high culinary culture. When Maggie McElroy, a widowed American food writer, learns of a Chinese paternity claim against her late husband's estate, she has to go immediately to Beijing. She asks her magazine for time off, but her editor counters with an assignment: to profile the rising culinary star Sam Liang. In China Maggie unties the knots of her husband's past, finding out more than she expected about him and about herself. With Sam as her guide, she is also drawn deep into a world of food rooted in centuries of history and philosophy. To her surprise she begins to be transformed by the cuisine, by Sam's family -- a querulous but loving pack of cooks and diners -- and most of all by Sam himself. *The Last Chinese Chef* is the exhilarating story of a woman regaining her soul in the most unexpected of places.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Nicole Mones has mined the endless riches of China once again in *The Last Chinese Chef*. This time she hits the trifecta: the personal stories of Sam and Maggie, the history and lore of Chinese cuisine, and an inside look at cultural dislocation. Maggie McElroy is a widowed American food writer who is suddenly confronted with a paternity claim against her late husband's estate--by a Chinese family. Her editor offers her another reason to go to Beijing: write an article about a rising

young Chinese-American-Jewish chef, Sam Liang. Having sold the home she had with her late husband Matt and reduced her possessions to only the barest necessities, with her life feeling as though it is contracting around her, Maggie embraces the opportunity to sort out her feelings about Matt's supposed infidelity and do some work at the same time. She and Sam hit it off right away, even though he is involved in a very important competition for a place on the Chinese national cooking team for the 2008 Olympics. They travel together to the south of China where she meets her husband's possible daughter--with Sam standing by to act as translator--and where Maggie meets much of Sam's family. He has been welcomed back with open arms, even though he occasionally feels that he has one foot in China and one in Ohio. The Beijing uncles and the Hangzhou uncle are a raucous, loving, argumentative bunch of foodies who advise Sam about menus, encourage a romance with Maggie, make him start over again when the dish isn't perfect, and alternately praise and criticize his cooking. Maggie loves being in the middle of it all and finds herself more and more drawn to Sam. She begins, with Sam's help, to see food as "healing" and understands the *guanxi* or "connectedness" that takes place around food. At the beginning of each chapter is a paragraph taken from a book entitled *The Last Chinese Chef*, written by Sam's grandfather and translated by Sam and his father. Mones has written that book, too, which is an explanation of the place of food in Chinese history and family life. The novel is rich with meaning and lore and an examination of loving relationships. Don't even touch this book when you're hungry. The descriptions make the aromas and textures float right off the page. --Valerie Ryan --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A recently widowed American food writer finds solace and love "and the most inspiring food she's ever encountered" during a visit to China in Mones's sumptuous latest. Still reeling from husband Matt's accidental death a year ago, food writer Maggie McElroy is flummoxed when a paternity claim is filed against Matt's estate from Beijing, where he sometimes traveled for business. Before Maggie embarks on the obligatory trip to investigate, her editor assigns her a profile on Sam Liang, a half-Chinese American chef living in Beijing who is about to enter a prestigious cooking competition. Sam's old-school recipes and history lessons of high Chinese cuisine kick-start Maggie's dulled passion for food and help her let go of her grief, even as she learns of Matt's Beijing bed hopping. Though the narrative can get bogged down in the minutiae of Chinese culinary history (filtered through the experiences of Sam's family), Mones's descriptions of fine cuisine are tantalizing, and her protagonist's quest is bracing and unburdened by melodrama. Early in her visit, Maggie scoffs at the idea that "food can heal the human heart." Mones smartly proves her wrong. (May) --This text

refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I am so glad that this was a selection by my book club, because it is not not something that I would have automatically picked out for myself. It was like having a book within a book within a book. It was constructed beautifully, an easy read, you want to turn the pages to find out what is going to happen next. It gives you such a wonderful perspective on the art of cooking, the care that goes into preparation and how food unites people. It is work of fiction but the research that was done is incredible, there is so much detail and history to broaden your scope on the Chinese culture. Do not let the my response to the questions regarding violence and sexual content put you off, it is a small part of the story and not designed to be offensive. Please add to you list of reads you will not be sorry. Oh yes one more thing, you might get the munchies as you read.

This is a book without depth or style, really a modern widow's romance with China via a Chinese-American chef. The cliches are endless and crippling, especially about the uniqueness of Chinese cuisine and the necessity of cooking it in China. To say, as the lead character -- a food writer, no less -- that the Chinese are unique in high ceremonial cuisine is to shortchange the French and the Japanese, to begin with. The Big Night banquet scene is good, but that's it. I could go on and on, but the book beat me to it.

Being interested in Chinese food and culture, I took a chance on this novel and it paid off big! Not a big "romance" fan, I prefer a story with substance, the love interest and intrigue are secondary to me. I realize I'm probably the odd reader out here, but hey, that's what I like. Don't worry romance fans, there is a very good one here that should satisfy all readers. For those wanting more, it has that too. I don't know when I've enjoyed a novel by a new writer more. The story kept me completely engrossed, a delightful surprise. The cooking parts were utterly absorbing and fascinating. The family parts felt real and not contrived. I don't like plot spoilers, if you want to know what happens, read the book! A good book is similar to a good meal, you have an afterglow of satisfaction upon finishing that lingers. This one is well worth your time and money. Don't miss it!

A memorable book! I have no interest in cooking, but the food preparation in this book is wonderful and unforgettable. Unlike anything I've read before. I read this book years ago, but just bought this copy as a gift. Nicole Mones wrote one of my all-time favorites, *LOST IN TRANSLATION*, and I just finished her *NIGHT IN SHANGHAI*. All recommended!

There are several story lines in the book. The initial thread deals with Maggie whose husband died suddenly. A year after his death she is informed he may have had a child with a woman in China. This is an interesting thread, but at times it gets tedious. The more interesting thread is her awaking to the intricacies of Chinese food and her relationship with Sam Liang, a chef from a long line of famous chefs. I would recommend this book.

This was definitely one of those books that I started and didn't want to put down until I was done with it. I spent a long night reading late and paid for it the next day - but it was worth it! I LOVE LOVE LOVE books that intertwine a great story with cooking and amazing food. I've been into Chinese food lately (Chinese-Chinese, not Chinese-American) so this was a great fit. I am obsessed with finding good Chinese food. It was one of those books where up until the end I didn't want it to be finished. I wanted to continue to learn about where the characters went and what they ate, who they saw, what they talked about... I'm slightly upset it's fiction and not a memoir. Can I just say, though, that while I love the book I'm not in love with the ending. I didn't buy it and was disappointed. Did anyone else feel the same way? That said I still recommend it highly. It was beautifully written and she did a great job describing China and its food. If you're interested in learning more about China, its culture and its amazing food -- this is a great fit. Enjoy.

Maggie is a professional writer, reviewing restaurants and food for a living; she is also a widow, having lost her husband in a random accident a year ago. She has survived that period by moving away from almost all her contacts from that time and immersing herself in her work. And now she must travel to China to track down her late husband's purported daughter; while she is there, she is assigned to write a review of a new and upcoming chef, one who has returned to the recipes and values of traditional Chinese cuisine. This is a fine novel, rich in details of Chinese cooking and eating, filled with charming characters and many bits of Chinese history. If you are interested in Chinese culture, you should read this book; if you enjoy reading engaging novels, you must read this book; if you enjoy Chinese food, this book may transform how you think about both the food and the traditions that undergird it.

My review is primarily based on my deep interest in all things Chinese. If you do not particularly share this interest in Chinese history, art, and culture, you may find this book more of a romance than great historical fiction, but pleasurable in its own right. If you are a "foodie", however, you will

revel in the amazing descriptions of ingredients, techniques, and traditions in Chinese culinary arts. Many of you will be fascinated to know that authentic Chinese gastronomy is far, far different than Chinese American cuisine.

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