

Food culture difference

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historical phenomenon. It is the summation of civilization and a mental picture which can be created in the progress of a nation's development. This thesis expounds the important function of food culture between different cultures by analyzing Chinese food and Western food. By examining these differences, we can improve our ability in cultural communication.

The contact between different countries becomes much tighter through the incorporation of a global economy. At the same time, the cultural communications become more important in the big distance between these two cultures. The distinction between cultural communications become more and more evident and the study of Chinese and Western food culture is an important part of it. Food is a special phenomenon, people having knowledge of food from one side of the study of different cultural backgrounds, customs and historical environment by study. We all know that different nations have different cultures.

This thesis focuses on the different food cultures in Chinese and western countries. Chinese food culture in this thesis mainly refers to the one in the Han nationality. As we know, China is a nation with 56 ethnic groups, each of

which has its own unique food and food habits. The Han nationality and its culture are the mainstream in China due to historical, political and economic reasons. Western food culture in this thesis is mainly concerned with the British one due to the fact that its cultural pattern and influence have become dominant in the west, which is generally recognized by the world. 2.

Different Values in Chinese and Western Food Culture 2. 1 Collectivism in Chinese food culture 2. 1. 1 Collective orientation In China, collective orientation with deep roots can be traced back to ancient time. Confucius points out, " If one wants to establish himself, he should help others to establish themselves at first. " in which collectivism is appreciated. " Even the dog swaggers when its master wins favor" shows the fact that everything in China is branded with collectivism. In such collectivistic culture, a " we" consciousness prevails, and people are expected to be interdependent and show conformity to the group's norms and values.

Group goals usually take precedent over individual goals, and the primary value is to seek harmony with others. Actually, group harmony is so highly valued that obedience to, and compliance with, in groups pressures is routine. (Neuliep, 2000: 33) 2. 1. 2 Collective orientation in Chinese food culture This collectivistic orientation also plays an important role in Chinese food culture. Normally, Chinese people would like to take the style of " sharing" when they have a dinner together, whether at home with family members or outside with friends. As Vera Y. N. Hsu describes, " The typical Chinese dining table is round or square.

The ts'ai dishes are laid in the center, and each participant in the meal is equipped with a bowl of " fan", a pair of chopsticks, a saucer, and a spoon.

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All at a table take from the ts'ai dishes as they proceed with the meal. Good eating manners require each participant take equally from the different ts'ai dishes, so that all will have an equal chance at all the dishes. " (Chang, 1977: 304) When the dinner starts, the host usually shows a menu to guests asking them to order the dish they like before making the final decision. When a dinner comes to an end, participants always strive to pay the bill unless someone has claimed it in advance.

The " truth of sharing" reflects almost everywhere from the dinner start to the end. 2. 2 Individualism in western food culture 2. 2. 1 Individualistic orientation It is well known that Great Britain tends toward individualism. Individualism refers to the doctrine, spelled out in detail by the seventeenth-century English philosopher John Locke, that each individual is unique, special, completely different from all other individuals, and " the basic unit of nature". (Samovar 2000: 62) Therefore, in individualistic culture, an " I" consciousness prevails, and emphasis is placed on an individual goal over group goals.

This value orientation stresses individual initiative and achievement, and individual decision-making is highly appreciated. 2. 2. 2 Individualistic orientation in western food culture Western food culture is characterized by the " separated' style because of the great influence of the individualistic orientation. It is contrary to the " sharing" style in Chinese food culture in many ways. For example, westerners do not take the ts'ai dishes from the public plate, but have separate individual plates. The way of " going Dutch" is widely taken when the bill is to be paid, which means everyone pays his own share.

The role of individualism in Western food culture is obvious and its influence is self-evident. 3. Different Features in Chinese and Western Food Culture 3. 1 Extravagance in Chinese Chinese food culture is probably much older than any other kind of food cultures. Few cultures are as food oriented as Chinese culture. The most common example is the greeting used among Chinese people when they encounter: " Have you eaten? " food plays so important a role in people's daily life that it inevitably becomes an ostentatious way because of face (or " mianzi" in China).

So the extravagance and exquisiteness become the main features of Chinese food. Face in China involves a claim for respect and dignity from others. Losing one's face is one of the worst ways to injure one's self-esteem. The banquet is also influenced by the " face" system. They are no longer a social occasion just for meeting or eating, but to some extent, a good chance for the host to show off his power and earn his face. The more expensive or precious the food is, the more dignity the host has, the more the quantity of dishes in a banquet, the warmer hospitality can be shown, and the more " face" he can earn.

In this sense, formal banquets in China have one thing in common: there should be more than enough food on the table. Otherwise the host will lose face. That leads directly to the extravagant food culture. 3. 2 Simplicity in western food culture Compared with extravagant banquets in China, the scale of banquets in western countries is much smaller. That is because the belief in food in western countries is mainly focused on function as necessity for human beings survival or a way of communication.

For example, in a party, the host usually does not prepare food and drinks and serves some simple food only like cheese, sandwiches, fruits etc. For most Westerners, this is a good opportunity for communication and reunion, or a great occasion where they can strengthen relationships and make new friends. What they actually care about is the casual, harmonious and joyous atmosphere, the maximum freedom and relaxation they can enjoy at the banquet.

4. Different Etiquette in Chinese and Western Food Culture

4. 1 Different time-conceptions in Chinese and western food culture

4. 1. " M-time" and " P-time"

Edward T. Hall, who is well known for his discussion of time across cultures, proposes that cultures organize time in one of two ways: either monochronic (M-time) or polychronic (P-time) (Hall, 1989: 46). He also points out that M-time is the characteristic of people from western countries, while P-time is the characteristic of people from Asia, Africa and Latin America (Hall, 1999: 93). The two conceptions are incompatible. We can see the sharp contrast between P-time and M-time from the lateness in Chinese food culture and the punctuality in western food culture.

4. 1. 2 Lateness in Chinese food culture

People in the P-time cultures do not emphasize scheduling by separating time into fixed segments. They treat time as a less tangible medium so that they can interact with more than one person or do more than one thing at a time. Therefore, in these cultures, personal interaction and relationship developments are far more important than making appointments or meeting deadline. China is a country with P-time. Chinese people are usually a little later than what is scheduled when participating in some activities like banquets.

Normally, they would be half an hour late. The host will arrange some entertainments, such as playing cards or chatting. Tea and various desserts like candy, cakes etc. are served for the guests who have arrived on time to kill time. Both the host and guest get used to that and would not interpret this kind of lateness as an impolite behavior. However, this conception changes sometimes. With the development of cross-cultural communication, more and more Chinese people, especially the young, are gradually influenced by the M-time in western countries.

4. 1. 3 Punctuality in western food culture

Unlike Chinese people, people in M-time cultures tend to follow precise scheduling. Once the time is set, it is rarely changed, and people should take it seriously. Usually, everyone is supposed to arrive on time when attending a formal meeting or banquet. It is also acceptable that people can be a little late sometimes, but no more than 10 minutes, otherwise this behavior will be regarded as inappropriate by both the host and other guests, and one will have to give a proper explanation. The one who violates the rule of punctuality shall be punished seriously in M-time culture.

4. Different seating arrangement

Samovar pointed out that “ Culture influences even the manner and meaning in seating arrangement”. So seating arrangement is an important means of giving different explanations on social status or interpersonal relations. With regard to seating arrangement in a banquet, there exist some major distinctive disparities between Chinese and Western food culture.

4. 2. 1 The South and north seating arrangement in Chinese food culture

In China, the seat facing south in a banquet is usually regarded

as the most important, while the seat facing north is comparatively less important.

It is because of traditional Chinese culture. China is an old country with a long history of more than five thousand years. There used to be many dynasties. Whatever the dynasty, the emperor always sat with facing south during the ceremony of the royal inauguration or in the process of discussing governmental affairs with ministers. On the other hand, the ministers were all facing north when they met the emperor. Gradually, the word "south" has been elevated into a position relatively high in Chinese people's minds, and it symbolizes the supreme authority, power and position.

By contrast, the position of the word "north" is much lower. Therefore, in a formal banquet, the seats that face south undoubtedly will be reserved for those who are respectable or powerful. 4. 2. 2 The right and left seating arrangement in western food culture In Western countries, the seating arrangement is quite different. In the past, the most distinguished guest was seated on the left side of the host. The reason is that in ancient times there were many assassinations for political and social reasons, and assassins held daggers in their right hands to attack.

It was convenient and easier for the host to protect the guest who was on his left hand when the assassin attacked. However, with the development of civilization, this old style of assassination has been extinct for a long time and the seating arrangement also changed. Nowadays, what Westerners are most concerned about is the perspective of psychological need instead of physical security when they arrange seats in a banquet. The result is that the seat at the right side of the host is more honorable than the one on the left

side in the widely recognized rule. 5. Different Consents in Chinese and Western Food Culture . 1 Different drink in Chinese and western food culture 5. 1. 1 Liquor and tea in Chinese food culture Liquor and tea are two kinds of main drinks in Han nationality. It is known to all that China is the hometown of tea, and one of the countries which invented the earliest brewtechnology in the world. Wine culture and tea culture have long history in China and they have become an essential part of Han national food culture in the past thousands of years. They greatly influence other countries all over the world. There are many kinds of tea and liquor in China.

Different kinds of tea and liquor have different functions, so people drink different tea and liquor in different seasons to keep healthy. Normally, people drink three kinds of tea in four seasons. In spring and autumn, people drink tea, which was made of various flowers to make them more beautiful and active. In summer, green tea is the best choice. It is a special kind of healthy drink and has many unique functions, such as refreshing oneself, removing strain, preventing heatstroke, cooling, caring for eyes etc. Most people choose black tea in winter because it is fermenting and not belonging to cold.

It can not only foster your stomach, promote digestion and your appetite but also help to strengthen the cardiac muscles. Chinese people always drink beer in hot summer and liquor in winter. Liquor has thousands of year's history in China and it creates a unique style in the world. It is fragrantly pure and has flavors. Drinking a small cup of liquor everyday could promote digestion, whet appetite and keeps one warm. 5. 1. 2 The wine and beer in western countries The grape wine and beer are common drink in western

countries. People in some cold area even drink sherry everyday to keep themselves warm.

In Britain, bars meet your eyes everywhere on the streets and become second living rooms. The British are experts in drinking and beer is their favorite drink. Normally, there are three kinds of beer which are divided by flavor: Bitter, Lager and Cider. In recent years, it has come into vogue to drink wine and the wine consumption in Britain is the greatest in the world. Simultaneously, juice is also a very popular drink in western countries. Usually people drink juice at breakfast. Juice gets unique welcome in Britain, the annual average consumption amounts to 19. 1 liters in Britain. 5. Different main food in Chinese and western food culture Rice and cooked wheaten food are two main staple foods in the Han nationality. The southern and northern regions cultivate rice, and rice has become the main nourishment in these areas. The northeast and northwest regions cultivate wheat and give first place to cooked wheaten food. Also, other kinds of cereals like maize, Kaoliang, grain, tuber crop have become staple food, in different areas as well as coarse cereals. The Han nationality's staple foods have colorful and various cooking methods and has hundreds of kinds of rice and wheat products.

Nowadays, the northeast regions in China still give first place to cooked wheaten food. Meat, milk and bread are the staple food in western countries. A common meal usually consists of soup, bread and butter. There are also various roasted foods besides the brown bread. Another staple food in Western countries is the potato. To westerners, potato is as important as rice to Chinese. You can often see that the British move packages of potatoes in

shopping carts in the supermarket just like Chinese people buying rice. 5. 3 Different banquet course in Chinese and western food culture 5. 3. Banquet course in China Generally speaking, a formal banquet in China consists of six major courses served in turn, including a hand plate, cold dish, hot dish, staple food, soup and dessert. A hand plate is for the guests who come early. Traditionally, it usually consists of candied fruit, traditional cake, but now, tea and melon seeds. I have mentioned that lateness is the traditional time conception in China. The hand plate is made ready for the guests and host when they chat or play cards to wait for other guests. Cold dishes are often served as the beginning of a banquet, which usually consists of a variety of small dishes and snacks. Actually, a cold dish is not for food but for beauty. Then, come the hot dishes, which are the most weighty and richest part of the whole. Staple food is also an indispensable component, which is rice or noodle in most cases. Soup is another important course. Unlike a western banquet, Chinese soup comes as a later course but not at first. Finally, comes dessert, which is composed of various finely made cakes, nuts, pastry, fruits etc. Only after the six courses are served will a formal Chinese banquet have come to an end.

It is also interesting to note that different from Chinese banquets which tend to break up immediately after the last course is served, Westerners may linger for hours after the completed meal in elevated and animated discussions. 5. 3. 2 Banquet course in Western food culture A formal banquet in western countries usually comprises four major courses, including soup, a subsidiary dish, a main dish and dessert. Soup is the first course, probably because westerners want to refresh themselves with some soup before the

meal, and taking soup will help to whet their appetites. The subsidiary dish is the second course.

It is usually composed of various types of fish for fish is easy to digest. The main dish is a heavy weight in a Western banquet, and it is often composed of meat, especially beef sticks or fish together with vegetables. Salad, which is composed of lettuce, tomato, cucumber and asparagus etc. dessert come lastly. Western dessert includes all food after the main dish, such as cakes, biscuits, cheese, pies, pudding, fruits, ice cream etc. Sometimes, people drink coffee or tea with sugar and milk while they have dessert.

5. 4 Different tableware in Chinese and western food culture

5. 4. Chopsticks in Chinese food culture

In China it is usually thought that people are an inherent part of nature. Many scholars pointed out that the traditional attitude of Chinese people toward universe or nature is “ Oneness between Man and Nature. (????)” (??? , 1997: 59) Under the influence of this orientation, Chinese people attempt a balanced act with nature and try to live in harmony with it. China is also a traditionally agricultural country. Since Chinese people mainly live on rice and wheat as their staple food by cultivating the farmland, the harvest of the crops depends on nature.

Therefore, in such cultural context and natural environment, people tend to live and work in peace. The application of chopsticks as the chief tableware can be traced back as early as the Shang and Chou periods, although hands were probably used more often than chopsticks (Chang, 1977: 35). When Chinese people use chopsticks, they usually appear to be cultivated and their attitudes toward food are gentle and kind. Roland Barthes, a famous French literary critic, once talked about the usage of chopsticks, and he

remarked that unlike fork and knife, chopsticks were not used to cut, poke or stab food.

Therefore, “ food was no longer the prey suffering the human beings’ violence but turned out to be the substance passed harmoniously through them. ” (??? , 2002: 74) In this sense, chopsticks are the gentle medium between man and food, and they reflect the harmonious relationship between man and nature.

5. 4. 2 Fork and knife in western food culture

Many Westerners think that people are dominant over nature. Quite different from China, the ancestors of many western countries lived by hunting due to some ecological and historical factors. Of course, meat was their basic food source and gradually took the place of staple food.

In order to survive in severe and harsh environments, they tried their best to be good at hunting, such as the use of some weapons like knives, forks and arrows etc to fight with or kill animals. That resulted in the aggressiveness and the adventurous sense in their temperaments. Compared with chopsticks, it is not exaggerating at all to say that knife and fork represent the violence and cruelty to food without any concealment. The way of eating in western countries actually reflects human’s conquest over nature.

5. 5 Different cuisine naming

5. 5. 1 Cuisine naming in China

Cuisine naming in China differs from place to place.

Generally speaking, there are three kinds of cuisine naming in China. The first cuisine naming method is, according to Professor Wang Fengxin’s research, the name of an ordinary Chinese dish usually contains four parts: main ingredients, subsidiary ingredients, way of cutting and way of cooking. They constitute the primary motivation of Chinese cuisine naming. (Wang, <https://assignbuster.com/food-culture-difference/>)

1999: 220) He also believes that the naming of Chinese home-style cuisine is based on the primary motivation. Take the Chinese cuisine “????? , Stir-fried Shredded Pork with Green Pepper” for example, its main raw material is “? , pork”; its subsidiary raw material is “?? green pepper”; the result of cutting is “? , shred”, and its way of cooking is “? , stir-fried”. Certainly, not every Chinese cuisine naming should follow the pattern of “ main ingredients--- subsidiary ingredients--- cutting method --- cooking method”. For example, “????? , Fried Scrambled Eggs with Tomato” is the pattern of “ main ingredients---subsidiary ingredients--- cooking method”. The second cuisine naming method is: usually, Chinese people eat for not only consumption but also many other purposes. In such a situation, they would like to have more refined and graceful names than the plain names for the food served.

The secondary naming method consists of the initiator’s name, the animal’s name and the plant’s name. As a matter of fact, Chinese cuisine naming after initiator’s name usually involves much Chinese culture or historical information and the cuisine naming after the animal’s name or plant’s name may give rise to cultural implications. For example, Chinese people will naturally associate “??? , Dongpo Meat” with Su Dongpo, the initiator of this dish, who was a famous poet in Song Dynasty. It is said that Su Dongpo created this dish when he was relegated to a local government.

He did many good things for the local people, so they decided to give the dish a name after him as a kind of commemoration. The cuisine “???? , Lotus Soup”, will remind Chinese people of lotus, which has been taken as a noble plant for its purity and freedom from dirt. Actually, it is a kind of soup which is made with eggs. In Chinese cuisine naming, “?? ” stands for egg-white

because of its shape and color. The third cuisine naming method is: in order to attract more customers, some restaurants or hotels give some common dishes very fantastic names, which originate from some Chinese legends or allusions.

For example, the cuisine name “???? , Turtle and Chicken Meat” originates from a famous historical allusion in ancient times that a famous general was surrounded by his enemy and had to bid an emotional farewell to his beloved concubine. Although the name is really attractive, the content is nothing new at all. 5. 5. 2 Cuisine naming in western food culture The feature of cuisine naming in Western countries is straightforward, which is similar to the first cuisine naming method in China. Time is money in Western people’s eyes, and they think people should not waste too much time on trivial things like eating and dining.

Therefore, from this point of view, the first and foremost requirement for the cuisine naming should be straightforward and simple. For example, “ Black Pepper Steak, ????? ” , “ Stewed Seafood Combination with Lobster Sauce,?????? ” etc. You can easily perceive the meaning of the cuisine and know what it is. Sometimes, even the name of some restaurants, such as “ KFC” (Kentucky Fried Chicken) will reveal the information about the cuisine they serve. Undoubtedly, straightforwardness is much more suitable to the Westerners for their fast pace of cooking and living. 5. Different healthy conceptions in Chinese and western food culture 5. 6. 1 Healthy conception in Chinese food culture Chinese food and drink usually contains little sugar, which will not lead to getting fat. But there are more and more fat people in China while our living standard has improved. China enjoys a good

reputation for its plentiful and splendid cuisine. Chinese people have many complex cooking methods, such as braising, boiling, braising with soy sauce, roasting, baking, grilling, scalding, deep-frying, steaming, drying, salt-preserving etc. (,? ,? ,?? ,? ,? ,? ,? ,? ,? ,? ,? , and the Chinese cuisine is always exquisite and tastes excellent. But much nutrition is destroyed because of such complex cooking methods. Simultaneously, Chinese people share dishes when they have a meal. Everyone's chopsticks touch the same dish and that highly increases the probability of hepatitis. 5. 6. 2 Healthy Conception in western food cultures Nutrition and balance are greatly cared for by westerners when they have a meal. An interesting phenomenon in western countries is the nutritional information on the food label, by which people's concern about nutrition is clearly reflected.

A look at information like the number of calories per serving, grams of fat, sodium, fiber and sugar content will make you more knowledgeable in selecting foods to reduce your nutritional health risk. In addition, the balance in diet structure is also essential to Westerners. Nowadays, more and more westerners are starting to worry about their weight for their diet containing too many calories. This is evident in menus in many restaurants offering " low calorie" or " weight watchers" meal. The vegetable and fruit salad served to westerners all year around because they have low calories and high vitamin.

In conclusion, it is by the influence of pragmatism that westerners are inclined to take the food into consideration basically from the nutritional perspective. In their eyes, food or eating is just a way to keep health and thus what the westerners care about most is the nutrition contained in food

and the balance of the whole structure. When they have a meal, they use separate plates for each other, which usefully guard against the probability of infection. 6. Conclusion By comparison and analysis we have made so far, one conclusion may be drawn that Chinese and Western food culture reflect each other's cultures with their own unique features.

They are neither superior nor inferior to the other and should deserve the same respect from each other. Certainly, for the process of globalization, Chinese and Western food cultures do not exist in isolation. It is well known that globalization has been becoming an inevitable trend around the world and an inexorable force to influence people's life in almost every aspect. In other words, the wheel of human history has moved as inexorably forward from isolation to integration. Due to the open policy, Chinese people and Chinese culture have more and more chances of contact with foreigners and foreign cultures.

People of different cultures can learn from each other. When Chinese culture is learning or adopting something new or different from foreign cultures, we should remember that Chinese culture is also being learnt and adopted by them at the same time. A good case in point is that, nowadays, more and more people, especially the young people, have been fond of the typical western fast food like KFC or Macdonald's, while on the other hand, more and more Chinese foods have been welcomed by foreigners, and it is said that where there are people, there are Chinese restaurants.

In a word, Chinese and Western food culture will develop together by the cross-cultural communication. Bibliography [1] Chang, K. C. Food in Chinese Culture: Anthropological and Historical Perspective [M]. USA: The Vail-Ballou
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