

Cross-cultural Comparative Study: Differences between Chinese and Western Dietetic Cultures

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Abstract: With the soaring development of globalization, there have been more cultural exchanges currently between countries and nations all over the world. "Eating" as a means of communication should be taken seriously, which can narrow the distance each other effectively. The eating culture - to put it differently the dietetic culture, is an indispensable part of the cross-cultural communication. This paper will compare Chinese and western diet cultures from three perspectives of dietetic contents, table etiquettes and dietetic attitudes, reveal the differences between them, and deeply appreciate the internal reasons behind the differences, which will contribute to cross-cultural exchanges and promote the cultural integration of the world.

1. Introduction

Culture is rather complicated which includes belief, knowledge, art, law, morality, customs and any habit or ability acquired as a member of a society. Human beings have a common cultural base, but differences occurred on the embodiment of culture in the different scopes of human groups (Zhao, 2003). Every national and regional dietetic culture stems from the enrichment of their respective culture with which diverse and abundant eating styles come into being.

Passing through thousands of years of cultural advancement, China has occupied an important status on the world's dietetic stage for its profound dietetic connotation. At the same time, a prosperous situation of culture arose in western countries, in that as former colonies they had a large number of immigrants, so they integrated the food culture of colonized countries into their own food civilization.

When facing different cultures, we ought to treat every of them equally and contain both merits and defects so as to explore some valuable information and to understand the internally distinct thinking pattern. "

2. The Main body

2.1. Differences in Dietetic Contents

The first difference is reflected in the source of ingredients. In China, people eat mainly vegetarian food supplemented by meat in their daily lives. Conversely, westerners get used to giving priority to meat with vegetables as a side dish. That's probably why the latter is heavier than the former in general as meat is believed to contain more calories than vegetables. Chinese diet is diversified with many folk snacks favored by foreigners, but there are kinds of foods that they can't stand as well. "Preserved eggs", as a traditional snack and the material of delicious porridge, have long been regarded to be a "weird" food which was once voted the most disgusting food by an American TV show. Other typical examples come to animal's pluck and chicken claw, which are usually thrown to garbage by westerners and are served on the meals exquisitely by Chinese instead.

Next come the culinary methods which include timing, adjustment of the heat and so forth. There are more than 50 kinds of main ways of cooking in China, for instance, steaming in a container, crisp frying with syrup, stir-fry, stew, pickle and boil. Chinese prefer to have cooked food with emphasizing

the use of seasonings, while in the west three dominating culinary methods which are carbonization cooking, soft cooking and mix cooking are commonly used. Additionally, it becomes more than different that raw food is favored by the westerners who mainly stick to the original taste.

Thirdly, name of dishes is implicit among Chinese dishes and explicit among western dishes. "Ants climbing the trees", "Buddha jumping over the wall" and "Meat balls braised with brown sauce" are three representative names of Chinese delicacies which might be relevant to some fairy tales and well-known legends in ancient times. While the majority of the western foods have a straightforward and clear name, and you will realize what the basic ingredients are when you hear the name of them such as "Fish and Chips" and "Roast potato".

What comes the last is a dietetic habit – Chinese people get accustomed to combining food with drinking while western people give preference to separate them during the meal.

The four major differences are able to attribute to the regional characteristic, climatic environment and cultural customs; meanwhile two conceptions of "Unity of nature and human" from China and "Humanism" from the west are given full expression.

2.2. Differences in Table Etiquettes

Due to different history and culture, there are many differences in table manners between China and the west. The following will explain differences in tableware, attendance time and seating arrangements, conducive to the intercommunication at the table.

2.2.1. Tableware

The most obvious difference in cutlery is that Chinese people use chopsticks while westerners use knives and forks. Having been influenced by farming culture for a long time, Chinese people desired a peaceful and stable life against invasions. Thus they create a harmonious atmosphere with a kind of unprincipled peace where all people gather at a round table using chopsticks to eat. For western people, owing to the hunting culture they always seek to prevail over others and are ready to embrace risks. A rectangular table, shape knives and forks, the bowl, the plate, the goblet appear most in west. Simply put, the effect of diverse culture led to the fashioning of the characteristic cutlery.

2.2.2. Attendance Time

It is acknowledged that time is money both in China and in the west, with exception when it comes to attending a banquet. In China, it is common to be late for a family dinner. Preparing snacks such as melon seeds and peanuts early for guests to kill time is a routine arrangement of the host. Usually the inviter will not treat the guest's being late as impolite behavior. However, in western countries, formal banquets require punctuality with a limitation of around ten minutes late. If you arrive late for more than 20 or 30 minutes without informing the host in advance, it will be considered a breach of contract and there is no need for other person to wait for the unreliable man.

2.2.3. Seating Arrangements

The topic refers to the historical origin and sexual factor. In ancient times, Chinese emperors all sat in the north and facing south gradually became a symbol of high social status in people's minds. Therefore, it formed a convention -- at a banquet face south as the top seat and north as the bottom seat. While the westerners distinguish the lowed from the higher by using "left" and "right" dating back to ancient western society.

Influenced by Confucianism for a long time, the idea of men being superior to women is deeply rooted. In the past, women didn't have a seat at the table at all and were always busy cooking in the kitchen where they had their meals as well.

But in the west, "ladies first" is a traditional concept because most western countries believe in Christianity, in which the mother Mary is highly regarded and respected. And the way men and women cut in at the table also demonstrates the creed of equality. (Jiang, 2007: 55)

2.3. Differences in Dietary Attitudes

The western diet pays attention to the combination of nutrition components of food. In western food culture, such questions as whether the food combination is nutritionally balanced, whether the intake of calories is appropriate, and whether the nutrients can be completely absorbed have become a culinary science. In China's eyes, western food is very mechanical. However, Chinese people attach great importance to the artistry of food, more requirements on the taste of food, but less attention to nutrition. Chinese people regard food as not only a means of physical requirement, but also a kind of spiritual enjoyment.

3. Internal Reasons behind the Differences

In China, it is mainly the collectivism of a group culture that dominates the values. In western countries, especially the United States, it emphasizes the dignity, value of individualism, distinctions and characteristics, and encourages a unique style. Therefore, Chinese and western values are completely different, which is also reflected in the diet.

In western countries, diet is only a means of survival and communication. An American psychologist named Maslow divided people's needs into five levels, from the lowest to the highest. The lowest level was the need for *food*, and the other four were the need for *security*, *emotion*, *esteem* and *self-actualization*. As far as communication means are concerned, the purpose of banquets is in the following aspects. One is to express gratitude to those who offer help and services. The second is to win the trust of customers. The third is the celebration of a deal. Fourth, ask for help. Five is when you introduce people. Six is when you suggest and discuss certain ideas. Westerners believe that eating is only a way to ensure health and normal survival, only to maintain life. It is not difficult to find from here that although eating is important, western countries only stay in the simple communication level of eating, unlike China, which attaches great importance to eating.

4. Conclusion

The differences between Chinese and western food culture are apparent, and each has its own advantages. The variety in the concept of the diet makes western diet tend to be scientific and rational, while Chinese diet is prone to be artistic and emotional. With the acceleration of economic globalization and information flow, Chinese and western food culture will advance to merge in the collision and complement each other in the integration. Now Chinese food has begun to pay more attention to the nutrition as well as the healthy and scientific cooking; western food also takes the road to pursue Chinese food's color, aroma, taste and connotation. I am determined that Chinese and western food culture will flourish together in the exchange.

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