

Analysis of Difference in Catering Culture Between Eastern and Western Countries

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Abstract: Based on the different cultural background, the dissertation mainly talks about the catering culture in the East and the West from the aspects of people's concepts, eating ingredients, cooking methods, food names and table manners. Through the comparisons, it allows people to know more about the different eating habits and regional characteristics, which promote cross-cultural communication. In addition, China, as a country which is famous for her delicacies, is introduced chiefly. Then some popular restaurants or snack bars will be mentioned in order to analyze today's food tendency. With the development of our society, the combination of the Eastern and Western food culture will still continue.

Keywords: Catering Culture; Diet Differences; Cross-Cultural Communication; Chinese Delicacies

1. Introduction

Just as an old saying goes: "Food is the paramount necessity of people." Catering culture is closely linked with our daily life, which also plays an important role in regional characteristic culture. It's universally acknowledged that people in different areas have different cooking culture, affected by tradition, living environment, habits, religious beliefs and so on. Different from the old times, nowadays the modern people have a lot of kinds of food to choose. It's common to travel abroad for a few days if people want to enjoy eating the local specialties or attending some grand banquets their foreign friends hold. Thus the basic knowledge of Eastern and Western catering culture should be acquired.

2. Literature Review

Having three meals a day is the basic principle for everyone: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Food supports people's lives. To some degree, it also reflects different traditions and cultures. In China, it is widely acknowledged that people should have a good breakfast, be full at lunch and eat a little at supper. However, eating habits vary from region to region on account of many subjective and objective factors. The differences of catering between the East and the West can be seen from the behaviors, eating manners or some other details in the parties, banquets and weddings. Up to now, many scholars have studied about food in different countries and have compared them, which contribute to the promotion of the inter-cultural communication.

2.1 The differences in the concepts of food

Dang Binghua (2010) talked about the different concepts of food between the Eastern countries and the Western countries in her article. She thought that the Westerners attached more importance to the food nutrition, focusing on whether the protein, the carbohydrate, fat and vitamins were well-balanced or not. On the contrary, people in the East were particular about food art, who liked enjoying the happiness of tasting the delicacy.^[1]

Similarly, Cai Xiaoling (2012) claimed that to the people in the West, diets were mostly the means of survival or the ways of communication. Even though the food was tasteless, they could also eat it up rationally. However, Chinese people focused on the combination of colors, shapes, smells and tastes.^[2]

2.2 The differences in food and cooking methods

Dai Yuenong and Lu Juan (2012) also talked about the food in their article, thinking that Chinese cooking methods were varied. The same food could be cooked in different ways, such as stewing, frying, baking, braising or simmering. The different tastes were all amazing.^[3]

3. Different aspects of catering culture

Catering looks simple, but actually it has a lot of things for people to learn about. The difference of catering culture is reflected in many aspects. For example, people's concepts of diet, eating ingredients, cooking methods, the ways of naming food and table manners will be discussed as follows. Through comparison, people can realize that the difference in catering culture reflects in many subtleties. This is good for people to experience the changes of our society and the effects the Easterners and the Westerners bring to each other.

3.1 The concepts of diet

People's concepts of diet are gradually formed in the process of making food and tasting food, which change with the times. People learn to choose ingredients or cook in different ways from the ancestors. Meanwhile, People in different regions imperceptibly accept and inherit the ancestors' concepts of eating. The concept of diet in the East varies from that in the West though they may be changed through the development of society.

3.1.1 The pursuit of tastes and nutrition

A Chinese old saying goes: "Food is the paramount necessity for people, while taste is the most important of food." It is a universal phenomenon that the Easterners discern good food from bad according to its taste and the Westerners choose food according to the nutritional value. While treating guests, the hosts in the East may say modestly: "I am very sorry that the dishes are not very good. They may not cater to your tastes." They will never say: "I am very sorry that the dishes may not have much nutrition and may have too much calories." Of course, it does not mean that people in the Eastern countries care not a whit for nutrition, for everyone wants to eat tasty and healthy food. They just pay more attention to the taste reconciliation than adequate nutrition.

Many people believe that the rational thinking is reflected on the Westerners' preference of food. Catering is a necessary means of communication and survival, which is the lowest need of people in Maslow's theory of human needs.^[4]

3.1.2 The views on economy

In most of the countries in the East, when people have big dinners, they prefer to prepare much more food and drinks than that really need. What is common in the rural areas is that the whole pots of pork, mutton or chicken prepared in advance far exceed the demand. The meat can be stored in the fridge for a few weeks, but the fruit and vegetables are liable to quick deterioration, which may lead to mass waste. Some hosts find solutions to it, giving friends and relatives the rest things as presents after the dinner. To some degree, it is a way to reduce waste, but objectively speaking, excessive luxury is still going on.

On the other hand, when it comes to catering, whether it is luxurious or not is one of the common topics among guests. Not only the quantity but also the quality of the food will be talked about, such as the brand of the wine. To some degree, the hosts pay much attention to the level of the feast because they want to try their best to show their hospitality and let all the guests enjoy their time. However, there is no denying that some hosts just want to make it a point of honor.

By comparison, the concept of saving is more prevalent among the Westerners, who focus on the quality rather than the quantity. The quality they care about does not mean the expensive food and drinks, but the freshness and nutritional value. They call for economy.

3.2 Cooking methods

To cater to people's tastes, different cooking methods are used. The raw materials should be heat and be cooked. However, little people like to eat that kind of food. The next step is to season the materials with some necessary things. Then the same cooking materials can be cooked in different ways and have different tastes.

3.2.1 The cooking methods in the East

The cooking methods in the East are various. There are mainly fourteen cooking methods, such as stewing, frying and steaming.^[5] In the East, the food should not only be delicious, but also be good-looking and appetizing. Diners will be attracted by the luster and appearance of food first, then smell it and taste it at last. Therefore, the collocation of different materials and the reconciliation of sauces are necessary in the Eastern food. The chafing dish and the mixed stew are the specialties. Besides, the five spices, salts, soy and vinegar are the basic flavors in the Eastern countries. Sometimes the diners cannot distinguish the raw materials because the condiments are given too much to the dishes. The cooking methods are flexible. People can cook in their own ways instead of following the cookbooks strictly. The cooking method of each dish can be changed to adapt to different temperatures, seasons, regions or utilities. If it is summer, the color of the food can be lighter. If the guests are from Szechwan, more peppers can be added to the dishes.

3.2.2 The cooking methods in the West

In the West, the cooks seldom use condiments and additives in order to keep the natural tastes and colors of food. They do not use too much cooking methods to cook in case of destroying the original tastes and flavor, so the cold food is in the majority of the Western dishes. In the West, milk is the essential cooking material, which can be classified according to different needs. The cooking methods in the West are normalized, thus the cooks can select the cooking materials conveniently according the characteristics and categories of the materials. When they cook, the quantity and time are precise.

4. The Reasons for Cultural Differences

The catering culture in the East and the West are different, which can be seen in many aspects. There are many reasons for the cultural differences, such as the different geographic environment, different religious beliefs and different character traits.

4.1 Different geographic environment

The regions that the Easterners live in are good for plants to grow up, so the vegetables are enough to eat. However, many Western countries are in the zone of temperate marine climate, which is the superexcellent place for herding.^[6] Due to different geographic environment, the Westerners are nomadic people who make livings by fishing, hunting and breeding. Although the ancient Chinese often hunt for animals, this survival mode cannot meet people's need as time goes by and the population of people increase. The large territory is used to cultivate. Therefore wheat and rice become the Easterners' main food.

4.2 Different religious beliefs

The Easterners' catering culture is influenced by the religious belief. Most people in the Western countries believe in Buddhism, so they advocate leniency. In the old time, people prefer to eat vegetables and fruit rather than meat because they think killing livestock is rude and bloody. They believe that all the animals are intelligent. Besides, Confucius is considered to be a great philosopher in the East, who believes that the benevolent loves others. His thoughts are classical and affect people profoundly.

Most people in the West are Christian, so they respect Blessed Virgin Mary. That is the reason why women in the Western countries have high status. However, in the doctrine of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in the East, the status of women is always ignored. Instead, the idea of Three Obediences and Four Virtues penetrates deeply into people's mind, thus women cannot take their seats at a banquet.

5. Conclusion

In a word, catering culture is an important part of national culture. With the development of our society and the promotion of cross-cultural communication, the distinctions of catering culture in the East and the West are gradually disappearing. People in different countries gain more and more knowledge about it. Catering culture is a common topic, which is close to people's daily life. The traditional catering culture reflects the long history and the change of it represents the rapid development of the society. Everyone should respect the differences in catering culture between the East and the West, promote inter-cultural communication and cultural fusion.

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