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Research Article

## Mechanisms and strategies for international dissemination of Chinese culture through food

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### Abstract:

As globalization accelerates, the international spread of culture plays a vital role in establishing cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. As a country with a long history and rich cultural heritage, China has a unique position on the global cultural exchange stage.

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Among them, food, as an important carrier of cultural communication, not only reflects China's profound cultural heritage, but is also one of the most direct and universal forms of cross-cultural exchange. This article takes Chinese food as the research subject, integrating theories of communication, semiotics and food anthropology as well as social aesthetic methods of cross-cultural food exchange. An in-depth analysis of the mechanisms and strategies of international communication of Chinese culture through food was conducted, and the mechanism of the international communication of Chinese food culture was sorted out. The innovation of this article is to study the external communication of Chinese culture based on the Chinese context and using food as an entry point. By combining cases of cross-cultural communication with multiple communication subjects, the practical path for food media symbols to promote the international communication of Chinese culture is clarified, and suggestions are put forward on how to effectively carry out the international communication of Chinese culture through food.

**Keywords:** Chinese food, cultural communication, international exchange, culinary diplomacy, intercultural understanding

## 1. Introduction

Food is in a sense an important embodiment of the culture of a country or nation (Reddy, G., & van Dam, R. M., 2020: 149). As an important symbol for bridging the gap between Chinese and foreign cultures, Chinese food has played an important role in the international dissemination of Chinese culture by connecting local cultural concepts with global spiritual connotations and breaking down geographical barriers (Tian, R. G., Tian, K., Dandan, Z., & Wang, C. H., 2018:355). In recent years, Chinese food has played



an increasingly important role in cross-cultural communication: in the banquet sessions of many major main diplomatic events, elaborately designed Chinese food and tableware with strong Chinese cultural connotations have attracted extensive attention from both Chinese and foreign media (Zhang, K., 2023); Chinese short-video bloggers, such as Li Ziqi and Grandpa Amu, have been recognized through their YouTube, TikTok (the international version of China's short-video platform Douyin) and other platforms to spread the word about China's rural life and traditional food (Yang, Y., 2022: 342). Their videos not only show the process of food preparation, but also include the collection of raw materials and production tools, presenting viewers with a back-to-basics lifestyle and sparking heated discussions among foreign netizens about Chinese food culture.

From royal banquets to street snacks, from the culinary customs of traditional festivals to the matching of ingredients at the daily table, China's food culture embodies the philosophical thinking, aesthetic taste and life wisdom of the Chinese people. Therefore, spreading culture through food not only enhances the national image, but also helps deepen the world's understanding and recognition of Chinese culture (Lipscomb, A., 2019: 1). In the wave of globalization, the international dissemination of culture has become a key link to interconnect the world and an important means to demonstrate a country's soft power. As one of the world's four major ancient civilizations, Chinese culture continues to attract widespread attention globally for its profound and diverse cultural connotations (You, W., 2018: 772). Among many cultural elements, food is undoubtedly one of the most intuitive and easily accepted forms of cultural expression. Chinese food is famous for its unique flavor, rich variety and profound cultural connotation,



and it has become a pioneer in the international dissemination of Chinese culture across the limitations of language and region (Guang, T., & Gang, C., 2019).

## 2. Materials and methods

The purpose of this paper is to explore the effective mechanisms and strategies of international communication of Chinese culture through food as a medium. In order to comprehensively understand and analyze the existing research results, theoretical frameworks and their practical applications, this study adopts the literature review method to collect and critically cite a wide range of literature in related fields, the content analysis method to analyze selected examples in depth and the case study method in qualitative research for the interpretation of key terms and the extension of the content and auxiliary argumentation.

As China's position in the global economic and political arena grows, Chinese cuisine is increasingly coming into the international spotlight. Through various international food festivals, cookbooks, cooking courses, and an increasing number of Chinese restaurants, Chinese cuisine is gradually becoming a bright cultural card in the international arena. Current research on the functions and roles of food in academia and industry focuses on the relationship between food and society and the state, the uniqueness of local food, and the relationship between food and the economy, cultural exchanges, and the expression of personal identity. The study of the functions and roles of food has also become a common concern of both the academic and practical worlds, and has emphasized its special importance.

Chinese scholar Wang Renxiang explores the relationship between traditional Chinese food and social values. Anna



Anatolyevna explored the evolution of Russian food and cooking techniques from the beginning of ancient Rus' to the collapse of the Soviet Union, pointing out that the focus of different social classes on food varied considerably, and that cooking techniques varied in different periods of history due to the influence of the social environment and the state system (Pilipenko, A. A., 2019: 122).

The classic work *Recipes from the Garden of Contentment* by Yuan Mei, a scholar of the Qing Dynasty in China, provides an important and unique perspective on understanding the food culture of ancient China and how food played a role in the transmission of culture in society (Mei, Y., 2018). The Chinese Taiwanese scholar Chiang Hsun also often states in his work that “food is a form of cultural expression” (Jiang Xun., 2017). Lyudmila Anatolyevna and others have argued that national cuisine is an important part of national identity, and that the love of food and identification with it can enhance an individual's interest in the culture of that particular nation and promote mutual communication (Andreeva, L. A., Hopiyainen, O. A., & Filimonova, N. V., 2017: 122). Rachel Laudan examines the spread of dietary and culinary technologies along with the expansion of imperialism to influence global food cultures by looking back at the mastery of grain cooking from 20,000 years ago to the formation and development of contemporary dietary techniques and cultures (Laudan, R., 2013).

In her research, Russian scholar Marina Vladimirovna points out that the current low level of awareness and recognition of Russian food among people of other nationalities and regions of the world, and even the difficulty of access to Russian food, has only affected the world's perception of Russia to a certain extent



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(Kalmykova, M. V., 2016: 61), while Carolyn Steel discusses the relationship between food and our daily lives in a series of studies examining the impact of food supply chains on urban life (Steel, C., 2013).

Overall, there is a wealth of food-focused perspectives but relatively few publications and outputs, and the potential and impact of food as a tool for cultural communication has not been fully realized, with other perspectives on the field to be added (Treatment, C. f. S. A., 2014). How to effectively utilize this tool for the promotion of national culture is the focus of current research and the innovation of this paper.

### 3. Discussion

In international exchanges, the profound and far-reaching Chinese culinary culture has created new opportunities for exchanges and mutual understanding between Chinese and foreign civilizations, and various culinary symbols condensing Chinese culture have played an increasingly important role in cross-cultural exchanges (Wang, Y., Zhang, Y., & Zhao, X., 2023: 155). The Chinese government, enterprises, and the public have used food as a medium to express and transmit the material forms and values of food, utensils and behaviors in a specific way, thus giving the Chinese food a symbolic function as a medium.

Take the Beijing Winter Olympics as an example, this international event provides an excellent opportunity to promote Chinese culinary culture to the world. In the Athletes' Village, Peking Duck, as a business card of Chinese cuisine, gained wide acclaim among athletes and staff from several countries. This is not only because of the unique flavor and cooking technique of Peking Duck itself, but also because it serves as a taste experience in



cultural exchanges, which can directly touch the participants' hearts and minds, and arouse their curiosity and desire to explore other Chinese cuisines and even cultures. In addition, the promotion of Chinese cuisine outside of China is equally important. To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and China, the first large-scale celebration of Chinese New Year was held in Moscow during the Chinese New Year in 2024, with the launch of the "Chinese New Year in Moscow" cultural program (Tass., 2024). The center of Moscow was transformed into a festive Beijing. Chinese food festivals, Chinese food weeks and other events are held regularly in several countries, through which local people can not only taste authentic Chinese dishes, but also learn about the cultural stories behind them and their preparation. Such interactions promote mutual understanding and appreciation of cultures, thus making the international spread of Chinese culture more profound. Through these concrete examples, we can see that food, as a cultural carrier, has become a powerful tool for the foreign exchange of Chinese culture through the effective integration and dissemination of various platforms and activities.

In the international dissemination of Chinese culture, the food culture system constructs a specific "symbolic domain" (Doda, Z., 2005). The sensory experience stimulated by food serves as the boundary of the symbolic domain, acting as a "filter membrane" that dynamically controls the entry of Chinese food and its culture into the system. Sino-foreign exchanges, the process of globalization and the development of media technology have led to more contacts and collisions between Chinese and foreign food culture systems, and the interaction between Chinese and foreign symbolic systems has become more diversified, creating new



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possibilities for the dissemination of Chinese culture (Wang, Y., 2024: 81).

As a symbol and important carrier of national or regional culture, food culture often plays a connotative role (Sun, G., Lin, X., Chen, J., Xu, N., Xiong, P., & Li, H., 2023). The sensory experience inspired by food is like a certain degree of intimate contact with the place and people to which the audience belongs, and this kind of sensual, three-dimensional interaction brings a direct and strong experience, forming an image cognition between the food and the place, and establishing a fuzzy emotional connection. In the context of international communication of Chinese food, the positive feelings of overseas audiences towards food will play the functions of emotional transfer and public education, leading them to generate positive evaluations of Chinese culture and China's national image.

Janice's favorite bean buns act as an "emotion generator", effectively triggering and regulating the emotional practices between Janice and China. In addition, Chinese food at the Beijing Winter Olympics left deep and unique emotional memories for athletes from different countries, who expressed their appreciation and gratitude for China's preparation of the Winter Olympics on overseas social media platforms, such as American athlete Tessa Maud, who posted on the photo wall (Instagram): "I love the people, the food and the culture here so much. The people, the food and the culture. Thank you for supporting me." Overseas netizens also responded positively to the athletes' tweets, "Impressive food," "China has the right atmosphere and positive energy," and "China is the best at almost anything it does ". As a result, the focus of overseas people extends from food to positive feedback and



positive identification with China's capabilities and attitudes, and the food symbols reach the last link in the mechanism of international communication role, i.e., constructing cultural identity.

The widespread global aspiration for Chinese cuisine not only promotes the transmission of Chinese traditions and history, but also serves as a medium of cultural exchange across linguistic and geographical borders. Carrying a wealth of stories and traditional concepts, these cuisines provide people around the world with a direct and intuitive way to encounter and experience Chinese culture. The shared experience of eating and drinking, especially during festivals and special celebrations, deepens the understanding and recognition of Chinese culture. Dumplings at Chinese New Year and mooncakes at Mid-Autumn Festival are not only an essential part of the celebrations, but have also become important symbols for spreading Chinese culture and strengthening cultural identity. Modern media distribution mechanisms, such as food tourism programs and cooking sharing on social media, have further expanded the reach of Chinese cuisine, making it a window into China's diversity for a global audience. Flavors and cooking styles from different regions demonstrate the breadth of Chinese culture and make people realize that China is not composed of a single culture, but a richly diverse, inclusive and open collection of cultures. By experiencing the food, people not only taste the delicious flavors, but also establish an emotional connection with Chinese culture, and this emotional connection drives the public to develop a deep interest in and identification with Chinese culture.



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## 4. Results

As a physiological activity of human beings, food is so routine and basic that people tend to overlook the rich cultural significance it carries and its media-activated characteristics that go beyond physiological satisfaction and sensory pleasure. In this paper, we consider food as a cultural media symbol and analyze how it breaks down cultural barriers in the international dissemination of Chinese culture, and how it constructs Chinese cultural identity through sensory stimulation and its associative experience. By analyzing the value and significance of food as a media symbol, we focus on the blind spots of food in communication studies. From the sensory experience, we explore the mediating role of dietary activities in cross-cultural communication, and try to change the neglected phenomenon of sensory science in the study of dietary cross-cultural communication.

In recent years, the influence of Chinese cuisine has been increasing in countries around the world, and a variety of subjects have constructed a rich and colorful international communication landscape of Chinese cuisine culture (Gray, J., 2015). However, the trend of "gastronomic diplomacy" has developed to the present day, which is not only to enhance the global presence of the Chinese nation or Chinese cuisine through "making encounters", but also to use food as a medium to construct China's national image through telling good food stories, and then to promote the "other's" cross-cultural communication. Instead, it is to use food as a medium to construct China's national image through telling good food stories, and then to promote the identification of the "others" with the Chinese nation and Chinese culture.



#### **4.1 Exploring representative Chinese food symbols and interpreting the Chinese cultural connotations embedded in them**

At present, Chinese cuisine continues to be popular around the world, but overseas people's love for Chinese cuisine is mainly generated by the sensory experience inspired by culinary activities, and their understanding of the Chinese culture behind the food is relatively limited. This requires the focus of international communication of Chinese cuisine to be deepened from "food itself" to "cultural interpretation", so as to enhance the sticky role of cultural content in the communication mechanism. For example, Hangzhou's famous food "Ding Sheng Cake" in the Hangzhou Asian Games was loved by athletes because of its good meaning. As for Chinese specialties such as dumplings and roast duck, which were successfully featured in the Beijing Winter Olympics, we can focus on promoting the Chinese cultural stories and national sentiments they carry in the future, so as to continue and innovate the narrative of Chinese delicacies in sports events, and to enhance the goodwill and sense of identity of overseas people towards Chinese culture.

#### **4.2 Empowering the international communication mechanism of Chinese food symbols with digitalization, and fully utilizing the new media technology to innovate the modes of food sensory experience**

The rapid development of the Internet and digital media technology is reshaping the global communication pattern, which brings brand-new opportunities for telling a good "Chinese food story". At present, China's communication bodies have initially explored the communication mechanism of "Chinese cuisine +



digital technology" in terms of content, form and channels. For example, on overseas social media platforms, the matrix accounts of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Culture and Tourism often send out articles to promote Chinese cuisine globally, and Chinese enterprises have carried out a series of live events, short videos on Chinese cuisine and culture. Live broadcast activities, Chinese food-themed short videos and documentaries have become "popular". However, it is still necessary to further promote the in-depth integration of Chinese food communication with digital technology (Zhang, X., 2022: 123), drive the change of the whole process and chain of Chinese food communication by digital technology, and explore the practical path and theoretical mechanism of Chinese food global communication under the digital media ecology.

#### **4.3 Give full play to the linkage function of each symbol in the multi-symbol domain network to maximize the effect of dietary communication.**

The international dissemination of Chinese culture is a complex and changing process system, in which dietary symbols and other symbols interact and influence each other (2). Overseas groups' sensory experience of Chinese food is also affected by the interference and influence of established ideologies and values. In addition, the emotion of love for a country's food does not exactly migrate to the country to which the food belongs. For example, Mexican tortillas and Turkish barbecue are popular all over the world, but the cultural dissemination of the countries and nationalities to which the two foods belong is relatively inferior. Therefore, in the process of international dissemination of Chinese food culture, the joint influence of various symbolic domains, such



as economic, social and audience cultural backgrounds, should also be considered. Only with hard power as the foundation, digital technology as the drive, and culture as the wheel, can we really use food as the axis to effectively enhance the global communication power and international influence of Chinese civilization, and show the world a credible, lovely and respectable image of China.

#### **4.4 Promote the participation of multiple actors in the promotion of Chinese food culture symbols.**

By further integrating international, organizational and interpersonal communication platforms, and relying on food as a medium to build a connection between the foreign public and Chinese food, more people can meet with Chinese food, thus stimulating their multi-sensory experience, and then emotionally touching them, changing their views and building their identity. In addition to official organizations, Chinese enterprises and the public abroad are important actors in promoting the spread of Chinese culture.

### **5. Conclusion**

#### **1. The International Dissemination of Food Culture is of Great Importance**

The diversity of Chinese cuisine can demonstrate the breadth and plurality of cultures. Meanwhile, as a cross-cultural universal language, cuisine can cross the barriers of language and culture, establish emotional ties, and become a bridge for international communication. In addition, as part of the cultural soft power, food communication plays an indispensable role in enhancing China's international image. In addition, gastronomic communication can promote intercultural understanding and respect, help break down



cultural prejudices, and enhance mutual understanding among peoples around the globe. It is also a driving force for the development of tourism and related industries, so that cultural communication and economic development complement each other. At the same time, international communication has also become an important platform for the protection, inheritance and innovation of traditional culinary culture, stimulating the fusion of cultures and the creation of new cultural phenomena. Therefore, the international dissemination of Chinese cuisine is not only a powerful means for Chinese culture to communicate with the outside world, but also a key way to shape the country's image, promote economic growth and foster cultural innovation.

## 2. The Results of this Study are Replicable

The mechanism of international dissemination of Chinese food culture has a certain degree of replicability. From the refining of the cultural value of the symbols and their dynamic role in cross-cultural communication to the emotional practice of triggering the audience, this complete set of external discourse system of Chinese food symbols is of reference significance to the international communication of other symbols of Chinese culture. By selecting and reorganizing colorful Chinese cultural symbols, and based on the international communication pattern of social media and video, the international popularity and goodwill of symbols including Chinese cuisine, costumes, martial arts, traditional non-heritage, etc. are continuously enhanced, so as to realize the touching, touching and emotionally moving in international communication by means of the cultural connotations and national spirit carried by cultural symbols and to transform the audience's temporary and emotional experience into rational cognition, and extend it to their



understanding of the Chinese food and culture, as well as to their understanding of the Chinese culture. This will transform the audience's temporary and sensual associative experience into rational cognition and extend it to the understanding and recognition of Chinese culture, and ultimately promote the construction of a complete external discourse system of Chinese culture.

### **3. Prospects for the Operationalization of the Research Results**

Influenced by a variety of social, political and economic factors, coupled with the realistic considerations of the complexity and dynamics of cultural communication, the above strategies given in this study need to be verified in depth at the practical level, especially in terms of the practical effects of the application of digital technology in integrating with the traditional culinary culture. The application of digital technology needs to be analyzed in relation to specific cases in order to analyze its effects in enhancing the sensory experience of food, especially Considering the acceptance of new technologies by users in different cultural backgrounds. As for the representative symbols of Chinese food culture, cultural research should be deepened to clarify how these symbols are transmitted and interpreted by audiences in different cultural environments. Further, interdisciplinary research is needed to explore the effects of symbols and their challenges in cross-cultural communication. In addition, the cooperation mechanism and evaluation of the impact of multiple actors in the promotion of Chinese culinary culture are also important research topics, and a long-term research program should be established to monitor the



effectiveness of these strategies and their adaptability in different socio-cultural contexts.

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