FOOD CULTURE IN CHINA:
FROM SOCIAL POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: Based on anthropological theory on food, this research gives a brief discussion on the development direction of food civilization, analyzes the facts that people's diet activities and eating behaviors, in the ancient Chinese society centering on the state political power, were controlled or influenced by the political ideology. It also probes the relationship between food culture and social-political traditions. Taking 'tables' and 'banquets' as the subjects, the paper introduces haute cuisine, everyday food and national dishes from the social stratification of diet. It proposes that the development of Chinese food has been influenced by the ritualized privilege system, noble traditions and application of ancient science and technology invention of cooking. It responds to Gernet's idea of poverty stress and Kwang-Chih Chang's idea of ethos. Through the power symbols of Chinese banquet culture, a banquet level analysis model is presented to pave a path for further empirical study.

Keywords: food culture, banquet level, social consciousness, social stratification, power symbol

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1. Introduction

In the ancient Chinese society with the state political power as the center, people's diet activities and eating behaviors were controlled or influenced by political ideology, and they tended to break away from the material joy of the diet itself and transform into non-diet social functions (Huang 2001). This is mainly manifested in the link between eating behavior and state governance by seeking the rule of governance in the theory of food and cooking; including social food activities in the political and ethical order of 'rites'. Through food reward or offering food as tribute to the emperor, diet being treated as political means for

winning others' support or as a political tool for officialdom, and the sharp social contradictions arise from the large disparities of food consumption and food resources possession among people (Lin 1997). The development of traditional Chinese food culture has presented a distinctive feature of political ideology, because the social diet behavior has always been consciously or unconsciously interfered or influenced by social politics.

2. Food culture and social consciousness in China

Food folklore is initiator of many cultural phenomena. For example, an important concept in Chinese aesthetics is 'beauty', which originated from people's daily eating activities. The aesthetic consciousness of Chinese culture originally came from people's gustatory organs, which can be seen from the meaning of the character 美(beauty). 美is composed of 羊(lamb) and 大(big) and means 甘 (sweet and pleasant) in its structure. Namely, the Chinese original aesthetic consciousness arose from the taste sensitivity of fatty mutton, and then extended in turn to the senses of smell, sight, touch and hearing and further to mental consciousness. It was finally involved in nature and human society, extending to all aspects that could bring about beauty and aesthetic feeling in the spiritual and material life (Lin 1996). There is a close relationship between the eating tools and cultures between the Chinese and the Western one, the use of knife and fork is matched with the split dining system, which gives rise to the cultural characteristics of Westerners' attention to independence and individuality. Chopsticks are, on the other hand, suitable for family members to sit together at a table, highlighting the family unit, thus letting the Orientals have quite strong family values and concept of harmony (Yin and Han 2007).

The Chinese food culture has the characteristics of inheritability and development, and throughout the history of Chinese food culture, it has maintained its momentum of development since its primitive society. Neither the change of dynasty nor the change of social system has had a profound influence on it, and the philosophy of supplying enough food to people and food being the top priority was very popular. Eating was a top priority for people in China. Confucius long ago said that the desire for food and sex is part of human nature. As such, in the Chinese culture, which emphasizes human nature, food became the priority. Because of the attention to diet, Chinese people would, when they had leisure time or abundant raw materials, work out a variety of food. In the event of a disaster, they tried to develop all sorts of wild vegetables and weeds for survival. Therefore, the number of food breed and design continued to rise, which caused many Westerners to have the illusion that the Chinese dare to eat all the edible items. What's more, Chinese cooking is flexible, which is characterized by saying that there is no fixed taste and what is delicious is valued. In Chinese cooking, there are ways but no rules, making Chinese dishes have infinite names, designs and colors (Zhou 2007).

The beauty of food is one of the important roots of Chinese aesthetics, which inspires people with the stimulation of eating. Triggering art inspiration is the inevitable result of Chinese food culture pursuing complete and beautiful color, fragrance, taste, shape, and utensils. It makes food culture a comprehensive art containing multiple cultural connotations of diet, diet mentality, beautiful utensils and etiquette, food enjoyment and eating. Chinese foods have not only exquisite craftsmanship and rich nutrition, but also elegant and graceful names, which are literary and romantic, poetic and fancy (Zhou 2004).

When one reviews the historical development of Chinese food culture, it is not hard to find that, since the rise of the Zhou Ritual, etiquette system of the Zhou Dynasty (1046 B.C.–256 B.C.), the social public eating behavior was included in the category of "the ritual". The daily diet activities embodied the ideas or bore the function of "the ritual", which was the most prominent social characteristics of the ancient food culture.

As a matter of fact, the origin of the ritual was diet. The initial meaning of ritual refers to the sequence of having a meal, which was directly generated from worship activities by offering food and fruits to gods, ghosts and ancestors. Before eating and drinking, even in the case of vegetables and soup, people must worship and let the ghosts and departed ancestors eat first. They dared not to eat the fruits or rice of the new harvest until some had been sacrificed for the ancestors to taste first. As a result, in the sacrifice of food, heaven, earth, gods and ghosts were the first to be taken care of. The living would neither eat nor drink until their deceased ancestors had done so. These sequences of having a meal thus constituted the initial meaning of the ritual. Then, the connotation of the ritual was continuously expanded, and eventually evolved into a series of political ethical orders of respect for seniority, superiority, affinity difference, gender difference, which strictly defined the identity of social members. Of course, some scholars have questioned the argument (Li and Tian 2014).

To strengthen the political ritual order of differences between men and women, men enjoying higher status than women in the social ethical relationship, the ancient diet activities also bore the function of practical moralization. This was reflected in the fact that females were often excluded from public banquets in terms of participation in social diet activities. This kind of phenomenon, i.e. men and women did not eat at the same table, was an inherited family rule and custom inside the general feudal family or patriarchal clan. Even in the family life of an individual small family, the inequities between genders shown in eating were commonly seen (Tylor 2004).

The traditions of any culture would not remain invariable beyond time and space. Without exception, they follow the rule of life that happens, develops, and declines. It is not advisable to treat a cultural tradition with reluctance to part with life and the most beautiful feeling of life. Cultural tradition itself is in con-tradiction between life and death, and life cycle is its way of existence and movement process. It is advisable and feasible to treat or inherit and carry forward cultural traditions cognitively and actively in a scientific way. There have been

many ethnic cultures in the history of world civilization, and some ethnic groups who created certain culture are no longer able to survive. The tradition of Chinese food culture also faces such challenges, which are opportunities as well (Wolff 2006).

Chinese food culture traditions are under the process of evolution and updating. The food industry development in China lags, and there are conflicts between traditional diet modes and manufactured foods. The impact resulting from ideas will spread from heavily to lightly through the whole stage of transformation. Overall, China's food industry is adjusted to the general trend of modernization, and the proportion of processed foods increases year by year, which is an objective trend. Nevertheless, how to process traditional food resources into modern foods that are popular with consumers is a problem that the suppliers have been facing through the process (Leach 1991). This is because the generalization process of food industry may not be able to eliminate the cultural differences and traditional customs of groups. Modernization always goes abreast with localization. It is the modernization coming out of the tradition that has the continued momentum and influence of localization, which can be widely accepted by general consumers. At the same time, people's consumption level and purchasing power are crucial factors. Since the reform and opening, the diet of the masses has improved greatly, and their consumption level has gone up significantly. Most people can have sufficient food, and quite a few of them have already eaten well enough, which means the problem of food and clothing has basically been solved. Many people are in transition from eating well to eating more scientifically and rationally by considering nutrition, function, economy, convenience and civilization (Zhao 2000).

China's food industry is growing rapidly, but there are also structural problems. The reasons are as follows: First, people lack the ability to buy manufactured food, especially peasants far away from cities and towns cannot play the role of major consumers of industrial food. In the second place, people's consumption structure restricts the investment into the purchasing power of industrial food, which restrains the growth of purchasing power. The Chinese family child care and education investments are too heavy (especially the latter; statistics show that 43% of Chinese savings is used for their children's education), which are followed by expenses on housing, medical treatment, and so on. All these are crucial factors constraining food expenses, and the Chinese tradition has been the tightening of belts. The third reason is that, affected by the consumption ideology, many people, especially those far away from the urban areas, are content with their lifelong habit of diet. They follow the traditional cultural modes in terms of raw materials of food, varieties, cooking and processing ways, ways of eating, and so on. The concept of consumption, of course, is not static and will inevitably change with the change of the previous two (Schlosser 2002).

3. Social stratification of Chinese food

Jack Goody, an anthropologist from the University of Cambridge, U.K., has published works, such as Food and Love: A Cultural History of East and West*, Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* to discuss cultural differences based on food. (Goody 2012). By investigating two tribes in Ghana, Africa, Goody found that there was no social differentiation in the diet of African tribes. The case was used as a contrast against the diet stratification prevailing in Europe and Asia, depending on which Goody reflected on many conceptual mis-understandings of Eurocentrism in anthropology. During the ancient civilizations evolving into modern societies in most parts of Europe and Asia, the cooking behavior corresponded with social strata, generating the binary corresponding relation of haute cuisine and everyday food (Park 2017).

3.1. Everyday food, haute cuisine and national dishes

Everyday food refers to the average household home-cooked meals. Usually it means that people process the grain and vegetables gathered from their field together in their kitchen. There is nothing about table setting at meals but only the food preparation process embodies the gender division of labor (Wiltie 2008).

Haute cuisine is different in that it puts emphasis on the venue of eating, ornament of food, and color collocation. Furthermore, precious food ingredients and exotic spices that come from remote mysterious areas are used. Haute cuisine is associated with prominent level of social status, and the food enjoyed by the royal court, nobles and officials has a clear hierarchy in the category of haute cuisine. The nature of dishes is related to the specific system of food production and distribution, and the differentiation of dishes is a sign of existence of social stratification in culture and politics. A society with cultural and political stratifica-tion could and can be seen in ancient and modern societies of Europe and Asia. The distinctive characteristic of its food culture is that it is associated with the people who form the hierarchy. Haute cuisine and a noble way of life are related and form a food distribution mechanism descending along the social hierarchy (Sun 2015).

A high-ranking person gets the most precious ingredients, and noble guests are always the first to be served. Even for the same ingredient, hierarchy exists in each part. Meat of inferior quality is served to people sitting at the lower end of table, and viscera, deer legs or entrails only to low-ranking people. On the issue of diet development, Goody believes that there is a rule of flowing from top to bottom, that is, haute cuisine is always produced at the highest end of class society, which is enjoyed among people of high status. Then it flows down from the top to the general population (Yang 2014). About space, it spreads from the national political and economic center to the periphery. The haute cuisine fad is always developed in the capital, big cities and big hotels, and then spreads to the small and medium-sized peripheral cities.

Goody also puts forward his views on national dishes, arguing that haute cuisine is generated in economically developed and historic regions and is linked to the world economic trade, such as the French cuisine. Yet, he suggested that the United States is now the most developed society economically and culturally in the world, but American foods have been very simple, which has something to do with its relatively brief history. He even held that there is no American food as such, which faces a lot of opposition in the United States (Du and Sun 2006).

Goody's theory of food anthropology is hardly an academic paradigm, and his viewpoint does draw on many predecessors' theories. Issues that food is linked to social stratification, class identity and cultural identity are the explicit phenomena of many ethnic food cultures, which can get confirmed with a little observation. Therefore, many an early anthropologist knew much about and expounded it. Raymond Firth indicates that food is used to express and maintain social relations (Firth 1991). Through his research carried out in Taiwan, Wolff (1974) suggests that the Chinese eating behavior is part of the wider social system (Frederick 2003). In the developed society, the dietary difference is fixed by law and etiquette rules, forming a written regulation. Guanzi (723B.C. to 645B.C.), an ancient Chinese statesman said that how much people eat and drink and what clothes people wear should be regulated (Li 1997).

The New Book, a book on political philosophy written in early Western Han Dynasty, maintained that the differences of people's status ought to be embodied by details, including explicit details like salaries, carriages, costumes, crowns, palaces, rings, bedding, flags, as well as personal life concerning wife and concubines, food and drink, worshiping, funerals, which must follow the differential matching of a hierarchical society, thus forming a strict hierarchy culture. It had the effect of knowing one's social status by observing his/her clothing and ornaments (Li and Tian,2014). This kind of effect acted as the roles of ritual and law, customs and society. Different classes had different clothing and food resources. The lifestyle was fixed up by material symbols to form differentiated privileges and ways of life, and to construct the social order of China (Li and Tian 2014).

Social and political stability, the dignity and courtesy of officials, and people's satisfaction with their state of life are all necessary to secure privileges. This kind of privileged society was indoctrinated to people in the form of ritual, which was regarded as a normal life style by people so that they believed that it was quite normal for the noble class to enjoy delicacies and all other luxuries of life (Walman 2005). Moreover, it became a normal phenomenon in every culture for people to pursue privilege and to enjoy riches, beauties and big banquets brought by the privileged status. We can find the cultural root of the extremely extravagant and luxurious lifestyles of contemporary privileged class from the privileged ritual system of ancient China. The effect of controlling policies may alleviate the situation temporarily, but after the trend is over, it will be back in some other ways. It is only a matter of time for the privileged culture to boom as its root is still there (Wilson 2010).

3.2. Social reasons for the highly advanced Chinese cuisine

Discussion on why the world food culture is so developed in the Eastern and Western countries like France and China leads to the issue of food anthropology. The French sinologist Jacques Gernet and Chinese scholar Kwang-Chih Chang explained on this problem respectively in etic and emic perspective. Gernet mentioned low nutrition, long-term drought and famine, arguing that poverty was the root of the highly developed Chinese food culture, which forced the Chinese to make full use of potential edible vegetables and insects, and animal intestines (Gernet 1962). It means poverty impelled the creative invention of Chinese cooking, and poverty was the cause of the highly developed Chinese food culture.

Kwang-Chih Chang, from the perspective of Chinese culture, disagrees with Gernet's proposition, maintaining that poverty referred to resource scarcity, and that resource scarcity could only be a favorable condition, rather than a reason, for cooking invention and innovation. Compared horizontally with China, many underdeveloped ethnic groups across the world did not have similar food culture as China did; as such, Gernet's views were at least not theoretically universal. Kwang-Chih Chang's explanation was: The reason that the Chinese showed creativity in this respect might be simple: food and ways of eating were both one of the cores of Chinese lifestyle and a component of Chinese ethos (Chang 2003).

Saying that diet is one of the cores of the Chinese lifestyle is confusing logically because if there is one, there will certainly be two, three, etc. If so, we cannot call it the core. Furthermore, claiming that diet is a Chinese ethos is even ambiguous since such questions will naturally depend on what kind of ethos it is, why such ethos came into being, and so on. There was no explanation from Kwang-Chih Chang. Core and ethos may mean, as perceived popularly, that Chinese people are fond of eating, prompting the creativeness in terms of cooking. It is difficult for the simple attribution to make objective explanation of the well-developed food culture; hence it will increase the chance for other ethnic groups to misinterpret it. On the other hand, anthropology and sociology advocate that phenomena should be studied in society and interpreted from the cultural tradition of social structure formation. Only in this way can scientific research conclusions be made (Kottak 2012).

The root cause of the highly developed Chinese food culture is the result of a combination of multiple factors. These factors include the ritual penetration and transformation of social life by the philosophy of differentiated privileged hierarchy, the five elements cycling theory featuring unity of heaven and man and proper response and adaptation, highly developed professional chef groups, noble traditions and the application of scientific and technological inventions to the kitchen (Feng 2009).

Early in ancient China, a differentiated privileged system and its matching diet pattern were already established. Diet was divided and configured by different classes enjoying different diets, the emperor eating beef, mutton and pork, feudal

princes beef, high-ranking officials mutton, scholar-officials pork, and common people eating vegetables (Li and Tian 2014). This is consistent with appropriate amount of diet and differentiated diets described in books like *Guanzi* and *New Book*, two famous ancient Chinese books written more than 2000 years ago. As for commoners, only when they reached 70 years where they allowed to eat meat, otherwise they could eat vegetable only. *What Cao Gui Says about War*, a renowned work written during the Warring States Period, is the record of social life at that time, in which what impresses modern people is that the social and economic development should be considered by meat-eaters so why do herb-eaters worry about it? Here, the Meat-eaters were indicated as a class, who were social and political elites contrasted by common people eating vegetables, or herb-eaters (Gertz 1999).

Eating meat was not only the right of the privileged, but also monopolized the state affairs, while herb-eaters were not entitled to be involved in the decisions of state affairs at all. It shows that the diet is not only the expression of social stratum, but also an indication of political status. However, despite the low status of the herb-eaters, they were struggling for the right to participate in the country's politics, believing that the meat-eaters are vulgar and have no long-term plans (Li and Tian 2014). Meat eating vs. vegetable eating is likewise superior vs. stupid subordinate and discussing public affairs vs. talking about private things, which have explicitly corresponding matching relations. From the perspective of structuralism anthropology, the opposition of meat eating, and vegetable eating contains cultural and natural binary opposition and connotes the separation of civilization and savageness. In ancient China, the binary opposition was set artificially through ritualized privilege rather than by the medium of fire (Li and Tian 2014).

The Chinese were one of the most innovative and original peoples among ancient civilizations in the world, which impressed Joseph Needham deeply. He found that many ancient inventions were applied to food preparation, making Chinese diet complex and rich in dietary patterns, designs and colors, and preparation methods. This should be the important reason for the highly developed Chinese food. Therefore, the analysis of the reasons for the highly developed Chinese food cannot be limited to one factor, but a variety of reasons (Zhang 2017).

3.3. The privileged circle and the professional chef group within walls

The emperor, officials and nobles were the privileged classes of the ancient society, and the food was distributed according to the rank and status. The emperor was in the highest position when having meals, which should be distinguished from the food specifications of the subjects, nobles and rich businessmen. After Wang Mang usurped the Western Han Dynasty, he modified laws and regulations based on the five elements cycling doctrine of the five elements complementing each other. *Rites of the Zhou Dynasty* records that 120 delicious dishes are served,

according to which Wang Mang established the dietary system of emperor being entitled to enjoy 120 kinds of dishes (Gu 1978).

As per Kwang-Chih Chang's research, *Rites of the Zhou Dynasty* says 4000 royal servants served the emperor of the Zhou Dynasty, approximately 60% among whom, namely 2271 servants, were responsible for food and drink. Among the 2271 servants, 162 were in charge of the daily diet of the emperor, empress and crown prince, 70 were specialized in meat food, 128 were chefs meeting the consumption needs within the palace, 128 were chefs responsible for the food and drink entertaining officials; 62 were chef assistants, 335 purchased and prepared grain, vegetable and fruit, 62 specialized in game, 342 were dedicated to the supply of fish, 24 were responsible for the supply of turtles and other crustaceans, 28 dried the meat, 110 supplied wine, 170 supplied 'six drinks', 94 people supplied ice, 31 people were responsible for bamboo shoots, 61 people served meat, 62 people made food, sauces and condiments, and 62 handled salt (Chang 2003).

The ancient dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou were only the shared masters under the heaven. Dozens to hundreds of vassal states surrounded the dynasty's capital city. The scale of imperial court and the number of officials were far less than those of the Qin Dynasty, and the dietary patterns were relatively simple. By the time of the feudal dynasties, the style and quantity of the royal diet was more varied, and the "Complete Manchu-Han Banquet" of the Qing Dynasty alone was enough to astonish people (Schlosser 2002).

Like the imperial palace, the officials and nobles also enjoyed the privilege of delicacies, and the service of servants dedicated to the banquet and food preparation. *Places of Interest in the Capital*, a book written in the Song dynasty (960–1279 AD), records the 'four departments and six divisions' of Guangui Manor in the Southern Song Dynasty capital city of Hangzhou, which administered the chefs with detailed division of labor and efficient matching and professional service teams of banquet. The four departments included the department of drapery setting, the department of kitchen, the department of tea and wine, and the department of tables and plates. The first was responsible for the banquet layout and landscaping of the banquet venue (Goody 2010).

The department of kitchen oversaw purchasing food, washing, cooking, and recipe matching (Zhuang 2010). The department of table and plates was responsible for serving food and wine to guests. The six divisions included fruit division, honey and frying division, vegetables division, oil and candle division, condiments and medicine division, and cleaning arrangement division. The six divisions worked together on fruit platter, cold dish platter, lighting, spices and medicine for relieving drunkenness, floor, table and chair cleaning, etc. for the banquet. Regarding the extent of detailed division of labor of the teams serving the banquet, they were smaller in scale compared with those of the royal court. However, they were more clearly rational in terms of category setting and more efficient, and it was easier to coordinate about managerial hierarchy. These departments and divisions were really a simplified, miniaturized or common version of the royal food and banquet servant team (Tian and Zhou 2012).

The four departments and six divisions were affiliated to the privilege of officials and nobles, and the duality was directed at cooking, delicacies and feast. The specialized division of labor was very convenient for the officials and nobles. The officials and nobles have the four departments and six divisions in place with clear responsibilities, allowing everything to be handled neatly and helping to spare officials and nobles the work (Tian and Luo 2013). The host and hostess do not have to bother with any housework like burning incense and serving tea, hanging pictures and arranging flowers, which means the banquet catering could be performed properly and appropriately without bothering the host and hostess. The ancient records suggest that the four departments and six divisions were skilled at every specialty, showing the professionalism of banquet catering service as well as of chefs (Fuhrman 2011).

Extremely wealthy families like those of the emperor, officials, nobles hired chefs to cook for them. It was the professionalism of this chef group that made the main body of invention. Chefs belonged to a class of very low social status, one level lower than the commoners. The Shang dynasty had special regulations concerning costumes. Slaves, prostitutes and government runners are originally untouchables, who are despised by others (Qu 1981). Nevertheless, in ancient times, chefs were considered as the opposite of the privileged but at same time they were associated with the privileged class. They were a necessary result of privileged class's functional services, with inner attributes and attachment, so their status was not high, and even today they are still referred to as 'zuo fan de' (people who simply cook food).

As for the cooking skills, chefs who had certain special privilege were engaged in cooking for their whole life, whose refined skills were passed down from generation to generation through their disciples and offspring to form a unique career in Chinese society (Tian and Zhou 2013). With the division of labor and professionalism of chefs, the inventions and innovation based on inheritance of cooking skills have lasted for thousands of years, and results showed that Chinese cuisine was highly developed. The fact that hat the nobles linked food to status and compared with each other also stimulated the innovation of cooking. The nobles glory due to delicacies would certainly reward the chefs or strive for or employ famous chefs to serve them. The nobles were proud of the delicacies while the chefs became more reputable due to the food, thus formed a unique inter-dependent relationship. The cooking innovation and competition gained two-way dynamics, which greatly contributed to the continuous improvement of the food culture (Yang 2014).

Chinese Yin-yang and five elements (阴阳五行) theory shaped the food culture. It holds that people should use ingredients and eat food according to the philosophy of united nature and humanity. It also encouraged cooking to develop. Each meal at the royal court for aristocrats contained as many as dozens or even hundreds of dishes (Wang and Tian 2012). This would need diversity of ingredients, diversity of cooking methods, and diversity of condiments to keep the dishes numerous and at the same time free from repetition. And even for the same

ingredient, the color and taste needed to be different. It was the diverse ingredients, cooking techniques, and condiments that embodied the creativeness of Chinese food. On the other hand, the complicated food diversity which marked the developed Chinese cuisine was never seen in the diet of the subaltern classes and people in the countryside. Therefore, the theory of poverty generates pressure proposed by Gernet and the 'ethos' proposition of Kwang-Chih Chang agree with historical reality or could explain why the Chinese food culture was highly developed (Zhuang 2010).

We propose that multiple factors like special privileges system and the traditions of the aristocracy have led to the development of food culture, which can be verified in other similar countries. France was a country with aristocratic traditions, so the needs of the nobles and the royal palace promoted the development of French food culture (Zhang 2017). American society is the most developed country in terms of economy and culture, but its food culture is extremely simple. Jack Goody said that the United States has not developed the American food. This is directly related to the fact that the American civilians are the main body of society and there is no aristocratic traditional culture. America is the typical representative of the spirit of capitalism after the influx of protestant ethic. It emphasizes diligence and frugality and does not waste food (Gates 2011).

Furthermore, there is no aristocracy, so the national dishes of America and ordinary people's dishes are almost the same. Their professional chefs make a living through commercial restaurants, while the earliest professional chef vocation in China and France was created by, attached to and belonged to aristocrats. Delicacies were created by professional chefs and enjoyed exclusively by the privileged class. Being different from the United States, China and France had established their national dishes a long time before. These national dishes were prepared by royal chefs to entertain domestic and foreign guests, so they were called royal dishes. With the passage of time and because of social progress, the ingredients and patterns of national dishes became simplified, but the spirit and symbolism of the royal dishes can still be found (Baker and Friel 2016).

Chef's specialized profession was first generated due to the privileged system. The chefs were attached to the court and manors of nobles. Then with the development of society and booming of cities, various restaurants, hotels and inns appeared thanks to the demand of civilians, and chefs were liberated from the closed walls of privileged aristocrats and became a commercial professional group. For instance, Hangzhou, the capital of Southern Song Dynasty (AD 1127–1279), had restaurants serving northern dishes which moved from the capital city in Northern Song Dynasty (AD 960–1127), and there were also southern food restaurants as well as a variety of snack bars. They were in streets, alleys and famous gardens (Yang. 2012). The emperor and his wives would sometimes also go out of the palace to hold banquets in famous gardens. An entertainment-oriented society promoted the development of restaurant industry, and the market demand expanded the professional space of chefs. Even the four departments and

six divisions formerly belonging to the government and nobles were also copied by average people. They established commercial companies dedicated to banquet service business and contracting a full range of banquet services for rich people (Li and Tian 2014).

Bustling commercial restaurants and banquet companies constituted the main body of Chinese culinary inventions, but the targets of these restaurants and food and drink production organizations were still mainly the classes of high social status. For the peasants, however, even if they went downtown for the fair, they would only have a simple meal in small restaurants or snack bars, and snacks were then called auxiliary food. But commercial restaurants and professional chefs entered civil society, whose roles in promoting the Chinese cuisine tended to expand step by step. Restaurants gradually became the main carrier of cooking skills (Yang 2013).

As time went by, restaurants greatly enhanced the cooking development. The competition among restaurants and chefs encouraged the continuous innovation of cooking skills. When the emperor, his wives and nobles grew tired of their own meals, they secretly went into streets to look for delicious foods and snacks which were new to them. They introduced these snacks to royal recipes, while famous royal dishes moved to the menus of commercial restaurants. It was the result of flowing up and down that finally completed the composition and matching of Chinese banquets and recipe series. At the same time, many recipes and recipe books were formed, which marked the Chinese cooking and catering systems were shaped and finalized (Zhao 2006).

4. Banquet culture and power symbol of China

Food is shared in a certain way of distribution and exchange in groups to support livelihoods. It reflects social food attributes and group function. The distribution and exchange of food reflect the social characteristics and human beings' cultural presentation, which absorbed the eyes of anthropologists. The most striking focus is that of wealth-boasting banquet, which is in food anthropology classified as banquet culture as they are not only carriers of food amalgamation and the scene of food exchange and distribution, but also the demonstration of culinary arts, table layout, and feeding patterns. They show the status, rank, authority, and interactive way in the banquet. In some sense, banquet is the most frequently performed human ritual. The secular composition of this ritual is more than the mystery one, so it is often ignored by anthropologists. It only appears in the exchange and distribution problem field and belongs to the economic category of human beings. Food anthropology can, however, enlarge the depth and breadth of the research, carry out marginal study on banquet culture, and promote anthropological evolution (Kottak 2012).

4.1. Banquet culture of China

China is the most developed society in terms of banquet culture. Banquet culture constitutes an important field of food anthropology, which contains the exchange and mutual function as well as elements such as structure, power, token and symbol. It blends perspectives of various anthropology schools and becomes the most innovative field of food anthropology. There is no objection to the proposition that China is the world's food and beverage giant at home and abroad, and its cooking creativity seems to have no match globally. Sun Yat-sen once said that although China lagged behind the western powers in every respect, it was advanced in food, which however earned for Chinese people the reputation of being fond of eating and greedy. Many facts have shown that China's food industry is highly developed, for example its excess of ingredients, cooking and banquet etc. (Chen and Wang 2017).

Traditionally, Chinese governance was based on rites. Banquets became an integral part of the ritual and custom system. The banquet ritual and custom were embedded in custom and festivals, life etiquette, social interactions and other activities of the royal families at the highest level, government officials and citizens at the middle level and rural residents at the lowest level. Like a rope, banquets tied the lives of Chinese people in the performance of custom and ritual formalities. They embodied all kinds of implications related to power, threshold, amity, respect, exchange, symbol, etc. Through the many meanings of micro-cosmic scenes, the banquet formed a cultural cluster of Chinese banquet culture, which has basically not been changed since it was finalized in the Zhou Dynasty about 3000 years ago. Especially at present, whether in central or peripheral cities, restaurants of all scales are extremely popular, with lights being bright and people drinking lavishly in extremely noisy circumstances. Treating others to a meal is one way of life for some people. It is sometimes a burden for other people, and a luxury beyond expectation for still others.

The patterns of the banquet culture started from the rites of Zhou Dynasty (BC 1046 – BC 256), which were inherited and strengthened by the royalty of all dynasties. They then penetrated the deep culture of the whole society from top to bottom, which have been influencing the Chinese society up till today. There were various categories of ancient banquets. The emperor held the royal banquet under conditions of court gathering, the first when the emperor was given power, the capital settlement banquet when the reign's title was changed, and the ten-thousand-years old traditional banquet for the emperor's birthday. The emperor made seasonal festivals all year round, such as on the first day of the lunar new year, Cold-food festival, winter solstice, Mid-Autumn festival, Double-ninth Day, and so on. In addition to these court gathering banquets, the royal palace needed to supply food to the key office workers of the imperial court, known as food awarded by the emperor and meal eaten in the corridor, which was a small public official banquet (Li and Tian 2014).

When the official was promoted, he would have a celebration banquet, and the intellectuals who passed the public service examinations would host good-news

banquet, deer banquet and banquet of honor, etc. In the countryside, people held a land tilling banquet during the busy season, and a rural drinking feast and 'a-thousand-old-men banquet'. The main parts of the banquet and drinking culture have kept their long-lasting influence till today. For instance, the students who have passed the university entrance exams hold 'the number one scholar banquet', 'teacher-thanking banquet', etc. In remote areas or ethnic minorities, 'long-street banquets' and other customs are still observed (Park 2017).

Banquet is a kind of dinner party, and there was a clear process from the split dining system to joint dining system. In ancient times, the split dining system meant that people sat at the table, with a small table placed in front of each person and people ate the food individually. It was depicted on paintings of Han Dynasty (BC 202 – BC 220) and the famous "Hongmen Banquet". So why was the ancient Chinese split dining changed into joint dining? Scholars believe that it had something to do with change of patterns of furniture like tables and chairs. Furniture was revolutionized during the Tang Dynasty (AD 618 – AD 907) and the subsequent five short dynasties due to the introduction of sitting tools from the western regions of China. Tables and chairs entered the daily life of Chinese people, who gradually sat on chairs at the table and ate together, thus producing the joint together system that has continued up to now (Zhang 2017).

The popularity of the split dining system began in the Song Dynasty about 1000 years ago, which was related to the development of the catering industry in the market. Today, because joint dining may cause infectious diseases and sanitary problems, many scholars specialized in catering have reflected and criticized the traditional dining system compared with the western-style split dining system. They argue that joint dining is not healthy due to saliva coming together, and they propose to learn from the split dining system of the western banquet. The table settings of the banquet have experienced gradual changes. The earliest mode was that people sat at a small table, and then at a big table, but the big table was square, and guests sat around the square table. Finally came the modern round table. The connotations of the banquet etiquette required people to be separated from each other, with the respected, i.e. the elders, and guests having their own designated seats. Seats reflected in ancient portraits are as follows:
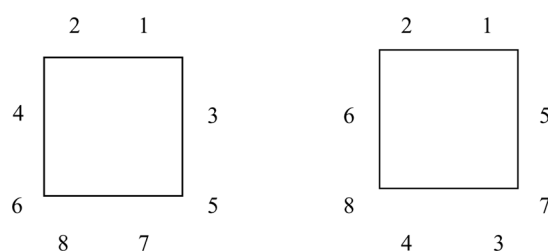
A: Seating arrangements in the north   B: Seating arrangements in the south

Fig. 1. Seating arrangements around the table.

At present, square tables are seldom seen in big restaurants, and round tables are increasingly bigger, some of which can serve more than 20 or dozens of people. Small restaurants use square tables more often. Of course, small hotels' square tables only serve citizens of lower social status, students and migrant workers for small get-togethers. In school canteens and government canteens, square tables are also common, but few people entertain guests at the canteen (Zhuang 2010). After the round table emerged, there was no significant difference of the banquets seating from the ancient square table seating. People still had to sit according to the seniority and age of guests and host. There were only a few slight differences of seating arrangement in different regions.

However, the basic differences of host – guest, old – young, superior – inferior and male – female can be identified through the seating arrangement. The table seating arrangement was the establishment and public display of each person's social status, which was even stricter than what was shown in "emperor and subjects, father and son, old and young, men and women, and superior and inferior" on public occasions, and which was impossible to ignore. With this, table setting, and banquet seating arrangement were deeply rooted in the differentiated order rule of social stratification and were intuitively demonstrated. The cultural effect of the demonstration is that it has become, by the acculturation effect, every Chinese cultural psychology (Yang 2013).

4.2. Banquet grade mode and power symbol

Contemporary China carries on the basic cultural elements of the ancient banquets. The government has too much power and controls public resources, examines and approves too many procedures. Due to resources monopoly of the government, the relationship between the government and its service objects is not equal or symmetrical. When enterprises, businessmen and average people handle affairs, go to a doctor, sit for exams and go to school, apply for a job and seek promotion, request for hospitalization and operation, enter lawsuits, face traffic penalty, etc., they need to entertain people with banquets. In this meal-treat relationship, the entertainers want everything to go smoothly to make themselves comfortable. Usually businessmen earn respect and they take it for granted. As a result, the fad of the banquet treatment has evolved into the most fashionable way of handling business, although the banquet had been partially converted into new forms such as direct bribe with cash or sex offer (Wilson 2010).

However, business banquet is still the main body of contemporary banquets, among which many are show-oriented related to power & money trade-off, but the crackdown and online exposure have limited its room for development. Banquet seating is a social stratification and structure, and the banquet concerns the social hierarchy and food sharing laws, which we call the banquet hierarchy mode.
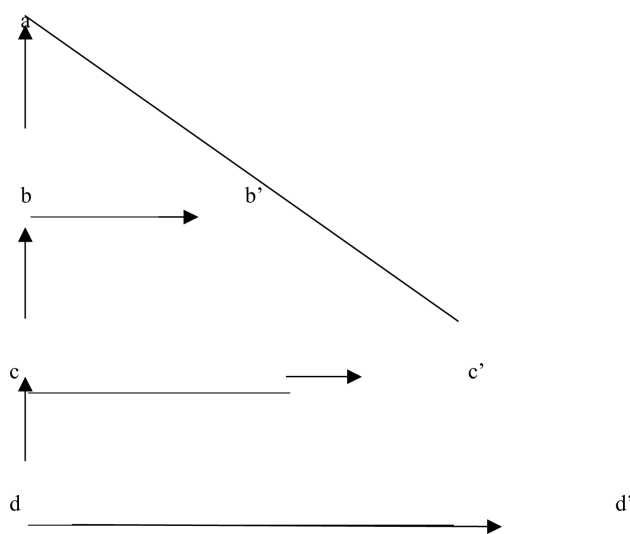
Fig. 2. Banquet hierarchy model.

The model above indicates the stratification of hotel, and the following numbers increase in order: clubs, restaurants at high, middle and low levels. It shows status relationship at the banquet. The horizontal line in the figure represents the same social class, and the a-b-c-d longitudinal arrow represents the social or bureaucratic stratification. We can find three characteristics of the banquet food resource allocation in China.

First, it presents the main characteristics of parallel communication, most banquets expressed by d-d', c-c' and b-b' are among relatives and groups at the same level. This is because of the size of population in lower class. Each person may not attend banquets so frequently, but every banquet may end up with large numbers with people joining gradually.

Second, banquet resources show upward mobility, that is, people of low level treat those of prominent level to feasts. It may also happen that someone important is not at an elevated level but possesses the resources needed by the entertainer. This means that the motivation for a banquet is subject to the influence of 'social tension'. Social tension is the power above everyone and the resources it entails. When playing the game around scarce resources, people will, because of the lack of constraint mechanism of public choice and transparent procedures, rush to entertain people of power. Competing for more luxury banquets not only became the effective means for influential persons to facilitate the next step of choosing strategies, but also improved the efficiency of any dealings (Zhang 2017).

Third, cross-class banquets are relatively rare, namely the banquets of a-b, b-c and c-d are commonly seen while those of a-c and b-d are less common. As for a-d sitting at a table, it probably never happens unless when the important person inspects work at the grass-roots level and joins the meal, which is characterized by anthropology as ritual performance. It is hard to imagine that an average citizen

can invite the head of a department under a provincial government, or a ground-level government official can invite a senior official at the provincial level to join his or her banquet. Dining at different tables is often adopted in cross-level situations. The driver of a senior government official is, for example, seldom seen at the same table with the official. This is like the case when you may help a beggar, but you never ask him to join you for the meal (Baker and Friel 2016).

Status identification in a diet exists everywhere. The identity system is usually heavily guarded, the separation level and identity gap are more complicated than we usually think. Banquet stratification shows that people's gathering of the same status is highly organized, which implicates hierarchical system control and its displacement on private space (Yang 2014). It transcends the interaction between formal occasions and serious occasions, and through the replacement of hierarchy, the power holders can be properly released from the restraints and behavioral requirements required by formal occasions. In the formal space of power field, such as in the office, conference venues and other situations, the power owner must sit seriously with little smile, immersed in an atmosphere of 'halo' majesty. According to Goffman's theory of theater, the official situation of the power owner is merely a for-stage performance, which requires backstage support, and the bigger the power, the greater the backstage (Goffman 1974).

The banquet, in the form of backstage in the power field, makes the power effect more enjoyable and attributes power to the specific interpersonal circle through the verbal interaction of chatting, drink and toasting. Once the circle is confirmed and established, the unknown trades begin to unfold secretly in the secondary backstage of the banquets. The banquet being highly organized is therefore only a representation, it is the fixation and consolidation of interpersonal circles that is its symbol. The trades hidden behind will most probably become the ultimate significance of banquet symbol (Tian and Luo 2013).

The first feature is that this simple model shows that banquets are dominated by the interaction at the same level and the banquets between the upper and lower levels are fewer, but it refers to the opportunities of banquets rather than the number of banquets. In the bureaucracy society, the custom of respecting superiors is the traditional way of interaction among people from different social classes. The second feature refers to the banquets, at least in city areas, it occurs much more frequently than the first type. Because the main purpose of the banquet between relatives and people at the same level is to exchange feelings, the average number of a banquet is limited (Chen and Wang 2017).

Because of the base number of the lower stratum, the absolute number still appears large, reality is that the opportunities and numbers for individuals at the lower stratum to host banquets or be invited to banquets are low. Between the individuals at the lower stratum and the total amount of banquets at the lowest level, the opportunity and number have a negative correlation. On the other hand, individuals at an elevated level are at high frequency in terms of the opportunity and quantity of hosting and attending banquets. There is a positive correlation between the opportunity and quantity of banquets. They constitute the main body

of banquets held at high-end hotels, which is a distinctive characteristic of the group different from other groups (Sun 2015).

5. Conclusion

Social and political factors have a significant and special impact on the development and transformation of Chinese food culture. Being influenced and transformed by political ideology, eating moved away from the physical and physiological significance of allaying hunger, nutrition, and enjoyment of eating. It was oriented towards political ethics. It became not only the ritual and order carrier of a series of political and ethical relationships like the nobility and the low classes, privilege, honor, seniority, dignitaries, and so forth, but also a tool in political arena for building trusts and securing personal gain as a government official.

In addition, the high and low social status and polarization between the rich and the poor are fully embodied by the huge disparity of food consumption and the extreme inequality of available food resources. It created sharp social contra-dictions in all dynasties and ages. As the most important part of social material and cultural life, food culture was in terms of origin far earlier than the origin of national politics. Once the national politics appeared, food culture has never detached itself from the national politics to exist independently. On the contrary, food culture was subject to political interference, participated in politics and finally served politics consciously or unconsciously. In this way, the development of food culture in ancient China showed the obvious political ideological features.

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