



Anthropological Thoughts on the Chinese Culinary Culture

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ABSTRACT Taking the documentary film 'A Bite of China' as the subject, this paper reviews the major contents of the film and probe the cultural phenomenon behind it as an anthropological film by the methodology of content-based analysis. The documentary introduces a variety of Chinese culinary cultures in seven episodes mainly including the acquisition of various kinds of food and the culinary techniques of food. The anthropological significance of the Chinese culinary culture is explained. It in-depth discusses why 'A Bite of China' became the most popular documentary film in China at that time from the perspective of film and television shooting technology and post-production.

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, a documentary titled 'A Bite of China' became popular in China, allowing the Chinese people to understand the rich and colorful diets among different ethnic groups in various regions and natural environments in an all-round and multi-angle way for the first time. The documentary shows the impact of food on Chinese people's life and behavior in various respects, especially in the acquisition of original materials and the culinary arts of delicacies. In addition, the documentary delicately depicts the unique charm of Chinese cuisine, as well as the rituals, ethical awareness, customs and habits involved.

As is known to all, Chinese culture has a long history and has a long tradition of culinary culture (Tian et al. 2018). It is very particular about diet. It requires excellent materials, exquisite cutting skills, unique duration of cooking, diverse skills, harmony between five flavors and elegant appeal. China has a vast territory with abundant resources, and various regions, nationalities and climates lead to a variety of culinary cultures with diverse styles, which provides abundant material for the shooting of 'A Bite of China' (Zhang 2012: 62). On this basis, 'A Bite of China' narrates various cuisines in all parts of China from different angles. It is a summary of the Chinese culinary culture with a long history, and a collective presentation of the culinary cultures of all ethnic groups living in different environments in China.

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Objectives

The Chinese culinary culture in 'A Bite of China' is involved in the ways to acquire original materials and cook delicious foods, with a detailed description of the humanities, history and ecosystem of regional cuisines. The documentary not only presents the culinary cultures in various parts of China in an all-round way, but also gives a summary of regional and ethnic cuisines in China. This paper does not intend to carry out the traditional research on the ethnography of food, which refers to the relationship between a single commodity or substance, food and social changes, food non-safety, diet and rituals, diet and identity, diet and society and so on. From the shooting techniques and narrative skills of 'A Bite of China', this documentary undoubtedly has the nature of "cultural record" in anthropological films, especially in the introduction of rituals, ethnic groups, customs and other aspects involving the objectives of the traditional anthropological studies. Therefore, it is completely logical and reasonable to regard it as an anthropological film concerning the Chinese culinary culture.

The purpose of this paper is to deconstruct the documentary in depth from the perspective of generalized anthropology, to re-examine the response of the traditional Chinese culinary culture, which has been accumulated a lot in the long history, to the modern fast food culture, concerning whether it adheres to its original style or choose to change, and the impact it poses to the urban and rural cultural groups. Moreover, this paper examines why 'A Bite of China' can

outplay the documentaries on the Chinese culinary culture in recent years based on visual anthropology and cultural criticism, as well as conducts academic discussions on the presentation and shooting ethics of the culinary culture in 'A Bite of China'.

METHODOLOGY

Since the beginning of twenty-first century, plenty of new ways have emerged to process, store, distribute and accesses audiovisual information. Multimedia communication establishes new forms of communication between people, between people and environment. Intelligent media interfaces are becoming increasingly important, and machine assistance in accessing media, in acquiring, organizing, distributing, manipulating and consuming audiovisual information has become vital (Ohm 2016). Content based analysis as a research method has been widely applied by social scientists to study cultural and social phenomena. Content analysis classifies textural material, reducing it to more relevant, manageable bits of data, which uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text (Weber 1990). There is no simple right way to do content analysis, instead researchers must judge what methods are more appropriate for their unique studies. In this study, the current researchers applying the content-based analysis by continuously taking notes and repeating watching the films under reviewing, then process the reviewing notes in each episode to generate the discussing topics and theories.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

'A Bite of China' describes the culinary cultures of all ethnic groups in China in seven episodes, including "Gifts from Nature", "The Story of Staple Foods", and "Inspiration for Change", "The Taste of Time", and "Secrets of the Kitchen", "A Perfect Blend of Five Flavors and Our Farm". Through these seven episodes, it displays the categories of cuisines of various ethnic groups in China and their detailed cooking techniques, so that people will have a per-

ceptual understanding of culinary cultures of ethnic groups in different regions.

Interpretation of 'A Bite of China'

In Episode 1 "Gifts from Nature", it includes the matsutake from Shangri-la, (Yunnan Province) Grilled Matsutake; winter bamboo shoots from Suichang, Zhejiang Province (Youmen Dongsun (Stewed Bamboo Shoots) and Xuecai Dongsun Doufu Tang (Soup of Tofu, Winter Bamboo Shoots and Potherb Mustard); well salt from Dali, Yunnan Province (Nuodeng Huotui) Nuodeng Ham from Yunlong County, Lawei Piao-xiang Yan Du Xian (Smoked Pork with Pickled Winter Bamboo Shoots), lotus roots from Jiayu County, Hubei Province, Paigu Lianou Tang (Soup of Lotus Roots and Pork Ribs), Jiaoyan Oujia (Lotus Roots with Spicy Salt and Force-meat) and Suanla Ouding (Hot and Sour Lotus Roots); fish from Chagan Lake, Jilin Province, Jingcai Jianmen Yutou Paobing (Beijing cuisine: Bread Soaked in Fish Head Soup), Jianju Majiaoyu (Pan-fired Mackerel), Suancai Yu (Boiled Fish with Pickled Cabbage and Chili), Songshu Guiyu (Sweet and Sour Mandarin Fish), and Kua Dun Yu (Stewed Fish). This part mainly chooses different foods as gifts from nature where the eco-geographical environment is greatly varied between North and south, East and West in China with the changes in the four seasons to show the Chinese ecological wisdom that remains unchanged for thousands of years and passes on from mouth to mouth.

In Episode 2 "The Story of Staple Foods", it includes Huang Momo (Yellow Steamed Buns made of broom corn millet), the staple food of people in Northern Shaanxi; rice noodles of the Dong people in Liping, Guizhou Province; Changshou Mian (Longevity Noodles on the birthday); Niurou Lamian (Hand-Pulled Noodles with Beef in Lanzhou); Yangrou Paomo (Pita Bread Soaked in Lamb Soup); Qishan Saozi Mian (Qishan Noodles with Minced Pork) in Xi'an, Shaanxi; Rongzong (Glutinous Rice Dumplings Filled with Meat) in Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province; Niangao (Rice Cake) in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province; Jiaozi (dumplings), the staple food for Chinese people in the Spring Festival, and other staple foods. Through the introduction of these

staple foods, it traces back to the agricultural pattern formed in China for thousands of years, as the dry farming areas of wheat and corn along the Yellow River in the north and the rice farming areas along the Yangtze River in the south with sufficient sunshine, and the staple food pattern formed by the people limited by them, namely, Rice in South and Noodles in North.

In Episode 3 “Inspiration for Change”, it starts with the fermentation of the original materials of food, together with the ancestors’ wise use of jars, pots and other utensils, as well as the view of time based on experience accumulation, so that the original materials can be transformed into delicacies because of the fermentation of microorganisms. The key point is to elaborate how the Chinese people make ingenious use of cooking techniques in the transformation of materials and how they get the right time in the process of transformation. The cuisines roughly include tofu from the Old Jianshui Town in Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Nai Dou Fu (Dried Milk Cake) in the Ujumchin Steppe, Rushan (a dairy product in the shape of fan) in Bai nationality in Yunnan Province; and Maodoufu (Hairy Tofu covered with white hypha) in southern Anhui Province; Shaoxing Huangjiu (Rice Wine in Shaoxing) and soy sauce in Northeast China. The charm of “change” lies in the addition of human factors, which makes food itself increase its taste that has not had flavor-type transformants (mostly presented by fungi), thus increasing the delicacy of the material itself.

In Episode 4 “The Taste of Time”, starting from the relationship between time and food, it describes the cuisines formed after the baptism of time. It roughly includes salting, sugaring, oil immersion, saucing, airing, seasoning, freezing and other methods for preserving food. During time, the materials will become tasty with the help of various condiments. Finally, several combinations of flavors arise from the neutralization of “time and flavorings” “in food, coupled with the nature of the material itself. The cuisines involved include Paocai (pickled vegetables) of the Chaoxian nationality; Lawei (preserved meat) in Hong Kong; Larou and Yanyu (cured meat and salted fish) of the Miao nationality in Hunan Province; Xiangxi Xunrou (Xiangxi Bacon); Nan’an Laya (Nan’an Preserved Duck); ham and

bacon from Anhui Province; Jinhua Ham from Zhejiang Province; mullet roe from Taiwan; and shrimp paste from Hainan. Time plays a crucial role in the transformation of taste in food. The clever grasp of time (duration of heating, cooking time, curing time, etc.) has become the most important way to transform the materials in the Chinese culinary culture.

In Episode 5 “Secrets of the Kitchen”, starting from the artistic characteristics of Chinese cuisines, it illustrates that Chinese cuisines not only brings wonderful enjoyment to people’s taste buds. Visually, every Chinese cuisine is an exquisite work of art with perfect color, fragrance, taste, look and utensils. The essence of the three stages of cooking, steaming and stir-frying experienced by the Chinese people is to control and grasp the relationship between water and fire in food, and to integrate and neutralize all kinds of condiments, as well as to develop a trinity of perception of taste, smell and vision through the processing and repair of cooks. It is mainly related to the cuisine boiled and stewed by the people in Nixi Village with black pottery; Qiguoji (steamed chicken soup, Yunnan style); Shizitou (Lion’s Head: Steamed Fish Head with Diced Hot Red Peppers); Wensi Tofu; Jianzhen Suya (Jianzhen Vegetarian Duck, made with skin of tofu, black fungus, water bamboos, *coprinus comatus*, cayenne pepper and carrots); steamed pig, a cuisine in the Cantonese village banquet; the request of Huaiyang cuisine for cooks in cutting skills; the use of oil and hot pepper in Hunan cuisine; Xihu Cuyu (Steamed Grass Carp in Vinegar Gravy), a Hangzhou cuisine and the secrets of the kitchen among ordinary people.

In Episode 6 “A Perfect Blend of Five Flavors”, based on the importance of “taste” in cuisines, it introduces various condiments, original materials, and cooking methods, and various tastes, such as salty and fresh, sweet and salty, sour and sweet, sour and hot, spicy and hot, bitter and fragrant, fresh and fragrant, are shown by various masters of seasoning. It is involved in sugar, pepper, hot pepper, salt, dried orange peel, vinegar and other condiments. The cuisines include Jiangpaigu (Braised Spare Ribs in Brown Sauce) in Wuxi; Tangcong Bobing (Spring Onion Flatbread) in Chaozhou; Chenpi Ya (Fried Duck Tongues with Tangerine Peel) in Macao; Yaorou (Cured Pork) in Zhenjiang; Yuxiang Rousi (Shredded Pork with Garlic Sauce),

Mapo Tofu (Stewed Tofu with Minced Pork in Pepper Sauce) and Tengjiao Yu (Rattan Pepper Fish) in Sichuan cuisine; Doubanjiang (Thick Broad-bean Sauce) in Sichuan; Yuwan Zicai Bao (Soup of Fish Ball and Seaweed); Qingzheng Yu (Steamed Fish) and Baiqieji (Boiled Chicken with Sauce) in Guangzhou cuisine. The sweet, sour, bitter, pungent, and salty flavors and their variant flavors make Chinese cuisine ever-changing. When cooking dishes, seasoners do not use a single flavor, but pay attention to blending and balancing the flavors in a dish, so that the taste of dishes can perfectly agree with people's taste buds.

In Episode 7 "Our Farm", starting from the dishes on the table, it then focuses on the vast fields that produce various materials of the dishes, explores the sources of delicacies and the ways how they are cultivated by human beings in numerous ways, and highlights the ecological and environmentally friendly way of agricultural production. Specifically, it includes glutinous rice in terraced fields in Congjiang County, Guizhou Province, where Dong, Miao and Zhuang people live together; sea cucumbers, abalones and sea urchins in Zhangzi Island, in the northern Yellow Sea; taro in Duotian, Xinghua, Jiangsu, the Yangtze River Delta; barley in Shigatse Prefecture, of Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau; vegetables in roof gardens of the hutongs in Beijing. This part mainly presents the diversity of cuisines and agriculture in China, and the variations in cuisines and materials between regions. Farming nations in various regions make ingenious use of the gifts of nature, create delicious food, nurture culture, as well as adapt to and transform the history of natural ecological environment.

Anthropological Deconstruction in 'A Bite of China'

From the traditional anthropological point of view, ethnography refers to a textual monograph developed in the field work involving observation and description towards a community for a long time (usually more than a year). The theoretical support extracted from the monograph is mainly the primary materials collected by individuals in observation, which are usually a panoramic description of the whole community. Typ-

ical ethnography describes the history of ethnic groups, the geographical environment in which they live, the patterns of kinship systems, symbols, politics, economic systems, educational or social systems, and the connection between the target culture and the mainstream culture (Fetteman 2007: 10).

Through the analysis of ethnography, Wolcott has found that the central elements of ethnography are as follows: First, the author uses descriptions with high-level details; Second, the author tells the story informally, just like a storyteller; Third, the author explores the cultural events of the roles and the behaviors of the groups; Fourth, the author describes the daily life of everyone; Fifth, the overall format is descriptive, analytical and explanatory; Sixth, the article contains questions (Wolcott 1997: 328).

Thus, the holistic and global "cultural description" has become one of the basic elements of traditional ethnic groups. 'A Bite of China' takes the form of "anti-tradition" to show culinary culture in China. Its production process is contrary to the inherent mode of traditional ethnography, and what is presented to us in the seven episodes is the fragmented culinary culture involving complex groups. Through extensive searches for materials concerning food in various regions and the editing by video cameras and recorders, many fragmented landscapes of culinary culture as montage have been produced. It's certain that such a presentation of culinary culture is also the concrete expression of narration – transformation – meaning in the semiotics of post-modernism. The following is a detailed analysis of the documentary.

Examples of Traditional Anthropological Research in 'A Bite of China'

Episode 1 is titled "Gifts from Nature". It chooses the ethnic groups living in distinct geographical and ecological environments in China and the culinary cultures arising from people living in vastly different natural environments, and shuttles people's attitudes towards cuisines to reflect how nature gives Chinese people cuisines as gifts and how do the Chinese people live in harmony with nature. Gifts from nature involved in this episode mainly include matsutake in Shangri-la, Yunnan, Nuodeng Ham in

the north of Dali, Yunnan Province, and bamboo shoots in Liuzhou, Guangxi Province (winter bamboo shoots in Suichang, Zhejiang Province), fishing in the Xisha Islands, in Sanya, Hainan (stilt fishing, a custom in Wanwei Village of the Jing nationality in Hainan), lotus roots in Hubei and Hunan Provinces along the Yangtze River, and winter fishing in Chagan Lake, Jilin Province and so on. From a spatial point of view, the gifts from nature are arranged from south to north. From the perspective of time, it mainly concentrates on autumn and winter. From the climatic point of view, except for the plateau climate in Yunnan, the warm and hot climate in Southern China has gradually transited to the cold climate in Northern China. To sum up, this episode mainly summarizes the dietary and living conditions of people benefiting from gifts of nature on the east of the Mohe-Tengchong line in China, when there is a small-time gap.

Cultural Ecology Research

The documentary starts with the “matsutake” in Shangri-la area of Diqing, Yunnan Province, which is an elf-like food growing in primitive forests and becoming the favorite on the dining table in cities because of its rich nutritional value and great difficulty in picking. Matsutake grows in mingled forests of pine and oak, and is extremely sparsely distributed, so that people must pick it in the forest after raining. Tibetans in Shangri-la have a chance to pick up matsutake after the rainy season every year, and it has not been a long time since matsutake became a dish on people’s dining table. Due to the growing market demand, matsutake in Shangri-la County is regarded as a rare wild fungus, which is divided into 48 grades. The purchasing price of matsutake is 80 Yuan per piece in its origin, but it will be sold at 700 Yuan per piece where it is sold, obviously showing the excellent value of matsutake. After picking up matsutake, every dweller in the mountains will consciously cover up the fungus pit with pine needles on the ground so that the hyphae will not be destroyed. While getting the gifts from nature, the mountain people will also abide by the rules of the forests out of habit, which is a cultural habit for obtaining gifts of nature s for a

long time. Even when the market economy has invaded such a marginal area in history as Shangri-la, the original ecological view of culture spread among the mountain people still plays a role in guiding people to live in harmony with nature from generation to generation.

The regional transformation from the southwest frontier to the northeast frontier to the southeast coast demonstrates the way that various ethnic groups get food from nature in terms of space and climate. The regional transformation between the land and the ocean demonstrates the route that people get food from the source. In the process of interaction with nature, each ethnic group has developed its own “ecological rules”, which have evolved into a unique ecological culture and regulated the behavior of each member in the ethnic group. On the other hand, nature regards her generosity as a reward for human beings.

Salt, the Intermediate of Cultural Exchange

At present, the most famous works about condiments in academic circles take the micro part of culinary culture, namely, original materials and condiments as elements of cooking and cultural exchanges to carry out special studies, to emphasize how the trade and dissemination of certain edible element changed the pattern of world trade from various aspects, changed the growth and decline of the geographic pattern of ancient empires, and the dietary preferences and tastes of human beings. The gift of nature continuing in ‘A Bite of China’, mainly the gift of land, is salt, the most crucial element in the process of making Nuodeng Ham.

Salt, an important condiment in Nuodeng Ham, is also an extension of such research. Salt, as the most important commodity in the area inhabited by ethnic groups in Nuodeng in history, has a history of nearly a thousand years. The technique of boiling salt with salt water used to be one of the aspects that Chinese anthropologists are interested in. The description of Nuodeng Ham begins with the boiling of Nuodeng salt, in which several symbolic expressions of anthropology are used. Starting with the construction of the “earth stove” for boiling salt in winter, the “brine” was transported from the salt well with a history of thousands of years and then boiled on the stove. About 4 hours

later, the brine was gradually crystallized into salt. Then, the weight of salt was fixed by “mould”, and the specifications of Nuodeng salt flowing into the market were determined by such a precise mode of measurement to facilitate the pricing, which fully showed the importance of salt in Nuodeng. Then the pork for ham was selected, and the salt was evenly applied to the surface of pork and knead repeatedly when the weather was sunny, and the temperature was low between the Winter Solstice (22nd solar term) and the Great Cold (24th solar term). After a month of deep fermentation, the pork was hung outdoors to be blown by warm air. After 2-3 years, Nuodeng Ham was successfully salted. In the process of salting Nuodeng Ham, Nuodeng salt joined in the process as the most important auxiliary symbol. The ham made by Nuodeng people with Nuodeng salt is the creation of the national culinary culture based on gifts of nature, while its function cannot be underestimated.

Nuodeng salt, which used to be the most important commodity in the Tibet-Yi Corridor on the border of the Chinese Empire, became a medium for the interaction between Sichuan, Yunnan and Tibet. It has formed a commodity trade circle with tea in eastern Sichuan, horses in south-eastern Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and northwestern Sichuan and the spices from India, so that its anthropological significance is self-evident.

Research on Rituals

From land to sea, human beings are also receiving gifts from the sea. The gift of the sea also starts and ends up with a series of “symbolic” rituals and actions. On the Chagan Lake of Jilin Province, the Mongolians in the Gorlos Grassland, armed with cotton socks, boots and hats made of dog skin, break ice at the previously chosen fishing spot. They choose to fish in sunny days, as oxygen in the water increase and the fish crowd together, which is easier for fishing. They throw a fish net to the lake under the ice, while the amount of fishing depends entirely on the judgment of Shi Baozhu, the experienced chief fisherman. The capstan is set on the ice with a rope wound around the capstan to relate to horses. Then, the horses are driven to pull the fish net under the ice.

When Spring Festival is approaching every year, there will be a grand sacrifice for the lake

and fish. Because of the involvement of tourism elements (tourists and business), the ceremony itself has changed. With the development of government tourism projects, the sacrificial ceremony and the symbols of the ceremony, such as “mask”, “sacrificial costume”, “chief fisherman”, “flag of head” and “sacrificial music”, are also changing. Traditional rituals exist only in the “historical memory” of older fishermen like the chief fisherman. Fishermen in Chagan Lake use the fish net with the mesh that is 20cm in diameter so that it can only trap fish over five years old and the young fish are deliberately missed by fishermen.

As the Gorlos Mongol saying goes, always leave something for the next hunt, and it is a strict rule among the fishermen that has been passed on for generations, and an agreement between fishermen and lakes and oceans.

Stilt fishing, a traditional fishing method, still exists in Wanwei Village on the three islands of Hainan inhabited by Jing ethnic groups. In the summer morning or evening along the coast, fishermen, by casting the fish net while standing on stilts, can catch fish and shrimp in the shallow sea. However, such traditional fishing method has been gradually replaced by modern ocean fishing and can be only seen in folklore performances. And the fishing skills are also likely to fail to be handed down from past generations. Ocean fishing is common in Sanya, Hainan. Before departure, the fishing crew will first seek divination to choose a lucky day, and prepare ocean-going food, fresh water, diesel, medicine, fishing tools and other items. The fishing crew is generally composed of 20 young and middle-aged people aboard, while the fishing lasts twenty to thirty days. They also offer sacrifices to the sea gods on board. Whether the crew can harvest in the ocean fishing also depends entirely on the fortune and the judgment of the captain.

Rituals such as “stilt fishing”, “sacrifice for the lake and fish” and “seeking divination” originally belong to the topics of traditional anthropological studies. Here we consider the rituals themselves and explain the functional significance behind them. Thus it can be concluded that these rituals originated from the animism and myths and legends, that is, the evolution of the worship of “sea god” and “lake god” that has been passed so far. People can interact with gods through these rituals and pray for the “gods” to bless them to get a bumper harvest

from nature. From the development of fishing rituals mentioned above, as the fishing industry develops, whether people can get gifts from nature is completely based on the relationship between man and nature, rather than the god making a trouble. On this basis, the “stilt fishing” has gradually become an item in folklore tourism, while the sacrifice for the lake and fish and the awareness of seeking divination itself is also changing. The sacred rituals have gradually become performances, while the nature of rituals themselves has switched from the originally religious event to a social event. By understanding rituals from the perspective of performing behavior and process, it enables us to realize that cultural changes are intense and profound in the process of modern social changes. Cultural changes from the angle of rituals have fully illustrated this aspect.

Fragmented Binary Opposition Combination

Cross-space Binary Opposition

In Episode 1 “Gifts from Nature”, the editors clearly used the cross-space binary opposition combination to represent the gifts from nature in two directions. Zhuoma and her mother pick up matsutake, a natural fungus in the primary forest of Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, which is a gift from the forest. In the winter fishing of Chagan Lake of Jilin Province, Shi Baozhu, chief fisherman, leads the fishing crew to fish in the ice lake, which is a gift from the lake. The binary opposition combination between the southwest and the northeast, between the forest and the lake and the matsutake (vegetable) and fish (meat), as a cross-spatial and regional manifestation, enables the spectators to experience different materials of food as gifts from nature under strong environmental differences, and sigh at the rich and colorful culinary cultures arising from the diversity of geographical and ecological environments in the vast territory of China. However, within such binary opposition combination, there is a very high “ecological tacit understanding” between man and nature, which is manifested in a harmonious ecological view. That is, after picking up matsutake, people fill the pit with silver needles to ensure that the hyphae are not destroyed. The winter fishing of Chagan Lake uses a net with the meshes which are 20cm

in diameter so that it can only trap fish over five years old and the young fish are deliberately missed. The strict regulation in the forest and the rule among the fishermen, which has been passed down for generations, have become the ecological rules for farmers to continuously get gifts from nature. Only by strictly observing them can human beings benefit from nature for a long time and live in harmony with nature.

Binary Opposition between Urban and Rural Areas

The binary opposition between urban and rural areas has deeply influenced the development of contemporary Chinese society. In the same way, when the Chinese culinary culture is introduced in ‘A Bite of China’, it also reflects the diet and lifestyle of the two communities from the urban and rural perspectives. The binary opposition between urban and rural areas in this documentary is reflected in many aspects. For example, when Zhuoma and her mother pick matsutake in Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, they will earn a total of 5,000 Yuan after the challenging work for two months, as matsutake is divided into 48 grades and is very cheap in its origin. However, when the packaged matsutake is delivered to the restaurant in a big city, a dish of Grilled Matsutake can be sold at as high as 1,600 Yuan, becoming a dish for the people with certain consumption capacity. In the process of modernization and urbanization, luxury consumption in cities drives demand, which makes such matsutake collectors as Zhuoma and her mother lie on the top link in the production relations. Because of the constraints of transportation, information and so on, the top groups are unable to decide the price independently, so they are still at the edge of the market economy, and they are unable to have a say in the price of diner goods, which refer to materials of food here, in cities. In addition, in Episode 2 “The Story of Staple Foods”, there is a binary economic opposition between urban and rural areas, between the individual business model of “Yellow Steamed Buns” represented by Huang Guosheng, an old man in Northern Shaanxi, and the production of Zongzi (a traditional Chinese dumpling made of glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves) on the modern assem-

bly line. Therefore, there is also a huge contradiction between urban and rural interaction with “people” as the intermediary in culinary culture, which is not only reflected in economic structure, but also in culture, especially in culinary culture.

Binary Opposition between Refined and Popular Tastes

We usually use the phrase of suiting both refined and popular taste to describe that the literary and artistic works are beautiful and popular which can be appreciated by highbrows and lowbrows alike. Although it is the result of common appreciation in the end, the artificial division of refined and popular has become an indisputable fact in traditional Chinese culture. In ‘A Bite of China’, there are also the boundaries between refined and popular culinary cultures. For example, in Episode 5 “Secrets of the Kitchen”, international chefs like Juchanglong and Liang Zigeng serve five-star hotels or higher, and their target customers are upper-class dignitaries with solid economic foundation. Tashi, a Tibetan black potter, and Ouyang Guangye, a village cook, represent the cultures of family cuisine and village banquet and the culinary culture at the village level. These two groups, which have obvious boundaries in cuisine, have become the representatives of refined culinary culture in urban China and popular culinary culture in rural China. Similarly, the refined and popular culinary cultures also represent the sub-culinary cultures of the highbrow urban style and the lowbrow rural style, as well as cater to the needs of the urbanized and village-oriented target groups.

Binary Opposition between Tradition and Modernity

The contradiction between tradition and modernity has become a serious problem in the process of inheritance of Chinese culture, while change has become its main means. Similarly, it is also embodied in ‘A Bite of China’. In Episode 1 “Gifts from Nature”, Chief Shi in Chagan Lake of Jilin Province will take part in the sacrifice for the lake and fish every year. To cater to the tourism industry, Chief Shi himself will play a lead-

ing role in the performance, but the major ceremony has been far from that in the memory of the elderly, which has become the compromise-based adaptation when the traditional culture encounters the impact of modern tourism. In Episode 6 “A Perfect Blend of Five Flavors”, the villagers along the coast of Eastern Guangdong followed the tradition of making a living by evaporating brine in the sun to make salt in history. However, because of their low income, most of the villagers choose to go out to work and large areas of salt fields have been abandoned, but Liu Yingwu still chooses to make a living by making salt. As Liu said, “Salt distillation is a legacy. So, after all, I am protecting this history.” Thus under the influence of market economy, there are still individuals who stick to the tradition, instead of being attracted by the temptation of market economy.

Cultural Phenomena in ‘A Bite of China’

After the release of ‘A Bite of China’ on CCTV, it has attracted wide attention on the Internet and has been broadcasted in Chinese communities, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. As a result, a strong cultural phenomenon has emerged in the Chinese community. The awakening of tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon to the taste bud memory of overseas Chinese of the same origin has become one of its main factors. In mainland China, a “fever of ‘A Bite of China’” has come into being rapidly, and the audience could hardly wait to watch the second ‘A Bite of China’. With the afterheat of the first ‘A Bite of China’, it is necessary for us to analyze some cultural phenomena hidden behind it from an anthropological point of view.

Linkage Effect of “Cultural Products+ By-products”

In addition to the main products, there will be additional products for a good cultural and creative commodity. Besides the documentary as a main product, ‘A Bite of China’ is sold to TV stations through copyright sales and some books are published. It also includes many additional products, such as time-honored food brands and brand promotion of food materials (Guang Ming Daily Reporter 2012). The “cultur-

al phenomenon of A Bite of China” is so popular that it can be seen from a case. Entering ‘A Bite of China’ on the book website Amazon, 97 images and books about the culinary culture will come out, all of which were published around July 2012. All of them are the linkage effect of the hot documentary ‘A Bite of China’ on CCTV.

In addition, the dissemination on the Internet also allows ‘A Bite of China’ to attract a higher recognition among the audience. Lu Didi, owner of an online store on Taobao, said that on the night when the Nuodeng Ham from Yunnan Province was introduced on the first episode, her store had 32 new orders. Since the launch of ‘A Bite of China’ on May 14, there have been more than 4 million searches for snacks and specialties on Taobao, an increase of 13.54 percent on a month-on-month basis. More than 5 million items have been traded, while several online sellers have benefited from the documentary. The style of A Bite has also been spread far and wide on the Internet, such as A Bite of Tsinghua University, A Bite of Peking University and A Bite of Communication University of China and so on (Niu and Li 2012).

Some people, according to the introduction on ‘A Bite of China’, found the “Mongolian yurt” restaurant to have a taste of Mongolian food. Based on the introduction in ‘A Bite of China’, some audience made a food map on the regions and categories of the cuisines and posted it on Weibo. It can be seen from this that the advertising effect arising from the cultural products of ‘A Bite of China’ and their secondary by-products has become a cultural product. With the help of modern new media (such as Weibo and WeChat), such highly influential cultural products not only play a role in satisfying the sensor experience in eyes, ears, noses and body and the emotional and spiritual feelings of the individual audiences, but also exert a profound impact on the culture, relationship and economy in the fields of social life.

Crossing the Traditional Presentation Model of Culinary Culture

Today, with the development of modern media, food has become one of the most important topics, which can be roughly divided into the following three categories: (1) TV programs

(introduction and promotion): All Foods and Delicacy (BTV), The Chef’s Choice (CCTV), Our Kitchen (Hebei TV), Fortune Food (SETV), World of Delicious Food (ZJTV), etc. (2) V programs (Game relay): Cooking Contest, Sino-French Food Contest, National Cooking Arena Contest, etc. (3) Documentaries: Tasting Treasures of China, Food on the Silk Road, Chinese Cooking, etc.

The above three categories of gourmet programs (or documentaries) have been operated on TV stations for many years as star programs, but they are still not as popular as ‘A Bite of China’, which arouses a fever of culinary culture in the whole Chinese cultural circle. There are many reasons. Maybe they attach importance to the production process of gourmet food, the popularization of skills in the cooking process, but ignore the significance of cooking as a culture. Maybe the holistic record of cooking food makes the people living at a fast pace in cities feel lengthy and dilatory. Or in the process of introducing gourmet foods, they are mixed with something about tourism and recreation, leading to the deviation of the content of the program, so that the audience will naturally switch their focus from food to others. On the contrary, ‘A Bite of China’ has an extremely accurate positioning. Nowadays, the fast food culture is extremely flourishing, but it grasps the fast-paced life in modern cities, deeply excavates the mentality, pursuit and preferences of people in the civilized society, shoots the scenes across the space and time in a glittering way to present a number of small but exquisite dishes to the audience in a fragmented manner, while abandoning the detailed exhibition process of each dish. Then the “fragmented” landscapes of culinary culture are pieced together in a montage form and connected in series by the structure of the contents and themes, thus producing the seven-episode culinary documentary with cultural implications.

The Expressed Other Cultures and Lost Urban Groups

In anthropology, “other” is relative to “we-group”, while they refer to two groups with diverse cultural characteristics. ‘A Bite of China’ shows the rural life as “other”. The content is

based on the psychological filter of urban people's inherent imagination of rural life. To be more precise, rural people must be expressed by urban people when they are unable to express themselves (He and Fan 2013). 'A Bite of China' is an attempt to present the real rural culture from the perspective of a group of urban people. Because of the regional differences in culture, "urban people" and "rural people" are a pair of unbalanced groups in the eyes of the public in China, and the cultures that they represent are also analyzed corresponding to "civilization" and "incivilization".

'A Bite of China' is mainly concerned with the process of farmers acquiring food materials, and it is certain that there are some scenes concerning how to cook food, mechanized production and elites in the food world. After all, they account for a small proportion. However, from a holistic point of view, the film mainly focuses on showing other's rural life, for panoramically depicting rural culture from the perspective of cuisine. Through the shooting, editing and synthesis of materials, the abstract rural culture in the minds of editors and directors is concretely presented in the form of documentary. When a group of urban people manipulate and shoot a culinary documentary based on the simple outlook on life and ecology of rural people, most of the audience attracted is those in cities. The reason is that the audiences represented by urban residents have some psychological deficiencies, and 'A Bite of China' just fills the psychological black hole and awakens some gene of culinary culture hidden in the body of the audience, which is different from the economic activities that people purchased commodities according to their needs in the pre-capitalist period. 'A Bite of China' is both a product of post-modernism and a cultural product, which has become a good remedy for the cultural deficiency of urban groups. Throughout the process, it can be regarded as a practice that the group, dominated by urban people, seeks for their spiritual home that has long been lost based on the charm of local culture.

Myth of Culinary Culture

One of the main reasons why 'A Bite of China' has become popular is that the editors have

got rid of the general mode of documentary shooting. That is to say, the description of a material or a cuisine is to introduce the living conditions of the characters, customs and habits, natural environment, social environment and other aspects in the introduction to such food, rather than to describe it as a whole, so that the dull culinary documentary itself will become a cultural landscape to show the ceremonies and ethics that food brings to the Chinese people. However, as a cultural phenomenon, it involves many misunderstandings in public perception. The following is an analysis of these misunderstandings.

Does Nature Merely Give Gifts?

'A Bite of China' was originally created according to the internationally prevailing production model. The crew spanned 60 regions in China, and employed three pre-investigators, eight directors and 15 photographers, and three editors. It covered all parts of China, including Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and took 13 months to complete. The documentary is divided into seven episodes, and one episode uses as many as 1,300 shots. With a fast pace and a large amount of information, it tells a story almost every eight minutes. With such a large amount of manpower and material input, it must have taken various materials, while it is indeed difficult to present the seven episodes of the edited documentary to the audience. Here the authors do not intend to examine the abilities of the editors of this documentary, but to take into account whether these scenes presented to the audience are the true reflection of the rural life of the farmers or the ritual show made in the benefit of collectors and editors, what the criteria are when the editors are editing the documentary, whether it is logical fluency or fragmentary narration of the story, and whether some negative economic, cultural and political effects are deliberately avoided in the editing process.

The stilt fishing described in Episode 1 "Gifts from Nature" has become a folk tourism item, and the memory of fishing which has been on the verge of loss is mastered by five old people of Wanwei Village inhabited by the Jing ethnic group. What does the director shoot such materials for? Is he propagandizing the skills that are

about to disappear, or is he laying a foundation for describing the following ocean fishing in Sanya? And is the purpose of the filmmakers, just as Robert Flahadi's classic anthropological film *Nanook of the North* about the hunting of polar bears in Nanuk, solely to describe the traditional fishing skill? It is also in "Gifts from Nature" that there was originally a story of Badu Bamboo Shoots in Tianlin County, Guangxi. Because of the overall drought in Tianlin County, the bamboo shoots were badly harvested, and the hero of the story could only collect bamboo shoots in the lower humid areas of the forest. But the story was finally deleted by the director because it was not glamorous when it came to drought (Nanfang Metropolis Daily 2012). It was a natural disaster, but in 'A Bite of China', it was deliberately concealed because it was not in line with the national arid climate at that time. It is like a beautiful flower, while the filmmakers just keep sticking beautiful petals close to the audience, dazzling their eyes. But the leaves, stems and roots of the flower are inadvertently concealed, which may make the audience subconsciously think that we only get gifts from nature, rather than disasters. So, the value of such cultural product in guiding the audience to recognize reality deserves our doubts.

Secrets Outside the Kitchen

'A Bite of China' devotes a special episode to the secrets hidden in the kitchen of the Chinese culinary culture. The episode is mainly to compare with the western culinary style of raw food and individual serving. Chinese cuisine pays more attention to color, fragrance, taste, look and utensils, and has experienced three important leaps in boiling, steaming and stir-frying through the long-term accumulation in history. It also evolves into the ways of frying in deep oil, stewing, braising, frying in shallow oil, and roasting, while it also attaches importance to the matching of duration of heating, materials and seasoning, which leads to a variety of Chinese culinary cultures. And all these secrets are hidden in the kitchen of China. As the film says, "Secrets of the Kitchen, on the surface, is the art of water and fire. To put it bluntly, it is nothing more than a harmonious relationship between man and nature. The ultimate secret of the kitchen

is that there is no secret, because the land is selfless to humans and because humans all have deep love for delicious food.

However, the secrets outside the kitchen have gradually become the focus of attention in recent years. Many people began to reflect on their attitude towards problem food from the documentary. Especially in the past decade, there have been toxic milk powder, problematic milk, swill-cooked dirty oil, genetically modified rice, and viral meat and vegetables. The reason is that industrialization and marketization make the transformation from original materials to food simplified by diners subjectively. Compared with other important matters in life, food is reduced to a position like "consumables". As a result, the manufacturers in the food production and supply links have abandoned the quality as a premise of operation but taken "profit-seeking" as the sole purpose (Wang 2012: 32).

So, when 'A Bite of China' was hot on the air, the restaurants in the society did not offer as natural, healthy and pollution-free food as displayed in the documentary. On contrast, when having a dinner, we always avoid these problems because of the banquet or the need for entertaining guests, so the culinary culture represented by 'A Bite of China' shows the images that are artificially processed. After viewing the visual feast and taste experience it brings, the audience is more concerned about reflecting on the logic of eating. That is, when the harmonious ecological view advocated by the Chinese culture encounters the market economy, why do businessmen choose to focus on their interests, resulting in the proliferation of toxic food? As for the reasons for the problems, Wang Si, a scholar, argues that it is mainly because of the serious lack of food education (Shi 2009). The association "food education" was first proposed by Sagen Ishizuka, a Japanese health scientist, in his work *Ways to Preserve Health by Food* in 1897. He believes that "Physical education, intellectual education and talent education are food education." In 2005, the Japanese Parliament adopted the Basic Law on Food Education, which implements food education as a national policy and popularizes it in families, schools and even the whole society. Therefore, the definition of food education involves two aspects. On the one hand, it is the foundation of survival, in-

tellectual education, moral education and physical education. On the other hand, through a variety of experiences, people can acquire knowledge about “food” and the ability to choose “food” and cultivate people who can live a life with a healthy diet.) It is obviously difficult to promote and publicize food education in China. We can only regulate the behavior of traders in society by means of moral restraint and legal sanction. After reaching a certain stage, the Chinese people will no longer worry about the secrets outside the kitchen with the help of food education but continue to inherit the secrets in the kitchen.

Misunderstandings in Culinary Culture

As the production crew of ‘A Bite of China’ introduced, “Many of the concepts we have been accustomed to are deduced only when we really get to the field (Nanfang Metropolis Daily 2012).” For example, when filming the episode “Secrets of the Kitchen”, we subconsciously assumed that the Roast Whole Lamb tasted best, while we never considered steaming or boiling it. The people in the grassland, Inner Mongolia selected by the production crew usually boil the mutton in clear water and then add a little salt, which is known as boiled mutton or hand-to-chase mutton. In the authors’ view, the Roast Whole Lamb is the main method of mutton cooking in pastoral areas, while we ignore the lack of wood resources on grasslands and the difficulty of lighting up a bonfire. It is concluded that the whole sheep roasted by bonfire is deduced by the Han people themselves, rather than the way that the Mongolian people eat the lamb.

The broadcasting of ‘A Bite of China’, in addition to describing the acquisition of food materials and the way food is cooked, has accordingly popularized some culinary misunderstandings to the public. Regional culinary culture must be consistent with the local ecological environment, history, humanities, society and economy, which is true in history at least. In the primitive stage of human beings, the cultural transformation from raw food to cooked food is due to the accidental use of fire by human beings, so that people paid attention to collecting and storing the kindling after that to cook the raw local food (animals and plants). It is sure that modern means of transportation and stor-

age make it possible to carry on the exchange of culinary cultures among various regions. For example, today we can find, for example, today we can see seafood, shark fins and abalone in high-end restaurants in Tibet. Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou are also a collection of famous snacks from all over the country, traditional dishes of all nationalities, all the major styles of cooking in China and even the themed restaurants with foreign styles of cooking.

As is known to all, the banquet form of these high-end restaurants is either a business banquet or a government reception, while few salaried persons are likely to have dinner there. Nowadays, culinary cultures are exchanged in various regions, but the local people still inherit the local culinary culture that has been passed down for hundreds or even thousands of years in China and even in most countries of the world. The meaning of such cultural form is consistent with that of the human behavior in filling the stomach based on the local resources in the primitive stage, which agrees with the cultural significance in the traditional saying in China that “Those living on a mountain live off the mountain, those living near the water live off the water-make use of local resources.”

Anthropological Deconstruction of ‘A Bite of China’

Deconstruction refers to the creation of impure structural forms through destruction, to enrich the deconstructed object. The possible sign is that in the confrontation with global integration and international standards, the cultures of the region, the nationality, the history and the individual are made meaningful in today’s world, even if it is only reflected in fragments. After the 1980s, it seemed that there was not such a major theoretical school as structuralism, functionalism and cultural psychological school emerging in the circles of anthropological studies. From this period onwards, the anthropological theoretical research has gradually reflected, criticized, questioned and inherited the existing theoretical schools.

Field in ‘A Bite of China’

The field in the eyes of Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), can first be conceived as a relatively independent social space defined by some specific principles, while each field has its own

unique values and regulatory principles. These principles define a space constructed by the society. Second, field is an active space full of conflict and competition. Third, field is a relational system consisting of a series of objective and historical relations between various positions attached to a certain form of power (or capital) (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 138 - 145). Here we still take Zhuoma and her mother who collected matsutake from Episode 1 "Gifts from Nature" as an example. They live in Shangri-la County inhabited by the Tibetan ethnic group, where they inherit the ecological view of harmonious coexistence between Tibetan people and nature, so that they can get gifts from nature. There is also competition among farmers who collect matsutake, which comes from the "generous" returns brought by matsutake. In addition, the operation of the local market has made matsutake a valuable food incorporated into the global economic system, as it is exported to Japan within three days as mentioned in the film. The substantial number of matsutake collectors in Shangri-la County, represented by Zhuoma and her mother, live in the cultural circles within the field of the Tibetan people, but are involuntarily involved in the world economy. And the reason for this is that the highly valuable matsutake functions as the intermediary.

In-depth Description of Knowledge concerning Local Culinary Culture

Clifford James Geertz believes that cultural analysis is an explanatory subject of exploring the significance, rather than an experimental science of exploring the law. He believes that culture is neither a force nor a cause of social events, actions, institutions or processes, but a social phenomenon that can be clearly described in it, which is a deeply described context, while its purpose is to explain the seemingly mysterious social expressions (Geertz 1999: 5-16). On the surface, 'A Bite of China' displays the description of food materials and cuisines, but in fact, it is to describe the social culture, historical culture and ecological culture hidden behind the cuisine in depth. Although its presentation is a patchwork of fragmented shots, it is really described as a process or an event, whether in the way to acquire food materials by picking, plant-

ing, harvesting, fishing and so on, or in steaming, boiling, stewing, roasting, frying in shallow oil, frying in deep oil and other ways of cooking, so that the audience can deeply understand the clear context of narration. In addition, such a description process also achieves the purpose of displaying the local culture where the cuisine is quite popular. Regardless of the regional flow of food materials or cuisine, the gathering of snack culture to cities has formed a new sort of local culinary knowledge in the exchange and integration of cultures among various regions.

For example, a story goes for the formation of Huaiyang cuisine in 'A Bite of China'. Many merchants moved to Yangzhou to earn a fortune by trading salt, and they brought from their home towns local cooks, foods and flavour, which created the neutral taste of Huaiyang dishes, mild and pleasant, acceptable to both the northerners and southerners. Compared with similar documentaries on culinary culture on CCTV and the large-scale cooking reality shows like Chinese Cooking, the gap is that they focus on individuals but neglect the cultural and social significance behind the cuisines. At the same time, Chinese Cooking is a live reality show, involving certain performances, which is known as ritual performance in anthropology.

Cuisine and Ethnic Boundaries

It is generally believed that, to determine an ethnic group, clothing, language and food are all one of the cultural representations, but food is not the most important. In addition, the boundaries of ethnic groups are very vague and intermingled, so that several factors are required to determine the boundaries (Xu et al. 2005: 85). Taking the description of Lanzhou Hand-pulled Noodles in 'A Bite of China' as an example, it has triggered some reflections on the relationship between Muslim cuisine and their identity. For example, Hui, the primary ethnic group of Chinese Muslims, is also a highly sinicized ethnic group, and she has no national language of her own, and her dress and lifestyle have been gradually sinicized, while the Hui people are widely distributed in China. As far as today's Hui people in China are concerned, because of the limitations of their work and study, most of them have not been engaged in any religious affairs,

such as going to church or chanting scriptures. The only feature hidden in their own hearts that distinguishes them from the Han people is the Muslim cuisine that the Hui nationality has always adhered to. Muslim cuisine refers to the beef and mutton slaughtered by hand after the Amani chants scriptures, and it has become the last baseline for Hui people to distinguish themselves from non-Muslim people. However, in the popular Muslim cuisine, Hui Muslims do not show their ethnic identity in this way.

Instead, for the Hui people, when having a dinner in restaurants, many of them show their ethnic identity and feel assured to see a sign writing Muslim, bottles, and the Shahada that there is no God, but Allah and Mohammed are his messenger, the huge photos of the pilgrimage to Mecca and other Muslim symbols. As for whether the restaurant chefs are Muslims or whether cattle and sheep have been slaughtered, they do not intentionally care about that. Muslim cuisine is the only significant national characteristic of modern Hui Muslims in China. Therefore, the case of Hui Muslims seems to illustrate from another aspect that culinary culture plays an extremely significant role in providing references for the definition of ethnic boundaries.

An Interpretation of Visual Anthropology in 'A Bite of China'

The documentary 'A Bite of China', through various aspects of Chinese cuisine, fully demonstrates the traditions and realities from the cultural aspects that food brings to the Chinese people, such as rituals of life, national customs and ethics. It has witnessed several special food materials in China and a series of cultural elements that are related to food and constitute the characteristics of Chinese cuisine. While leading the audience to understand the beauty and long history of Chinese culinary culture, it has created a model for large-scale culinary documentaries. The culinary documentary has not only become a model for people to experience the Chinese culinary culture visually, but also a film and television work in the way that the content is presented, which naturally makes it possible for us to interpret the Chinese culinary culture from the perspective of visual anthropology.

Visual anthropology is a discipline that expresses the principles of anthropology, records, and exhibits and interprets the culture of a group or attempts to establish cross-cultural comparisons by means of images and videos (Zhuang 2008). As early as the late 1980s, Dr. Tian Guang, an expert in applied anthropology of the Hui nationality in China, and his wife, Wang Hong, translated and introduced Visual Ethnology, the monograph by Professor Karl G. Heider of the United States, to the academic circles in China, which was the first work to introduce the visual ethnology of the United States in mainland China. Professor Heider's monograph is a successful work with both theoretical and practical significance. The book focuses on how to fully express the connotation of ethnology by means of film and television to make the films more ethnological, while discussing various theoretical and practical issues put forward in the process of the development of visual ethnology in an all-round way and elaborating on the ways to produce ethnological films (Li 1990: 57).

Subsequently, many anthropologists in mainland China, including Zhuang Kongshao (2008) and Li Dejun (1990), have studied and filmed several anthropological films. The major of visual anthropology was set up Peking University, Yunnan University and Lanzhou University, so that there have been a considerable number of studies on visual anthropology and academic groups in mainland China.

Unlike the traditional textual culinary ethnographies, 'A Bite of China' is based on culinary culture to display and disseminate the Chinese culinary culture by means of shooting ethnographical films to present a culture constructed under the camera. It is a way to express culinary culture between textbook discussion and on-site observation, which not only transcends the traditional textual presentation in the form of textbook but is also inferior to the audience's experience on the site. It is displayed in the form of images between these two modes of expression, which not only achieves the goal of popularizing the Chinese cuisine culture, but also allows the audience to lose their minds in visual and sensory aspects.

'A Bite of China', a documentary on culinary culture, shows China's rich and colorful food materials in an all-round way, from the aspects

of spatial geography, climate differences, time changes, growth environment and so on. It consists of seven episodes with the themes of “Gifts from Nature”, “The Story of Staple Foods”, “Inspiration for Change”, “The Taste of Time”, and “Secrets of the Kitchen”, “A Perfect Blend of Five Flavors”, and “Our Farm”. Focusing on the key words of “gifts”, “staple foods”, “change”, and “time”, “kitchen”, “blend” and “farm”, it vividly depicts the dazzling Chinese cuisines in the form of montage. Next, the play scripts of the first two episodes will be presented in the form of text, and then it will be analyzed from the perspective of visual anthropology.

China is the earliest country to cultivate rice in the world, with a history of about 7,000 years. Rice is mainly grown in the south of the Yangtze River Basin and the Northeast China Plain in China, and a small amount of rice is also grown in Yinchuan Plain, Ningxia. It has become the staple food for more than 65 percent of Chinese people. The fine species of wheat, which originated in West Asia, were introduced from Hexi Corridor to Central Plains. During the localization for about 4,000 years, it has become the most widely planted crop in Northern China and become the primary staple food for the northerners. Planting traditions in the South and North have led to the culinary pattern of staple food in the south and north of China today.

The directors of ‘A Bite of China’ show us a gluttonous feast in vision. The brilliant Chinese culinary culture is bred by the changeable natural geographical environment in China. While benefiting from nature, the Chinese people strictly abide by the conventions with nature, so that the Chinese culinary culture can have such a long history. Therefore, the documentary detonated the documentary market in China in 2012, became a rare fine work in the mainland documentary market, and won the title of Wild China on the Tongue Tip in the BBC edition. Moreover, the authors believe that this documentary is also a rare masterpiece in visual anthropology in China recently, especially in the visual ethnography of food. For the reasons, it can be concretely analyzed as follows from the perspective of visual anthropology.

First, each episode has its own theme, prominent focus, meticulous scenes, skillful cutting, vivid characters and complete narrative. Seven

episodes are devoted to the elaboration of culinary culture in various regions of China and are all based on the key words in the theme, such as highlighting “gifts” in Episode 1 Gifts from Nature. The key points are also depicted in proper balance, as it just highlights the diverse dietary patterns in China despite a large span in time and space. Lens mostly focuses on the way to obtain materials and the process how the materials turn into dishes by chefs. Close-up and telephoto lenses are combined. Some, from close-up lens, display the meticulous skills of the chef when materials are cooked into dishes to visually stimulate the customers’ multiple associations on the transformation and formation of the delicious food contained in the materials, to stimulate people’s taste buds through nerves, thus stimulating their appetite. Some show the difficulty of obtaining food materials from the telephoto lens, such as the process of collecting matsutake in the primary forests and the workers digging a large area of lotus roots out in Jiayu, Hubei Province. In the acquisition and production of food materials or a dish that is influential in some region, it takes the civilian class, either families or individuals, and starts with a simple story, leading the audience to seek for delicious food.

When displaying the materials or cooking dishes, the documentary also attaches importance to depicting the living environment, lifestyle and spiritual pursuit of the grass-roots class. The scenes are cut and edited very clearly, rather than the messy scenes in other documentaries, and the scene is so real that can drive the taste resonance of diners in an image record of food. The process of making each dish is more like calling the taste memory of the diners through the image-based culinary ethnography. Such memory may exist in a specific stage of each diner in life, and thus the call of the specific dish for the diner’s specific life memory has transcended the food itself and become the true portrayal and resonance of personal feelings and memory. Human beings learn to cook raw food, to be good at cooperating with each other, to be delighted to share food, and to express their feelings and identities with food. These above are the wisdom of human beings living with nature, and that of getting along with each other in the group. People inherit the dietary civilization

generation after generation, with the gratitude to gifts from nature and the respect to the wisdom of human beings (Wang 2012: 31-32).

Second, with the rapid development of catering industry, there are diversified needs for food and drinks. Problems in food safety frequently occur, and the public is eager for the original and non-toxic food. Cuisine is slowly publicized as a culture. Since the reform and opening up, the market economy has acquired the reallocation of resources. In the past, the dishes that were exclusive to the privileged began to be shared by the public, such as the palace banquets entering the streets in cities from the tables of the nobles to accept the public. Moreover, many civilian dishes have begun to become special snacks or become brands in cities, such as Roujiamo (Marinated Meat in Baked Bun), Lanzhou Hand-pulled Noodles and Yangrou Paomo. Regardless of the privileged and the civilians, the dishes in both aspects have flowed to the communities in cities. Finally, streets in cities become where there are all the cuisines, the dishes from various regions, and all kinds of snacks, thereby developing a pluralistic culinary culture in the city.

As for the frequent problems in food safety, toxic milk powder, swill-cooked dirty oil, lean meat powder, genetically modified rice and other problems have been frequently disclosed, thus becoming the greatest worries of the public in food. 'A Bite of China' strives to become originally ecological on the way to acquire materials and cook dishes, so that the audience may subconsciously think that it is true, while the non-toxic food becomes the most desired among the public. The Chinese culinary culture has a long history, but there is hardly any image in the form of documentary that displays culinary ethnography of the Chinese culinary culture from a panoramic view and the anthropological study of Chinese cuisines is still in its infancy. The public's understanding of cuisine almost rests on the taste, seldom understanding the Chinese culinary culture in an all-round way. In such a social and cultural context, the well-made documentary 'A Bite of China', with the key words focusing on culinary culture, introduces the culinary cultures of various ethnic groups, as well as reflects the food-making ceremony of ethnic groups, the folk customs of residential culture

and festival culture, and the ecological tacit understanding between ethnic groups and nature from multiple dimensions of culture. As a result, to a certain extent, 'A Bite of China' shows China's agricultural culture, ecological culture and food culture from the perspective of cuisine.

Third, literary voice-overs are simple but sincere, with the narrative style of foiling the grand culinary culture from the perspective of the grass-roots class. The voice-overs in 'A Bite of China' have great force of emotional penetration, from which the viewer can be touched with the deepest emotions. As in the episode "The Taste of Time", the voice-over goes that "It's the taste of salt, mountain, wind and cloud and the taste of time and love. In a long time, it has incorporated people's affection for homeland and folks as well as human's virtue of thrift and perseverance. After passing by the tip of the tongue, the combined taste reaches deep in heart." The dubbing, combined with the smiles of the representative characters of cuisines in this episode, makes people feel the beauty and hope of life and the success and joy of harvest. The second half of the sentence matches the magnificence of the natural landscape in the picture. The voice-over helps the narration of the picture very well, sublimates the subject of the picture, promotes the ideological significance of the picture, and achieves the unity of the voice-over and the picture (Xiong and Chen 2012: 87-88).

'A Bite of China' presents the acquisition process of each kind of food or the cooking process of each dish through a separate story, such as Zhuoma and her mother who collect matsutake, Maorong and Shengwu who dig lotus roots out in late autumn, and Huang Guosheng, an old man in Northern Shaanxi who sells the Yellow Steamed Buns, and so on. The daily life of these people living at the grass-roots level is their creation of delicious food. Through the stories of these amiable characters, they are organically connected with the delicious food as the media. With the switch between close-up lenses and telephoto lenses, their living conditions are displayed in a panoramic perspective. With the help of the plain civilian language, the documentary mostly focuses on the sources of food and the stories of the people who make food, while introducing local customs, practices and habits, ritual behavior, folk festivals and ethnic

differences that are reflected through these culinary differences from one aspect of food.

'A Bite of China' pursues the natural and inherent aspects of life and pays attention to the ordinary roles in life to reflect the times from a micro point of view (Xiong and Chen 2012: 88). It is especially manifested in the ending of each episode, where there are the simple and honest smiles of the workers who harvest food and cook food in the episode, and the lens goes from near to afar and slows down, showing the most natural and sincere smiles. Such form of manifestation makes it possible for the relevant cuisine and the regional culinary culture that it represents to express itself in the normal culture of each ethnic group, and to become an alien culture highly recognized among the public. The viewers also take their inherent culinary culture (or culinary food), which is known as we-group culture here. When presenting the culinary culture in 'A Bite of China', it also includes eating habits, eating rituals, and lifestyle, geographical and ecological environment, which is known as they-group culture here.

When watching the documentary, the viewers will unconsciously compare we-group culture with they-group culture to a certain degree. There may be two situations. One is that their culinary culture highly accords with that of they-group from some angle, which is embodied in the awakening of the viewer's "culinary memory", becoming an important aspect to capture the viewer's enthusiasm for watching the documentary. The other is that there is no intersection between their culinary culture and that of they-group, which also satisfies the public's curiosity-seeking mentality. At the same time, it is also the purpose of the traditional anthropological research on satisfying people's curiosity about alien cultures, which is reflected in the film of culinary visual ethnography. When the public's novelty-seeking psychology is satisfied, the documentary takes the narrative skills of small stories and common characters, together with the tension of the language and voice on the image to sublimate the content to be expressed in the documentary itself. Instead, it presents us a rich and colorful culinary culture from the perspective of culinary visual ethnography.

Fourth, the content is accurate and comprehensive, panoramically presenting the Chinese

culinary culture and the political and economic outlook of China and the traditional view of ecological civilization in China from the perspective of culinary culture. 'A Bite of China' consists of seven episodes, which are almost related to all kinds of food for the ethnic groups living in China. There are both Han and other ethnic minorities, the groups living on the grassland and on the coastal areas, and those living on the plateau and on the plain, and both the review of history and the innovation of the current cuisines, thereby becoming a living culinary visual ethnography of contemporary China. Diverse dishes in the documentary are either a mature way of livelihood, or a fine art and commodity, or just a meal to satisfy the taste buds of the diners. Of course, it is based on its ultimate results.

In the process of cooking food, we can find the relationship between man, external factors (condiments, fire, cooking utensils, etc.), food materials and dishes. There may be some connection between man and the outside world in the process of cooking the materials into dishes. Such connection may be either entangled in the above-mentioned modes and embodied in the value of food, cooking skills, food memory, or separated from the above-mentioned modes and embodied in the pursuit of economic interests, the inheritance of culinary culture of the groups, and the distinction of ethnic boundaries. In addition, when introducing how to acquire the food materials, the visual ethnography unconsciously shows the traditional ecological concept of the Chinese people concerning the harmony between man and nature. For example, in Episode 1, after Zhuoma collects matsutake, she will cover up the fungus pit with pine needles so that the hyphae will be free from being destroyed. In addition, the chief fisherman in Chagan Lake of Jilin Province fishes with the net that has meshes of 20 cm in diameter, and only traps the fish over five years old. In these two cases, the rules in the forests and the strict rule that has been passed down for generations show why the Chinese people can obtain gifts from nature for a long time, which depends entirely on the ancient and profound ecological wisdom of the Chinese people, an ecological view concerning the harmony between man and nature.

Fifth, it uses modern shooting techniques, and the perfect switch between close-up lenses and telephoto lenses, between theme and groundwork, and the tiny but exquisite recommendations in the form of direct cinema on the culinary cultures with prominent regional differences in China.

'A Bite of China' sent a director team to collect materials in more than 70 shooting sites throughout the country at the beginning of shooting and got fully prepared for the shooting. In shooting, in addition to the use of more advanced international cameras, montage-style picture editing and image composition put the images on the acquisition of food materials and the cooking of dishes into an integrated whole by juxtaposing or superimposing, which allows the viewers to perceive culinary cultures in different regions from various angles. Besides, 'A Bite of China' describes the process of food acquisition and cooking by means of close-up lens in a unified manner, such as the shooting of the cutting skills and the scene that the tofu is cut into filaments and drifted in water in the introduction to Wensi Tofu. The telephoto lens is used to depict the local humanities, historical and social environment in the introduction to local culinary culture. The switch between telephoto lenses and close-up lenses is processed in a smooth and tactful manner.

In terms of theme and groundwork, in the episode "Secrets of the Kitchen", for example, the social and cultural background of developing Huaiyang cuisine is explained in detail before its introduction. "Yangzhou was once the most important stop on the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal which brought the city a cultural charm integrating the north with the south. Hundreds of years ago, when Yangzhou was the hub of the salt trade in China, many merchants moved here to earn a fortune by trading salt. They brought from their hometowns local cooks, foods and flavor, which created the neutral taste of Huaiyang dishes, mild and pleasant, acceptable to both the northerners and southerners. Salt traders were rich, but they never had a place in politics, so they devoted themselves to comparing their gardeners and chefs. The influence of it can still be tasted from certain types of haute cuisine today." The introduction of the social and historical background of the formation of

Huaiyang cuisine has enabled the audience to have a deeper understanding of the profound historical and cultural integration of Huaiyang cuisine, coupled with a distance view of the old walls and old streets in Yangzhou and the full-length shot of China Huaiyang Cuisine Culture Museum.

Cinema verite is also called direct cinema. Such movies guarantee the enhancement of the realistic effect by capturing the unmodified events in the daily life of specific characters and their direct and frank influence (Li 2007: 33). 'A Bite of China' is in conformity with the narrative form of direct cinema. For example, when the rice noodles from Liping County, Guizhou Province are introduced in the episode "The Story of Staple Foods", the daily life of Yang Xiuxia, an ordinary woman, is recorded in a panoramic way without any processing. When making rice noodles, Yang Xiuxia and her husband first grind the dipped fresh rice into rice milk, scoop out the milk and steam it on the boiling water, air dry it and store it. After the series of processes, rice noodles are made. Most of the food production in 'A Bite of China' relies on the daily life of the ordinary people. Even when filming the world-famous chefs abroad, it also uses the approachable shooting techniques to close the distance with the audience, to grasp the audience's psychological convergence and awareness, so that the influence of the film is further strengthened. From another point of view, the documentary relies on gratitude, yearning, nostalgia, memory, intolerance, diligence, thrift and other feelings to present the lives of all ordinary people, and it is recognized by the public based on the traditional and memorable symbols.

CONCLUSION

The production of 'A Bite of China' subverts the views of the traditional visual ethnological films or visual anthropological films. Ethnological films must follow the basic spirit of the completeness criteria of complete body, complete behavior (or complete event) and complete character, so as to reproduce the integrity of characters, environment and events in the context of complete culture and truly reveal the cultural links among characters, environment and events, as well as the internal relationship between them

and the entire cultural background. It is displayed in 'A Bite of China' that each dish is a cultural slice, supplemented by the description of the historical, humanistic and social environment. Moreover, it allows the audience to learn about the macro cultural topics from the stories of culinary culture in small places, which is the most important reason why 'A Bite of China', as an anthropological film, has been widely appreciated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper introduces the content of 'A Bite of China', deconstructs it from the perspective of traditional anthropology, and interprets it from the perspective of visual anthropological films. When understanding the Chinese culinary culture, we should not superficially think that it is only the experience of human beings in visual and taste nerves but should also have a profound knowledge of the anthropological, sociological and cultural knowledge behind culinary cultures, including rituals, ethnic groups, religions, nationalities, history, ecology, social stratification, binary opposition of cuisine, economic circles and so on. The recognition in these aspects will enable us to understand the simple but meaningful culinary behaviors from multiple dimensions. Cuisine is a cultural behavior, and the transformation from raw food to cooked food is the process of nature to culture when human beings first learnt how to cook. In addition, from the perspective of communication between Chinese and Western culinary cultures, we should also ponder over how to break through the mighty attach of foreign fast food culture and give a new life to the traditional culinary culture in China.

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