

Brief analysis of the taste culture in *The Gourmet* by Lu Wenfu

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Abstract: Through text analysis of the novel, *The Gourmet* by Lu Wenfu, this paper aims at discussing how individual sensory memory formed based on taste-oriented dietary behaviors integrate the development of urban culture, and how the taste culture as a part of urban culture paper is accepted and rebuilt, fused with history and culture with the change of time until it becomes a feast of sensation and develops into an important part of urban culture. Urban culture is a kind of culture of sensation. The ethnic groups in the society feel as the historical sediment based on individual sensation, feeling, and perception. The sense of "hearing" "vision" and "taste", by no means one-sided are always synesthesia, which are closely related to people's continuous pursuit of the topic "how people realize a poetic dwelling in the city". Through text analysis of the novel, *The Gourmet* by Lu Wenfu, this paper aims at discussing how taste-oriented dietary behaviors affect the development of urban culture, and how taste culture as a part of urban culture paper is accepted and rebuilt, fused with history and culture with the change of time until it becomes a feast of sensation and develops into an important part of urban culture.

Introduction

Taste culture is the sum of the sensory and secular of the material and spiritual culture accumulated in people's long-term eating behaviors. Diet as everyone's basic activity constitutes most of individual history of life. The dietary habit, taste preferences and food material choices in different areas present regional differences. Habits that were transmitted through successive generations, evolved into custom, and gradually solidified from individual to family and groups have become the elements of life with living experience and family memories after historical accumulation. Over time, this social phenomenon with food as the basic element, condensed with people's life wisdom has fused with people's inner spirit and become a unique cultural phenomenon in the process of accumulation, heritage, creation and development, which inevitably will develop in the process of urbanization and gradually become a part of it.

Individual's taste memory

"*The Gourmet*" describes food-related ups and downs between Gao Xiaoting, a revolutionary cadre and Zhu Zizhi, a capitalist in Suzhou over forty years before liberation to the rehabilitation of Cultural Revolution. "I", Gao Xiaoting, and the gourmet Zhu Zizhi, represent two groups, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Zhu lives on renting family real estate with special preference to delicate food, and have sufficient economic conditions to his satisfaction. His daily life mainly focuses on eating around. He eats noodles with the first soup early in the morning at the famous Zhu Hongxing's noodle shop in Suzhou. And then, he gets on a rickshaw to Changmen Stone Road and meets his friends in the restaurant, recalls what they have eat in the previous day, comments and discusses what to eat next, at Xinjufeng, Yichangfu, or Songhellow. If they are tired of eating at these restaurants, they go hand in hand, and get on a carriage in four to Shi family restaurant for barbel lung soup, or noodle in Feng Bridge Twon, or mud-baked chicken in Changshu. The suburban and local food are for the choice of these senior gourmets. With all-round time and special transfer, he has

formed his own culinary map, and his cross-regional eating behaviors unintentionally promote transregional exchange and integration of food culture.

Zhu Zizhi selects food carefully, which embodies his calm, leisure and exquisite life attitude. "I", received the traditional education since childhood to live an industrious and simple, frugal life, object the behavior of pursuing food. "I" moved into Zhu Zizhi's house with mother after anti-Japanese war as a distant relative and then lived a life depending on Zhu family. At that time, ordinary people lived a poor life. My mother took the initiative to undertake housework (although Zhu Zizhi desires nothing but eat thinks it not necessary) to show gratitude. She asked me, a student, to look for local delicacies through the streets. "Buy some braised pork at Lu Gao Jian, buy Yewei at Ma Yong Zhai, buy some spiced ribs at Wufangzhai, buy some shrimp dried sea fish at Cai Zhi Zhai, buy some wine geese in someone's houses, buy oil stinky tofu at Xuanmiaoguan, and go to buy some local food at places nobody knows"

With the emergence and development of city, taste culture will inevitably be fused with urban culture, thus imprinting different taste memories on urban landscape. Speaking of some food, people firstly think of a store, a street, a city, which is how a fixed collection is established between food and the city. At numerous "humiliating" twilight when "I" looked for food, the cultural landscape of the city of Suzhou before liberation is presented in the novel, "tall buildings and fine wine on this side, neon lights illuminated the shining and colorful paving stones. On the other side, under the dim street lights in the deadly silent alley, an old woman was collecting vegetables next to the dustbin. Different famous cuisines are on the list. Guests are playing drinking games at table. But a lot of people are lining up in front of the rice store like shadows..." Before liberation, under the serious class differentiation, urban stores are constructed to meet upper class demands, thus presenting the urban landscape of "the portals of the rich reek of flesh and wine while frozen bodies lie by the roadside."

"It is well known that Suzhou dishes with exquisite material selection and huge waste. Chefs rely on gourmets to become famous, and rely on them to distinguish the very tiny difference. It is better to run into Confucius, who said 'One does not object to the finest food and enjoy the exquisite food.' A feast of taste, carefully selected ingredients, numerous and complicated food types will inevitably lead to huge waste. Before liberation, a large number of poor people with low income who could not afford to enjoy food like Zhu Zizhi consoled themselves with the excuse of "objecting the concept of pursuing food" like me, and criticized the degraded and parasites life style of rich people. At the same time, some merchants cater to rich people's taste and try best to serve gourmets like Zhu Zizhi, thus promoting the emergence of more restaurants.

Individual's eating behavior also promoted the heritage of food culture unconsciously. Food culture closely related to human beings with its own strong radiation affects rebuilds and develops individual's eating behaviors. Despite my doubt of the saying that "it is a culture created by laboring people for thousands of years that people in Suzhou are gourmets", I guess it was invented by Zhu Zizhi, Kong Bixia and other upper class people. However, as the balance between supply and demand is necessary to ensure social reproduction, both buyers and sellers actually inherit and carry forward the Suzhou local food culture. The aesthetic taste, the scope of activities, taste preferences of upper-class people also impact urban planning, hotel location, food processing methods, which are immersed with the development of urban culture. Individuals have participated in the construction of urban culture while accumulating their unconscious sensory experience. With "food" as a clue, they have enriched their own life experience, and consolidated the sensory memory of community.

The development status of Suzhou City at that time is described in the novel. The wealthy and rich people in Suzhou were originated from Hangzhou. In Tang Dynasty, "hundreds of thousands of men were charged tax, five thousand of their offspring were granted title of general". In Ming Dynasty, "There were three thousand sing-song girls in the attic, and the trade volume of cargo ships reached one million gold." With the emergence of Shanghai in modern times, "wise people owned properties and purchased estates in Suzhou, allowing them to take the offensive or the defensive as they choose. Suzhou, not the political and economic center, without too much officialdom jostling or operation risks, not a place of strategic importance, has never gone through a big war over the two thousand

three hundred years later after State of Wuyue. With pleasant climate, rich natural resources and beautiful scenery, ancient landlords and bureaucrats, wealthy businessmen, monks resuming secular life, and unrecognized scholars, old prostitutes loved to spend one's remaining years in Suzhou. So many rich and literate people live in peace and contentment. Food, drink and entertainment are indispensable, which making Suzhou Garden rank first in the world and making Suzhou food reach the perfection. "I", as an underlying poor people with barren memories for food only felt mentally depressed due to the unequal social status, and turned to the Communist Party with the hope of early communism. The unforgettable memories of people have imperceptibly shaped people's life.

Fluctuation of taste culture under the surging waves of time

Individual's eating behaviors are limited by collective consciousness. The ever-changing environment outside city has disturbed the inherent cultural texture of city. In pursuit of spiritual stability, people must constantly adjust and update old habits, and impact the root of tradition. Oriented by contemporary life demand, adhering to new values, people change the position of food in cultural system. Food exceeding its functions of satisfying people's hunger can realize a common aesthetic sense of taste, sight, and hearing, serve political, economic and other social activities as an important means of social contact. Taste culture is presenting its more profound significance. As the American scholar Westminster Division said, "it is people's basic physiological demand to obtain food which becomes a symbol with too much meaning so that it is no longer how it was."

It is a long and rough road of historical changes. Traditional values of diligence and simplicity as an important means of Communist Party to maintain the interests of peasants and soldiers can help to rectify the extravagant custom of bourgeoisie and compel simple diet after its widely implementation. With the unification and simplification of traditional cuisine, food culture not thriving as before continues in a secret way and revitalizes after the social develop to a certain level. In the novel, with the comprehensive outburst of war of liberation, the social situation changed sharply. "I" with experience of searching food for Zhu Zizhi knew well about local snacks and were assigned to Department of Business Administration accidentally responsible for managing food. After industry-wide public-private partnership, "I" was appointed as manager at a famous restaurant in Suzhou, where only upper-class people could afford before liberation, surrounded by beggars. With my personal hatred for Zhu Zizhi, I tried to change the luxurious eating habits of rich people. Firstly, I mobilized employees to change the traditional business idea and turned target clients to workers and peasants from the landlords and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie. After external decoration rectification, removal of the neon at the door, lights in the window, the aesthetic space changed with more function oriented after removing private compartments and adding seats, self-service tableware. After the overall development and progress of society, people will no longer satisfy simple fullness, and naturally have spiritual pursuit after living a rich material life.

As proved by facts that diet, more than a physiological behavior, is a spiritual enjoyment beyond social class. Food culture after years' heritage with continuous charm has attracted more people to experience the role of gourmet. Therefore, after the end of decade-long calamity, generally, ordinary people hope to obtain a comfort of taste.

The author intentionally voices for Suzhou food culture under suppression by using the character in the novel, points out "my" mistake of impulsively promoting popular dishes, "Suzhou food is so famous and a century-old culture created by working people. You are the one to blame if you ruin the culture."

At that time, gourmets like Zhu Zizhi without other choice in front of the "popular dishes" offered by the Communist Party married a woman Kong Bixia who was good at cooking and set banquets at home. The featured and well-known delicacies in Suzhou continued to be inherited under the secrecy. Together with Zhu Zizhi, Kong Bixia, a totally different gourmet, was much more peculiar and stringent for food. She "created another system of Suzhou cuisine, which is the high degree crystallization of material civilization and cultural appreciation. It embodies the rich content of

Suzhou dishes in an extremely simple and elegant form, making it almost back to nature after exquisite polishing. Eating, called as an art, can only refer to this system.” The aesthetic attitude towards food is consistent with the orientation of the cultural development of the city. Therefore, after the market economy recovered, the inherited food culture will inevitably present a new feature and blend into the overall blueprint of urban cultural development.

Significance of food for urban cultural development

"The streets and alleys in Suzhou City have not changed a lot, but there are more people. The disaster impacted people's eating firstly, so the first wave after disaster would be towards the food market. And then, people thought of dressing up, fans and TV machine." The particularity of eating lies in that as a basic activity of people's life has the potential to be improved and sublimed, thus taking up a place in any environment of any times." Human beings are strange as they have particularly sensitive taste when eating, and distinguish tiny difference in salty, light, fragrant, sweet, tender, and overcooked food. But people would feel starving when hungry and even eat up three bowls of rice once extremely starved." The change in food functions and people's attitude to food vividly manifest the improved development level of urban culture. Throughout the whole novel, Zhu Zizhi is an eligible gourmet. Before liberation, he was the only gourmet served by other peoples, and his eating habits were despised by lower-class people. But in the end part of the novel, "gourmet" was given a commendatory meaning as everyone wants to be a gourmet who can taste the artistic flavor from delicacies.

Summary

The change which can be foreseen has actually manifested right now. Included by urban external construction, food culture as a branch of urban culture has developed due to people's concept of food, and embodies diverse and complicated features. Urban citizens' lifestyle and life quality as the underlying foundation of urban culture are also reflected vividly in people's daily diet from mundane perspective. People's life attitude that "everything in the world with flavor deserves people's taste" has also expand people's daily life into aesthetic range. With the convergent development of urban planning, dissemination of local food specialties in different cities, people in different areas can achieve cultural identity to a greater extent.

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