

A Comparison between Chinese and Western Banquet Custom from the Cross-culture Perspective

Yi Li

Inner Mongolia Normal University, Huhhot, China

Abstract

There is an old saying in China: Hunger breeds discontentment. Which means food is the first necessity of the people. People from different countries consider food as a top priority. Because of the importance of food, the most simple food culture can become a rich and interesting banquet culture. With the development of global economic diversification, Western and Chinese banquet customs have also been colliding and merging. Different banquet customs also embody distinctive characteristics and cultures of different nations. The banquet is not only an important part of diet culture but also an important representation of the progress of social etiquette and civilization. Therefore, it is very important to conduct research on Chinese and Western banquet customs. In general, the banquet is a social activity closely related to human life. This paper will analyze the differences of banqueting customs including forms of the banquet, seating arrangement and food of banquets, from the perspective of cross-cultural communication. Reasons are also employed here, so as to in the efforts, people's consciousness on custom differences can be cultivated, which can enrich their understanding of different cultures, so as to reduce cultural conflicts and promote the development of the intercultural communication.

Keywords

Banquet Custom; Comparison; Reasons.

1. Introduction

Different cultures have different conventions. With the rapid development of the economy and with the advent of the information age, the frequent cultural exchanges between countries were unparalleled in the past. If people don't know other countries' cultures or customs when they get along with them, they may make some mistakes, it is the best thing of intentions and the worst of results. And it means separate customs will influence intercultural communication. So people must grasp the differences between cultures in order to work together and live conveniently. On the other hand, avoiding and eliminating cultural differences are becoming more and more important in our society. As everyone knows, food is the first necessity of the people, so it is easy to understand why the banquet is closely related to people's lives. And when people make new friends or get together with their family, their first choice is to have a banquet, no matter the scale is big or small, so it can be seen, the banquet is really imperative. It is one of the best ways to understand a culture from food and banquet aspect.

From the ancient times to the modern society, the way of cooking is changing, and the rules, customs are updating, and the development of society, the customs of different countries are merging together, and the customs of the banquet are no exception. The paper will make a comparison between the banquet customs of China and the Western countries, and research the kinds of food Chinese and westerners chose for the banquet. The order of serving, the rules of sitting arrangement and the forms of the banquet in China and Western countries will be mentioned in the comparison. The reasons for the differences are also touched upon in chapter

four. Everyone is aware that in the process of economic globalization, cross-cultural communication is inevitable, so each people should make some preparation for it. With the efforts, people's awareness on the differences of banquet will be aroused.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Definition of Key Terms

Banquet: a banquet is a large meal or feast, complete with main courses and dessert, often served with alcoholic beverages, such as wine or beer. A banquet usually serves a purpose such as a charitable gathering, a ceremony, or a celebration, and is usually preceded or followed by speeches in honor of someone. In the majority of banquets, the gathering is seated at round tables with around 8 to 10 people per table. It can give people a chance to ensure that new friends or renew acquaintance with old friends .

Custom: it means one country or the general public of a nation creates, use and inherit a kind of material life and spiritual and cultural life during history. Custom is the creation and inheritance of a nation in a specific historical and geographical environment. It stands for a cultural form. It has obvious domestic features.

2.2. Previous Studies

In A Comparison between Chinese and Western Banquet Custom from the Cross-culture Perspective, Chen Yihan, Henan University, mainly talks about the differences between China and Western countries' banquet customs, and the historical development, custom differences. In A Study on the Differences of Chinese and Western diet culture, Wang Na, Henan University, mainly analyzes the differences in the diet culture which is incomplete. In Table Etiquette Culture, in Cross-cultural Communication between China and the west, Chenjie only talks the differences of table etiquette, diet concept, eating habits and conversations on the banquet has also been mentioned. In How foreigners treat to dinner, Simayan and Zhuyouli talk about what food do leaders have on the banquet, which dishes do the bosses like have been mentioned in this paper, it only mentioned how the people have great influence treat others on the banquets, it is incomplete.

2.3. Comments on Previous Studies

The previous studies on banquet customs from cross-cultural perspective mainly focus on the forms of banquet or diet culture, some papers just analyze one side's banquet customs, and some papers only mention the way of treating for great people like a boss or a president's way of treating on the banquet. However, in these papers the reasons of differences are not mentioned, and the comparison on banquet customs are also not mentioned. So comparative study on banquet customs will be made in the paper.

3. Comparative Studies

The differences in Chinese and Western banquets will be analyzed in this part, and the comparisons between the forms of the banquet, sitting arrangement, the order of serving and the kinds of food for a banquet will be made. All of these can help readers to understand different cultures easily and show the differences clearly.

3.1. Different Forms of the Banquet in China and Western Countries

With the development of society, there are more and more forms of banquet, each form has its characteristics and customs. Some forms of the banquet in China and Western countries will be analyzed in this part.

3.1.1. Banquet Forms in China

China is different from Western countries in banquet forms, there are some main forms of it:

The first one is an informed banquet. In China, an informed banquet is a casual form, it is usually held for friends and family members, and there are no special reasons or aims to hold it. For example, people will take part in this banquet because they haven't met their friends for a while. Another one is party. This can take place for classmates, teachers, students, and colleagues. There are many kinds of parties, like a birthday party, wedding ceremony, graduation party. Wedding ceremony is the most common party, the family will hold a big party for the newly-married, usually, a party will be held by the groom's family firstly, and after several days, a party will also be held by the bride's family, on the ceremony, the couple will offer tea to their parents to show their respect, all the family members and their friends, colleagues will participate in it, and the host will pay for the meal, and the guests will give cash gifts to the host. For the small-sized party between friends or relatives, people may receive guests at home or go to the restaurant. If the party is just a gathering of friends or acquaintances, mostly, the host will pay for it, but when the participants' number is huge, they may divide the cost equally.

From the point of view of tradition and custom, Chinese entertain guests, no matter in the restaurant or at home, they pay greater attention to the formal banquet, host and guests sit around the table according to the age and honor. Besides, banquet advocates bustling with noise and excitement, a big scale is also common in Chinese banquet.

3.1.2. Banquet Forms in Western Countries

Although banquet is just to invest some people to gather together, there are many different banquet forms, and there are some main forms in Western countries:

The first one is buffet dinner. Normally, there are no seats, and the dishes usually are cold dishes like salad, cold meat, bread. The host will put the dishes and drink on the table, and the guests will take the dishes in a plate by themselves, standing or sitting and talking with each other. The second one is reception. The size of reception is larger and more formal, it is commonly found in celebrations, like the opening ceremony, closing ceremony, cultural performance and sports performance for visit celebration. It has two forms: buffet dinner and cocktail. The reception is usually official or semi-official. It has special etiquette standard and requirements and it is commonly organized by specific sector, it is rare to hold reception by family or individual. The third one is luncheon. There are two forms of it: business luncheon and social luncheon. Business lunch is usually prepared for business partners, some of them also invite customers' relations. People can talk with each other in a friendly and relaxing atmosphere which can help the work go well.

In western countries, there are many kinds of parties, for example, the first one is tea party, it is a simple reception, the hostess usually gives the guests a call and asks them to have a cup of tea. It is often held in the afternoon and aims to welcome the new neighbors or the visitors or celebrate of moving to a new house. It can be a family party too. Cookies, desserts, tea or coffee are the food and drink provided in the tea party. And the second one is stag party, it is a party on the weekends, only for men. At this party, women will not company with their husbands or boyfriends. Men will talk about the affairs of state, current events, undertaking, sports and everything that men interested in. On the contrary, there is a hen party for women.

3.2. Differences of Seating Arrangement

From Zhou Dynasty, China has had rules of seating, if the host arranges the seats wrong, it will show the disrespect to the guests. In Western countries, they also have strict rules of seating, because they think it can show ones' good breeding and etiquette and elegant manners. Chinese and Westerners both pay attention to the rules of seating, but they have some differences.

3.2.1. Seating Arrangement in China

Chinese prefer to the round table in the banquets. If the banquet is held in a restaurant and there are two or more than two tables, the rule of table setting is that the people sit on the table which is opposite to door are the most important and usually, the people on the right of that table have a higher social status and the people on the left have a lower social status. If there are three round tables, the table in the middle is senior, the right is next and the left is second. Generally speaking, the right stands for honor and the left stands for lower social status, whatever how many tables are. When sitting, the host had better arrange the seats for each other, and the younger had better to wait until other sit down.

There are some basic ways of setting arrangement: First, the host should sit facing the main door, then the guest of honor sits on the right of the host. Second, if the position of the host is inferior to the guest of the honor, the host can ask the guest to sit where the host should have seated and the host sits on his right. As for the banquet of fewer than five people, its table setting can follow those four rules: The first one is flexibility arrangement. The second one is the right stands for honor and the left stands for low social status; the middle seat stands for the senior. The third one is the most important person usually sits at the middle just facing the door. The fourth one is, take the host seat as the sign, the guest on its right is the most important one and who sits on the left is more important than other guests.

3.2.2. Seating Arrangement in Western Countries

In Western countries, long tables are more common in their lives and banquets. They also think the right stands for honor and the left stands for low. In the banquet, the host and hostess will sit with each other, the gentleman of honor sits near the host, his wife sits near the hostess and the others follow them. In some informal parties, it follows the rule that lady is first. If a man and a woman have a dinner together, the man should let the woman sit on his right and do not let the woman sit near to the passageway; anyway, the man ought to let the woman sit inside. When there are two couples, ladies should sit opposite to their husbands. When two men with a woman have a meal, men should let women sit in the middle. When two people have a dinner, the senior sit inside. Moreover, men should remove the chairs and let women sit first.

3.3. Differences in the Order of Serving

Because of different cooking habit and culture, there are different serving orders between China and Western countries. After cold dishes, Chinese prefer to the main course with staple food then the dessert or fruits. It is different from Western countries, most Chinese dishes are hot, expect cold dishes, so the host or the waiter needs to serve these dishes first so that the taste and smell of food would not be destroyed. But for Western countries, there is not too much hot food, their serving order is quite different with Chinese.

3.3.1. Chinese Serving Steps

In China, the first dishes are cold dishes, then the hot dishes; next staple food; at last the sweets and fruit. When there are many tables in the banquet, the servants should serve dishes to each table at the same time. Besides, hot dishes should be served from the left side opposite the seat of the guest of honor. Single serving like scallop and snacks should give the guests first and then the host. Dishes like a whole chicken, whole duck, and whole fish, their heads and tails can not be put toward the host's seat. Besides, if the banquet is in the restaurant, the waiter will hold the dishes one by one to the guests, it also follows the rules that the first are cold dishes, then the hot dishes and staple food, finally, fruits. In the restaurant, every dish for the banquet just likes a slide show, each time a dish is served.

3.3.2. Western Serving Steps

Western serving procedure often do it like this: the first dish is bread and butter, the second one is cold dishes and soup, the third one is the seafood and main course, in the end, they will

have dessert, coffee, and fruits. They have cold dishes, soup, and bread at the same time. Cold dishes are also known as appetizer dish, served as the first course usually with an aperitif. And soup includes consomme and cream soup. There are fish, pork, beef, and chicken for the main course. And there are ice cream and pudding for the dessert. When in a formal banquet, the serving steps are very important and there are many details to follow. The conventional method is: every dish starts from the most important female guest, then the guests will be served counterclockwise, the host has to wait until the end. If there is only hostess, the dishes will be served from the female who replaces the host and sits on the right of the hostess, it is important to note that the hostess should not be served firstly, which is very discourteous.

3.4. Different Kinds of Food for the Banquet

According to the geographical reasons, cooking habits and other reasons, there are different kinds of food for daily life and banquet of different countries. For example, China has a huge proportion of inland and long coastline on the east part, and there is a long history of its agriculture, so people prefer to choose rice, noodle as their staple food. On the contrary, people in the north and west Europe prefer to have milk product, egg, beef, fish, etc. This is closely related to their culture of nomadism and voyage.

3.4.1. The Kind of Food in Chinese Banquet

Chinese cooking culture is extensive and profound, so the kinds of food are rich and varied. In general, China has a vast territory and a large number of nationalities. According to different kinds of the banquet, different regions and nationalities, there are not specially appointed kinds of the dishes in Chinese banquet. But the processes are same, a formal banquet has cold dishes, hot dishes, desserts, staple food and soup. Chinese pay attention to color, flavour, taste, shape, and container of the dishes. For flavour, people pay attention to spicy, sour, sweet and salty. There are vegetables, meat, eggs, bean products and seafood for the dishes. If some people get together and order the dishes, one should not order same meat or seafood dishes. After some hot dishes, considered the richness and the requirements of women or children, there will be some desserts. Then, the staple food will be served, Chinese staple food are diversified, there are rice, noodle, dumplings, steamed bun, meat bun, baked scallion pancake, etc.

Tea is an important part of the banquet, there is an old saying: seven essential things of life are firewood, rice, oil, salt, soy, vinegar, and tea. Chinese people consider tea at the same position with other necessities, it can be found that tea has a high position in people's life. On a banquet, the quality of tea will also show the respect to the guests, in addition, the tea in the cup could not exceed than 70 percent.

Another important thing for the banquet is liquor, comparing with westerns, Chinese would like to drink liquor in the banquet. There are some famous liquors in China, like Moutai, Wuliangye, Guo Jiao and Jiannanchun, etc. The liquor can show the host's economic power and whether he cares about the guests or not. For example, if the host thinks the guests are very important to him, he will serve Wuliangye or Moutai, on the contrary, if he thinks the guests are just common and their relationships are not very close, he will serve some normal liquor. Usually, the host will propose a toast at the beginning of the banquet, and people will also drink with each other during the banquet, this can help them get in touch with each other and promote the feeling of harmony and amity. In some informal banquets like party between colleagues or friends, they may choose beer for drinking, because beer has a low alcohol content, people can enjoy it but will not be in drunk.

The name of each dish also has some rules and standards, if a wonderful dish has a beautiful, brilliant and memorable name, it will make people happy and have a rich appetite, however, if a delicious dish has a very common name, it will make the dish in the shade.

In general, there are four ways of naming dishes: First naming method is using praise. Some lucky and wish words will be used to make everyone satisfied and joyful. This kind of name is

absolutely necessary for the big ceremony or some festival like spring festival. The second one is luxurious. It is using exaggeration to give the dish a very flowery name. And next one is allusion. That means the name of the dish mostly has a story. For example, there is a dish, it puts soft-shelled turtle and chicken together, and its name called Farewell to my concubine, in Chinese it called Ba Wang Bie Ji, because soft-shelled turtle in Chinese is also called Wangba, and chicken is Ji. Last one is artistic, using beautiful words to make the dishes poetic and pictorial splendor .

3.4.2. The Kind of Food in the Western Banquet

The main dietary objects of Westerners are animal raw materials, supplemented by crops. Wine is usually served as the table drink, the after-meal drink is often served as coffee. And mostly, Westerners would like to choose frying, baking, boiling, braising as their cooking methods.

Usually, there are terrine, fresh oyster, salad, ham for appetizers, it is said that appetizers originate from Russia, before all the guests get together, those people who come earlier will have something to drink or eat in another room. And then, the food which is served in that tradition becomes appetizers.

After the appetizers, soup will be served, there are many kinds of soup, for example, consomme, mixing beef, chicken with lots of condiment, it also has some branches, such as consomme of vegetable, French onion soup, and beef tea. They may choose a cream soup, which is combined milk with consomme, cream, condiment and fired flour, based on these, the cook can add fish, chicken, and vegetables in it, like mushroom cream soup, vegetable cream soup. Cold dishes will also be mentioned, there are salad and cold dishes in aspic, it is savory jelly based on fish or meat stock, and used as a mold for meats or vegetables, like chicken aspic, lobster in aspic.

The main course, the kinds of the main course are various, it mainly includes garnish, entree, and sauce. The first one is garnished. Garnish can make entree colourful and beautiful, it can make the whole dish unified, harmonious. The second one is entree. There are many types of entree: seafood will be served. Usually, Westerners would like to choose freshwater fish, saltwater fish or crustaceans for the entree. The ways of cooking are: boil, braise, deep fired, steam and stew. There is beef, too. As everyone knows, beef is very important in Western countries, according to the different part of the body, there are different cooking methods. For example, sirloin is on both sides of the back of the cow, near the butt, it is the best part of the cow, and the cooking methods for it are grilled, roast and pan-fried. The third part of the main course is sauce, like salt, sugar, soy, etc.

In China, people will have tea before the banquet starts, but in most Western countries, they do not have this custom. Western countries prefer to wine, they have red wine and white wine. And they also like champagne, beer, and brandy, their liquor's alcoholic strength is always higher than most of the Chinese liquor, for example, Russia is famous for vodka.

In Western countries, they would like to drink coffee in some small party or gathering, like on tea party, some people will choose coffee as their drinking. Compared with Chinese tea, they have a long history of drinking coffee, and they have a richer experience in choosing and roasting coffee bean.

These depended on their modes of production. The early Western countries were nomadic, specializing in animal husbandry, and supplemented by agriculture. They have rich experience of livestock breeding, and the price of animal raw material is lower than crops, that's why Westerners have different kinds of food from China.

4. Reasons for the Differences

Food culture can be divided into many parts, such as food, tableware, function, cooking methods. It is also related to other factors, such as economy, religion, traditions, nations. All of these

factors could lead to the differences of the banquet customs, some of them are determining factors, this part will focus on these decisive factors, and try to analyze the reasons for the differences.

4.1. Geographical Conditions

Human and nature environment depend on each other, they are a whole part, human influence environment from many aspects, and human can not separate from the environment, and environment will influence human's value of life. The geographical condition is also a part of the environment. So the banquet customs will also be influenced by geography.

China is a country with a huge proportion of inland, this leads to Chinese development agriculture, and China can be divided into two parts: In eastern and southern parts of China, there are large areas of plain, and there are many famous rivers like the Yangtze River, the Zhujiang River, and Wujiang. There are many plows on the plain and near the river, and there are better conditions to plow and sow in these areas, people can cultivate crops and vegetables with rich earth, that is why people in southeast China usually eat rice and vegetables, because there are fertile soil and adequate water. Another distinguishing feature is: the southeast areas are near the sea and there is long coastline, people in those areas can live on fishing and they enjoy eating seafood. While in northwest China, people usually take noodles, steamed bun, dumplings as their staple food. Because in that part, there are not many big rivers and in most areas, there are only plateaus, and there are not flatness and rich earth in these areas, people can only plant some crops that do not need too much water, like wheat, corns, potatoes, and scallions. Almost every family lives in the northwest will store many potatoes, scallions and Chinese cabbage in winter for it is so cold here in winter that no vegetables can grow, but people in the southeast would never do this. In addition, due to its geographical position, the north and west China are far away from the sea, so in those areas, it is a little difficult for people to accept some kinds of seafood. Considering these two parts, it can be concluded that China is a large agricultural country and people prefer crops and vegetables as their food.

Compared with Chinese, Westerners prefer meat and seafood, vegetables and some wheaten foods are just like ornaments. Most Western countries are surrounded by the sea, especially Europe, there are not many lands and plains, there are many mountain land and plateau which are not suitable for planting crops and vegetables. Moreover, most parts of Europe are typical Mediterranean climate and temperate oceanic climate, they are also unsuitable for agriculture, but temperate oceanic climate is very propitious to animal husbandry, the grass has high quality, that is the reason for Europe is famous for animal husbandry and they lead a nomadic life, and why they prefer dairy products. In some areas with Mediterranean climate, like Greece, Italy and France, they are famous for some Mediterranean crops, for example, grapes, olives and corns are all common crops in these countries. Because their geographical conditions are not suitable for agriculture, they begin to explore outward from the sea, they have advanced skills on building ships, they have rich voyage experience, all of these are different from China and lead to different food culture and customs.

4.2. Collectivism and Individualism

Different food culture reflects different national culture, in another way, it shows a different sense of worth. Different food culture and banquet customs of China and Western countries are also influenced by a different sense of worth. The most significant and obvious part of the sense of worth is the differences between collectivism and individualism.

Westerners inherit the cultural lineages of nomadic and navigational people, they mainly depend on breeding, fishing, and supplemented by planting, which leads to the varieties of the food are always meat and seafood. But China is a big agricultural nation, Chinese mainly depend

on planting and their food normally are rice, wheaten food like noodle, steamed bun and vegetables.

They have different characters. Westerners are brave, adventurous while Chinese are mild and modest. Chinese prefer to live and work in peace with the whole family, they usually put the unity on the first, sometimes Chinese will sacrifice their own benefit for the majority, they are collectivism; while Westerners prefer to explore new world and take the adventure, compared with Chinese, they do not take too much care of the majority, there is an old saying in China can be used to describe their life attitude, pay attention to one's own moral uplift without thought of others, and Westerners pay more attention to the privacy, and mostly they would not do something that does not benefit to themselves and they also emphasize one's equal rights. So they are more individualism than Chinese.

There are banquets everywhere, and the importance depends on its function. People entertain guests in order to make new friends and keep in touch with old friends, although every countries' banquets have basic functions, there are many differences in the way of eating between different countries. For example, in Western countries they usually take individual serving, the buffet is a good example for it, everyone can choose what they like, using their own tableware, they can stand or sit, talking with people who are on the same wavelength. This shows Westerners respect individuality and freedom. But in Chinese banquet, people will sit around a table, and share dishes with others, and people will talk with each other, no matter the relationships are close or aloof. From this point, it is easy to find that Chinese pursue harmony and peace, they do not want to be too special, and it also can be seen as a sign of collectivism.

4.3. The Function of Food

Chinese cooking culture is extensive and profound, its core is unique viewpoints of cooking and the food composition. On the viewpoints of cooking, Chinese are influenced by its philosophy, traditional Chinese people believe in man is an integral part of nature. From this, Chinese people stress the colour, smell, and taste of food, they pay attention to the artistic quality of the dishes, for Chinese, food is more like a kind of artwork. The function of food for Chinese is not only filling the stomach and satisfying one's hunger but also satisfying the eagerness of delicious dishes so that they can feel happy from the physical and psychological part. In a word, Chinese diets overemphasize favor and spiritual enjoyment, sometimes the diets may neglect the assortment of nutrition, for example, the chefs will add much oil and salt in the dish so that it can be tasted good, however, too much oil and salt can lead to high blood pressure and other illness.

On the contrary, Westerners have a rational, scientific viewpoint of cooking. When they cook, they will try their best to maintain the original taste of the food and its natural nutrition. They emphasize food's nutrition, protein, vitamin, etc. They especially pay attention to whether the nutritional composition of food is reasonable or not. In most cases, Westerners think food is a mean of subsistence, the function of food is just filling the stomach and getting nutrition, they merely take a more scientific, normative and rational way. For example, in the primary and junior middle schools, there are nutritionists to promise the reasonable meal and the nourishment of the well balanced for students, they will consider the proportion of each nutrition.

So different functions of food in China and Western countries also lead to the different banquet customs.

5. Conclusion

In a word, geographical conditions, climate, and traditions lead to the cultural differences between China and Western Countries, and the cultural differences create different banquet customs. In cross-cultural communication, because of the cultural differences, people always misunderstand foreigners and both of them will feel embarrassed, sometimes it may even hurt one's feelings. So it is essential to study the cultural differences between China and Western Countries. A gentleman gets along with others but does not necessarily agree with them. This sentence means people need to admit the differences and respect the differences so that they can find harmony. In cross-cultural communication, people should apply this idea, respect the differences between different countries and try to find the common points.

Moreover, it is important to know the customs and etiquette of a country in intercultural communication, there is an old saying: when in Rome, do as the Romans do. When someone attend a banquet which is held by other countries' people, he should pay attention to their customs, so that he will not make some mistakes in intercultural communication.

In addition, people should face differences, seek common ground while reserving differences and keep a positive attitude to communicate. When promoting Chinese culture, Chinese should also absorb western advanced culture to enrich and renew the traditional culture. Moreover, if people could respect different cultures and communicate with each other equally, it will result a better and deeper cross-cultural communication.

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