

Zhuang Food Culture: Meaning and Representation in the Process of New Media Communication in China

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Abstract

Designing a qualitative research method using observations, in-depth interviews, group discussions, and literature review data fieldwork survey collection investigated by participants to the meaning and representation of Zhuang food culture in the process of new media communication in China. The Zhuang people are a Tai-speaking ethnic group, mostly living in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in Southern China. Food also plays a critical role in symbolizing happiness in Chinese culture. Zhuang food culture holds seven tiers of meaning for the Zhuang people, manifested in both traditional festivals and daily life. In Chinese culture, verbal communication is most accurately interpreted in the context of nonverbal communication, social hierarchy, and other background information. Social roles and a concern for respect and harmony inevitably have a bearing on communication. Zhuang food culture reveals that amidst the development of new media communication in China. Focuses on the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival activities: A deeper understanding of the unique cultural characteristics of this ethnic group in new media communication; the Five-Color Sticky Rice; the Zhuang society and the outside world continuously are developing increasingly; the transformation of the Zhuang people through their production and life practices; etc., The representation of Zhuang food culture on new media platforms is primarily conducted through three dimensions: food culture, regional culture, and traditional Zhuang culture. Zhuang Food Culture has the remarkable ability to bring people together and create a sense of connection. For instance, dumplings, with their round shape and plump filling, symbolize wealth and prosperity and are often eaten during the Chinese New Year to usher in a prosperous year ahead.

Keywords: *Qualitative Research Method, Zhuang Food Culture, Traditional Festivals and Daily Life, Nonverbal Communication and Society, Meaning and Presentative Media Network.*

Introduction

Who are the Zhuang people in China? The Zhuang People in China are the largest minority group. The Zhuang people are one of the ancient nationalities and the second largest of the 56 ethnic groups officially recognized by the government of China. Zhuang brocade, Nanjing brocade, Chengdu brocade, and Suzhou brocade are known as "China's four big famous brocade." (Trip China Guide, 2023). Their rice farming techniques and Singing Festival are considered to be national treasures. It has been as recently as 1965 that the Zhuang Ethnic Group was united under this name. As a race, they have been called by several other designations. The Zhuang people originated in South China and Vietnam in an area known as Baiyue. The second part of the name, Yue, refers to any Chinese minority group that wasn't part of the Han majority. It so happens that this particular group of Yue pledged allegiance to the Zhou dynasty under the feudal lord of the region of Chu during the third century BCE, their living style is the same as regions of the Luoyue, Xiou, and Cangyu ethnic groups and it is thought that these people groups make up the ancestors of the modern-day Zhuang minority (Schluetz & Muscato, 2023).

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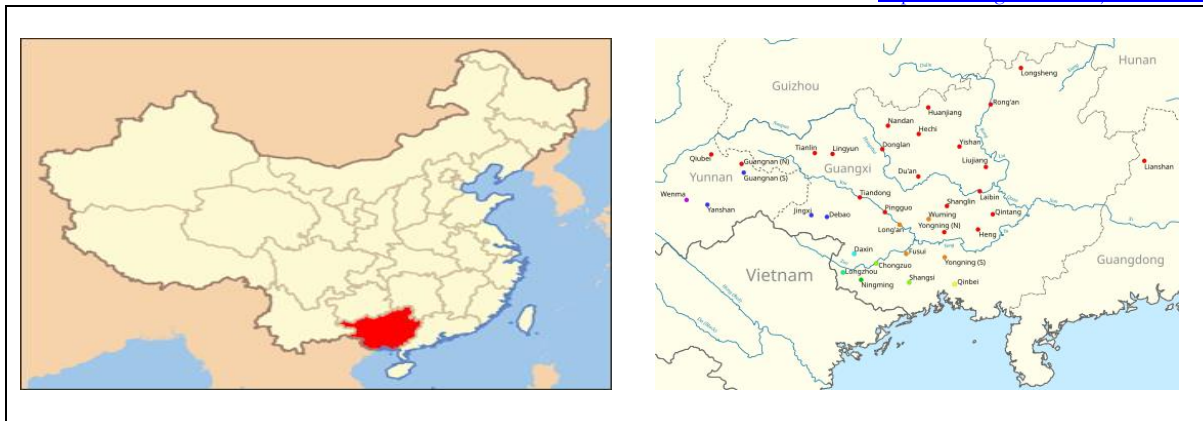


Figure Caption 1: Sites Surveyed in Zhang Monority (1999)

Source: Pittayaporn (2009)

The Zhuang people speak Northern and Central Tai as well as Mandarin Chinese. Their languages descend from the Thai language and are more closely related to it than to Mandarin Chinese. Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of Zhuang dialects in Guangxi and related languages in Northern Vietnam and Guizhou. The Northern Tai languages are an established branch of the Tai languages of Southeast Asia. They include the northern Zhuang languages and Bouyei of China, Tai Mène of Laos and Yoy of Thailand. Pittayaporn (2009:300) distinguishes a similar group of Zhuang varieties. The Tai languages include the most widely spoken of the Tai–Kadai languages, including Standard Thai or Siamese, the national language of Thailand; Lao or Laotian, the national language of Laos; Myanmar's Shan language; and Zhuang, a major language in the Southwestern China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, spoken by the Zhuang people (壮), the largest minority ethnic group in China.



Figure Caption 2: Mythologies of the Zhuang Ethnic People Group in China

Zhuang villages and clusters of villages tend to be grouped by clans or people who believe they have a common ancestor. Houses are often grouped by surname with newcomers living on the outskirts of the village. Before 1949, village organization was based on patrilineage and village-wide religious activities focused on gods and spirits who protected the community and assured the success of the crops and livestock. The Zhuang are the largest minority in China with almost 20 million members. Virtually indistinguishable from Han Chinese, they live primarily in western Guangxi Province, where they make up a third of the province’s population, and rule their territory through a system based on village chiefs in the

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region — their autonomous region covers the entire province of Guangxi, the reason why Zhuang or Vah Cuengh became unpopular is due to discrimination from Sinitic people and assimilation policies for the past thousand years or so (Yueh-Hwa & Diamond, 1994).

The Zhuang evolved from Tai-speaking peoples that lived in southern China for centuries and were described by Chinese historians when the Chinese made their first major push into the region in 211 B.C. The Zhuang descended from clans in present-day Guangxi province after the fall of the Han Dynasty in A.D. 220. Each clan had great political power, and many slaves and controlled large areas. The people that evolved to become the Zhuang had three important cultural characteristics: They were among the first to grow buckwheat; they are regarded as creators of the magnificent paintings of the Huashan cliffs that stretch for 200 kilometers along a river bank; and they have developed and maintained a bronze drum cult, primarily in Guangxi, where many old bronze drums have been discovered and the sounds, they produce still have important religious and ritual value (Chuang, 2021).

The Zhuang have dozens of festivals and holidays, and most of the festivals are observed according to the lunar calendar. They honor their ancestors during Chinese New Year and the Festival of the Dead in the summer. One of their biggest celebrations is Antiphonal Singing Day. Ceremonies honoring ancestors are held at home altars and in ancestral halls. The Chinese Qingming Festival (Tomb Sweeping Day), in which ancestral graves are tidied up in the third lunar month, is often combined with an Ox Birthday Festival and ceremonies for the goddess who protects at birth and during infancy (Huang, Huang, & Zhang, 1988). The main staple food of the Zhuang people in the Fangchenggang region is rice, and other cereals such as corn, sweet potatoes, taro, and cassava are used as supplementary foods. For breakfast time and lunchtime, most people eat rice porridge and rice noodles with simple vegetable dishes such as pickled vegetables. The Zhuang people love meat, fish, and vegetable dishes, such as pickled dishes, a special homemade tea, rice wine, and special festival foods that they make such as colorful sticky rice, and sliced horse hoof (Figure Caption 3).



Caption Figure 3: Traditional and Cultural Food of The Zhuang Ethnic Festival Group

Source: China Government Digital Terrestrial Television (2024)

Generally, China was one of the first Asian civilizations to accomplish regular growth and stability. It acquired a distinctive taste in cuisine, allowing its dishes to grow and evolve at an impressive pace. Several factors contribute to China's high attention to culinary detail, diverse cuisines, and mainstreaming of dishes. Chinese Food Culture: Food is fundamental in Chinese culture and everyday life. The Chinese believe that if someone is eating good food fosters unity and togetherness among families, forging stronger relationships. Chinese cooking involves shopping for fresh foods daily. That means selecting the freshest meats, in-season produce, and live seafood. Chinese culture emphasizes the dish's flavor, color, aroma, and texture. These are the essential building blocks of a delicious meal and tasting experience. Traditionally,

frozen and canned foods are rarely consumed, and Western desserts like pies, cakes, ice cream, and cookies are only enjoyed on special occasions like weddings, holidays, and birthdays (San-J Newsletter, 2024).

Research on Zhuang food culture meaning and representation in the process of new media communication in China, Cultural food products can reflect and influence people's cultural perspective. Through examining the cultural products distributed in new media, we can understand the impact of new media on China from a cultural perspective. In the first section, Chinese culture within the framework of Hofstede's culture dimension is laid out, which is described as high-power distance, long-term orientation, weak uncertainty avoidance, emphasizing accomplishment, restrained, and very collectivistic. Chinese collectivism is evident from the institution's online presentation of individual social networking, underlying the formation of social capital communication on online social networks. The relationships between new media and cultural change, and discuss how new media may influence Chinese cultural change. A new media, it potentially exerts power along with modernization in influencing people's cultural orientation in collectivism–individualism. Because the new media changes communication and becomes a more important platform for disseminating cultural products, we submit that cultural products in new media reflect Chinese cultural values and may influence Chinese cultural change in the long run (Xu & Zhang, 2017).

This study interpreted and understood the process of media representation of Zhuang food culture from the perspectives of meaning and representation, enabling the focus of new media communication to converge on the construction of the meaning of the cultural Zhuang food. It addresses the absence of representation theory in academic research on Zhuang food culture before 2024 and the inadequate understanding of the cultural connotations of Zhuang food culture in new media communication from the perspective of inheriting and developing the nation's excellent traditional culture, this study also holds significant academic and practical significance.

The formation and development of Zhuang food culture have always been influenced by the unique natural ecology and geographical environment in which the Zhuang ethnic group has lived and multiplied for a long time. The Zhuang people primarily reside in Guangxi, China, where the vast and boundless subtropical virgin forests provide abundant food resources for the Zhuang people living there, offering a strong guarantee for the reproduction of future generations and the continuation of the population. Finally, the meaning of Zhuang food culture: For a long time, paddy culture, as the economic foundation, has been influencing various aspects of Zhuang social life, including clothing, food, housing, and transportation. Especially, in the dietary life of the Zhuang people, from the sources of food materials to food processing methods, they mainly revolve around the center of paddy culture. From daily diet to festive and other special diets, they are all deeply imprinted with the brand of paddy culture.

Methodology and Methods

The researcher discovered that the representation of Zhuang food culture on new media platforms is primarily conducted through three dimensions: the representation of food culture, the representation of regional culture, and the representation of traditional Zhuang culture. Among these, food culture is the overt representation, while regional culture and traditional Zhuang culture constitute the deeper, underlying representations in five steps.

Research Objective

To circulate values and cultural meanings generated through cultural practices within the realm of symbols, functioning as symbolic resources for social individuals to forge their identities, and investigate the Zhuang food culture holds seven tiers of meaning for the Zhuang people to be manifested in their traditional festivals and daily life.

Research Procedures

This qualitative research method was designed to investigate the circulation values and cultural meanings generated through cultural practices within the realm of symbols, functioning as symbolic resources for social individuals to forge their identities, and investigate the Zhuang food culture holds seven tiers of meaning for the Zhuang people to be manifested in their traditional festivals and daily life in five steps.

Step I: The Text of Zhuang Food Culture Was Discovered

The Zhuang's origins can be traced back to the Paleolithic ancient humans, as demonstrated by a large amount of contemporary archaeological evidence. The Zhuang trace their lineage to the Lạc Việt people through artworks such as the Rock Paintings of Hua Mountain, dating from the Warring States period (475–221 BC). Zhuang people love salty and sour dishes like pickled cabbage, pickled vegetables and pork, and dried fish. The main staple food of the Zhuang people in the Fangchenggang region is rice, and other cereals such as corn, sweet potatoes, taro, and cassava are used as supplementary foods. There is more emphasis on how to eat to balance yin and yang. A typical Zhuang's meal usually consists of rice, soup, and three to four side dishes. Dishes are made of seasonal vegetables, fresh seafood, or bite-size portions of meat or poultry.

Step II: The circulation of values and cultural meanings generated through cultural practices within the realm of symbols to Zhuang's social individuals to forge their identities were described

The context of the field of cultural studies aims to unravel the profound influence of culture on society. By examining the multifaceted relationship between culture and society, this study seeks to highlight how culture shapes individuals, communities, and social interactions through an interdisciplinary approach, encompassing aspects of anthropology, sociology, and media studies, the article explores the diverse dimensions of cultural influence, including language, values, norms, and symbolic systems. This article describes the significance of cultural studies in understanding the complex dynamics of contemporary Zhuang's societies in their food culture.

Step III: Zhuang food culture holds seven tiers of meaning for the Zhuang people, manifested in both traditional festivals and daily life was assessed

About a three-hour drive from Guilin in China's Guangxi province is Ping An, a Zhuang village famous for its beautiful terraced rice fields and millennia-old culture. The ethnic Tai are a group of indigenous people of Southeast Asia whose town units are said to date back 5,000 years. At present, some 90 million ethnic Tai people live across the region and can be divided into 80 groups. They speak various forms of the Tai language. The river snakes from its watershed in Mao'er Mountain in Guilin's Xin'an county through Guilin, Yangshuo, Pingle and Zhaoping and joins the Xi River in Wulin. Therefore, the Zhuang of South China are the most numerous of Zhuang minority peoples. In Vietnam the Zhuang were identified historically as the Nung, and more recently as the combined Tay-Nung minority, the largest of Vietnam's 36 minority peoples. However, based on anthropological theory on food, this research gives a brief discussion on the development direction of food civilization, analyzes the facts that Zhuang people's activities and eating behaviors, in the ancient Zhuang society centering on the state political power, were controlled or influenced by the political ideology. It also probes the relationship between food culture and social-political traditions. To observe with the research team's survey, Zhuang villages and clusters of villages tend to be grouped by clan or people that believe they have a common ancestor. Houses are often grouped by surname with newcomers living on the outskirts of the village. They set up their villages on a mountain slope facing a river and live either in one-story or two-story brick houses with Chinese-style roofs. The two-story houses have a living area upstairs pens for animals and storage areas downstairs. They grow patty rice, glutinous rice, yams, and maize as their staples, with double and triple crops the norm in most years. They also raise tropical fruits such as mangos, bananas, lychees, pineapple, oranges, and sugar cane. Most of their protein comes from fish, pigs, and chicken. Markets have traditionally been the center of economic life. According to the "Human Use of Insects as a Food Resource." The former eats mainly the leaves of *Platycarya stobilacea*, the latter the leaves of *Malus seiboldii*.

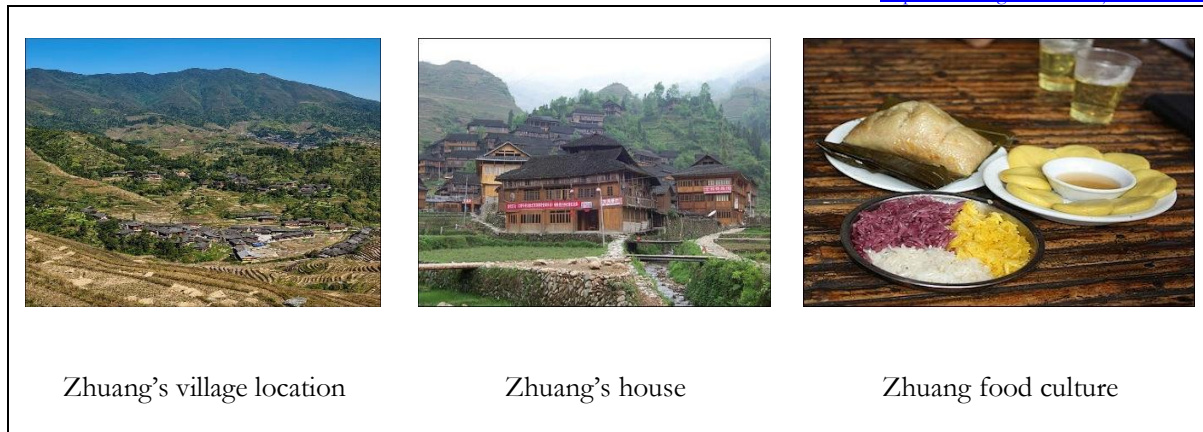


Figure Caption 4: Zhuang Village in The Longji Rice Terrace Area and Zhuang Food Culture

Source: Blanc (2009).

Step IV: The representation of Zhuang food culture on new media platforms was monitored and evaluated

Under the background of modernity, the cultural communication environment of the Chinese Zhuang Nationality Festival has changed a lot, showing a development trend that spans time and space, regions, and ethnic groups. It also has established an open and interactive attitude and an unprecedented close connection with the tourism economy and commercial trade. However, in the face of the complicated media environment, the March 3rd Festival, as a traditional national festival, still inevitably encounters the impact of modernity from many sides, and brings certain obstacles to cross-border cultural exchanges. The study uses methods of literature analysis from the characteristics of national culture itself and finds a way out, which can stimulate cultural vitality, and gradually alleviate the difficulties in cross-border communication to promote the reproduction of national culture and realize the sustainable development of national culture. We conducted a qualitative study comprising 25 experts in nutrition, sociology, food culture, and agriculture from Zhuang villages, they used the media platforms with in-depth interviews to monitor and evaluate the representation of Zhuang food culture on new media platforms.

Step V: To employ the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival as a case study, extending the representation research to encompass the public's experience and perception transmission of Zhuang food culture during the festival was discussed.

Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival refers to the 3rd day of the 3rd month in the Chinese Lunar Calendar, is a traditional festival for many ethnic groups across China. People in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region usually celebrate it with various activities including embroidered ball throwing, antiphonal singing, sparkler-grabbing, bamboo pole dancing, and lushing performances (Figure Caption 5).

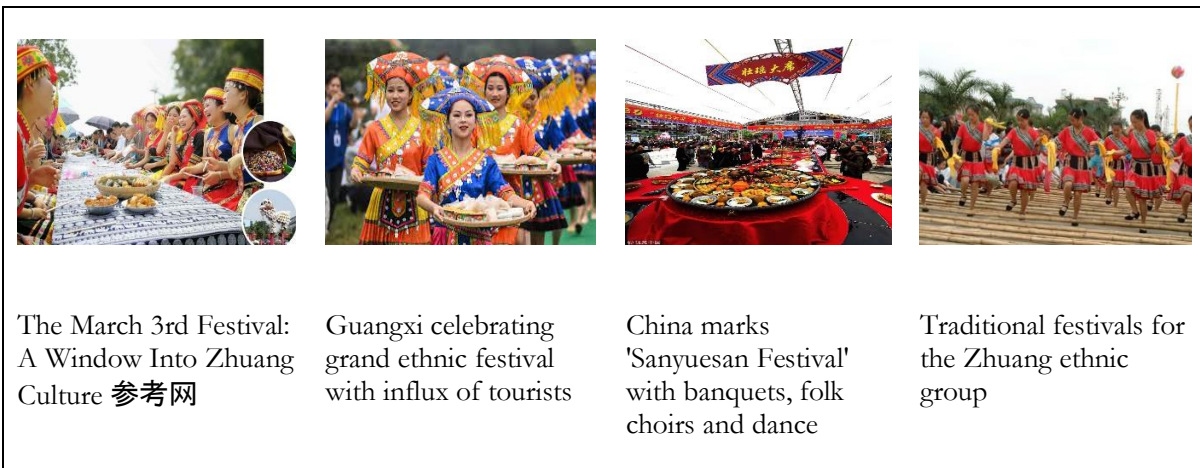




Figure Caption 5: Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region: Sanyuesan Festival Celebrated; Guangxi Rolls Out Tourism Policies in Support of Sanyuesan Festival, And Five-Color Glutinous Rice

Source: Photo by the People’s Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (2023)

Figure Caption 6 shows the *Zhuang’s Paddy Culture Food Festival*: The Zhuang have a rich variety of customs and culture. "Sam Nyied Sam" the 3rd day of the 3rd month of the Chinese lunar calendar is one of the main festivals of the Zhuang celebrated by singing, dancing, games, and special food. At this time traditionally young men and women sing antiphonal songs to each other that including festival of the ancestor sacrifice of the 7th lunar month, the Duanwu medicine festival, Buffalo King Festival celebrated in Niutouzhai Village, Wenshan County, where there is a Buffalo King Temple. The Zhuang have long worshipped the water buffalo, Bullfighting festival, Firstfruits Festival, and Zhuang children's festival; dates chosen by each individual village



The March 3rd Festival: A Window Into Zhuang Culture 参考网

Guangxi celebrating grand ethnic festival with influx of tourists

China marks 'Sanyuesan Festival' with banquets, folk choirs and dance

Traditional festivals for the Zhuang ethnic group

Figure Caption 6: Zhuang Food Culture at The Zhuang’s Paddy Culture Food Festival

Source: Photos by Xinhua (2023)

Figure Caption 6, show the Guangxi Rice Noodle Festival of Zhuang Food Culture, locals in Guangxi feast on their regional specialty of snail noodles. The novelty of the dish has made it a viral sensation in China during the pandemic. Slippery rice noodles are first bathed in a slow-simmering broth of laboriously peeled river snails. Then they're topped with odorous bamboo shoots that have been covered in salt and left to ferment for a few weeks, tofu and salty lemon vinegar. Much of the preparation relies on fermentation, common in cuisine from southern Guangxi province where the noodles first began. Their malodorous reputation also makes snail noodles quite possibly one of the worst meals to make at home: The smell of the pickled toppings and the stewed snails can linger for hours. In 2022, online influencers with tens of millions of followers began blogging about the disgustingly good snack of the media communication on food popular culture.



Figure Caption 6: The Guangxi Rice Noodle Festival of Zhuang Food Culture

Source: Photos By People's Daily Online (2020)

As reported in the Figure Caption 6, rice noodles cooked with river snails, a signature street food of Liuzhou in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, is becoming an increasingly popular snack at home and abroad (People's Daily Online, 2020).

Research Collections

This study interprets and understands the process of media representation of Zhuang food culture from the perspectives of meaning and representation, enabling the focus of new media communication to converge on the construction of the meaning of Zhuang food culture. It addresses the absence of representation theory in academic research on Zhuang food culture before 2024 and the inadequate understanding of the cultural connotations of Zhuang food culture in new media communication. From the perspective of inheriting and developing the nation's excellent traditional culture, this study also holds significant academic and practical significance.

Research Methods

This study is a fundamental research that adopts qualitative research methods. In information collection, the researcher primarily gathers data through two methods including literature collection, and fieldwork. Firstly, during the fieldwork. The researcher conducted using the interview data design with various groups, including inheritors of intangible cultural heritage techniques, relevant government staff, tourists, and food business operators. Among them, the key informants were mainly Pan Honghua, the inheritor of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region-level intangible cultural heritage of Five-Color Sticky Rice, and Lai Meining, the inheritor of the Nanning City-level intangible cultural heritage of Five-Color Sticky Rice, as well as Huang Rong, the head of the Propaganda and Promotion Department of Guangxi Tourism and Development Group. The information provided by these key informants was crucial for this study.

Qualitative Data

The researcher also obtained information through participatory observation by participating in events such as the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, the Paddy Culture Food Festival, and the Guangxi Rice Noodle Festival. Secondly, the researcher collected data through literature, primarily data including articles, books, and internet resources, ultimately resulting in descriptive texts. This project uses an innovative combination of research methodologies from 'big data' computational analysis, media studies, and discourse analysis in a staged process.

Results

Ethnobotanical investigation including market surveys, semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews, and participatory observations was conducted for the development of Zhuang food culture, the meaning and representation of Zhuang food culture in the process of new media communication in China was described. The results of the qualitative research study are reported for each section as follows:

Part I: The Socio-historical and Cultural Development of Guangxi Related to Zhuang Food Culture

This study examines the historical contexts of ethnic politics in China. The notion of ethnicity was developed as one of the key categories in China's modern nation-building project. During the 1950s, a variety of Tai's speaking groups, who inhabit mainly Guangxi, were officially recognized as a minzu (national minority) of the People's Republic of China under the collective name "Zhuang". Guangxi, is an autonomous region located in southern China. It is bounded by the Chinese provinces of Yunnan to the west, Guizhou to the north, Hunan to the northeast, and Guangdong to the southeast; the Gulf of Tonkin (Beibu Gulf) and Vietnam border it to the south and southwest. Nanning, the capital, is about 75 miles (120 km) southwest of the region's geographic center. The formation and development of Zhuang food culture have always been influenced by the unique natural ecology and geographical environment in which the Zhuang ethnic group has lived and multiplied for a long time. The Zhuang people primarily reside in Guangxi, China, where the vast and boundless subtropical virgin forests provide abundant food resources for the Zhuang people living there, offering a strong guarantee for the reproduction of future generations and the continuation of the population.

The Emergence of Zhuang food culture (Prehistoric Period)

The dietary life during this extended period was not as idyllic as one might imagine; instead, it was fraught with hardships. The biggest challenge encountered by the ancestral Zhuang people in their dietary life was the scarcity of food sources, prompting them to toil tirelessly throughout the day to scrounge for sustenance and rely on collective strength to maintain their shared existence is significant. After inventing pottery through fire-hardening techniques ten thousand years ago, the Zhuang ancestors utilized these pottery vessels as cooking utensils to boil grains and meats. As a result, roasting and boiling were the prevalent food processing methods among the ancestral people at that time. There were no fixed meal schedules or specialized utensils like bowls and chopsticks for dining; instead, people ate with their hands, quenching their thirst with mountain spring water or animal blood. This was the nascent stage of the Zhuang ancestors' dietary life, which, though primitive and barbaric, laid the foundation for the subsequent formation and development of Zhuang food culture.

Formation of regional styles of Zhuang food culture (Shang and Zhou to Sui and Tang dynasties)

Guangxi is located in the subtropical region characterized by a warm climate, abundant sunshine, and high annual rainfall, which is highly conducive to rice cultivation. Since the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the Zhuang ancestors began using bronze tools in agricultural production. In Matou Township, Wuming County, Guangxi, bronze tools such as copper axes, copper hatchets, copper knives, and copper chisels used for farming were unearthed from burial sites dating from the Western Zhou to the Spring and Autumn period in China. From the Qin and Han dynasties to the Northern and Southern dynasties, ox-drawn plowing gradually spread throughout the Zhuang regions. The introduction of iron tools and ox-drawn plowing in the Zhuang regions facilitated rice farming but also contributed to the Zhuang people's rice-based food cultivation structure, gradually establishing rice as the staple food in Zhuang food culture.

Development of Zhuang food culture (Ming and Qing Dynasties)

The imperial cuisine of the Ming dynasty was mainly grain-based. Therefore, meat and bean products were not as popular as their life were in the former dynasties. In the Qing dynasty, a famous dish was sweet potatoes. Maize and chili peppers were also introduced around the mid-16th century. The Ming Dynasty is renowned for its art achievements, literature, and science. The era witnessed a flourishing of traditional

Chinese culture, with notable advancements in painting, calligraphy, poetry, and ceramics. Fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats were supplied in their times. In Ming Palace, more vegetables and fruits were eaten than meat and fish among the meat and fish eaten were chicken, pheasant, goose, duck, carp, golden carp, Mandarin fish, bream, rabbit, and deer. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, China underwent significant changes, transforming economically, culturally, and socially. Many of these changes were driven by interactions and trade with European countries.

From the Song Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty, the social economy in the Zhuang regions experienced rapid development, with agriculture, handicrafts, commercial trade, transportation, and other sectors showing varying degrees of progress and advancement. Alongside this social development, and progress, the interactions between the Zhuang society and the outside world also continuously increased. Due to long-term ethnic interactions and integrations, the scope of Guangxi Zhuang tribes has been gradually reduced. At the same time, with the deepening cultural exchanges and mutual infiltration between the Zhuang and other ethnic groups, many original traditional cultures of the Zhuang, including their food culture, have also been continuously diminishing in scope, incorporating increasing cultural elements from other ethnic groups. The Zhuang people have transformed the cultures of the ethnic groups, leading to the formation of unique festive and life ceremony dietary customs in Zhuang society. The dietary system and etiquette with Zhuang characteristics have taken shape.

The Zhuang people's Spring Festival, Tomb-Sweeping Day, Dragon Boat Festival, Bon Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, Double Ninth Festival, New Year's Eve, and so on, are all festivals that originated in Han regions and were "transformed" by the Zhuang people through their production and life practices. Therefore, the Zhuang food culture during these festivals shares similarities or commonalities with the Han culture, such as eating zongzi during the Dragon Boat Festival and mooncakes during the Mid-Autumn Festival. At the same time, some dietary customs distinguish the Zhuang from the Han, such as the Double Ninth Festival also known as the "Birthday Celebration Festival" in a considerable part of Zhuang regions. On the 60th birthday of the Zhuang elderly, their children will prepare a grain jar for them. After that, every year on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, the children will add grain to the jar, and the whole family will have a reunion dinner.

Prosperity of the Zhuang food culture (modern times to the present)

In the last three decades, China's food system has moved from one based on rationing and grain coupons to one characterized by increasing choices, rising prices, and growing concerns about food quality and safety. Food is an important part of daily life for Chinese people. Chinese people enjoy eating and believe eating good food can bring harmony and closeness to their family and relationships. Similarly, the Zhuang people, constituting the largest minority group in the area, possess a wealth of traditional knowledge concerning wild edible plants (WEPs) owing to the region's favorable environment and dietary customs. With the rapid development of urbanization, tourism, and trade, the Zhuang people's food culture, including the consumption of wild edible plants, has become an attractive aspect of urban development.

Since the mid-19th century, the Zhuang society, like the entire Chinese society, has undergone significant political and economic changes. After the Opium War in China, the long-closed door of China's feudal society was opened, and foreign novelties continuously flooded into China, bringing various degrees of multifaceted influences to people from all walks of life in China. Especially since the founding of New China, the appearance of the entire society has undergone rapid and profound changes. The development and progress of society have brought excellent opportunities for the development of Zhuang food culture. During this period, the exchange between Zhuang food culture and the food cultures of other domestic ethnic groups was unprecedentedly active. Through these exchanges, advanced cooking techniques from the ethnic groups were absorbed, making Zhuang cuisine more scientific and reasonable than before. After the founding of New China, under the guidance of the Guangxi government, various aspects of customs in Zhuang social life underwent certain reforms, eliminating some unhealthy customs including dietary practices, and gradually forming a new scientific and civilized outlook on diet. The evolution of Zhuang food culture from its initial emergence to later prosperity and vitality is a result of the interplay of various factors within the Zhuang community, including social, economic, cultural, and geographical factors. The

combined force of these factors not only drove the progress of Zhuang society and shaped a paddy-based dietary structure within it, but also facilitated the gradual evolution of Zhuang food culture into a meaningful system with multi-layered connotations.

Part II: The Meaning of Zhuang Food Culture

Zhuang ethnic group is one of the earliest recognized ethnic groups in China. It is the second largest ethnic group among the 56 ethnic groups and the most populous ethnic group in China and also the largest ethnic minority group with a long history and splendid culture in China. Zhuang Nationality is one of the earliest ethnic groups to cultivate rice. The culture of rice cultivation is very developed, and rice has naturally become the staple food of the Zhuang People. Rice production methods are various, such as, steaming, boiling, stir-frying, braising, frying, and so on. Zhuang people like to eat aquatic products, fish, and clams, all for their precious taste. The fungi and fruits, cicadas, snakes, and animals in the forest are also the daily delicacies of the Zhuang people.

For a long time, paddy culture, as the economic foundation, has been influencing various aspects of Zhuang social life, including clothing, food, housing, and transportation. Especially, in the dietary life of the Zhuang people, from the sources of food materials to food processing methods, they mainly revolve around the center of paddy culture. From daily diet to festive and other special diets, they are all deeply imprinted with the brand of paddy culture. Interpretation of the two Zhuang delicacies, five-colored glutinous rice, and Liuzhou River snails rice noodles, and deep understanding of the multi-layered meanings behind the foods made from rice by this paddy culture nation, the Zhuang people. The selection of five-colored glutinous rice and Liuzhou River snail rice noodles as representatives of the Zhuang food culture is based on the following three reasons:

The raw materials of these two delicacies are derived from rice, embodying the paddy culture of the Zhuang people

Mo or Moism (Chinese: 麽教; pinyin: Mó jiào) is the religion of most Zhuang people, the largest ethnic minority of China. It has a large presence in Guangxi. While it has a supreme god, the creator Bu Luotuo (布洛陀), numerous other deities are venerated. It has a three-element theory (sky, earth, and water). Many Zhuang resisted foreign control, striving for continued independence. Their subsequent defeat meant that the Zhuang had never been again to have an opportunity for autonomous development. The Zhuang Culture is a mosaic of religion, farm life, art, foods, dress, and architectural styles. In many homes among the Zhuang people, you will find individuals who speak more than one language and talented artists who practice a cultural variety of art forms from textiles to music. This unique people group has gained respect and has established a thriving and unique culture in China.

The Zhuang culture is mainly an agrarian group famous for its early cultivation of rice. Excavations have recovered ancient artifacts in the form of rice farming tools. Rice was the staple of the ancient Zhuang diet and due to their production by the crop, it has become a staple, not only throughout the Southern of China but throughout the Asian world. The style of rice cultivation in the Zhuang village is considered of a national treasure in China. The primary raw material for rice mill plants is the paddy, which determines the quality of the rice. So, purchasing from paddy growing areas called paddy belts is recommended as it will be cost-effective. These products include parboiled rice, breakfast rice cereals, canned rice, easy-to-cook brown rice, rice bran oil, and yeast-fermented rice cake. Rice and rice-based products derived from the rice grain and rice flour include parboiled rice; quick-cooking rice and ready-to-eat convenience foods; rice flours; rice starch; cakes and puddings; baked breads and crackers; breakfast cereals and expanded rice products; extrusion-cooked and puffed-rice snacks; noodles, etc.,

Zhuang Ethnic Group is one of the first groups to develop cultivated rice planting in the world. The long-time rice agriculture has produced a profound and lasting impact on the work, life, customs, personality, and inner mentality of the Zhuang people. In an agricultural society where the model of self-sufficiency continuously predominated the Chinese economic model, rice culture boosted the development of the

Zhuang people. However, rice culture is nothing more than the production of the natural economy whose disadvantage is to come out gradually of the social development. The exploration of approaches to uniting rice culture with modernization, and rice culture with socialist market economy is expected to be beneficial to the modern development of the Zhuang people. Rice is one of the world's most important staple food crops. The ancestors of the Zhuang, the largest ethnic minority in China, are among the earliest rice cultivators in the world.

Both of these delicacies carry the significance of national unity and is used by the Guangxi government and the Zhuang ethnic group to construct ethnic identity

Five-color glutinous rice: The festival staple food of the Zhuang people

It is cooked with five kinds of rice of different colors: black, red, yellow, purple, and white. When it comes to the Tomb Sweeping Festival or the Song Festival on March 3, every household of the Zhuang ethnic group in Wuming cooks a dish to treat their guests. Guangxi is a place with ethnic characteristics, where one of China's largest ethnic minorities, the Zhuang people, live. What we are talking about today is the special cuisine of the Zhuang nationality: five-color glutinous rice. The status of glutinous rice products is particularly prominent in the festive diet of the Zhuang people. Glutinous rice, as a staple offering in the sacrifices of Zhuang society, reflects that it is a common item shared by humans and deities. The main ingredients of Zhuang nationality's five-colored glutinous rice are glutinous rice and plant dyes. The Zhuang people in Guangxi use locally abundant maple leaves, red indigo, yellow flowers, and turmeric, as dyes to color the glutinous rice black, red, yellow, and purple, and together with the original white color of the glutinous rice, it becomes the Zhuang nationality's five-colored glutinous rice. The colors of the five-color glutinous rice are yellow, purple, red, black, and white. Among them, white is the natural color. The other four colors are all dyed with local ingredients. To dye the glutinous rice, we use round-leaf red and bluegrass, long-leaf red and bluegrass, maple leaves, and turmeric. Now, people in Guangxi also use other plants to obtain various colors, such as blue and green (Figure caption 7).

Some trivia: red and bluegrass is a Chinese herbal medicine. Maple leaves are not only ornamental plants but also medicinal plants. In traditional Chinese medicine, it is mainly used for rheumatism. Turmeric can be used for sterilization in Chinese medicine. Its role is to promote bile secretion and enhance gallbladder contraction. However, it is prohibited for pregnant women and those with blood deficiency. Round leaf red blue grass and long-leaf blue grass are red and blue grasses of the same species but with different leaf shapes. The leaves are long, and dark in color, and the color after cooking is purple. The leaves are round and light in red color and the color after making is red. Allergic is to a certain kind of plant or are taboo people, please do not use this plant, you can use other plants that can make colors for cooking. This information is presented for cultural purposes only and isn't regarded as medical advice or scientific claims.

The Five-color Glutinous Rice made by the Zhuang people in Guangxi will prepare five-colored glutinous rice during the most important traditional festival of the Zhuang nationality, the "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival." Additionally, some Zhuang villages will also make five-colored glutinous rice during other festivals such as the Spring Festival, Qingming Festival, and Zhongyuan Festival. Those who have traveled in China must know some kinds of glutinous rice food, like tang-yuan, zongzi, and niangao, etc. However, have you heard of wuse nuomifan ((五色糯米饭), or "five-colored glutinous rice? This food wasn't what any visitors were likely to see in most parts of China. Then, how do Zhuang people make this five-colored rice? Zhuang people don't simply throw black and red rice into their pots. The five colors - black, purple, yellow, red, and white - of the sticky rice are extracted from some healthy herbs. Maple leaves provides the black dye, a plant called zifanteng the purple; huangfanhua the yellow; honglancao the red; and nature, of course, makes the white. First, the herbs must be snipped into tiny pieces, and boiled in water for hours to get the dye. Next, soak the raw rice in the natural dyes overnight to ensure the perfect color. And then, steam the five color-soaked rice in a steamer for one hour. (Figure Caption 7).

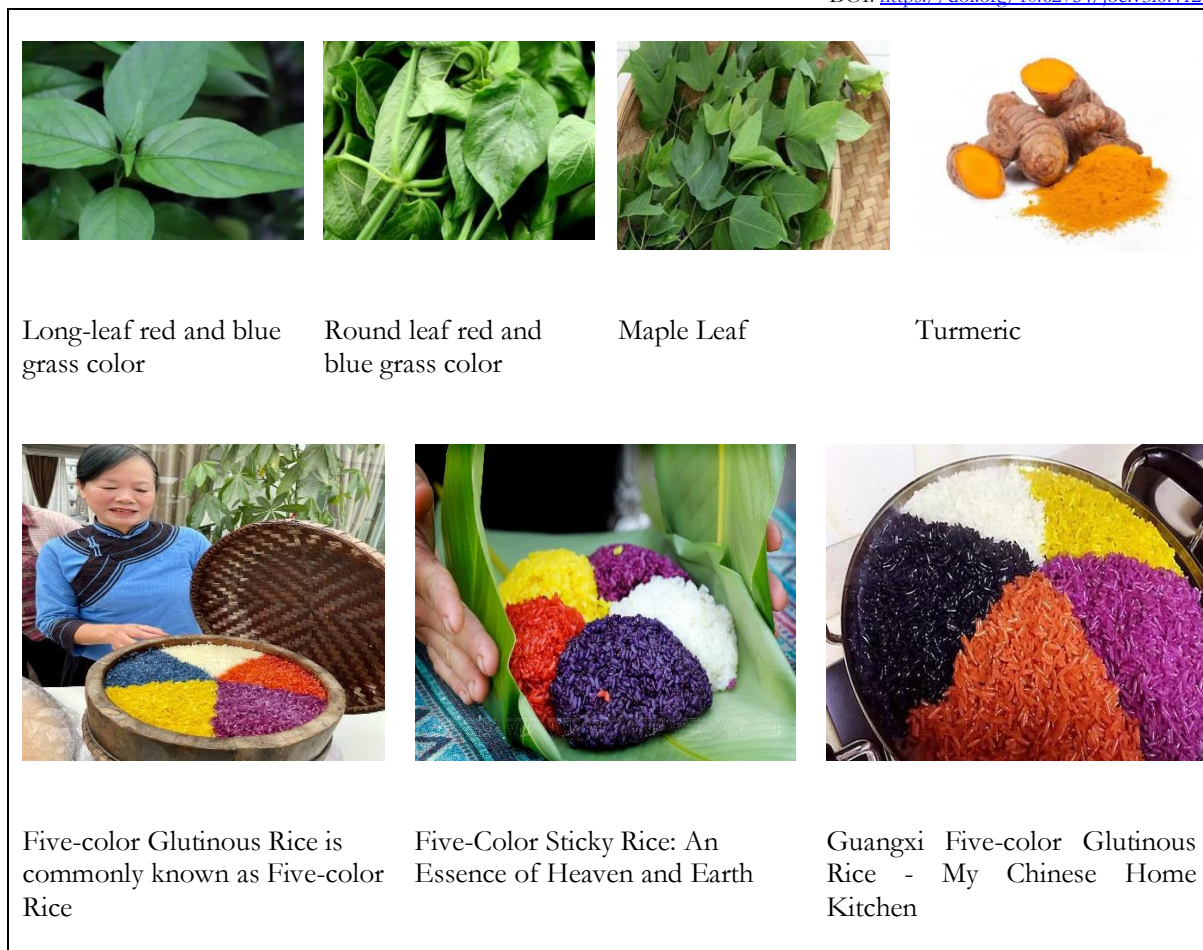


Figure Caption 7: Raw Materials to Be Made for The Five-Rice Color on The Guangxi Five-Color Glutinous Rice in Zhuang Food Culture

Source: Photos By My Chinese Home Kitchen (2021)

Liuzhou River Snails Rice Noodles: The Common Food Memory of Guangxi People

Human dietary preferences and taste orientations are often formed within the context of family and social upbringing. Just as the Zhuang people in Guangxi have a culinary tradition of eating rice noodles, dietary preferences become difficult to change once they become habitual tastes. Daily, there is no particular awareness of when rice noodles are available. Still, once they are absent, they become a profound longing and an unbearable addiction, especially for the elderly in Guangxi who cannot go a day without rice noodles. Guangxi is a major province for rice noodles, with each city having its unique bowl of rice noodles. Rice noodles have become a distinctive hallmark of every city in Guangxi. Liuzhou River snail rice noodle combines the food cultures of the Han nationality and ethnic minorities, resulting in a blend of four flavors: "sour, spicy, fresh, and fragrant." The main ingredients of Liuzhou River snails rice noodles include river snails, yuba (dried tofu skin), and dry-cut rice noodles. The auxiliary ingredients include pork spine bones, fried peanuts, sour bamboo shoots, black fungus, sour bean sprouts, and green vegetables. This small bowl of rice noodles contains the dietary memories of various ethnic groups in Guangxi, including the "sour food culture" of the Dong and Miao ethnic groups, the traditional "rice noodle culture" of the Han, Zhuang, and other ethnic groups in Guangxi, as well as the "spicy food culture" of the Yao ethnic group. Together, they form the dietary memories of the integrated development of various ethnic groups in Guangxi (Figure Caption 8).

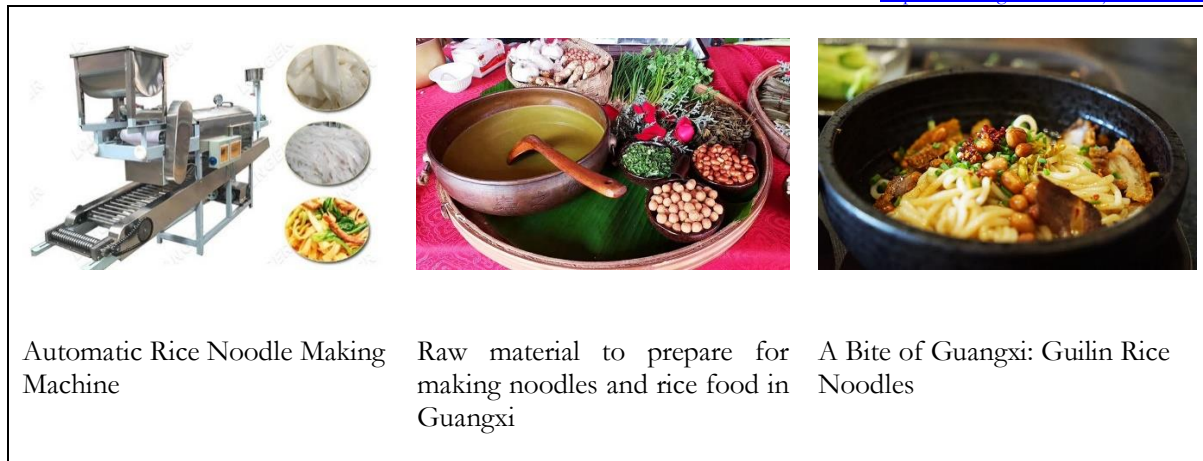


Figure Caption 8: Liuzhou River Snails Rice Noodles: The Common Food Memory of Guangxi People

Source: Photos by People's Daily Life Online (2024)

The Meaning of Five-Colored Glutinous Rice and Liuzhou River Snails Rice Noodles in Daily Life and Traditional Festivals

Based on a field investigation into the dietary activities of Guangxi people towards five-colored glutinous rice and Liuzhou River snail rice noodles in daily life and traditional festivals, the researchers found that the Zhuang dietary culture encompasses seven layers of meanings, which are:

The meaning of primitive worship and belief

The Zhuang people in Guangxi believe in the theory of five elements: metal, wood, water, fire, and earth, and believe in interrelated and interactive. The five elements correspond to five colors, which are reflected in the traditional diet and embody the beliefs and thoughts of the Zhuang people in harmony between man and nature. The Zhuang people deeply believe that the daily lives of humans and nature are interdependent and should respect nature's bounty. They make five-colored glutinous rice to worship gods. Some Zhuang villages in Guangxi hold memorial ceremonies in autumn, scattering five-colored glutinous rice on farmland and fields, sharing food with gods, and thanking heaven for good seasons and harvests. The Zhuang people use five-colored glutinous rice to symbolize a bumper crop and hope for a good harvest.

The Meaning of Survival Belief

Guangxi is hot and humid, and bacteria are prone to multiply in the surrounding environment. However, the Zhuang people have accumulated rich experience through long-term living, adapting to local conditions, and making flights to use local plants to strengthen their bodies. They use plant juices such as maple leaves, yellow gardenia, red bluegrass, and turmeric to dye glutinous rice, which turns into five colors after steaming and emits the aroma of plants. This glutinous rice increases appetite, and has certain health-care functions, satisfying the Zhuang people's need for physical strengthening and representing a simple survival belief. The five-colored glutinous rice showcases the wisdom of the Zhuang people.

The Meaning of Aesthetic Concepts

The five-colored glutinous rice made by the Zhuang people in Guangxi integrates their aesthetic concept, reflecting their love and tolerance for various colors. Purple and red symbolize the vigorous vitality of summer, yellow represents the joy of autumn harvest, white symbolizes the tranquility and peace of winter, and black represents the land that nurtures all things in spring. Five-colored glutinous rice not only symbolizes peace throughout the four seasons but also provides a delightful experience for both the eyes and the palate. During landmark occasions such as the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in 2018, the 70th anniversary of the founding of New China in 2019, and the

centenary of the Communist Party of China in 2021, Guangxi residents have expressed their profound sentiments towards the country and the party by arranging five-colored glutinous rice into symbolic patterns such as the Chinese national flag, Guangxi's map, the emblem and flag of the Communist Party of China, using different colors of glutinous rice in intricate designs. This demonstrates that five-colored glutinous rice is not merely a delicious food, but also an artistic culinary creation.

The Meaning of Ethnic Identity

The distinction between one ethnic group and another cannot be established solely by oneself. An ethnic group must rely on a reference point to differentiate between the self and the other, thereby constructing boundaries between the self-ethnic group and other ethnic groups. Undoubtedly, five-colored glutinous rice also serves as a symbol for maintaining the boundaries of the Zhuang ethnic group. For a specific purpose, during particular festivals, the production and enjoyment of certain foods represent a shared collective memory of a nation. This collective memory is a core element that constitutes ethnic identity. Guangxi Zhuang people have continued the tradition of making five-colored glutinous rice for ancestor worship, entertaining guests, and socializing with friends during traditional festivals for thousands of years. This has formed a shared collective memory among Zhuang people in the region and has also fostered ethnic identity.

The Meaning of Moral Norms

During the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, Zhuang people will prepare five-colored glutinous rice to offer sacrifices to their ancestors, allowing the ancestors to taste the food first before the family members share the offerings. This is a way for Zhuang people to handle sacrificial offerings according to the moral norms of their ethnic group. Guangxi Zhuang people possess admirable moral standards and hold the utmost respect for the eldest ancestors and parents in the family. During traditional festivals, Zhuang people will invite the elderly to sit in positions of honor, fostering a positive social atmosphere. Five-colored glutinous rice is not merely a type of food; it is also a manifestation of the social nature of the ethnic group and a reflection of good moral norms.

The Meaning That Embodies the Zhuang People's Thought of Valuing "Glutinous Rice"

Offerings enable people to communicate with gods and honor the gods, and people will choose the best offerings they believe in. The Zhuang people are deeply influenced by rice culture, and believe that glutinous rice is the most precious. During ancestor worship, they will inevitably offer five-colored glutinous rice processed from glutinous rice. In the eyes of the Zhuang people, glutinous rice is better than ordinary rice and is the best of rice. Using it as a gift best represents one's sincerity. The five-colored glutinous rice as an offering and a gift, embodies the Zhuang people's profound belief in the nobility of "glutinous rice."

The Meaning of Cultural Integration in Guangxi's Ethnicity

A humble bowl of Liuzhou River snail rice noodles encapsulates a diverse array of cultures: the sour food culture of the Dong and Miao ethnic groups, the paddy culture of the Zhuang people, the spicy food culture of the Yao people, and the rice noodle culture shared by the Han and Zhuang ethnicities. While the rice noodles with river snails inherently possess distinct local attributes, the ethnic identity within the dish has become blurred, with ethnic boundaries becoming less prominent. Evolving from a humble street snack to a local cultural symbol, the rice noodles with river snails have permeated every aspect of Guangxi people's lives, becoming a shared culinary memory and a symbol of ethnic unity and cultural exchange in Guangxi.

Shared sensory experiences, food memories, and beliefs have constructed a communal space with shared values and meanings for the Zhuang people. Within this communal space, people are more closely connected due to these shared elements, thereby strengthening their identity and sense of belonging.

Part III: The Zhuang Food Culture Within the Framework of Representation

Food is an essential part of every culture. It's more than just a means of sustenance, but a way of expressing oneself, connecting with others, and passing on rich cultural heritage. Food is deeply ingrained in our cultural identities and serves as a representative in Zhuang heritage, history, and values. There is more emphasis on how to eat to balance yin and yang. High importance is placed on the freshness and flavor of produce or food. A typical Chinese meal usually consists of rice, soup, and three to four side dishes. Dishes are made of seasonal vegetables, fresh seafood, or bite-size portions of meat or poultry. The way for serving food and dishes is placed in the middle of the table for people to share. Members have to wait to eat until the whole family is seated. There are orders of serving rice, porridge, and soup. Food culture is the collective habits, rituals, beliefs, values, lifestyle, and practices around producing, procuring, and taking food. It shapes the way people live and feel. It affects their identity and their culture. Food defines and helps form connections with the families, societies, and countries of people. Italian, Chinese, Thai, Indian, French, Japanese, and Mexican cuisines are widely recognized as the top seven globally. These culinary traditions are renowned for their distinct flavors, exceptional ingredients, and rich cultural heritage.

Stuart Hall's theory of cultural representation, emphasizes the interconnectedness of language, identity, and cultural differences, highlighting how representation shapes these concepts within a cultural context. Hall believes that cultural identity is who people are, and here "people" refers to a group of people of a particular race, or ethnic group, and that has the same language or religious culture. It is this sense of community that has fixed the identity. Culture is a way to make sense of or give meaning to things of one sort or another. It's true, of course, that we all don't make sense of things in the same way, and therefore, that each of us has a little kind of conceptual world of our own, or rather we have our take on the conceptual world. In Hall's words, If the forms of provided commercial popular culture are not purely manipulative, then it is because, alongside the false appeals, the foreshortenings, the trivialization, and short circuits, there are also elements of recognition and identification, something approaching a recreation of recognizable experiences and attitudes, to which people are responding. Culture is also viewed as a practice, a process involving the giving and taking of meanings, namely, the production and circulation of meanings. Cultural representation practices consistently emphasize the analytical utilization of reality's signs, symbols, and narratives.

In the process of new media dissemination, the number of digital media practices reflecting these two delicacies on the internet is the largest

Stuart Hall's theory of representation argues that theory within a media context, there will often not be a true representation of events, people, places, or history. Why? Because there can never be one true meaning. Any meaning can always be contested. Producers, therefore, have to imbue a particular meaning to the piece of media text they are working with. People with social power and privilege may attempt to spread an ideology within media text, pushing their preferred messaging or interpretation (this will be explored more in the Reception Theory section, below). Studying the meanings and messages in media reveals the viewpoints, biases, and political positions of those who created it. Over his career, Hall became increasingly intrigued by the reception of media by audiences. He devised reception theory to examine how media messages are encoded and decoded. The producers of media encode messages into the media they put out, and these messages are, in turn, decoded by audiences. Because they are so diverse, the members' audience is free to decode their messages as they choose. For example, consider the three following positions:

The dominant or preferred message refers to how the producer wants the audience to decode the message. If the audience is of the same age group, gender, ethnicity, class, etc. as the producer, it is easier for them to align with the dominant message.

The oppositional message refers to the audience rejecting the dominant message and creating its meaning. Often, the audience will adopt the oppositional position if they're of a different demographic or hold differing views of the producer on the media content.

The negotiated reading is a compromise between the dominant and oppositional messages. The reason the audience may take this position is multifaceted, they may be of the same background as the producer and

understand some of the messages within it. However, they may also feel the issue is more complex than the media shows and needs greater exploration.

Precisely due to the various cultural representation media possessed by modern society, particularly mass media, and online media, representation practitioners can reproduce, re-express, and recirculate various cultural meanings and values through representation practices such as symbol exploration and narrative innovation. Focused on this research, media representation to the activities of representing the Zhuang dietary culture through media. It involves the "transformation" (re-symbolization) of entities already imbued with the significance of Zhuang dietary culture into cultural texts through the function of media symbols, thereby re-producing, creating, and circulating cultural meanings and values derived from Zhuang dietary life within the realm of symbols. The "China Online Audio-visual Development Research Report (2024)" indicates that as of December 2023, the number of online audio-visual users in China reached 1.074 billion, with an internet user penetration rate of 98.3%. By the same date, the total number of short video accounts across all platforms surpassed 1.55 billion, and the daily average number of short video updates on major short video platforms approximated 80 million. China's short video platforms possess a colossal user base, which translates into more opportunities for individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds to share and promote their respective cultures through these platforms, thereby enhancing mutual understanding and cultural exchange among various ethnic groups.

Through certain filming and editing techniques, as well as rich audio-visual language expressions, food short videos present their content in a more artistic and stylized manner, thereby conveying the emotions behind the food and the protagonists' reflections on life. This also makes short videos more "manipulative." In terms of symbol selection and collocation that more hierarchical in meaning expression. Consequently, researchers believe that short food videos represent one of the optimal ways to present Zhuang food culture through media. "Lamumu Qingqing" is an ordinary farmer in Beiliu Town, Beiliu City, Guangxi, a slope village. In 2021, she put the simple rural food life with a camera to record, and edit into short videos released to the major online platforms, so far a total of 900 original food short videos. This is very popular among netizens. She uses short videos to show the food culture of the Zhuang people to domestic foreign netizens and retain the name of the "flavor of the Zhuang mother" for the new generation of Zhuang people.

This research has selected the short videos of the short video blogger "Lamumu Qingqing" as a case study to sort out various symbols within food short videos, revealing the meaning-production process underlying their cultural representations. The analysis primarily focuses on three dimensions: the representation of food culture, the representation of regional culture, and the representation of traditional culture:

The Representation of Food Culture

The dimension of the representation of food culture is characterized by three aspects: dining utensils, ingredients, and production processes. For instance, in the videos of "Lamumu Qingqing," the kitchen utensils used primarily include water scoops, stoves, earthenware pots, large iron pots, and wooden spoons, reflecting a rustic and natural lifestyle. The process of making five-colored glutinous rice exemplifies the Zhuangs' practice of taking from nature and using it in harmony, expressing their adherence to natural laws and the concept of unity between man and nature.

The Representation of Regional Culture

In the short videos of "Lamumu Qingqing," the representation of regional culture is primarily achieved through two methods: firstly, through the lens language, depicting Guangxi's geographical landscape and social features; secondly, through narration and voiceovers, particularly the imagined connotations conveyed by dialect symbols, showcasing a generalized regional spacetime and local humanities, a significant amount of dialect symbols are utilized. Taking the video episode on Liuzhou River snail rice noodles as an example, at the beginning, the motherly "Lamumu Qingqing" inquires her son in a gentle dialect whether he knows the source of the smell in the snail rice noodles. Then, she explains to her son and the audience that the smell originates from the sour bamboo shoots, that have been soaked and fermented in mountain spring water for seven months. The dialects used in the food short videos serve powerful communication

symbols that resonate deeply with people, contributing simultaneously to the overall construction and dissemination of Guangxi's regional culture.

The Representation of Traditional Culture

In the dimension of the representation of traditional culture, the short videos of "Lamumu Qingqing" primarily showcase the Zhuangs' inheritance and adherence to traditional festivals and culinary skills. Take the most significant traditional festival of the Zhuangs, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, as an example. "Lamumu Qingqing" not only dresses her son in traditional Zhuang attire but also guides him in making the festival's staple food, five-colored glutinous rice. Although the son does not utter any lines, his facial expressions serve as a testament to the inheritance, and he represents the hope for cultural transmission. The theory of cultural representation emphasizes the role of representation in cultural construction. The dissemination of Zhuang food culture in new media is not merely a superficial display of ingredients, cooking methods, festival foods, etc., but rather a means of conveying and constructing the deeper meanings and values of Zhuang culture through these superficial representations.

Part IV: The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival: The Meaning and Representation of Zhuang Food Culture in The Process of New Media Communication

The Zhuang people of Guangxi consider festivals as the moments when the food is the most abundant, the dishes the most sumptuous, the preparation the most exquisite, and the cooking the most elaborate in their lives. Among these traditional festivals, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival holds the utmost significance for the Zhuang people of Guangxi. During this festival, people utilize their own or local ingredients to create special delicacies, thereby expressing their culture and traditions. Therefore, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival serves as a platform for the concentrated and comprehensive display of the rich food culture of the Zhuang people. Before the widespread adoption of Internet technology, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival primarily relied on the interpersonal communication of their real life for dissemination. With the development of new media technologies, the communication channels for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival have become increasingly diversified, and significant innovations have been made in the modes of transmission. Since the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival was inscribed on the fourth batch of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2014, Guangxi has organized large-scale celebrations to mark this festival annually. On the eve of the festival, in addition to traditional print media such as newspapers, magazines, and books reporting on the festival activities, radio, television, and various online platforms also publish a wealth of festival-related information during the festival period, creating a festive atmosphere for the arrival of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival.

According to the *Guangxi Cloud Public Opinion Monitoring System*, during the over 40-day period of the "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival" in 2023, the total number of information related to the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on the internet reached more than 290,000 pieces and repeatedly ranked among the top ten trending topics on Weibo, Kuaishou, Douyin, Baidu, and other platforms. Among them, Nanning Radio and Television Station jointly initiated the topic "*Sanyuesan Festival and Singing for a Good Life*" with Kuaishou, which sparked enthusiastic participation from numerous netizens. By April 22, 2023, the number of participants in this topic across all online platforms reached 120 million. Based on the above observation of social realities, researchers have chosen the field of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival to further delve into the significance and representation of Zhuang food culture in the process of new media communication. Hall argues, that two systems of representation, are involved in the process of meaning production. In the first system, objective objects - people, things, and events - become conceptual maps in people's minds through psychological representations. In the second system, these conceptual maps generate meanings that can be communicated and shared through the system of symbols including written symbols, linguistic symbols, visual symbols, and so on.

The First System of Representation of Zhuang Food Culture in The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival

Observation method, the first system of representation of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival through promotional videos at this festival released by the Guangxi Department of Culture and

Tourism on various online platforms. On April 10, 2024, the Guangxi Department of Culture and Tourism released the promotional video "A Thousand-Year Appointment: Guangxi's Sanyuesan Festival" for the 2024 Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. Within 24 hours after its release, the video had garnered over 100,000 shares and likes on video-sharing platforms, with related hashtags on Douyin (TikTok's Chinese version) surging to the top of China's trending list (Figure Caption 9)..



A screenshot of the promotional video for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is being forwarded on the Weibo video channel of China's People's Daily.

Guangxi celebrates the grand ethnic festival with an influx of tourists

Sanyuesan Cultural and Tourism Festival held in S China's Guangxi

Sanyuesan Festival celebrated in China

Top 8 Traditional Festivals of Guangxi, China

The Zhuang Song Festival

Figure Caption 9: People of Zhuang Ethnic Group Attend 'Hundred-Family Banquet' in S China: Guangxi Celebrates the Grand Ethnic Festival with An Influx of Tourists of the Promotional Video for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival

Source: Photos by Guangxi Department of Culture and Tourism official WeChat account (2024)

After the holiday of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Guangxi, successfully. The viewership of this promotional video has exceeded 16 million plays and has been forwarded by multiple mainstream media outlets. Among them, after the video was forwarded by the People's Chinese Daily, provided by the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, it received 5.15 million views. This promotional video ingeniously integrates the unique ethnic cultural elements of Guangxi, encompassing concepts such as costume culture, Zhuang food culture, dance culture, sports culture, and ethnic musical instruments, into its narrative. By employing and editing techniques of video symbolism, suggestion, metaphor, reinforcement, and contrast, it controls and designs the audiovisual language elements, including image symbols, elements, rhythm, space, shot composition, and the relationship between sound and audio recording image. The promotional video weaves the love stories of the Zhuang people throughout history into a poetic narrative.

Consequently, from ancient times to the present, the love stories of young men and women intertwine through time and space, symbolizing the retrospection of history and the encounter of the present. In the film, the graceful dance of the women conveys their aspirations for the future through their eyes, while the men arrive on horseback, their hearts filled with the desire for love. As the plot unfolds, the rich ethnic elements in the promotional video rhythmically blend with the modern landscapes of Guangxi, forming a lively and melodic video that vividly and captivantly showcases the cultural characteristics of the various ethnic groups in Guangxi (Figure Caption 9). It can be said that the first system of representation of Zhuang food culture has been completed through the cultural representations and media representations in the promotional video "A Thousand-Year Appointment: Guangxi's Sanyuesan Festival".

The Second System of Representation of Zhuang Food Culture in The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival

Festival tourism is a part of a phenomenon that is rather larger than its tourism component. The relationship between people and the various elements of the festival may be complicated by the changing availability of information sources, including web-based sources, and changing relationships towards those sources concerning access ease and trust. China Focus: The vibrant festival highlights the cultural charm of various Chinese ethnic groups. Artists perform in celebration of the Sanyuesan Festival at an alley in Nanning, south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, on April 13, 2024. The Sanyuesan Festival is a traditional festival celebrated on the third day of the third lunar month by various ethnic groups in China. The festival usually sees various ethnic cultural events organized across the region, which has the largest population of ethnic minorities in China. This year, Guangxi launched a splendid array of folk cultural activities, and its 14 cities have planned and organized a slew of events, incorporating regional characteristics and cultural highlights and offering a prolonged period of cultural festivities for residents and visitors.

Before the official commencement of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, the concepts of Zhuang food culture presented in the first system of this representation research cannot yet be perceived as truly existing and tangible information; they are merely preparatory. When Zhuang food culture is disseminated through various media formats during the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, the public gains access to the concepts within the representation system media. Upon entering the festive space, festival participants gain the people's perceptions and experiences of Zhuang food culture, generating new meanings that complete the second representation system. In this process, Zhuang food culture is presented, inherited, and developed.

Through participant observation and informal interviews, the researchers collected the reception of the Zhuang's dietary cultural concepts by festival participants during the second process representation system. Among them, Qiuyue, a Han Chinese who wore Zhuang costumes to participate in the five-colored glutinous rice-making activity, told the researcher, "This looks like a gathering of Zhuang people, and their way of life is that they have invented their symbols and grammar, from hairstyles, clothing to dietary behaviors and even ways of thinking." There was also Ms. Pang, a tourist from Shandong Province, China, who couldn't resist placing an order to buy many bags of five-colored glutinous rice and Liuzhou River snail rice noodles at the festival site, as she wanted to bring the delicious food of Guangxi home with her.

In general, the participants of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival have a very high level of perception and acceptance of the concepts related to the Zhuang food culture. The researcher believes that the promotional video for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival released by the Guangxi Culture and Tourism Department on the Internet serves as a medium to represent the Zhuang food culture within the festival culture through processed audio-visual language. This is the process of the first system of representation in the context of new media communication. When audiences watch the festival videos appearing on the internet are promoted. The Zhuang food culture within the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is transmitted to them through digital media technology. The audiences are inspired by the culture and participate in the activities of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, experiencing and perceiving the food in the festive space, and gaining an overall sense of the Zhuang food culture.

At this point, the previously represented Zhuang food culture has been fully transmitted and received through the experience of the festival activities, and the participants also gain meaning from it. This is the process of the second system of representation. In the process of new media communication, the media

representation of Zhuang food culture through digital media technology follows the first system of representation, showing a "real - reproduction" framework, and then the public completes the dietary experience in the festival space of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival follows the second system of representation, which is "media representation - interactive sharing", presenting another "reproduction - participation" framework. These two frames finally constitute a panorama of the representational practices of Zhuang food culture in the process of new media communication.

Discussions

Food is one of the necessities of life. Food contains nutrients, substances essential for the growth, repair, and maintenance of body tissues, and for the regular of vital processes. Nutrients provide the energy our bodies need to function. Nutrients provide the energy our bodies need to function. The energy in food is measured in units called calories. Age, sex, weight, height, and level of activity determine the number of calories a person needs each day (National Geographic Society, 2021). Food and water consumption is essential to human life. Your body needs energy from food sources and hydration from water to function properly. The many systems in the human body work optimally with a varied diet and adequate water intake daily. But their bodies are also able to survive for days without water (Soliman, 2024). Humans need to obtain nutrients from food to survive and be healthy. The requirements of energy and nutrients are different due to differences in race, age, sex, and physical activity level. People living in different areas take nutrients from each different type of kinds of food; therefore, nutrition is a cultural biological process rather than a simple physiological and biochemical process. Food intake can directly influence one's biological function throughout life, as its results are on a biological level. When people eat, the process can be influenced by economics, politics, culture, and many other factors (Ma, 2015).

Chinese people in general are not as concerned about nutrition as Western culture. They are more concerned with the food's texture, flavor, color, and aroma. These are the crucial points for good Chinese cooking. Chinese daily meals consist of four food groups: grains, vegetables, fruit, and meat. Because of lactose intolerance, the Chinese do not consume large amounts of dairy products. Instead, Chinese substitute these with soymilk and tofu, which also contain large amounts of protein and calcium. Vegetables, fruits, and meats are usually fresh. Some exceptions include preserved vegetables such as snow cabbage or mustard greens, preserved eggs, aka "thousand-year-old eggs" or salted and dried fish. Other exceptions include snack items such as beef jerky, cuttlefish jerky, sweet and sour preserved plums, or dehydrated mango slices. Canned or frozen foods are seldom eaten. Western desserts such as cookies, cakes, pies, and ice cream are eaten only on special occasions such as birthdays and weddings. After dinner, families usually eat seasonal fruit as dessert. Chinese desserts such as red bean soup, sweet white lotus seed soup, or steamed papaya soup are served as a special treat on a hot summer night (Zhou et al., 2024).

High importance is placed on the freshness and flavor of produce or food. A typical Chinese meal usually consists of rice, soup, and three to four side dishes. Dishes are made of seasonal vegetables, fresh seafood, or bite-size portions of meat or poultry. Because the Chinese expect to have fresh fruit and vegetables in their daily meals, it is not difficult to comply with a provider's suggestion to increase intake of these items. However, it might be more of a drastic change to ask an anemic Chinese patient to add more meat to her diet to help control her anemia. Again, in Chinese food, meat portions are usually small, and often used to flavor the dish or soup. It might be helpful if the provider recognizes the challenge of increasing meat intake and suggests culturally appropriate ways to do so. For example, the patient could add meat to dishes that were originally purely vegetable (e.g., adding chicken to boy choy, minced pork to green beans, or beef to Chinese broccoli, aka "gai lan") (Lin, 2020).

Zhuang people love salty and sour dishes like pickled cabbage, pickled vegetables and pork, and dried fish. During festivals, they make a dish called fang (zongzi) which is sticky rice, mushroom, pork, and sour vegetables, wrapped in bamboo leaves and steamed. Zhuang loves drinking rice wine or oil tea, and tea leaves fried in oil with rice grains and brewed. Then peanuts, rice cake, or anything is added to it. The first meal of the day starts with rice congee and tea. After the men have returned from the fields the women usually serve for lunch rice, noodles, pickled vegetables, and meat. For dinner, it's bread, noodles, or rice.

Creative rice and corn are made of the Zhuang people's staple food and glutinous' rice is particularly favored in south Guangxi. Chewing betel nuts is a habit still popular among some Zhuang women (Liu et al., 2023).

Based on the anthropological theory of food on the development direction of food civilization, analyzes the facts that people's diet activities and eating behaviors, in the ancient Chinese society centering on the state political power, were controlled or influenced by the political ideology. It also probes the relationship between food culture and social-political traditions. Taking 'tables' and 'banquets' as the subjects, the paper introduces haute cuisine, everyday food, and national dishes from the social stratification of diet. The development of Chinese food culture has been influenced by the ritualized privilege system, noble traditions, and application of ancient science and technology invention of cooking. It responds to Garnet's idea of poverty stress and Kwang-Chih Chang's idea of ethos through the power symbols of Chinese banquet culture, a banquet-level analysis model is presented to pave a path for further empirical study (Tian, et al., 2018).

China's food system has moved from one based on rationing and grain coupons to one characterized by increasing choices, rising prices, and growing concerns about food quality and safety. In 2012, China became the world's largest grocery retail market. This growth is shaped by urbanization and the emergence of a middle class with changing food habits. E-commerce grew by more than 52% in value between 2014 and 2016. Ordering lunch or dinner online became a daily routine for millions of urban residents, despite the tremendous amount of food and plastic waste generated. Meanwhile, younger Chinese are distancing themselves from the origins of food and losing food knowledge and skills (Si & Scott, 2019). This research reveals some striking dietary changes, such as increased consumption of oils, animal-sourced foods, and sugar-sweetened beverages. A complex system of formal and informal mechanisms. This system is comprised of subsidized large food firms designated as "dragon head" enterprises by the state, specialty co-operatives, government-run wholesalers, and uncharted systems of petty traders to bring products from villages to diverse markets and retail formats.

Chinese communication style is influenced by the cultural norms and values of China with an understanding of the multifaceted nature of Chinese communication styles, from the high-context, indirect, and relationship-focused approaches prevalent in Chinese society, to the rich lexical tapestry of the Chinese language itself. You will be better prepared to navigate the complex landscape of Chinese cultural dynamics, fostering deeper connections and more meaningful interactions in the process. Chinese communication is often considered 'high-context', a term coined by anthropologist Edward T. Hall in his seminal work, 'Beyond Culture' (1976). In high-context cultures, much of the message is conveyed through nonverbal cues, social norms, and shared understanding, rather than explicit words. High-context cultures place great importance on developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Building and maintaining relationships, or *guanxi*, is crucial in Chinese culture. This adaptation can lead to more productive and harmonious relationships, facilitating intercultural understanding and collaboration (Xiang, 2024).

Shejian shang de Zhongguo (舌尖上的中国, known as 'A Bite of China', hereinafter Shejian) has met with great fanfare, home and abroad, and become a celebrated geographical brand name of Chinese culinary culture. Shejian marks a distinctive attribute of China's contemporary food media, which deploys glamorized food images, from ordinary staple food to lavish celebratory meals, to reify social prosperity and personal happiness. Shejian's unprecedented success and influence should be attributed to CCTV's convergence strategies against the backdrop of media reforms. On the other, audience participation and recreation on the Internet have invigorated the formation and spread of the Shejian phenomenon while problematizing the official interpretation, and ideological construction of the documentary. Shejian's savvy viewers and cynical imitators poach the florid documentary script to write their versions of reality, albeit disguised with profanity and laughter. The widespread legal practices play with the establishment culture, and how such online expressions shed new light on China's Internet culture and censorship (Qu, 2023).

Conclusion

Due to the rapid development of Internet technology and the widespread popularity of smartphones, new media platforms have become indispensable main channels for people to obtain information and interact with each other. Driven by this social development trend, people are increasingly inclined to display and disseminate their ethnic cultures through new media platforms. As a result, Zhuang people actively utilize various new media platforms, employing Zhuang food culture as a vehicle, to affirm their self-identity, embody ethnic characteristics, and distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups within a multicultural context. In this context, the social context serves as the foundation and source of representation, representation, in turn, can influence, reinforce, or even alter certain aspects of the social context. In the basin of Liuzhou River snail rice noodles as an example, the extensive exhibition and dissemination of Zhuang people on new media platforms have significantly enhanced the social popularity and recognition of this food, subsequently triggering a surge in market demand and changes in production methods. This transformation exemplifies the practical influence of representation on society, underscoring the pivotal role of cultural representation in sociocultural development.

As a research model, the study of Zhuang food culture reveals that amidst the development of new media communication in China, Zhuang food culture has transcended traditional communication channels and increasingly relies on the public vision space jointly constructed by various digital communication media. This transformation has significantly enriched the representational practices of Zhuang food culture, presenting it with even more diversified characteristics. More importantly, this digital mode of communication has endowed Zhuang food culture with cross-regional and cross-cultural characteristics, enabling it to transcend geographical boundaries and engage in exchanges and interactions with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Consequently, Zhuang food culture not only carries the material value of food itself but also plays a pivotal role in cultural exchanges, possessing social functions that transcend the mere meaning of food. Cross-cultural business partners may differ in their normative orientations toward relational exchange. Because of the extent of international trade, there is a need to develop a more nuanced understanding of cross-cultural relational exchange. Design/methodology/approach of Zhuangs' sharing abilities and shared cultural background on the functionality of cross-cultural traditional and festival food culture relations. It also demonstrates the use of the repertory grid method in studying perceptions of relational norms.

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