

The process of the diffusion of Sichuan cuisine

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Abstract:

The paper analyzes the process of the diffusion of Sichuan cuisine, such as what kind of marketing strategy does this type of cuisine use to be succeed. After doing a review for several papers, the paper conclude that the process of becoming popular for Sichuan cuisine shows an example of a connection between culture and population that leads to diffusion. The special history, geographical features, marketing strategies and so on all play a big role in presenting the best side of this cuisine to the whole China, even the entire world. It turns out that the cuisine has been successfully spreaded which proves that people from other regions are willing to accept this culture. Thus, in order to let a culture becomes popular, building a close bond that attracts people is significantly crucial.

Keywords: Sichuan cuisine, marketing strategy, culture, traditional, diffusion

Introduction

Sichuan is a province in the southwestern part of China. It is famous because of it's history, views, food and so on. The high development of the region successfully diffused its culture, especially food outward. Sichuan Cuisine diffused successfully due to the diversity of culture in its province, which helped it to stand out among all the other cuisines in China.

Process analysis

The ancient story along with the interesting naming strategies of Sichuan successfully captured the imagination of people which helped to boost the diffusion of Sichuan cuisine. The story of 'Wife and husband lung slice' are especially famous and would always pique people's curiosity by using this weird name. The story began at the 1930s, Chaohua Guo and his wife always had a lot of excess offals at the end of the day because they opened up a restaurant that cooks beef. One day, he came up with an idea to put all the excess offals with chili oil, sesame, Sichuan peppercorn, chili and soy sauce together for dinner. After tasting, Chaohua Guo and his wife found out that the dish was unexpectedly delicious and named it 'Wife and husband waste slice'. However, 'waste slice' did not sound good to them, they decided to change it to 'lung slice' since waste and lung got the same pronunciation in Chinese.(Xin) Chaohua Guo's ingenuity made this story attractive to people. By telling this story, people could not only understand the history behind the dish that they are eating but also experience the wisdom of the ancient people. Besides, telling stories is one of the most convenient ways to spread the culture. More specifically, people would share stories with their friends, families and so

on which could cause a faster cultural spread to different regions in the country and gradually spread to the rest of the world. And with the help of social media nowadays, spreading stories like this will become easier and easier. Special names will be easier for people to remember and stay in their head longer, so giving dishes unique names will definitely enhance the process of diffusion. Secondly, the story of Mapo tofu is also as interesting as the 'Wife and husband lung slice'. The source suggests that an old lady who is called Chen Mapo opened a restaurant located near Wanfu Bridge in north Chengdu. The restaurant was famous because of her unique approach to Tofu. Thus, her techniques attracted many poets, laborers and its popularity spreaded through the whole city(Callos). This story is not as specific as the last story, so it created more room for people to build up their own imaginations toward this dish which will left an unforgettable eating experience for them. It also allowed people to have a sense of connection with the dish after they learned the history of it and the learning process became a bond that holds people and the dishes together. Thirdly, according to a famous Sichuan cuisine chef, Sheng Li, these stories could contribute to the preservation of those conventional cooking styles of the Sichuan dishes which made their job easier.(Li) Thus, ancient stories are definitely a crucial factor to Sichuan cuisine

as if those stories were not successfully preserved, many significant dishes would not exist in a traditional way now.

Due to the special geographical features, Sichuan produced many unique spices that has distinctive tastes which attracted people from different regions of China. The western part of China is surrounded by mountains which

caused it to have a hot and humid climate(Lipman). Due to rainfalls which causes humid environments, planting vegetables becomes easier for Sichuan people and leads to a huge production of spices that are frequently used in Chinese food such as fresh ginger, garlic, green onions, brown peppercorn (fagara), chiles (lajiao) and Sichuan peppers. Because of the humid environments, spicy spices became especially popular and famous in Sichuan province. The reason for this is because Sichuan people believe spiciness can successfully drive away the moisture in people's bodies(Li). Thus, people from other humid regions were attracted to this healthy habit and decided to come to Sichuan in order to buy some spices that is not available in their region. Moreover, there are 7 popular combinations of spices which are spicy and hot, fish flavor, hot and sour, 'The 7 spices', ginger juice, smashed garlic, spice salt and pot-stewed fowl(Li). Thus, having a unique geography is so crucial because it leads to a wide range of spices which allowed people to have different eating experiences every time. Furthermore, local spices are going to create a sense of novelty because it is something that is only available in this specific region. Hotpot is a signature dish from Sichuan Cuisine, the greatest thing about it is that it could be cooked by using various spices. Chefs could use their imaginations to build up their own combinations for the customers. For example, if people prefer spicy food, chefs will put in Sichuan chiles along with Sichuan peppers. They could also use green onions and dried chiles. If people want to try some unspicy flavors, chefs will put in a little bit garlic and ginger along with fish soup. Therefore, having a wide range of choices of spices caused by the geographic features allowed chefs to be creative with the materials. Moreover, unlike other cuisines that are limited in flavors, dishes from Sichuan cuisine can be cooked in either spicy or unspicy, even with other special flavors which allowed people from other regions to have a better adaption with the food.

Sichuan cuisine's convenient and creative style of dishes could easily attract people's attention by using its comprehensive cooking techniques. According to the Na and Ma, "Cooking methods of Sichuan cuisine include stir-frying, pan-frying, braising, dry-frying, deep-frying, stewing, smoking, simmering in a covered pot over a slow fire, baking on a pan, quick-scalding, salting, and stewing in soy sauce."(Na and Ma) Different cooking methods will create various flavors for ingredients, making the cuisine itself more diversified so people won't get tired by eating things that got similar flavors. In addition, the successful development of comprehensive cooking methods in Sichuan cuisine also proves that people are willing to spend time on improving it. This kind of high expectation along with great attitudes of pursuing perfections toward

the quality of food will benefit the diffusion of Sichuan cuisine. Customers will also have a better dining experience by seeing the hard work that chefs put in. Also, most of the cooking techniques in Sichuan cuisine can easily match with almost all cooking materials. For example Tofu, which is a really famous cooking material in China, can be cooked in various ways such as stir frying, dry frying and so on(Na and Ma). By using these simple techniques, more people will be encouraged to cook at home. Those techniques also had a huge impact on other cuisines in China which led to the stimulation of the diffusion. Besides, the cooking techniques also promoted the inventions of unique Sichuan Style seasoning. "There are also a wide variety of fine-textured fermented and cultivated condiments, such as Zigong well salt, Neijiang white sugar, Langzhong Baoning vinegar, Deyang soy sauce, Pixian bean paste, Maowen and Chengdu pepper, Xufu sprouts, and Nanchong Dongcai."(Na and Ma) These special ingredients are all created by special techniques from Sichuan and contributed to provide a great basis for the dishes, they are also really distinctive in the country which people in other provinces can't imitate.

Due to the successful marketing strategies from Sichuan chain restaurants, which contributed to the diffusion of the food, Sichuan cuisine rose to the top of the pyramid. To start off, chain restaurants is the best way to spread a type of cuisine because of the mature economic system behind it along with well crafted advertisements. Furthermore, the significant amount of restaurants and some special adaptations for food in particular regions will be able to increase the popularity which will finally lead to a wide range of diffusions. The famous hotpot chain restaurant called Haidilao is the most successful Sichuan chain restaurant in China right now. According to the research, "It has over 200 outlets in 60 Chinese cities as well as more in Los Angeles, Tokyo, Singapore and Seoul. There are plans to set up many more this year. Revenue is estimated to grow by more than 30 percent to 10 billion yuan (\$1.5B)." (See) Because of the huge amount of outlets that Haidilao has in China, it gains popularity by letting more and more people frequently notice the brand name which help to gradually create deep impressions of the restaurant as well as Sichuan cuisine itself. Furthermore, great customer service with enthusiasm is another reason of the success of Haidilao. Adequate snacks, drinks, card, board games and even professional nail designs were offered in the waiting area(See). These things provided by Haidilao leaves a good impression of people from the region of Sichuan to the customers in the first place which will lead to positive feedbacks of the cuisine created by the sense of hospitality. Due to the observation of a customer, "Hot face towels, bib covers, protective cell phone bags, etc. are offered

just prior to dining. There are even “noodle masters” that will prepare handmade noodles by twirling them in front of you in an elaborate display coupled with music.”(See) The positive feedbacks from customers will diffuse which will help to gain popularities for both the cuisine and the restaurant. Specifically, people will be willing to try more Sichuan food in the future due to the good impression they had.

The movement of people along with the influence of government officials stimulated the diffusion of Sichuan cuisine. When the household registration system started to lighten its policies at 1980s, workers from Sichuan migrated to other parts in China and caused a series of cultural diffusions(Meng). The movement of people contributed a lot during the early period of the diffusion because the internet is not as developed as it is right now which leads to the fact that most of the information needed to be spread out by people. This policy also benefits the future development of the cuisine because it was the first few cuisines that has been spreaded out which caused it to have more time to adapt to other regions. Moreover, the influence created by famous government officials also played a big role in the successful diffusion of Sichuan Cuisine. Zhou Enlai, one of the most famous premier in Chinese history, was obsessed with Sichuan cuisine. His contribution to the diffusion is irreplaceable because he was the first person who introduced Sichuan Cuisine to Beijing and influenced people to open an authentic Sichuan restaurant in Beijing. He also guided and taught people techniques about Sichuan cuisine using his own experiences(Across China). This is really crucial to the spread because Beijing is the capital of China which consist a huge amount of population that can easily promote the diffusion. Furthermore, Zhou Enlai was also really authoritative in China which caused him to have a significant influence toward people’s thoughts. Except Zhou Enlai, the head of the country during that period of time, Mao Zedong, was also obsessed with spicy food especially Sichuan cuisine. “Mao’s famous words—”If there are no spicy [peppers], there is no revolution” (*bu la bu geming* 不辣不革命)—have inspired many Chinese who are proud of their spicy palates.”(Wang) This quote had a huge impact on people during that special period time of revolution because Mao had the most authority during that time and his ideas could easily influence people’s thoughts. Additionally, Mao was trying to persuade people to join revolution by saying that eating spicy food could be seen as an indication of courage, valor and so on.(Wang) This has brought the diffusion into another level because it created a deep impression in people’s mind by creating unique bonds between spicy food and revolution. In other words, spicy food or Sichuan cuisine became a special pillar in

people’s mind.

Conclusion

Consequently, the process of becoming popular for Sichuan cuisine shows an example of a connection between culture and population that leads to diffusion. The special history, geographical features, marketing strategies and so on all play a big role in presenting the best side of this cuisine to the whole China, even the entire world. It turns out that the cuisine has been successfully spreaded which proves that people from other regions are willing to accept this culture. Thus, in order to let a culture becomes popular, building a close bond that attracts people is significantly crucial.

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