

Research on the Special Food Culture of Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture from the Perspective of Culture and Tourism Integration Taking the Special Dishes Named After the Stories of *King Gesar* as an Example

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of cultural tourism, the food culture with local characteristics is also becoming more and more popular. This paper introduces the characteristics of the special food in Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, analyzes some special dishes named after the stories of *King Gesar* and their cultural connotations, and finally explores the significance of the spread of those special dishes and its culture in the perspective of culture and tourism integration.

Keywords: *King Gesar, Special food, Culture connotation, Culture and tourism integration.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Mr. Jun Wu, the pioneer of the study of "Gesar Culture", put forward in his "Collection of Wu Jun Tibetan Studies" that the epic "*King Gesar*" is a reflection of the melting and development of Tibetan culture.[1] Gesar is an extremely influential hero in Tibetan history. The culture of Gesar is one of the core cultures of Khampa Culture and has been widely concerned by researchers. A great number of experts and scholars have studied Gesar Culture. From the perspective of food culture, this paper further studies Gesar Culture on the basis of previous studies through literature reading and field investigation. The special food named after the stories of *King Gesar* is very unique, which is closely related to the stories of *King Gesar*, with rich connotation and profound cultural implication. With the development of the cultural tourism industry, the dissemination of the culture of Garze special dishes named after the stories of *King Gesar* has an important role in cultural protection, spiritual inheritance, and promotion of tourism and economic development.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GARZE SPECIAL FOOD AND DISHES

Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture is located in the west of Sichuan Province, accounting for about one-third of the acreage of Sichuan Province. The terrain includes mountains, grasslands, forests, river valleys, etc. Due to the small arable area, the variety of crops planted is extremely limited, and the variety of food is also limited. The special food in Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture has two prominent characteristics. First, the ingredients have unique plateau characteristics. The raw materials of Garze food are mainly from the original local specialties on the Garze plateau, such as highland barley, corn, peas, yak meat, chestnuts, potatoes, radishes, cabbage, lettuce, Ginseng fruit, various wild mushrooms and Cordyceps, so it is particularly convenient to obtain food materials. In addition, the climate of Garze Plateau is cold and dry, the sunshine is abundant, the water is rich in minerals, and there is no industrial pollution. Therefore, the vegetables and fruits grown here have higher sugar content, and naturally have better taste. The most

famous characteristic meat in Garze is the yak beef. The yaks here grow up by grazing on the mountains, eating wild grass and drinking snow water. The yaks have to wade through mountains and rivers to find food every day. They exercise a lot, so the yak beef is more compact and mellow than the beef of captive cattle. Hence, all local ingredients here have unique geographical and climatic characteristics of the Garze Plateau. Second, the special dishes have rich cultural connotations. The dishes named after the stories of *King Gesar* clearly reflect the cultural connotation of Gesar. Most of the special dishes named after the story of *King Gesar* are connected with some important events or scenes in the story of *King Gesar*, so that people will never forget the deeds of the hero King Gesar in their lives. Therefore, there is a saying that "The Tibetan food in Garze Prefecture relies on the local specialties to determine the food variety, the ecological environment to determine the food styles, and the cultural background to determine the diet habits". [2]

3. SPECIAL DISHES NAMED AFTER THE STORIES OF KING GESAR AND ITS CULTURAL CONNOTATIONS

The special dishes named after the stories of *King Gesar* are inextricably related to King Gesar. The author learned dozens of them during the field investigation. Each dish name can be associated with a story of *King Gesar*. Each story can make people imagine the story content or scene in the book of *King Gesar* through the dish name, such as "Meto Natze Cake", "Twelve Flower Dishes", "Lost Helmets" "Take the Pearl of Heaven", "Food of Life", "A Tercel Fly on the Land of Snow", "Horse Race for the Throne", "King's Divine Armor", "Huo-lingWar", "Arrow Broken Hongqiao", "Flying Pigeon Transmission", "Destroy the Devil in Jiadi", "Arrest", "Tongue Lotus Clip", "Snow Lotus Soup", "Flower Crisp", [3] etc. These unique dishes are named after the characters, images or related events in the stories of *King Gesar*, which is easy to arouse people's curiosity and attract people to explore the mystery. It has rich connotations and profound cultural implications. There are many Garze special food dishes with Gesar cultural connotation. Here is a brief introduction of some particularly representative ones to share with you.

"Meto Natze Cake" is a snack cake, which is made of local specialty Ginseng fruit, potatoes, butter and sugar. It tastes sweet and has the

function of calming the nerves, nourishing and strengthening the body. The idea of this delicious food comes from the story of Gesar's biological mother, Meto Natze, who is the name of the third daughter of the Dragon King. It is said that the pregnant mother dreamed of a golden God who was around. She woke up in the next morning and felt relaxed. In a few days, she especially liked to eat sweet cakes steamed with potatoes. Later, people called this sweet potato cake Meto Natze Cake.

"Horse Race for the Throne" is a hot dish, with yak hooves representing horses, potatoes and broccoli representing monsters such as tiger heads, leopard heads, bear heads and thirty generals. The idea is derived from Choru (Choru is the name of King Gesar before he ascended the throne, means "rise up"), who took back the demons such as the tiger head, the leopard head, the bear head and so on, and made great efforts to win over 30 generals, and ascended to the throne as "King Gesar". At the same time, Choru won the chance to marry Sengcham Cholmo, the most beautiful woman. From then on, he opened up a new journey in his life. "Horse Race for the Throne" was a major turning point in King Gesar's life. Before the horse race, he was only a young boy with divine power. After the horse race, Gesar enthroned, and he became the "Lion King Gesar", and the real King Gesar was "coming into the world".

"A Tercel Fly on the Land of Snow" is a crispy and delicious cold dish, which is made of cucumber, radish and potato to form an eagle. This dish is the first course of a banquet. The idea is derived from the personal image of King Gesar. The image of King Gesar in the hearts of the local people is like an eagle flying high on the plateau. It is extremely brave and indomitable, and is praised as the "A Tercel Fly on the Land of Snow".

"Twelve Flower Dishes" is a combination of twelve cold dishes, which are made of various kinds of meat and vegetable cold dishes. They are full of color, fragrance and beauty. The idea came from King Gesar and his twelve princesses. The "Twelve Flower Dishes" are placed around the dish "A Tercel Fly on the Land of Snow", the "A Tercel Fly on the Land of Snow" in the middle represents King Gesar, and the "Twelve Flower Dishes" around represent King Gesar's twelve princesses. In addition, "A Tercel Fly on the Land of Snow" and "Twelve Flower Dishes" also represents Padma Sambhava sitting on the lotus platform. It is said that King Gesar is the incarnation of Padma Sambhava, "A Tercel Fly on the Land of Snow" in

the middle represents Padma Sambhava, and the "Twelve Flower Dishes" around represents the beautiful lotus platform.

"Lost Helmets" is a hot dish, mainly made of yak beef and precious fungi, and covered with a golden pot. This dish represents the war helmets of Chatsa Shigar with golden rice pot, and the Hor State with yak beef and precious fungus. The idea comes from the story of General Chatsa Shigar. Chatsa Shigar is the cousin of King Gesar, the pillar of the Ling State, the unparalleled hero in the world, and the most upright and brave of the 30 generals under King Gesar. In the famous Hor-Ling War, in order to protect the first queen Sengcham Cholmo, Chatsa Shigar defeated enemy troops with a force inferior in number, but finally died of a trick designed by Tsinpa Merotse. Knowing that he was doomed, he threw his helmet to a place not far from the center of Hor State, proving that he would use it to suppress Hor State when he died. It is said that the battle helmet later turned into a unique mountain, which is now the Zhari Yongkang Mountain.

"Food of Life" is a hot dish, which is cooked from highland barley, peas and corn produced locally in Garze. The idea was derived from the fact that King Gesar, after defeating the Great Food Nation, distributed the grain of life, highland barley, to the Snow Mountain of Cavaloge when distributing food, so the granary was full and the economy was prosperous. Because this kind of seed is blessed by King Gesar and the three brothers of Cavallori, the highland barley planted in everywhere of Garze County now grows very well, so Garze County is rich in highland barley. The highland barley has always been the staple food of Tibetan compatriots in Garze region.

These dishes are named according to the stories of *King Gesar*. Each of them has a special meaning and rich Gesar cultural connotation. "*King Gesar* is a great heroic epic of Chinese Tibetans.... Gesar has a long history and is widely spread, representing the highest achievement of ancient Tibetan folk culture, and is a great encyclopedia reflecting the social history of ancient Tibetans." [4] According to historians, the area of Ashu Grassland in the northeast of Dege County, Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, is the main area where King Ling Gesar was born, grew up and fought all his life. The story of King Gesar has been spread for more than ten centuries, mainly based on the fusion of some myths, legends, proverbs and folk songs of Tibetan compatriots. The biography of

King Gesar portrays a great hero, King Gesar, who is a combination of man and God. He was born from heaven and experienced all kinds of hardships, and became King Gesar with both wisdom and courage. In his life, he eradicated the evil, helped the poor and the weak, and helped the ancient Tibetan people living a peaceful and happy life in turmoil and disaster. *King Gesar* depicts hundreds of wars and shapes and thousands of different characters vividly, with rich content and broad connotation. Part of Garze special food and its food culture are deeply influenced by Gesar Culture and have unique cultural connotations. As the saying goes, "Chinese traditional food culture is extensive and profound, and the characteristic food culture in Garze has a long history." [5]

4. THE SPREAD OF SPECIAL FOOD CULTURE NAMED AFTER THE STORIES OF *KING GESAR* IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURE AND TOURISM INTEGRATION

In this part, it mainly elaborates on the protection of local culture, the inheritance of national spirit, and the development of tourism and economy.

4.1 Protection of Local Culture

The biography of *King Gesar* is not only an excellent literary masterpiece, but also a vivid and concrete record of the daily life of ancient Tibetans in China, so that future generations can intuitively understand the history, beliefs, customs and dietary culture of ancient Tibetans. Gesar Culture has the characteristics of Garze Tibetan compatriots. "Culture has national characteristics. National language, national character, national tradition and national way of life are all manifestations of national culture, and national quality also reflects the uniqueness of each national culture to some extent." [6] At the same time, it was also a reflection of the local people's life, the production mode, thought and behavior at that time. Gesar Culture is one of the core cultures of Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. The special dishes named after the stories of *King Gesar* are a manifestation of Gesar Culture. For thousands of years, it has inspired generations of Khampa people, affected the production and lifestyle of local residents. Gesar Culture has always been widely concerned by researchers of Khampa Culture. There are many researchers, but so far, few people have studied it from the perspective of food culture. The most

direct way to spread food culture is to be eaten and experienced by people. Food culture integrates Gesar Culture into people's daily life in a different way, visually and vividly shows people the unique charm of Gesar Culture, and spreads it to the general public in a convenient way accessible to everyone. This way of cultural protection is better than using only documentary records. It is another form of protection to Gesar Culture.

4.2 Inheritance of National Spirit

"Khampa Culture is a regional culture with the Tibetan culture as the main body, compatible with other national cultures, and characterized by diversity and complexity. It is a humanistic spirit with the spirit of Ling · Gesar's heroism and romanticism as the essence." [7] King Gesar is a great king in the history of Garze Tibetan-inhabited region. He is strong and powerful, intelligent and brave. He grew up in adversity, went through vicissitudes, and never retreated in the face of countless hardships and challenges in life. His whole life is to protect the peaceful and happy life of Tibetan compatriots, fight all over the country, kill evil spirits, dominate the world, and uphold justice. In addition to supporting the weak, he cares about all living beings in the world. In order to save the Tibetan people, his spirit of fearing sacrifice is worth passing on from generation to generation. "Gesar melted the frozen snow mountains with his courage and tenderness, moistened the fertile grassland; Gesar contained the holy blue sky with his broad chest, so that the pain of the past would no longer cry." [8] Gesar is the hero worshipped by countless Khampa residents and the embodiment of Khampa man. Studying the special dishes named after the stories of King Gesar has the function of carrying forward Gesar's humanistic spirit and inheriting the local national spirit.

4.3 Development of Tourism and Economy

In the past, the traffic conditions in Garze region were backward, and the development of cultural tourism industry was backward, too. Due to the good transport in recent years, Garze Prefecture has become a particularly popular tourist attraction in China because of the slogan "Everyone must drive on the national road of G318 in this life, because it is the most beautiful and longest national highway in China." Tourism is nothing more than food, accommodation and transportation, and everyone's daily meal is inseparable from food. The beauty of food experience is the key to tourism

development. In the context of culture and tourism integration, the food culture with Khampa characteristics will be spread out through "eating" to attract more tourists to experience the unique lifestyle. Today, with the increasingly diversified development of cultural tourism industry, creating special food culture tourism will be welcomed by tourists who love culture. Garze Prefecture is endowed with unique regional and ethnic scenery spots. The creation of valuable food culture will certainly promote the development of tourism and drive the development of economy.

5. CONCLUSION

With the development of society and the improvement of living standards, the opportunities for people to travel have greatly increased. The public is paying more and more attention to cultural and spiritual needs, focusing on improving the quality of cultural tourism and catering services. The culture of special food named after the stories of *King Gesar* has the strong regional characteristics and Gesar cultural connotation of the Khampa Plateau. With the continuous heating up of cultural tourism, local cultural tourism industry is one of the industries with the greatest development potential. The dissemination of the characteristic food culture named after the stories of *King Gesar* is of great significance to the protection of local culture, the inheritance of national spirit and the promotion of tourism and economy development. However, in the economic and cultural development, cultural development is in a weak position and development is difficult. Now it is a rare opportunity to develop food culture with the help of tourism development integrating culture and tourism. How to excavate and develop the food culture related to Gesar Culture to the maximum extent and make it obtain better industrial benefits is a problem worthy of further discussion.

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