

The Research on Sliced Boiled Chicken

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Sliced boiled chicken is a kind of Chinese food which has a history of more than two hundred years. At the very beginning, it was offered to customers as a kind of fast food. After two centuries' development, it has become a cultural symbol of Guangdong region. In other words, the significance of sliced boiled chicken has transcended the food itself. It is an essential part of Cantonese life. Because it is a dish that is relatively easy to cook, we can see sliced boiled chicken everywhere in Guangdong Province, China. No matter in the city or in the countryside, in upscale restaurants or in fast food restaurants, if you want, you can easily find a place to enjoy the delicacy of sliced boiled chicken. However, most of the people just know to eat sliced boiled chicken. Only a small part of them will notice the history behind this dish. At the same time, though this dish is seen as a cultural symbol, most people just see it as a money making tool which greatly disturbs its development.

Keywords: sliced boiled chicken, Guangdong region, Hainan region, Cantonese Cuisine, cultural symbol

I Introduction

Sliced boiled chicken has many other English names such as white cut chicken, water-boiled chicken, soft-boiled chicken and steamed chicken. In Chinese, it is called Bai Qie Ji, Bai Pian Ji and Bai Zhan Ji. From this angle, white cut chicken is the most apposite translation.

The historical record of this dish first appeared in the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912). This dish might have appeared in earlier dynasties but we couldn't find direct evidence. There is a statement that sliced boiled chicken first appeared in the State of Chu in the Warring States Period (475 B.C.-221 B.C.) (Qiu, 2001; Zhou, 2015). At that time, it was called Lu Ji. However, most people still believe that sliced boiled chicken originated in the Qing Dynasty.

There's no doubt that Chinese food is delicious. However, seldom people will spend time on the theoretical knowledge of it. Because after 1949, cook is an occupation that is despised. Until today, many Chinese people still think that cooking is not a decent job. Therefore, the research on Chinese food is not so hot. It also brought much trouble to the research of sliced boiled chicken. Because of that, the information was too little. At the same time, this research is also about agriculture. Therefore, the field investigation in the countryside is of great importance.

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The aim of this paper is to expound the historical and cultural significance of sliced boiled chicken. More importantly, we need to find a better way of its development.

II The History and Culture of Sliced Boiled Chicken

Appearing as a Kind of Fast Food

In the Qing Dynasty, a gourmet and poet named Yuan Mei (1716-1798) was the first person who described sliced boiled chicken in words (Guangdong Vocational and Technical Teaching and Researching Office, 2020). He called it Bai Pian Ji in his book *The menu of Sui Garden* (1792) (Yuan, 2020). In ancient times, when traveling in the countryside or staying in hotel, it was not quite convenient for cooking (Yuan, 2020). In this situation, sliced boiled chicken was a good choice (Yuan, 2020).

From Yuan's words, we can easily know that sliced boiled chicken was a kind of fast food at the very beginning. As a matter of fact, until today, sliced boiled chicken is also a star of fast food. You can easily find sliced boiled chicken in the fast food restaurants of Guangdong, Hainan, Hong Kong and Singapore.

A Representative Dish of Cantonese Cuisine

As mentioned before, sliced boiled chicken appeared in the Qing Dynasty. With time goes on, it has been spread to different places.

In China, the people from Guangdong, Hainan and Shanghai are the fans of sliced boiled chicken. At the same time, the people from Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province were also of great importance in the history of sliced boiled chicken. As mentioned before, in Chinese, sliced boiled chicken had three names, Bai Qie Ji, Bai Pian Ji and Bai Zhan Ji. The name Bai Qie Ji was given by Cantonese people. The people from Zhejiang Province called it Bai Pian Ji. The people from Jiangsu province and Shanghai City called it Bai Zhan Ji. By the way, Yuan Mei, the poet and gourmet I mentioned before was from Zhejiang region. That's why he called sliced boiled chicken as Bai Pian Ji in his book.

Cantonese people are the rabid fans of chicken. They always say that a banquet without chicken should not be called banquet (Pan, 2021b). There is a statement that Cantonese people have thousands of ways to cook chicken. In Guangdong region, sliced boiled chicken is one of the most popular ways of cooking chicken. Though having no direct evidence, most Chinese people still see Guangdong region as the home of sliced boiled chicken. It was a pride of Cantonese people. If the people from other places say that sliced boiled chicken is not delicious, Cantonese people will reply that they know nothing about eating chicken. As a matter of fact, the home of sliced boiled chicken is yet an unsolved mystery.

Cantonese Cuisine is one of the Eight Great Cuisines in China. It can be divided into three parts: Guangfu Cuisine, Chaozhou Cuisine and Kejia Cuisine (Guangdong Vocational and Technical Teaching and Researching Office, 2020). Sliced boiled chicken is a representative dish of Guangfu cuisine.

The Spread of Sliced Boiled Chicken

If we see Guangdong province as the home of sliced boiled chicken, its route will be divided into two parts: southward spread and northward spread. As mentioned before, sliced boiled chicken is also popular in Zhejiang Province, Jiangsu province and Shanghai City. It was the result of sliced boiled chicken's northward spread.

Compared with the northward spread, the result of the southward spread is much more remarkable. In Hainan province, sliced boiled chicken got new vitality. Because the people of Hainan Province have a powerful weapon: Wenchang chicken. It is one of the most famous chicken breeds in China and has become a brand of Hainan Province. Its story will be introduced in the next part.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, many people from Hainan region (Hainan region first became a province in 1988) immigrated to Malaysia and Singapore. The skill of cooking sliced boiled chicken was brought to Southeast Asia by them. After that, Hainanese Chicken Rice, a famous and popular kind of fast food appeared.

In 2018, Hainanese Chicken Rice was applied for immaterial cultural legacy of the world by Singapore (Zhang & Chen, 2021). This event started the argument between Malaysia and Singapore. The scholars of both sides insisted that their own country was the home of Hainanese Chicken Rice.

Hainanese Chicken Rice is a kind of fast food consisting of a dish of sliced boiled chicken, a bowl of rice and some vegetables. It can be found in the restaurants of Guangdong region, Hong Kong, Hainan region and Southeast Asia.

No matter how heated the argument is, both the historians from Singapore and Malaysia had to admit that the immigrants from Hainan region were the creators of Hainanese Chicken Rice (Zhang & Chen, 2021).

III The History of a Famous Chicken Breed

The Relation Between Chicken Breed and Sliced Boiled Chicken

Sliced boiled meat is a kind of food that widely spread in Guangdong region (including Hainan region) (Pan, 2021). Because of the cooking method (boiled the meat without seasoning), the quality of ingredients is of great importance. Therefore, many famous poultry breeds appeared in Guangdong region. Some of them even have the history of more than two centuries. As a matter of fact, because of the long history of China, many Chinese agricultural products have a very long history. The history of these ancient agricultural products is worth writing a book to record.

In Guangdong region (including Hainan region), many kinds of local chicken breeds are used to cook sliced boiled chicken. In these chicken breeds, Wenchang Chicken is a representative one. After all, it helps sliced boiled chicken go out of China and go to the world market. Therefore, in this paper, it will be introduced in detail.

The History of Wenchang Chicken

The word “Wenchang chicken” has two explanations: a famous chicken breed and a famous dish.

As a chicken breed, the history of Wenchang chicken is more than five centuries. The name “Wenchang chicken” first appeared in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Wenchang was a city in Hainan province. At the same time, in Chinese, Wenchang means cultural prosperity. In the Ming Dynasty, many scholars and officials came from this region.

The most common statement was that a politician named Xing You (1416-1481) was the first person who promoted Wenchang chicken (adapted from wenchang.hainan.gov.cn). He gave a few chickens to the emperor as presents. The delicious chicken finally became very famous because of the praise of the emperor. The emperor also named the chicken with the name of its home. That is the origin of Wenchang chicken. By the way, Xing You was the ancestor of this paper’s first author.

The word Wenchang chicken also stands for the sliced boiled chicken made of Wenchang chicken. It was one of the four most famous dishes of Hainan cuisine (Chen, 2018). The famous Hainanese Chicken Rice was the derivative of it.

Before reform and opening (1978), Chinese people were relatively poor. Therefore, they seldom have a chance to enjoy Wenchang chicken. In this period, the main consumer groups were the Chinese people living in Southeast Asia (Chen, 2018). As a matter of fact, the cost of breeding Wenchang chicken was really high. Because this chicken breed needs special breeding method and feed.

The Special Breeding Method of Wenchang Chicken

After collecting a lot of information and having a field investigation in the countryside of Wenchang City, we found that the reason of Wenchang chicken's high quality is its special breeding method.

Wenchang chicken is a kind of chicken breed with a small size. A capon is usually 2.75 kilograms in weight. A hen is usually only 1.5 kilograms in weight. Experienced people can quickly recognize a real Wenchang chicken after seeing their legs and wings. The cute short wings and legs of Wenchang chickens are their important features (as shown in figure 1).



Figure 1. A Wenchang chicken (Source: adapted from tv.cctv.com).

In large-scale farms, the breeding cycle of a chicken is 7 months. In the last two months, the farmers need to cage them and restricted their activities. The breeding cycle is not permanent. Some farmers may extend it to eight months (adapted from wenchang.hainan.gov.cn). In special situation, the breeding cycle may be extended to a whole year.

The feed is also very important. Since Wenchang chicken is famous for its fatty meat (a little like the French foie gras and Korean beef). The more fat that the meat have, the higher price it will be sold at. In order to let the chicken become fatter, the farmers need to use some special feeds. In the five months that they are free, except insects and seeds of trees, the farmers will also use copra to feed them. The researchers from Hainan University found that using fermented coconut water to stir the forage and feeding the chicken with it can also accelerate its weight gain (Liu et al., 2020).

In the two months that they are put into cage, their food was changed. Usually, the mixture of rice and hot oil is a good choice.

Because of the special breeding method, the cost of Wenchang chicken is much higher than other kinds of chicken. Both capon and hen are suitable for sliced boiled chicken. Here, we take capon as our research object.

After the filed investigation, we got such information from local farmers. Using this breeding methods, the cost of a capon (7 months' breeding cycle) is 100 RMB. The price of it is 121 RMB (22 RMB per 500 grams). It is the wholesale price of live chickens. After slaughtering and freezing, the price of chicken is about 53.7 RMB per 500 grams (online shopping). The relatively high price of Wenchang chicken greatly limits its commercialization because the average income of Chinese people is not so high.

IV The Cooking Method of Sliced Boiled Chicken

Since sliced boiled chicken originates from a kind of fast food. The cooking of it is really simple. Hooking the chicken head, put the chicken into simmering water (Niu & Niu, 2021). Raise the chicken from the water every 5 minutes, pour the water from chicken's abdominal cavity and put it into the water again, repeating the process for three times (Niu & Niu, 2021). In Chinese, this special cooking method is called San Jin, San Ti (soaking and raising for three times). After that, brush peanut oil all over the surface of the chicken, cut the chicken into pieces and put it on a dish (Niu & Niu, 2021). A finished product is as shown in figure 2.



Figure 2. Sliced boiled capon (photographed by XING Cheng).

For a delicious sliced boiled chicken, the dipping sauce is of great importance. It is the best way to distinguish different styles' sliced boiled chicken. For example, because the sliced boiled chicken from Wenchang City, Hainan Province is too greasy. Its dipping sauce usually consists of kumquat juice and soy sauce. Since sour food can relieve greasiness. In Lianjiang area, Guangdong Province, the dipping sauce is a little complex. It is usually a mixture of soy sauce, peanut oil, sesame oil, garlic, kaempferia and coriander.

V The Commercialization of of Sliced Boiled Chicken

The Present Situation of Sliced Boiled Chicken's Commercialization

Frankly, the commercialization of sliced boiled chicken is not good at all. Singapore and Malaysia are exceptions because they successfully promote Hainanese Chicken Rice and make it become a brand. Compared with them, the people from the home of sliced boiled chicken's behave badly. Sliced boiled chicken still stays in the areas that the people had accepted it one to two centuries ago.

Actually, not only the sliced boiled chicken, everything about Chinese traditional culture is facing the same situation. The wrong attitude towards traditional culture is the real reason of it. Between 1949 and 1976, for some

reasons, Chinese people did many things to destroy traditional culture. Today, when talking about the history of that period, they will explain that they did not pay attention to the protection of traditional culture because they were poor at that time. However, in today's China, because most of the officials of culture sectors are incompetent, the situation is still bad.

At the same time, because the market economy appeared in Chinese mainland relatively late, most people don't have an open mind. Take sliced boiled chicken as an example. Most people just see it as a dish. Few of them will try to dig its commercial and cultural value. In this field, the people from Hong Kong did better. Many dishes of Cantonese cuisine have appeared in their movies and TV dramas. It is a good way to promote Cantonese culture.

The New Way of Sliced Boiled Chicken's Commercialization

As an old Chinese saying goes, for a successful product, only thirty percent is producing (Feng, 2008). Seventy percent is propagating (Feng, 2008).

At present, the quality of sliced boiled chicken is good enough. It needs to be hyped. The experience of Japanese people propagate sushi is worth learning. After all, there is no bad product but bad marketing. In order to let sliced boiled chicken become more famous, the businessmen have two things to do.

First, put it into movies, TV dramas and computer games. The more people know it, the more people may try it. In a word, do what the people from Hong Kong do.

More importantly, a idol-making movement is necessary. In Japan, a documentary called Jiro Dreams of Sushi is very famous. The old cook is called the god of sushi (adapted from tv.cctv.com). In this era, we need to find "the god of sliced boiled chicken". Actually, this method can be used in the propaganda of every kind of Chinese food. As a matter of fact, it is very easy to find many gods of food such as the god of dumplings and the god of roast duck in China, a veritable gourmet kingdom.

At the same time, it is well known that many unscrupulous media organizations are trying their best to belittle Chinese food. Stop them from telling lies is very important.

Except propaganda, making sure the consumer groups is very important. The price of sliced boiled chicken changes according to the chicken breed. Some chicken breeds are expensive. Some of them are cheap. Therefore, sliced boiled chicken can appear as upscale food. It is also the delicacy of ordinary people. In this situation, avoiding shoddy goods is of great importance. Otherwise, the reputation of this traditional food will be discredited.

VI Conclusion

Sliced boiled chicken is an important part of Cantonese culture. We shouldn't just see it as a kind of food. It is the childhood memory of many people. At the same time, for the people from Guangdong and Hainan Provinces, sliced boiled chicken is in their blood. Especially when going abroad, sliced boiled chicken is the embodiment of their homesickness. It just likes the sushi to Japanese people and the pizza to Italian people. In a word, it is a cultural symbol of Guangdong region (including Hainan region). At the same time, in order to better protect this cultural symbol, commercializing it in a correct way is necessary.

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