

On the Inheritance and Development of Local Traditional Food—Take Quzhou Longyou Sponge Cake as an Example

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Chinese traditional food always refers to the food with complete color, fragrance, and taste, each of which has its own unique cultural connotation and embodies China's extensive and profound traditional culture. As one of the traditional specialties in Quzhou, Longyou Sponge Cake has a unique regional flavor and cultural heritage. The written history of Sponge Cake originated in the Ming Dynasty. In the 600-year long history, Sponge Cake has a deep historical and cultural connotation, which is deeply loved by the local people and gradually forms a unique cake culture. However, in recent years, due to insufficient publicity, cumbersome production techniques, lack of "culture+" brand strategy development, and other issues, it is difficult to be promoted and inherited by the local government and people, and it is difficult to go out of Quzhou and into the vision of Chinese people. Therefore, it is extremely important to study and explore a path suitable for the sustainable development of Sponge Cake in view of the development status of Quzhou's characteristic food Sponge Cake.

Keywords: local specialties, Sponge Cake, inheritance and development

Background

In the 5,000-year history of the Chinese nation, food culture, as an indispensable part of traditional culture, plays a crucial role in the development of culture (Gai, Shi, Ma, & Cui, 2018). The local traditional food not only shows the local traditional culture, but also is an important basis for exploring the local traditional culture (Wang, Liang, & Gao, 2022). Longyou County is located in the Jinqu Basin in the west of Zhejiang Province, belonging to Quzhou City. It is adjacent to Hangzhou in the north, Jinhua in the east, Suichang in the south, and Qujiang District in the west. The region has a profound cultural heritage, a wide variety of traditional specialties, a specific geographical location and superior ecological conditions, and is significantly different from the water sources in other regions, which creates unique conditions for the birth of Sponge Cake. According to the *Records of Longyou County*,

It is said that there was a kind of cake in the Ming Dynasty. Because of its unique flavor, exquisite production, and harmonious sound of "Fugao", it symbolized luck, so it became a festival delicacy. On holidays, every family steamed cake, which was used as a snack or gift to relatives and friends, became a unique style. (Yu, 1925)

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In fact, it is not important when Sponge Cake was originated and how it was named. What is important is that it has been passed down from generation to generation, and its craftsmanship has become increasingly perfect. A complete set of handmade processes has been gradually summarized, forming a unique style. It is a traditional food deeply popular among the people in Quzhou and an indispensable food in the people's holiday diet. On January 12, 2007, the former AQSIQ approved the implementation of geographical indication product protection for "Sponge Cake". The folk traditional snacks have distinctive dietary cultural characteristics, which are the inheritance of Longyou people's life and provide important reference value for outsiders to understand the local economy and culture.

This paper introduces the historical origin and production process of Sponge Cake, studies and analyzes a series of production and promotion problems faced by Sponge Cake in the new era, and finds out the shortcomings in the communication. Finally, the author proposes targeted sustainable development approaches to the existing problems, with a view to promoting the inheritance and development of Quzhou Sponge Cake culture.

The Historical Origin and Technological Characteristics of Sponge Cake

Sponge Cake is a famous specialty of Longyou County, Zhejiang Province, and a national geographical indication product of China. Longyou in history is rich in rice, wheat, rape, and other grain and oil crops, and the rice culture has a long history. In ancient times, the cake was actually the coarse grain that farmers ate by themselves. It is said that a long time ago, a little daughter-in-law of a farmer's family accidentally knocked over a bowl of rice wine on the stove when she was mixing rice flour steamed cakes. Seeing the rice wine flowing into the flour, the little daughter-in-law was anxious to cry, but she did not dare to speak out. Afraid of being scolded by her mother-in-law, she had to mix the rice flour with rice wine and steam it in the steamer. Who knows that because of the fermentation of rice wine, this cake is particularly soft and delicious, with a slight wine smell. Since then, Longyou people have consciously mixed in home-made rice wine when steaming cakes. The steamed cakes have swelled and become soft due to fermentation, which is called "cake making". The custom of cooking cake making during the Spring Festival has been formed. It is lucky to be "fat" and "high", "annual" and "step by step". Over time, "Sponge Cake" has become a specialty and is loved by people.

Sponge Cake is made with unique technology and exquisite ingredients. The finished product is as white as jade, with holes as thin as needles, smells delicious, tastes sweet but not greasy, and tastes waxy but not sticky. Its biggest feature is that it is fermented by adding a proper amount of glutinous rice wine in the production process, which is nutritious, especially suitable for the elderly and children. The process of making cake is quite complicated. From raw materials to finished products, more than 10 processes are required, such as water immersion, rinsing, pulping, milling, dehydration, mixing and stirring, cage filling, fermentation, steaming and pruning of reed leaves. The traditional manual method is to soak the rice for tens of days, then rinse it with water, and grind it into fine powder. In addition, add lard, ham, sweet wine, and other condiments in a certain proportion to make a paste. To make the cake, you need a special steamer. The bottom of the steamer is covered with lotus leaves or other leaves. Put the rice flour paste into the steamer and heat it gently for fermentation. During this period, change the order of the steamers every 7-8 minutes, from the top to the bottom, and repeat until you feel warm by touching the cage wall, and then stop heating. At this time, the cake cannot be made out of the pot, but should be put into the sweet wine to wait for it to change. When the half cage is filled, some small bamboo sticks can be evenly inserted into the inner wall of each steamer cage, about

four or five for each cage. This is to help the hair cake breathe. Finally, steam it with high heat. After steaming, sprinkle red and green silk on the top, or put red dates, honey dates, green plums, etc. The finished cake has bright colors and attractive fragrance (Yao, 2008). Sponge Cake has a variety of designs and colors. In the old days, there were many brown sugar cakes and green cakes. Now, there are steamed white sugar cakes, sweet scented cakes, walnut cakes, red date cakes, and chestnut cakes. The process is fine. White glutinous rice is used with japonica glazed rice. After soaking for tens of days, the rice swill is washed with water, ground into fine powder or rice paste, and drained. Add lard, sugar, and yeast in proportion to make a paste, and place it in a lotus leaf steamer. First warm and ferment, wait until the cage is full, and steam it vigorously. Apply sesame oil or vegetable oil while printing patterns or spreading red and green silk, osmanthus, etc. The finished product is as bright as jade, and its pores are as thin as needles. The smell of lotus is fragrant. The food is glutinous but not sticky, sweet but not greasy.

However, in recent years, Sponge Cake lacks a clear idea of development in terms of communication, and its manifestation is relatively simple, so there is no breakthrough in the development speed. In the era of no shortage of food, there is no new pattern or innovation, which makes it difficult to keep up with the food trend. In particular, similar substitutes for various kinds of food are constantly emerging, consumers have turned to substitutes, and the traditional food business is declining (X. Q. Wei, Y. Q. Wei, & Xiao, 2020). Therefore, in the development process of Sponge Cake, we should constantly improve the development ideas, so as to be invincible in the development of local specialty food.

The Outstanding Problems Faced by the Inheritance and Development of Sponge Cake

Insufficient Publicity

According to the description in *Modern Advertising and Language Art* published in 1994, language plays a vital role as “the main factor forming current commercial advertising” (Yang & Gao, 1994, pp. 2-3). There is no doubt that advertising can indeed expand product publicity and improve product popularity to a certain extent. In today’s modern society, the speed of new media technology is constantly accelerating. Many consumers are guided by information through advertising to achieve product marketing. Although Sponge Cake has a high reputation in Quzhou, it has a history of more than 600 years. However, people outside Quzhou generally do not know about it. Outsiders themselves do not know much about Quzhou, let alone the small county town of Longyou. Therefore, compared with the publicity efforts and forms of today’s trendy food such as Haidilao and Delux, the publicity efforts of Sponge Cake are far from enough, and the forms of publicity are mostly street billboards, which are relatively backward and have poor publicity effects. Nowadays, young people can tell many McDonald’s products immediately, but few people have mentioned Sponge Cake, including young people in Quzhou. This is enough to show that the current publicity effect of Longyou Cake is negligible, the brand publicity effect of Sponge Cake has not been realized, and the market position of Sponge Cake is worrying.

Complicated Production Process

Longyou people make Sponge Cake, which is a tradition carved in their bones. It has been enduring for hundreds of years and passed down from generation to generation. The process of making cake is very complex and delicate. From the collection of raw materials to the formation of finished products, more than 10 processes are required, such as water immersion, slurry pulling, flour milling, mixing and stirring, cage filling, etc. And

the traditional manual process is more meticulous. First, soak the rice for tens of days, rinse the original taste of the rice, then grind it into fine powder, and drain the rice slurry. Then add lard, sugar, and other accessories in proportion to make a paste, and put it in the steamer with lotus leaves. First warm and ferment, then steam. Finally, print patterns on the cake while it is hot, or sprinkle red and green silk, osmanthus, etc. The finished product is as bright as jade, fragrant with lotus, glutinous but not sticky, sweet but not greasy. It can be seen that the process is tedious, and requires careful operation and careful employment, which is to test the endurance and carefulness of Longyou people. However, in today's rapidly developing society, the production process of more than one day or two and less than a few hours can no longer meet the market demand, and people's demand for food is accelerating. Therefore, a huge problem Sponge Cake is facing is how to simplify the production process, and greatly improve the production efficiency on the premise of ensuring the original flavor, so as to increase the market supply to improve economic efficiency.

Absence of "Culture+" Strategy

With the continuous improvement of the material living standard, people's pursuit of spiritual life is also growing. In particular, the pursuit of food is no longer just about "eating", but more about the culture and feelings contained in food (Cao, 2021). Although Sponge Cake is famous in Quzhou, it actually lacks cultural empowerment. Many people know Sponge Cake, but only few people know the cultural stories, people's stories, and craftsmanship stories behind the cake, and even some local people know very little. This phenomenon leads to the fact that local people in Quzhou only know how to sell machinery directly, which cannot impress consumers. Even though the taste can make customers praise it for a while, the short memory will not bring more feedback, which cannot effectively attract repeat customers. How to create a cultural brand and reflect the brand effect of cake making is one of the problems faced by Longyou merchants at present.

Innovative Development Strategy of Sponge Cake

Apply the Innovative Media to Promote Sponge Cake

The eating habits of each region in China are very different, and the cultural characteristics of the North and the South are also very obvious. But diversity reflects diversity, and diversity includes inclusiveness. A variety of regional specialty foods, such as Beijing Roast Duck, Changsha Stinky Tofu, Shaxian Snacks, etc., have fans from all over the country. From the perspective of hot sales, more independent regional brands are becoming more and more popular. Similarly, we can make local traditional food like Sponge Cake into a food with unique regional characteristics in Quzhou. We can use developed new media technology to vigorously promote and publicize, meet the needs of modern consumers and the market, and enhance the public's recognition of the product. To make Sponge Cake known as the landmark traditional food of Quzhou by the people all over the country, it must be promoted nationwide through the network media, newspapers, and other modern government and other entertainment platforms. For example, Quzhou can be promoted through official channels such as making food promotional films, documentaries and variety shows with a wide audience, or through entertainment platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Tiktok. At the same time, we should improve the information about Sponge Cake on the platform website with intensive information dissemination, record more detailed historical sources and ancient legal system, write the deeds of the inheritors of Sponge Cake, provide smooth channels for customers who want to try Sponge Cake, strengthen the interaction with customers browsing on the platform, and actively guide potential customers to contact the history and culture of Sponge

Cake. In a word, we must push it to the eyes of the people all over the country through various modern media technologies and means to make more consumers interested in learning about Quzhou and even Quzhou's food culture.

Upgrade the Production Process of Sponge Cake

The production process of Sponge Cake is tedious and time-consuming. From preparing raw materials to producing finished products, each step of the ancient method reflects the patience and meticulousness of the ancestors. Therefore, the selection of raw material varieties, the control of heat, the design and stacking of cookers, and the skillful techniques all affect the flavor of the cake. However, in the new era of rapid change, the tedious traditional production process is not only gradually lacking the attention of young people, but also facing the risk of loss. In order to adapt to the rapid market demand, the local government should implement the national policy of protecting and inheriting time-honored brands, and actively carry out the action of "revitalizing time-honored brands". All relevant departments and enterprises should provide technical innovation support and coordinate the upstream and downstream production layout. Save the collection time of raw materials, update and speed up the use of facilities and equipment, and adopt the intensive means of "machine + labor" to greatly improve the production efficiency so as to supply the market demand in a timely manner. Science and technology are the primary productive forces. Faced with the situation of small profits but little sales, cake makers should unite to improve the cumbersome production process before, form the Sponge Cake industry chain, achieve "strong association, fast production, high efficiency and good benefits", and create a new situation of cake making technology.

Create a Cultural Brand of Sponge Cake and Highlight the Strategy of "Culture + Food"

Brand is the symbol of food culture, just as Shaxian Snacks have opened chain stores in Japan and South Korea while their stores are all over the country. And Sponge Cake is also in need of such a brand. Quzhou can improve the popularity of Sponge Cake by relying on the regional characteristics of food, so as to enhance the brand effectiveness of the cake product industry. For example, with the help of the food festival held every year in Longyou, tourists and consumers can be mobilized to participate in activities and actively spread the cake culture, so that participants and other potential people can feel that Sponge Cake culture can not only eat but also play, not only food but also culture. This fully reflects the effect of "festival culture + food". The strategy of "tourism culture + food" can be promoted simultaneously with the strategy of "festival culture + food". Relying on Confucian culture, ancient city culture, red culture, and other related historical stories, urban stories, and people's stories of Sponge Cake, let the cake engrave the city's imprint and cultural context, and let tourists fall in love with Sponge Cake. It is particularly noteworthy that the outer packaging design of Sponge Cake should focus on the current popular portable style, and the outline design image should be exquisite and fashionable, avoid the simplicity of the original outer packaging, and add Longyou or Longyou featured landmark patterns in the outer packaging design, build people's impression of the relationship between the cake and Longyou, and establish a traditional featured brand system under the cake culture.

Conclusion

Quzhou's food culture is brilliant, and Sponge Cake, as an important component, has been developing so far. The ancient culture and wisdom behind it are still worth exploring, thinking, and studying by people today. However, the inheritance and development of culture is not always smooth, and the drawbacks of Sponge Cake

in the traditional mode limit its development and promotion in the current era. Through the research on sustainable development of our group, we chose to keep the core and advantages of the traditional system while approaching the needs of the modern fast-paced lifestyle, gradually increase the market share of Sponge Cake, seek to integrate and promote the traditional and innovative development in a new form, and vigorously promote the local historical culture.

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