



Zhuang Food Culture as Artifact : Meaning, Representation and Digital Media Practice in the Process of New Media Communication in China

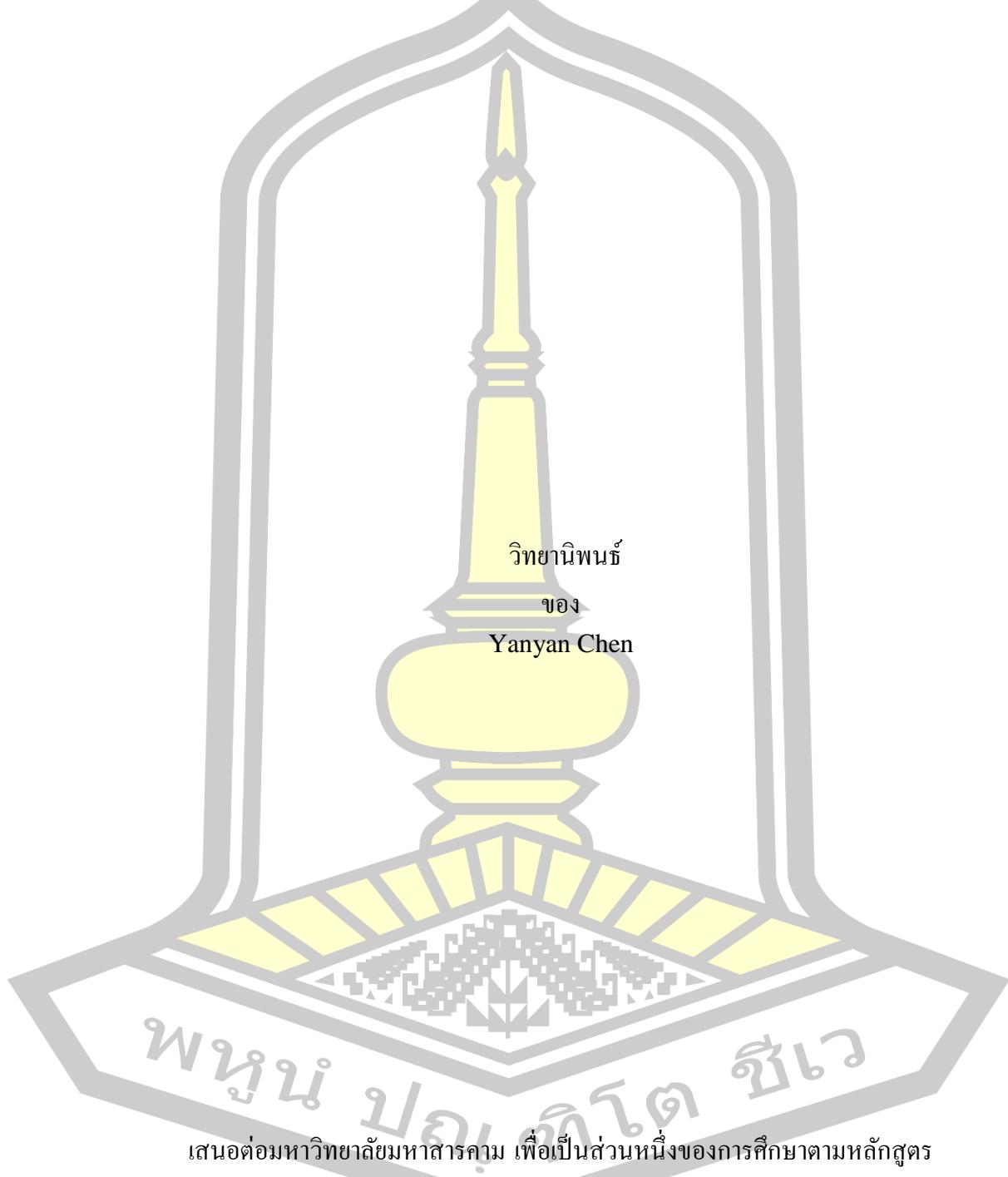
Yanyan Chen

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation

October 2024

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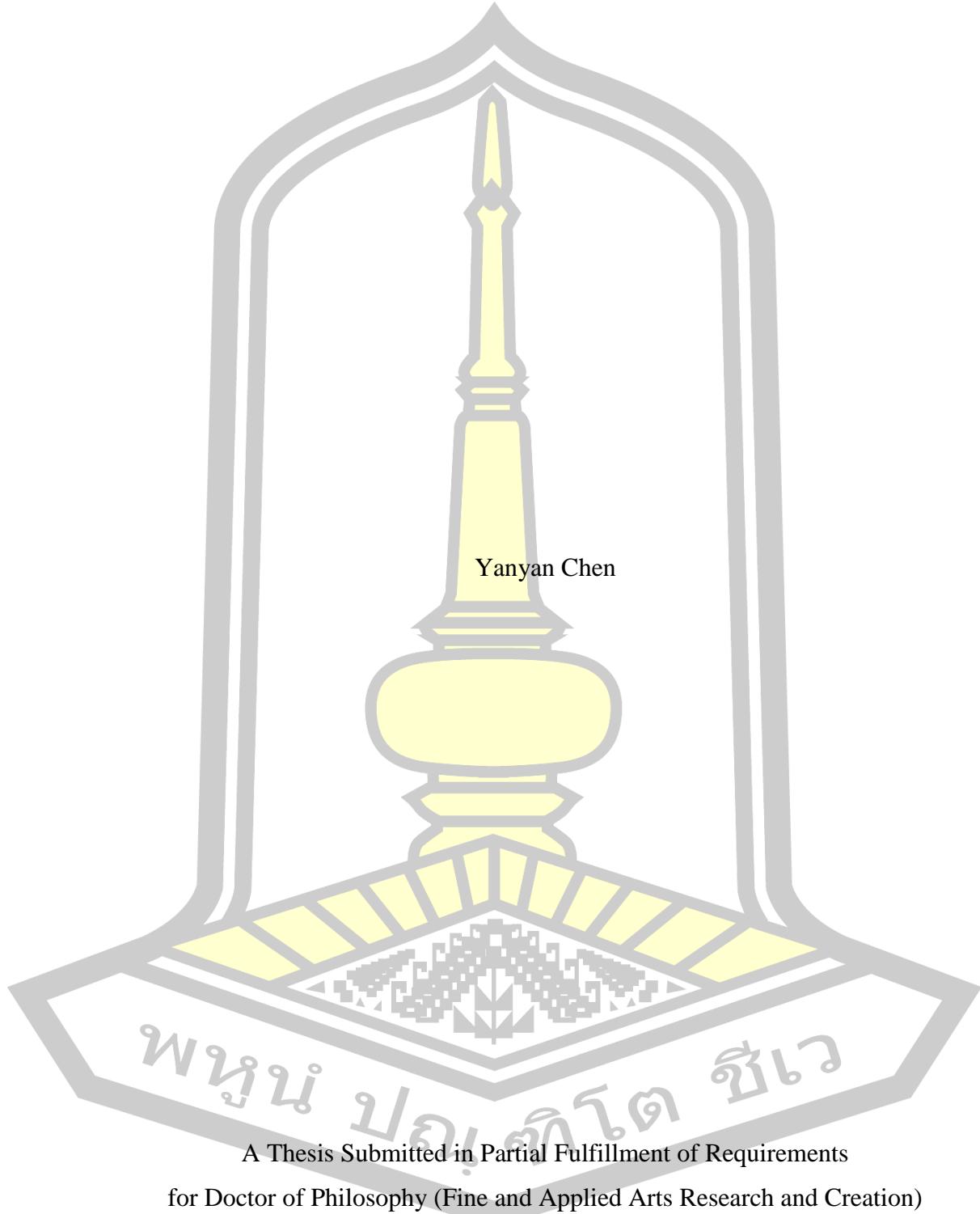


เสนอต่อมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตร
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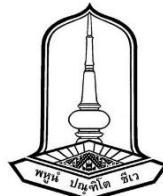
Zhuang Food Culture as Artifact : Meaning, Representation and Digital Media
Practice in the Process of New Media Communication in China



A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
for Doctor of Philosophy (Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation)

October 2024

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The examining committee has unanimously approved this Thesis, submitted by Ms. Yanyan Chen, as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation at Mahasarakham University

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ABSTRACT

This research is basic research. Using qualitative research methods, the research text is the Zhuang food culture. The primary focus is on exploring the meaning and representation of Zhuang food culture in the development process of Chinese new media communication.

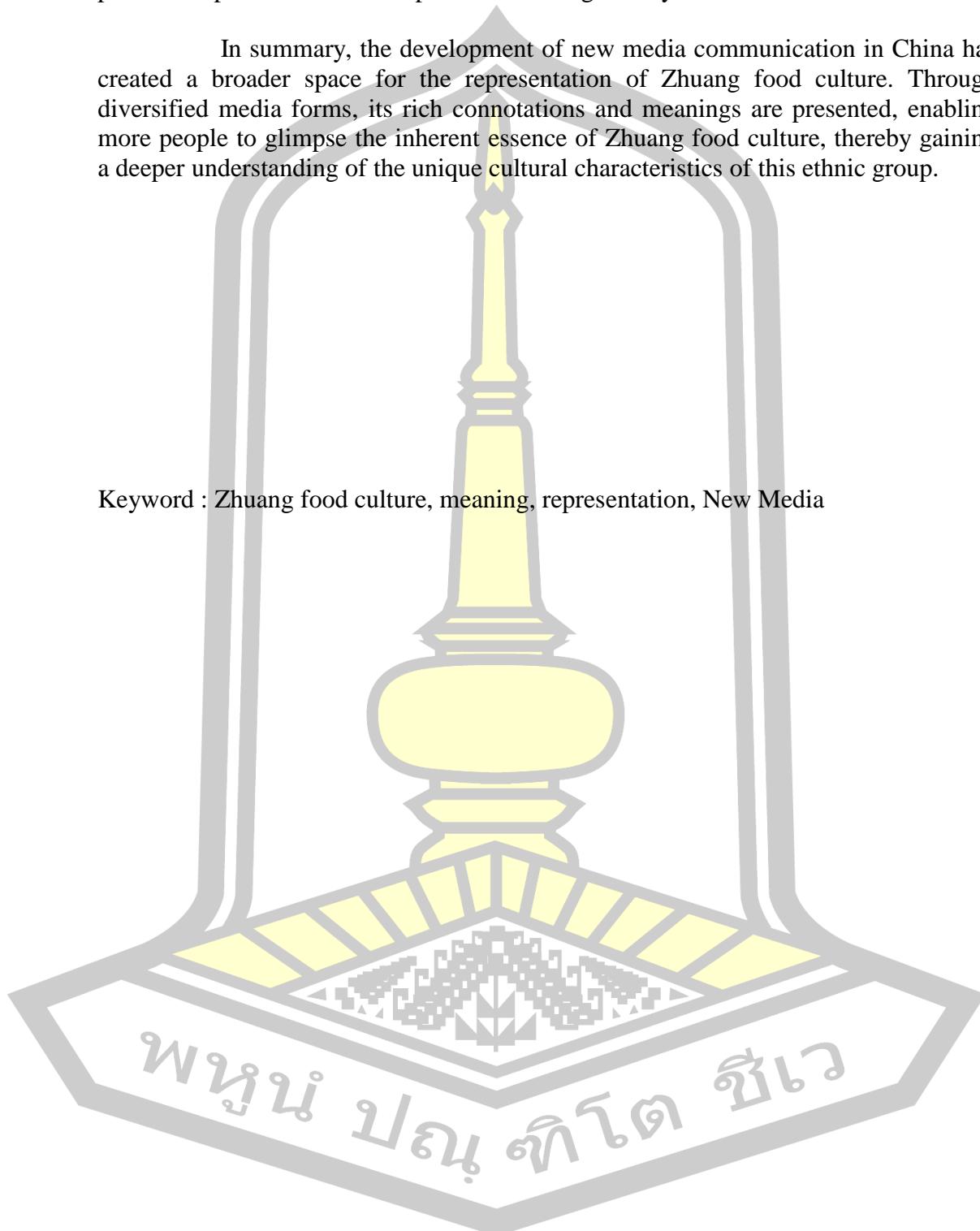
This study indicates that Zhuang food culture holds seven levels of meaning for the Zhuang people during traditional festivals and daily life: 1) the meaning of primitive worship and belief, 2) the meaning of survival beliefs, 3) the meaning of aesthetic concepts, 4) the meaning of ethnic identity, 5) the meaning of moral norms, 6) the meaning that embodies the Zhuang people's thought of valuing "glutinous rice," and 7) the meaning of integration of ethnic cultures.

In addition, The researchers found that the representation of Zhuang food culture on new media is mainly conducted from three dimensions: the representation of food culture, the representation of regional culture, and the representation of traditional culture. The representation of food cultural shapes the resilient character of the Zhuang people in their constant pursuit and progress from three aspects: cooking utensils, ingredients for food, and Food preparation process. The representation of regional culture discusses micro-documentaries construct cultural identity and guide aesthetic appreciation from the perspective of the regularity and purpose of regional cultural communication. The representation of traditional culture is characterized by the inheritance and adherence of Zhuang people to traditional festivals and traditional culinary skills.

Besides. The researchers conducted a case study of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival to analyze the meaning and representation of Zhuang food culture in the festival field during the process of Chinese new media communication, arriving at three conclusions: 1) The participants in festival activities are not only the receivers of the meaning of Zhuang food culture, but also the creators of meaning. 2) The representation of Zhuang food culture changes as the festive culture evolves. 3) The

mediatization of Zhuang food culture is a variety of representations that reflect the public's response to the development of Zhuang society

In summary, the development of new media communication in China has created a broader space for the representation of Zhuang food culture. Through diversified media forms, its rich connotations and meanings are presented, enabling more people to glimpse the inherent essence of Zhuang food culture, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the unique cultural characteristics of this ethnic group.



Keyword : Zhuang food culture, meaning, representation, New Media

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Finally, my dissertation is completed. It took me nearly four years to go through this process, and I felt a mix of emotions. I have entered my thirties. During this fleeting time, I experienced hesitation, confusion, anxiety, and even pressure so great that I could hardly fall asleep. However, what I gained more was a sense of accomplishment and happiness after overcoming difficulties and climbing the ladder one by one. On the path of exploring academic progress, the completion of my doctoral dissertation is a mountain that I am about to overcome. It is also the most shining part of my doctoral stage, which is full of happiness, moving moments, happiness, and achievements, though it was arduous.

Studying for a doctorate is a spiritual journey, and my mentor, Asst. Prof. Dr. Peera Phanlukthao, has been my guide on this path. He has illuminated the direction for my confusing academic journey, encouraged and supported me to find my own academic goals, and provided me with both ample academic freedom and space as well as solid support. What moves me deeply is not only Professor Peera's careful guidance on my dissertation, but also his rigorous, practical, humble, and gentle demeanor as a scholar, which deserves my lifelong learning. Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude to all the teachers in the college. Your brilliant courses have been invaluable gains in my doctoral studies, and your determined and diligent academic paths are my role models.

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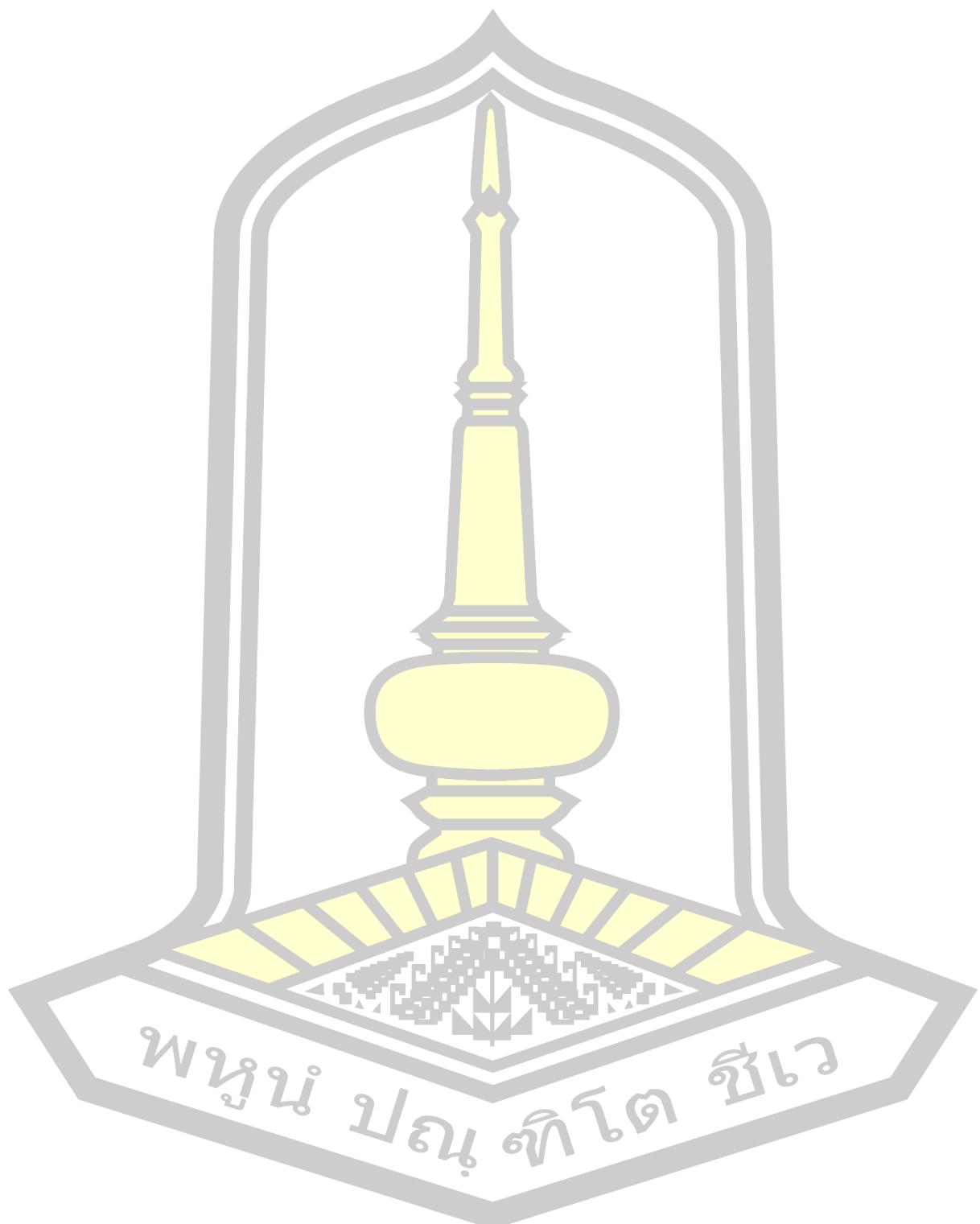


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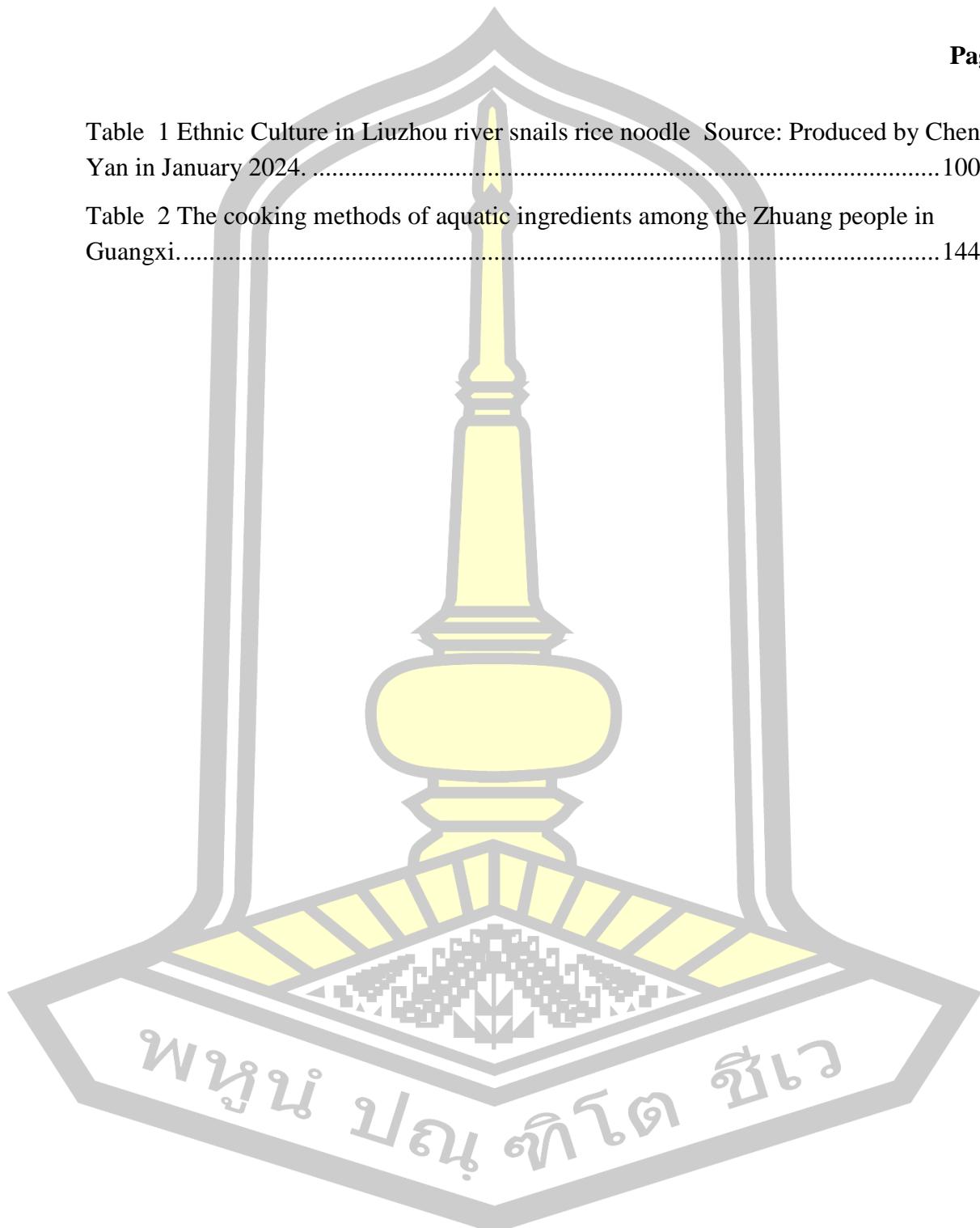
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Chapter I

Introduction

1. Background of Research (with Reference)

"Food is fundamental to the survival and development of mankind, especially in the traditional concept of the Chinese people, "agriculture is the foundation of the country, and food is the day of the people", and "food" is the most important thing in the world. The object of my research is the food culture of the Zhuang people. Food culture arises with the emergence of human society, and through the inheritance of successive generations, the food cultures of various ethnic groups in the world have been constantly changing, sometimes even making the form of their cultures more than the instinctive needs of human survival, and forming a whole set of food culture system and unique symbolic meaning. The food culture of the Zhuang people permeates the social production, traditional customs, and moral concepts of the Zhuang people, carries the traditional culture of the Zhuang people, has a great influence on the folk culture, and is closely related to the wedding, funeral, old age, sickness and death and other aspects. It can be said that one cannot have a complete understanding of the Zhuang people and their culture without studying their food culture. With the rapid development of emerging information technology, new media communication in China has penetrated all areas of people's production and life. Due to the emergence and participation of new public media, Zhuang food culture in the process of new media development in China has begun to rely on the public space of vision co-constructed by digital communication media and has a different media representation from that of the past. **Meaning, representation, and digital media practices will be important concepts in this study.**

Zhuang Food Culture :

Zhuang is the most populous minority in China, and according to the China Statistical Yearbook-2021, the population of Zhuang in China is 1,956,546 ¹, with about 1 million Zhuang distributed in Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture and other cities and counties in Yunnan Province, and the rest in Lianshan Zhuang and Yao Autonomous County and Huaiji County in Guangdong Province, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture in Guizhou Province, Hunan Province. The rest are located in Lianshan Zhuang Yao Autonomous County and Huaiji County of Guangdong Province, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture of Guizhou Province, Jianghua Yao Autonomous County of Hunan Province, and some cities and counties in Sichuan, Shaanxi and Xinjiang provinces. Most of the Zhuang in the rest of the provinces migrated during the Taiping revolutionary² period due to war, and their populations are relatively small and

¹ Announcement of the results of the seventh national census in Guangxi in 2021
<https://new.qq.com/omn/20210513/20210513A08MPF00.htm>

² Taiping revolutionary (1851-1864), a leading group consisting of Hong Xiuquan, Yang Xiuqing, Xiao Chaogui, Feng Yunshan, Wei Changhui, Shi Dakai, etc. took the lead from Jintian Village in Guangxi to launch a peasant

scattered. Therefore, in this study, when discussing the food culture of the Zhuang, the food of the Zhuang in Guangxi is the main focus, and the food of the Zhuang in the rest of the provinces is generally not elaborated.

The formation and development of the dietary culture of the Zhuang people is mainly subject to the constraints of the social, economic, and geographic environment, and is influenced by the level of development of the productive forces and the quality of culture. The Zhuang mainly live in the southern subtropical region, where the climate is warm, with plenty of sunshine and annual rainfall, which is very suitable for the growth of rice. As one of the earliest ethnic groups to cultivate and plant rice, the Zhuang have been extremely important to the production and life of Zhuang society from ancient times to the present. Nowadays, there are still a lot of place names with the character "Na" in many Zhuang areas, even in some areas of Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and other countries, "Na" is pronounced as "na2", which is "na2" in Zhuang, "which means "field" in the Zhuang language. "The emergence of 'Na' place names is linked to the emergence of rice agriculture, a historical mark of the emergence of rice civilization, which to a certain extent preserves the original face of the Zhuang rice agriculture culture." (Qin Naichang, 2004, p46)

The beginning of cooked food was the earliest starting point of Zhuang food culture. "Fire is the root of dietary cooking, and it should be said that with fire comes dietary culture." (zhuwei,1997,P10) Once human beings learned to use fire and had food materials that could be directly processed, cooking gradually came into being. It was only in the late Paleolithic or later, in the early Neolithic, that the Zhuang ancestors became more skillful at taking and preserving fire and utilizing it to their advantage. The process from raw food to cooked food requires the power of fire, and the control of fire is not a simple process of making food but includes a series of "cooking" techniques, which can be said to be an important invention of the Zhuang to cope with the living environment. The use of fire puts the cook at the center of nature and culture, connecting the two and influencing the relationship between other beings and objects in social and ecological networks.

From the Shang and Zhou to the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the food culture of the Zhuang ancestors with local style was gradually formed. Since the Zhuang ancestors began to cultivate rice in the Neolithic period, due to the backwardness of the production tools and farming methods, the progress made by the Zhuang people in the production of rice in the thousands of years before the Shang³ and Zhou⁴ Dynasties was not very obvious. Starting from the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, the ancestors of the Zhuang people began to use bronze tools in agricultural production, and bronze tools that could be used in agricultural production, such as bronze battle-axes, bronze axes, bronze knives, and bronze chisels, have been unearthed in the Western Zhou - Spring and Autumn Period burial complexes in the Matou Township of Wuming County. During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods⁵, iron

uprising war against the feudal rule of the Qing Dynasty and foreign capitalist aggression , was the largest large-scale anti-Qing movement in China in the mid-19th century.

³ The Shang Dynasty (c. 1600 BCE - 1046 BCE), the second dynasty in Chinese history, also known as the Yin Shang, was the first Chinese dynasty to have a direct written record of its contemporaries.

⁴ The Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC-256 BC) was the third slave state in Chinese history after the Shang Dynasty.

⁵ The Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period (770 BC-221 BC) was an era of a hundred schools of thought, an abundance of talent, and an active academic culture. It was a period of great division in Chinese

production tools were gradually used by the ancestors of the Zhuang people. In Pingle Yinshanling Warring States Tomb, there are 180 iron tools unearthed, most of which are production tools, such as hoe, axe, adze, chisel, knife, and so on. The use of bronze and iron tools in the Zhuang region was conducive to the production of rice agriculture and played an important role in promoting the development of the social productivity of the Zhuang ancestors. At this time, ox plowing was also gradually popularized in the Zhuang area, and this kind of plowing method was very suitable for paddy field operation, thus providing good conditions for the rapid development of rice agriculture.

"During the period from Qin-Han to North-South Dynasties, due to the wide implementation of iron tools and ox plowing in agricultural production, the agricultural production in Xioou⁶ and Luoyue⁷ areas had a great development. At that time, besides rice, there were also chestnuts, beans, Coix lacryma, corn, and so on, but the main grain crop was still rice, forming a grain cultivation structure dominated by rice." (Qin Naichang, 1997, p217). Therefore, the Zhuang people's cultivation of rice, cooking of rice, and consumption of rice reflect their continuous dietary conquest of nature for the sake of their stomachs, a conquest that has the significance of survival.

From the Song Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty, the social and economic development of the Zhuang region was rapid, with different degrees of development and progress in agriculture, handicrafts, commerce and trade, and transportation. The social development and progress also promoted the formation of special dietary customs such as festivals and life rituals of the Zhuang people, and the dietary system and rituals with Zhuang characteristics were finalized in this period.

Rice production is a long process. Due to the low level of productivity and cognitive ability, the Zhuang people lacked knowledge of the causes of the abundance or failure of rice and the changes in various natural phenomena, so they imagined that there was a supernatural and mysterious power at the disposal of the gods. To pray for good weather and good rice harvest, people often hold corresponding sacrificial ceremonies during the red and white events and different seasons, offering sacrifices to the gods, burning incense and praying, and entertaining the gods with songs and dances. Many customary foods are chosen as offerings, all of which are frequently used in daily life, and all of which are given special significance in the expression of their divinity, and this choice includes the regional and cultural characteristics of the worshippers.

The March 3rd Zhuang nationality is a representative traditional festival of the Zhuang people and an important day of worship for them. On the third day of the third month of the lunar calendar every year, families in Zhuang villages make five-colored glutinous rice to worship their ancestors, and after the worship activities, the whole family gathers together to eat the five-colored glutinous rice. The fact that people eat and drink together represents the existence of feelings between them and is a positive social behavior. People share food with the spirits of their ancestors because

history.

⁶ Xieou, also known as Xiyue, is a square state that appeared in Lingnan during the pre-Qin period, and Xieou is mainly distributed in the vast area east of the Liujiang River, north of the Yujiang River, south of the Xiangli River and west of the Xijiang River in today's Guangxi Province.

⁷ The ancient state of Luoyue extended from the Hongshui River basin in Guangxi in the north, from the southeastern part of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau in the west, and from the Red River basin in Vietnam in the southeast.

the Zhuang people hope that they can create a connection between themselves and the spirits of their ancestors. The five-colored glutinous rice is first offered to the spirits and ancestors for their enjoyment, and then the people eat it, which is a way for the Zhuang people to handle the offerings following the moral code of the Zhuang people, whose social nature determines that a single human being is incomplete, and that only when a human being is in the midst of an ethnic group can he or she become a complete human being. Five-color sticky rice from gods and ancestors to share is the deepening of the Zhuang people's moral consciousness, the end of the sacrificial form is the five-color sticky rice to eat together, which has risen to the Zhuang village interpersonal identification relationship, can appear in the sacrificial and banquets of five-color sticky rice, has already exceeded the simple basic function of food, The dual nutrition that supplements physical and chemical properties of the body and the spirit has become a spiritual and artistic food.

The food culture of the Zhuang people is not only closely related to the regional environment but also closely related to disease prevention and health care. The material making five-color glutinous rice by Zhuang people is pure Chinese herbs harmless to human health: red orchid grass, yellow rice flower, maple leaf, and purple rattan. The juice of these plants is dyed into the glutinous rice so that the glutinous rice becomes red, yellow, black, and green four colors. Then the white glutinous rice is placed on the plate together, showing a gorgeous color and colorful visual effect. While enhancing one's appetite, this cuisine makes full use of the "five colors" of Chinese medicine. According to traditional Chinese medical theory, wood corresponds to the color green, fire corresponds to the color red, earth corresponds to the color yellow, gold corresponds to the color white, and water corresponds to the color black in the five elements of Chinese medicine. The five Chinese elements⁸ correspond to the five organs of the human body: wood corresponds to the liver, fire corresponds to the heart, earth corresponds to the spleen, gold corresponds to the lungs, and water corresponds to the kidneys. This is what the Chinese people often say: there are five elements in Taoism, five organs in human beings, and five colors in things, and at the same time, it fully embodies the medical theories of the Zhuang people. They believe that medicine and food come from the same source and that eating food is the same as taking medicine, which can help to regulate and maintain the body. This theory reinforces the custom of making five-colored glutinous rice on The March 3th Zhuang nationality, forming a unique local wisdom.

Through the form of ritual offerings, the everyday five-colored glutinous rice enters into the structure of the spirit and concept of the Zhuang people's ethnic beliefs. The fact that the Zhuang people use five-colored glutinous rice as an offering more often than other foods is because rice is the staple food of the Zhuang people. The food that people use more frequently in their daily lives can become the food of faith, the food of power and spirituality, and the gods of heaven in their imagination can only enjoy rice. This choice is a common belief culture among all farmers and herders.

⁸ Five elements, i.e. wood, fire, earth, gold, and water, are the five types of things that ancient Chinese thinkers used to see in their daily lives to illustrate the unity of the origin and diversity of all things in nature, which is one of the foundations of Chinese philosophical thought, and the application of which in Chinese medicine is referred to as the Doctrine of the Five Elements, one of the basic theories of traditional Chinese medicine.

To this day, rice-based delicacies are still active in the festivals and real-life activities of the Zhuang people in Guangxi, and they have become symbolic regional cultural symbols, rather than representations of food and ethnic rituals, and they continue to play a social role in society that goes beyond the meaning of food itself.

With the Interim Measures for the Protection and Management of National Intangible Cultural Heritage coming into effect on December 1, 2006, intangible cultural heritage lists began to be established in various places. Out of the original intention to protect and pass on the local cuisine, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region started to excavate the history and connotation of the Zhuang food culture, and the five-color glutinous rice and the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle flour entered this protection list.

To promote the living inheritance of Zhuang food culture, "the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle handmade skills" was selected into the intangible cultural heritage list of the autonomous region in 2008. In May 2010, the Zhuang five-color glutinous rice-making technique was included in the third batch of the Guangxi autonomous region level intangible cultural heritage list, and on June 10, 2021, "the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle handmade skills" was included in the fifth batch of the national intangible cultural heritage list. The Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region government has also established a protection mechanism for inheritors of intangible cultural heritage-making skills. At present, the inheritors of five-color glutinous rice-making skills include Huang Shuoying, Pan Honghua, and Lai Meining, and the inheritors of the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle making skills include Chen Muhua, Zhang Xiaoxian, and Nidiao Yang.

"In the ancient Greek tradition, feasting, drinking, was a social bonding agent, reinforcing civic functions and values, preserving social order and national stability."

(YinShaoTing. 2008.P56) Food and diet alone do not establish a true network, but through special procedures, mediums, and forms, rituals, and food thus establish a permanent interaction. The fact that these two cuisines can become representatives of the Zhuang food culture is the result of the joint efforts of the Zhuang ethnic group and the local government to create a consensus. On the one hand, these cuisines are rooted in the Zhuang people's concept of rice culture, and on the other hand, the Zhuang food culture is integrated with the national ideology and cultural construction through the ritual performance of the Zhuang people on The March 3rd Zhuang nationality.

In 1980, the activity of The March 3rd Zhuang nationality gradually shifted from being freely organized by villages of the Zhuang nationality to being led by the government. 2006 The March 3th Zhuang nationality was listed as one of the first batch of "intangible cultural heritages" at the national level, and in 2014, it was established by the government of Guangxi District as a legal holiday in Guangxi region. With the concerted efforts of the government and various departments, The March 3th Zhuang nationality of the Zhuang has gradually spread and developed outward, and other cultural elements of the Zhuang have also been added to it, turning it into a comprehensive large-scale cultural and sports event that combines folk entertainment, sports competitions, business and trade, and so on. Every The March 3th Zhuang nationality of the Zhuang, Guangxi gathers tourists from all over the country to see and experience the ethnic customs, and the five-color glutinous rice

made from rice, a representative of the Zhuang food culture, and the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle have also brought a certain impact to the regional tourism industry.

the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle is a cultural necessity rather than a nutritional one in contemporary dining as a signature of the urban diet. China's economic diversity and entrepreneurial surge after reform and opening up has led to the rapid growth of snail noodle stores in Liuzhou from family vendors to private stores, and the slow expansion of diners from a niche to a mass audience. With The March 3th Zhuang nationality being recognized as a local legal holiday by the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region government in 2014, The March 3th Zhuang nationality has transformed from a small-scale, spontaneous regional festival to a large-scale public holiday with universal participation, and the regional cuisine of the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle is also an integral part of the festival, attracting the attention of many tourists. Especially in 2020, the outbreak of the new Crown Pneumonia epidemic, up to two and a half months most Chinese people stayed at home, a long period of home isolation to stimulate people's demand for the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle this kind of "Heavily flavored" food, promote the sales of bagged Liuzhou snail meal outbreak, but also make the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle has become the city's business card. The "The March 3th Zhuang nationality - Bagui Carnival 2023" organized by the Government of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region included a sharing session on the intangible cultural heritage of the Zhuang nationalities in terms of skills and cuisine, and through the sharing of food, participation in its preparation and enjoyment, the Government hoped that the Zhuang nationalities would build up a common experience and memory. This common food culture not only strengthens the ties and solidarity among the Zhuang people but also enhances their ethnic identity.

For the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle itself, what becomes the city card is the cultural significance attached to the connotation of food, the significance of the local people for the inheritance of local emotions and cultural values, and gradually become the symbol of regional food on the basis of the common people's diet.

Five-color glutinous rice is more widely used during The March 3th Zhuang nationality, on April 21, 2015, Wuming District, Nanning City, Guangxi Province, held the largest ever Zhuang five-color glutinous rice steaming and tasting activities, the event site steaming glutinous rice weighing 3,378 pounds, steaming five-color glutinous rice of the round steamer cage with a diameter of 4.8 meters, attracting the eyeballs of many tourists. Combined with the festive atmosphere of The March 3th Zhuang nationality of the Zhuang nationality, the Zhuang people use the five-color glutinous rice to display various patterns representing national unity and celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which symbolizes the patriotism and love for the Party of the Zhuang people through concrete images. Combined with the festive atmosphere of The March 3th Zhuang nationality of the Zhuang nationality, the Zhuang people use the five-color glutinous rice to display various patterns representing national unity and celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which symbolizes patriotism and love for the Party of the Zhuang people through concrete images. It can be seen that the Zhuang people's transformation of the five-color glutinous rice from being shared by people and gods to being shared by everyone, and from being shared by the Zhuang ethnic group to being shared by all ethnic groups

during The March 3th Zhuang nationality of the Zhuang People, and the Guangxi people's upgrading of the the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle from being a folk snack to being a national intangible cultural heritage have made the five-color glutinous rice and the the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle transcend the basic function of mere food, and become a kind of food that spiritualizes ethnic unity and the art of ethnic diet. Relying on such a field as the March 3 festival of the Zhuang people, the five-color glutinous rice and the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle have completed the construction of the cultural representation of the unity and upward mobility of the Zhuang people.

The definition of representation in cultural studies comes from Stewart Hall, a representative of the Birmingham School. He defined "representation" as, "Representation is the production of meaning through language, a process that is an essential part of the process of meaning production and exchange among the members of a culture, and includes the use of language, notation, and images to represent and represent things". (Stuart Hall, Xu Liang, Lu Xinghua, Translation, 2013, P15)

Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. (Stuart Hall, Xu Liang, Lu Xinghua, Translation, 2013, P8) On the specific festival occasion of The March 3th Zhuang nationality of the Zhuang people, the five-color glutinous rice and the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle have been given special symbolic meanings, becoming symbolic symbols for people to pass down the traditions internally, sustain and gradually deepen the ethnic identity of the Zhuang people, and externally, to set cultural boundaries, and to construct the image of ethnic unity in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

And how is meaning constructed? Hall points out that cultural representations acquire meaning through "language". The "language" here is a variety of media intermediary forms, from language, writing to painting, sculpture, and then to modern media technology means. Since the creation and development of photography in the mid-nineteenth century, people have continued to use the technological medium of images to characterize the real world, believing it to be more powerful and efficient than verbal and written communication, and therefore have continued to seek breakthroughs in terms of the medium's productivity (technological advances), relations of production (industry, markets, and their regulation), and consumption (socio-cultural expressions and interactions).

According to communication guru Lippmann, the mass media, by creating a "mimetic environment", largely makes the audience forget what the world is really like. By exporting the dominant public opinion environment, it allows people to live their lives unknowingly accepting the ideology and social norms propagated by the ruling class. It can be said that the mass media, together with society and the audience, have contributed to the change of meaning of Zhuang food symbols. According to McLuhan's statement that "the medium is an extension of the human being", as time passes and media technology continues to develop, the mass media and the audience become more inseparable. To some extent, the media has become the sixth sense of people, it meets the needs of the public, but also causes the public more desire. In other words, the concept of the audience will have an impact on the mass media, and the mimicry environment created by the mass media will in turn affect the audience. This alternating cycle process also promotes the continuous enrichment of the symbolic meaning of Zhuang food culture.

Cultural representations, on the other hand, convey people's perceptions and values of the world through various symbolic systems such as language, literature, art, and religion, reflecting the unique cultural characteristics of a community.

Cultural representation analysis emphasizes the examination of cultural practices, arguing that things acquire meaning under the ways in which we represent them, that representation itself is both a product and a manifestation of culture, and that "culture is not so much a set of things (novels and paintings or television programs and comics) as it is a process, a set of practices, the giving or getting of meaning ". (Stuart Hall, Xu Liang, Lu Xinghua, Translation, 2013, P3) In terms of meaning, things 'themselves' do not have a single, fixed and immutable so-called clarity; the acquisition of meaning for a given thing depends on the particular context of use in which it is situated. (Stuart Hall, Xu Liang, Lu Xinghua, Translation, 2013, P14)

Therefore, there exists more than one way of interpreting or representing any culture. In terms of the modus operandi of representation, although it covers three modes of operation: reflective, intentional, and constitutive, the first two have been much criticized due to their limitations, and constitutive has become the consensus in the academic community. There are two practical approaches to the theory of constitutive representation. The first is the semiotic approach, represented by Roland Barthes, of how meaning is constructed through language, and the second is the discourse approach, represented by Foucault, of how the process of linguistic practice of a particular intention affects people's thoughts and behaviors. (Stuart Hall, Xu Liang, Lu Xinghua, Translation, 2013, P35-36) When we already have a concept of the material world, there are also two systems of representation, the internalization of external things on the one hand, and the externalization of internal concepts on the other. Digital video as a cultural text is also a form of meaning production that realizes representation through symbols. Mere food itself does not have symbolic meaning; it is through the production of digital video that people have given meaning to food, allowing five-colored glutinous rice and the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle to symbolize Zhuang food culture.

This study is based on the reality of the current new media communication context. The concept of new media was first proposed by Goldmark, director of Columbia Radio Network Technology Institute, and then it became popular quickly. In May 1998, the annual meeting of the United Nations Information Committee officially called the Internet the fourth media after newspapers, radio, and television, namely new media. However, when UNESCO decided in May 1998 that new media was the Internet, the subsequent emergence of mobile phones, digital TV, digital broadcasting, and so on revised the concept of new media. Thus it can be seen that new media is a concept of development with relativity. With the development of science and technology, a new form of media may appear every once in a while.

Therefore, Hu Yuanyuan (2015) in her doctoral thesis defines new media as "in today's era, new media is relative to the traditional media such as newspapers, radio, television, a new media form, is the use of digital technology, network technology, mobile technology, through the network, wireless network, cable network and channels, such as computers, mobile phones, digital TV terminal, provide users with the spread of information and entertainment form and media form." (P.15)

On February 25, 2022, the China Internet Network Information Center released the 49th Statistical Report on the ANNUAL REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW MEDIA IN CHINA⁹. The Report showed that the size of Chinese Internet users reached 1.032 billion as of December 2021,[3] and the 47th Report before that stated that the size of short video users was 873 million as of December 2020, accounting for 88.3% of Internet users as a whole, which shows that new media has become the fastest and most convenient, as well as the most appropriate, means of communication in the current communication context.

The combination of Zhuang food culture and new media is a new form of connotation of a national character to interpret the national thoughts and concepts of the Zhuang people, which may have a far-reaching impact on the future direction of Zhuang food culture. The fusion of Zhuang food culture and new media also conveys art in a new form and constitutes a new aesthetic paradigm, which both updates and utilizes traditional cuisine and expands and transcends it. The communication channels of Zhuang food culture have also expanded from the traditional newspaper and TV platforms to new media platforms such as cell phones and the Internet.

It can be said that the development of new media has provided the possibility of diversified communication forms of traditional Zhuang food culture, and the continuous progress of digital technology has provided the technical guarantee of digital artistic communication of Zhuang food culture. This study analyzes the dietary symbols of Zhuang specialties such as five-color glutinous rice and the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle by collecting their digital videos on social media platforms, which have different meanings in different forms of communication media: first, the social meaning of dietary symbols as a carrier of narrative; second, the existence of dietary symbols as support for emotional expression, which is closely related to people's food symbols exist as a basis for emotional expression and are closely related to people's emotions; thirdly, food symbols represent cultural connotations, from which the national culture of Zhuang people can be seen.

However, the researcher found that the digital medium of animation is missing in both the rich ethnic cultural activities of the The March 3th Zhuang nationality and the various food communication platforms. Compared with other communication methods, animation art relies on unique representation in new media communication, and the diversity of visual experiences provided by animation art can further expand the traditional visual representation forms, including Flash, AI technology, CG technology, mobile source H5 interface, interactive games, and other digital media applications, using the characteristics of different media to trigger different ways of communication. Increase the speed of spreading between people, bring each other closer, promote the integration and communication of different human cultures, and make it easier for us to understand its artistic connotation and gain greater aesthetic value from it. Unfortunately, in such a rich form of communication, we seldom see cases of using animation art to communicate Zhuang cuisine.

⁹ ANNUAL REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW MEDIA IN CHINA, started in November 1997, is one of the most authoritative reports on Internet development data released by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC).

The importance and necessity of research :

Taking the digital representation of traditional Zhuang cuisine as a starting point, this study introduces the theory of representation and explores the representation process of cuisine from concrete objects to perceptible concepts through the paths of cultural representation, media representation, and digital media practices.

This study is the first to use representation theory to explore Zhuang food culture, which not only expands the boundaries of representation theory research, but also deepens the theory to a certain extent. From October 1, 1980, when the government organized the first The March 3rd Zhuang nationality, to this year, The March 3th Zhuang nationality Folklore Festival has been held for nearly 43 years, but the domestic research community has paid little attention to the representation of the symbols of the Zhuang food culture presented in The March 3th Zhuang nationality Festival, and the digital media practices related to the traditional Zhuang food culture are still minimal, lacking the corresponding real and reliable field data to understand and refer to. data for understanding and reference. This study explains and understands the process of Zhuang dietary symbol presentation from the perspectives of cultural representation and media representation, so that the focus of new media communication can be focused on the construction of the meaning of Zhuang food culture, which makes up for the lack of representation theory in the previous research on Zhuang food culture, as well as the impenetrability of the connotations of Zhuang food culture in new media communication.

At the same time, in today's prevalence of new media communication methods, Zhuang food culture needs to rely on more diverse forms of communication, and constantly send out a call to the outside world, so that foreign tourists can feel the local food culture when traveling in Guangxi, so that the culture can be shared. Under this circumstance, the Zhuang food culture through digital media practice also makes the people of this ethnic group identify and recognize their own food culture and plays a more positive role in the preservation of the Zhuang food culture.

Finally, the emphasis on the dissemination and development of traditional culture has reached a strategic level in China, and various policies have been introduced to protect the dissemination of traditional culture. In October 2014, Xi Jinping's speech on literature and art proposed that "the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation requires the prosperity of Chinese culture". He emphasized the importance of traditional culture. At the same time, he also pointed out that "we should inherit and carry forward the excellent Chinese traditional culture, and inherit and carry forward the spirit of Chinese aesthetics in the light of the new conditions of the times. Subsequently, in October 2015, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th Party Central Committee proposed "to build a system of inheritance of outstanding Chinese traditional culture, strengthen the protection of cultural heritage, and revitalize traditional crafts."

In January 2017, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and The General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on Implementing the Project of Inheriting and Developing Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture, requiring the overall goal to be "by 2025, the system of inheriting and developing excellent traditional Chinese culture will be formed." Important achievements have been made in the areas of research and analysis, education and popularization, protection and

inheritance, innovation and development, and communication and exchange. Cultural products with Chinese characteristics, Chinese style, and Chinese style are more abundant, cultural consciousness and cultural confidence are significantly enhanced, the foundation of national cultural soft power is more solid, and the international influence of Chinese culture is significantly enhanced."The implementation of these specific policies is not only a concrete implementation of General Secretary Xi Jinping's ideas for the innovative development of Chinese elements and the use of the past for the present but also reflects a high degree of attention to the dissemination and transmission of traditional culture at the national level. Behind the rise of the country and the enhancement of national strength is the need to construct the national image externally, as well as the psychological longing of the people internally for the improvement of the international status and cultural influence and a strong sense of national identity, which makes the researcher invoke the theory of representation to explore the path of representation of the Zhuang food culture, which is of great importance and necessity at present.

2.Purposes of Research

This research aims to study the **Zhuang food culture** of ethnic minorities in Guangxi region, China. There are 4 essential objectives as follows.

- 2.1 To study the Development of Zhuang food culture .
- 2.2 To study and analyze the meaning of Zhuang food culture in Zhuang people's traditional festivals and daily life.
- 2.3 To analyse the Representation of Zhuang Food Culture in New media.
- 2.4 To analyze the meaning and representation of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in the Process of New Media Communication in China.

3. Research Questions

- 3.1 In China's Guangxi region, what stages have Zhuang food culture experienced and what are its characteristics?
- 3.2 How is the meaning of Five-color glutinous rice and Liuzhou River snails rice noodle that is related on national traditional festival and daily life.
- 3.3 How do people utilize **New media** to represent Zhuang food culture? What are the New media practices regarding Zhuang food culture on the Internet?
- 3.4 What is the meaning of Zhuang food culture in The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in the context of new media communication processes in China?

4. Definition of Terms

4.1 Wording of research text

4.1.1 Zhuang food culture:

The Zhuang people are spread over a vast area and live across provinces, thus forming several cultural segments, which are commonly referred to as regional cultures. There are nine cultural zones, including the middle and lower reaches of the Hongshui River, the Longjiang Cultural Zone of the Liujiang River, the Northwest Guizhou Cultural Zone, the Guiyue Xiang Cultural Zone, the Right River Cultural Zone of the Yongjiang River, the Left River Cultural Zone, the Yongnan Cultural Zone, the Guibian Cultural Zone and the Wenshan Cultural Zone. These nine cultural areas basically cover the main distribution areas of the Zhuang, among which all the other seven cultural areas are under the jurisdiction of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, except for the Wenshan Cultural Area, which is mainly a separate cultural area with the Zhuang counties under the Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, and the Guiyue Xiang Cultural Area, which spans Guangxi, Guangdong, and Hunan provinces. This study takes Guangxi, where Zhuang is most concentrated, as the physical space to study the food culture therein.

4.1.2 Five-color glutinous rice

The main ingredients of five-color glutinous rice are glutinous rice and vegetable dyes. Although it is called five-color glutinous rice, it is not fixed to five colors. Generally speaking, there are three to five colors, mainly red, purple, yellow, white, blue, and black, and people in different Zhuang regions mix and match the colors according to their preferences. The most important feature of Zhuang's five-colored glutinous rice is colorful and splendid. Although Zhuang five-color glutinous rice is just a kind of diet, its close connection with numerous Zhuang festivals and rituals makes it one of the symbols of Zhuang culture. The Zhuang ethnic group has many branches. The customs of the same branch vary from region to region, but their five-colored glutinous rice is more or less the same. The variability of the five-colored glutinous rice in different regions exists only in the choice of plant dyes. At the same time, it is worth noting that the five-colored glutinous rice is not unique to the Zhuang, but the Yao, Miao, and Buyi living in the southwest China have their five-colored glutinous rice. However, the social functions of the five-colored glutinous rice are different among different ethnic groups, and the legends of its origin are also very different, and the types of plants used for dyeing are also different among different ethnic groups. The focus of this thesis is on the five-color glutinous rice of the Guangxi Zhuang people.

4.1.3 Liuzhou River snails rice noodle:

River snails rice noodles are a famous original rice noodle snack in Liuzhou, Guangxi, which is a product of China's reform and opening up, modified by night market vendors from rice noodles and boiled snails. It is called "snail noodles" because its soup is made from the snail, made from stone snail and pork bones, with spices such as star anise, clove, cinnamon, and peel, and simmered over a gentle fire to make the soup base. The local specialty dry-cut noodles are cooked in water and served with traditional side dishes such as fried bean curd, sour bamboo, sour bean

curd, peanuts, shredded fungus, and fresh seasonal vegetables, and finally sprinkled with fragrant onions and poured with snail soup, presenting a bowl of "fresh, fragrant, sour, spicy and hot" snail noodles.

The Liuzhou River snails rice noodles has been variously stated, based on the fact that the earliest surviving individual industrial and commercial business license for snail noodles is from a roadside stall located on Gubu Street in Liuzhou City in 1988. Therefore, it is determined that snail noodles originated in the night market of Gubu Street in Liuzhou in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Gubu Street in Liuzhou was built at the end of the Ming Dynasty, and the name Gubu Street means grain and beans, and the name Gubu Street means wharf, and Gubu Street is located on the Liuzhou River. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when China's Cultural Revolution had just ended and folk commerce began to recover, several new cultural and entertainment venues such as the Workers' Cinema were built around Gubu Street, attracting a large number of Liuzhou citizens and leading to the rapid development of the Gubu Street restaurant industry, and the Gubu Street night market was formed. Liuzhou people love to eat snails and rice noodles, so some savvy night market owners began to operate both boiled snails and rice noodles. This slowly formed the prototype of snail noodles. Subsequently, the ingredients and production process of snail noodles were improved and perfected, gradually taking shape, and in the mid-1980s it developed into the original signature cuisine of Liuzhou.

4.2 Wording about academic issue

4.2.1 Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival

1) Sanyuesan Festival

The Sanyuesan Festival is a traditional festival of the Zhuang people, which is mainly characterized by cooking glutinous rice in five colors, sacrificing ancestors, visiting relatives and friends, and attending the song festival, and other folk activities.

2) Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival

In 2014, the traditional "Sanyuesan Festival" was officially recognized as the "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival" and included in the national list of intangible cultural heritage, and a two-day holiday is granted in Guangxi every year for the "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival".

In this article, the "Sanyuesan Festival" of the Zhuang nationality in Guangxi specifically refers to the traditional festival celebrated on the third day of the third lunar month every year in the Zhuang nationality's gathering areas in Guangxi. The term "Sanyuesan Festival" is used in the traditional sense, while "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival" is a specific name for "Sanyuesan Festival" under the practice of protecting intangible cultural heritage. Unless specifically explained, the terms refer to the same festival.

4.2.2 New media :

The concept of New media does not have an authoritative definition at present. On the one hand, New media itself is only a description, not a precise concept; on the other hand, its connotation and extension are still changing with the innovation of media technology. From different perspectives and according to different references, people can see different manifestations and characteristics of new media. As a result,

people have different opinions and opinions on the definition of New media. At present, some of the more influential views are:

According to Wired magazine in the United States, "new medium is communication by all for all." UNESCO defines new media as "a medium that uses digital technology as a basis and the Internet as a carrier for information dissemination."

Professor Xiong Chengyu, director of the New media Research Center of Tsinghua University, believes that "New media is a relative concept. Today's New media mainly refers to media forms generated and influenced based on computer information processing technology, including online network media and other digital media forms offline."

According to Professor Cui Baoguo of Tsinghua University, "There is no clear definition of the so-called new media. It generally includes video, multimedia, cable TV, satellite TV, fiber optic communication, integrated digital communication network, etc. Among them, the most pervasive and the most important is the digital media. Among them, the most permeable and influential are high-speed information highway and multimedia technology."

Of course, there are other views, such as "New media is a form of media that realizes many-to-many or peer-to-peer communication based on interconnection and has interactive functions such as interaction with users", "New media is a new form of communication when it reaches the scale of mass media", "New media is an interactive digital communication platform where people can produce, disseminate, receive and culturally influence the information in the process of communication using computer technology".

To sum up, new media is a relative concept, which is a new media form developed based on traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and TV; it can also be considered that new media is a concept that is always in flux, broadly including all digital traditional media, online media, mobile media, digital TV, etc. At present, it mainly refers to the new media based on Internet technology, digital technology, and mobile communication technology, which provides users with integrated information and entertainment services such as content information, audio and video, connected games, data services, and online education. It has two core changes: first, the medium of communication has changed from traditional media to new media based on the Internet; second, the communicators have changed from authoritative media organizations and media institutions to all people.

In this study, the researchers mainly focus on the investigation of Zhuang food culture in new media platforms, particularly video and live-streaming platforms (such as YouTube, TikTok, Tencent Video).

4.3 Wording of concepts

4.3.1 Cultural Representation

Culture is first and foremost concerned with the production and exchange of meaning among members of a member or group, i.e., the "giving and getting of meaning". The members of a group must share the same "cultural code", and the conveyance and exchange of meaning must rely on the same "linguistic code". The term "language" is not defined in a narrow sense, but refers to all visual, auditory or tactile images that can be communicated and understood. (Stuart Hall, Xu Liang, Lu Xinghua, Translation, 2013, P3) A bridge or a system (a system of meaning) is then required to function between language and culture, to convey meaning, without which we would not be able to receive the communication of meaning, and therefore would not be able to build and maintain our common culture. We call the functioning of such systems of meaning the practice of representation.

The system of cultural representations is the place where the mainstream values and ideologies of society are produced and operated, and specifically the various symbols in the system, such as daily communication, proverbs, legends, television, radio, etc., contain the position of the subject recognized by society as a whole, such as the ideal cuisine, the ideal interpersonal relationships, etc. The shaping of these ideal subjects is a symbolic activity by which society perpetuates and produces values.

The ideal state of life of the Zhuang people, as reflected in their food culture, is an important manifestation of cultural thinking. This ideal state of life includes the Zhuang people's desire for a loving relationship between husband and wife, their strong need for reproduction and offspring, and their pursuit of wealth, peace, and longevity. These cultural representations of the pursuit of an ideal life are often expressed through the Zhuang people's dietary behaviors with strong cultural connotations during the ceremonial activities of The March 3th Zhuang nationality of the Zhuang People.

4.3.2 Media representations

Although media and representation are often used together, media representation in a broader sense is closely related to the mediated nature of media and the representation of meaning in language, and the representation system of media gives meaning to things through various concepts and symbols. The media representation used in this study follows more of its narrower concept, i.e., media representation is often used to refer to the mass media's image construction and symbolic reproduction of an object. For example, the media representation of groups such as Muslims and teachers; or the representation of national images in the coverage of other countries (Peng Z,2014) or the representation of an object in a specific issue, such as the media representation of companies in the coverage of public health policies (Weishaar H, Dorfman L, Freudenberg N, et al,2016).

Media representations are in essence the reproduction of something, but they are not entirely objective but are produced through the operation of the media, and they also have a catalytic effect on the formation of people's ideas and the solidification of their attitudes. In this sense, media representations bear the imprint of social culture and are also the result of meaning production by media organizations,

and they also have a cognitive representational impact on the members of society exposed to the media. This study argues that media representations can be seen as the media presentation of Zhuang food culture representations.

4.3.3 Digital media practice

Digital media practice refers to the process of using media representation in the digital environment. In this study, digital media practice refers to the construction of digital video image representation of Zhuang food culture by mainstream media. It is based on The March 3th Zhuang nationality festival activities such a field in Five-color glutinous rice and Liuzhou River snails rice noodles Guangxi Zhuang people's hope for national unity and a better life is projected on the body, and the regional cultural image of Guangxi is expanded in the extensional meaning of these two food symbols.

4.3.4 Meaning

In this study, the construction of the meaning of Zhuang food culture is discussed in three parts: the first part is the significance of Zhuang food culture in the daily life of Zhuang people, the second part is the significance of Zhuang food culture in The March 3th Zhuang nationality, and the third part is the significance of Zhuang food culture in the process of new media communication.

5. Scope of Research

5.1 Scope of Area

The Zhuang are the most populous minority in China, with a population of more than 17.3 million by the end of 2000, including more than 15.6 million in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, accounting for 33% of the total population of the Autonomous Region and 90.1% of the total Zhuang population in China. About 1 million Zhuang are distributed in Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture and other cities and counties in Yunnan Province, while the rest are distributed in Lianshan Zhuang and Yao Autonomous County and Huaiji County in Guangdong Province, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture in Guizhou Province, Jianghua Yao Autonomous County in Hunan Province, and some cities and counties in Sichuan, Shaanxi, Xinjiang, and other provinces and regions. Guangxi is the main Zhuang settlement area, while the Zhuang in Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province and Lianshan Zhuang and Yao Autonomous County and Huaiji County of Guangdong Province are also relatively concentrated, while the Zhuang in the rest of the provinces has a small and scattered population. Therefore, when discussing the food culture of the Zhuang, this paper mainly focuses on the Zhuang in Guangxi, and generally does not elaborate on the food of the Zhuang in the rest of the provinces.

The study selected five-color glutinous rice, a representative of Zhuang cuisine, and the Liuzhou River snails rice noodles, which originated in Wuming District, Nanning City, and Liuzhou City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, respectively, as study cases.

Wuming District, Nanning City, Wuming is located in the south-central part of Guangxi, Wuming District is under Nanning City, the capital of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, 32 kilometers away from Nanning City. Wuming District has a total area of 3389 square kilometers, accounting for 1.4% of the area of Guangxi, with

a total population of 660,000 people, of which 86% are Zhuang people, and is one of the birthplaces of Zhuang civilization, and the Zhuang language is also spoken in the standard Wuming dialect.

Liuzhou is located in the central northeast of Guangxi, is an important railroad hub to communicate with southwest China and south-central, east, and south China, is a two-way product processing and trade base and logistics transit base city with ASEAN, southwest of the sea channel distribution hub city, is the largest industrial base in Guangxi, is a regional manufacturing city facing the southeast coast and Southeast Asia, China's only at the same time has four major automobile group vehicle production Liuzhou is the largest industrial base in Guangxi, a regional manufacturing city facing the southeast coast and Southeast Asia, and the only city in China with the production bases of four major automobile groups. Liuzhou is a multi-ethnic area where Zhuang and Dong are the oldest indigenous ethnic groups in Liuzhou, and the ethnic composition of Liuzhou residents is more than 30 kinds. There are 48 ethnic groups living in Liuzhou, including Zhuang, Han, Miao, Dong, Yao, Hui, Mulao, etc. Ethnic minorities account for more than 52% of the city's total population.

5.2 Scope of Time

The construction of the representation of Zhuang food culture has always been inseparable from the field of the most important festival of the Zhuang people, The March 3th Zhuang nationality, so this study will also be discussed in conjunction with the development of The March 3th Zhuang nationality. The combination of the Zhuang food culture with Internet communication technology has only been around 20 years, and the combination with new media technology has only emerged as a new trend in the last few years.

In 1984, the first The March 3rd Zhuang nationality, organized by the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region government, was held in Nanning from April 3 to 5, with 100,000 Chinese and foreign spectators converging on six sites in People's Park to watch a variety of cultural and artistic performances and songs. Since then, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region has organized The March 3rd Zhuang nationality once a year (Deng shuhua, 2002. P152); this is the first point in the time frame of this study.

On January 13, 2014, The March 3th Zhuang nationality was approved by the People's Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region as a legal holiday in Guangxi (all citizens in Guangxi Autonomous Region have 2 days off). On November 11 of The same year, The March 3th Zhuang nationality, declared by Wuming District of Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, was approved by The State Council of the People's Republic of China to be included in the fourth batch of national intangible cultural heritage list. This is the second time point in the timeframe of this study. Therefore the time frame of this study is divided:

Stages of the origin of the Zhuang food culture: (Prior to 1984) :

Prior to 1984, the Zhuang food culture, represented by five-color glutinous rice and Liuzhou River snails rice noodles, was mainly an intra-ethnic and local dietary practice, resulting in unique dietary customs.

Traditional phase of Zhuang food culture: (1984-2014) :

After 1984, The March 3th Zhuang nationality activities were freely organized by The Zhuang villages and gradually transferred to the government. With the

continuous expansion of The March 3th Zhuang nationality ceremony, Five-color glutinous rice and Liuzhou River snails rice noodles gradually form regional and national cultural connotations, and become a bond to maintain the unity of Zhuang traditional culture.

Stage of Inheritance and Innovation of Zhuang Food Culture: (2014-present) :

In 2014, Chinese new media entered a new stage of development. Mainstream media constructed the video image representation meaning of Zhuang food culture. It is based on The March 3th Zhuang nationality festival activities such a field in Five-color glutinous rice and Liuzhou River snails rice noodles Guangxi Zhuang people's hope for national unity and a better life is projected on the body, and the regional cultural image of Guangxi is expanded in the extensional meaning of these two food symbols.

5.3 Scope of Content

I found through the experience of various ethnic traditional festivals held in Guangxi over the years, market visits, and literature browsing that although there are many rice products in Zhuang food culture, such as bamboo sticky rice, pumpkin rice, sweet potato sticky rice, sweet wine, glutinous rice wine, moxa rake, zongzi, oil tea, and glutinous rice blood sausage, etc., the researcher decided to find the two most representative foods for a case study, although there are various varieties. Although there are a variety of traditional Zhuang foods, there are differences in the degree of commercialization, among which two foods are the most commercialized, one is five-color glutinous rice and the other is Liuzhou River snails rice noodles. These two foods were selected as case studies of Zhuang food culture, and they have three things in common, in addition to their high degree of commercialization, that make them representative of Zhuang cuisine:

1. The raw materials of both foods come from rice, which can reflect the rice farming culture of the Zhuang people.
2. Both foods embody the yearning of the Zhuang people for national unity and the intermingling of ethnic cultures. The glutinous rice in the five-color glutinous rice has a strong stickiness, representing national unity. The main ingredients of snail noodles contain rice flour, field snail, sour bamboo shoots, wood ear, and green vegetables. The Liuzhou River snails rice noodles reflect the rice culture of the Zhuang people, the sour bamboo shoots reflect the sour food culture of the Dong and Miao people, and the field snails reflect the snail-eating culture of the ancestors of Liuzhou. Therefore, Liuzhou River snails rice noodles are also the product of the intermingling of various ethnic food cultures and mutual reference.
3. These two delicacies have entered the National-level Intangible Cultural Heritage List¹⁰ one after another, and in May 2010, the Zhuang five-color glutinous rice-making technique was included in the third batch of the Guangxi autonomous region intangible cultural heritage list. on June 10, 2021, the Liuzhou River snails rice

¹⁰ National-level Intangible Cultural Heritage List is the list of intangible cultural heritage approved by the State Council of the People's Republic of China and determined and announced by the Ministry of Culture. The State Council of the People's Republic of China approved the naming of the first batch of national-level intangible cultural heritage list in 2006.

noodles noodle-making technique was included in the fifth batch of the national intangible cultural heritage list.

6. Research Methods (Summary)

6.1 Population and Sample

6.1.1 key Informant

Inheritors of non-heritage gastronomic skills: Outstanding non-heritage culinary skill inheritors master the exquisite skills and cultural traditions created by their ancestors, they are the living treasure trove of culinary skills, they carry the essence of culture created by their ancestors and have the genius of individual creativity, they are the key to the transmission of traditional Zhuang cuisine from generation to generation.

Research scholar of Guangxi ethnic culture: Professors from the College of ethnology and sociology, Guangxi university of nationalities and researchers from Anthropology Museum Of Guangxi, who have been carrying out long-term excavation and organization of theories on the society, history, politics, economy, and culture of the hereditary ethnic minorities of Guangxi, Through these people, we are able to understand the formation and development process of Zhuang food culture.

Staff of government agencies: The Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Culture and Tourism Department manages major cultural activities in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, is responsible for the protection of the intangible cultural heritage of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and promotes the protection, inheritance, popularization, promotion, and revitalization of the intangible cultural heritage. Through the staff of this department, we can learn about the process of recording, confirming, and establishing a list of intangible cultural heritage in the Zhuang food culture, and the organization and implementation of The March 3th Zhuang nationality.

6.1.2 Casual Informant

Food operators: Food operators here are people who make and sell food, either by creating their brands of food and having independent stores, or simply by setting up stalls in markets or along the streets to sell.

Digital Media Production Team: The digital media practice of this study focuses on the path of representation of Zhuang food culture in digital media, so the members of the digital media production team are the main participants of the digital media practice, through whom I can learn how to make the Zhuang food culture interactive and able to spread in all directions through the form of digital technology.

6.1.3 General Informant

Food consumers: Modern technology has given a strong impetus to the development of the food industry, and the breakthrough in vacuum bagging technology has provided the technical basis for the traditional Zhuang cuisine to go nationwide and sell worldwide. Therefore, the food consumers here include local people in Guangxi as well as consumers from all over the country and even the world, which also include tourists who come here because of the influence of The March 3th Zhuang nationality.

Audience and tourist groups: This study used questionnaires to understand the audience and tourist groups' overall feelings during The March 3th Zhuang nationality

event, their transmission, and reception of the concepts of Zhuang food culture gained as characterized.

6.2 Instrumentation

Picture and video recording (cameras, video recording equipment)

Voice record

Field notebook

6.3 Data Collection

6.3.1 Literature research method.

By using the resources of the library of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and the information platform of the Internet, we consulted books, papers, local records, and other materials related to Zhuang food culture, new media communication, and representation theory. The research is organized and analyzed to make new discoveries based on the research results of previous authors.

6.3.2 Participant Observation Method

The researcher observed the representation of Zhuang traditional food during the festival by entering the Zhuang March 3 event context in Nanning City, Wuming District, to understand how the participants of the Zhuang March 3 event felt about Zhuang food culture, and how the concepts represented were transmitted and received. Using ethnographic and anthropological field research methods, interviews and surveys were conducted in real-time in the field, and relevant literature was compiled and analyzed. The researcher selected five-color glutinous rice and Liuzhou River snails rice noodle stores as the field observation sites, focusing on the five-color glutinous rice and Liuzhou snail noodle dining groups and the owners of the stores operating them. During the observation process, the environment, brands, and purchases of the food stores were recorded in the field. The production and operation and sales activities of the five-color glutinous rice and Liuzhou snail noodles were observed in the field.

6.3.3 Case analysis method

Select and invite appropriate people to form groups. Group members share their understanding of topics and phenomena in a relaxed, natural setting whenever possible. The researcher can obtain immediate input and suggestions, and continue to discuss new topics and issues that emerge from the discussion. The focus group method avoids the limitations of general questionnaires that make it difficult to answer the "why" behind data and appearances and allows participants to directly present their motivations, ideas, and opinions. In this study, the author gathered several designers into a group, and when they came together to communicate, they inspired each other in the interaction and attracted each other, thus uncovering more valuable information. This method ensures that the research is interactive and open and that the communication always revolves around the focal topic.

6.4 Data Analysis

First, the first data integration will be carried out based on the data collected in the research conceptual framework.

Second, the second data integration will be carried out according to the research purpose;

Finally, the descriptive analysis will be used to analyze data by combining concepts and phenomena.

6.5 Research presentation

6.5.1 Full paper of research

-Descriptive analysis

6.5.2 Research article

-International research article, Scopus level or ISI

7.Literature Review

7.1 Literature Review about research text

Compared with the culture of Zhuang architecture, costumes, and brocade, there are still relatively few studies devoted to Zhuang food culture. The studies related to Zhuang food culture include: Mo Junqing's article "An Introduction to the Food Culture of Zhuang Country", which introduces a series of specialties of Zhuang representative food, including the introduction of the food shared by Zhuang and Dong people. In "Historical Analysis of Zhuang Food Culture", Fang Sumei elaborates on the history of the development of Zhuang food culture based on a thorough study of historical data; Qin Cailuan's "Zhuang Food Culture in the Hongshui River Valley" and "A Brief Discussion of Zhuang Rice Culture" analyze and study the connection between the natural environment of Zhuang areas and rice culture and elaborate on the connotation, characteristics and development pattern of Zhuang food culture; In Li Fuqiang's "The Fragrance of "Barbaric" Rice - Zhuang Farming Culture", he reveals the motives of the origin of Zhuang agriculture, describes the development of Zhuang agriculture, and illustrates the influence of farming culture on the entire Zhuang society. In "Research on Zhuang Food Culture", Huang Anhui elaborates on the food situation of Zhuang according to the timeline and also analyzes and researches the reasons for the formation and development of Zhuang food culture.

Food, as an important part of material culture and social life, has long been studied in anthropology. Early anthropology focused on food and drink in religious offerings, rituals, and descriptions of customs associated with ethnic groups around the world. Among the comprehensive works of founders such as Edward Burnett Tylor, James George Frazer, Emile Durkheim, and Franz Boas, Food is mainly studied as part of the "otherness" culture. As Jack Goody points out, anthropological investigations of food in the nineteenth century focused on totemism, sacrifices and sacraments, taboos, etc., the religious aspect of the consumption process. At this stage, food, the medium of communication with the soul, served to bring together the collective and unite the individual and expressed a symbolic meaning in various places of activity.

One of the first scholars to reflect on the relationship between food and culture was Taylor, who, in Primitive Cultures, cited a variety of soul-satisfying banquets given to the dead by different peoples around the world, and argued that cooking was

a skill that had only been universally developed since the emergence of humankind. For example, in the case of "the Assam Ragas, where burial rites are held monthly and offerings are placed on the graves; in the primitive tribes of India, where the relatives of the deceased offer food and drink in front of the deceased during the funeral rites of the tribesmen, and, after the exorcism rites, continue to prepare the foodstuffs needed for the feast to have a good time; and in the case of the Catholics, where All Souls' Day recreates the feasts that used to be held in memory of the dead".

(Edward Taylor. Translated by Lian Shusheng, 2005) The Catholic All Souls' Day reproduces the old feasts in memory of the dead."It is thought that they concentrate on the remnants of the most primitive animistic views.

Turner traces the symbolic mechanism of rituals along the lines of structural functionalism. He pointed out that "bipolarity" is the essential characteristic of symbols: one pole is characterized by natural physiological features or biological human experience; the other pole is characterized by social structures and values or human social experience, both of which are united in symbols. (Turner. Translated by Zhao Yuyan, Ouyang Min, Xu Hongfeng, 2006) Symbols have the characteristic of expressing complex meanings in simple forms, and their function is to re-establish the stability and balance of the social order. In many rituals of the Zhuang, food often has multiple functions.

After the establishment of an ecological relationship between human beings and food, social ethics and political systems were derived from the two. Confucianism contains moral standards on the relationship between food and rituals and elevates food from the functional and practical value of satisfying physiological needs to the level of social morality and personal integrity. In the patriarchal system, there were many rules related to food, and most of the Chinese ceremonial vessels were symbolized by food vessels, thus forming a special ethical system. In the West, Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics contains a clear stipulation on the ethics of food: "Eating a lot or a little affects your health, and eating in moderation is the only way to maintain your health properly. The same is true of courage, restraint, and other virtues. In the same way, the man who indulges in pleasures easily and is unrestrained in his desires is indulgent, and the man who avoids pleasures like a bumpkin is indifferent. Therefore, moderation and courage are both destroyed by a bad balance, and a moderate balance should be preserved. (Aristotle. Translated by Liao Shenbai, 2003, P38) All over the world, different ethnic groups have similar ethical cultures.

In *The History of Food: Perspectives on Human Eating and Civilization* the author argues that "the liturgy is important because it is impossible that the way of drinking and eating, which belongs exclusively to the priesthood or a few, should be permanently monopolized." (Amesto. Translated by Han Liang Yi, 2005, P188) In other words, no individual or group of people can gain a monopoly over food, but only through food rituals and the establishment of a special social ethic of food can it be maintained in the long term. The system of social ethics has been given a special cultural significance by the inclusion of different groups of human beings in their understanding of food. Already half a century ago, anthropologists saw food as an important medium for conveying concepts and ideas, whose significance was recognized in the analysis of myths, class differences, and religious practices.

Compared with the West, anthropological research on food in China started later, while anthropological research in Hong Kong and Taiwan focused on food earlier. In Hong Kong, anthropological research on diet focuses on the local diet of Hong Kong under the influence of globalization, with the Chinese University of Hong Kong as the main position. The university's professor Ng Yin Wo has carried out research on the changes and socio-cultural relations of Chinese food in Asia and around the world, and has paid attention to the relationship between food culture and national ethnic consciousness. In the article "Hong Kong style cafes: from the globalization of Hong Kong's food culture", the relationship between globalization, regional food culture and identity is explored, and it is argued that "the development of Hong Kong's cafes has participated in the process of globalization, and with the development of globalization of food culture, Hong Kong's popular cultural traditions of the deeper implications of Hong Kong's Hong Kong style cafes is undoubtedly representative of the Hong Kong people's cultural identity of Hong Kong as an important symbol of the Hong Kong people" (Wu, Yanhe, 2001 (4), pp. 24-28). Another anthropologist, Prof. Tam Siu-wai, studies the social role of Hong Kong people's identity from the perspective of identity, and Hong Kong-style tea drinking also possesses this characteristic, and it is a cultural mediator that strengthens Hong Kong people's social relations and constructs their identity, and the material consumption behaviors centered on tea drinking are an important part of urban people's identity (Tam Siu-wai, 2001 (4), pp. 29-32.). Professor Zhang Zhanhong focuses on the local traditional food production under the influence of globalization trend, and the change of Hakka restaurants is a perspective of the change of social life style in post-war Hong Kong (Zhang Zhanhong, 2001(4), P33-35.). In conclusion, as an Asian financial center with a long history of colonial rule, the collision between traditional lifestyles and globalization has become the most genuine feeling of Hong Kong's social populace, therefore, its food anthropology is biased towards the study of the changes in traditional food culture under the trend of globalization and the relationship between identities.

In Taiwan, food ethnography has a certain accumulation of disciplines and disciplinary characteristics, and their research involves the flow of food in the southeast coastal region, in addition to the local food culture of Taiwan and the food culture of the mainland. For example, Bao Le-shi's "In Praise of Commodities: On Bird's Nest in Cross-Cultural Trade" examines the trade network formed by the production of bird's nest. Jiang Bin's "The "Saliva" of Rock Bird's Nest and the Freshness of Feasts: Bird's Nest Production and Social Relationships in Sarawak" focuses on the production of bird's nests and the construction of local social structures. Professor Zhang Xun takes Angelica sinensis as an example of cultural construction of gender, body and food, and argues that "gender and gender bodies are under cultural construction, and gynecological diseases are even more culturally constructed..." (Zhang Xun, 2007.). The "Chinese Food Culture Foundation" in Taiwan and its journal "Chinese Food Culture" have brought together a group of highly recognized scholars. Since 1998, this organization has organized the "Chinese Food Culture Symposium" in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong to discuss and study aspects related to food taboos and rituals, food literature and aesthetics, food and ethnicity, food change and communication, status and power relations, food

ethics and religion, etc., and has invited We have invited such well-known scholars in the field of dietary anthropology as Goudy and Simmons, whose keynote speeches were presented at the Eighth Chinese Dietary Culture Symposium, and Wang Mingke, Peng Zhaorong, Xu Xinxin and other enlightening scholars who have discussed the topic of "Dietary Culture and Boundaries of Ethnic Groups. This year, in the symposium on "Food Culture and Ethnic Boundaries", scholars such as Wang Mingke, Peng Zhaorong, Xu Xinjian and others had inspiring dialogues. At the First Higher Forum of Anthropology in China in 2002, Prof. Gong Pengcheng presented a paper entitled "Religious and Ethical Conflicts in Dietary Civilization", in which he elaborated on the religious and cultural factors that may lead to conflicts between international politics and economy in terms of the dietary practices of religions through the presentation of a seven-part paper on whether to forbid food, what to forbid, the meat and vegetable controversy, abstinence from killing and letting go of life, the quest for commonality and the preservation of differences, the ethical conflicts, and the obscenity of holy objects. Lin Shurong's Food, Taste, and Body Sense: Perceiving the Social World of the Dong People in China begins with the fact that the Dong people in Qiandongnan, Guizhou Province, love to eat sour food, and analyzes the cognitive system, marriage, and social relations of the Dong people through the use of the body sense as a research path.

In mainland China, Ye Shuxian translated two papers, The Mystery of the Sacred Cow: A Case Study in Dietary Anthropology and Dietary Anthropology: A New Approach to Solving the Mystery of Humanity and Culture, and then translated and published M. Harris's representative work, Good Eats: The Mystery of Food and Culture, which introduced the materialist viewpoint of dietary anthropology, and pushed scholars in China to pay more attention to dietary anthropology (Ye Shuxian, 2001, 23(2), p. 5-11.). 2), P5-11.). Xiao Jiacheng, on the other hand, has been involved in the specific study of food anthropology for a long time, and in his book The Charm of Sublimation: The Wine Culture of the Chinese People, Xiao draws on a wide range of knowledge from various disciplines, such as history, psychology, literature, and even microbiology, fermentation, brewing technology, and even medical science, and focuses on the center of the culture of wine, and puts forward a "socio-cultural model" as a way to understand the relationship between human behavior and wine and its mutual complementarity (Xiao Jiacheng, 2007). A "socio-cultural model" is proposed as a way to understand the relationship between human and wine behaviors and their mutual complementarity (Xiao Jiacheng, 2007.). Professor Guo Yuhua has also studied genetically modified foods in the context of the technological revolution of globalization, and she argues that the Chinese society's unique attitude towards genetically modified soybeans is due to many of its own characteristics in terms of soybean production and consumption, as well as to a variety of reasons such as China's social, cultural and institutional characteristics. (Guo Yuhua, 2005(5).)

Professor Qu Ming'an's series of articles, including "Symbols of Chinese Dietary Culture: A Study of the Surface Structure of Dietary Symbol Culture", "The Multiple Meanings of Chinese Dietary Symbol Culture", and his monograph, "Symbols Hiding the Soul of the Nation: An Essay on Chinese Dietary Symbol Culture", introduce the theory and method of symbolic anthropology into the field of dietary research, and give a detailed discussion on the theoretical framework, value orientation, and social

functions of dietary symbol culture. It is considered that "dietary symbolic culture is a dietary activity with psychological and social attributes under specific conditions. It includes various interpersonal interactions, ritual processes, festivals and celebrations, religious life and other standardized dietary activities and dietary customs formed in social life. It is a cultural phenomenon with symbolic significance in human dietary life, which regards diet, the most basic form of people's life needs and life activities, as a kind of cultural symbols. Through people's use of specific food, dietary utensils and dietary behaviors as the media or carriers in various rituals and daily life, and the adoption of analogies, associations and other intuitive and graphic ways of thinking and expression methods, it brings out the deep desires, aspirations, wishes and feelings of people in the groups and individuals. The desire, wish, emotion, mood, personality and corresponding values deep in people's hearts are fully expressed, which serve the functions of transmitting information, communicating interpersonal relationships, regulating behavioral activities and recognizing natural and supernatural phenomena." (Qu Mingan, 2001.). Subsequently, articles on ethnographic studies of the food culture of China's ethnic minorities from the perspective of symbolic anthropology include Qin Ying's Jumping Vegetables: Feast Rituals of the Nanjian Yi and Chen Yongye's Joyful Feast: A Study of the Hani Long Street Feast. Qin Ying explained how the "jumping vegetables" preserved by the Yi people in Nanjian, Dali, Yunnan Province, was separated from the elements of daily life in the village and became the symbol of important events in the village, and made an in-depth analysis of its dietary symbol and artistic symbol (Qin Ying, 2010.). Chen Yongye regards the Hani Long Street as a symbol that reflects the social structure and cultural system, and analyzes the deep cultural psychology and value orientation of the Hani people through concrete forms of expression. (Chen Yongye, 2009.)

Similar studies on the global mobility of food and ingredients have been translated and published in China. Arturo Waldman describes the beginnings of maize as an ingredient in the Americas from an anthropological and socio-economic history perspective, culminating in books such as The Legend of the Spice and History in a Bottle, which are typical of "cultural histories of ingredients", but also in books such as The History in a Bottle and The Legend of the Spice. The former traces the "spice race," discussing the culinary, sexual, medicinal, magical, and repulsive aspects of spices in terms of taste, flesh, and spirit, and why spices eventually fell out of favor and became only mildly special foods today (Jack Turner. Translated by Zhou Ziping. 2007.). The latter discusses the close relationship between drinks and history by describing the discovery and spread of beer, wine, spirits, coffee, tea, and cola (Tom Standitch. Translated by Wu Pingzheng, 2017.). As one of the most important aspects of human civilization, in terms of function and appearance, food culture has made the most "physical" expression, expression and performance of human survival and evolution, and at the same time, it also contains profound "metaphysical" philosophy, academic theory and truth and other aspects of the world model. However, the disciplinary research on the cultural system of food, such as food anthropology, food ethnology, food sociology, food identity research, etc., is relatively weak. Accelerating research in these areas is not only beneficial to the promotion of traditional Chinese food culture, but also an important part of highlighting Chinese characteristics and Chinese learning in various disciplines (Peng Zhaorong, Xiao Kunbing. 2011 (3), pp. 48-56.).

Some people go beyond the bustle of the dinner table to explore the Chinese culinary values behind the food - "heaven" and "harmony", i.e., food for heaven, harmony for beauty, for survival, and for seeking happiness from food (Bai Wei. 2018, p. 4). seeking happiness from food (Bai Wei. 2018, P4.). This is the root of the mentality of Chinese food culture, the core value orientation that elevates food to gastronomy, and the logical starting point of The Philosophy of Chinese Gastronomy and Diet, which brings ancient Chinese philosophical thinking to the stovetop and the table.

7.2 Research related to concepts

Representation, context, and ideology have been popular topics in cultural studies. In his book Cultural Representation and the Practice of Meaning, Hall defines "representation" as the production of meaning through language. Specifically, on the one hand, an object is imagined in the mind through description, and on the other hand, representation is symbolic and representative (Hall, 2003). In cultural studies, "meaning" is extremely important. All people in a group should have a common "cultural code" and a common "linguistic code" is needed for communication and exchange. Language is not the kind of speech we understand, but a broader concept, such as audiovisual language. Hall sees the dialogue of "meaning" as an unequal exchange but as an important process in the "cultural cycle". Therefore, a bridge needs to be built between language and culture, and this bridge is the system of meaning (Hall, 2003). In layman's terms, cultures in this world are constructed in different ways, but in a way that is acceptable and communicated by the members of the group. The formation of culture requires the operation of various systems of linguistic representation, including sounds, words, pictures, and images.

There are two approaches to the practice of constitutive representational theory. The first is the semiotic approach represented by Roland Barthes, how meaning is constructed through language, and the second is the discourse approach represented by Foucault, how the practical process of the language of a particular intention affects people's thoughts and behavior (Hall, 2003).

When we already have a concept of the material world, there are also two systems of representation, on the one hand, the internalization of external things internalization, and the externalization of the internal concept on the other hand. The text of this study is Zhuang food culture, which also realizes the representational meaning through symbols.

Scholars have gradually developed the study of signs from the micro level to the macro level. It started with Saussure's proposal that language could be divided into energy and reference, and Roland Barthes applied it to sign systems, followed by Hall's explanation of meaning production processes and cultural cycles. Research has gradually moved from focusing on how symbols produce meaning and how meaning is strung together to focusing on the process by which symbolic representations operate to collude with culture, all of which are attempts to explain the process of meaning production and culture sharing.

In his book Representation - Cultural Representation and the Practice of Meaning, Hall (2003) introduces the concept of the cultural cycle, which he argues consists of five parts: production, identity, representation, consumption, and rule. However, these five parts are interconnected and will reappear in the next part. This is of great relevance to the study of Zhuang food culture and the digital media practices of Zhuang cuisine.

8. Concept, Theory and Conceptual framework

8.1 Concepts of Research

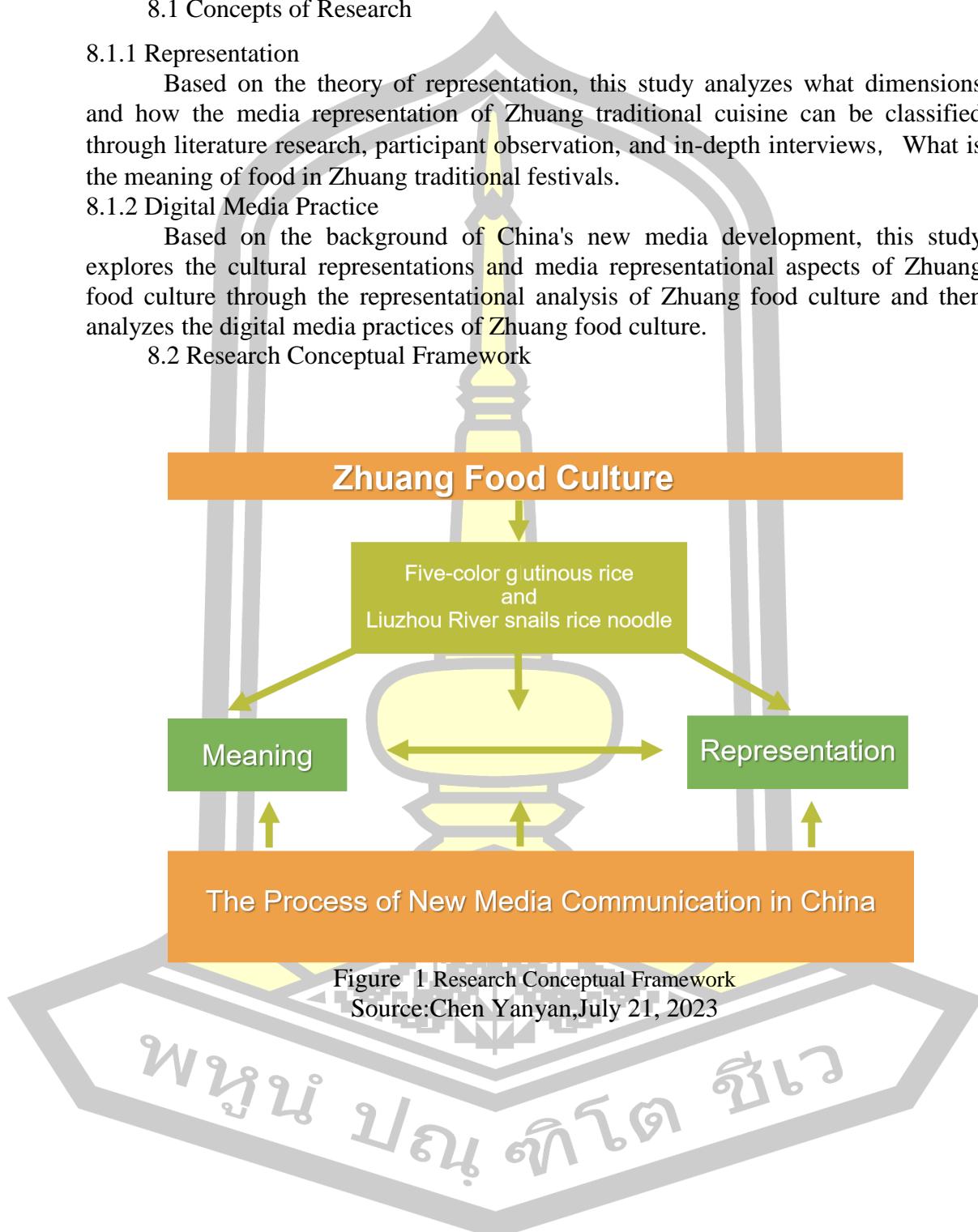
8.1.1 Representation

Based on the theory of representation, this study analyzes what dimensions and how the media representation of Zhuang traditional cuisine can be classified through literature research, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. What is the meaning of food in Zhuang traditional festivals.

8.1.2 Digital Media Practice

Based on the background of China's new media development, this study explores the cultural representations and media representational aspects of Zhuang food culture through the representational analysis of Zhuang food culture and then analyzes the digital media practices of Zhuang food culture.

8.2 Research Conceptual Framework



9. Research Plan

	Research Plan									
	2023						2024			
	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4
Writing research proposal reports and defense										
Fieldwork										
Data Synthesis and Data Analysis										
International research article (Scopus level)										
TS3										
TS4										
First draft of the full paper										
Completion of the full thesis and graduation defense										

Figure 2 Research plan
Source:Chen Yanyan,July 21, 2023

10. Chapter Structure

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Origins of Zhuang Food Culture

Chapter 3: The meaning of Zhuang food culture

Chapter 4: A Representational Analysis of Zhuang Food Culture

Chapter 5: The meaning and representation of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival

Chapter 6: Summary, Discussion, and suggestion



11. Benefit of Research

11.1. Benefit for academic circle

The theory of representation in the field of Western cultural studies is introduced into the study of Zhuang food culture, expanding the vision of food culture research; returning to the facts themselves, summarizing the process of representation in the production and consumption of Zhuang food culture, and making a new expansion at the empirical level of theory.

Discovering, protecting, inheriting, and promoting the traditional food culture of the nation is a systematic cultural project of great significance. The systematic study of the dietary culture of the Zhuang people also has important academic value and practical significance from the perspective of inheriting and developing the excellent traditional culture of the nation.

11.2 Benefit for Society and community of research place

The study of the food culture of the Zhuang people, which is centered on the rice culture, is of irreplaceable value and significance for the recognition and acknowledgment of the cultural wisdom of this region of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The food culture of the Zhuang people is related to all aspects of the social culture of the Zhuang people, involving cultural origin, ideology, political system, and economic relations, and can provide meaningful information for the study of the culture of the Zhuang people as well as the traditional Chinese culture, and at the same time can provide the government with reference bases for safeguarding the unity of the motherland and the unity of the nationalities.

11.3 In theory

Theoretically, there is a wealth of historical research on Zhuang dietary culture, but not much research on the characterization of Zhuang dietary culture. Overall, there is still much room for interpretation and characterization studies on the meaning of Zhuang food culture. Under the framework of the representation theory, the significance is hooked up, and cultural representation, media representation, and digital media practice complement the operation of the food culture in the representation theory, so the use of the representation theory to study the Zhuang food culture is an extension based on the previous research, and it is also another interpretation and validation of this theory.

CHAPTER II

Origins of Zhuang Food Culture

Introduction

Throughout China's thousands of years of history, from the highest ruling class down to the common people, whether they were great thinkers or commoners in the marketplace, food and drink have been indispensable to everyone. People can easily understand the significant role that diet plays in maintaining human survival and development, but when elevating diet to the cultural level and comparing it with the profound mysteries of politics, military, literature, and art, it seems that people find it difficult to accept. Given that individuals engage in dietary activities on a daily basis, for the majority, such endeavors are considered mundane. However, culture transcends mere realms of pure spirituality and cognitive spheres; cultural paradigms often emanate from fundamental human needs. In the era of civilization, human dietary practices have transcended mere sustenance, evolving into a manifestation of aesthetic contemplation and creative endeavors. As a cultural phenomenon, gastronomy embodies the dual facets of material and spiritual culture.

The formation and evolution of any culture entail a gradual process, and Zhuang food culture is no exception; it has progressively matured alongside the formation and development of the Zhuang ethnic group itself. Categorized by historical stages of development, the history of Zhuang food culture can be delineated as follows:

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

Development of Zhuang food culture (Ming and Qing Dynasties)
 Prosperity of the Zhuang food culture (modern times to the present)

Part 1 The Emergence of Zhuang food culture (Prehistoric Period)

The ancestors of the Zhuang people have inhabited the Lingnan¹¹ region and its surrounding areas since ancient times. Over the past million years, Guangxi has consistently maintained a warm and humid climate, providing exceptionally favorable conditions for human habitation. In recent years, a significant number of lithic artifacts have been unearthed along the banks of the Youjiang River in Baise, Guangxi. These artifacts are widely distributed, encompassing over a hundred lithic artifact sites in locations such as Tiandong, Tianyang, and Baise. It is unlikely that all

¹¹ Lingnan, located in the southernmost part of China, is crossed by the Tropic of Cancer in the middle of Lingnan.

of these Paleolithic humans migrated from outside the area, and fossils of their own ancestors would certainly have survived within Guangxi. In addition, archaeologists have also unearthed a plethora of ancient human activity sites and fossils, including the Liujiang and Bailiandong people from the Paleolithic era, as well as the *Zengpiyan* people from the Neolithic era in Guilin and the Xijin people from Hengxian, Guangxi. "In the process of modern Zhuang ethnic constitution formation, there appears to be a certain genetic inheritance relationship between them and certain Neolithic populations from the Lingnan and Southeast Asian regions, with their origins seemingly tracing back to the late Paleolithic Liujiang people." (Li Fuqiang, Zhu Fangwu, 1993, p.391). The concentration of Zhuang ethnic communities in places like Baise and Liuzhou in Guangxi today suggests a certain continuity between these prehistoric sites and modern Zhuang culture.

What did the ancient Zhuang ancestors rely on for sustenance? Direct historical records concerning this aspect are relatively scarce. However, by combining these few written records with archaeological findings, we can still glean some fundamental insights into the embryonic stages of prehistoric Zhuang dietary culture.

The warm and humid climate of the southern region is highly conducive to the proliferation of various flora and fauna. The vast subtropical primeval forests have endowed the ancestors of the Zhuang people with abundant food resources, providing a robust guarantee for the reproduction and continuity of the population. However, the prevalence of primeval forests also signifies an increase in venomous snakes and fierce beasts, posing a significant threat to human survival. Initially, the ancient Zhuang relied on avoidance tactics towards venomous snakes and fierce beasts, sustaining themselves solely through the collection of various fresh fruits, tender shoots, and the excavation of starchy plant roots obtained during daylight hours from the forest.

As human understanding of wild animal behavior deepened and defensive tools continued to improve, the ancestors of the Zhuang people transitioned from mere avoidance of fierce beasts to daringly engaging in hunting activities. Approximately 50,000 years ago, artifacts excavated from caves inhabited by the 'Liujiang people' revealed fossilized remains of a variety of animals including South China boar, wild boar, bamboo rats, gibbons, macaques, hog badgers, Chinese bears, deer, bovines, and ovines. (Li Youheng, Wu Maolin, Peng Shulin, Zhou Shibao, 1993, p.22). Given that animal fossils were found within caves, it can be inferred that these animals were consumed as food by the ancestors of the Zhuang people rather than utilized for other purposes. The Zhuang ancestors relied on hunting as a means to procure wild animals for sustenance, a practice fraught with considerable risks, including the potential sacrifice of lives. Despite such risks, food sources remained uncertain. Therefore, gathering remained significantly important for the ancient Zhuang, as plant-based food materials were comparatively easier to obtain than animal-based ones. "However, the advent of meat consumption indeed expanded the food resource spectrum of the Zhuang ancestors, simultaneously playing a pivotal role in the evolution of their physiology. The influence of meat on the brain, thus providing it with much more material for its own nourishment and development than

before. Thus, it can develop more rapidly from generation to generation.' (Engels, translated and compiled by Yu Guangyuan, 1984, p. 301)."

In addition to gathering wild plants and hunting wild animals for sustenance, by the early Neolithic period, the ancestors of the Zhuang people, through years of food collection, gradually gained insights into the growth patterns of various plants. They began the cultivation of wild rice, gradually transforming it into cultivated rice, thus initiating rice agriculture."Among the tools of production unearthed at the Duoji site in Qinzhou, Guangxi, in the Neolithic period, there are a considerable number of stone axes and adzes, which are suitable for felling and reclaiming the land and removing weeds; stone plows, hoes, shovels, knives, and sickles, which are suitable for loosening the soil, cultivating and planting as well as harvesting; and stone milling discs, grinding rods, and mortars and pestles, which should be used as tools for processing grains." (Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Cultural Relics Task Force, 1993, p.222-223).There are tools specialized in processing grains, indicating that rice farming has begun to appear. "From the stone axes, stone adzes, mussel knives, stone grinding discs, stone grinding rods and other production tools unearthed from cave sites such as the Beiqiu site in Nanning area, Caipi Yan in Guilin, and Dalongtan in Liuzhou, we can see that as early as the Early Neolithic Period, which is more than 9,000 years before present, the forefathers of the Xioou and Luoyue people had already begun paddy farming, thus proving that the Zhuang people are the ancient paddy-farming ethnic group living on this piece of land in Guangxi " (Qin Naichang, 1997, p.10) .

The advent of primitive agriculture invariably accompanied primitive animal husbandry. In the densely forested and wildlife-rich southern regions where the Zhuang ancestors resided, advancements in their labor tools led to rapid development in the hunting economy. With an increasing abundance of captured game, surplus animals were kept in caves for domestication, reserved for consumption when wild game was scarce. Prolonged captivity led to the gradual domestication of certain wild animals, as their wild instincts diminished, rendering them docile and eventually transforming them into domesticated poultry and livestock.

The inception of rice agriculture among the Zhuang ancestors and the transition from hunting to the domestication of wild animals greatly stabilized food sources. During this period, the primary crops cultivated and consumed by the Zhuang ancestors were rice, supplemented by wild yams and wild taro. Domesticated edible animals included pigs, dogs, chickens, ducks, as well as captured juvenile animals such as hog badgers and wild boars.(Qin Naichang, 1997, p. 10).

"The area where the Zhuang ancestors resided was crisscrossed with rivers, providing an ideal location for fishing and shrimp catching. Excavations at the Zengpiyan site in Guilin, Guangxi, yielded remains of fish such as carp, pomfret, and turtles, as well as accumulations of snail and clam shells, with a predominance of clams. Snails accounted for a significant proportion, suggesting that people at the time likely relied primarily on consuming aquatic animals and gathering, as aquatic

animals were easier to collect and posed less danger compared to hunting fierce beasts." (Edited by Zhang Zimo, 1990, p. 234).

Various fishing tools have been unearthed in Neolithic sites across many regions in Guangxi. For instance, at the Nanshawan site in Xiangzhou, Guangxi, net sinkers were discovered, while at the Dingshishan site in Yongning, there were findings of spears and fish hooks. (Chen Yuanzhang, 2003, p.12) This indicates that people of that time had already acquired knowledge of fishing techniques, including using nets, hooks, or spears to catch fish. The early inhabitants residing along the coast of the Beibu Gulf took full advantage of the favorable geographical environment by gathering shellfish and catching various small-sized fish and shrimp in the shallow sea. At the Beiqiu site in Dongxing, Guangxi, dating back to the Neolithic period, excavated animal bones encompass two major categories: vertebrates and mollusks, with a wide variety of species, many of which are aquatic products such as fish, turtles, clams, and snails. These shell mounds, formed over years of accumulated discarded shells after the consumption of various aquatic animals by the Zhuang ancestors, were unearthed in large numbers along the banks of the Yujiang, Yongjiang, Zuojiang, and Youjiang rivers in regions like Hengxian, Yongning, Wuming, and Fusui, Guangxi. This ample evidence indicates that the Zhuang ancestors began enjoying delicious aquatic products as early as 10,000 years ago.

The advent of cooked food marks the earliest point in Zhuang dietary culture. 'Fire constitutes the fundamental cornerstone of culinary cooking; it can be asserted that culinary culture emerged with the mastery of fire.' (Zhu Wei, 1997, p.10) Once humans acquired the knowledge of fire utilization, along with readily processable food ingredients, cooking gradually became prevalent. The Yunmeng people, who lived approximately 1.7 million years ago in Yunnan, are the earliest known hominids to have utilized fire, while approximately 800,000 years ago, the people in Baise, Guangxi, had already acquired this skill. Certainly, at this time, the Zhuang ancestors' use of fire for food processing was still unconscious, as mastering the use of fire did not equate to learning how to obtain and preserve fire. It was only in the late Paleolithic period or the early Neolithic period, even later, that the Zhuang ancestors truly became proficient in obtaining and preserving fire, harnessing it for their benefit. In the caves of Zengpiyan in Guilin, there are fire pits, indicating the frequent use of fire by Zhuang ancestors approximately 10,000 years ago. In the Balayan Cave in Laibin, Guangxi, where Zhuang ancestors once resided, many animal bones have been discovered, bearing signs of fire scorching. 'With the advancement of human society, mere usage and preservation of fire are not sufficient; there is a need to seek more rational methods to harness the heat energy released during combustion. Once humans become proficient in mastering fire, it becomes an indispensable element in life.' (Lin Yaohua, 1997, p.416.) Fire not only cooks food but also serves in pottery firing. Subsequently, food can be cooked by boiling when combined with water in pottery vessels.

Fire emerged as a new liberating tool for the Zhuang ancestors, 'In the vast historical journey, for survival, our ancestors had to continuously conquer nature, starting with the conquest of food. The transition of humanity from raw to cooked food marks a monumental achievement in this conquest. This accomplishment greatly bolstered humanity's confidence, courage, and strength in overcoming nature. Consequently, there have been significant transformations in food resource development, food preparation technology, culinary utensil innovation, and dietary practices, ushering humanity into a whole new culinary realm.' (Wang Renxing, 1987, p.11).

After crafting pottery through the use of fire, the Zhuang ancestors utilized these pottery vessels as cooking utensils to cook grains and meats, marking their transition into a more advanced stage of cooked food consumption. The emergence of cooked food revolutionized the long-standing dietary habits of the ancestors, characterized by a primitive diet of raw meat and blood. Previously unpalatable and difficult-to-digest raw meats, fish, crustaceans, and mollusks could now be consumed after being cooked over fire. The transition from raw to cooked food represented a significant advancement in dietary practices for the Zhuang ancestors. Cooked food facilitated the absorption of nutrients by the human body, fostered brain development and evolution, significantly reduced gastrointestinal diseases among the Zhuang ancestors, and contributed to the improvement of their overall physiological well-being.



Figure 3 Scenes of pottery making by ancestors of the Zhuang people
Source: Guangxi News Reporter Chen Chuangming Photo

The emergence and development of meat consumption, the utilization of fire, the inception of cooked food, and the incorporation of pottery into dietary practices mark three pivotal milestones in the prehistoric dietary life of the Zhuang ancestors. Contrary to romanticized notions, this prolonged period of dietary existence was fraught with hardships. Scarcity of food resources posed the most significant challenge to the dietary life of the Zhuang ancestors, prompting them to toil tirelessly and rely on collective efforts to sustain communal survival. 'Primitive dietary practices, in terms of their form, have long been communal feasting within the clan.' (Xu Hairong, 1999, p.346.) During this era, social stratification had yet to emerge, and food was distributed equally among individuals, who gathered together to share the fruits of collective labor. Grilling and boiling were common methods of food preparation, and there were no designated utensils for eating; people ate by hand and drank spring water or animal blood when thirsty. This marked the embryonic stage of the Zhuang ancestors' dietary life, appearing primitive and barbaric yet laying the groundwork for the formation and development of subsequent food culture.

Part 2 Formation of regional styles of Zhuang food culture (Shang and Zhou to Sui and Tang dynasties)

During the Shang and Zhou periods, metal tools were introduced into the Lingnan region and gradually adopted by the Zhuang ancestors. 'The burial site of Yuanlongpo in Matou Township, Wuming County, is the first discovered tomb complex from the Western Zhou period in Guangxi. It is also the earliest dated tomb discovered in Guangxi, accompanied by bronze artifacts, indicating that the Guangxi region had matured bronze smelting technology by at least the mid-Western Zhou period.' (Zhang Long, 2003, p.16) The utilization of metal tools greatly enhanced the productivity of the Zhuang ancestor's society, leading to significant advancements in their material standards of living. From the Shang to the Sui and Tang periods, the Zhuang ancestors gradually developed a localized style of food culture. This is attributed to an expansion in the variety of food items, the gradual formation of distinctive food processing methods, the emergence of certain culinary preferences, and the gradual formation of regional dietary styles.

The term staple food generally refers to the essential foods and food items necessary to sustain the basic physiological and metabolic functions of the human body. Staple foods are largely dictated by the production of primary grains, with primary grains typically constituting a significant portion of the overall food structure. Due to varying influences from environmental and other factors across different regions and ethnicities, staple foods often vary. The Zhuang people primarily inhabit the subtropical regions of the south, characterized by warm climates, ample sunlight, and abundant rainfall, which are highly conducive to the cultivation of rice. Since the Neolithic period, Zhuang ancestors have been cultivating rice, but due to limitations in production tools and farming methods, progress in rice production among the Zhuang people was not very pronounced from the early Neolithic period until several thousand years before the Shang and Zhou periods.

From the Shang and Zhou periods onwards, Zhuang ancestors began utilizing bronze tools in agricultural production. In Matou Township, Wuming County, a burial site dating from the Western Zhou period to the Spring and Autumn period yielded bronze tools suitable for agricultural cultivation, such as bronze axes, adzes, knives, and chisels. During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, iron tools gradually came into use among the Zhuang ancestors. In the graves of the Warring States period discovered at Yingshanling in Pingle County, a total of 181 iron artifacts were unearthed, the majority of which were agricultural implements including hoes, axes, spades, chisels, and knives. The utilization of bronze and iron tools in the Zhuang region contributed to the advancement of rice agriculture and played a significant role in fostering the development of Zhuang ancestor's societal productivity.

"During the Qin, Han, and Northern and Southern Dynasties periods, the widespread adoption of iron tools and oxen plowing in agricultural production led to significant advancements in agricultural productivity in the regions of Xiyu and Luoyue. During this era, apart from rice, staple crops included chestnuts, beans, Job's tears, and millet, but rice remained the predominant cereal crop, establishing a rice-centric agricultural planting structure." (Qin Naichang, 1997, p. 217.)



Figure 4 The world's earliest rice seeds were about 5,600-5,300 years ago.

Source: Reporter Chen Chuangming, Guangxi News Network

At this time, oxen plowing was also gradually popularized in the Zhuang area, and this type of plowing was very suitable for paddy field work, thus providing good conditions for the rapid development of rice farming.

In the Zhuang region, the earlier varieties of rice cultivated were glutinous rice and japonica rice, with early-maturing glutinous rice gradually introduced from Annam, Vietnam after the Song Dynasty. The "Record of Foreign Things" written by Yang Fu during the Han Dynasty, recorded the introduction of rice cultivation by Zhuang ancestors from *Jiaozhi*¹², which matured in both summer and winter, with

¹² Ancient Chinese name for a place in southern China, located in the Red River Delta region

subsequent cultivation in the following year. Glutinous rice, characterized by its stickiness, was commonly consumed by the Zhuang people in the past but is now typically reserved for festivals and significant occasions. In addition to its use as food, glutinous rice was frequently employed in brewing alcoholic beverages due to its widespread cultivation at the time. Japonica rice serves as the staple food in the daily diet of the Zhuang people today, often processed into a fluid-like porridge or thin rice gruel for consumption. Similar to other ethnic groups, the Zhuang people also enjoy making various pastries using glutinous or japonica rice.

In addition to rice, various tuberous root crops, such as potatoes and taro, were frequently consumed by the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group during this period. These tuberous crops are easy to cultivate and their yields are more reliable compared to rice. They were even used as a substitute for rice as the staple food when rice harvests failed. Wild sweet potato, rich in starch and nutrients, was one of the ancient food crops of the Zhuang ancestors. Yang Fu described in his "Record of Foreign Things" as follows: "Sweet potato is similar to taro, and there are also huge ones. Peel off the skin, and the flesh is white as fat. People in the south mainly eat it as a substitute for rice and corn."

The cultivation of millet by the Zhuang ethnic group also boasts a considerable history. As a variety of foxtail millet, millet is drought-tolerant and easy to cultivate. However, due to the significant amount of labor required for mid-season tillage, it has not been widely promoted in Zhuang regions since ancient times. Additionally, as a dryland crop originating from the Central Plains, millet is not well-suited for cultivation and growth in the rain-abundant south. Consequently, in the daily dietary life of the Zhuang people, the proportion of millet is far less significant compared to tuberous root crops such as potatoes and taro.

The Zhuang ethnic region boasts a diverse array of produce, greatly enriching the dietary structure of the ancestors of the Zhuang people who had emerged from a primitive state. In addition to the gradual establishment of rice as the staple food, there was an increasing variety of side dishes, including various birds flying in the sky, wild animals running on the ground, diverse wild vegetables growing in the soil, and a plethora of fish, shrimp, mussels, and snails swimming in the water. In the "Lingbiao Luyi" written by Liu Xun of the Tang Dynasty, there are records of the ancestors of the Zhuang people consuming various birds, animals, and aquatic creatures such as "partridges, kingfishers, white foxes, carps, pigs, sheep, chickens, deer, and snakes." In the book "Descriptions of Southern Plants" written by Ji Han during the Jin Dynasty, various plant parts such as flowers, leaves, roots, and tubers that were edible to the residents of Lingnan, including the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group, were enumerated. For instance, the fruits, flowers, and leaves of plants like yam, eggplant, water spinach, wolfberry sauce, ginger flower, and turnip were commonly harvested and consumed by the local people at that time. These plant parts that were frequently gathered and eaten by the people may have been equivalent to the vegetables consumed today. However, unlike modern vegetable cultivation, they did not require extensive care and were more likely to be wild. Nevertheless, vegetable

of what is now northern Vietnam.

cultivation by the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group may have begun during the Qin and Han dynasties due to the "superior geographical conditions in Guangxi, which naturally led to the early development of vegetable cultivation in agricultural production" (Li Bingdong and Ge Dehua, 1985, p. 266).

It is worth mentioning that the dietary food structure of the Zhuang ancestors during this period included many kinds of fruits grown through horticulture. "The lychee, native to China and renowned as the 'King of Fruits in Lingnan'¹³, is said to have its origins directly from the Zhuang language, according to scholars. The modern Zhuang term for lychee is '*laehcei*'. It is deduced that the term 'lychee' in Chinese was derived from Zhuang, indicating that it was likely first cultivated by the Zhuang ancestors." (Qin Shangwen, Chen Guoqing, 2003, p.41.)

Until now, lychees produced in the Zhuang ethnic region still enjoy a certain reputation throughout China. "From a medical perspective, lychees possess the functions of 'invigorating the spirit, enhancing intelligence, fortifying qi, and beautifying the complexion', which is why they are deeply welcomed by people." (Liao Guoyi and Huang Huashu, 1998, p.57.)

The cultivation of longan in the Zhuang ethnic region, similar to lychee, began at a very early time. "The longan tree resembles the lychee tree, but its branches and leaves are slightly smaller. The fruit has a greenish-yellow shell, shaped like a round pellet, with a seed like a wooden ball but not hard. The flesh is white and juicy, sweet as honey. Each cluster bears fifty to sixty fruits, resembling a bunch of grapes. The longan ripens after the lychee, hence it is called the 'slave of lychee', indicating that it often follows lychee." (Ji Han, 304 AD).

In the biographical history book "Dongguan Hanji" written by Ban Gu, Chen Zong, and others, it is described as follows: "When the Chanyu came to pay tribute, he was presented with oranges, tangerines, longans, and lychees. The Emperor Wei Wen ordered his ministers, saying: 'Among the precious fruits of the south, there are longans and lychees. Let them be tribute every year, coming from Jiuzhen and Jiaozhi.'" The above-mentioned documents not only refer to lychees and longans but also oranges and tangerines, thus confirming that these fruits had already been cultivated in the Zhuang ethnic region during the Han and Jin dynasties. Therefore, the widespread cultivation and consumption of fruits played a significant role in rationalizing the dietary structure of the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group.

During the Qin and Han dynasties, various new cooking utensils emerged among the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group, including ceramic cauldrons, ceramic pots, ceramic bowls, ceramic plates, iron tripods, and iron stands, among others. (Liang Youren, 1993, p.491.) The increase in dining utensils greatly facilitated the dietary life of the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group, allowing for more refined food processing.

"Frying" and "pressing" are two different methods of food processing. "Frying" requires both fire and oil as the medium for heat transfer, while "pressing" does not involve the use of fire or oil. However, these two methods of food processing appeared in the dietary life of the Zhuang ancestors during the Han and Jin dynasties

¹³ Lingnan, located in the southernmost part of China, is crossed by the Tropic of Cancer in the middle of Lingnan.

with relatively mature "facets." Bone balls are one of the traditional folk foods of the Zhuang people, as recorded in the "Book of Later Han," which mentions the custom of the Zhuang ancestors in Guangxi eating bone balls. The processing method of bone balls involves pounding the bones of pigs, cows, or sheep with meat, mixing them with ingredients such as ginger, cinnamon, and salt, then kneading them into thumb-sized balls, and finally frying them in oil or boiling them directly in water until cooked.

"Squeezing" is a commonly used food processing method among the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group, and there are numerous historical records pertaining to this aspect. Jia Sixie's "Qi Min Yao Shu"¹⁴ describes it as follows: "Sugarcane is found everywhere, but the sugarcane produced in Jiaozhi is particularly mellow and good. Originally, there is no difference in thickness, and its flesh is very even, with a circumference of several inches and a length of over ten feet, resembling bamboo. When cut and eaten, it is sweet, and when pressed to extract juice, it becomes like maltose, which is called sugar and is even more precious. When boiled and exposed to the sun, it solidifies into a block and when broken, resembles bricks or playing pieces. When eaten, it dissolves in the mouth. People of that time called it rock sugar."



Figure 5 The Zhuang use traditional tools to extract sugarcane juice.

Source: <http://news.sohu.com/2024.4>

¹⁴ **Qimin Yaojutsu**, written around the end of the Northern Wei Dynasty (533-544 A.D.), is a comprehensive work on agronomy written by the Chinese agronomist Jia Si Foi during the Northern Wei Dynasty, and one of the monographs in the history of agronomy in the world, making it the earliest surviving complete book on agriculture in China.

The Qin and Han dynasties marked a significant period for the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group in the production of sugarcane sugar. By the Tang dynasty, the Central Plains region had truly mastered the technique of sugarcane sugar production, which subsequently spread to the regions inhabited by the ancestors of the Zhuang people. The emergence of sugar was a momentous event in human dietary life because "sugar is an important substance for the human body to generate heat. It can be directly consumed alone, but more importantly, it serves as a raw material for condiments, sweets, candies, and pastries. With sugar, thousands of delicious dishes and various types of candies and pastries have been created accordingly. Otherwise, people's food choices would be very monotonous." (Wang Mingde and Wang Zihui, 2002, p.38.).

The production of sauces was a common food processing method in the Central Plains region during the pre-Qin period. One of the main sauce products was "hai" (meat sauce), which was made primarily from meat. Ancient Chinese texts record various types of hai products processed from the meat of animals such as pigs, cows, and sheep. The ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group also used sauce-making methods to process food, using not only meat from various animals but also ant eggs, which were referred to as "ant egg sauce." According to modern medical research, ants themselves are rich in amino acids and vitamins, and sauce made from ant eggs is effective in treating rheumatic diseases, coronary heart disease, pain in the waist and legs, and other ailments. From this perspective, ant egg sauce was not only a food item for the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group but also had nourishing properties, making it a therapeutic medicine through diet.

Roasting and burning have been ancient cooking methods practiced by the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group. With numerous rivers, lakes, and harbors, the Zhuang region is abundant in fish resources. Liu Xun, a Tang dynasty official in Guangzhou, wrote in his "Ling Biao Lu Yi" (Records of Strange Things Beyond the Ridge): "When the boat rushes through a school of fish, without using nets, the fish jump into the boat on their own, quickly filling it up. This is used to make 'xiu' (a type of fish dish), hence the name 'tiao' (which means to jump). It is also said that when the boat departs, it should not be positioned in the middle of the school of fish, lest the weight of too many fish sinks it. This is how we know how plentiful they are."

The Lingnan area, where the Zhuang ancestors lived, not only had a large number of fish, but also formed a famous fish market, "In addition to selling freshwater fish in the fish market, they also sold marine fish and all kinds of seafood, which was most prevalent in the Lingnan fish market." (Li Hu, 1998, p. 201.)

Fish played a significantly important role in the daily dietary life of the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group, and the cooking methods of roasting and burning were commonly used to process fish dishes during the Han and Tang dynasties. "Roasting" generally refers to grilling processed ingredients over fire, while "burning" can either mean cooking food ingredients directly over fire until thoroughly cooked or placing them in a cooking vessel for continuous heating to achieve doneness.

"The invention of stir-fry is a major event in the history of Chinese cooking, not only because of its many side dishes, a variety of dishes with a combination of a dish, but also because of its short processing time, the loss of nutrients in various

dishes is less. Its invention enabled the people to have a daily dish to accompany their meals." (Wang Xuetai, 1993, p. 132)

The invention of stir-frying vegetables is also a remarkable thing in the dietary life of Zhuang people, which can be regarded as an important sign of the preliminary development of Zhuang people's food culture to some extent. Unlike the northern nomadic people, the traditional diet of Zhuang people does not mainly rely on large herbivores such as cattle and sheep, but mainly on the rice agricultural production. Therefore, the dietary life of Zhuang people has obvious characteristics of agricultural nation. The plant-based vegetarian foods, smaller aquatic animals, and meats from chickens, pigs, and other animals consumed by the ancestors of the Zhuang people did not require extensive cooking time as with beef and mutton; they could be consumed with minimal processing. The cooking method of "stir-frying" was well-suited to the culinary requirements of the ancestors of the Zhuang people. Additionally, stir-frying itself offers various advantages, such as maintaining the freshness and tenderness of dishes and allowing flexibility in seasoning. Consequently, once invented, stir-frying continued to gain popularity. While it gradually became prevalent in the Central Plains region after the Western Han Dynasty, the ancestors of the Zhuang people may have adopted it slightly later, but it was nonetheless widespread by the Sui and Tang dynasties. The stir-fried foods prepared by the ancestors of the Zhuang people were not only consumed by themselves but also, at times, offered as regional culinary delicacies to the imperial court.

"After the invention of stir-frying, its rapid acceptance and evolution into a preeminent and diverse culinary technique can be attributed not only to the Chinese tradition of grain-based meals supplemented with vegetables for filling and meat for nourishment but also to the apt adaptation and flourishing of stir-fried dishes, which perfectly align with such dietary customs." (Wang, 1993, p.133.)

Dietary predilections refer to the particular fondness that people exhibit towards certain foods in their daily culinary lives. The dietary predilections of a nation can serve as a reflection of its unique traditional customs and practices. The emergence of these national culinary predilections can be attributed, on one hand, to the influence of the natural geographical environment of the region inhabited by the nation. For instance, nations residing in alpine regions often display a proclivity towards alcohol. On the other hand, some nations develop a strong affinity for specific flavors or consumption methods of certain foods over time through regular consumption, ultimately culminating in the formation of dietary predilections.

The Zhuang ethnic group is widely distributed across various regions, with some residing along riversides and coastlines, while others dwell amidst hilly terrains. Through prolonged living practices, the ancestors of the Zhuang people gradually cultivated specific dietary predilections. Among these, the most notable ones include the consumption of raw fish and shrimp, as well as the practice of nasal drinking

The tradition of the Zhuang ethnic group consuming raw fish has a long-standing history, persisting to the present day. In ancient times, raw fish slices and raw meat slices were referred to as "kuai". Consuming raw fish slices typically involves ingredients such as scallions and ginger, as their strong and spicy flavors serve to mitigate the fishiness and preserve freshness. The thinly sliced raw fish possesses a delicate and fresh taste, accompanied by a crisp and smooth texture, while retaining the authentic flavor of the fresh fish, thus boasting a high nutritional value.

Despite the delectable nature of raw fish, it is regarded as somewhat indigestible by some outsiders. The accounts of Zhuang people consuming raw fish, as documented by the Chinese Ming Dynasty geographer Xu Xiake in his travelogue, illustrate both the practice's prevalence among the Zhuang people and his personal dilemma of being unable to partake in it. In addition to raw fish, raw shrimp also constitutes a favored delicacy among the Zhuang ancestors, exhibiting similarities to pre-cooking era raw food consumption habits.

However, there are fundamental differences between the two in essence. First, the raw fish and shrimps eaten by people in Tang Dynasty were carefully processed with many ingredients, while the raw fish and shrimps eaten by prehistoric humans were not further processed and no ingredients were added; second, the cooked food of the ancestors of Zhuang people in Tang Dynasty has developed to a certain extent, so has the Zhuang diet culture. In a sense, eating raw fish and shrimps has already carried more cultural factors, that is, people's conscious behavior and awareness have been added, which is no longer simply to fill the stomach. However, from the later Zhuang people's preference for raw fish and shrimps, it can be reflected that the Zhuang people's diet and life still had a relatively obvious prehistoric style at that time.

Nasal drinking was once a unique dietary practice favored by the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group, and it was also relatively prevalent among other ethnic minorities in Lingnan in ancient times. The history of nasal drinking among the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group dates back a long time. According to the "Biography of Jia Juanzhi" in the "Book of Han," fathers of the Zhuang ancestors would bathe with their sons and teach them the art of drinking water through their noses. This suggests that the dietary practice of nasal drinking among the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group had already begun by the Han Dynasty at the latest. Because it involves "drinking," the food must be in a liquid form; otherwise, it would be impossible to consume through the nose. In the *"Lingbiao Luyi"* written by Liu Xun during the Tang Dynasty, there are records of the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group using nasal drinking to consume nourishing soups. When people were excessively fatigued and their vital energy was greatly depleted, they would consume these nourishing soups to restore their vitality. Evidently, the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group adopted nasal drinking as a means of ingestion for two possible reasons. On the one hand, they may have believed that this method of ingestion was more conducive to the absorption and digestion of nutrients by the body, allowing these tonics or medicines to take effect more quickly. On the other hand, they may have considered certain foods to be rare and precious, and using nasal drinking as a way of consuming them during meals with guests made them even more valuable.



Figure 6 Mapping the state of nose-drinking among the ancestors of the Zhuang people according to the literature , source: Chen Yanyan, 2024.2, Drawing

"In terms of dietary customs, on the one hand, due to the long-standing coexistence of various ethnic groups within the unified family of the motherland, mutual learning, exchange, and infiltration have occurred, leading to many similar practices among ethnic minorities and the Han ethnic group, as well as among neighboring ethnic minorities. On the other hand, since most ethnic minorities in China reside in different border regions with varying geographical environments, climates, and natural resources, resulting in diverse dietary ingredient structures, coupled with factors such as each ethnic group's historical development, lifestyle, and religious beliefs, almost every ethnic group possesses its own unique dietary customs." (Wang Mingde, Wang Zihui, 2002, p.195)

In ancient societies where ethnic characteristics were not distinctly apparent, certain customs and practices of one ethnic group might also exist among neighboring ethnic groups. Ethnic food culture, as a subset of ethnic culture, is no exception. Before the Song Dynasty, the characteristics of the Zhuang ethnic group as an

independent ethnic entity were not yet fully developed. Therefore, many dietary customs and practices of the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group shared similarities with those of other ethnic minorities in adjacent southern China.

The embryonic stage of the "mixed" dietary style began to emerge during this time. The Zhuang ancestors inhabited the Lingnan region, characterized by a complex ecological environment and abundant sources of food materials, leading to a diverse array of culinary offerings. Many items rarely consumed or deemed inedible in the Central Plains and northern nomadic regions, such as venomous snakes, centipedes, and ant eggs, became delicacies among the Zhuang people. The Zhuang ancestors' fondness for and willingness to consume various exotic creatures stemmed from long-standing cultural practices. Additionally, due to their remote borderland location and distance from the Central Plains, the Zhuang people were less constrained by Central Plains traditions.

During this period, although the dietary practices of the Zhuang ancestors had significantly advanced compared to the previous stage, as evident from the diverse sources of food, food structures, processing methods, dietary preferences, and styles mentioned above, there remained substantial disparities between the two epochs. However, when viewed holistically, the dietary life of the Zhuang ancestors during this time was still in its nascent stage, representing a relatively closed system. Due to limited interactions with the outside world, there existed a lack of comprehensive external reference points for dietary comparisons, making it improbable to extensively incorporate or adapt foreign culinary cultures. Concurrently, clear class distinctions emerged within Zhuang society during this period. The affluent segments of society possessed greater wealth and consequently had access to a wider variety of food resources to indulge their luxurious dietary preferences, while the impoverished had to engage in extensive efforts simply to sustain themselves.



Part 3 Development of Zhuang food culture (Ming and Qing Dynasties)

From the Song Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty, the socio-economic conditions in the Zhuang ethnic region underwent rapid development, with varying degrees of progress and advancement in agriculture, handicrafts, commerce and trade, transportation, and other sectors. Alongside this societal growth and progress, the Zhuang community's interactions with the outside world also increased steadily. Prolonged ethnic exchanges and integrations have gradually reduced the territorial scope of Guangxi Zhuang tribes. Simultaneously, as the Zhuang people engaged in deeper cultural exchanges and mutual infiltration with other ethnic groups, many aspects of their traditional culture, including dietary customs, have undergone significant transformation, incorporating an increasing number of cultural elements from other ethnicities.

Due to the internal development of the Zhuang ethnic group coupled with the intensifying external impetus, the food culture of the Zhuang ethnic group ushered in a peak period of development during this era. The substantial introduction of diverse food ingredients facilitated the rationalization of dietary structures, emphasizing the integration of nourishment, therapeutics, and supplementation, while food processing methods became increasingly diversified. The formation of unique dietary customs associated with festivals, life ceremonies, and other special occasions, along with the establishment of distinctive dietary institutions and etiquette, are testament to the remarkable progress achieved by the food culture of the Zhuang ethnic group during this phase.

During the periods spanning from the Shang and Zhou dynasties to the Sui and Tang dynasties, the dietary habits of the Zhuang ancestors were notably characterized by a diverse palate. However, the various foods consumed during this era, particularly those derived from plant sources, were predominantly obtained through the Zhuang ancestors' gathering labor, with only a limited portion obtained through productive labor. Rice, taro, and yams may represent the most representative harvests obtained through productive labor during this time.

Beginning in the Song Dynasty, with the gradual southward shift of the national economic center, personnel exchanges in the southern regions continuously increased, and material exchanges became more frequent. In particular, the establishment of trading markets such as Yongping Village Trading Market, Qinzhou Trading Market, and Hengshan Trading Market transformed the Zhuang ethnic region into a significant hub for product exchange with the outside world. During the Yuan and Ming dynasties, events like the Mongolian Western Expeditions, Zheng He's voyages to the West, and the opening of new sea routes enabled China to gain a deeper understanding of the world and introduced various useful crops and economic

plants from different parts of the globe. Once these crops and economic plants were introduced to China, they rapidly spread among various regions and ethnic groups, eventually reaching the Zhuang ethnic region in Guangxi.

Sweet potato, corn, and peanut are the most commonly cultivated food and cash crops introduced from abroad in Zhuang society. The sweet potato "originated from the regions of Mexico and Colombia in the Americas. Towards the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century, the Portuguese and Spanish brought it to Indonesia, Annam, and the Philippines in Southeast Asia. Around the 10th year of the Wanli reign (1582), Chen Yi from Dongguan, Guangdong, and Fujian maritime merchants independently introduced the sweet potato from Annam and Luzon for trial planting in the Dongguan and Quanzhou regions." (Yang Guozhong, Chen Zhiping, 1993, p.262.) The cultivation of sweet potatoes in Zhuang regions likely began towards the end of the Ming Dynasty. Due to its drought tolerance, adaptability, and high yield, the sweet potato was widely promoted in Zhuang villages. "There are two types of sweet potato skins: red and white, both fragrant and sweet, and can be used as a substitute for rice. In October, they bloom everywhere in small fields, and are planted everywhere in Guangdong," as written in "Yuexi Congzai" compiled by Wang Sen in the Qing Dynasty of China. The sweet potato has high utilization value. The roots can be directly boiled and eaten, or sliced and dried for later consumption. They can also be used for making alcohol. To this day, the Zhuang people in the Longsheng area of Guangxi still popularly use sweet potatoes to make alcohol for drinking.



Figure 7 Wine made from sweet potatoes
Source: <https://image.baidu.com/> 2024.4

The cultivation of corn in Zhuang regions also began relatively early, dating back to the end of the 16th century. Corn is drought-tolerant and easy to grow, with straightforward planting and tillage methods. As a result, its cultivated area in Zhuang regions has continuously expanded, gradually becoming an important food crop second only to rice. Traditional methods of consuming corn in Zhuang society mainly include grinding it into flour to make corn bread, boiling broken kernels into corn porridge, or stir-frying corn kernels. Corn products are filling, making corn an essential supplementary food to rice. During famine years, it even replaced rice as the staple food of the Zhuang people. "The introduction and cultivation of peanuts in the mid-to-late Ming Dynasty were significantly influenced by maritime merchants from Fujian, Guangdong, and Huizhou. Peanuts are suitable for planting in dry and sandy soil, offering high quality and delicious taste while yielding more than other oilseed crops. Thus, the cultivation of peanuts provided people with excellent food and oil." (Yang Guozhong, Chen Zhiping, 1993, p.266.)

The cultivation and consumption of peanuts in Zhuang villages have had a considerable impact on the dietary life of the Zhuang ethnic group. Peanuts can not only be directly processed into numerous food products but also used for oil extraction. According to records in the county chronicle of Shangsi County in Guangxi, the Zhuang people in Nadang Township of Shangsi County consumed peanut oil during the Qing Dynasty in China. At that time, every household had peanut oil, ranging from over a thousand jin (a traditional Chinese unit of measurement) to two or three hundred jin, which was extracted either individually or cooperatively. The emergence of peanut oil marked a significant change in the culinary history of the Zhuang ethnic group, as it altered their long-standing reliance solely on animal fats as cooking oil in their dietary life.

Please help me translate this text into English using advanced vocabulary for essay writing: the variety of vegetables became more and more common in the side dishes of the Zhuang diet during this period. Wu Zimu of the Song Dynasty recorded in Mengliang Records the cultivation of vegetables in the southern region at that time, the types of which were mustard, lettuce, boletus, lettuce, endive, scallion, leek, garlic, garlic, purple eggplant, water eggplant, tip gourd, cucumber, wild rice, ferns, radish, asparagus, old ginger, ginger sprouts, and so on. During the Yuan Dynasty, common vegetables circulated in both northern and southern regions included radishes, eggplants, cucumbers, gourds, winter melons, mustard greens, chard, lettuce, amaranth, taro, chives, ginger, scallions, garlic, leeks, turnips, kale, and mushrooms, among others. Notably, radishes, turnips, eggplants, cucumbers, winter melons, chard, chives, ginger, scallions, garlic, and mushrooms were particularly prevalent. (Shi Weimin, 1996, p.135). Most of the vegetables listed above were widely consumed by the Zhuang people during this period. Spinach and cucumbers were introduced from abroad, while others were introduced from other regions within the country, with some being native to the Zhuang areas. However, vegetable cultivation demands relatively high soil and climatic conditions, and not every vegetable can be grown in every location. For the Zhuang people residing in rocky mountainous regions, where

local land is infertile, cultivating even common crops is challenging, let alone vegetables requiring better soil conditions to thrive.

The rising popularity of tea consumption in Zhuang regions emerged as a notable aspect of their food culture during this period. Recorded in the "New Book of Tang: Biography of Wei Dan" authored by Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi during the Song Dynasty, when Wei Dan assumed the post of Governor of Rongzhou, he "established twenty-four agricultural stations, promoting the cultivation of tea and barley, and fostering benevolent governance." However, even during the Tang Dynasty, tea consumption was not widespread in Zhuang society, and betel nuts were primarily served to guests. Starting from the Song Dynasty, tea cultivation gradually increased in some Zhuang areas. Harvested tea leaves were partially retained for personal use and guest entertainment, while the rest were sold. Given the hot and humid climate in Zhuang regions during the summer and the dry and less rainy conditions in autumn, drinking tea was beneficial for cooling down and refreshing the body, as well as for revitalizing the mind.

The history of brewing and consuming alcohol in Zhuang regions is profound. Bronze vessels such as ding (cauldrons), lei (wine jars), and zun (wine vessels) dating back to the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period have been unearthed in Gongcheng, Guangxi. Based on their shapes, these bronze vessels are believed to have been wine vessels used by people at that time. The presence of these wine vessels suggests that the ancestors of the Zhuang people had already begun consuming alcohol during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. Around the Tang Dynasty, the ancestors of the Zhuang people had skillfully mastered the art of brewing, and some households started to produce sweet wine and various fruit wines. During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, the variety of alcoholic beverages brewed by the Zhuang people expanded significantly, and various medicinal liquors became popular. Among them, San She wine and Ge Jie wine were well-known medicinal liquors. "San She wine uses Feng Chui snake, Jin Huan Shang snake, and Guo Shu Long snake as its main ingredients. After slaughtering the snakes and removing their internal organs, the Zhuang people place them in jars with rice liquor for soaking for more than two years. During this process, the snakes are extracted four times and then soaked for another four times to extract their useful components as much as possible. After two clarifications, filtrations, blendings, and aging, the wine is produced. This wine is light yellow, fragrant, slightly fishy, and refreshing. It is a folk remedy in Zhuang villages for treating rheumatism, hemiplegia, joint pain, and edema." (Qin Shangwen, Chen Guoqing, 2003, p.309)

"Starting around the end of the Tang Dynasty, some writings on food therapy were no longer satisfied with studying the therapeutic health effects of certain single-flavored foods, and began to explore composite formulas, and a new system of medical treatment, medicinal meals, emerged. The combination of medicine and diet pushed food therapy to a new stage of development." (Wang Renxiang, 2002, p. 264)

The medicinal diets of the Zhuang region were gradually consumed as in the whole country. Regarding the development of Zhuang medicinal diets, there are not many specific records in history, but this does not mean that there was no knowledge of food therapy in the dietary life of the ancient society of the Zhuang. On the contrary, from the Qin and Han Dynasties to the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the ancestors of the Zhuang people in their dietary life paid great attention to the combination of food, healing, and tonic, and reasonably matched the different properties of food with different flavors to process many food products with medicinal dietary functions.

"Ancient Chinese dietary therapy, developed in the Tang and Song dynasties, has become increasingly stereotyped and mature. The development of social economy and the improvement of the level of food culture further promoted the development of food therapy in the Tang and Song dynasties, making it more massive and systematic." (Chen Weiming, 1993, p. 69) While emphasizing the combination of food, healing and tonic, the dietary life of the Zhuang people constantly improved their cooking techniques to produce food with a full range of colors, aromas and flavors and with national characteristics.

The Zhuang people love to eat bacon and still do until now. The production of preserved meat requires a lot of ingredients and complicated procedures, which is difficult to do well without certain food processing techniques. At the latest, during the Qing Dynasty, the Zhuang people were able to make delicious preserved meat, indicating that the cooking knowledge of the Zhuang society at that time was already quite complete, and that they knew the comprehensive food processing technology combining various means.

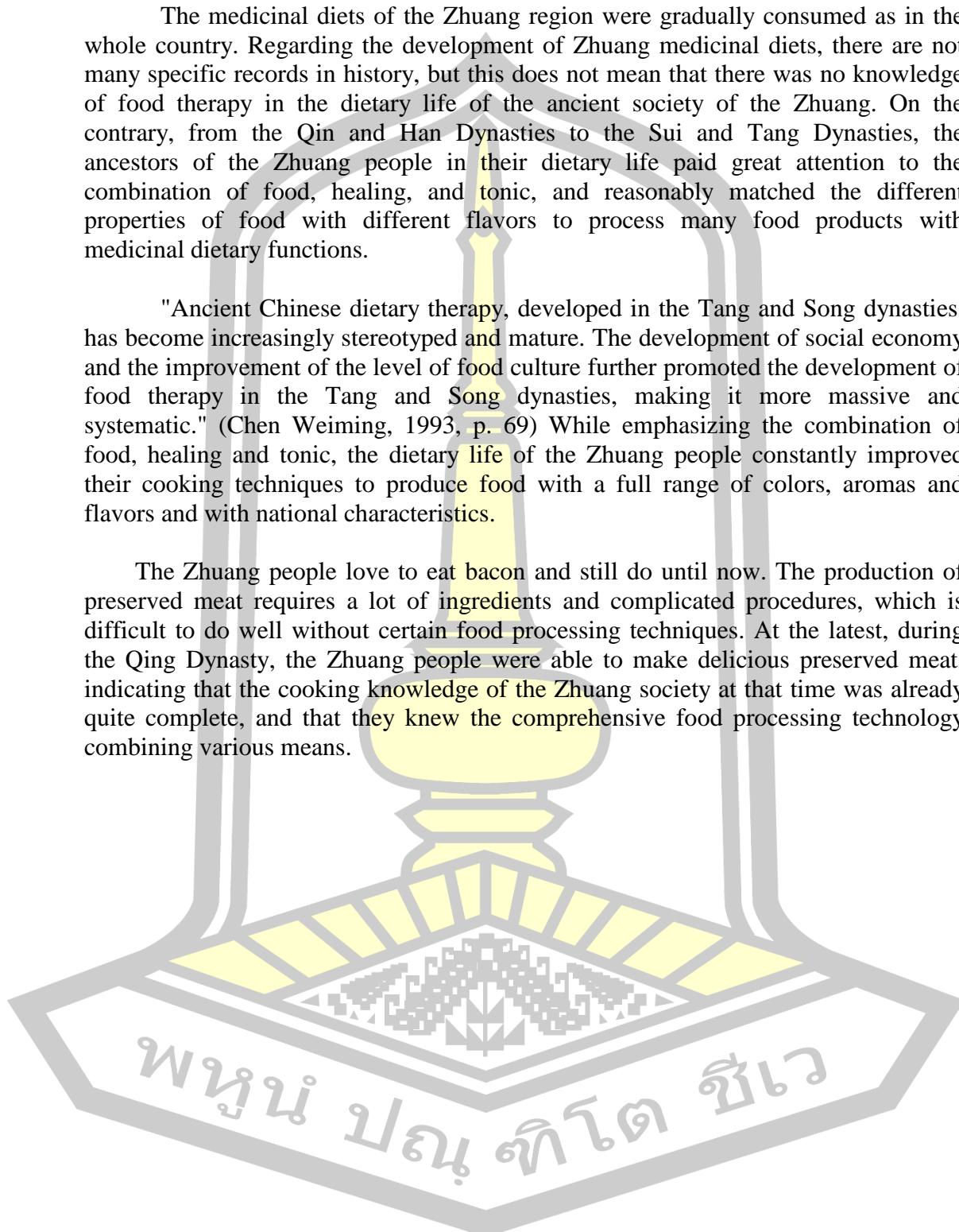




Figure 8 People of the Zhuang ethnic group make Preserved meat in Longji town, Longsheng Autonomous County, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

Source: Photo by You Congjun and Wu Qianxi, 2024.1

"Food is the paramount necessity of the people, and taste takes precedence in food." The advancement of culinary techniques and the development of food culture rely heavily on the innovation of seasonings. The Zhuang people began consuming salt early on, particularly those residing near the coast, who found it more convenient to obtain sea salt. Subsequently, sugar, various soy sauces, and vinegar were incorporated into Zhuang dietary practices. Given the Zhuang people's long-standing residence in the Lingnan region, abundant plant resources have played a significant role in their culinary traditions. Ingredients such as ginger, scallions, and Chinese chives have long been used as seasonings, while since the Ming and Qing dynasties, additional seasonings such as chili peppers, sesame seeds, coriander, and lemons have been introduced. The emergence of multiple seasonings corresponds to the diverse dietary preferences of the Zhuang people, as "the purpose of seasoning in traditional culinary arts is to remove unpleasant odors, highlight the main flavors, enhance taste, and enrich the overall flavor profile." (Wang Xue-tai, 1993, p.143).

Different food ingredients possess distinct characteristics, and it is essential to complement them with various seasonings during the cooking process to achieve true harmony; otherwise, the dish may become unpalatable or even intolerable. Particularly, the Zhuang people have a penchant for various aquatic products. Therefore, in cooking, the key lies in eliminating fishiness. However, removing fishy odors is not an easy task and often requires the use of multiple seasonings, especially those with robust flavors of plant origin, to effectively neutralize the undesirable taste.

"From the middle of the Han Dynasty onwards, with the changing social, political, economic, and cultural conditions, the traditional system of seasonal festivals gradually transitioned towards a secular system of festivals. By the Eastern Han and Wei-Jin periods, a system of seasonal festivals that would influence China for two thousand years had essentially taken shape." (Xiao Fang, 2002, p. 67)

This marks the approximate period when the traditional seasonal festivals of the Han ethnicity in the Central Plains region took shape. However, it is not necessarily the case that other remote regions inhabited by ethnic minorities had developed their own comprehensive system of seasonal festivals during the Wei-Jin period. "The Zhuang ethnic group's customs and traditions during the seasons are derived from various sources, including agricultural practices, certain lifestyle customs, influences from Han ethnic festivals, and associations with historical events and figures. Yet, simultaneously, they are closely linked to certain religious and superstitious beliefs." (Liang Tingwang, 2000, p. 467).

In summary, the traditional festivals of the Zhuang ethnic group encompass those derived from their own culture, as well as those adopted and "adapted" from the Han and other ethnic groups. The prevalence of traditional Han festivals in Zhuang villages occurred later than that of Zhuang festivals, roughly after the Song Dynasty. According to the "Tai Ping Huan Yu Ji" written by Le Shi of the Song Dynasty, the Zhuang people already possessed their own ethnic festivals before the Song Dynasty, although they were not very systematic or complete. After the Song and Yuan Dynasties, many seasonal festivals became widespread in Zhuang villages, and the food culture associated with these festivals began to take shape during this period.

"The March 3th Zhuang nationality," "Cow Soul Festival," and "Birthday of King Mo Yi" are some of the more representative traditional festivals of the Zhuang ethnic group. On the third day of the third lunar month, households of the Zhuang ethnic group in many places prepare five-colored glutinous rice and dye eggs in various colors. Young men and women engage in singing duets, and the local community provides food and accommodation for visitors from neighboring villages, regardless of whether they are acquaintances or not.

The "Cow Soul Festival" is celebrated annually on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, although some places hold it on the sixth day of the sixth lunar month or the eighth day of the eighth lunar month. On this day, "every household steams five-colored glutinous rice and feeds it to the cows wrapped in loquat leaves. Some also set out offerings of wine, meat, fruits, and vegetables outside their homes. The head of the household leads an old cow around the dining table, singing cow songs as they walk" (Pan Qixu, Qin Naichang, 1993, p.359).



Figure 9 On April 17, 2023, a folklore event of the Zhuang Cow Soul Festival was held in Gulan Village, Wuai Township, Nandan County, Guangxi Hechi City. The scene of the Ox Soul Festival

Source: Photographed by Kwong Wai Nam, 2023.4.



Figure 10 At the festival venue of the Cow Soul Festival, the priests of Gulan Village offer sacrifices to the god of cows by spraying wine.

Source: Photographed by Kwong Wai Nam, 2023.4.

At the festival venue of the Cow Soul Festival, the priests of Gulan Village offer sacrifices to the god of cows by spraying wine, and then tickle, comb and bathe the cows, sing about the hard work of the cows, express their worship and respect for the cows, and bow to the cows in reverence to pray for good winds and rains and good harvests in the coming year.

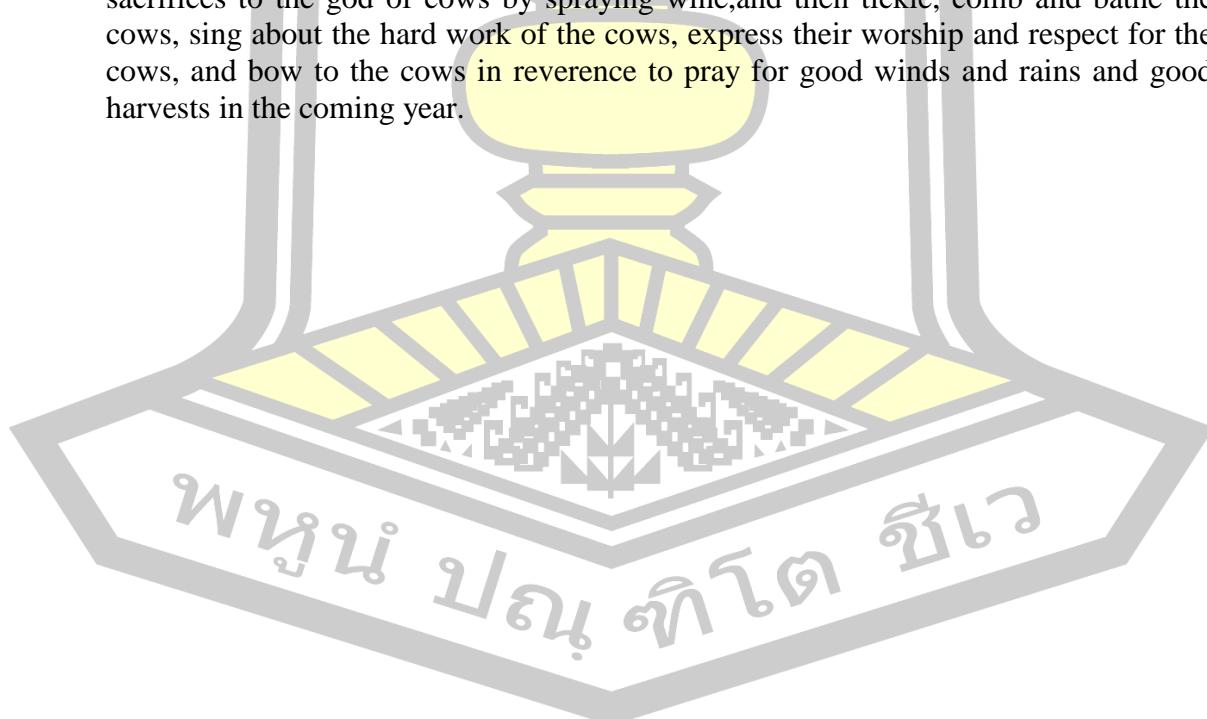




Figure 11 Local children make and wear cow head masks and blow cow horns in gratitude for the important role of cows in farming and production.

Source: Photographed by Kwong Wai Nam, 2023.4.



Figure 12 The Zhuang people of Gulan village pound the five-colored glutinous rice that has been worshipped to the bull god into mochi patties.

Source: Photographed by Kwong Wai Nam, 2023.4.

Certainly, feeding the cow with five-colored glutinous rice is merely a ritual; ultimately, the five-colored glutinous rice and other offerings are primarily intended for human consumption. "Deities are embodiments of humanity. To please them, people always offer the most devout attitudes, solemn ceremonies, and abundant food as sacrifices, presenting different offerings according to the season. In reality, sacrificing to deities is just a formality to satisfy people's spiritual needs. While it may appear to be an offering to the gods, it is actually a way for people to enjoy the fruits of their labor and improve their lives through festivals" (Qin Cailuan, 2000, p.95).

In Guangxi's Liujiang and Longjiang regions, the Zhuang ethnic group celebrates the "Birthday of King Mo Yi" on the second day of the sixth lunar month every year. Legend has it that King Mo Yi once saved the Zhuang people, and as a result, they offer sacrifices to him annually. "During the festival, each household sends one representative to participate in the grand sacrificial ceremony held at the Temple of King Mo Yi. According to the twelve months of the year, different parts of pig and cow meat, bones, liver, intestines, etc., are prepared into twelve dishes, which are then presented on the altar at intervals. Once all twelve dishes are offered, paper money is burned and bows are made. After the ceremony, each dish is evenly distributed among the participants for tasting" (Pan Qixu, Qin Naichang, 1993, p.360).

The Zhuang ethnic group's festivals such as the Spring Festival, Qingming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Ghost Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, Double Ninth Festival, and New Year's Eve have been adopted from the Han ethnic group and have undergone "adaptation" through the Zhuang people's practices in production and daily life. As a result, the food culture of the Zhuang during these festivals exhibits both similarities and differences with the Han. For instance, both groups traditionally eat zongzi during the Dragon Boat Festival and mooncakes during the Mid-Autumn Festival. However, there are also distinct culinary customs among the Zhuang. For example, in many Zhuang regions, the Double Ninth Festival is also known as the "Birthday Celebration Festival." On the 60th birthday of a Zhuang elder, their children present them with a jar for storing grain, symbolizing longevity. Thereafter, on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, the children add more grain to the jar, followed by a family feast. In contrast, the Han ethnic group typically drinks chrysanthemum wine, eats Double Ninth cakes, climbs high, and wears cornelian cherries on this day, focusing on auspiciousness and avoiding misfortune, whereas the Zhuang emphasize family reunions.

Dietary regime refers to the system of meal consumption, typically encompassing the frequency of daily meals and whether meals are taken individually or communally. "The practice of consuming three meals a day is most common in our country and can be considered a product of agrarian culture. The rhythm of 'working from sunrise to sunset' in production and daily life demands that dietary habits align accordingly." (Xue Maixi, 2001, p.238).

The Zhuang people primarily engage in rice cultivation as their main agricultural activity. However, due to diverse geographical environments, a significant portion of the Zhuang population continued to reside in forests even by the Song Dynasty. During this period, those living in the mountainous forests along the Youjiang River in Guangxi were nomadic, relying on hunting and gathering various flora and fauna to sustain their livelihoods. Consequently, the number of meals consumed each day naturally varied depending on the success of their hunts and collections. It was only during the Qing Dynasty that "rice cultivation in Guangxi witnessed significant growth, leading to a substantial increase in rice yields. Apart from local consumption, a considerable surplus of rice was also produced and transported to other regions." (Qin Naichang, 1997, p.324). It is during periods of relatively stable living conditions that the dietary regime of consuming three fixed meals a day gradually takes shape.

Culinary etiquette, also known as dining etiquette, refers to the ceremonial practices surrounding food consumption. "Although dining etiquette is not unique to civilized societies and likely emerged concurrently with the act of dining itself, the elaborate rituals of civilized societies are far more intricate than those of primitive ages. Due to a lack of documentary evidence, our understanding of dining etiquette during the Xia and Shang dynasties is limited. However, by the Zhou dynasty at the latest, a relatively comprehensive system of dining etiquette had been established." (Wang Renxiang, 2002, p.79) In China, the Han ethnicity had already developed a

fairly comprehensive system of dining etiquette by the Zhou dynasty. The formation of dining etiquette among the Zhuang people roughly coincided with the development of rites of passage, as a complete set of dining etiquette not only encompasses everyday dining rituals but also includes special dining rituals associated with life events.

Part 4 Prosperity of the Zhuang food culture (modern times to the present)

From the mid-19th century onward, Zhuang society, like the entirety of Chinese society, underwent significant political and economic transformations. Following the Opium Wars in China¹⁵, the long-sealed gates of feudal society were opened, ushering in a continuous influx of foreign novelties that brought multifaceted influences to people of all social strata in China. Particularly since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the entire social landscape has experienced rapid and profound changes. The progress and development of society have provided excellent opportunities for the advancement of Zhuang food culture. During this period, Zhuang food culture entered a period of prosperity: unprecedented levels of exchange both domestically and internationally, widespread adoption of modern cooking methods and technologies, the formation of new dietary perspectives, and the gradual elimination of detrimental dietary customs—all of these aspects epitomize the flourishing stage of Zhuang food culture.

The internal and external exchanges of Zhuang food culture have reached unprecedented levels of activity. This concept encompasses two aspects: the exchange of Zhuang food culture with that of other ethnic groups within China and the exchange and emulation of Zhuang food culture with foreign food culture. "As a complete system of ethnicity, it can be broadly stated that there is inevitably a certain degree of closure, or rather, it is the closed nature of the system that constitutes its integral characteristics, allowing it to become an ethnic group. Often, there is hesitation or resistance towards external influences, but the least resistance to the absorption of the strengths of other ethnicities lies in food." (Wang Xuetai, 1993, p.116)

The exchange of culinary practices between the Zhuang people and other ethnic groups within China has a long history. For instance, as early as the Han Dynasty, the Zhuang ancestors utilized the Chinese medicinal herb *Yizhiren*¹⁶ to make zongzi, which were then introduced to the Central Plains region as tribute items. Furthermore, various agricultural crops and vegetables native to many ethnic groups within China have continuously been introduced to Zhuang regions, enriching the dietary structure of the Zhuang people.

¹⁵ An unjust war of aggression waged by Britain against China from 1840 to 1842 was also the beginning of China's modern history of humiliation.

¹⁶ *Yizhiren*, known in traditional Chinese medicine, refers to the fruit of the plant *Alpinia oxyphylla* Miq. belonging to the ginger family, *Zingiberaceae*.

However, since the 19th century, Zhuang interaction with the outside world has far exceeded that of any previous era in both breadth and depth. The fifth volume of the "Social History Investigation of Zhuang Communities in Guangxi" documented the situation in Luodong Township, Yishan County. Before 1945, Luodong Township had a population of less than ten thousand. Yet, there were over a hundred households engaged in noodle-making throughout the township. Wealthier households had deposits of around one hundred yuan, while the least affluent had at least five yuan. On average, the township ground about a thousand kilograms of wheat daily, yielding over seven hundred kilograms of flour. The average trading volume amounted to seventy to eighty yuan, with an increase of around five hundred kilograms of flour on market days, leading to transactions exceeding one hundred yuan. Noodles, a simple and fast food greatly enjoyed by the Han people of the Central Plains, had already become widely popular in the remote Zhuang regions of western Guangxi before 1949, indicating that the exchange of food culture between the Zhuang people and other regions had reached a certain level of sophistication.

Cultural experts in ethnic studies argue, "China's rich culinary culture is a collective creation of various ethnic groups. The development of Chinese culinary culture primarily benefits from the highly developed agricultural civilization and its long history. Without the raw materials and technological expertise provided by agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, and fisheries, the result would only be akin to 'a clever housewife unable to cook without rice.'" (Xu Wanbang, Qi Qingfu, 1996, p.103).

Similarly, the development and prosperity of Zhuang food culture rely not only on the rapid advancement of the local agricultural sector and technological progress but also on the various materials and culinary techniques provided by other ethnic groups within China. The exchange of culinary practices between the Zhuang people and other ethnic groups within China is reciprocal; the Zhuang people can introduce various food materials and food processing methods from other ethnic groups and learn many aspects of their culinary practices. Particularly significant is the influence of Guangdong province on Zhuang culinary culture.

The commodities imported from Guangdong to the Zhuang ethnic regions of Guangxi encompass not only production tools but also essential living materials, including various food ingredients. Since the onset of China's reform and opening-up policies, the increasingly prosperous unified domestic market economy has propelled Zhuang ethnic food culture into a golden age of development. Ethnic cuisine from various minority groups is gradually spreading from urban areas to Zhuang villages, with dishes such as Xinjiang-style grilled lamb skewers, Manchu saqima, Tibetan butter tea, and others profoundly influencing the dietary habits of Zhuang people today. From 1842 to the present, Zhuang culinary etiquette has been significantly influenced by other ethnic groups, particularly the Han Chinese, with some customs and etiquettes converging or resembling those of the Han Chinese. This convergence is a natural occurrence in the process of cultural integration among various ethnic groups.

In traditional Chinese dining customs, hierarchical notions are deeply ingrained, evident in seating arrangements, the sequence of serving dishes, etiquette for toasting, and terms of address, all bearing the stamp of hierarchy. The seating arrangement during banquets serves as a significant indicator of the status and hierarchy of individuals. Depending on the occasion and the attendees, the seating arrangement varies accordingly.

The hierarchy in seating arrangements during Zhuang ethnic dining differs slightly from that of the Han Chinese. While in Han Chinese culture, facing south is considered respectful in terms of hierarchy, and facing east indicates the host-guest relationship's hierarchy, the Zhuang ethnic seating arrangement also exhibits a degree of hierarchy but is generally not as strictly structured as in Han Chinese customs. In Zhuang ethnic region banquets, men and women dine separately, primarily because men consume alcohol while women do not. However, if Zhuang women partake in drinking, they may sit at the same table as men, with no strict order of seating.

The traditional diet of the Zhuang people has always emphasized the combination of food, therapy and tonic, and has striven for excellence in processing technology and methods. Especially since 2000, due to the accumulation of traditional food processing technology and the intervention of advanced cooking technology of other ethnic groups, the cooking technology of the Zhuang diet has entered a stage of comprehensive and rapid development, which is more scientific and rational than before in many aspects such as food preservation and processing hygiene.

Dietary hygiene is particularly crucial for maintaining human health. The Zhuang ethnic group is known for its emphasis on cleanliness; however, due to the longstanding preoccupation with the daily hustle of providing three meals a day, hygiene in daily dietary practices often tends to be neglected. Li Daquan's "Local Customs of Longsheng Township" records the method of eating raw fish among the Zhuang people in Longsheng, Guangxi, highlighting a lack of attention to hygiene. Local Zhuang people consume raw fish regardless of the species, catching them from streams and rivers, dipping them in sauce, and eating them immediately afterward. Even those who are relatively more hygiene-conscious merely add a bit of perilla spice to the dish, thinly slicing the fish without removing the scales before consumption. Furthermore, they use a knife and sauce by the riverside to catch fish, dipping each caught fish into the sauce and immediately eating it.

When it comes to consuming raw fish, compared to the past, people nowadays pay more attention to hygiene during the processing. Firstly, the fish's internal organs must be thoroughly cleaned, and any blood in the fish meat should be absorbed using clean gauze. Additionally, various ingredients are used, including those to remove fishy odors and enhance freshness, among others.

"Diet is the most important thing in the life of human society. Therefore, human beings attach great importance to and pay attention to food. In this process will naturally form a series of ideological concepts and produce some psychological activities. This is the so-called diet concept and diet psychology." (Chen Weiming, 1993, p. 34.)

The formation and development of dietary perspectives are closely linked to social progress and development. As society advances to a certain extent, corresponding changes occur in dietary perspectives. "As a folk cultural phenomenon, the customs of the Zhuang people, their emergence, evolution, and development, are determined by the material production level of certain historical stages and constrained by social structure." (Pan Qixu & Qin Naichang, 1993, p.354).

As part of the customary practices of the Zhuang ethnic group, dietary customs inevitably develop some detrimental habits to modern civilized and healthy living throughout its long history. These may include seating arrangements during daily meals, excessive feasting at celebratory events, and indulgence in alcohol leading to disturbances. As early as the 1930s, the Guangxi provincial government initiated reforms targeting the lifestyle habits of various ethnic groups within the province, including the Zhuang people. In Chapter Two, Article Eight of the "Regulations for Improving Customs in Guangxi Province" issued by the government, it stipulated: "When entertaining guests during weddings, households are primarily encouraged to host tea ceremonies, with the option of providing alcoholic beverages; however, the cost of each table should not exceed three yuan, and even in prosperous cities, it should not exceed ten yuan." (Kang Zhenhua, Liang Shangyan, 1938).

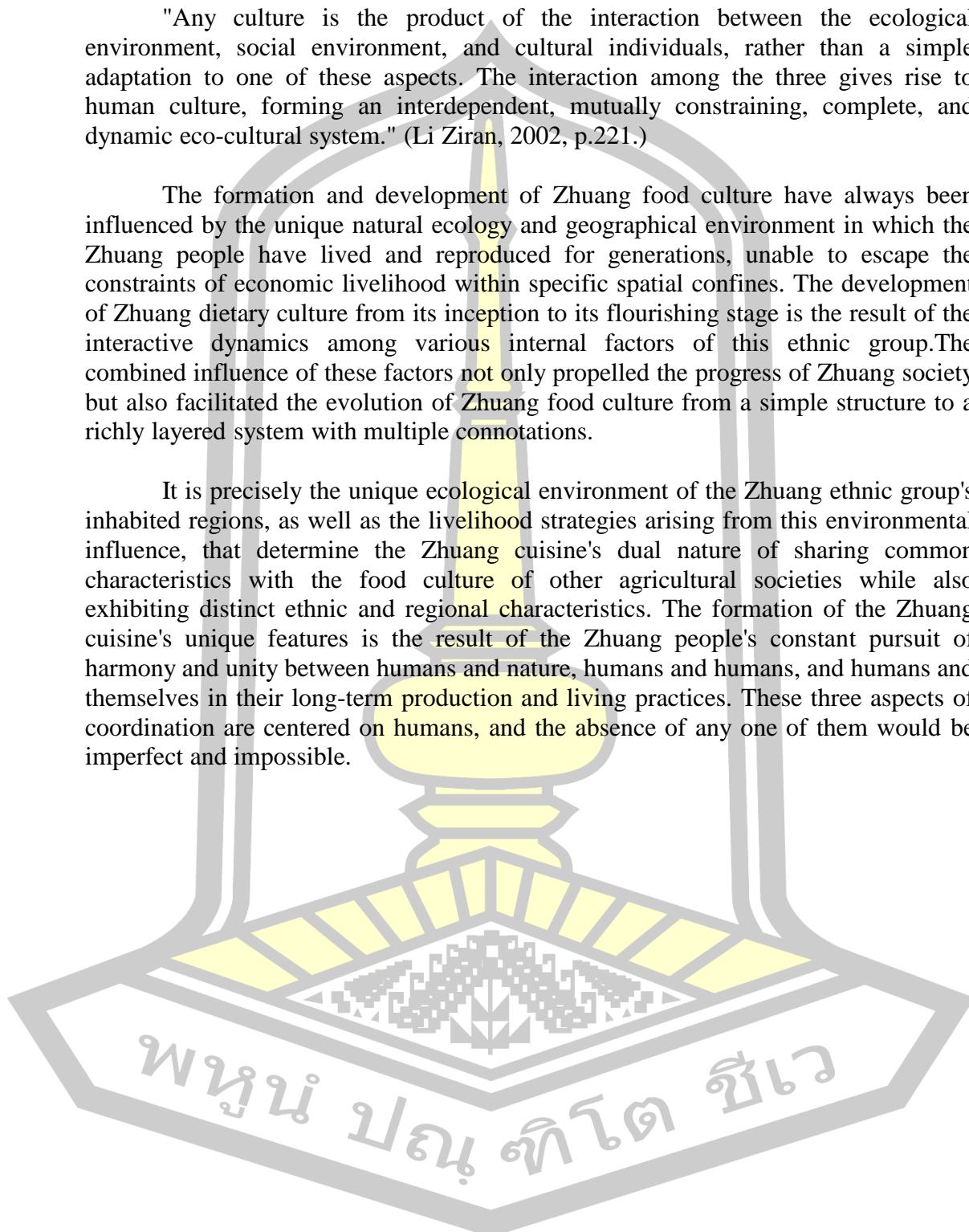
Since the founding of New China, under the guidance of the Party and the Government, certain reforms have been carried out in all aspects of the social life of the Zhuang people, including the elimination of some undesirable dietary practices. The gradual elimination of undesirable dietary practices has been conducive to the formation and promotion of a civilized outlook on diet and to the improvement of people's quality of life. However, the formation of customs and habits is the result of the accumulation of people's long-term life, not which kind of external force can be completely changed at once, and its reform needs a slow process, such as Tian'e County, Guangxi, Baoding Township Zhuang, for a long time is still preserved men and women do not share the seat of the custom. Men and women generally do not share the same table at banquets, mainly because women do not smoke or drink alcohol and eat at different speeds, and secondly because they are afraid that men will make rude remarks or behaviors when they are drunk, a custom that has been retained until now. However, the overall trend shows that the bad dietary practices of the Zhuang people are indeed gradually decreasing.

Conclusion

"Any culture is the product of the interaction between the ecological environment, social environment, and cultural individuals, rather than a simple adaptation to one of these aspects. The interaction among the three gives rise to human culture, forming an interdependent, mutually constraining, complete, and dynamic eco-cultural system." (Li Ziran, 2002, p.221.)

The formation and development of Zhuang food culture have always been influenced by the unique natural ecology and geographical environment in which the Zhuang people have lived and reproduced for generations, unable to escape the constraints of economic livelihood within specific spatial confines. The development of Zhuang dietary culture from its inception to its flourishing stage is the result of the interactive dynamics among various internal factors of this ethnic group. The combined influence of these factors not only propelled the progress of Zhuang society but also facilitated the evolution of Zhuang food culture from a simple structure to a richly layered system with multiple connotations.

It is precisely the unique ecological environment of the Zhuang ethnic group's inhabited regions, as well as the livelihood strategies arising from this environmental influence, that determine the Zhuang cuisine's dual nature of sharing common characteristics with the food culture of other agricultural societies while also exhibiting distinct ethnic and regional characteristics. The formation of the Zhuang cuisine's unique features is the result of the Zhuang people's constant pursuit of harmony and unity between humans and nature, humans and humans, and humans and themselves in their long-term production and living practices. These three aspects of coordination are centered on humans, and the absence of any one of them would be imperfect and impossible.



CHAPTER III

The meaning of Zhuang food culture

Introduction

As an effective carrier of human material activities and cultural transmission, food, or food, not only satisfies people's basic survival needs and physical pleasure, but also shocks the people who are in the "feast" to convey historical and cultural information, greatly satisfies people's psychological and spiritual needs, and can reflect the customs of a place and people's living habits.

Five-color glutinous rice and Liuzhou snail rice noodle, with their unique production skills and unique cultural significance, have become a shining pearl in Zhuang food culture. These two dishes not only make us revel in the enjoyment of the tongue, but also provide us with valuable clues to reveal the multi-level meanings of the colorful food culture of the Zhuang people. Therefore, this chapter is mainly divided into three parts:

Part1 Dietary representatives of the Zhuang paddy culture

Part 2 Five-color glutinous rice: The festival staple food of the Zhuang people

Part 3Liuzhou River snails rice noodle: The common food memory of Guangxi people

It includes the food ecology, food function, food making skills, food history and culture of the two kinds of food. The content of this chapter will lay a solid foundation for the study of the media representation of Zhuang food culture.

Part 1 Dietary representatives of the Zhuang paddy culture

Human beings create culture, and are also created by culture. Thus, human beings are the subject of culture, as well as the object of culture. Human beings' existence in the world also signifies that they are embedded in culture. Culture is always manifested in various symbols, including human artifacts, behaviors, and even ideologies, all of which constitute the symbols or texts of culture.

To some extent, the creation of culture is the creation of symbols. From the point of view of the symbol, its basic function is representation. The reason why symbols are created is to convey some meaning to people. Fundamentally, therefore, representation involves a complex relationship between the sign itself and the intention and the thing being represented, on the one hand, and on the other hand, it is closely related to communication, dissemination, understanding and interpretation in a particular context. In this way, culture is essentially human behavior that conveys meaning through the use of symbols. That is why some cultural scientists insist that the core of culture is the creation, interaction, understanding and interpretation of meaning.

Xun Kuang, a thinker from the Warring States period in China (476 BC - 221 BC), once said, "The land can produce cereals and grains, and if people are adept at cultivating and managing the land, then the land will yield more crops, even allowing for two harvests in a year."

The Zhuang are an agricultural people, fundamentally characterized by rice agriculture. As one of the first ethnic groups to cultivate and plant rice, the Zhuang have been extremely important to the productive life of Zhuang society from ancient times to the present.

Now in many Zhuang areas, and even in parts of Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and other countries, there are still a large number of place names with the character "Na", which means "field" in Zhuang language. The emergence of the place name "Na" is linked to the emergence of rice agriculture, a historical mark of the emergence of the rice civilization, which to a certain extent preserves the original face of the Zhuang paddy culture." [Qin Naichang, 2004, p. 46]

For a long time, rice farming, as the economic foundation, has been influencing various aspects of Zhuang society, including clothing, food, shelter, and transportation. In particular, Zhuang's dietary life, from the source of food ingredients to food processing methods, is mainly centered on rice farming. From daily meals to festivals and other special meals, they are deeply imprinted with the paddy culture.

The paddy culture, in its most general understanding, comprises farming techniques, production systems, almanac divination, and sacrificial activities praying for a bumper harvest, as well as symbolic folk customs and religious rites related to beliefs. It is a cultural system that connects the daily behaviors of Zhuang people with their surrounding natural environment.

Rice has a close relationship with the Zhuang people, who draw on their knowledge of the biological nature of rice in relation to the local ecology, and also talk about food made from rice in their daily lives, boasting about them and assigning various attributes to them through their actions, and in these words and actions give food made from rice various social values and cultural significance.

When the Zhuang people offer sacrifices to their ancestors, glutinous rice is an indispensable offering. Glutinous rice in the Zhuang region is the first variety of cultivated rice, so the ancestors of the Zhuang people used glutinous rice as their staple food, and "valuing glutinous rice as a precious thing" is also a habit that has been slowly developed by the Zhuang people after the emergence of cultivated rice; the Zhuang people are an ethnic group with a profound foundation of the paddy culture, and the Zhuang people use the five-color glutinous rice made from glutinous rice as the main food for the festivals, or as gifts, or as sacrificial offerings, all of them are an important manifestation of the "valuing glutinous rice as a precious thing".

Rice noodles are also an essential representative of the numerous foods made from rice in Guangxi. According to legend, during the Qin Dynasty, Emperor Qin Shi Huang sent General Tu Sui to lead the army southward through Guilin to attack Lingnan (today's southern Guangdong, Guangxi, and northern Vietnam). When they were trapped in Xing'an, Emperor Qin Shi Huang dispatched Shi Lu¹⁷ to mobilize one hundred thousand craftsmen from all over the country to specifically construct Lingqu Canal, aiming to connect the waterway transportation between the Yangtze River Basin and the Pearl River Basin.

¹⁷ Shi Lu (Qin Dynasty), whose birthplace is unknown, was reportedly a Yue people. Shi Lu's major contribution to the Qin Dynasty was the construction of Lingqu Canal, which accelerated the process of Emperor Qin Shi Huang unifying Baiyue. Historical records state: "Qin Shi Huang then ordered Jian Lu (Shi Lu) to dig Lingqu Canal to transport grain, enabling the army to penetrate deeply into Baiyue."

At one time, hundreds of thousands of soldiers, craftsmen and civil workers from the north gathered in less than a hundred square kilometers of the Spirit Canal and stayed there for three years. As they were not accustomed to eating rice in the south and were homesick for their homeland, there were many sick people, which greatly affected their morale and fighting strength. Coupled with the transfer of food from the north, long-distance traveling, difficult, had to do the north of the southern food, the Qin army barracks, some people will be ground into powder rice and then rolled into noodles, after continuous testing, and ultimately made of rice, "rice noodles", later known as rice flour. This is the earliest Guangxi rice noodles.

Guangxi is a major province for rice noodles, and every city has its unique type of rice noodle, which has become a distinctive symbol of each city in Guangxi. Among them, Liuzhou's snail rice noodles are famous throughout Guangxi due to their rich flavor and are also well-known across China and the world.

Human dietary preferences and taste orientations are often shaped within the family and social growth environments. Similar to the food custom of Zhuang people in Guangxi consuming rice noodles, dietary preferences become habitual tastes that are difficult to change once established. In daily life, there is no special awareness when rice noodles are available. However, once they are absent, it can become a profound longing and unbearable addiction, especially for the elderly who cannot go a day without rice noodles. Therefore, the habitual factors embedded in people's dietary life are extremely powerful.

Similar situations are also shared by other ethnic groups both domestically and internationally. They may travel to seek delicious foods from various countries and regions around the world, but within a week, if they are Japanese, they will crave miso soup and rice. Koreans may miss their homemade kimchi, while Chinese may long for their habitual flavors such as Northeast dumplings, Chongqing hotpot, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, and so on.

It can be seen that the recognition of the food culture of each ethnic group and region is a kind of originality, which makes diet become a yardstick of cultural identity. The Zhuang people's food identity centered on rice has an identity with the "root", because "for us, people with social attributes, the cultural meaning of food is extremely important" (Peng Zhaorong, 2013, P123). In the current era of globalization, many Zhuang people travel to various parts of the world, bringing their ethnic food culture to every corner of the earth. Through delicious dishes such as five-color glutinous rice and Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, they find a sense of belonging and cultural identity. Therefore, "like religion and language, food is the litmus test of culture. Members of the same cultural group recognize each other through food, and they can identify outsiders just by examining the menu. Through food, we can identify or distinguish a culture. Although dietary habits often follow trends and advertisements can promote them, food culture is conservative and deeply rooted in everyone's psyche." (Written by Amesto and translated by Han Liangyi, 2013, P161)

The interpretation of the term "culture" in the Dictionary of Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies, compiled by renowned American scholar John Fiske and others, is quite representative: Culture is "the socialized production and reproduction of sensation, meaning, and consciousness. It is the realm of meaning that connects the production field (economy) with the field of social relations." The researchers understand that the rice culture of the Zhuang people is created and

inherited jointly by the members of the Zhuang society, involving emotions, values, and people's cognition. Rice culture is not merely a static existence, but is continuously shaped and reshaped by the people of the Zhuang society. It connects economic activities and social relations, carrying meanings and values.

Therefore, when we interpret the two cuisines of the Zhuang food, five-color glutinous rice and Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, we can deeply understand the spiritual world behind the food created by the Zhuang nationality, a rice-growing nation. The making of these two dishes by the Zhuang people is not only a satisfaction of taste buds, but also a demonstration of the essence of the Zhuang paddy culture. They convey the Zhuang people's love for life, awe for nature, and adherence to and inheritance of traditional customs, as well as their identification with their own ethnic culture. Through these two dishes, we can deeply appreciate the rich connotations and profound significance of the Zhuang food culture.

Part 2 Five-color glutinous rice: The festival staple food of the Zhuang people

As a cultural phenomenon, folk festivals are unique "enthusiastic focuses" in people's daily lives. Festival cuisine is an essential component of festival culture, reflecting not only people's pure dining activities but also the profound cultural connotations embedded deep within. "In the life of a specific community, every factor of culture plays a specific role and has a specific function" (written by Radcliffe-Brown and translated by Xia Jianzhong, 2002, p.37). In the Zhuang food culture, rice plays a primary role, reflecting the Zhuang people's production and lifestyle based on rice farming. The prominence of glutinous rice in the festive food culture of the Zhuang people demonstrates that glutinous rice not only satisfies the basic dietary needs of people during festivals but more importantly, as a regular sacrificial offering in Zhuang society, it is a shared item between human "enjoyment" and divine "offering". While some poultry and livestock, such as chicken, duck, pig, and fish, also play this dual role at times, they are still, to some extent, "derivatives" of rice-based agriculture. This reveals the Zhuang people's distinction and meaning of food.

The Zhuang ethnic group in Guangxi has a primitive nature worship and believes in the theory of five elements, considering that metal, wood, water, fire, and earth promote and restrain each other. The five elements correspond to colors, specifically the five colors, which are reflected in traditional cuisine and embody the Zhuang people's belief and philosophy of the harmony between nature and humanity. The Zhuang people realize that humans and nature are interdependent and integrated, with nature providing benefits to humans and humans respecting nature. Using natural grains and herbs, and applying their wisdom of life, the Zhuang people create five-colored glutinous rice to worship gods. This concept is verified and passed down through ethnic customs.

In some Zhuang villages in Guangxi, not only is the five-colored glutinous rice made on the third day of the third lunar month every year, but also sacrificial rituals are held in autumn. Coinciding with the golden autumn, all the villagers, men, women, and children, gather at the edge of the fields with their homemade five-colored glutinous rice, accompanied by rice wine and other dishes, to express gratitude to the gods for a good harvest in the year. The villagers scatter the five-colored glutinous rice on farmland and fields, sharing it with the gods. The Zhuang

people use five-colored glutinous rice to symbolize a bumper crop, expecting a good harvest, with grain piled up as high as mountains and filling lakes and seas. The traditional festival cuisine of the Zhuang people, represented by five-colored glutinous rice, has passed down the Zhuang people's worship of primitive gods and respect for the gifts of nature from generation to generation to this day.

2.1 Natural dyes for five-color glutinous rice

Located in the subtropics, Guangxi Zhuang region enjoys a warm climate, abundant sunshine, ample rainfall, and lush vegetation with a wide variety of plants. The utilization of edible plants by Zhuang people has formed a unique food culture with Zhuang characteristics. When selecting edible plants, Zhuang people often have a close relationship with health care and medicinal use, reflecting the national cultural tradition of "medicine and food coming from the same source."

Five-color glutinous rice is a kind of colored glutinous rice made with high-quality glutinous rice as the main raw material, dyed with food coloring extracted from a variety of natural plants, and made according to traditional cooking methods.

The five-color glutinous rice of the Zhuang nationality is mainly composed of black, red, yellow, purple, and white glutinous rice. The "five colors" of different villages are not the same, and there are often some changes, such as adding green, blue, or other colors, or reducing one or two of them. So there will be some black, red, yellow, green and white and other five colors, some black, red, yellow, blue and white and other five colors, some only black, red, yellow three colors, some black, red two colors, and so on.

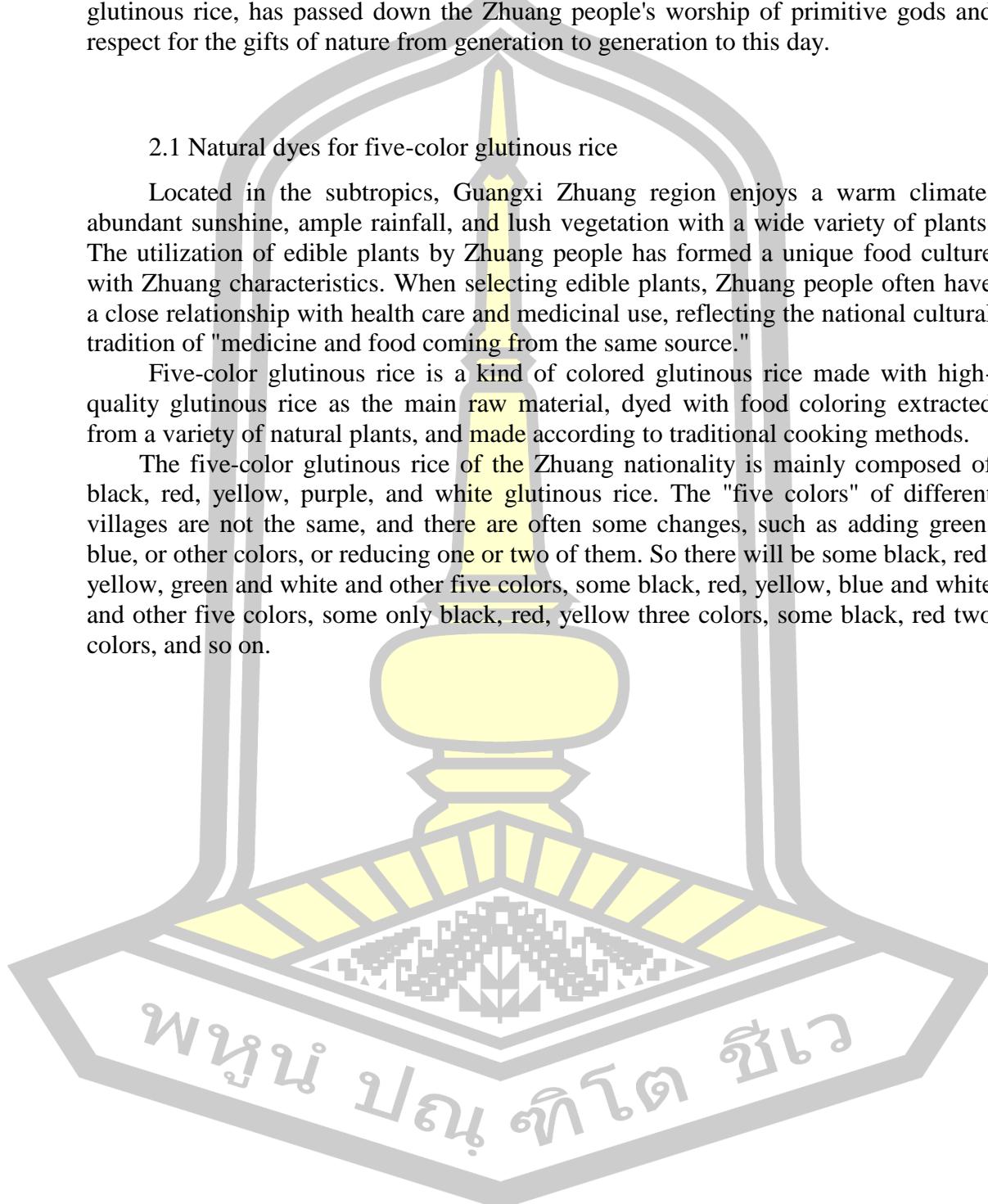




Figure 13 Five-color Glutinous Rice is commonly known as Five-color Rice also called Green Essence Rice or Flower Rice, named after the five colors of glutinous rice: black, red, yellow, purple and white.

Source: Chen Yanyan, 2023.3, photo

The five-colored glutinous rice of the Zhuang nationality is usually arranged in a circle because the circle symbolizes reunion, completeness, and harmony. This traditional custom not only shows the unique aesthetic concepts and cultural traditions of the Zhuang people but also reflects their beautiful wishes for family reunion and social harmony.

In Zhuang culture, red is regarded as a sacred, solemn, warm, auspicious, and evil-repelling color, forming various customs, rites, regulations, or taboos. For example, when Zhuang people build a new house, they hang red cloth on the beams and doors and paint them red, representing the meaning of good fortune and happiness, and also to ward off evil spirits and disasters, praying for peace and safety in their homes.

The dye plants used in red sticky rice mainly include the leguminous plant sapwood, Euphorbiaceae plant red blue grass, and amaranth plant, and the parts used are the heartwood of sapwood, the stems and leaves of red bluegrass, and the stems and leaves of red amaranth, among which "orange sticky rice" can be obtained after the use of sapwood dyeing for a long time. These plant varieties are also rich in natural pigments, such as hematoxylin and hematoxylin contained in hematoxylin, purple-blue in red and bluegrass, amaranth red pigment, and other natural pigments.



Figure 14 Zhuang five-color glutinous rice red dye-sumu silk (Gu Yue Culture and Art Village, Nanyang Town, Qingxiu District, Nanning City, Guangxi-Guangxi Traditional Crafts Workstation Lai Meining five-color gourmet workshop)

Source: Leung Hon-Cheong, photo taken in 2018.3

In Zhuang culture, purple symbolizes depth and mystery, connected with the world of spirits and ancestors. The Zhuang people believe that purple can bridge the gap between the human world and the spiritual world, possessing a powerful spiritual force.

Red and purple dyes are derived from the same species of Red Indigo Plant (Gonglancao) but with different leaf shapes. Red Indigo Plant (Gonglancao) has a relatively short growth cycle, typically taking only 120 days from sowing to harvest. Moreover, it has a strong adaptability to soil and grows easily. The leaves of *Indigofera tinctoria* used as a red dye are slightly rounded, with a vivid emerald green

color. Both the front and back surfaces of the leaves are exceptionally smooth, with clear veins.

The leaves of the Red Indigo Plant (Gonglancao) used as purple dye are slightly longer than those used for red dye, and their color is dark green. The back of the leaves has a thin layer of white fuzz. After boiling these two types of Red Indigo Plant (Gonglancao) in a pot for several minutes, when peeling off the outer skin of the stems, the stems of the red dye become blood-red, while the stems of the purple dye remain unchanged. The Red Indigo Plant (Gonglancao) has the function of promoting blood production. According to the record in "Lvshantang Leibian" (Discussions of Various Subjects in Lvshantang): "Safflower is red and juicy, and it is a product that promotes blood production and circulation." (Zhang Zhicong, 1982, P80.)





Figure 15 Red Dye for Zhuang Five-Color Glutinous Rice - Red Indigo Plant (from Lai Meining's Five-Color Cuisine Workshop at Guangxi Traditional Craft Workstation, Guyue Culture and Art Village, Nanyang Town, Qingxiu District, Nanning City, Guangxi)

Source: Liang Hanchang, March 2018, Photographed



Figure 16 Purple Dye for Zhuang Five-Color Glutinous Rice (from Lai Meining's Five-Color Cuisine Workshop at Guangxi Traditional Craft Workstation, Guyue Culture and Art Village, Nanyang Town, Qingxiu District, Nanning City, Guangxi)

Source: Liang Hanchang, March 2018, Photographed

The Zhuang people have long held a unique aesthetic concept of "black being beautiful." This refers to the Zhuang people's preference and emphasis on the color black. In Zhuang culture, black has profound cultural implications and is regarded as a noble, dignified, and elegant color. Traditionally, the Zhuang people believe that black can ward off evil and misfortunes, thus the color is frequently used in clothing to bring good luck. Therefore, Zhuang people often wear black clothes in daily life, especially men.

The black dye for the five-color glutinous rice is derived from maple leaves. Maples are deciduous trees, mainly distributed in provinces south of the Qinling Mountains and Huaihe River in China, with their leaves turning red in autumn. However, the maple leaves used for dyeing glutinous rice must have a bright green or dark green leaf surface. Maple leaves are palmate, with a width slightly greater than the length, and there is fuzz on the veins of the back of the leaves. Maple leaves are greatly beneficial to the stomach and intestines. Li Shizhen, a medical scientist of the Ming Dynasty, described maple leaves in his medical masterpiece "Compendium of Materia Medica" as follows: "It stops diarrhea, improves sleep, strengthens tendons and vital energy, and prolongs life with long-term use." In addition, it is also emphasized that the rice cooked with maple leaf juice can strengthen bones and muscles, improve bowel function, maintain bone health, and enhance overall physical well-being when consumed by humans.

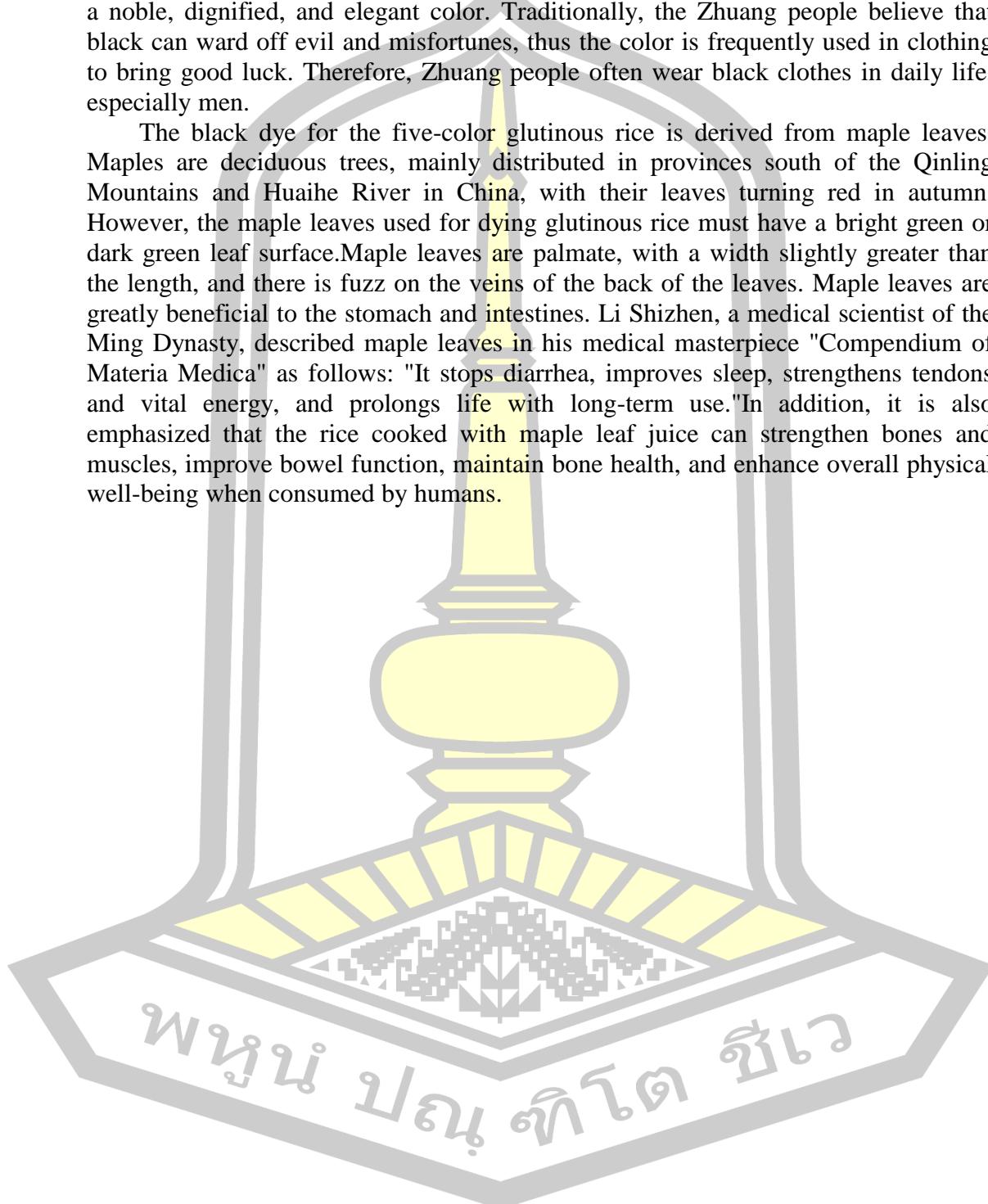




Figure 17 Black Dye for Zhuang's Five-Color Glutinous Rice - Maple Leaf (from Lai Meining's Five-Color Cuisine Workshop at Guangxi Traditional Craft Workstation, Guyue Culture and Art Village, Nanyang Town, Qingxiu District, Nanning City, Guangxi)

Source: Liang Hanchang, March 2018, Photographed

Moreover, in the hearts of the Zhuang people, the maple tree symbolizes the entire nation's history of suffering. According to the earliest extant Chinese monograph on herbs, trees, and fruits in the Lingnan region, "Nanfang Caomuzhuang" (Records of Herbs and Trees in the South), it is recorded that: "There are many maple trees between the Five Ridges (mountains). As time goes by, they develop tumors. One night, during a violent thunderstorm, the tumors grow suddenly by three to five feet, called 'fengren' (maple people). Yue shamans (priests of the Yue people) use their techniques to communicate with the gods, and it is truly effective. However, if they are not taken properly, they can transform and disappear." From this, we can see that the Zhuang people have a deep sense of reverence for the maple tree due to its profound influence.

In China, yellow is often associated with the maturity and harvest of crops. As an agricultural-based ethnic group, the Zhuang people consider yellow as a representation of the bountiful harvest of rice and other crops, symbolizing the prosperity of agriculture and material abundance.

There is more than one type of yellow dye. The main sources are turmeric from the Zingiberaceae family, Cape Jasmine from the Rubiaceae family, and *Buddleja officinalis* from the Loganiaceae family. The parts used for dyeing are the rhizome of turmeric, the ripe fruit of Cape Jasmine, and the buds and inflorescences of *Buddleja officinalis*. These plants contain rich natural pigments, such as curcumin in turmeric, gardenia yellow pigment in Cape Jasmine, and *buddleja* yellow pigment in *Buddleja officinalis*.

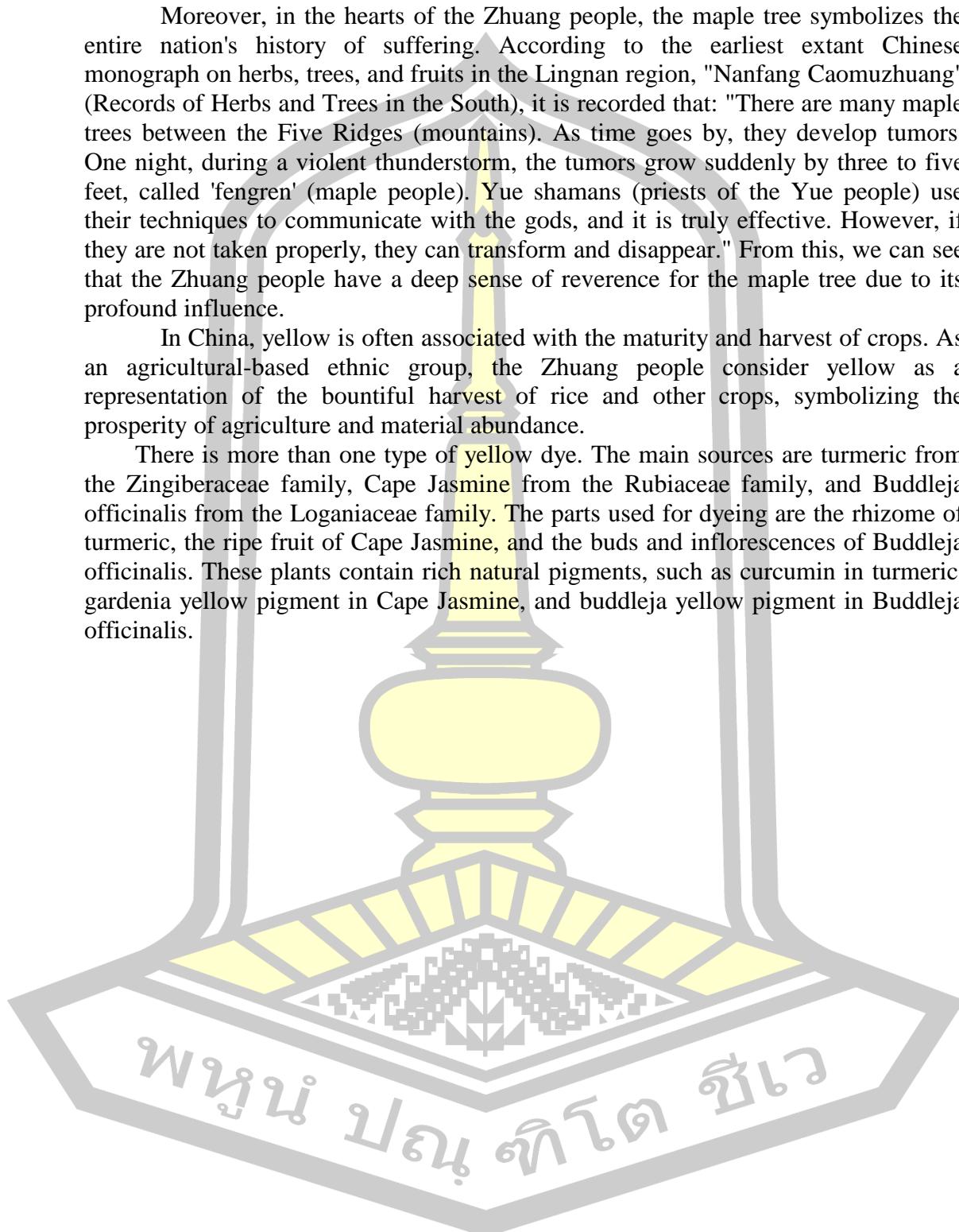




Figure 18 Yellow Dye for Zhuang Five-Color Glutinous Rice - Turmeric (from Lai Meining's Five-Color Cuisine Workshop at Guangxi Traditional Craft Workstation, Guyue Culture and Art Village, Nanyang Town, Qingxiu District, Nanning City, Guangxi)
Source: Liang Hanchang, March 2018, Photographed

Most Zhuang people are accustomed to using *Buddleja officinalis* to dye yellow glutinous rice. *Buddleja officinalis* is commonly referred to as "Huanghua" (yellow flower) in folk, presumably because its flowers can turn water yellow when boiled.

Buddleja officinalis, belonging to the Loganiaceae family, is a deciduous shrub that grows in semi-shaded areas such as hillsides, riverbanks, and hilly regions. It flowers from February to April each year, producing small lavender flowers that bloom for a relatively long period of 2 to 3 months. After the flowers fade, oval capsules form and the dried flowers or buds are used medicinally.

Zhuang people usually collect flowering *Buddleja officinalis* in February and March, select clean branches and leaves, and dry them for storage. *Buddleja officinalis* is cold and has the functions of clearing heat, dispelling wind, cooling blood, and improving vision. As mentioned in the "Compendium of Materia Medica" by Li Shizhen, *Buddleja officinalis* was originally classified as a herb, but later it was reclassified into the woody category, becoming a unique plant that is "used to treat glaucoma, redness, and discomfort in the eyes with excessive tears, eliminate red veins in the eyes, and eye problems caused by indigestion of beans or malnutrition in children."

Another yellow dye is called Huangzhi, which belongs to the Rubiaceae family. It is an evergreen shrub with a height of about 1-2 meters. Its leaves are opposite and elliptical. The flowering period is from May to June, and the fruits mature in November. The fruits are elongated, green when just formed, turning yellow, and then orange-red when ripe. The ripe fruits can be picked and used as dyeing materials. The fruits of Huangzhi are a traditional Chinese medicine that has the effects of clearing heat, removing fire, detoxifying, and dispersing blood stasis.

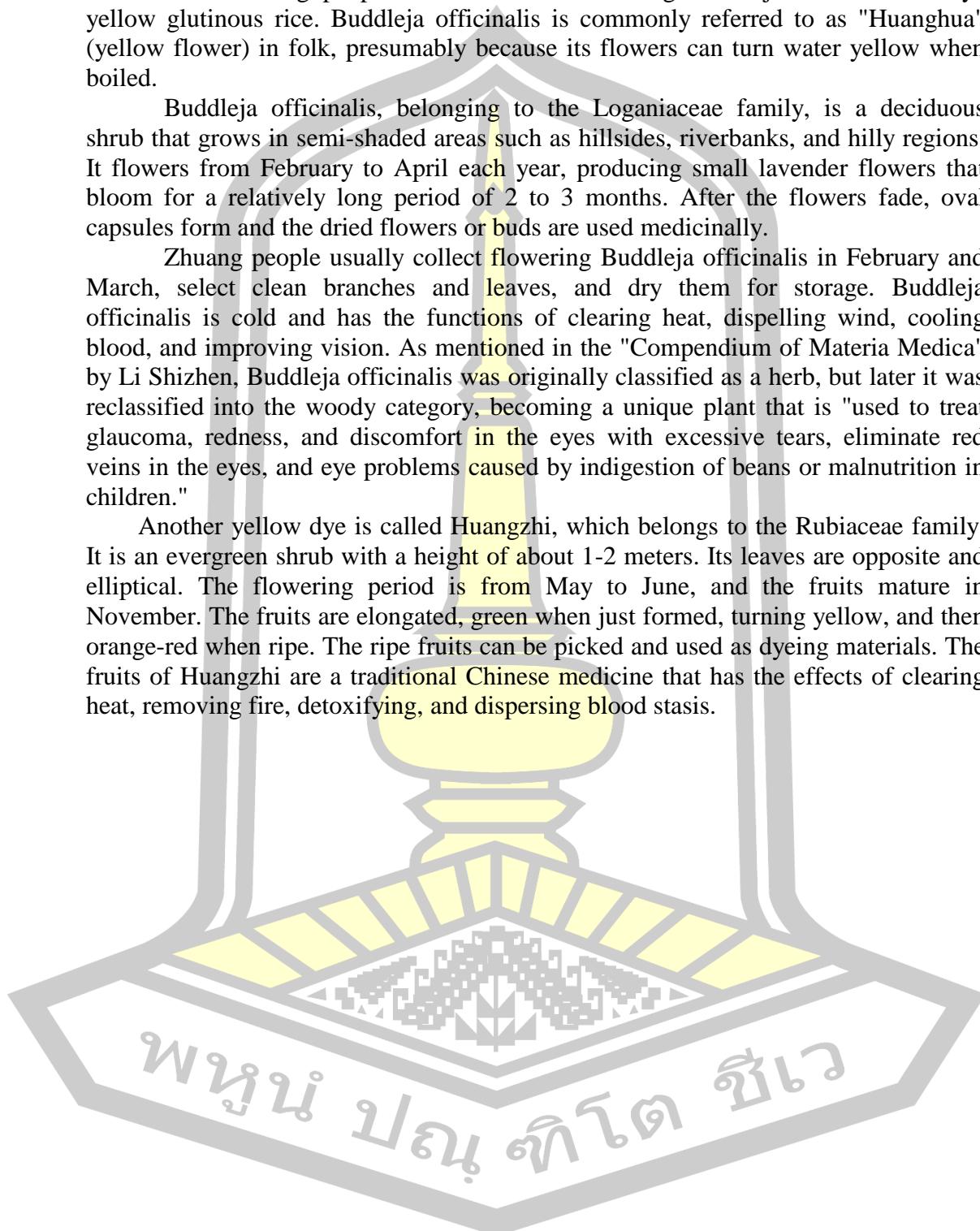




Figure 19 Yellow Dye for Zhuang's Five-Color Glutinous Rice - *Buddleja officinalis* (from Lai Meining's Five-Color Cuisine Workshop at Guangxi Traditional Craft Workstation, Guyue Culture and Art Village, Nanyang Town, Qingxiu District, Nanning City, Guangxi)

Source: Liang Hanchang, March 2018, Photographed.

White plays a very important role in the traditional culture of the Zhuang people, with multiple symbolic meanings such as purity, mystery, sacredness, peace, and love.

White color requires no dyeing, as it is the most authentic hue of glutinous rice. In the grain section of "Compendium of Materia Medica", glutinous rice is given a significant position, and the "rice" mentioned in the book specifically refers to "glutinous rice." Furthermore, the water washed from glutinous rice by the Zhuang people is believed to possess magical effects such as replenishing qi, quenching thirst, relieving diarrhea, and detoxifying.

The Zhuang people have a fond aesthetic impression of blue, which is reflected in the daily clothing of Zhuang women, such as their headscarves, bellybands, and aprons, most of which are blue.

Although blue is not a traditional color for the five-color glutinous rice, in some Zhuang villages, we can still observe glutinous rice dyed in a profound blue hue. This unique blue dye is completely handcrafted by the villagers. They first burn the stalks of glutinous rice into ashes, mix water to form a black solution, and then pour it into

purple dye. They vigorously rub the Red Indigo Plant (Gonglancao), and through this series of elaborate preparations, the captivating blue dye is finally created.

In addition to using glutinous rice gray to make blue dye, some villagers will use butterfly bean flowers to make blue glutinous rice color. Butterfly bean flower, mainly distributed in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and a small amount in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, is a typical tropical vine, blooming all year round, regardless of season. It is rich in vitamins A, C and E, rich in anthocyanins, which can improve immunity, help and promote skin elasticity and collagen generation, and have antioxidant effects. Therefore, while dyeing glutinous rice, it can also enhance the nutritional value of food.

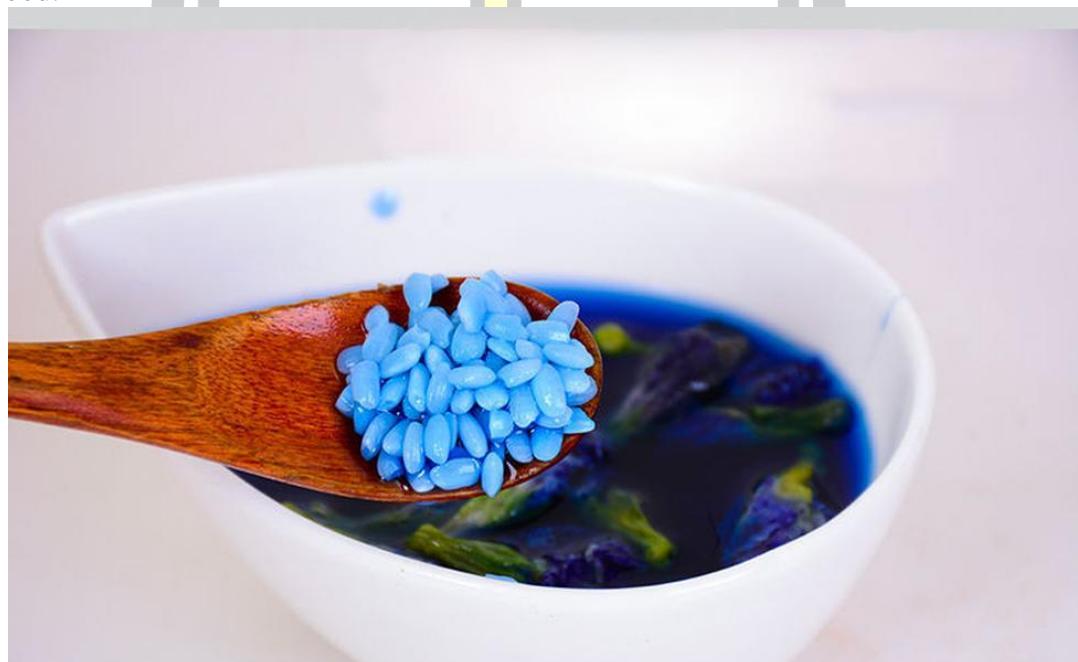


Figure 20 The natural blue pigment in butterfly bean flowers is a natural food dye. The glutinous rice soaked in butterfly bean flower juice is bright in color and fragrant with plants.

Source: <https://image.baidu.com/> [Accessed on September 11, 2023]

The process of transforming white glutinous rice into five-color glutinous rice, which involves dyeing white glutinous rice with various colors using food dyes, is not just a simple culinary process but also encompasses a series of "cooking" techniques as well as Zhuang medicine theories. It can be considered an embodiment of the indigenous wisdom of the Zhuang people.

Color is a manifestation of visual perception, reflecting the refraction of light waves onto objects and into human eyes. Different ethnic groups have varying preferences and aversions towards colors due to their distinct geographical locations, customs, production environments, and thus, different ways of thinking, leading to different interpretations of colors. Color is also a reflection of Zhuang culture and tradition. The colors of the five-color glutinous rice are red, purple, yellow, black, blue, green, and white, which symbolize the Zhuang people's respect for nature, good luck and prosperity, bumper crop yields, peace throughout the four seasons, and unity.

The Zhuang people have had their own distinctive ethnic cultural characteristics since ancient times, and their unique personality and temperament give them a unique pursuit and understanding of color aesthetics. The Zhuang people's understanding of color has undergone a typical process of transformation from simplicity to complexity, from monochromatic to polychromatic. The application of polychromatic colors marks the awakening of the Zhuang people, reflecting their adaptation and tolerance of the diversity of the outside world.

The development of five-color glutinous rice is the best example of this transformation, evolving from the initial black glutinous rice to the five-color glutinous rice with red, yellow, purple, black, and white. In Zhuang customs, purple and red are symbols of vitality and hope, representing summer. Yellow symbolizes abundance and happiness, representing autumn. Black is an expression of good fortune and prosperity in Zhuang, representing spring, while white represents purity and emptiness, representing winter. Therefore, the five-color glutinous rice conveys the message of peace and prosperity for the Zhuang people throughout the four seasons.

The Zhuang people's aesthetic thinking is dual, so that the visual beauty and food value can exist at the same time, to achieve unity, five-color glutinous rice is a typical representative of the Zhuang people's aesthetic standard concept, can be said to be the perfect combination of color, fragrance, mottled, colorful colors, mellow, peaceful, moist and soft taste.

The Zhuang people have believed in primitive religion since ancient times, worshipping nature and inherently venerating the "Five Elements" and "Five Colors." The "wood, fire, earth, metal, and water" correspond to the "green (cyan), red, yellow, white, and black" respectively. Therefore, in Tiandeng County, Guangxi, there are still a few [Zhuang families who steam glutinous rice with the five colors of green \(cyan\), red, yellow, white, and black.](#)

The Zhuang people in other regions of Guangxi rarely use green dye, but instead choose the Red Indigo Plant (Gonglancao), which is abundant and easily found in Guangxi, for dying purposes. The colors of the five-color glutinous rice are directly related to primitive religion, indicating that the Zhuang people have emphasized "harmony between man and nature" since ancient times. They recognize the integration and interdependence between human beings and the universe, acknowledging that nature provides mankind with bounty while mankind respects nature. Using five-color glutinous rice to worship ancestors and gods is also a way to pray for comprehensive blessings from the gods and ancestors.

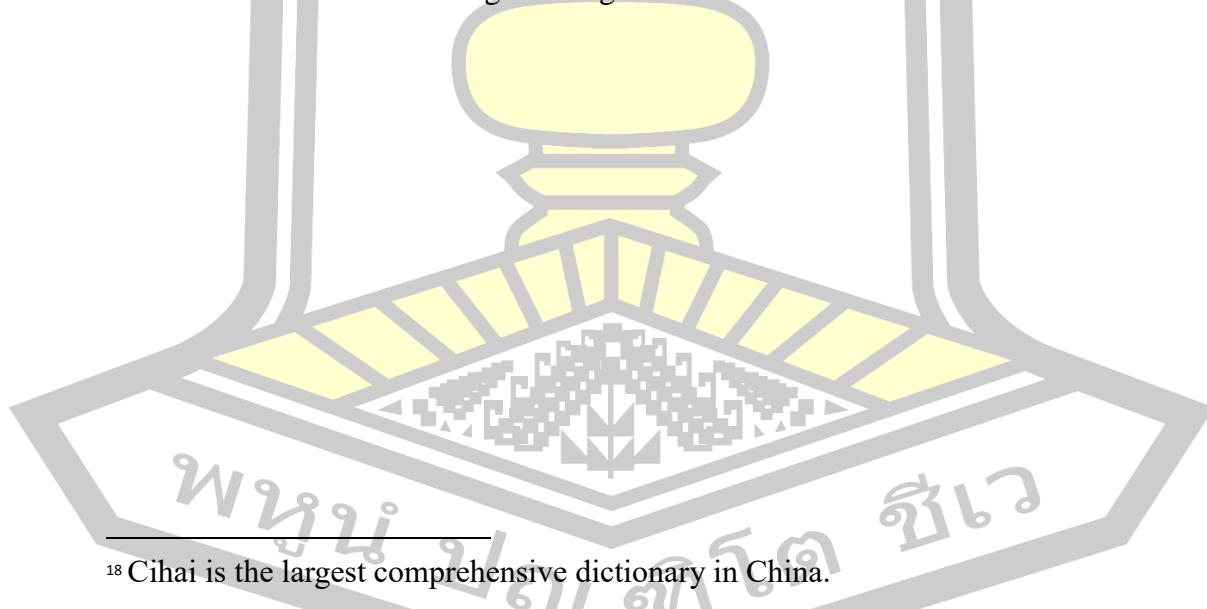
2.2 Tools for making five-color glutinous rice

When humans first used natural fire to cook food, they did not have any tools. Therefore, the emergence of food processing tools is an important symbol of the development of food culture. Dietary utensils are the product of human history developing to a certain stage, as well as the objective product of the laws of human historical development. The social functions of dietary utensils also present a variety of cultural connotations.

The main tool for making five-color glutinous rice nowadays is the wooden steamer. According to the interpretation in "Cihai" ¹⁸(a Chinese dictionary), the basic meanings of "zeng" (steamer) are: "1. An ancient pottery utensil for steaming rice. It has many holes on the bottom for steam to pass through, placed on a tripod-shaped vessel for steaming, similar to a modern steamer; 2. A wooden barrel-like object used for steaming rice nowadays; 3. A utensil for distillation or decomposition of objects." The steamer, the most primitive cooking utensil for steaming, is recorded in various ancient books. It is said in "Ancient History Research"¹⁹ that "the Yellow Emperor invented the pot and steamer, and the way of eating by fire began." This indicates that the steamer appeared in the late primitive society. Later, in the Neolithic Age, pottery steamer emerged, which is also the earliest form of steamer that has been verified. The character "甗" (steamer) has the radical "瓦" (tile), suggesting that the ancestor of the steamer is pottery and it is also the earliest tool used by humans to process food with steam.

The character "甗" in "Shuowen Jiezi"²⁰ (Explanations of Simple and Compound Characters) represents the earliest form of the steamer, and it is also the oldest and most primitive combination of a pot and a steamer.

The "Rites of Zhou" written by Zhou Gongdan, a literary figure of the Western Zhou Dynasty in China, mentions that the "yan" (steamer) consists of two parts: the upper part is the steamer itself, which is a utensil used to hold food and has many small holes at the bottom. The lower part is the "li" (tripod cauldron), a cooking utensil with three legs that resembles a large pot used for boiling water today. The "li" is used to hold water, and by lighting a fire underneath the "li", the food inside the steamer can be steamed through boiling water.



¹⁸ Cihai is the largest comprehensive dictionary in China.

¹⁹ "Ancient History Research" is a historical work created by Qiao Zhou during the Wei and Jin dynasties to correct the errors in the historical events recorded in Sima Qian's "Records of the Grand Historian" from the Zhou and Qin dynasties and earlier.

²⁰ "Shuowen Jiezi" (Explanations of Simple and Compound Characters) is a linguistic reference book compiled by Xu Shen, a scholar of classics and philology from the Eastern Han Dynasty. It is the first dictionary in China and even the world, and the earliest Chinese linguistic dictionary that systematically analyzes the shapes of Chinese characters and examines their etymology.



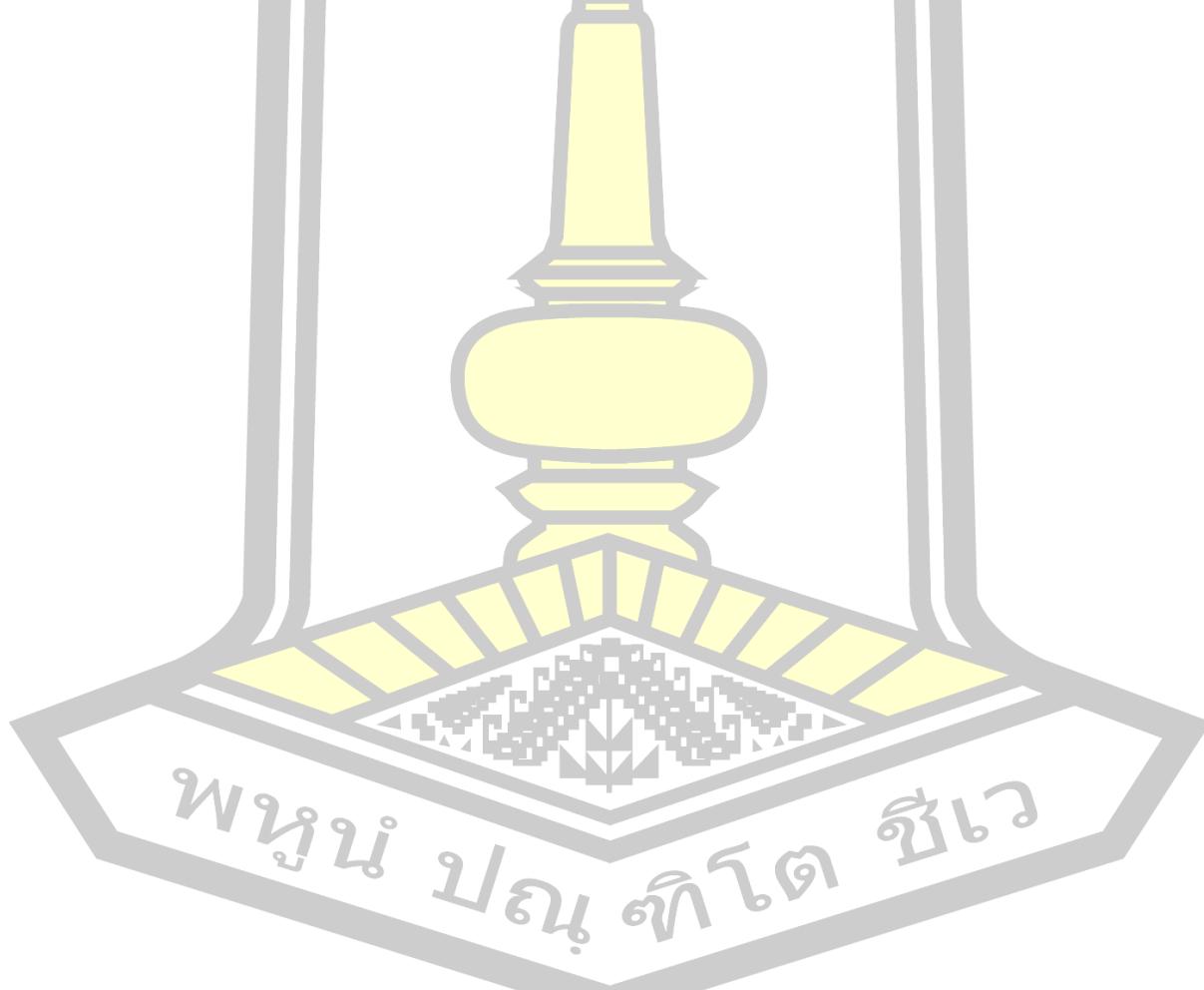
Figure 21 Ancient Chinese cooking utensil for steaming food: Yan
Source:<https://so.redocn.com/> [Accessed on September 11, 2023]

The *Yan* was an ancient Chinese steaming utensil that could be divided into two parts. The lower part was the *li*, used for boiling water, and the upper part was the *zeng*. Between them was a hollow grate used for placing food, allowing steam to pass through.

The early *yan* was a pottery item with an integral upper and lower part, which later gradually developed into a bronze utensil with separable upper and lower sections for easier use. The *yan* combines the triple functions of a pot, steamer, and stove. Bronze *yan* evolved from pottery *yan* and was popular during the Shang Dynasty to the Warring States Period. During the Shang to Western Zhou dynasties, the *yan* was cast with the *zeng* (steamer) and *li* (cauldron) as a single piece, while in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, the *zeng* and *li* could be separated. The *yan* was prevalent during the Shang and Zhou dynasties but became rarer by the Han Dynasty.

In addition to the use of yan, pottery zeng was also used along with pottery pots. Food was placed inside the Zeng, and water was poured into the pot. The zeng was then placed on top of the pot. After lighting a fire under the pot, when the water boils, the steam can pass through the small holes on the bottom of the pottery Zeng to steam the food, which is also the prototype of today's steamer. The emergence of the zeng provided humans with a new cooking method, ending the history of humans only being able to barbecue and boil food.

During the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the zeng further evolved into the "copper zeng," which was found in the tomb of Fu Hao from the Shang Dynasty. After the emergence of ironware, the zeng was then made of iron. As recorded in Sima Qian's "Records of the Grand Historian,"²¹ "Xiang Yu" ²² led all his troops to cross the river, sinking all their boats and breaking their cauldrons and zengs." This indicates that the main cooking utensils used by Xiang Yu's troops were zengs and cauldrons. Therefore, steaming has existed in China for more than 6,000 years, and using steam to cook food is a unique food processing method in China.



²¹ The Records of the Grand Historian is a biographical history book written by Sima Qian, a historian of the Western Han Dynasty. It is the first biographical history in Chinese history.

²² Xiang Yu was a statesman and strategist in the late Qin Dynasty.



Figure 22 The bronze yan is a cooking utensil with a human touch, used for steaming, boiling, or heating food.

Source:<https://so.redocn.com/> [Accessed on September 11, 2023]

After the Han Dynasty, wooden zeng gradually replaced the previous pottery, copper, and iron zengs and has been used up to the present day. There are three main reasons for this replacement: 1) During the cooking process with pottery zeng, the inner wall is prone to peeling, and food is easily contaminated; 2) Metal zengs are expensive to make and heavy in weight, making them inconvenient to use; 3) Wooden zengs embody the meaning of the "five elements" (metal, wood, water, fire, earth) in traditional Chinese culture. Wooden zengs became one of the five elements: iron pot, wooden zeng, water, fire, and earth stove, forming a complete "cooking utensils five-element diagram" in Zhuang families.



Figure 23 The Five Elements Diagram of Cooking Utensils" in Zhuang Ethnic Families in Guangxi

Source: Photo taken by Lu Boan, a reporter from Xinhua News Agency.

On March 25, 2020, in Xiangxian Town, Shanglin County, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, a Zhuang woman was steaming five-colored glutinous rice. The iron pot represents "metal," the wooden zeng represents "wood," the burning firewood represents "fire," water is put into the iron pot, and coupled with the earthen stove, the "five elements" (metal, wood, water, fire, earth) are gathered, forming a "The Five Elements Diagram of Cooking Utensils" in Zhuang Ethnic Families in Guangxi.

2.3 The use of five-colored glutinous rice in Zhuang traditional festivals

The traditional food of the Zhuang people, five-colored glutinous rice, is consumed on important occasions such as reunions, sacrificial rites, and celebrations. In Guangxi, the Zhuang people generally steam and cook five-colored glutinous rice on the third day of the third lunar month every year, and in a few Zhuang regions, it is also steamed and consumed on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month.

Behind the ritual activities held during traditional festivals, there is inevitably a set of concepts and belief systems that accompany them. The concepts and beliefs behind the rituals are also where the meaning of such activities lies. The festivals and rituals of various ethnic groups in China are rich and diverse.

The Zhuang ethnic group holds a mythological belief in the spiritual nature of all things, worshiping many natural objects, including ancestors and spirits. They believe that although ancestors have passed away, their spirits still exist and that these spirits will continue to live with them and their descendants. Therefore, the Zhuang people offer sacrifices to their ancestors on the third day of the third lunar month every year, praying for their blessings and a happy and auspicious life. The ancestor worship ceremony has specific rituals, originating as a collective behavior in primitive society and representing the concrete manifestation of the transition from primitive worship to religion.

The Zhuang ethnic group believes in ancestor worship, and in their view, the soul is not an illusory existence but a substantial one. It has a residence, emotions, and desires. After a person dies, their soul continues to live in another world and remains connected with the living through sacrificial rituals, bringing happiness to people.

The early ancestor worship of the Zhuang ethnic group was the adoration of the clan leaders and heroes in the tribal group, which gradually disappeared with the collapse of the primitive society. However, the belief in tribal ancestors has transformed into veneration for the initial founders of villages or individuals who have made significant contributions to the interests of the village. As families continue to develop individually, many beliefs and offerings to household ancestors have also formed, thus forming the most specific ancestor worship among each family in the Zhuang ethnic group.

The Zhuang people believe that every individual has a soul residing within their body, which is indestructible and exists independently. When a person dies, it is only the body that perishes, while the soul remains and transforms into a gods or ghost. The objects of this belief are their ancestors spanning several generations who are related by blood. According to the Zhuang people, ancestors have three souls, which go to different places. One soul goes to the graveyard and is called the tomb guardian spirit, blessing descendants with prosperity, but cannot return home. Another soul

resides on the shrine at home, protecting the family's safety. The third soul is reborn into a new life.

On the third day of the third lunar month, the Zhuang people begin to offer sacrifices to their ancestors, mainly at the shrine and the cemetery. Shrine worship, also known as domestic worship, is the offering of sacrifices to the ancestors of past generations residing in the shrine. From a representational perspective, domestic worship best embodies the blood relationship between the deceased ancestors and the living.

No matter what the living standards are, the Zhuang people never forget their roots and set up a shrine in their homes to place the ancestral tablets. On the morning of the third day of the third lunar month, after steaming the five-colored glutinous rice, the Zhuang people first place the prepared offerings on the shrine for the ancestors to consume, light candles and incense, and family members will kowtow in front of the shrine.

Tomb worship refers to sacrificing to the ancestral spirits residing in the graves. Graves have always been important places for worshiping ghosts and spirits, as well as places for communication between ancestors and descendants. The Zhuang people in Guangxi choose to hold a worship ceremony at their ancestors' graves on the third day of the third lunar month.

During the sacrificial ceremony, it is essential to burn incense and light candles. The Zhuang people believe that burning incense allows their ancestors to smell the aroma and accurately find their way home to enjoy the food offered. Meanwhile, lighting candles enables their ancestors to see the light and recognize the sincerity of those worshipping, so that the ancestors can grant them the blessings they pray for.

Throughout the entire ceremony, the offering, the person, and the soul form a stable triangular structure, with the "person-offering-soul" triad being linked together through the burning incense and candles. As Levi-Strauss mentions in his book *The Savage Mind*, the offering serves as a medium for communication between humans and gods: "Sacrifice is an absolute or extreme activity, which is related to an intermediary."

Since ancient times, humans have believed that both humans and gods need food and drink. Hence, food offerings came into existence. Food offerings are materialized symbolic representations that connect the secular world with deities. Without communication through offerings, all religious sacrifices would lose their meaning.

Freud believed that "such sacrificial rituals belong to the common celebration of the whole clan. Therefore, religious rituals become an important part of society, and the responsibilities required by religion also become the yardstick of social morality and values. Wherever there are sacrificial rituals, there must be grand celebrations, and wherever there are celebrations, there must also be sacrificial rituals. Sacrificial celebrations are often the climax of people's revelry and the most natural way of communication between people and between humans and gods."

Gods are the targets of human bribery, and food serves as the role of the bribe. The fundamental reason for choosing food lies in that food is the source and maintainer of life, representing the power of life and being indispensable to humans. By offering food as a sacrifice, gods grant blessings to humans, fulfilling any wish desired by humans.

Humans personify gods, believing that gods, like humans, must first satisfy their basic hunger before fulfilling human demands. In this way, sacrificial food culturally serves as a "mediator" that enables communication between humans and gods.

Since sacrificial food plays such an important role, the selection process cannot be arbitrary. Not only must the offerings chosen have a clear purpose, but the selection procedure also has strict requirements. One basic condition for selecting offerings is that a certain offering must represent the intentions of the worshippers, which is why offerings differ in different regions and ecological environments.

Among the food offerings, grains occupy the second place. Food offerings usually consist mainly of six cereals: broomcorn millet, common millet, rice, sorghum, wheat, and wild rice, which were staple foods for people in the ancient Central Plains and also crucial foods offered to gods in sacrificial rites. Offering rice to gods is a common practice among many ethnic groups. Besides directly using these six cereals for sacrificial rites, people often process them into various types of offerings to sacrifice to gods.

The ritual of ancestor worship on the third day of the third lunar month among the Zhuang people embodies the ritual forms and religious beliefs of the Zhuang ethnicity. This sacrificial ceremony integrates the religion and rituals of the Zhuang people, who hold a firm belief in ancestor worship and the concept of "animism," believing that all things possess spirits.

In the view of Zhuang people, the soul of their ancestors has a direct relationship with the happiness of life. They must let their ancestors feel their piety, which requires sacrifices and offerings and also brings a direct connection between religion and ritual.

Through the sacrificial rituals, human beings expressed their emotions and needs, and the gods completed the process of humanization. At this time, human beings have completed the process of worshipping physical objects, and the worship of supernatural power has been strengthened, while the Zhuang people have constructed ancestral souls that can dominate everything and exist, and have established a close and friendly relationship with the ancestral souls during the rituals of worship, even to the extent that they believe that they can influence the souls' thinking.

Therefore, sacrificial rites represent a value-oriented activity based on equality. In such activities, the food offerings presented by humans to gods are a shared necessity for both parties. From then on, humans and gods rely on each other, with humans deriving their strength from gods, and gods depending on the sacrificial offerings.

When the Zhuang people offer sacrifices to the ancestors and the souls of cattle, they must use five-colored glutinous rice in addition to meat. This is closely related to the profound rice culture in the Zhuang region. The Zhuang people, influenced by the rice culture, must offer the most precious glutinous rice among all rice varieties during ancestor worship.

In the folklore of the Zhuang people, the emergence of five-colored glutinous rice is intended to commemorate the filial, diligent, brave, and upright ancestors of the Zhuang people. Therefore, the symbolic meaning expressed by five-colored glutinous rice is not only a remembrance of the ancestors but also a hope for a better life in the future.

Five-colored glutinous rice is in line with the religious sacrificial norms of the Zhuang people, and its morphological characteristics displayed in color, ingredients, and taste are consistent with the traditional value orientation of the Zhuang people.

In the religious sacrificial process of traditional Chinese society, there exist two distinct types of specific ways to handle offerings: one is the symbolic eating and drinking behavior with natural characteristics, where people take special actions to destroy the offerings in specific natural spaces or environments that symbolize the presence of gods, indicating that the gods enjoy the offerings, such as burning offerings, burying offerings, and so on.

The other type is the symbolic eating and drinking behavior with ethical characteristics, where people share the offerings after the sacrificial ceremony. As mentioned in "The Book of Rites", "It is permissible to offer sacrifices first and then eat, but not permissible to eat first and then offer sacrifices." After the sacrificial activities, the five-colored glutinous rice is also consumed by the Zhuang people.



Figure 24 Ancestor Worship Activity on the Third Day of the Third Lunar Month in Zhuang Ethnic Families in Guangxi

source : <https://www.meipian.cn/> [Accessed on September 11, 2023]

On the early morning of the third day of the third lunar month every year, Zhuang families prepare delicious food and dishes to offer sacrifices to their ancestors and pray for blessings from their ancestors. After the sacrificial ceremony, the descendants enjoy the feast together.

In the process of sacrifice, sacrifice is one of the basic characteristics of a religious ceremony. Religion is a common activity of the members of a community, and all sacrificial activities are accompanied by a feast. The food sacrifice is the main body of the feast, that is, people continue to enjoy the food sacrifice.

From a cultural perspective, the sharing of the same food between humans and gods is no longer solely for sustenance, but an expression of the intimate bond between the two. Therefore, food offerings have become an interactive tool for the integration of humans and gods, serving the interests of humans subjectively. Freud stated, "Wherever several people are gathered together and have a meal in common, a sacred bond is established among them the moment they have all taken a bit from the same dish."

The five-colored glutinous rice is also shared between humans and gods. On the morning of the third day of the third lunar month every year, the Zhuang people bring offerings such as five-colored glutinous rice to offer sacrifices to their ancestors. After the ancestral worship, the whole family gathers together to share the five-colored glutinous rice. Eating and drinking together among people represents the existence of affection between them and is also a positive social behavior.

Sharing food with the souls of ancestors is a way for people to express their hope of being closely related to their ancestors' spirits. Why do people offer sacrifices to their ancestors first and then consume them? This is a way of handling offerings according to the moral norms of the Zhuang people. The social nature of human beings determines that an individual is incomplete, and only when a person is in a community can he become a complete person.

From being enjoyed by the gods to being shared by everyone, the five-colored glutinous rice represents a deepening of the moral consciousness of the Zhuang people. The final stage of the sacrificial ceremony, where the five-colored glutinous rice is shared, has risen to become a symbol of interpersonal recognition among the Zhuang people. The food that appears in sacrificial ceremonies and feasts has already transcended its basic function as food and become a spiritual and artistic expression, which is also one of the social functions of the five-colored glutinous rice.

2.4 The Use of Five-Colored Glutinous Rice in Other Chinese Festivals

The visual characteristics of the external shape of food are easily compared and associated with people's internal concepts and consciousness, thus deriving symbolic meanings. [Feng Zhiming, Ni Shuixiong, 2007, P4] Pictographic implication is the most direct form of food symbol encoding.

The five-colored glutinous rice made by the Zhuang people, arranged in a circular shape, symbolizes family reunion, abundance, happiness, and other life aspirations based on the fundamental concept of "completeness." Here, the "shape" refers not only to the form but also to the image of food constructed by a series of factors such as morphology and color.

Up to now, the five-colored glutinous rice has not only been an indispensable part of traditional festivals of the Zhuang people in Guangxi, but also plays a significant role and attracts attention and affection as a distinctive symbol of local

culture with its unique food image in national festivals such as the Spring Festival, National Day, Mid-Autumn Festival, and Tomb-Sweeping Day in China. As a dietary symbol carrying special meanings, the five-colored glutinous rice can demonstrate its unique charm on different festival occasions, becoming an important bond connecting the past with the future, and tradition with modernity.

The Spring Festival is an extremely important traditional holiday for Chinese people, marking the beginning of a new year and implying auspiciousness, reunion, harmony, and happiness. It symbolizes the continuation of life and the arrival of hope, serving as a significant moment for Chinese families to reunite. The Spring Festival also holds significant importance for the people of the Zhuang ethnic group in Guangxi.

The Spring Festival is a time for the Zhuang people to reunite. Since the five-colored glutinous rice symbolizes good luck, abundance, and happiness in Zhuang culture, the five colors represent different meanings. For instance, red symbolizes good fortune and prosperity, green represents vitality, and yellow signifies a bumper crop of grain. Therefore, the Zhuang people make five-colored glutinous rice and share it with their families to express their best wishes for the New Year and their beautiful expectations for life.

To usher in the auspicious Year of the Dragon in 2024 and create a festive, joyful, warm, and harmonious atmosphere, a series of events named "Intangible Cultural Heritage Celebrating the Spring Festival and Cultural Activities Entering Thousands of Homes" in 2024 are co-hosted by the Nanning Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television, and Tourism, the Nanning Institute of Ethnic Cultural Arts (Nanning Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center), as well as the Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television, Sports, and Tourism of various counties (cities, districts), and development zones.

From January 13 to February 24, 2024, a series of cultural activities will be launched in Nanning through a combination of online and offline methods. To enhance citizens' cultural experience during the Spring Festival, Xinhui Academy has specially planned a series of intangible cultural heritage workshops. Pan Honghua, an inheritor of the craftsmanship of making five-colored glutinous rice, was invited to give a lecture on site with her five-colored glutinous rice. Through Pan Honghua's lecture, the seeds of cultural inheritance were unknowingly planted in the hearts of citizens and tourists.





Figure 25Pan Honghua, the inheritor of the Guangxi autonomous region's intangible cultural heritage of five-colored glutinous rice making techniques.

Source: Chen Yanyan, Photographed on February 15, 2024

On the sixth day of the Lunar New Year in 2024, Pan Honghua, the inheritor of the Guangxi autonomous region's intangible cultural heritage of five-colored glutinous rice making techniques, held a promotional event for the experience of the intangible cultural heritage production techniques at Xinhui Academy, the best-preserved Qing Dynasty building in Nanning, Guangxi. This event focused on the protection, inheritance, and practice of intangible cultural heritage, while also enhancing the influence of inheritors of intangible cultural heritage techniques.

Pan Honghua, an inheritor of the Guangxi autonomous region's intangible cultural heritage of five-colored glutinous rice-making techniques, was once a teacher. She learned to make five-colored glutinous rice from her grandmother since childhood and listened to her grandmother's stories about it. Influenced by her grandmother's teachings, Pan Honghua developed a strong interest in Zhuang ethnic cuisine culture. In 2018, the inheritance base for the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region's intangible cultural heritage of "Zhuang Ethnic Five-Colored Glutinous Rice Making Techniques" was officially unveiled, and Pan Honghua resolutely resigned from her stable job to become the head of the base. In 2021, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region's Department of Culture and Tourism released a public notice on the "Recommended List of Representative Inheritors for the Seventh Batch of Autonomous Region-level Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative Projects in

Guangxi," and Pan Honghua became the representative inheritor of the autonomous region-level Zhuang Ethnic Five-Colored Glutinous Rice Making Techniques project. Since then, she has actively promoted and advocated for five-colored glutinous rice from the perspective of a member of the Zhuang ethnic group.

广西第七批自治区级非物质文化遗产代表性项目代表性传承人推荐名单 Recommended List of Representative Inheritors of the Seventh Batch of Representative Projects of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Guangxi Autonomous Region						
序号	姓名	性别	民族	出生年月	项目名称	推荐单位
南宁市 (17)						
1	梁肇儒	男	壮族	1955. 03	横县壮族三相圩逢	横州市文化馆
2	李秀连	女	壮族	1970. 09	横县云表壮族歌圩	横州市文化馆
3	陆云岗	男	汉族	1966. 12	宾阳油纸伞制作技艺	宾阳县文化馆
4	雷桂丰	男	壮族	1956. 08	上林壮族师公舞	上林县文化馆
5	廖玉兰	女	壮族	1968. 05	马山丝弦戏	马山县文化馆
6	梁耀京	男	壮族	1967. 03	壮族会鼓	马山县文化馆
7	李映浩	女	汉族	1978. 09	瑶族壁和骨伤疗法	江南区文化馆
8	梁碧云	女	汉族	1956. 08	疍家婚礼	江南区文化馆
9	周建孟	男	壮族	1961. 10	南宁香火龙舞(青秀区壮族芭蕉香火龙舞)	青秀区文化馆
10	张月珍	女	壮族	1964. 03	蒲庙花婆节	邕宁区文化馆
11	罗启明	男	壮族	1952. 03	武鸣生榨米粉制作技艺	武鸣区文化馆
12	Pan Honghua	女	汉族	1965. 09	Technique of making five-coloured glutinous rice	Wuming District Cultural Centre
13	甘保辉	男	壮族	1974. 04	武鸣柠檬鸭制作技艺	武鸣区文化馆
14	何春连	女	汉族	1972. 11	武鸣灵马旱藕粉制作技艺	武鸣区文化馆

Figure 26 Pan Honghua is on the public list of recommended representative inheritors for the seventh batch of representative projects of intangible cultural heritage at the autonomous region level in Guangxi.

source: Website of the Department of Culture and Tourism of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region gxzf.gov.cn [Accessed on March 11, 2024]

In applying for provincial-level and national-level intangible cultural heritage, the most important task is to authenticate the qualification of the applied project. The key to judging whether a project is qualified lies in whether it can meet the evaluation criteria for intangible cultural heritage. In 2007, the application requirements for national-level intangible cultural heritage proposed four criteria: having outstanding historical, cultural, and scientific value; being typical and representative of demonstrating the cultural creativity of the Chinese nation; having the characteristics of being passed down from generation to generation within a certain group and existing in an active state; and having distinctive characteristics with significant influence in the local area.

In an interview with researchers, Pan Honghua expressed her aspiration to promote and popularize this handicraft, serving as a successor to the Zhuang ethnic group's culinary culture. Therefore, Pan Honghua would conduct presentations and teach people how to make five-colored glutinous rice during every Chinese festival and celebration. Additionally, she actively participates in various cultural exchange activities, bringing five-colored glutinous rice to more places and enabling more people to understand and taste this unique Zhuang food.



Figure 27 A group photo of researchers and Pan Honghua, the inheritor of five-color glutinous rice intangible heritage technology

Source: Yanyan Chen 2024.1 Photograph

The researcher went to Wucaizhuang Township, Wuming District, Nanning City, to visit the Zhuang folk intangible heritage Museum and interview Pan Honghua, the inheritor of five-color glutinous rice intangible heritage technology.

Guangxi is a national demonstration zone for ethnic unity and progress. Twelve ethnic groups, including Zhuang, Han, Yao, Miao, and Dong, live together in harmony and friendship. Guangxi is the main concentration place of Zhuang nationality, Zhuang food culture also has a profound influence on the culture of other surrounding ethnic groups.

On February 3, 2024, researchers came to Chengyang Bazhai in Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County, Liuzhou City, Guangxi for research. The Dong people in Sanjiang County uphold their unique traditional customs to welcome the New Year. On the eve of the Spring Festival, Dong women are busy pounding glutinous rice cakes, wrapping zongzi (rice dumplings), frying fried doughnuts, making oil tea, and preparing five-colored glutinous rice to celebrate the New Year in a distinctive way.

In the traditional festivals of the Dong people, five-colored glutinous rice, besides being used for sacrificial purposes, has also become a must-have gift when the Dong people visit relatives during the Spring Festival. The Dong people have a

tradition that "on the first day of the lunar new year, they do not go out", "on the second day, they visit their mother's family", and "on the third day, they start to visit relatives." On the second day of the lunar new year, daughters take their husbands-in-law back to their mother's home, and parents prepare five-colored glutinous rice for their daughters, symbolizing their good wishes for them. The five-colored glutinous rice during the Spring Festival visit is a symbolic representation of expressing emotions and caring for relatives and friends. Both the giver and the receiver convey their best wishes through the medium of five-colored glutinous rice.



Figure 28 The researcher interviewed Wu Huifen, a villager who made five-color glutinous rice in Chengyang Bazhai village, Liuzhou, Guangxi
Source: Photography by Chen Yanyan, February 2024.

On February 3, 2024, researchers arrived in Chengyang Bazhai, and villager Wu Huifen told them, "During the Spring Festival, the Dong people make and eat five-colored glutinous rice to pray for a bumper crop and the prosperity of their descendants. The traditional folk customs and food experience activities held in Chengyang Bazhai allow tourists from all over the world and audiences across the country to experience the unique New Year of Guangxi's ethnic minorities from close quarters."

The Zhuang five-colored glutinous rice follows rigorous standards in both material selection and production methods, and its deliciousness depends precisely on these two key elements. The production process of this delicacy not only integrates the profound emotions, exquisite skills, moral concepts, and artistic aesthetics of the Zhuang people but also represents a multi-dimensional cultural embodiment. The Zhuang five-colored glutinous rice is not only a delicious dish made following specific production procedures but also carries the rich ideology of the Zhuang people. Therefore, it has become a unique dietary cultural symbol. From this perspective, it conveys profound meanings and becomes a medium for people to identify and understand the dietary and cultural information of the Zhuang people.

Part 3 Liuzhou River snails rice noodle: The common food memory of Guangxi people

The food itself carries rich meanings, connecting local food with local culture and embodying inheritance. After being invented and created by ancestors, these foods are passed down and innovated from generation to generation. Over time, these foods have transformed from simple edible items - serving the purpose of eating, to multi-faceted symbolic objects - local dietary symbols. When a certain food is embedded in the daily diet of a local group, it gradually becomes a "taste of home" and serves as a dietary memory for locals. As a familiar dietary symbol for Guangxi people, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle have become a representative of local culture in Liuzhou, Guangxi. Therefore, while food serves as a unique identifier, symbol, or representation, it can also be a carrier for establishing local identity.

As an important part of food anthropology, the research on the construction of food symbols and food identity has continuously enriched in recent years. After the 1980s, the focus of food anthropology shifted to issues such as globalization, food and identity, and symbolic meanings of food. Once food culture became an object of research for the analysis of symbols and symbolic meanings, food was regarded as information, and "eating" became a form of social communication.

3.1 The origin of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle

Local cuisine is closely related to people's dietary habits and environmental climate. Liuzhou is located in the central and northern part of Guangxi, and the Lijiang River flows through the urban area, with unique karst landforms. Due to its subtropical monsoon climate, with sufficient annual precipitation and a warm and humid environment, local people prefer sour and spicy foods. Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, which are spicy, sour, and refreshing, can stimulate people's appetite and dispel dampness and cold, perfectly meeting the needs of the locals. Moreover, it is

affordable, generous in portions, and delicious, and over time, it has become a favorite delicacy of the locals.

There are mainly two views on the origin of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle. The first is the "historical record theory." This view holds that the origin of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle dates back to Liu Zongyuan, one of the Eight Great Prose Masters²³ of the Tang and Song dynasties. According to legend, when Liu Zongyuan was demoted to Liuzhou, Guangxi, due to his poor mood, he was depressed every day and had difficulty sleeping and eating, resulting in his gradual emaciation. The doctor was at a loss, and Zhou Wanfu, the chef of the mansion, was also very worried. One day, while washing vegetables by the Liujiang River, he accidentally found a few river snails and picked them up. He used local recipes in Liuzhou to stew soup with star anise, basil, river snails, sour bamboo shoots, and dried bean curd sheets, creating a dish. Liu Zongyuan's appetite increased significantly when he saw it, and he liked it very much, naming it Liuzhou River snails rice noodle.

The second view is the "local origin theory." In the late 1970s, folk trade in Liuzhou began to revive, with bustling night markets appearing in every street and alley. The Gufu Street market gradually became the largest gathering place for river snail wholesale in Liuzhou, and with a large number of workers nearby, night markets also emerged. Liuzhou people have always had the habit of eating rice noodles and river snails, and savvy owners would usually operate two stalls simultaneously, one for boiling river snails and the other for cooking rice noodles. When customers saw the glossy river snail soup while eating the noodles, they would add a spoon or two of the soup to enhance the flavor. Over time, this led to the formation of the embryonic form of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle. As time passed, the ingredients of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle became increasingly diverse, with dried bean curd sheets, long beans, pickled vegetables, and peanuts being incorporated into this small bowl of noodles, forming the current version of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle.

The local origin theory, among the two views mentioned above, reflects the combination and adaptation of people's subjective initiative and the objective conditions of the regional environment, adding "local" significance and triggering people's cultural identity with the region. Compared with the "historical record origin theory," this view is more convincing. Although these two views on the origin of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle differ in their explanations, they share a common characteristic: they were discovered through coincidence and chance, and have been continuously improved over time, becoming more closely integrated with local characteristics and carrying richer cultural meanings.

3.2 The Culture Embedded in Liuzhou River Snails Rice Noodle

A genuine bowl of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle should present white rice noodles, verdant vegetables, golden bean curd sticks, red peanuts, black fungus, striking red oil, and appetizing sour bamboo shoots. The combination of diverse

²³ Eight masters of prose in Tang and Song Dynasties, also known as "Eight masters of prose in Tang and Song Dynasties", are the collective name of eight essayists in Tang Dynasty and Song Dynasty, respectively, Han Yu, Liu Zongyuan and Ouyang Xiu, Su Xun, Su Shi, Su Zhe, Wang Anshi and Zeng Gong.

ingredients creates a unique flavor, and the tastes of various ingredients are not overshadowed but instead enrich the layered flavor of the rice noodles. The ethnic exchanges and integration in Guangxi are just like this bowl of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, "harmony in diversity, sharing beauty with all." Different ethnic cultures have brought them closer together through integration and collision and also inspired unique new flavors of different ethnic groups.



Figure 29 A bowl of authentic Liuzhou River snails rice noodle
Source: Chen Yanyan, photographed in January 2024.

Liuzhou River snails rice noodle in the main materials: river snails, bean curd bamboo, dry cut powder. Accessories: Pork backbone, fried peanuts, sour bamboo shoots, black fungus, sour beans, green vegetables. Liuzhou local river snails rice noodle is often "sour, spicy, fresh, cool, hot" readily available. A bowl of excellent river snails rice noodles, rice noodles strong way, sour and crisp, oil tofu to absorb the soup, a chopstick down lips and teeth to leave fragrance.

1. Culture of "Noodles"

The special natural environment of Guangxi determines that rice cultivation is the foundation of its agricultural development, which in turn shapes the dietary habits of Guangxi people - a daily diet that mainly consists of rice. As one of the major ethnic groups that have lived in Guangxi for generations, the Zhuang people have gradually formed the "Na culture" ("Na" refers to paddy fields in the Zhuang language) through long-term integration with multiple ethnic groups. This culture has cultivated a dietary habit that relies on "Na" for food, and rice noodles are one of them [Huang Anhui, 2005].

It is difficult to verify the historical origin or provenance of rice noodles, but among various versions of its origin, the theory of "rice noodles originating from the Qin Dynasty" due to Emperor Qin Shi Huang's expedition to the south of the Five Ridges and the construction of Lingqu Canal is the most widely circulated and convincing among the people, as it perfectly aligns with the narrative elements of the legend.

First, this argument effectively connects the history of Guilin, Guangxi, and even Lingnan with the Central Plains dynasties. Since ancient times, the Lingnan region has been considered a "barbarian land of the south." After Emperor Qin Shi Huang pacified Lingnan and established Nanhai, Guilin, and Xiang Prefectures, he incorporated Lingnan into the territory of the Central Plains dynasties. Since then, the Han Chinese from the Central Plains began to migrate to Lingnan, living together with the Baiyue people, jointly developing and managing Lingnan. This marked the beginning of large-scale interactions, exchanges, and integration between various ethnic groups in the north and south.

Secondly, this argument reflects the integration of the dietary cultures of the Han people in the Central Plains and the Baiyue people in the South, serving as an important carrier and symbol of the compatibility of northern and southern cultures, representing the power of ethnic unity. After Qin Shi Huang conquered Lingnan, a large number of northern soldiers, craftsmen, and laborers migrated there, naturally bringing their customs and habits to Lingnan. At the same time, they were influenced by the culture of Lingnan, including the dietary culture. Since wheat grows well in the north and can be made into "noodles," but only rice is grown in the south, a new food imitating northern noodles (known as "soup cakes" at that time) was created—rice noodles.

Thirdly, this argument expresses the nostalgia of Chinese people. The reason why the northern soldiers insisted on grinding rice into powder making it into a paste and then shaping it into rice noodles based on the look of their hometown's noodles, was that they were not accustomed to the southern rice. Additionally, being away from home for years of warfare, they inevitably felt homesick. Eating a bite of their hometown's cuisine, even if it was not noodles but resembled them, could greatly alleviate their homesickness. This was a common sentiment among the border soldiers and wandering travelers far from home, and an important manifestation of cohesion. Fourthly, this argument is "ancient and long-standing" enough to unfold cultural rendering with historical value and local characteristics, achieving an intriguing effect. Legends generally possess characteristics such as nationality, history, and legend. The older the legend is, the more it can inspire people's nostalgia and reflection on the past. Tracing the origin of rice noodles back to the Qin Dynasty demonstrates that Guangxi rice noodles possess profound historical roots and cultural heritage, fulfilling people's psychological expectations of legends.

Guangxi rice noodles are rich in nutritional value, diverse in variety, and convenient to eat, making them an essential delicacy on the dining tables of Guangxi people. Liuzhou River snails rice noodle successfully integrates the cultures of the Han ethnic group and ethnic minorities, creating a harmonious blend of "sour, spicy, fresh, and fragrant" flavors.

2. Culture of "Sour"

When it comes to Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, there is a saying circulating on the internet: "There are only two kinds of people in the world: those who love to eat river snails rice noodle and those who have never tasted it." Due to its unique "sour and pungent" flavor, not everyone can accept Liuzhou River snails rice noodle. It is often observed that those who love to eat it are eagerly anticipating it and enjoy it heartily, while those who dislike it will flee in panic as soon as they smell its odor.

Whenever a Liuzhou River snails rice noodle shop opens on the street, one can smell its "pungent" aroma even from a far distance. Moreover, many people still smell the aroma throughout the day after eating the noodles, lingering for a long time and leaving a lingering aftertaste.

The "sour" and "pungent" flavors are precisely the soul and signature feature of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle. The "pungent" flavor of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle is not unpleasant in the traditional sense, but rather the unique aroma of pickled bamboo shoots. People in Liuzhou have loved sour flavors since ancient times, and many families pickle their bamboo shoots as a daily accompaniment to meals.

In terms of production, people select tender and juicy bamboo shoots as the main ingredient, add mountain spring water, and ferment them in large jars to create a sour and pungent odor similar to stinky tofu. The love of sour food among people in Liuzhou is also traceable. On one hand, due to the low latitude and relatively high temperature, especially in summer, the heat makes people lose their appetite. However, sour food helps with digestion and absorption, enhances appetite, eliminates greasiness, and regulates the spleen and stomach, achieving the effect of stimulating the appetite before meals and relieving greasiness after meals. Therefore, it is deeply loved by the locals.

On the other hand, most areas of Liuzhou are karst landscapes with a large amount of limestone, resulting in a high calcium ion content and hardness of the water. Long-term drinking of such water can easily lead to kidney stones. Acidic foods can utilize their solubility to a certain extent, achieving the effect of acid-base neutralization, reducing the accumulation of stones in the body, and decreasing the risk of illness.

Of course, acidic dishes are not unique to the Zhuang ethnic group. In ancient times, food resources were scarce and precious. To prevent spoilage, people would preserve leftover food in jars through fermentation, which could be consumed as a condiment for a relatively long period of time. There is a saying among the people that "the Dong people cannot be separated from sour food" and "the Miao people cannot be separated from sour food." The Dong people are well-known for their sour fish and sour meat, and the Miao people also have many sour-flavored foods. Due to their geographical proximity, the Zhuang people in Guangxi also have a preference for sour foods, such as pickled bamboo shoots and pickled vegetables. Over time, the unique "sour" flavors of different ethnic groups have blended, learning from each other's strengths and overcoming weaknesses, resulting in the distinctive "pickled bamboo shoot" flavor in Liuzhou River snails rice noodle today.

In summary, this small bowl of noodles contains cultural memories of various ethnic groups, including the "sour culture" of the Dong and Miao ethnic groups, the traditional "rice noodle culture" of Guangxi's Han, Zhuang, and other ethnic groups, as well as the "spicy culture" of the Yao ethnic group. These cultures converge and become a dietary memory of the integrated development of all ethnic groups.

Table 1 Ethnic Culture in Liuzhou river snails rice noodle Source: Produced by Chen Yan in January 2024.

The Culture in Liuzhou river snails rice noodle	integration of ethnic groups
Culture of Rice Noodles	Various flavors of rice noodles preferred by various ethnic groups in Guangxi
Sour Culture	Dong, Miao, Maonan: sour bamboo shoots, acid beans
Spicy Culture	Yao, Miao: chili peppers

3.3 Liuzhou River snails rice noodle: A regional cultural symbol in Guangxi

Liuzhou River snails rice noodle originated from night market snack stalls. After being loved by locals, it became popular on the streets of Liuzhou. The earliest existing individual business license for river snail rice noodles is from a roadside stall located on Gubu Street in Liuzhou City, dated 1988. However, the business form at that time was limited, belonging to individual business operations, and had a small audience.

Driven by the original intention of protecting and inheriting local cuisine, Liuzhou began to explore the history and connotation of this folk delicacy, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle. In 2008, the "handicraft skill of making Liuzhou River snails rice noodle" was included in the list of autonomous regional-level intangible cultural heritage. During the same period, restaurants in Liuzhou also began to introduce this dish, diversifying its business forms, and evolving Liuzhou River snails rice noodle from a street snack to a formal dish.





Figure 30 The stall of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle in the night market of Liuzhou, Guangxi

Source: Xinhua News Agency reporter Huang Xiaobang

On summer nights, the newly opened Guangya Minsheng Night Market in Liubei District, Liuzhou City, Guangxi Province, is filled with the aroma of food, attracting numerous food lovers who adore Liuzhou River snails rice noodle. Both tourists and residents enjoy coming here to seek culinary pleasures after dark. According to researchers' surveys, there are a total of 143 food stalls in this night market, and 53 of them sell stir-fried river snails and Liuzhou River snails rice noodle.

In 2011, the Liuzhou Municipal People's Government encouraged local Liuzhou River snails rice noodle operators to open stores in major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen to promote the city's image, which also laid the foundation for the subsequent development of the dish. In 2012, the food documentary series "A Bite of China" sparked heated discussions upon its broadcast. In the episode "Gift of Nature" of the first season, the production method of sour bamboo shoots, one of the raw materials for Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, was introduced, and the method of making the dish with sour bamboo shoots was briefly mentioned in about 10 seconds.

This was the first time that Liuzhou River snails rice noodle appeared in the public eye nationwide. Although the production process was not presented in detail, it laid an important foundation for its popularity beyond Liuzhou and its subsequent explosion in popularity. However, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle emerged relatively late and do not have the long history and well-known reputation of other snacks like Chongqing noodles, Lanzhou noodles, and Sha County snacks. Therefore, it is almost impossible for it to win the market by expanding through store openings like other snacks. To enter the public eye, it must rely on the power of the media and utilize the public's curiosity to achieve success through unconventional means.

In September of the same year, Liuzhou launched the "Ten Thousand People Enjoying Liuzhou River Snails Rice Noodle" event, constructing a "World's Largest Pot" with a diameter of 10 meters and a height of 3 meters. Tens of thousands of citizens and tourists tasted the traditional Liuzhou delicacy, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, for free, and major media outlets vied to report on it.



Figure 31 The "Ten Thousand People Enjoying Liuzhou River Snails Rice Noodle" event.

Source: Xinhua News Agency reporter Chen Ruihua Photo: 2012.9

On September 30, 2012, citizens gathered around the "World's Largest Bowl of Liuzhou River Snails Rice Noodle" with a diameter of 10 meters and a height of 3 meters, waiting to taste it. On that day, Liuzhou, Guangxi, held the "Ten Thousand People Enjoying Liuzhou River Snails Rice Noodle" event, where tens of thousands of citizens and tourists tasted Liuzhou River snails rice noodle for free simultaneously. This created a Guinness World Record for the largest number of people sharing Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, sparking a food craze for it nationwide and beyond.

In conclusion, during this stage, the government played a leading role. To protect and inherit the craftsmanship of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, the Liuzhou Municipal Government provided more opportunities for practitioners and encouraged inheritors to pass down their skills by applying for intangible cultural heritage status

and organizing various competitions and events. These efforts have gradually transformed Liuzhou River snails rice noodle into a shining name card of Liuzhou, attracting people's attention.

As the scale of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle businesses continued to expand, its influence also grew. By 2014, there were approximately 5,000 physical stores of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle nationwide. However, the continuous development of the internet has limited the effectiveness of physical stores and offline activities, posing significant challenges to the development of the Liuzhou River snails rice noodle industry, which cannot meet the demands of more customers. A crucial step to address this issue is to transition from "bowls" to "bags."

In October 2014, Liuzhou Quanhui Food Co., Ltd. obtained the first pre-packaged Liuzhou River snails rice noodle production license in Liuzhou, marking the beginning of the industrialization development of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle. Since then, dozens of bagged Liuzhou River snails rice noodle production companies have emerged and developed rapidly. Coinciding with the popularization of domestic e-commerce at that time, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle has truly entered the lives of people across the country through the platform of e-commerce.

Moreover, geographical factors have also been a significant contributor to the rapid industrialization of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle. Liuzhou is an industrial hub with strengths in steel, automobiles, and machinery manufacturing. It can be said that "the gene of industry is deeply rooted in the veins of Liuzhou." Precisely due to the industrialized production model and technological breakthroughs, the path for the development of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle has been paved.

From the Liujiang people in the Bailian Cave in Liuzhou who began to eat river snails 20,000 years ago, to the roadside stalls of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, the chain stores of modern Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, and now to the packaged Liuzhou River snails rice noodle industry, the taste of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle has been spreading for more than 20,000 years on both sides of the Liujiang River. It has deeply integrated into the land of Liuzhou and the bloodline of the people of Liuzhou, becoming a regional symbol of Liuzhou.

With the continuous development of internet technology, the emergence of new social media platforms, and the growing popularity of short videos and live streaming sales, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle have successfully seized the opportunities of this era, quickly gaining widespread attention and popularity.

In August 2019, the famous food blogger Li Ziqi released a video on platforms such as Douyin and YouTube, introducing the production process of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle. This video not only directly promoted the establishment of the branded packaged Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, but also introduced it to overseas audiences, generating widespread attention. Many foreign netizens expressed their surprise, saying, "I didn't expect such a small bowl of noodles to have such a complicated production process."

At the same time, due to the "popularity" halo of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, many domestic celebrities spontaneously capitalized on its popularity to attract the attention of the audience. Since 2020, topics related to Liuzhou River snails rice noodle extended by celebrities have frequently appeared on Weibo's trending topics, generating more traffic and popularity for the dish. Although the initial media

hype brought a wave of popularity to Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, what truly propelled its fame was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

In an "Internet Celebrity Fast Food Favorability Ranking" released by NetEase DataRead (a column under NetEase that presents news content in the form of "information graphics"), Liuzhou River snails rice noodle ranked first with a heat index of 100. During this period, due to the inability to go out, the long-term bland diet stimulated people's demand for heavy-flavored instant foods such as river snails rice noodle, spicy and sour rice noodle, and self-heating pot meals, which led to the success of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle. Additionally, due to the pandemic, factories and enterprises shut down, resulting in a shortage of supply and a surge in demand. A large number of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle products in stock were sold out, and pre-sale orders were even backlogged for one or two months.

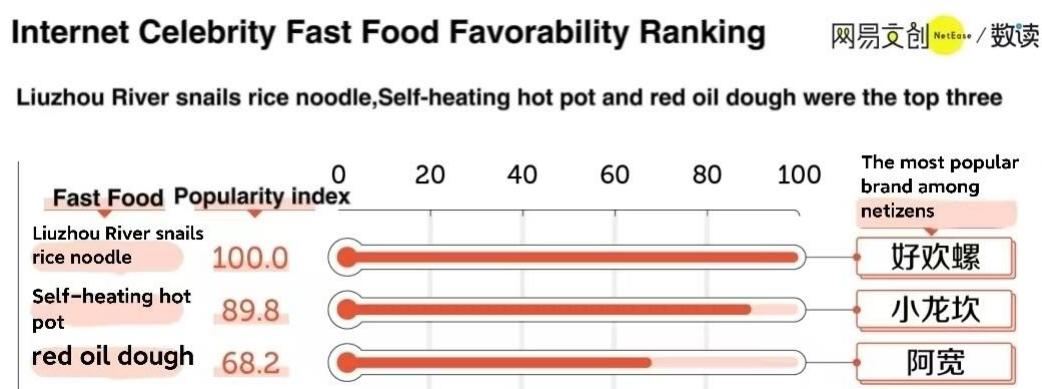


Figure 32 "Internet Celebrity Fast Food Favorability Ranking" released
Source: <https://www.gzstv.com/> [Accessed on March 15, 2024]

The heat index in this chart is calculated based on the number of mentions of the 20 most popular instant food categories, with the highest number of mentions taken as the benchmark heat index of 100. Liuzhou River snails rice noodle ranks first. The data comes from the posts and comments related to questions on Zhihu (Zhihu is a high-quality Chinese Internet question-and-answer community and an original content platform for creators) and Douban (Douban is a community website), with the statistics date ending on November 27, 2020.

During this stage, with the support of the market and media opinions, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle attracted more attention, and its reputation and symbolic prototype gradually became more stereoscopic, leading to the formation of local Liuzhou River snails rice noodle brands such as Haohuanluo, Luobawang, and Luozhuangyuan, which have a certain influence nationwide.

In addition, many other food companies such as BeicaoWei and Liangpinpuzi have also joined the production team of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, continuously launching new flavors. In conclusion, whether it is the development of local brands in Liuzhou or the entry of external brands, they are all important parts in the construction of the dietary symbol of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, and they can also be regarded as a cultural symbol in themselves.

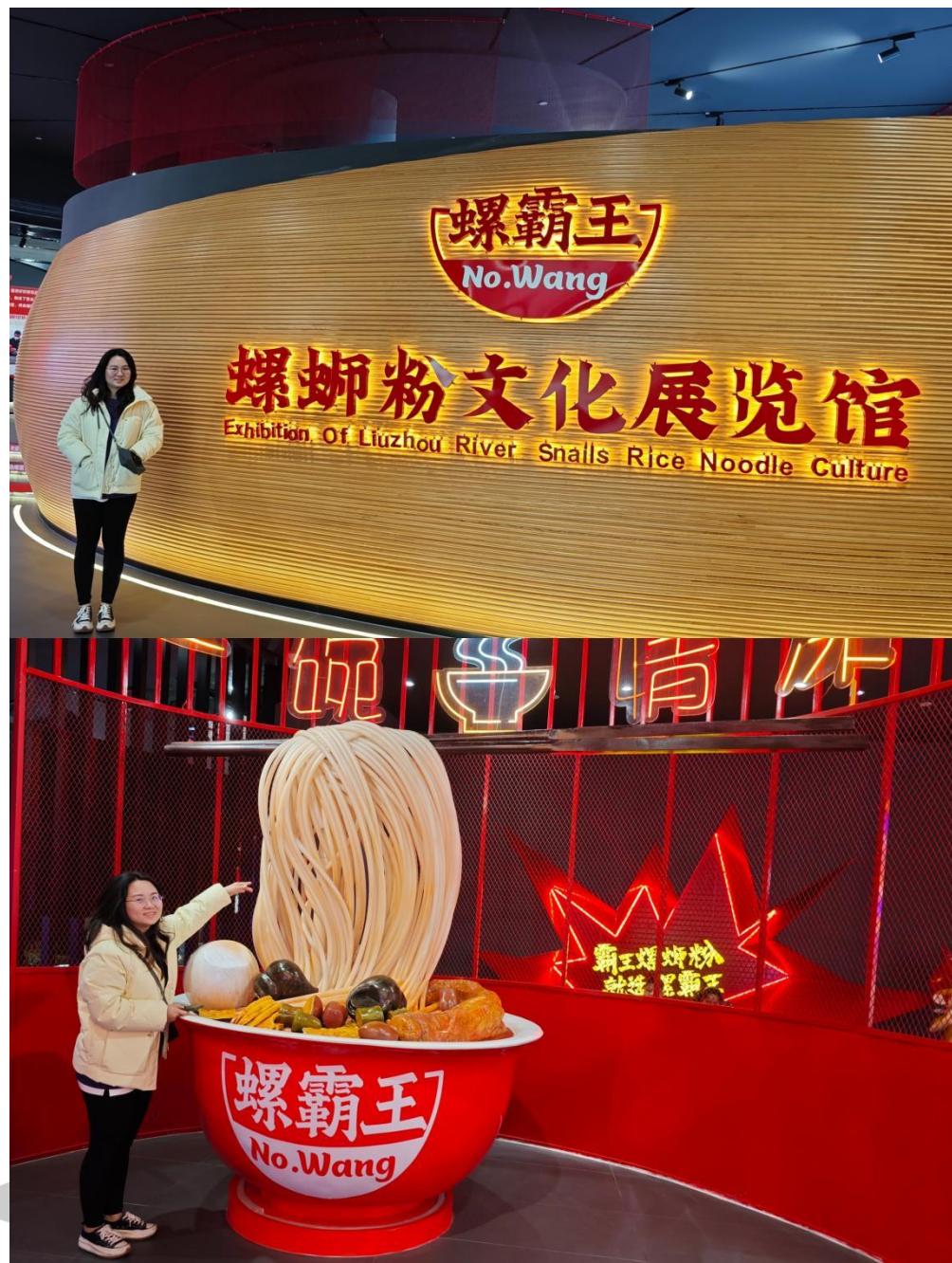


Figure 33 Researchers visited Liuzhou River snails rice noodle Cultural Exhibition Hall.

Source: Yanyan Chen 2024.1 Photograph

In 2023, Liuzhou received a total of 806.653 million domestic tourists, generating 88.389 billion yuan in domestic tourism consumption. For many tourists, the first stop on their trip was the numerous stalls and stores selling Liuzhou River snails rice noodle in Liuzhou. Meanwhile, scenic spots deeply integrated with the concept of "Liuzhou River snails rice noodle + tourism" have also become hot spots for tourists to visit. Researchers visited Liuzhou and toured the Liuzhou River snails

rice noodle Cultural Exhibition Hall, a new industrial tourism attraction themed on the culture of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle.

Initially, the symbolic construction of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle was aimed at pursuing economic benefits. Later, it was developed under the promotion of Internet marketing strategies and ultimately returned to the identity of Liuzhou people. As a representative of Liuzhou's urban culture, the existence of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle not only drives the economic development of Liuzhou but also helps to consolidate regional identity with its unique charm.

This collision between "internal" and "external" is the interaction between "self" and "others." When coming into contact with the outside world, traditional Liuzhou River snails rice noodle has to change with the times, evolving from traditional dining to packaged fast food. The recipe of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle is also constantly being upgraded, breaking the traditional recipe of using pig bones to make soup, replacing pig bones with cow bones to make fresh soup, achieving self-innovation.

Today, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle has not only gone beyond Guangxi but also spread worldwide. In this process, governments, enterprises, individuals, and other parties have actively utilized the cultural symbolic effect carried by Liuzhou River snails rice noodle to interact with the outside world. This interaction ultimately makes Liuzhou River snails rice noodle a unique regional symbol of Liuzhou City, Guangxi.

Behind all this, the active attitudes and actions of the people of Liuzhou, Guangxi towards Liuzhou River snails rice noodle in the current era are indispensable, that is, their enthusiastic participation and active promotion. The reason for the success of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle is precisely because it is regarded as a regional cultural symbol that constantly interacts with external cultures. In this case, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle presents more than just food, but the meaning of eating.

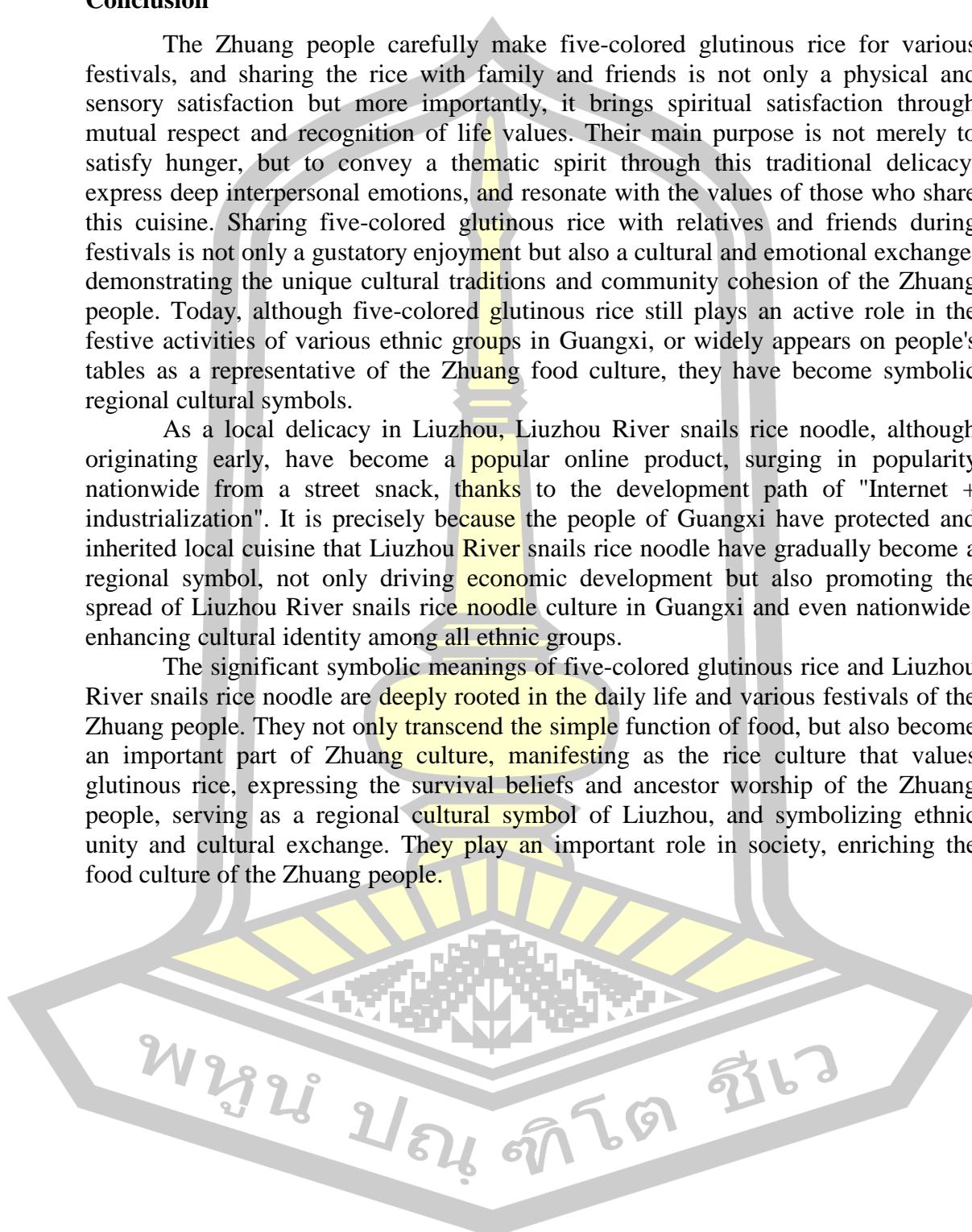
In addition to being a symbol of the regional culture of Liuzhou, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle is also a manifestation of the integration of ethnic cultures. Its popularity among the public through the Internet platform, spreading across China and even the world, is more of a transmission of cultural integration. This small bowl of noodles contains diverse cultures: sour culture, noodle culture, and **spicy** Culture. Although Liuzhou River snails rice noodle have obvious local attributes, the ethnic attributes of the noodles are difficult to define, and the definition of ethnic boundaries is not prominent. Of course, from an ordinary meal to a presentation as a local cultural symbol, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle have penetrated all aspects of Guangxi people's lives, becoming a shared food memory. It plays a significant role in consolidating the local identity of the Guangxi people.

Conclusion

The Zhuang people carefully make five-colored glutinous rice for various festivals, and sharing the rice with family and friends is not only a physical and sensory satisfaction but more importantly, it brings spiritual satisfaction through mutual respect and recognition of life values. Their main purpose is not merely to satisfy hunger, but to convey a thematic spirit through this traditional delicacy, express deep interpersonal emotions, and resonate with the values of those who share this cuisine. Sharing five-colored glutinous rice with relatives and friends during festivals is not only a gustatory enjoyment but also a cultural and emotional exchange, demonstrating the unique cultural traditions and community cohesion of the Zhuang people. Today, although five-colored glutinous rice still plays an active role in the festive activities of various ethnic groups in Guangxi, or widely appears on people's tables as a representative of the Zhuang food culture, they have become symbolic regional cultural symbols.

As a local delicacy in Liuzhou, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, although originating early, have become a popular online product, surging in popularity nationwide from a street snack, thanks to the development path of "Internet + industrialization". It is precisely because the people of Guangxi have protected and inherited local cuisine that Liuzhou River snails rice noodle have gradually become a regional symbol, not only driving economic development but also promoting the spread of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle culture in Guangxi and even nationwide, enhancing cultural identity among all ethnic groups.

The significant symbolic meanings of five-colored glutinous rice and Liuzhou River snails rice noodle are deeply rooted in the daily life and various festivals of the Zhuang people. They not only transcend the simple function of food, but also become an important part of Zhuang culture, manifesting as the rice culture that values glutinous rice, expressing the survival beliefs and ancestor worship of the Zhuang people, serving as a regional cultural symbol of Liuzhou, and symbolizing ethnic unity and cultural exchange. They play an important role in society, enriching the food culture of the Zhuang people.



CHAPTER IV

A Representational Analysis of Zhuang Food Culture

Introduction

From the perspective of representation theory research, this chapter takes the digital media images on China's leading internet platforms, Douyin and Tencent Video, as examples, and employs Stuart Hall's "Representation" theory as the primary research methodology to analyze the cultural connotations of digital media images. This chapter is divided into the following three parts: Part 1 Hall's Representation Theory; Part 2 Digital media practice of Zhuang food culture in network platform; Part 3 Analysis of representation of Zhuang food culture. By examining digital media images of food, this paper explores the selection and application of various "linguistic symbols" in image expression, as well as the operational mechanism of how these symbols connect with traditional cultural images and trigger audience emotions, laying a foundation for the case analysis in Chapter Five.

Part 1 Hall's Representation Theory

In Stuart Hall's book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, the first issue to be addressed is the relationship between language, meaning, and representation. Representation is the generation of meaning through language. In the Oxford Concise English Dictionary, there are two similar definitions of "representation": one is to represent or depict something, to bring it to mind through description or association; the other is to mean representation or symbol. This is not only the way we assign meaning to things in practice, but also the way we understand the world.

Symbols are a kind of language that possesses the function of conveying meaning. Here, "language" is applied in a very general and broad sense. The spoken and written systems of our daily languages belong to "language". However, various visual perceptual images, regardless of whether they are created by electronic, mechanical, digital, or other means, are also included when they are used to convey meaning. [Stuart Hall, 2003, P18]

In other words, "any sound, word, image, or object that possesses a certain symbolic function and is organized into a system capable of carrying and expressing meaning together with other symbols is a 'language'." [Stuart Hall, 2003, P19] Conversely, symbols are the general term for words, images, or sounds that we use to carry meaning. [Stuart Hall, 2003, P18] It is these various common languages that translate the thoughts and concepts in our minds into words, sounds, or images, which are then manipulated in spoken or written language to convey meaning to the outside world.

In the process of human-to-human communication, symbols represent many concepts and the relationships between concepts in human minds, which collectively create various cultural meaning systems. Symbols also serve as carriers of meaning in the process of cultural development, fulfilling the role of communicating emotions and intentions.

1.1 process of representation

The process of representation is the integration of objects, symbols, and concepts. When an object forms a concept in one's mind and is then communicated through symbols, it undergoes two representation processes: the internalization of external objects and the externalization of internal concepts.

The process of internalization of external objects involves the system of concepts and images that people form in their minds to represent internal and external objects. This establishes a one-to-one correspondence between all things in the world and the concepts in one's mind, which is essential for people to interpret the world. In the process of meaning generation, a conceptual system corresponding to the real world needs to exist in one's mind.

The process of externalization of internal concepts involves the use of language as a system to represent these concepts. As a single conceptual system is insufficient, people also require a medium of communication, namely language in its broader sense. Through this, people can combine various concepts with symbols such as words, actions, sounds, and images that can express these concepts. When these elements are combined, meaning can be communicated.

1.2 The representation of meaning

1. Meaning is constructed in the process of utilizing symbolic and conceptual systems.

Regarding how representation operates through language, Stuart Hall studied three different approaches: the reflective representation approach, the intentional representation approach, and the constructivist representation approach.

The reflective representation approach posits that meaning inherently exists in objects, and symbols merely reflect the real world, where all human utterances directly, correctly, or incorrectly reflect the essence of all things in the universe. Conversely, the intentional representation approach argues that the meaning of symbols lies in what the speaker or writer believes the symbols represent, which is the meaning of self-expression. In other words, only those who use language to communicate meaning can endow objects with meaning. The constructivist approach recognizes that language is public and social, and it believes that meaning does not exist in objects, nor is it assigned by users, but rather is constructed through the utilization of symbolic and conceptual systems.

Based on his critique of the first two representation approaches, Stuart Hall demonstrates the rationality of the constructivist approach. This representation approach does not deny the existence of objective things but rather denies that the material world can convey meaning. People need to use the linguistic and conceptual systems that represent the world to convey meaning. Representation practitioners construct meaning through these two systems and only then does the real world acquire meaning and ensure the smooth transmission of that meaning. In other words, "what meaning relies on is not the materiality of signs, but their symbolic function." [Stuart Hall, 2003, P26]

2. The operation of symbols

Stuart Hall argues that meaning is constructed in the production and use of symbols, and different types of symbols operate and play different roles in the process of meaning construction. Referring to the basic principles of symbols in linguistic systems, symbols can be divided into linguistic symbols and non-linguistic symbols. They transmit and construct meaning in texts and are systems (linguistic symbol systems or non-linguistic symbol systems) used to represent various concepts.

The objects expressed by linguistic symbols are objective phenomena, while phonological expressions convey semantics, which are concepts combining sounds with psychological attributes and real-world phenomena. [Yu Zhihong, 2017, P36] In the process of constructing meaning, linguistic symbols explain and illustrate video texts with their directness and certainty. Unlike newspapers and books, which mainly rely on linearly continuous linguistic symbols, digital media videos contain numerous non-linguistic symbols such as sound symbols and visual symbols. With their vivid and realistic characteristics superior to linguistic symbols, they carry information about time, space, and scenes to construct meaning.

3. The combined operation of symbols

When Stuart Hall discusses the cultural code of traffic lights, he mentions that any combination of colors, just like the combination of letters in written language or the combination of sounds in spoken language, is conditioned by their ability to be distinguished and not confused. The constructivist expresses this concept by stating that all symbols are "arbitrary." By "arbitrary," it means that there is no essential relationship between the symbol and its meaning or concept... Meaning is determined by relationships. [Stuart Hall, 2003, P27]

Ferdinand de Saussure believes that text unfolds along the axes of syntagm and paradigm. Among the four binary oppositional concepts of signifier and signified, language and parole, diachrony and synchrony, syntagm and paradigm, syntagm and paradigm are analogous to the horizontal and vertical axes on a coordinate system, unfolding horizontally and vertically along the two directions of level and vertical, respectively, known as "syntagm" and "paradigm." The different ways of integrating symbols also give the textual meaning different orientations and biases.

Combining Ferdinand de Saussure's relevant discussions on the "syntagm" and "paradigm" of symbols, this analysis utilizes Stuart Hall's constructivist perspective to examine the syntagmatic relationships between symbols in the research object's text. These symbols are represented in different ways, and their distinct syntagmatic relationships construct the logical content and generate meaningful biases in the text.

1.3 The generation of symbolic meaning

The meaning does not lie in things themselves or in people but in the systems of symbols and concepts used by people. In other words, meaning is constructed. This process is the entire process of meaning practice.

Stuart Hall's theory of representation is rooted in his theory of cultural hegemony. In his study of differentiated representations, he discovered the representation methods of dominant discourse and applied his theoretical research on cultural hegemony to the field of media, leading to the development of the renowned "encoding/decoding" theory. Hall refers to the process of mass communication producing meaning as "encoding," where encoders, after screening information from

the objective world, must symbolize the content, i.e., turn the intended meaning into symbols. Only when the information conforms to the rules can the meaning be better and more fully expressed? This is precisely the process of the generation of symbolic meaning.

Based on the interpretation of the generation of symbolic meaning from representation theory, and taking into account the morphological characteristics of video media, the generation of symbolic meaning in digital media videos is explained in the following three aspects:

1. perceptual layer

Videos on new media platforms present images through a combination of visual images and sounds, transmitting information to the outside world. These images and sounds directly affect the audience's senses and perception, which are also the primary concerns of video encoding. Combining with the theory of audiovisual language, we can understand that audiovisual language is a perceptual language that utilizes the rational arrangement of audiovisual stimuli to communicate certain information to the audience, including aspects such as images, sounds, and editing. After being arranged and processed by the video creator (encoder), these audiovisual elements such as images, sounds, and editing become a symbolic expression.

The coder symbolizes his/her understanding of the objective world through the selection and combination of various audio-visual elements and expresses his/her intention through these "processed" audio-visual symbols.

2. narrative layer

Digital media videos not only capture the audience's attention through simple visual representations, but also construct narrative texts by telling food and beverage stories to generate deeper meanings and evoke emotional resonance in the audience. Stuart Hall, in the early stages of developing his cultural representation theory, drew on Roland Barthes' relevant theories of semiotics. Combining Barthes' discussion of narrative symbols, Hall argued that any material is suitable for narration, including not only literary works but also paintings, films, comics, social news, conversations, and more. The narrative carrier can be oral or written spoken language, fixed or moving images, gestures, and an organic mixture of all these materials. The process of generating meaning in video symbols is also the process of utilizing symbols to compose texts for narration.

Conversely, "audiences can 'read' or interpret these signifieds within a unique framework of television narrative" [Stuart Hall, 2003, P37].in television programs. Audiences are also accustomed to understanding things within a narrative context. Therefore, during the video encoding process, encoders construct meaning through the combination of symbols in terms of themes, characters, scenes, and other aspects.

3. ideological layer

The purpose of encoders' utilization of symbols and symbol combinations is to construct the implicit meaning of symbols through the ultimately formed text, expressing their understanding of life and promoting social and cultural dissemination. Furthermore, due to the involvement of capital in media platforms, encoders also leverage the momentum of new media development to promote physical products and achieve profitability.

1.4 Transmission of meaning in symbols

When Stuart Hall studied the dissemination of television symbols, he believed that after the encoding process ends, before entering the dissemination stage, some media need to be utilized to enable the encoded information to be expressed, such as the broadcast system structure, production network, technical structure, and their interrelationships.

As an image symbol system composed of audiovisual discourse, the symbols in digital media videos share a high degree of consistency in communication forms with television symbols, both being symbolic representations. Compared to purely textual language symbols, these symbolic representations can convey information in a more vivid and specific manner. However, in the process of digital media video production, technical factors are required to re-encode the encoded information into video codes, thereby completing the dissemination of symbolic meanings. In this process, we analyze the three aspects of technical support, personnel participation, and audit and push mechanisms, referencing the study of factors affecting the communication process in communication studies and considering the characteristics of digital media communication media.

The development of internet technology has played a pivotal role in the process of symbol dissemination. On one hand, it has improved the efficiency of information dissemination, while also resulting in the fragmented dissemination of symbol meanings. On the other hand, with the technological empowerment of media platforms, simulated network scenarios have been created, making the communication of symbol meanings more vivid and concrete.

Media dissemination is inseparable from participants, and on digital media video platforms, these participants include video producers, publishers, and viewers, who often do not exist independently. The threshold and activity level of platform participants influence the dissemination of symbols and their meanings in the videos. The auditing and pushing mechanism refers to the mechanisms that media organizations and their established platforms employ to ensure the circulation of videos on the platform, such as traffic allocation and account pushing. Stuart Hall's theory of "cultural hegemony" has always been the main thread of his ideological development. The mandatory information pushing and auditing mechanisms of media platforms involve the "power" issue of achieving precise delivery of symbolic meanings. The process of creating and operating platform rules is precisely the process where media organizations dominate discourse through allocation and pushing, and it is also a kind of hegemonic behavior in the process of meaning dissemination.

1.5 Audience value of symbolic meaning

Digital media videos primarily have functional value for the audience. These videos deliver information through online media channels, satisfying the audience's curiosity about Zhuang food, providing insights into others' daily lives, and fulfilling psychological expectations such as experiencing vicarious taste sensations through the eating or reactions of characters in the videos.

The second aspect is the emotional experience value. On one hand, the diverse visual symbols in the videos directly affect the audience's senses, providing an immersive atmosphere. On the other hand, the story content elicits emotional resonance among the audience, providing an emotional experience.

Lastly, it triggers social identity recognition. "The meaning that is communicated (by symbols) is something that gives us our self-identity, our sense of who we are and where we 'belong'." [Stuart Hall, 2003, P3] The meaning of symbols in digital media videos affects the audience, inspiring them to pursue an ideal self. In the practice of information exchange between the audience and creators, as well as between the audience and other audience members, social group identities are assigned to the audience.

The audience receives the information and meanings carried by symbols through their senses, interprets them based on their own life experiences, and subsequently develops selective identification with the entire cultural product, satisfying their diverse needs for external information, cultural entertainment, and more. This is precisely the process in which the meanings of symbols act on the audience and produce impacts.

Part 2 Media Categories and Expressions of Zhuang Food Culture in New Media

New media is a relative concept, referring to the new media form that has developed based on traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television. It can also be understood as a concept that is constantly changing, broadly encompassing all digitized traditional media, network media, mobile media, digital television, and so on.

Researchers have found that with the in-depth development of the internet, the media categories of Zhuang food culture in new media are becoming increasingly diverse, which can be divided into three categories: social media (such as WeChat, Facebook), video and live streaming platforms (such as YouTube, TikTok, Tencent Video), and news and information websites (such as People. cn, CNN, BBC). The main manifestations of Zhuang food culture in these media categories are four types: photos, short videos, documentaries, and micro-documentaries.

The researcher logged on to these three types of new media to collect information, using five-colored glutinous rice as an example:

Social Media: After researchers logged in and browsed through WeChat and Facebook, they found that video accounts held the largest amount of data, accounting for 98.59% of the total.

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Figure 34 WeChat Screenshot

Data source: Graphic by Chen Yan Yan 2024.6

Video and Live Streaming Platforms: During the exploration of Tencent Video, researchers found that apart from documentaries, there were also micro-documentaries lasting between 30 to 40 minutes that reflected the Zhuang food culture. When browsing the video platform Bilibili, a cultural community and real-time commentary bullet screen platform highly populated by young Chinese, researchers discovered that there were a total of 21 pages of videos related to five-colored glutinous rice, among which 18 pages featured videos lasting within 10 minutes.

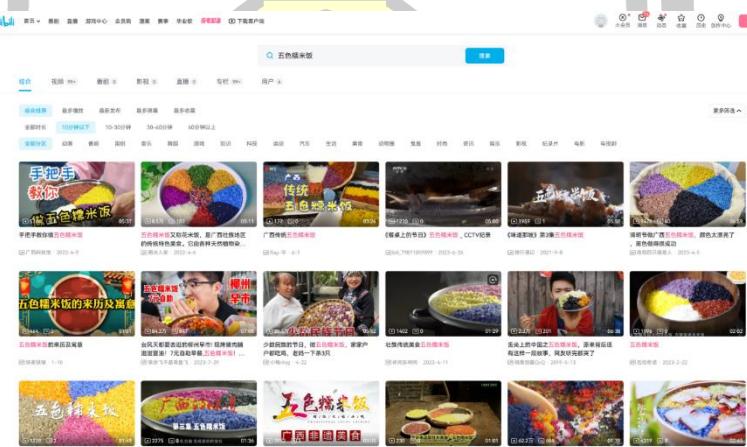


Figure 35 Screenshot from video platform Bilibili

Data source: Graphic by Chen Yan Yan 2024.4

News and Information Websites: The researchers found that on the People's Daily, a major national news website in China, there are 1,834 news articles, 196 images, and 4 videos related to five-colored glutinous rice. On the Guangxi News Portal, a news website dedicated to Guangxi province, there are a total of 721 videos related to five-colored glutinous rice.



Figure 36 Screenshot from people.com.cn
Data source: people.com.cn 2024.4

While browsing new media, researchers discovered an interesting phenomenon. During the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, the Zhuang people skillfully used five-colored glutinous rice to carefully arrange various patterns, aiming to enhance cultural cohesion and national pride within the Zhuang community. This tradition also conveys the Zhuang people's loyalty to the country, support for the Communist Party, and firm backing for national unity to those outside their community. Especially during landmark moments such as the 60th anniversary of the founding of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in 2018, the 70th anniversary of the founding of New China in 2019, and the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China in 2021, Guangxi residents expressed their deep emotions towards the country and the party through arrangements of five-colored glutinous rice. These arrangements, themed around these significant historical events, skillfully used different colors of glutinous rice to spell out symbolic patterns such as the Chinese flag, the Guangxi map, and the emblem and flag of the Communist Party of China.



Figure 37 Guangxi Zhuang people use five-colored glutinous rice to spell out various patterns based on the theme of the country's major historical events

Data source: Photo by Chen Yanyan 2024.4

After browsing these three types of media, researchers believe that the best way to present Zhuang food culture is through short videos and documentaries. This format condenses various ethnic and cultural elements into visual images, narrates the stories of delicious food and the culture behind it, stimulates audiences' aesthetic senses through visual and auditory effects, and constructs their impression of Guangxi Zhuang food culture.

2.1 short video

According to the "China Online Audio-Visual Development Research Report (2023)", by December 2022, the scale of online audio-visual users in China had reached 1.04 billion, surpassing instant messaging (1.038 billion) and becoming the largest internet application. In 2022, the market size of the pan-online audio-visual industry was 727.44 billion yuan, representing a 4.4% increase compared to 2021. Among them, the market size of the short video sector was 292.83 billion yuan, accounting for 40.3%, and it was the main source of industry growth.

In the past two years, the content of short videos has achieved horizontal and vertical development. On one hand, in terms of the breadth of involvement, it has expanded from traditional beauty, food, and humorous life to areas such as knowledge popularization. On the other hand, with the operation of professional institutions, the promotion of market competition, the support of platforms for specific valuable

content categories, and the continuous promotion of network supervision and governance, the overall quality of short video content has been improved. Undoubtedly, short video APPs have the characteristics of short content, low thresholds for production and dissemination, real-time sharing, diverse content types, wide dissemination channels, and social attributes. These characteristics are well aligned with people's increasingly fast-paced lifestyles and are closely related to their simplicity in production, quick release, strong affinity, and dissemination power.

With the in-depth adjustment of short video APPs, their content has gradually surpassed pure audiovisual pleasure and entertainment modes, and strengthened the audience's awareness of classification and stratification in terms of content specialization and vertical classification. Among these vertical classifications, food-related short videos are one category with a higher playback volume.

As the name suggests, food-themed short videos refer to short videos whose main content is food, with food as an essential element. Currently, the most common types on the market include food tutorials, food-eating live streaming, and creative food ideas. The integration of food with different elements has contributed to the rich and diverse characteristics of food-themed short videos. Produced mainly by food-themed self-media, food-themed short videos take food tutorials, eating live streaming, restaurant reviews, and creative ideas as their main content, aiming to popularize food knowledge and spread food culture. They are short videos of 2 to 20 minutes in length that are shared and disseminated on social media and short video platforms.

With the acceleration of people's life rhythm and the increase of fragmented time, short videos have gradually infiltrated into people's lives with clearer and more intuitive presentation and dissemination methods, gradually replacing single graphic and text content and traditional social media channels, and forming a new video ecosystem and economic growth point under the fragmented life. Short videos provide vivid and lively records and explanations of people's current lives. As an important part of people's lives, food has also emerged in large numbers. (Jin Qiang, 2020, P92-99.)

As the second wave of information dissemination in the Web 2.0 era, short videos are the product of the evolution of new media. Since its official launch on September 20, 2016, Douyin short videos has become one of the largest short video platform operators in China with a continuous increase in the number of users.

By 2023, the daily active users of TikTok have exceeded 900 million, with over 90% of them being under 35 years old. TikTok covers more than 150 countries and regions worldwide. According to data from SensorTower, a market research company focused on app markets, TikTok and its overseas version TikTok topped the global mobile revenue (non-game) ranking in February 2022, earning over US\$258 million, equivalent to approximately 1.631 billion yuan, from App Store and Google Play. TikTok has become the app with the highest global revenue.

The popularity of TikTok short videos lies in the fact that their characteristics can meet the user needs in the new media era. There are many characteristics of TikTok short videos, and after categorizing and analyzing them, researchers roughly classify them into the following three features.

1. Fragmentation and entertainment of communication content

People used to get information through newspapers, radio, and television. However, with the continuous development of the internet, the way people receive information has also changed. People's demands are increasingly inclined to concise and fragmented information. [Wang Jian, 2019, P92-93] TikTok short videos perfectly meet people's needs for fast-paced lifestyles, and they can make full use of people's free time while waiting for buses, riding trains, or eating meals.

According to the 52nd "Statistical Report on the Development of the Internet in China," as of June 2023, the number of Internet users in China has reached 1.079 billion, with an internet penetration rate of 76.4%. This vast population has made fragmented viewing of short videos the mainstream. With technological advancements and the development of the times, the content of TikTok short videos has become increasingly diverse, covering various fields such as food, fitness, medicine, finance, parenting, education, and so on, increasingly catering to the lives of modern people. In today's modern society, people's lives are fast-paced, and they face considerable pressure from work and life. They hope to relieve stress by watching videos.

However, compared to short videos, the duration of TV dramas and movies is relatively long. Users often need to resume work before finishing watching. In contrast, TikTok short videos are only a few seconds long, lacking continuity, and can be paused immediately whenever users want to stop watching. This feature satisfies the fragmented entertainment needs of various sectors of society.

Duality of user identity

As we all know, the communication process includes five elements: communicator, receiver, message, content, and feedback. The communicator is the initiator of the communication behavior. The receiver is the recipient or responder of the message, but the receiver is not merely a completely passive existence. On the contrary, the receiver can influence the communicator through feedback.

The characteristics of the new media era lie in its dynamic and bidirectional communication process. As a product of this era, short videos also possess the feature of dynamic bidirectional communication. This characteristic implies that users not only assume the dual role of communicator and receiver but can also play the role of "gatekeeper."

For example, users can film their short videos and publish them on the TikTok platform to gain more attention and likes from fans. They can also selectively watch short videos published on TikTok, give likes, make comments, and share them with others. In conclusion, under the background of new media, the dissemination of mobile short videos will gradually shift users from a passive to an active role, thereby enhancing their active participation. At the same time, it also endows users with the dual identity of "communicator" and "receiver."

3. Intelligent Video Recommendation

Another characteristic of TikTok's short videos is its intelligent video recommendation. Users of TikTok short videos occasionally find that the short videos published on the platform are very in line with their interests, making them want to continue browsing. This demonstrates the effectiveness of TikTok's short videos in terms of information presentation systems. By collecting, organizing, and analyzing

user data, TikTok short videos employ intelligent computing methods to establish relevance and generate content correlations. By disseminating content that interests users, TikTok short videos resonate with audiences and maintain their continuous attention.

For example, when users refine their preferences for dance and music short videos by continuously watching, evaluating, and sharing, the platform will analyze their reading behavior and continuously deliver dance and music short videos that the users prefer. If a user is not interested in a particular video, they can long-press on the video on the home screen to bring up the "Not Interested" option. By clicking this button, such short videos will be replaced by other types of short videos, and the platform will no longer recommend related short videos to the user. TikTok short videos attract customers through this intelligent short video recommendation method.

The researchers chose "TikTok" as the analysis platform for reflecting the short videos of Zhuang ethnic cuisine culture for the following reasons. On one hand, the TikTok platform has a large user base, with daily active users exceeding 900 million by the end of 2023. This vast user group also means that more people from different ethnic groups have the opportunity to share and promote their respective cultures through this platform, enhancing mutual understanding and cultural exchange among ethnic groups.

On the other hand, TikTok actively supports quality traditional cultural content and has successively launched a series of support plans, such as the "Intangible Cultural Heritage Partners" program and the "Craftsmanship Discovery" plan, to facilitate the dissemination of traditional culture. By April 2022, 1,553 out of 1,557 national-level intangible cultural heritage representative projects had related content disseminated on TikTok, achieving a coverage rate of 99.74%, with a total of 372.6 billion views for related videos. In a sense, TikTok has become a representative of traditional culture dissemination among short video platforms.

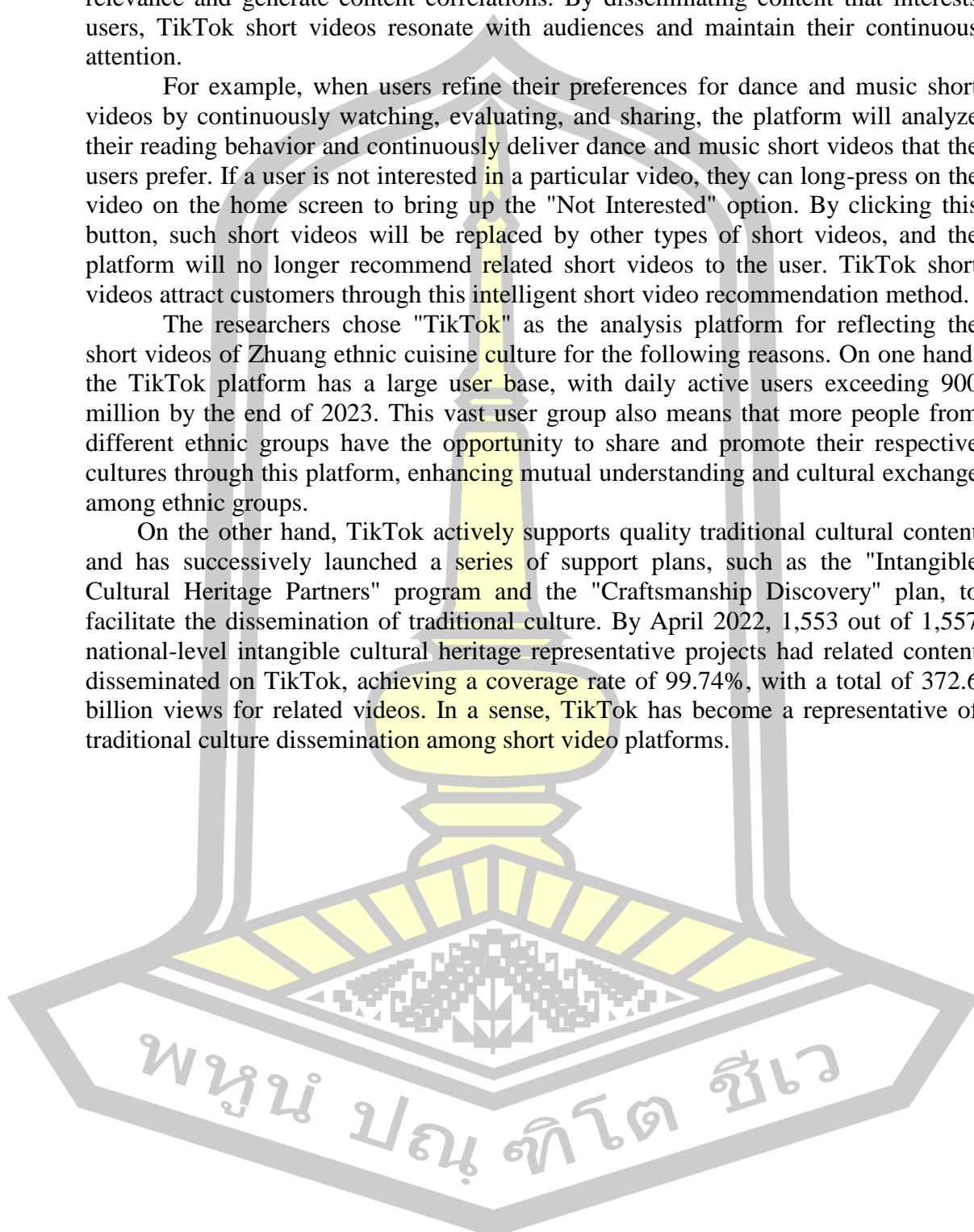




Figure 38 The list of national-level intangible cultural heritage foods that TikTok users love most from across the country.

Data source: TikTok's "2022 Intangible Cultural Heritage Data Report"

TikTok, the short video platform with the largest number of users in China, has showcased the culinary skills of national-level intangible cultural heritage through its "Intangible Cultural Heritage Partners" program, with Liuzhou river snail rice noodles, roasted whole lamb, Sichuan cuisine, dragon beard noodles and sliced noodles, Shaoxian snacks, Dezhou braised chicken, guilinggao (turtle jelly), Guilin rice noodles, Huizhou cuisine, and Jinhua ham among the top 10 favorite lists of TikTok users.

According to Hall, representation is the expression of meaning through language. The linguistic vocabulary used in daily communication is a symbol that represents a concept, creating an abstraction that is detached from objective existence. People then use this independently existing concept as an object of thought. In practical applications, users of symbols convey ideas by encoding meaning within a shared cultural environment. Representation is thus the entire process of meaning production. Therefore, researchers explore the process of meaning representation of Zhuang food symbols by analyzing short videos of Zhuang food on the TikTok platform.

Representation involves the construction of meaning through symbols. According to Hall, the process of representation involves two processes in the human mind, referred to as "two representation systems." These two processes are the "internalization of external objects" and the "externalization of internal concepts." As video texts, food-related short videos exhibit characteristics such as strict similarity between symbols and referents, and interpretability of the meaning embedded in the symbols, during the process of symbolic representation.

The operation of representation is the process of constructing symbolic meaning. In the short videos of Zhuang food, linguistic and non-linguistic symbols play their respective roles, and the meaning expressed by each symbol is often not used alone. For example, a scene where a female protagonist dressed in traditional Zhuang clothing cuts vegetables in her kitchen while speaking Zhuang to her husband includes props symbols, behavioral symbols, linguistic symbols. Its composition follows certain principles and techniques of aggregation. Drawing on previous theoretical achievements in the fields of linguistics and semiotics, the symbol aggregation is divided into "combination" and "aggregation" and expressed through the forms of "metaphor" and "metonymy".

Language is the combination of two elements that establish connections in the brain, or the combination of concepts and auditory images. [Saussure, 1980, P66] As a language with communication functions, the compositional symbols in short videos of Zhuang cuisine trigger people's associations with certain concepts in their brains, leading to a deeper understanding of meaning. These conceptual schemas formed in the brain, through the intermediary of "symbols," transform the concepts into a unified audiovisual entity that can be directly interpreted. This process involves two representation systems: the internalization of external objects and the externalization of internal concepts.

The process of meaning representation of symbols in short videos: internalisation and externalisation

1. Internalisation of external things in short videos

The various elements presented in short videos, such as daily behaviors like "cutting vegetables, cooking, serving, and plating," after long-term observation and practice by people, form conceptual systems in the human mind such as "making food," "meeting survival needs," and "providing positive emotional value." Similarly, "warm light" brings warmth, "close-up shots" enhance perception, "bright red and yellow colors" stimulate appetite, "soothing music" relaxes the mood, and "ribs" evoke associations of "nourishing the body." When these elements are combined, they

form a scene that generates a conceptual system in the mind related to "being edible, wanting to eat, and being delicious."

However, these conceptual systems are not merely a combination of individual concepts. They require the classification, organization, arrangement, and clustering of multiple concepts, establishing relevant connections between various concepts and distinguishing them based on their similarities and differences.

For example, in the ingredients of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, "green vegetables" and "river snail meat" are both food materials and can be classified into the conceptual set of "ingredients." Therefore, the conceptual system classifies them into the same category, but they are also placed in different hierarchical systems due to their differences in vegetables and meat. The first classification is based on the material attributes in daily life, while the second is based on the principle of vegetarian and non-vegetarian foods. This may represent a person's preferences, and dietary habits, reflect cultural practices, and even be associated with religious culture, forming different meanings through different combinations of concepts. The formation and generation of concepts and conceptual systems is the process of internalizing external objects.

2. Externalisation of intrinsic concepts in short videos

The process of externalizing internal concepts is the system of representing concepts through language, which is the second representation system that is integral to the entire process of constructing meaning. [Stuart Hall, 2003, P18] Language is a social phenomenon that originates from society and culture. [Stuart Hall, 2003, P33] In the process of human social development and cultural formation, people have consistent cognitions of certain concepts, thus sharing a cultural conceptual system. Therefore, they interpret the meanings of short videos in similar ways. However, merely shared concepts are not sufficient for communication, and that is why language serves as a medium of expression.

In short videos, "language" refers to the symbols comprising various elements such as sound, images, characters, actions, camera shots, props, etc. These symbols, which represent the direct relationships between concepts, are combined to form the entire textual content of the short video. Subsequently, when people view these on the internet or short video platforms, they generate similar understandings, allowing the meaning to be communicated and interpreted.

Different choices and combinations of symbols will lead to different meaning biases, so the meaning in short videos does not naturally exist or mechanically combine but is constructed by the video creators (symbol encoders).

Properties of symbolic meaning in the representation process in short videos

1. Symbols are strictly similar to references

As a text composed of various symbols, the short videos about Zhuang food, due to the media specificity of images that relatively restore reality, exhibit a high degree of consistency between the conceptualization in the mind triggered by visual symbols and their actual presentation. The most significant difference between the symbols in short videos and traditional language lies in the strict similarity between the visual symbols and their referents in short videos.

For instance, the visual image of river snails, an ingredient in Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, has strict similarity with the freshwater mollusk with a shell that grows in fields or rivers, which is what it refers to. The audience decodes the meaning

of the symbol "river snails" through two representation systems: one is the conceptual approach that links the freshwater mollusk with a shell to the concept of "river snails," and the other is the linguistic system approach that involves some similarity to the thing in some way contained or "looking like it" in film and television language.

However, strict similarity is not absolute. The "river snails" presented in the short videos of Zhuang food are merely video images captured through camera technology and displayed on the Internet platform, rather than actual river snails. Therefore, the short video production process, intermediate dissemination links, and other factors may lead to deviations or value additions in the meaning of the symbol "river snails."

2. Symbolic connotations are interpretable in terms of meaning

Symbols possess both denotative meaning and connotative meaning. Denotation refers to the collection of things indicated by conceptual symbols, which represents all the characteristics embodied by the symbols. For example, in a short video, when a beam of yellow light shines on a dish, the denotation of the symbol "a beam of yellow light" is the conceptual collection of increasing the light and brightness of objects within a certain range, which is an objective existence that does not change with human will.

Connotation refers to the generalization of the characteristics and essential attributes of the indicated objects, which is also the issue of "signifier" and "signified" involved in the symbols as a language mentioned above. In the short videos of Zhuang food, the signifier refers to the visual images, props, sounds, etc. in the videos that can evoke associations with the concepts of specific objects, while the signified refers to the meaning of the objects being encoded. Since there is not a strict one-to-one correspondence between the "signifier" and "signified" in short videos, and different choices and combinations of Zhuang food symbols by short video creators often lead to different interpretations of meaning, the connotations of Zhuang food symbols in short videos have diverse possibilities in terms of meaning interpretation.

For example, even with the same combination of two symbols - light and plate, the video creator's choice of warm light and a yellow plate, or cold light and a white plate, conveys completely different meanings. It is precisely due to the uncertainty and interpretability of the connotative meaning of symbols that there is greater flexibility in encoding the meaning of symbols.

However, meanings are not arbitrary interpretations. Saussure believes that the arbitrariness of linguistic symbols is a fundamental attribute that runs through the entire process. The symbols of Zhuang food in short videos, as a form of language, do not merely represent a single cognitive concept. There are degrees of absolute and relative arbitrariness, with the relative rationality of symbols being determined by the degree of arbitrariness [Zhang Shaojie, 2004, P4]. Unlike pure linguistic symbols, the meanings of symbols in short food videos are often generated through people's practical experience and associations, lacking complete arbitrariness.

Representational operations of meaning in short videos

Representation operation of a single symbol: High-quality food-related short videos possess a high standard in terms of filming and content, commonly including explanatory text, characters, voiceovers, accompanying text, props symbols, behavioral symbols, camera symbols, music, sound symbols, etc. Referring to the basic principles of symbols in the linguistic system, the symbols in the video can be

divided into linguistic symbols and non-linguistic symbols, and the study of the representation operation of meanings in food-related short videos is also analyzed from these two dimensions.

1. Linguistic symbols: explaining and breaking down barriers

According to Saussure, linguistic symbols constitute a system of signs that expresses concepts. In the context of food-related short videos, linguistic symbols refer to explanatory text about food preparation methods, explanations, or humorous interactive language during the food-making process. "The object expressed by linguistic symbols is an objective phenomenon, and phonetic expression is semantic. However, linguistic symbols do not connect pure physical sounds and meanings, nor objects (events) and names, but rather concepts with psychological attributes and real phenomena." [Yu Zhihong, 2017, P36] Therefore, the textual and linguistic symbols in food-related short videos trigger the viewer's conceptual schema of certain objects through linguistic characters or voice, playing an explanatory role in the short videos.

In the short videos of "*Lamuqingqing*," the original sound with a microphone is recorded and then re-presented through subtitles in the post-production process. Taking the video on Liuzhou River snails rice noodle as an example, the linguistic symbols in the subtitles include: At the beginning, the motherly "*Lamuqingqing*" gently asks her son if he knows where the smell of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle comes from, and then she explains to her son and the audience that the smell originates from the sour bamboo shoots soaked and fermented in mountain spring water for seven months. As the video progresses into the production process of Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, more detailed explanatory linguistic symbols are presented: waiting for the pot to heat up and then pouring in oil, adding spices to fry out the aroma, putting in the snails, adding boiling water, covering the pot, and simmering for an hour on low heat. These detailed explanatory languages help the audience form a relatively clear concept of the food production process.

Furthermore, the short videos of "*Lamuqingqing*" extensively utilize sound language symbols, such as the verbal interactions between the female protagonist and her son, and incorporate these as conceptual symbols that illustrate a harmonious family relationship in each episode. The local dialect is also employed as a linguistic symbol, widely used in the short videos to evoke viewers' perception of their hometown.

2. Non-verbal symbols: restore the scene and convey feelings

Non-linguistic symbols generally refer to symbol systems with visual, auditory, and other symbols as information carriers, excluding artificially created natural language symbols. [Wang Zhengting, 2018, P57] Non-linguistic symbols are frequently presented in short videos, such as props, cooking utensils, tableware, characters' actions and expressions during the cooking process, close-up and distant shots of food preparation, and background music. All of these convey emotions and meanings through generalized linguistic symbols. Unlike newspapers and magazines, which mainly rely on linear and continuous linguistic symbols, short videos contain numerous behavioral symbols, visual symbols, etc., presented to the public more straightforwardly and clearly.

All non-linguistic symbols, as a whole, constitute the basic elements of the text in food-related short videos. These symbols, with their vivid and realistic

characteristics that are superior to linguistic symbols, carry temporal and spatial, as well as scenario information, and tell food stories on behalf of the characters.

For example, in the videos of "Lamuqingqing," the most commonly seen tools are straw hats, cloth shoes, sickles, baskets, poles, etc., which are common tools in small-scale peasant economy production. The kitchen utensils mainly include water ladles, stove fireplaces, clay pots, large iron pots, and wooden spoons, reflecting an ancient and natural lifestyle. The process of making five-color glutinous rice demonstrates the Zhuang people's practice of taking from nature and using nature, reflecting their pursuit of green ecological civilization and presenting the traditional dietary lifestyle of the Zhuang people.



Figure 39 Account information of "Lamuqingqing" on the TikTok platform
Source: Chen Yanyan drawing, 2024.4

"Lamuqingqing" is an ordinary farmer from Liudipo Village, Beiliu Town, Beiliu City, Guangxi Province. Since 2021, she has recorded the simple rural life with a camera, edited it into short videos, and posted them on various online platforms. Up to now, she has released nearly 900 original short videos. These videos are classified into categories such as "Mom's Taste", "Fruit Picking", "Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage", "Gift of Nature", "Traditional Snacks", "Livestock Farming and

Planting", and "Necessities for the Chinese New Year", which are deeply loved by netizens. She uses videos to record the beautiful life in the countryside, showcasing the Zhuang cuisine culture to netizens at home and abroad, and also preserving "the taste of Zhuang mothers" for the next generation.

These symbolic items are full of symbolic meanings and constantly reinforce the audience's impression of the anchor "*Lamuqingqing*", making her video style with ancient charm firmly rooted in the audience's mind. Through the presentation of specific labor tools, cooking utensils, daily necessities, and homemade tools in the videos, the "signifier" expresses the qualities of a self-sufficient female character in the countryside, following the essence of life, making delicious food according to Zhuang traditional skills, demonstrating the wisdom of life derived from nature, and the "signified" meaning of longing and aspiration for an original and natural life. Whether it is rusty ironware, mottled clay pots, or yellowing bamboo baskets, the old and original tools repeatedly appear as symbols, all with unique existential value.

The representational operation constituted by multiple symbols: According to Ferdinand de Saussure, symbols formed into a system play an important role in conveying deeper meanings. In the larger symbolic system of food-related short videos, it generally includes linguistic symbols and non-linguistic symbols. While each symbol part conveys information individually, they also combine into a symbolic system, enabling the short videos to possess a systematic function of transmitting deeper meanings.

According to Ferdinand de Saussure, the symbolic text unfolds along the axes of syntagm and paradigm. Among his four binary oppositional concepts of signifier and signified, language and parole, diachrony and synchrony, and syntagm and paradigm, the latter two are analogous to the horizontal and vertical axes on a coordinate system, extending horizontally and vertically along the two directions respectively, referred to as "syntagm" and "paradigm". Different ways of integrating symbols also give the text meaning different implications and biases. Later, Roland Barthes renamed the two axes as "syntagma" and "system", arguing that the bidirectional aggregation method does not only refer to language and vocabulary but also applies to social life spaces. Below is an interpretation using the short videos of "*Lamuqingqing*" as an example.

1. Combination: connecting and matching to form a content logic

In the food-related short videos of "*Lamuqingqing*", the syntagmatic axis of sentence-segment relations is primarily manifested in the connections and combinations of scenes, characters, and actions. Through the combination of various props in the scene, as well as the combination of various shots and sounds, the video's content logic is conveyed, maintaining the fluency of linguistic and non-linguistic symbols, thereby achieving the narrative function of the syntagmatic paragraphs.

As the short videos of "*Lamuqingqing*" belong to the category of food tutorials within the domestic space, the narrative symbols primarily focus on the combination of food preparation processes and narrative plots. Firstly, in terms of food preparation processes, due to the limited length of short videos, it is not possible to showcase the entire process of food preparation from all perspectives. Therefore, a combination of close-up and long-shot camera angles, voiceover explanations, and subtitles is often adopted.

During the presentation of food preparation, the combined use of multiple symbols clarifies the steps and process, showcasing the precise production methods and the focused attitude of the characters to the utmost. This combination of symbols in food preparation is reflected in every episode of "*Lamuqingqing*"s short videos. Additionally, based on the language and camera symbols, dialogues between her and her son are incorporated, making the entire process authentic and interesting.

Secondly, in terms of the combination of narrative segments, the structure of each episode of "*Lamuqingqing*"s short videos is composed of three narrative combinations: her introduction of the food with her son through dialogue, their collaborative cooking, and their shared meal. Furthermore, the combination of symbols also depicts the environmental background. For example, "*Lamuqingqing*"s family lives in a small mountain village, and a series of symbols appearing in the videos, such as the farmland, farming tools, rice planting and harvesting activities, red brick houses, even exposed water pipes, and the cement floor at home, all serve to illustrate the mountainous village environment and family background. These combinations are evident in every episode of "*Lamuqingqing*"s videos, providing cultural context and driving the narrative forward.

2. Aggregation: selection and co-operation to generate meaning bias

As a possibility, the formation of the paradigmatic axis relies on the selection and coordination of various symbols with similar functions, and its meaning transmission also exhibits a certain degree of bias. If the syntagmatic axis focuses on narrative, then the paradigmatic axis aims to provide a basis for presenting the combined narrative of objects. Through techniques such as camera editing and montage, different meanings and biases are expressed by juxtaposing objects.

In the dining segment at the end of each episode, the aggregation of symbols such as the placement of bowls and chopsticks on the wooden table, the mother and son sitting together, the table piled with food, conversations at the dining table, the child's certificates and drawings on the wall, classic old songs as background music, close-up shots of the food, close-up shots of their mouths while eating, and panoramic shots of the mother and son dining, form a multi-layered and profound interpretation of meaning. Feelings of happiness, harmony, and nostalgia arise spontaneously. On one hand, removing any of these symbolic elements would diminish the profundity of the meaning expression.

Another example is the selection and application of camera language. In a single episode, the frequent switching between long, medium, close, and extreme close-up shots — long shots capture the rural scenery, medium shots depict family activities, close-up shots show the specific steps of food preparation, and extreme close-up shots highlight the food and the mouths of the diners — ensures that the choice of camera angles and scenes complements the characters, scenery, and actions being filmed. The use of editing techniques in the transitions between scenes is also a manifestation of the paradigmatic relationship between symbols, serving to convey meaning.

Through the application of filming and editing techniques as well as rich audiovisual language, short food videos make their content more artistic and stylized, thereby conveying the emotions behind the food and the characters' reflections on life. This also makes the selection and combination of symbols in the videos more "manipulable," resulting in a more layered expression of meaning. At the same time,

the audience, as decoders, are more likely to develop their own interpretive biases when decoding the symbols in the videos.

The aggregation methods of "syntagmatic" and "paradigmatic" symbols, on one hand, provide principled guidance for the entire video in conveying symbolic meanings and facilitate the expression of its ideological connotations and cultural implications through the cultural encoding of the encoder. On the other hand, due to the comprehensive application of various symbol aggregation principles, the expression of its meaning becomes more biased.

2.2 Documentary

He Suli, director of the China Documentary Research Center and chief editor of the first national-level documentary blue book "China Documentary Development Report", proposed that "the public era of documentaries began with food documentaries." Since the first season of the food documentary "A Bite of China" (2012) was broadcast, the content of food documentaries has become increasingly vertical and segmented, resulting in a series of well-received and influential documentary brands such as "Once Upon a Bite" (2018), "The Private Dinner of the Earth" (2019), and "Chinese Restaurant" (2019). While covering various types of users, food documentaries have gradually formed an internationally influential communication ecosystem.

Under the "Belt and Road" initiative, and facing new aesthetic contexts, food documentaries explore diverse cultural contents, focus on showcasing culinary characteristics, and adopt storytelling techniques to transcend the "popular science" format of traditional food programs that merely demonstrate food preparation and collection. By endowing food with new humanistic aesthetic meanings and philosophical concepts, these documentaries have broadened the value space of this genre.

The "cultural iceberg theory" is a commonly used model for people to understand cultural phenomena. This model compares culture to an iceberg, arguing that only a fraction of the iceberg is visible above the water, while the hidden part of the culture is often revealed through the visible part.

For food documentaries, the audiovisual layer is the "first space" presented to users by the media text, which serves as the location for food production, harvesting, transportation, cooking, and consumption. The spatial form conveyed in this layer enables the public to intuitively perceive the tangible world, and at the same time, the real space also allows culture and consciousness to be expressed. At the storytelling level, the documentary connects the living habits of residents in different regions, allowing viewers to understand unique regional cultures through horizontal comparisons, while the commonalities between regional images contrast with the national image. The cultural layer of the food documentary is hidden beneath the storytelling layer, representing the natural, life, and family views of people in different regional cultural backgrounds through cultural connotations such as ethnic festival food customs and ethnic minority costumes.

French Marxist critical philosopher Lefebvre broke the single-minded tendency of regarding "space" as an empty place or container, and placed history, society, and space in the context of material space. Undoubtedly, Lefebvre's view of space has broadened the public's understanding of space and guided people to incorporate

elements such as politics, economy, culture, and social relations into the discussion of space.

Therefore, the "first space" presented by food documentaries to the audience also exhibits diversity and complexity. On one hand, as physical spaces in geographical sense, such as mountains, rivers, squares, parks, and streets; on the other hand, the physical space utilizes the cultural space created by the physical space to make consciousness manifest, such as the reunion dinner table during festivals and the corner with a campfire for survival. It can be seen that the "first space" not only plays a practical functional role, but also carries the cultural spatial value of expressing regional consciousness and information.

As philosopher Cassirer said, all cultural forms are symbolic forms. In film and television creation, how to use diverse symbols to present regional images has become an important issue in the coding process of film and television works. In this context of film and television media, "the presence of signifiers" has become a consensus among documentary producers.

Specifically, "the presence of signifiers" refers to the narrative guidance based on the direct sensory experience of symbols such as sound and image through human senses, vividly and delicately portraying visual and auditory images, and enabling the aesthetic subject to achieve "the perception of presence" through highly simulated symbols (Li Xiaocai, Zhang Jing, 2019, p.3-8). Therefore, food documentaries intertwine cultural symbols with geographical environments through a series of media codes and then transmit them to the audience through certain media forms.

Tencent Video is a leading online video media platform in China, boasting rich quality and popular content as well as professional media operation capabilities. It is a comprehensive video content platform that integrates popular movies, TV shows, a variety of entertainment, sports events, news, and other information. Tencent Video officially launched in April 2011 and currently has a daily average coverage of over 200 million users across all platforms. As of March 31, 2022, the number of paid members of Tencent Video has reached 124 million.

At the end of June 2011, Tencent Video launched an online documentary channel, but at that time, the works mainly came from user uploads and copyright purchases. The former often lacked a certain degree of professionalism, while the latter brought significant cost pressure to the platform. This was a common challenge faced by many video websites in the production of documentaries. Until the end of 2017, when renowned documentary director Chen Xiaoqing²⁴ joined Tencent Video's documentary studio and began to produce original content, the documentary section of Tencent Video gradually presented a positive trend of flourishing development.

²⁴ Chen Xiaoqing is a mainland Chinese director and producer, director of *A Bite of China*, and currently deputy editor-in-chief of Tencent Video.

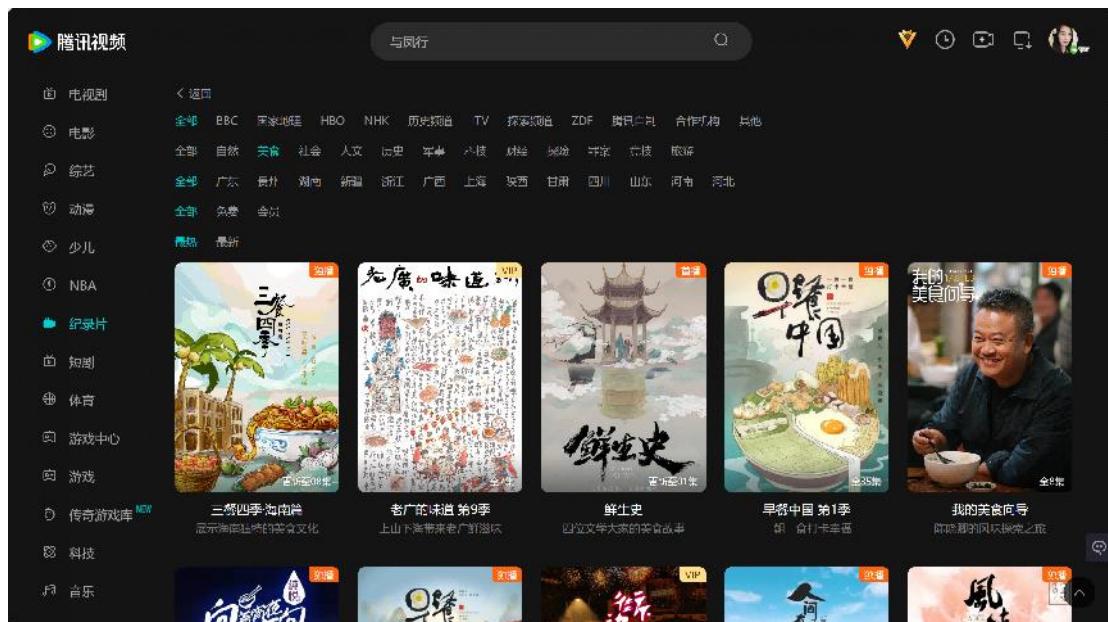


Figure 40 The interface of food documentaries on Tencent Video shows
source : <https://v.qq.com/channel/doco/>, 2024.4

The interface of food documentaries on Tencent Video shows that there are a total of 190 food documentaries on the Tencent Video platform. Chinese documentary production is gradually entering a new stage where elite culture is transitioning to mass culture, and food documentaries that meet the aesthetic and entertainment needs of the general public occupy a place in new media documentaries.

The researchers watched the Guangxi Zhuang cuisine documentaries on the Tencent Video platform, excluding the content simply copied from traditional media or other video websites. After sorting out and summarizing the obtained new media documentaries, the researchers found that the representation of food documentaries on Tencent Video is as follows:

Representation of written symbols: Media geography believes that there is an interactive relationship between media symbols and geographical space. On one hand, the geographical environment directly affects the selection and arrangement of media symbols; on the other hand, specific sequences of media symbols can reflect regional conditions. In today's era where electronic media dominates, written symbols have become the most frequently used symbols in mass media.

Influential food documentaries mainly utilize textual symbols such as geographically oriented episode titles, traditional appellations of regional cuisine, and local common languages. Through these codes, audiences outside of a specific region can intuitively obtain an aesthetic representation of that region, and then form an aesthetic image of the region through individual aesthetic imagination and processing.

The title of a documentary series is a semantic unit with particularly significant meaning, especially in the context of the emergence of countless video works on video websites in the new media era. The episode titles of a food documentary can enable users to quickly understand the theme of each episode within a short period. Therefore, as one of the criteria for determining the theme, the title of the series exhibits a concise and to-the-point textual presentation style in new medium

documentaries, which aligns with the fragmented viewing habits of users in the new media era.

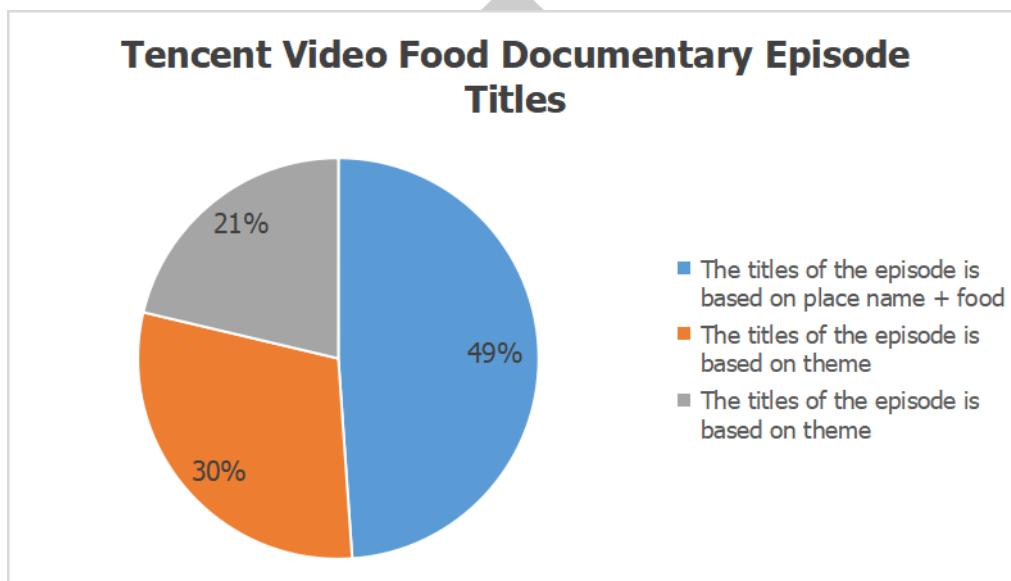


Figure 41 Tencent Video Food Documentary Episode Titles

Source: Producing images by Chen Yanyan, 2024.4

According to statistics, among the 190 documentary samples investigated by the researchers on Tencent Video, there are 93 works with the title format of "regional name + food appellation", accounting for a high proportion of 48.9%. Moreover, the episode titles of these food documentaries are controlled within 16 characters, such as "Nanning, Guangxi · Rolled Rice Noodle", "Liuzhou, Guangxi · Snail Rice Noodle", "Beihai, Guangxi · Crab Seafood Noodle", "Qinzhou, Guangxi · Trotter Rice Noodle", etc. These documentary titles are concise yet powerful, covering the content overview presented in the videos while bridging the connection between regions and their signature dishes with just a few words.

Representation of local common language: Chen Xiaoqing once said in an interview, "There are only two types of culture that are still alive today, one is dialects, and the other is cuisine." This shows that as a special system of symbols, dialects can not only make the narrative content more vivid and expressive but also play a crucial role in identifying local characteristics. Therefore, Tencent Video's food documentaries have made thoughtful arrangements in the use of local languages: At the end of each small story in "The Taste of China: Guangxi Flavor", there is a scene where the protagonist holds a local specialty and speaks a short passage in the dialect, highlighting the regional positioning and local identity.

In the Tencent Video food documentary "The Taste of Guangxi," there are scenes where Li Suying, a native of Chongzuo, Guangxi, teaches her daughter the technique of dyeing five-color glutinous rice in the local dialect; Tao Qing, a native of Liuzhou, Guangxi, enthusiastically narrates the joy of diving into the river to collect snails and cooking River snails rice noodle in the local dialect; and Gao Aming, a fisherman from Fangchenggang, Guangxi, warmly guides tourists to catch fish and shrimp using stilts while speaking in the local dialect.

People from different regions speak in diverse ways and languages, and each region has its dialect. The local languages vary from soft and pleasant to bold and bright, all of which carry regional flavors. However, even if it is difficult for people outside the region to understand the local languages, the different dialects with natural cultural charm still attract people to stop and admire.





Figure 42 Screengrab from video of food documentary The “Taste of Guangxi”
Source: Producing images by Chen Yanyan, 2024.4

The professional and articulate narration in traditional food documentaries is undoubtedly highly professional. However, its authoritative language symbols also create a sense of oppression and alienation for the viewers, leading to unsatisfactory decoding effects of the regional image. The extensive use of dialects in new media documentaries is catering to the viewing preferences of the "Internet generation" (referring to young people who have grown up with the Internet). By skillfully utilizing the flexibility of dialects to deconstruct the seriousness of standard narrations, it satisfies the curiosity and thirst for knowledge of "outsiders".

Moreover, the common languages in different regions exhibit strong uniqueness and locality in terms of speaking speed, intonation, and other aspects, reflecting regional cultural contexts such as "where people come from, personality traits, living habits, and cultural literacy", and reflecting the group characteristics of a region.

Representation of Sound Symbols: Since the late 19th century, humans have attempted to utilize film and television, composed of visual and sound symbol systems, to understand, criticize, or redefine regional images. This is because, compared to linguistic symbols, the immediacy of visual and sound symbols enables them to more intuitively express regional culture, ultimately resulting in a greater significance of signifier over signified.

Due to the special referential function of visual and sound symbols, the highly realistic images of appropriate character costumes, makeup, and food utensils in food documentaries, along with the complementary regional sound configuration, can activate different senses of the audience and form instant connections, stimulating olfactory and gustatory senses through visual "observation" and auditory "reception". Under the effect of synesthesia, the audience can empathetically participate in the dining experience, thereby enhancing emotional identification with a certain food, character, or even a region.

In order to utilize sound symbols to create authentic regional spaces and satisfy the cultural expectations of the general public, the producers of Tencent's food documentaries have retained highly imitative sound effects in the programs, such as the rhythmic thudding sound made when someone holds a kitchen knife to chop meat and hits the cutting board, the sizzling sound when ingredients are added to a pan and interact with the oil, and the slurping sound when people sip soup.

These sound codes create a strong sense of presence and authenticity for the audience, further activating the emotional space related to taste. Moreover, appropriately used sound symbols can complement the implied meanings presented by the camera language. For example, in the 9th episode of "The Taste of Guangxi" at 06:55, the picture shows the blue sea and sky, accompanied by the simultaneous sound of rolling waves crashing against fishing boats, setting the background for the story of Zhang Tianye, a fisherman from Longmen Port Town, Qinzhou City, Guangxi, who dives into the sea to collect oysters traditionally.

In "Taste of China: Taste of Guangxi", the sounds of Zhuang residents picking snails in rice paddies, washing snails by the river, and the crackling of the flames on the stove while stir-frying snails are incorporated. These sound effects express the dietary characteristics of the Zhuang people in Guangxi who enjoy eating snails at the auditory level. It can be seen that the sound symbols with local characteristics in food

documentaries complement the visual content and jointly present regional characteristics.

In addition to its ingenious retention of live sound, Tencent's food documentaries have skillfully integrated background music and voiceovers. For example, when narrating the story of Zhuang people making the characteristic dish of five-color glutinous rice, they accompany it with Zhuang folk songs, and when documenting the making of wormwood rice cakes by Zhuang people, they pair it with ballads. These sound elements with strong regional characteristics play a supplementary explanatory role in the textual content of the documentaries through their orderly arrangement and combination.

Representation of Visual Symbols: In the past, due to the limitations of special scene shooting techniques, time, space, and cost, food documentaries were unable to fully and authentically present all visual images, such as recreating historical scenes or visually expressing scientific knowledge. However, in the era of new media, with the in-depth development of digital technology, the application of 4K cameras, large-scale aerial photography, high-speed photography, and time-lapse photography has continuously expanded the narrative space of food documentaries.

However, as new technologies empower documentary production, film and television works produced through industrialized processes inevitably fall into clichés, such as the ubiquitous use of aerial photography for macro narratives, which naturally diminishes the decoding effect of regional images. Fueled by the "novelty addiction" (referring to viewers' preference for novel and fresh content), Tencent Video has continuously explored filming techniques and special effects packaging skills in the visual presentation of documentaries, boldly attempting to apply techniques like ultra-micro photography and photomicrography to showcase the internal structure and qualitative changes of food that are imperceptible to the naked eye. This not only subverts the visual composition of traditional food documentaries but also magnifies the characteristics of ingredients, thus subtly filling in viewers' aesthetic gaps regarding regional specialties.

To present viewers with imaginative micro-photography footage, the documentary production team at Tencent Video adopted various filming techniques such as ultra-micro, microscopic, and macro photography. Among them, ultra-micro lenses can typically magnify the subject by 1-5 times, while microscopes can achieve magnification ratios ranging from 0.7-11.5 times or specific multiples like 5x, 10x, 20x, 50x, and 100x. The filming format and technical application in documentaries are usually determined by the content being filmed. Tencent Video's "Once Upon a Bite" pioneered the use of microscopic photography in domestic food documentaries, taking the lead in collaborating with the Beautiful Science team²⁵ to glimpse the internal texture and subtle changes of food from a "molecular-level" micro perspective.

²⁵ The Beautiful Science team began working on the "Beautiful Chemistry" project in 2014. Originating from a joint original science communication project by the Advanced Technology Research Institute of the University of Science and Technology of China and Tsinghua University Press, "Beautiful Chemistry" aims to convey the beauty and magic of chemistry to the general public.

The documentary episode "The Spice Road" focuses on Guangxi, where the star anise production accounts for 70% of the global total. While discussing the drying process of star anise by the Mo Yi family in Teng County, Guangxi, the program utilizes cutting-edge photography techniques to optically magnify the process of the fruit flesh gradually shrinking and the fennel oil gradually condensing under the scorching sun of the Tropic of Cancer, allowing the public to visually witness the evolution of the ingredient's properties under molecular motion, creating a spatial spectacle.

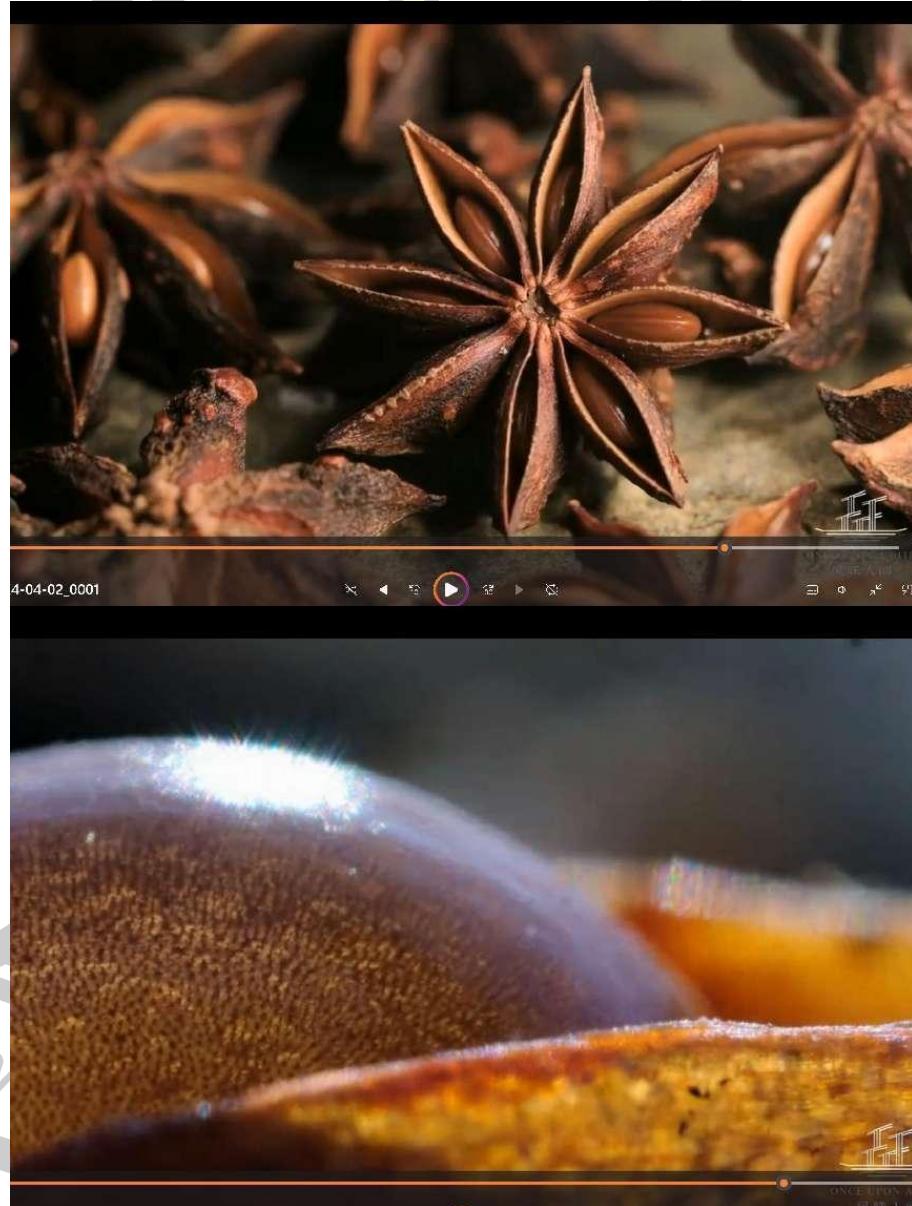


Figure 43 Screenshot of the video "The Spice Road" from Episode 6 of the first season of "Once Upon a Bite".

Source: Producing images by Chen Yanyan, 2024.4

In the sixth episode of the first season of the food documentary "Once Upon a Bite", titled "The Spice Road", the transformation process of star anise from Guangxi, from its unripe state to being processed into a spice ready for cooking, is vividly presented through the use of ultra-micro photography and photomicrography. By integrating high-definition images with audiovisual language, the visual appeal of the documentary's content is enhanced, allowing viewers to establish a strong cultural identity.

The documentary about Zhuang food culture comforts the masses overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of industrial civilization through the extension of culinary meaning, satisfying the emotional needs of the audience. Moreover, as a unique mass narrative medium, the documentary subverts the previous motivations for social groups based on "geographical ties" and "blood ties", creating a collective group based on "online ties". It gathers individuals who share the same regional attributes but have forgotten their regional identities due to social transformation in front of the screen, evoking a sense of belonging among residents.

Moreover, the social value of the documentary lies in its creation of a stunning visual feast through colorful sound and image elements, which not only satisfies "others'" imagination of a particular geographical and spiritual space, but also subtly corrects the misperception of the regional image among people outside the regional culture, and disseminates the image of Guangxi Zhuang nationality through the expression of commonalities in regional culture.

Part 3 Analysis of representation of Zhuang food culture

Human society is a symbolic society, and symbols are the means for humans to cognize the world. Culture embodies the summary of human cognition of the world, and the content and meaning conveyed by culture are presented and transmitted in the form of symbols. The expression of meaning by symbols lies in the communication and exchange between the interpreter and the sender, and cultural meaning connects the user and the receiver.

The significance of Zhuang food culture derives from the blending of different regions and the recall of people's emotional memories. Zhuang cuisine culture has embraced and integrated the unique features of Cantonese, Sichuan, Hunan, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Fujian, and other local cuisines, as well as incorporated the exotic flavors of Southeast Asia. The diverse eating habits and customs of different regions have promoted the development of Zhuang food culture. The expressions of Zhuang food culture are rich and diverse, including the materialized forms of tableware, kitchenware, and food selection, as well as different behavioral expressions such as cooking techniques, dining habits, and table manners. Furthermore, there are invisible forces rooted in people's hearts that regulate human behavior and consciousness.

Time has a specific meaning of irreversibility, and some events that occurred in a certain period cannot be reproduced. People can only seek those memories from their memories and imagination. Documentaries can carry memories, and their authenticity and cultural characteristics make them possess unique charm and special value. The communication channels of traditional documentaries are very limited, so the extent of their content dissemination is also limited, and the previous

communication methods are showing their decline in the era of information explosion. To cater to modern people's fast-paced, fragmented, and diversified information-obtaining habits, a new type of documentary - micro-documentary has emerged in recent years. Relying on the integration of television media and Internet media, enhances communication power and influence, realizing the widespread and profound dissemination of the culture contained behind micro-documentaries.

"Discovery" is a large-scale documentary program on human history, natural geography, and culture in the history of Chinese television. This program presents stories about China's history, geography, and culture through documentary techniques, explores the mysterious secrets of nature, uncovers the unknown details and fates of historical events, and showcases the grandeur of Chinese civilization. It is "China's geographical exploration, China's historical discovery, and China's cultural panorama." Among them, the "Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors" series focuses on traditional Chinese cuisine culture, revealing the relationship between food and culture, food and creators, and ingredients and the natural environment through investigation and experience, showcasing the charm of unique local cuisine culture and regional customs. This series of micro-documentaries consists of five episodes, each lasting approximately 35 minutes, specifically introducing the food culture of the Zhuang ethnic group in Guangxi.

This food documentary series showcases the familiar yet unfamiliar Zhuang cuisine from a unique perspective, exploring the touching of Guangxi stories behind the delicious dishes. Viewers can gain an understanding of the unique cuisine culture and emotional core of the Zhuang ethnic group through watching the program. It is a typical representative of documentaries on Zhuang food culture.

The researcher will specifically analyze the representations of the documentary "Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors" in terms of dimensions and how they are represented. Specifically, the analysis will be conducted from three aspects: The representation of food culture, The representation of traditional culture, and The representation of regional culture.

3.1 The representation of food culture

The food culture of the Zhuang ethnic group has been shaped through years of production and living practices of the Zhuang people, exhibiting unique cultural qualities in terms of its self-evolution, vertical development, and horizontal expansion. Specifically, from the perspective of evolution, the Zhuang food culture has undergone stages from raw food to cooked food and then to scientific cooking. In terms of its connotations, the Zhuang culture involves the development and utilization of food sources, the application, and innovation of tableware, the production and consumption of food, the operation and management of the catering industry, as well as the material and spiritual connections between diet and life, and society. From the perspective of expansion, the Zhuang food culture can be classified from multiple angles such as era and techniques, geography and customs, ethnicity and religion, displaying diverse cultural tastes.

1. Cooking utensils

Cooking utensils refer to the vessels used to process raw food ingredients into edible cooked food through steaming, stir-frying, boiling, and other methods. Different cooking utensils correspond to different food preparation methods. Food containers refer to the vessels that hold food during the dining process. Both cooking utensils and food containers are essential components of dining ware. The cuisine utensil culture of the Zhuang ethnic group has a long history, and the cuisine utensil culture has always been regarded as an important part of food culture.

Roland Barthes' double-layered ideographic structure provides a semiotic approach to interpreting mass culture. Barthes believes that the meaning system, "which, in itself, is a system that includes a representamen (signifier), a represented (signified), and the process of connecting the former with the latter (signification)" means that the first semiotic system (consisting of "signifier" and "signified") serves as a whole to become the "signifier" or "signified" of a second, larger semiotic system, respectively constituting the connoted sign or metalinguistic sign. (Roland Barthes, 2008, P55-58)

In this context, symbols possess two levels of signification: the direct level and the implicit level, with the implicit level being the "mystification" stage (Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, 1999, P2-3). While Barthes' original intention was "demystification", aiming to dispel and restore the distorted and "mythologized" meanings attached to symbols, his semiotic research approach has inspired Stuart Hall's cultural studies. Hall pays attention not only to meanings and their production but also to their "articulation" with historical and social structures. On a broader level, he examines the production of meanings and their cultural connections, encompassing both explicit and implicit representations.

The explicit representation of food containers in documentaries reflecting the Zhuang food culture is embodied in the selection of different utensils, while the implicit representation (connoted signification) refers to the relationship between food containers and regional culture.

For instance, the story of Zhong Mingda, the inheritor of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region's intangible cultural heritage technique of Gongcheng Oil Tea in the 23rd episode of "A Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors", contains two inherent meanings: First, Zhuang nationality's Zhong Mingda entertains his Han nationality's "Laotong"²⁶ (old friends). Gongcheng, Guangxi has the custom of recognizing "Laotong" since ancient times. "Laotong" refers to two people without blood ties who become close friends due to common interests or good conversation and believe they can maintain a long-term relationship, thus forming a bond like siblings. The "Laotong" custom of the Zhuang nationality shows the friendly exchanges, harmony, and unity among social members of various ethnic groups in Guangxi, which is a concentrated expression of the excellent traditional virtues of the Chinese nation.

²⁶ "Laotong" refers to people of the same age or with similar interests who voluntarily become sworn brothers or sisters. The custom of recognizing "Laotong" in Guangxi not only involves people of the same ethnic group, but also people of the same generation from other ethnic groups.

Second, although more modern cooking utensils have been introduced into kitchens with the development of the times, Zhong Mingda still prefers to use the traditional cast iron tea kettle invented by the ancestors of the Zhuang nationality, the tea mallet made of camellia oleifera branches, and the rattan separator when making Gongcheng oil tea. This reflects Zhong Mingda's adherence to traditional lifestyles and inheritance of traditional culture. Meanwhile, the rough and rustic appearance of these dining utensils embodies the Zhuang people's pursuit of a simple and unpretentious lifestyle, without seeking sophistication.



Figure 44 Screenshot of the video the "A Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors"
Source: Producing images by Chen Yanyan, 2024.4

Screenshot from the documentary "A Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors": In the mountainous and dense forest area of northern Guangxi, where the climate is damp and sultry, the wise local residents have created a unique food - oil tea, using local ingredients such as tea leaves and tea mallets, to dispel the cold and avoid the malarial miasma.

2. Ingredients for food

Ingredients for food refer to the main and side food materials, various vegetables, fish, meat, various edible oils, and cooking seasonings needed in the process of cooking. The essential attribute of food is to satisfy hunger, but the Zhuang people's pursuit of the ultimate taste gives food a role beyond satisfying physiological needs. Creating new flavors that food originally did not have is the essence of Zhuang's culinary culture. Excellent chefs can skillfully integrate various food ingredients and seasonings with different flavors through different cooking methods, making the food achieve a harmonious and unified taste. This "harmony" is distinct from "mixture," rather, it is a "harmonious integration of diverse flavors." It is faithful to the original flavors yet transcends them, offering a new culinary experience. As the saying goes, "Even a skilled cook cannot make a meal without rice." Therefore, the selection of ingredients is particularly important for culinary innovation in taste.

In the field of digital media, film, and television programs are a special genre that is produced through a system of rules or codes. At the most basic level, this genre system harmoniously combines signifiers that determine the attributes of different fictional worlds: for instance, settings (rural China, urban communities); locations (such as supermarkets, parks); character types (such as a mother and daughter, a lawyer); symbolic techniques (waves crashing against rocks, a speeding train); and plots (such as a mother and daughter with parent-child conflicts who finally find mutual understanding and acceptance through the mother's unwavering efforts). The genre codes are composed of principles that govern what can appear, happen, or not appear, happen in a specific genre world. In summary, these scenes, character types, images, and so on correspond to symbols of a particular kind of fictional world.

However, food documentaries differ from regular TV dramas in that they focus on realistic expressions rather than fictional plots. Specifically, the "scenes, character types, and images" in documentaries correspond to objectively existing people, objects, and events in the real world. There are three principles in the process of using symbols in documentaries: first, the authenticity of the choice of codes; second, the authenticity of the intention behind the operation and production of codes; and third, the authenticity of the images produced by the operation and production of codes.

The operational practice of codes is referred to as the process of "symbolic practice." Stuart Hall borrowed the theory of French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and believed that "symbolic practice" is: "the study of customs, rituals, totems, patterns, myths, and folk tales of some 'primitive' populations, not by analyzing how these things are created and used, but by examining what they attempt to 'say' and what cultural messages they disseminate. It does not interpret their content, but analyzes their meaning by observing the rules and codes that generate meaning in these objects or practices."

In the process of "symbolic practice" of A Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors, the representation of "ingredients for food" has consistently attempted to "speak" of two aspects: first, the inseparable close relationship between excellent dishes with superb flavors and their ingredients, or in other words, to achieve culinary transcendence in taste, the quality of ingredients must first be ensured; second, the emphasis on Zhuang cuisine culture, from the selection of ingredients to the preparation of dishes, and finally to the enjoyment of meals, all of which adhere to strict standards. To represent these two intentions, two representation methods are employed: first, linguistically, adjectives and adverbs such as "definite," "must," "best," "wonderful," "authentic," "necessary," "imperative" are used to emphasize the importance; second, through visual language, the unique characteristics of different ingredients are displayed to the audience.

For example, in the documentary, the bamboo shoots used to make Zhuang sour bamboo shoots are delicately presented under the camera's light, appearing white and tender. Zhuang people in Fusui, Guangxi, always choose the red-eyed fish that are abundant in the Zuojiang River basin to make sashimi. The fish's flesh appears yellow and firm under the camera, "When you use chopsticks to separate the fish meat, you can see that the inside is shaped like garlic cloves, piece by piece, very delicate and delicious." Starting from the selection of ingredients, the documentary naturally introduces the Zhuang people's pursuit of culinary excellence to the audience through authentic representations, while also showcasing the harmonious coexistence between people and nature in Zhuang traditional culture, as well as the Zhuang people's pursuit of the spirit of "harmony between heaven, earth, and humanity" to all viewers.





Figure 45 Screenshot of the video the "A Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors".

Source: Producing images by Chen Yanyan, April 2024.

3. Food preparation process

As a product of popular culture, documentaries possess the attributes of cultural industries. Nowadays, with the continuous invasion of the capital market into the field of television production, the production model of mass production and pasteurization has become increasingly apparent. Technical staff, photographers, editors, and directors in studios are becoming more and more efficient in designing, using light, and producing visual worlds and narrative patterns for specific genres of film and television dramas. The production of documentary genres is becoming increasingly standardized and formulaic.

However, genre production is not merely about standardization and fixed norms. When all documentaries become extremely similar to each other, they will soon lose audience because they will become too predictable and repetitive. Therefore, genre production is also about differentiation - that is, using product differentiation to maximize the attraction of different audiences, capture their attention, and keep a close eye on the changing focus.

In this regard, the textual representation of all film and television dramas, including documentaries, manifests in two aspects: first, producing various genres for different audiences; and second, creating variations between one example and

another. This differentiation is an important guarantee to attract audiences and bring pleasure to their viewing experience.

At the same time, the expression of different variations within the same genre is a way of meaning production. "Any given film (or television) genre produces meaning through the changing patterns of visual themes and ideological differences, and it is in this coordination that the main differences in meaning are highlighted" (Stuart Hall, 2003, p. 366). Difference is the key to the application of genre. Knowledge of any genre system can only be temporary, as a genre is a system and framework composed of various norms, expectations, and possibilities. In the field of semiotics, "genre norms function as deep structures or langues, while individual programs (themes), while realizing these implicit rules, function as paroles" (Stuart Hall, 2003, p. 368).

The representational methods of documentaries are diverse, and the representation of Zhuang cuisine culture is also multi-dimensional. Through the analysis of documentary texts, researchers found that the visual language and narrative text of the creators aim to highlight the unique characteristics of different aspects of Zhuang cuisine:

The concise representation of food production processes highlights the importance that the Guangxi Zhuang people attach to "original" flavors. The pursuit of "authentic taste" is a major characteristic of Zhuang cuisine. There are many representations of this pursuit of "authentic taste" in the documentary.

Table 2 The cooking methods of aquatic ingredients among the Zhuang people in Guangxi.

Source: Produced by Chen Yan in January 2024.

local	ingredients for food	Food practice
Fangchenggang, Guangxi	shrimp	boiled briefly in clear water and served with a light sauce
Beihai, Guangxi	sandworm	sashimi
Qinzhou, Guangxi	Fresh oyster	Directly edible
fusui, Guangxi	Squaliobarbus curriculus	sashimi

As can be seen from the cooking methods of aquatic ingredients by the Zhuang people in Guangxi, they strive to preserve the original flavor of the food, reflecting the classic narration in *A Bite of China*: "The more high-end the ingredients are, the simpler the cooking method required."

The complexity of food preparation steps represents the Zhuang people's pursuit of "novel" flavors in Guangxi. The Zhuang people are very sensitive to the taste of food, enjoy seeking ingredients with "special" flavors, and are more adept at "creating" novel flavors from ordinary ingredients through unique and intricate cooking methods. There are multiple representations of this in the documentary.

In the fifth episode of the documentary series "Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors", there is a distinctive food item in the Chongzuo area of Guangxi - sour porridge, which is called "Sa Shen" in the Zhuang language. The process of making sour porridge starts with cooking early-season rice into a mature meal, then cooling it down and putting it into a clay pot. After that, the sour porridge seed (probiotics) is added and stirred, followed by sealing and storing. During this process, the microbial

strains metabolize and transform the starch contained in the rice. The originally granular rice gradually loses its elasticity during fermentation, and the metabolism produces sugar and water, turning the rice into porridge. This preparation method retains the nutrition and freshness of the raw materials while filling the food with the aroma of rice, creating a unique and "novel" flavor.

Another intricate food preparation method introduced in the 23rd episode of "Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors" is the sour wine lees chili favored by the villagers of Jintian village in Guiping City, Guangxi. The villagers thoroughly mix the raw materials such as rice, rice wine, chili, garlic, and red wine lees, and after a month of mixed fermentation, the completed sour wine lees chili emerges with a bright reddish-brown color, a fresh and spicy taste, creating a memorable and unique flavor. The numerous exquisite culinary scenes in the documentary, including five-colored glutinous rice, Liuzhou river snail rice noodles, Huangyao stuffed tofu, Wuzhou paper-wrapped chicken, Guilin rice noodles, and so on, all reflect the Zhuang people's pursuit of perfection and refinement. When promoting this documentary to netizens, Ding Yi, the director of "Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors," said, "This food documentary reflects the development history of the Zhuang people in the representation of food culture. The food culture not only provides the source of vitality for the survival of the Zhuang people's descendants but also drives the progress of civilized society, shaping the Zhuang people's resilient character of constant pursuit and forward advancement."

3.2 The representation of regional culture

Food culture is a cultural product of numerous specific geographical spaces. Whether it is historical inheritance or spatial movement and diffusion, it cannot be separated from a specific region. An old Chinese is saying, "People are shaped by the land and water they inhabit." Different geographical areas and historical environments nurture different living habits and character traits of people living therein. People love and are reluctant to abandon their ethnic food styles, culinary traditions, and flavors. Over thousands of years, different food cultures have formed in various regions. Nowadays, regional food culture, or the regionality of food culture, has become an indispensable part of food culture.

While promoting the Zhuang food, the documentary reflects the Zhuang food culture also representing the regional culture behind the delicacies. The visual representation of regional culture is not only a reflection of reality but also a construction of artistic image to a greater extent. Reality and construction become the unity of regularity and purpose in the dissemination of regional culture.

The so-called conformity to laws refers to the authenticity of regional culture. From the perspective of film and television communication content, the authenticity of regional culture is the logical starting point of film and television narrative, as well as the basis for constructing cultural identity and guiding aesthetic admission. The authenticity of regional images in film and television works is a kind of compound authenticity, including the authenticity of objectivity, subjectivity, appearance, and truth. It not only follows certain scientific cognitive logic but also reflects certain aesthetic judgment logic, yet it is not completely equivalent to either. Scientific cognitive logic requires reflecting the essential attributes and movement laws of objective things. The aesthetic judgment logic depends on the perception laws of

subjective emotions and imagination. In film and television art, which centers on audio-visual perception, the authenticity construction of regional culture first and foremost must start from the objective truth to the subjective truth, and from the authenticity of appearance to the authenticity of truth.

In "Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors", there are two main methods to represent regional culture: one is to depict the geographical and social landscapes of different regions through camera language, and the other is to introduce the different aspects of different regions through narrative voiceovers (written language). In Episode 23, when introducing the taro from Lipu, Guangxi, the creator introduced a nursery rhyme joyfully sung by local children in dialect: "A fire in the deep night, the whole family sits together, the taro is fragrant and hot, even the emperor is not as good as me." This nursery rhyme is well known among local women and children, representing that the Lipu taro is filled with the unique hometown memory of the people of Lipu. The dialect used by the children when singing also serves as a communication symbol that deeply impresses people, and at the same time contributes to the overall construction and dissemination of the regional culture of Lipu, Guangxi.

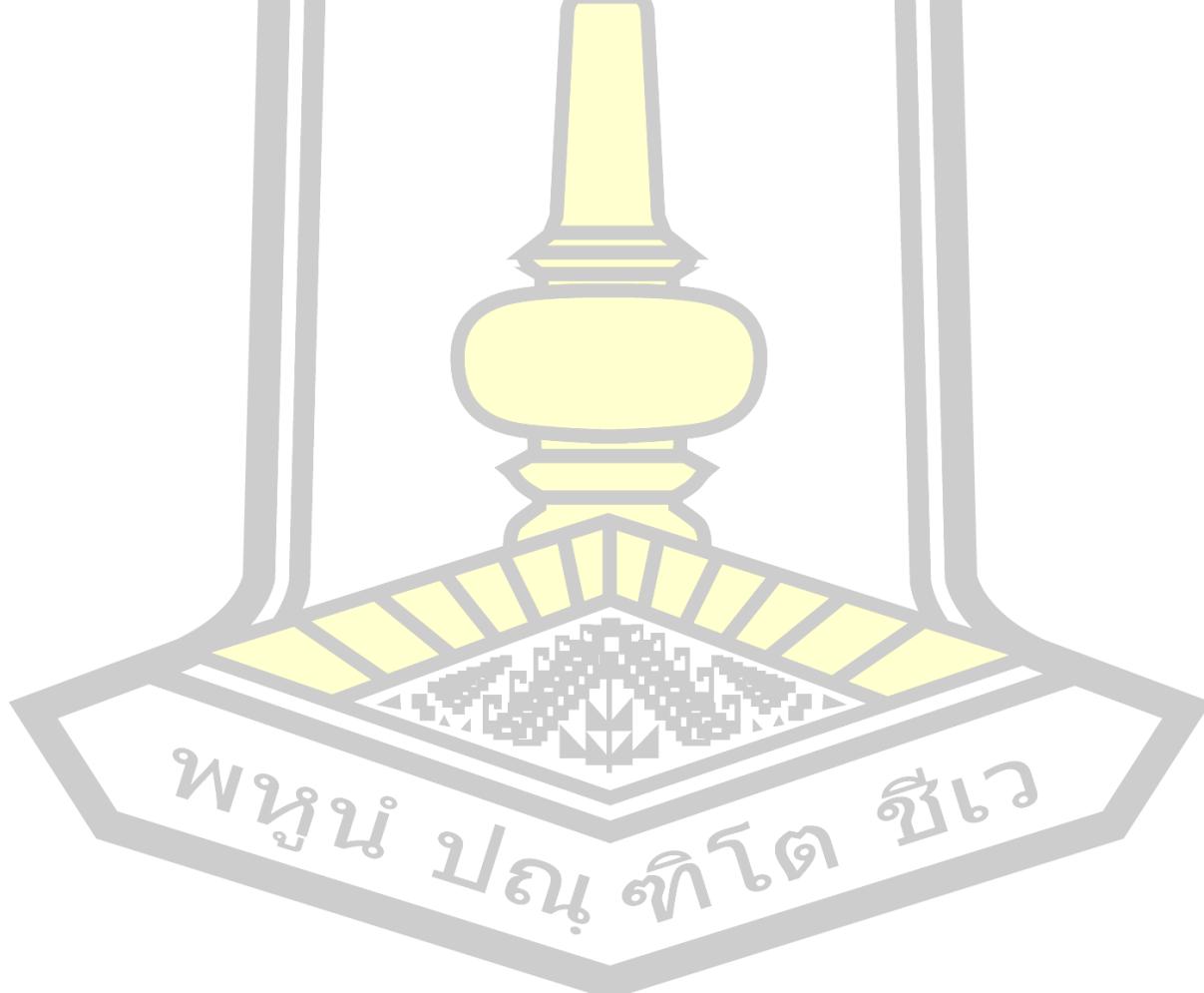




Figure 46 Screenshot of the video the "A Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors".
Source: Producing images by Chen Yanyan, April 2024.

Screenshot of "Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors", showing children in Lipu City, Guangxi, singing a nursery rhyme in the local dialect. The content of the nursery rhyme is Lipu's most authentic specialty - Lipu taro.

The so-called conformity to purpose refers to the cultural identity of regional culture. From the perspective of the subject and object of film and television communication, the conformity to the purpose of regional culture is reflected in both expressing the cultural intention of the communicator and conforming to the aesthetic imagination of the audience, just as Kant said, "Such representations are entirely in

line with the subjective psychological functions so that as soon as one sees them, they immediately cause the imagination and understanding to move freely and harmoniously." [Wang Yuwei, 2010, 5.]

Stuart Hall believes that cultural identity "is constructed in the process of constant change. It is a kind of production and a result of the interaction between history and culture." Regional culture is not immutable, and cultural identity is not innate. To construct cultural identity, it is necessary to conform to the intentionality of the communicator, as well as the identity, variability, and differences of the regional image, and respect the aesthetic cognition of the audience. Only in this way can the communication effect of constructing the cultural identity of the regional image be achieved.

For example, in 2018, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of reform and opening up and the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the autonomous region, Guangxi Nanning Television Station led nearly ten city television stations across the region to produce and broadcast a 12-episode food series micro-documentary "The Taste of Guangxi - Guixi Food Dictionary" together. After the broadcast of this documentary, it did not win the pursuit of the audience, and many netizens even left messages saying that the film production was rough, the wording was not rigorous, and the introduction of food was not comprehensive. This documentary only won the approval of the discourse power of the Guangxi government, and replaced the abnormal "cultural identity" of "folksiness" with "governmentality".

3.3 The representation of traditional culture

Traditional culture is a kind of national culture that reflects the characteristics and style of a nation, evolving from the evolution of civilization, and is the overall representation of various ideological cultures and conceptual forms in the nation's history. While selecting delicious food as the theme, "Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors" pays more attention to the stories of the Zhuang people in Guangxi behind the food and the character of the Zhuang people displayed in the stories. In general, it focuses on representing the Zhuang people and traditional Chinese culture behind the delicious food.

1. Harmony between human and nature, gratitude to nature

Located in the western part of the Liangguang Hills and facing the Beibu Gulf to the south, Guangxi has a mountainous and hilly basin landscape, including mountains, hills, platforms, plains, rocky mountains, and water areas. The complex terrain has led to diverse living conditions for the Zhuang people in Guangxi, with the seashore, hillsides, depressions, and other places becoming their homes. They have fully utilized the living principle of "living on the mountains and seas", regarding nature's gifts as blessings, understanding moderation, and carefully protecting ecological balance. In the documentary, the director shows the Zhuang people's pursuit of harmony between humans and nature through their way of life, demonstrating their gratitude and awe for nature.

In the documentary "Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors," whether it is fishermen living by the sea or farmers residing in the mountains, they are all striving

to discover the laws of nature. Mr. Huo, who has lived on Weizhou Island in Beihai for generations, relies mainly on fishing as the main source of income for four generations of his family. To increase his income, Mr. Huo goes to the sea to collect Sargassum. Sargassum is a type of algae that grows vigorously in the sea. Due to its rapid growth, it often covers the sunlight needed by coral in the sea, but it has a wide range of industrial applications. Therefore, collecting Sargassum does not destroy the ecological balance of the sea and can also clear survival obstacles for weak coral polyps. Local fishermen will collect Sargassum during their free time. In the documentary, the 60-year-old Mr. Huo, who is thin and has dark skin, jumps into the shallow sea with only a diving mask and quickly collects Sargassum in the sea.

In Pubei County, Guangxi, farmer Rong Jialiang is very familiar with the phenological calendar and can always be the first to know when the red-cone mushrooms, a unique specialty of the local red-cone forest, are in season every year. These mushrooms cannot be artificially cultivated and have high nutritional value, with strict requirements for harvesting and storage, resulting in a very high market price. As the narrator says, "This is a gift from nature." The local people obviously know how to treat this gift from nature. Although the harvesting time for red-cone mushrooms is only a few hours, villagers are extremely cautious during the harvesting process, avoiding damaging the mycelium at the base of the mushrooms. This kind of wisdom of moderation has made red-cone mushrooms the most important source of income for locals.

The Zhuang people in Guangxi have made good use of local natural resources. Even with limited resources, they have created favorable living conditions for themselves based on what they have. Qibainong Township is currently known as the deepest depression inhabited by humans. Although the karst mountains are rich in rainfall, the unique terrain makes it impossible to store rainwater. The documentary's narration states that "extreme environments test the imagination of survival." To obtain water, the villagers of Qibainong Township use bamboo to make troughs and place them underground in the mountains. In the documentary, farmer Tang Qimei skillfully cuts bamboo and connects the prepared bamboo sections, placing them in the cracks of stones. Water flows down along the bamboo, resembling a natural water diversion channel.

Maintaining ecological balance is the best way to show gratitude to nature. In the documentary, the collection of Sargassum and the harvesting of red-cone mushrooms reflect that the working people of the Zhuang nationality in Guangxi understand how to follow the laws of natural development in their daily lives. While achieving individual happiness, they also achieve the harmonious unity between humans and nature. The lush green mountains and clear water that evoke praises in the bullet comments of the documentary are the best evidence.

2. Love life and pursue innovation

The documentary lists many famous specialties of Guangxi to showcase its rich products, such as black rice, pearls, dendrobium, star anise, and handmade weaving. However, the abundance of resources is inseparable from the environment, as well as the hardworking and intelligent Zhuang people. Guangxi is characterized by "eight mountains, one river, and one field," and the Hongshui River in Guangxi has a high altitude. Donglan County belongs to the karst mountainous area with barren land, and the per capita planting area is only 0.65 mu (about 0.043 hectares).

Due to the scarcity of land, farmers are particularly careful with farming. Four hundred years ago, the locals invented the intercropping method to cultivate rice and produced a precious variety of black rice. In the documentary, local farmer Huang Yujian and his family are carefully bending over to plant rice in the fields. They attach great importance to every rice plant. To maximize the nutritional value of black rice, locals also use it to make wine.

This innovative and enterprising spirit is also reflected in the people of various industries in Guangxi. Kang Ge in Beihai utilizes the unique local terrain to cultivate seawater pearls. To improve the color of the pearls, Kang Ge selects suitable pearls, inserts artificial nuclei using modern technology, and then places the shells underwater for cultivation for one or two years. It is only through technology and patience that valuable seawater pearls can be cultivated. The big red star anise in Gulong Town, Tengxian County is also well-known, but it is not only due to natural factors, it also benefits from local technology. The documentary selects farmer Mo Yi as the protagonist, narrating how he devoted himself to research for ten years and learned grafting techniques to achieve high yields of star anise trees.

In the documentary, whether farmers, fishermen, or businesspeople, they all strive to make progress and innovate in their respective industries, injecting new vitality into the development of Guangxi.

3. Remain true to one's original aspiration and pass on the torch from generation to generation

Inheritance can be seen as a virtuous tradition that Guangxi laborers have embodied through their actions. Guangxi is a multi-ethnic region, and in the documentary, one can observe the emphasis and seriousness of Guangxi people in inheriting both culture and skills.

In "Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors," the Niuba from Yulin, Guangxi, is a traditional delicacy with a history of over 700 years. Yang Xueying operates an inherited Niuba shop at the west entrance of Yulin Street. Although the shop is not large, she still insists on making Niuba manually every day using the secret recipe handed down from her ancestors. In the footage, Yang Xueying proudly introduces her homemade handmade Niuba to customers. Zou's father and son and Yang Xueying are representatives of the inheritance generation, who carefully guard the skills handed down by their ancestors.

Guangxi is a multi-ethnic region with rich regional and ethnic cultures. The documentary shows that behind the cultural prosperity, the silent dedication of the people of Guangxi cannot be neglected. For example, Lu Huiying, a Zhuang villager from Banjie Village mentioned in the documentary, who goes out to work, returns home with her daughter to participate in the Zhuang People's Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. Lu Huiying not only dressed her daughter in traditional Zhuang costumes but also took the child to make the festival's staple food, five-color glutinous rice. Although her young daughter did not have any lines, the child's face was a testament to inheritance, and the child was the hope for cultural inheritance.



Figure 47 Screenshot of the video the "A Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors".

Source: Producing images by Chen Yanyan, April 2024.

From this screenshot of the documentary, it can be seen that the foreground of the image is a steamer bucket for steaming glutinous rice in five colors. The camera focuses on Zhuang villager Lu Huiying and her daughter. The mother and daughter are wearing traditional Zhuang costumes to make five-color glutinous rice during the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, representing their recognition of their own ethnic traditional culture and also promotion and inheritance of traditional Zhuang costumes. Without forgetting the original aspiration, the Zhuang people inherit the treasures of their ancestors' wisdom. It is this perseverance that enables the Zhuang people to continuously taste unique and flavorful delicacies. Carrying forward the torch handed down from generation to generation, the Zhuang people always regard inheriting their national culture as a sacred mission. Therefore, Guangxi's culture can be so rich and colorful, radiating endless vitality and charm.

The documentary "Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors," not only presents the food, but also subtly integrates the expression of traditional festivals into the background of food, indirectly introducing the festive food customs of the Zhuang people, such as the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Tomb Sweeping Day, Spring Festival, elderly people's birthday, the birth of a new life, and so on. This approach conveys the cultural values behind the festivals, symbolizing the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, as well as humans and society, that lies behind the delicious food.

In summary, "Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors" does not limit itself to introducing the delicacies of different festivals. It also provides extensive introductions to the origins of various festivals and the customs of celebratory activities in different regions. By presenting the folk customs and rituals of the Zhuang people, "Thousand Cities, Hundred Flavors" creates a cultural landscape that transcends the mere food itself, offering viewers not only a feast for the taste buds but also a richer spiritual nourishment and cultural sustenance.

Hungarian film theorist Béla Balázs proposed in his book *Film Aesthetics* that "documentaries must discover the most characteristic, interesting, moldable, and expressive elements in the vast realm of the empirical world." This statement contains

two key implications: firstly, documentary filmmakers should possess a broad horizon; secondly, the production of documentaries should excavate expressive and core competitive content. Balázs provided researchers with inspiration, which is to stand in a global perspective and adopt a developmental view to observe and represent the essence of Zhuang food culture. This "essence" not only includes traditional cooking techniques, but also embodies the various characters of the Zhuang people reflected in their current human relationships, society, and life stories. After all, the essence of all cultures is about the culture of "human beings."

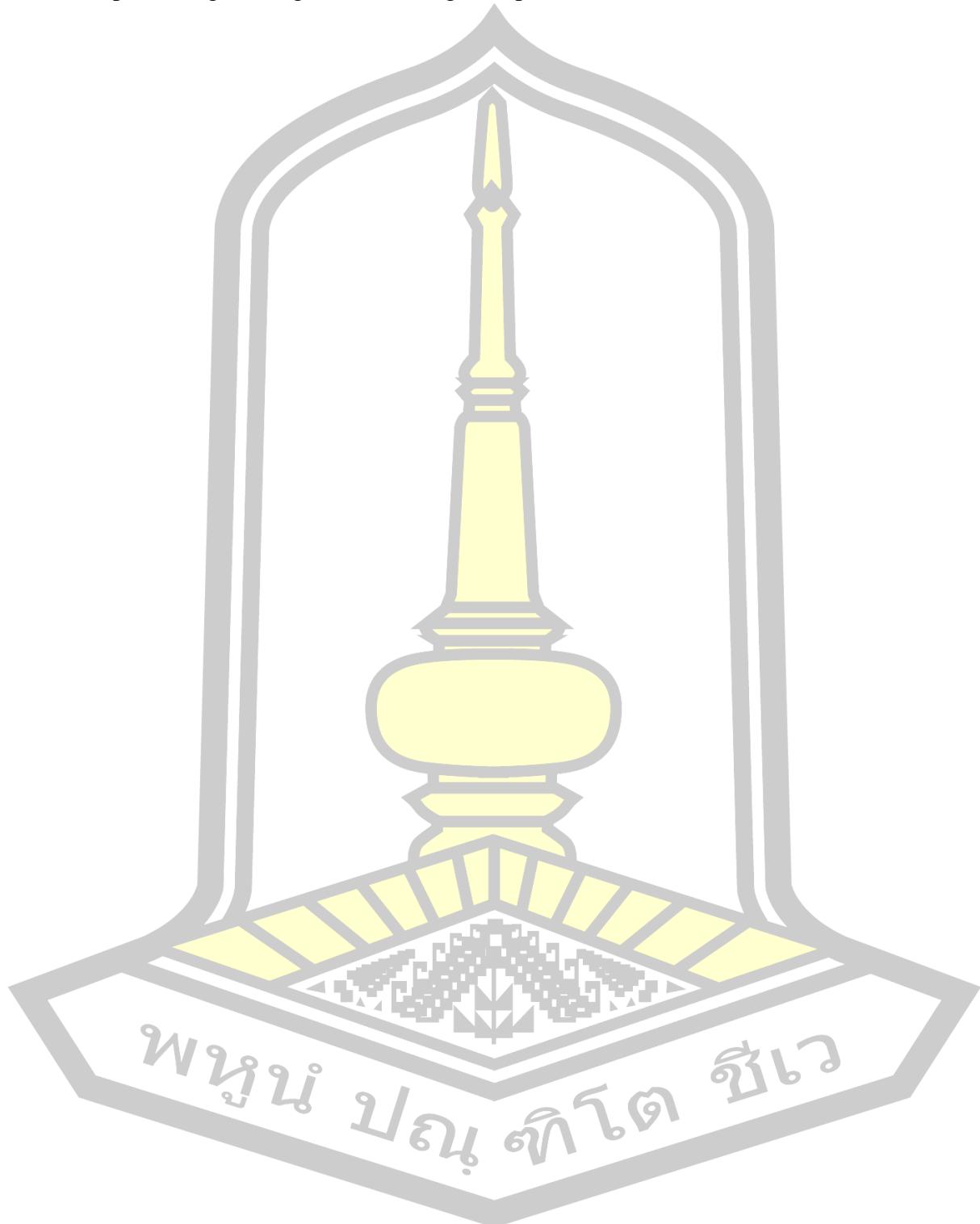
Conclusion

There exists a mutually promoting relationship between media technology and representation. Specific media technology triggers new representational practices, which in turn promote the demand for media technology innovation. Meanwhile, the continuous advancement of media technology further expands the possibilities of representation, creating a broader space for representational practices. Digital media images active on various internet platforms serve as new representational practices, greatly enriching the representational forms of Zhuang food culture. Through these new representational practices, we are able to more comprehensively showcase and disseminate Zhuang food culture, endowing it with richer and more diverse expressions.

Time has a specific meaning of irreversibility, and some events that occurred in a certain period cannot be reproduced. People can only seek those memories from their memories and imagination. Documentaries can carry memories, and their authenticity and cultural characteristics make them possess unique charm and special value. The communication channels of traditional documentaries are very limited, so the extent of their content dissemination is also limited, and the previous communication methods are showing their decline in the era of information explosion. To cater to modern people's fast-paced, fragmented, and diversified information-obtaining habits, a new type of documentary - micro-documentary has emerged in recent years. Relying on the integration of television media and Internet media, enhances communication power and influence, realizing the widespread and profound dissemination of the culture contained behind micro-documentaries.

Drawing on Stuart Hall's theory of representation, this paper focuses on analyzing various imagery symbols in micro-documentary about Zhuang food culture, revealing the process of meaning production beneath its cultural representations. The representations of Zhuang food culture in micro-documentaries are multifaceted, and the researchers mainly analyze them from three dimensions: The representation of food culture, The representation of regional culture, and The representation of traditional culture. The representation of food culture shapes the resilient character of the Zhuang people in their constant pursuit and progress from three aspects: cooking utensils, ingredients for food, and Food preparation process. The representation of regional culture discusses how micro-documentaries construct cultural identity and guide aesthetic appreciation from the perspective of the regularity and purpose of regional cultural communication. The representation of traditional culture is characterized by the inheritance and adherence of Zhuang people to traditional festivals and traditional culinary skills. Relying on Zhuang food, we can comprehend

the cultural value behind food and rediscover the significance of micro-documentaries in presenting Zhuang culture through the production and dissemination of cuisine.



CHAPTER V

The meaning and representation of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival

Introduction

This chapter takes the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival as an example to analyze the meaning and representation of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival **in the Process of New Media Communication in China**. It is divided into three parts: Part 1 The historical development and evolution of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival **in the Process of New Media Communication in China**; Part 2 The meaning and representation of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival; Part 3 The inheritance issues and countermeasures of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in the process of New media communication and development. The content of this chapter echoes the previous chapter.

Part 1 The historical development and evolution of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in the Process of New Media Communication in China

The Zhuang people are a rice-farming ethnic group with a long history, whose culture is deeply rooted in the complexity of rice cultivation. Rice growth is highly dependent on sunlight, rainwater, and management techniques, and various factors in the production process can directly affect the harvest. As the ancestors lacked an understanding of rice growth and natural phenomena, they tended to explain these phenomena mysteriously, believing that gods govern the abundance or scarcity of rice and natural changes.

To pray for favorable weather and a bumper rice crop, the Zhuang people hold various sacrificial rites in different seasons, offering sacrifices to the gods, chanting sutras and praying, and even performing dance, song, drum, and music activities to please the gods. Therefore, the folk festivals of the Zhuang people in Guangxi are very rich, with one or two festivals every season or every month. These festivals not only satisfy people's spiritual needs, but also provide them with opportunities to rest and relax, improve their lives, and promote the exchange of family and friendship.

Therefore, the Zhuang people in Guangxi regard festivals as the moments in life when food is the most abundant, dishes are the most delicious, preparations are the most exquisite, and cooking is the most sophisticated. Various local-flavored snacks and traditional dishes are almost all made and enjoyed during festivals. Among the traditional festivals, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is the most important one for the Zhuang people in Guangxi. This festival carries the shared historical memories of multiple ethnic groups in Guangxi. Through this festival, people can gain a deeper understanding of, respect for, and inheritance of diverse ethnic cultures, enhancing social cohesion and promoting cultural diversity. During the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, people use ingredients from their own homes or the local area to make special delicacies, expressing their culture and traditions. Therefore, during the

Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, the rich food culture of the Zhuang people is displayed in a concentrated and comprehensive manner.

The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, originally a spontaneously agreed custom among the Zhuang people, has gradually evolved into a national cultural symbol of Guangxi through the cultural excavation and protection efforts of the government. Researchers regard 2014 as an important time node because in that year, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival was inscribed on the national list of intangible cultural heritage, and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region declared it as a public holiday in Guangxi. The Guangxi government extensively promoted the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival as a representative of Zhuang culture and expanded its influence in the online media space. With the effective integration of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival and **new medium**, its communication methods have taken on a new look, ushering in a brand-new communication landscape.

1.1 The origin of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival

The third day of the third lunar month, as an annual grand festival for the Zhuang people in Guangxi, boasts a long history and rich content. On this day, the Zhuang people hold a solemn ancestor worship ceremony with reverence to express gratitude to their ancestors for their nurturing and pass on the traditional virtue of respecting the elderly and caring for the young. Meanwhile, people also go out to enjoy the spring outdoors and appreciate the gifts of nature. In addition, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is also a time for relatives and friends to gather together, visit each other, exchange emotions, and deepen their bonds. These diverse cultural functional attributes make the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival a festival filled with joy, gratitude, and reunion, which is an important part of Zhuang culture and one of the most cherished and anticipated traditional festivals for the Zhuang people.

Historically, there are numerous records about the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in various prefecture records, county records, customs records, and poems written by scholars and poets. In recent years, Chinese academic circles have conducted various textual research and constructions on the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, resulting in quite rich research outcomes. For example, Pan Qixu elaborated on the historical context and presentation forms of the "Zhuang Songxu" (Zhuang folk song gathering) in his study "Research on Zhuang Songxu"; He Weijing wrote the book "Sidelights on Folk Activities of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Guangxi", introducing various aspects of the festival, including its symbolic meanings, organizers, venues, procedures, and activities. Centering on the evolution process of the Sanyuesan Festival since 1980, the book proposed that the Sanyuesan activities should become a unique symbol and imprint of the Zhuang people, and through the efforts of society, the government, and other parties, they should eventually become a festival shared by all people, transcending ethnic and regional barriers. Qin Guiqing wrote "Origins and Evolution of the 'Sanyuesan' Festival", arguing that Guangxi, located in the south of the Five Ridges, has had increasing interactions with the Central Plains since the Qin Dynasty, leading to an increase in the exchange of ethnic cultures and mutual influence of customs and habits. The customs of the "Shangsi Festival" in the Central Plains integrated with the legend of *Liu Sanjie*, the "Song Fairy" of the Zhuang people, and thus formed the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Guangxi, and so on.

Overall, previous research achievements generally believe that the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival originated from the Shangsi Festival of the Han nationality, and

even classify the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival under the broad category of the Shangsi Festival, thus overshadowing the essential characteristics and local cultural features of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. For example, in the article "Research on Folk Culture of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Wuning, Guangxi" written by Li Shangli, it is argued that the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Wuming has a long history with traditional culture. It incorporates various ancient cultures such as sacrificial rites, poetry, and rice farming under people's eagerness for a good harvest and reverence for nature. At the same time, it is a traditional festival that integrates numerous folk customs such as family tomb sweeping, folk song duets, poetry gatherings, and ball throwing for marriage proposals, and the making of five-colored glutinous rice.

Due to the scarcity of historical documents and folk literature records about the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Guangxi, as well as the lack of continuity and systematicity, it poses a significant challenge to the textual research on its origin. As we all know, the textual research on the origin of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival can only yield a more reasonable conclusion when returning to the historical context of that time. Among them, folk legends with important historical significance, documentary functions, and the characteristics of oral cultural transmission provide us with a better perspective and approach.

In areas where Zhuang people live in compact communities, a large number of folk tales related to the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival have been circulating for a long time, and these folk stories are closely linked to the rice cultivation and cultural life of the Zhuang people. The "paddy culture" is comprehensively defined in Jiang Bin's book "Folk Customs and Rice Culture in the South of the Yangtze River": "It not only includes the utilization of natural science and historical archaeology to study the origin, circulation, and technical issues of ancient rice but also encompasses the changes in folk living habits and lifestyles brought about by rice cultivation, as well as the influence of rice cultivation on the temperament and cultural attitudes of people in the farming areas. In summary, 'paddy culture' refers to all aspects derived from rice cultivation" (Jiang Bin, 1996, P7). In modern cultural society, "paddy culture" is recognized and reflected as a certain ideological concept, which spawns conceptual culture, and the closely related folk tales are the carriers of this conceptual culture. Through collation, these folk tales can be roughly divided into three categories: ancestor worship and tomb sweeping, singing gatherings, and spiritual worship. legends of ancestor worship and tomb sweeping :

According to the record in the first volume of "Duanzhou Xiaoji Sijuan" (Four Volumes of Short Records of Duanzhou) from the reign of Emperor Daoguang of the Qing Dynasty, there is such a legend: Once upon a time, there was an old woman named Wen from Duanxi. She lived near a mountain stream and made a living by fishing. One day, she found an egg as big as a "dou"²⁷ on the bank, so she took it home and put it in a container. After more than ten days, something crawled out of the egg, shaped like a palm and over a foot long. The old woman let it go as it pleased. As it grew up, it could dive into the water to catch fish, catching more than ten fish every day. As it grew bigger, it caught more and more fish. It often swam back and forth around the old woman. Later, when the old woman was gutting a fish, she accidentally broke its tail, and it hovered and swam away. Several years later, it

²⁷ dou, an ancient unit of capacity used to measure the volume of grain or other items

returned. The old woman saw that its body was shining with dazzling light and said, "This is the son of a dragon, and now he has returned." So the old woman let it hover and play around as before. When Emperor Qin Shi Huang heard about this, he said, "This is due to my virtue." So he sent envoys with gifts to invite the old woman to live in the imperial capital. However, the old woman was reluctant to leave due to her attachment to her hometown. The envoys forced the old woman onto a boat, and when the boat had traveled over a thousand li, the dragon's son appeared and pulled the boat back, returning to the original place before nightfall. This happened several times, and the envoys were frightened, so they gave up and ultimately did not take the old woman away. Several years later, the old woman passed away, and the dragon's son often came to her grave, stirring up waves and depositing sand and stones to fill up her grave. The locals called the dragon's son Juewei Dragon, and the Southerners made boats in the shape of a dragon with a dug-up tail, originating from this legend. (Deng Yuanguang, 1830, P2)

A similar legend, known as the "*Te Jue*" legend, circulates in Shanglin and other areas of Guangxi:

Long ago, there lived an elderly woman in the village who was kind-hearted but had no children and lived alone. One day, she rescued a dying little snake. After the snake recovered, it did not want to part with the elderly woman, so she told the snake that there was a difference between humans and animals, and humans did not have tails. If the snake wanted to stay, it had to cut off its tail. The snake agreed and let the elderly woman cut off its tail. The snake, now without its "*Te*" tail, was called "*Te Jue*" by the villagers, representing masculinity in Zhuang culture, while "*Jue*" refers to a short tail in Zhuang culture. Meanwhile, the elderly woman is also called "*Nie Jue*" by the villagers, where "*Nie*" represents "mother" in Zhuang culture. From then on, the elderly woman treated *Te Jue* as her child. Later, when the elderly woman passed away in old age, the villagers buried her and said to the snake, "*Te Jue, Nie Jue* treated you as her child every day. Now she has left. It's up to you to show your filial piety." The *Jue*, the little snake, seemed to understand the villagers' meaning. It blinked its eyes, and suddenly there was a gale and a thunderstorm. When the villagers regained their senses, the elderly woman's coffin and the snake were already on the summit of Daming Mountain²⁸. It was around the third day of the third lunar month, and every year on this day, there would be thunderstorms and gales around Daming Mountain. The local villagers believed that *Te Jue* had come back to visit *Nie Jue*'s grave. Since then, the third day of the third lunar month has become a traditional day for Zhuang people to commemorate ancestors and sweep tombs. (Li Fuqiang, Bai Yaotian, 2013, P357-358)

The above two folk tales are largely similar, and the latter is obviously a variation of the former. Both tales involve snakes, storms and thunderbolts, as well as the themes of filial piety and tomb-sweeping. A thorough exploration of these themes reveals that they are all connected to the "paddy culture" of Lingnan.

One of the motifs - the snake, is recorded in *Shuowen Jiezi* (Explaining Characters and Analyzing Forms): "Min, refers to the southeast Yue. A tribe that worships snakes. Man, refers to the Southern Barbarians, a tribe that worships

²⁸ Daming Mountain also known as Damingshan, located in the central part of Guangxi

snakes." (Xu Shen, 1963, P17) "A tribe that worships snakes" refers to the ethnic group that believes in snake totems. Shuoyuan Jiaozheng (Collation and Annotation of Shuoyuan) records: "Therefore, they cut their hair and tattooed their bodies, brilliantly forming patterns resembling dragon offspring, to avoid the water god." (Liu Xiang, 1987, P302). The Hanshu·Dizhi (Geographical Records of the Han Dynasty) states: "(The Yue people) often live in the water, so they cut their hair and tattoo their bodies to resemble dragon offspring. Hence, they are not harmed." (Ban Gu, 2012, P405).

These historical records suggest that in ancient times, the boundaries between dragons and snakes were blurred, often equating snakes with dragons and dragons with snakes. In legends, dragons were not initially associated with rainwater. However, during the Ming Dynasty, when the Han Chinese concept of dragons governing water spread to the Zhuang areas, dragons became the deities in charge of rainfall. Therefore, in the second legend, when extreme weather such as storms or hailstorms occur in the Daming Mountain area around the **Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival**, local Zhuang people believe that it is *Te Jue* returning to sweep and worship his mother.

The second motif - rainwater. The traditional production and life of the Guangxi Zhuang people are mainly based on agriculture, supplemented by fishing and hunting, with less emphasis on industry and commerce. Among them, rice cultivation is the most important production activity. In the rice cultivation structure of the Zhuang ancestors, they mainly relied on natural rainfall for their rainfed paddies. Ling Wai Dai Da (Answers to Questions from Outside the Ridge) states: "This place is very deep and vast, and when one looks out, most of it is open land, with only a small proportion of farmland, probably only about one percent. The farmland is often chosen in places with perennial springs or groundwater, which can be cultivated into fields. If the land is even slightly higher, it will be abandoned and not considered farmland. During cultivation, farmers simply break the surface of the land without deep digging or soil turning. They plant directly on the field and do not transplant seedlings after planting. After planting, they will not irrigate or drain, regardless of drought or flooding. They neither classify nor cultivate according to the nature of the land nor cultivate. In short, they completely rely on providence to determine the growth of crops." (Zhou Qufei, 1999, P46).

The third motif - ethical morality. Both legends mention that every year on the third day of the third lunar month, the dragon (snake) "*Jieweilong*" (Digging Tail Dragon) or "*Tejue*" returns to sweep the tomb of its adoptive mother, and the Zhuang people later set the third day of the third lunar month as a festival for sweeping tombs and worshiping ancestors. The reason for this lies in the Zhuang people's great emphasis on "filial piety." In ancient society, the Zhuang people lived under a self-sufficient natural economy for a long time, and the land had a significant impact on their character formation. Fei Xiaotong said: "..... Our nation is indeed inseparable from the soil. Glorious history has grown from the soil, and naturally, it will also be bound by the soil. Now, it seems that many of us cannot fly into the sky. ... The god that occupies the highest position in quantity is undoubtedly 'the land'." [Fei Xiaotong, 2011, P21]. Whether in the hunting era or the agricultural era, as indigenous people, the Zhuang people in Guangxi have a deep affection for the land, which has fostered their attachment to the soil. They are content to settle down in rice paddies, have a strong sense of family, and are prone to forming the concept that "the heavens and the

earth are vast, but the family is the greatest." This makes them remember their ancestors while working and never forget their origins, demonstrating the important role of paddy culture in shaping and inheriting traditional virtues. legends of spiritual beliefs:

The book The Comprehensive Chronicle²⁹ of Immortals through the Ages records that the Xuanwu Emperor³⁰ was born "on the third day of the third lunar month, the hour of Gengyin, from the left rib of his mother." Therefore, the third day of the third lunar month became the birthday of the "Northern Guardian Zhenwu Xuantian Dadi." In Volume 2 of the Search for the Gods, there is also a record stating that "Xuantian Shangdi was born on the third day of the third lunar month." Zhu Quan of the early Ming Dynasty also wrote in the lower volume of The Jade Book of the Supreme Tao of the Heavenly Emperor in the 36th volume of the Continued Taoist Canon: "On the third day, the day of dispelling evil, the Northern Guardian Zhenwu was born." This statement is the same as that recorded in the Record of the Revelation of the Xuantian Shangdi from the late Yuan Dynasty to the early Ming Dynasty.

The above records show that the "third day of the third lunar month" is the birthday of the Zhenwu Emperor. The Ming Dynasty was the heyday of belief in Zhenwu, and temples (palaces, monasteries, halls, pavilions, and towers) dedicated to the Zhenwu Emperor were spread across the country, concentrated in Beijing, Nanjing, Huguang, Jin, Liaodong, Jiangzhe, Lingnan, Fujian and Taiwan, etc. Guangxi region was the "southwest capital" of the Ming Empire at that time, with several temples and monasteries dedicated to Zhenwu, and the incense was continuous. For example, during the Tianli reign of the Wen Emperor of the Yuan Dynasty (1328-1330), the Qingzhen Pavilion was built in the Bixia Cave of Diecai Mountain in Guilin; in the Ming Dynasty, the Xuandi Temple (Xuanwu Pavilion) was built on the top of Duxiu Mountain in the Jingjiang Wangcheng of Guilin; and the Zhenwu Temple was built in Beituo City, Enlai, Zhaoping County, Pingle Prefecture in the Wanli reign of the Ming Dynasty. Among them, the Guangxi Tongzhi records that "The Zhenwu Palace is located in the north of the county and is used for praying for rain." This refers to the Zhenwu Palace in Yangshuo County, Guilin, Guangxi. It can be seen that the veneration of Zhenwu in Guangxi had already become a folk belief in divine spirits by the end of the Ming Dynasty.

In terms of religious theory, Zhuang people's worship of the Zhenwu Emperor is mostly pragmatic. The Zhenwu Emperor is a deity who specializes in controlling water, and his primary function is to oversee precipitation. The History of the Later Han Dynasty compiled by Fan Ye of the Southern Song Dynasty records: "Xuanwu is the name of the water god and the official of the water division." The work Tao Shan Shi Lu written by Tang Zhongmian of the Qing Dynasty records: "Zhenwu is Yuanming, responsible for water affairs and located in the north. During the drought in spring, the people look up at the clouds anxiously. They crawl to the Yuan Palace

²⁹ The Comprehensive Chronicle of Immortals also known as The Record of the Common Origin of the Three Religions, compiled by Xu Dao during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties

³⁰ Xuanwu Emperor also known as Xuantian Shangdi, Yousheng Zhenjun, Zhenwu Dadi, etc., a deity in Chinese Taoism

and are delighted to see the divination results. The words 'clouds move and rain falls' are seen on the oracle bones. At that time, the sun rises, and the sky is as clear as if it has been wiped clean." This depicts the scene of people going to the Zhenwu Temple to pray for rain during droughts, and their worries before praying for rain and joy after rainfall are vividly portrayed, reflecting the effectiveness and benevolence of the Zhenwu deity.

Therefore, praying for rain is an important reason for Zhuang people in Guangxi to believe in the Zhenwu deity, and it is also a manifestation of the people's emphasis on the practicality of deities in religious rites. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the people particularly believed in this deity, so Zhenwu temples were widespread in Lingnan. Further exploring the reasons for Zhuang people's praying for rain, we can see that in a farming society where people depend on the weather for their livelihoods, the Zhuang people, as a rice-farming nation, have strict water requirements for rice cultivation. Too much water causes flooding, and too little water causes drought. Therefore, praying for rain to the Zhenwu deity is undoubtedly a product of paddy culture.

Legend of the Song Festival:

Produced by Guangxi Film Studio in 1978, "*Liu Sanjie*" is China's first musical feature film, which gained immense popularity and influence among the people after its release. The transition from folk legends to real historical figures and further extension from historical figures to folk stories has resulted in countless tales about *Liu Sanjie*. However, the focus of this section is not on the authenticity of this historical figure, but rather on exploring its connection with the **Sanyuesan Festival** through folk stories, historical documents, and other sources.

Legend has it that in a Zhuang village, there lived a "Song Fairy" known as *Liu Sanjie*. She was eloquent and skilled in praising labor and love through folk songs while exposing ugliness. Unable to defeat her, the local bullies killed her on the third day of March. The Zhuang people gathered to sing for three days and three nights on the day of *Liu Sanjie*'s martyrdom, which later evolved into the Song Festival.

Historical documents also record the **Sanyuesan Festival**. The informative book "Compilation of Ancient and Modern Books" compiled by Chen Menglei in the Qing Dynasty mentions "Ghost Dance and Competition," which was an activity held after the autumn harvest, where people prayed to the gods and ghosts for favorable weather before planting and gathered to sing after the harvest. In the late Qing Dynasty, Zhuang poet Wei Fenghua composed the poem "*Liaojiang Zhuzhi Ci*" to depict the grandeur of the **Sanyuesan Festival**: "The spring breeze warms and the rain has just passed... The third day of March is filled with beautiful flowers... Suddenly, the sound of singing arises from the wind, and every household's sons and daughters wear new clothes... The flowery songs ring in our ears, requiring a response... Enjoy the fun to the fullest, for after ten days, it's time for farming again." It can be seen that the **Sanyuesan Festival** in Guangxi spreads throughout urban and rural areas, with great bustle and excitement.

The above records involve the themes of "labor" and "harvest," indicating that the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival was largely celebrated for a "good harvest." Considering the timing, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival fell right before the busy farming season in Guangxi's Zhuang communities. Therefore, the Song Festival on the third day of March originally originated from the production cycle and daily

rhythm of rice farming among the Zhuang ancestors. People prayed for a good harvest at the beginning of the year and indulged themselves in entertainment before starting the spring plowing, to gather momentum for the spring farming. Later, with the improvement of living standards, the Song Festival on the third day of March gradually evolved into a comprehensive festival for socializing and various folk activities among young men and women. From this perspective, the Song Festival on the third day of March in the Zhuang communities can still be seen as a paddy culture.

From legends of ancestor worship and tomb sweeping, to legends of spiritual beliefs, and then to Legend of the Song Festival, all of them are closely related to paddy culture. It can be said that the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival originated from the long-standing paddy culture system of the Zhuang people, which is a product of the long-term interaction between the natural ecological environment and the cultural spirit of the Zhuang people, and a cultural carrier of the national psychological characteristics and temperament styles formed in the long-term production and life of the Zhuang people. In summary, the primitive form of farming and cultivation under the small-scale peasant economy has spawned the birth of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival.

1.2 The development process of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival before 2014

The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival has played an important cultural role in history. However, in the process of social changes, especially during the Cultural Revolution, it suffered severe trauma, and the decline of its functions further exacerbated its decline. After the Cultural Revolution, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival rapidly recovered and was rebuilt under the support of policies, government initiatives, assistance from intellectuals, and public endorsement, becoming a festival with influence both within and outside the region.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties in China, the rulers implemented a strict policy of banning singing to strengthen the control of civilian behaviors. They believed that the trend of singing gatherings was a "detrimental to moral education" behavior and should be strictly prohibited. Some literati and scholars also composed poems to belittle singing gatherings under the convergence of the official attitude. Lin Guoqiao described singing gatherings as "selling amorous feelings by the roadside and mountainside" in Tianhe Fengtu Poems. Wang Jin, a Qing dynasty scholar, questioned the chastity of unmarried women singing in public in the Annals of Liuzhou Prefecture, written by himself. These literati openly declared, "Do not say that we should not prohibit it because it is an important local custom." This means that singing gatherings cannot be excused as an important local custom and thus should be prohibited. Therefore, Li Yanzhang, the magistrate of Wuming [Magistrate, an ancient Chinese official title], quietly erected a monument banning singing in Matou Town, Wuming, to "prohibit flower songs." However, despite the strict prohibition, the trend of singing gatherings failed to be completely eradicated. During the Republic of China era, with rapid social changes and alternating political power, the ban on singing became even stricter, describing folk songs as "amorous words between men and women," and the attitude towards establishing a ban was even more resolute.

In 1931 and 1936, respectively, the "Rules for Eliminating Obsolete Customs Related to Weddings, Funerals, Birthdays, and Other Occasions in Counties and Cities of Guangxi" and the "Rules for Rural Prohibition in Guangxi" were issued,

requiring the rectification of obsolete customs in Guangxi's singing gatherings in the form of legal provisions. At the same time, the strengthening of violent control, arresting people who gathered to sing, and a tough stance on banning singing were implemented. The Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1977 especially accelerated the decline of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. Under the slogan of "breaking down the four olds and establishing the four news," the People's Daily publicly published "The Crucial Point of the Poisonous Weed 'Liu Sanjie' Is Opposing Violent Revolution" to criticize "Liu Sanjie," and singing folk songs and attending singing gatherings were strictly prohibited. Young men and women who violated the order were ordered to make a self-criticism before all members of the commune or were labeled as "promiscuous" and brought to the public assembly to undergo criticism and struggle against them. Although the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival was banned from gathering to sing during the Cultural Revolution, Guangxi Zhuang people still quietly went to the countryside to worship their ancestors and celebrate the festival on the day of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival.

In September 1949, the state issued the Common Program to recognize ethnic minorities and proposed to implement regional autonomy in areas where ethnic minorities live in compact communities, promoting the policy of ethnic equality. In December of the same year, Wuming County was liberated. In 1952, the Decision of the State Council on Ensuring that All Ethnic Minorities Living in Scattered Areas Fully Enjoy the Right of Ethnic Equality stipulated that ethnic minorities' customs and habits should be respected. In 1954, the Constitution of the People's Republic of China stipulated that all ethnic groups have the freedom to maintain or reform their customs and habits. In 1956, Guangxi carried out rural land reform and other movements throughout the region, resulting in stable prices and a prosperous market. With relatively stable politics and economic development, the main content of folk songs also changed accordingly, mainly praising current affairs such as policies and guidelines. The traditional folk customs of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival were awakened in a new form, but the true comprehensive restoration and reconstruction of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival occurred after the China's reform and opening up.

In 1979, the "Report of the Party Leadership Group of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission on Improving the Work of Ethnic Minorities Living in Mixed Communities and Scattered Areas" pointed out that respecting the customs and habits of ethnic minorities is a significant issue concerning ethnic equality and unity. During the reform and opening up in the 1980s, the country corrected the errors of left-leaning ideas, and the political, economic, cultural, and ideological circles in the country flourished. Under such a policy environment, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region People's Government once again attached great importance to the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, respected the wishes of the ethnic group, advocated, supported, guided, and developed the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, which enjoys widespread participation from the people. This led to the revival and resurgence of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival through the first government-led Zhuang Song Festival held on October 1, 1980.

From spontaneous folk activities to government-led events. Before 1979, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, a cultural memory deeply rooted in the hearts of the Zhuang people, flourished among the people, and folk songs spontaneously formed, with people voluntarily participating. On August 15, 2023, during an interview with

Lan Jiyou (Zhuang nationality) at the Cultural Center Square in Wuming District, researchers learned that "there was no specific organization for singing folk songs, they formed spontaneously, and the main singers were the elderly." Yu Yanming, the curator of the Wuming Cultural Center, also stated that "the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival has always existed, but it was officially recorded and guided by the government after 1979. Before that, each village organized it themselves." After the reform and opening up, the cultural sector began to rectify the root causes and clear up the sources, and culture was given due respect. Against this political backdrop, on October 1, 1980, the Wuming County government changed the situation of people spontaneously organizing the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival and led the organization of the first Zhuang folk song festival, "the National Day Folk Song Festival," in the county town. This conscious organization sent a signal of the government's respect, support, and encouragement for the people, breaking the previous situation of government suppression and prohibition of culture and establishing a new public image of the government. Since then, the practice of the government organizing festivals has continued.

In 1983, to implement the Party's ethnic policy of respecting ethnic customs and habits, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region People's Government decided to designate the third day of the lunar March as the Song Festival of the Zhuang people every year. On April 15, 1983, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, jointly organized by Guangxi University for Nationalities (now Guangxi University for Nationalities) and Guangxi Mass Art Gallery, was held at Guangxi University for Nationalities. At that time, leaders from various departments such as the Vice Chairman of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region People's Congress, the Political Consultative Conference, the United Front Work Department, the Education and Health Committee, the Science and Technology Association, the Ethnic Affairs Commission, and the Cultural Bureau all participated in the festival activities. The program and content of the festival included the opening ceremony, throwing of embroidered balls, and singing of folk songs. [Lu Yibin, 1983] This was the first time that Guangxi organized the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival event at the autonomous region level, and positioned the event as a "Song Festival", highlighting the function of singing folk songs during the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. Since then, it marked the beginning of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival activities organized by the government.

In 1984, the Ethnic Affairs Commission and Department of Culture of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region built stages in People's Park, Nanhu Park, and Ethnic Square in Nanning, and held a grand Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, accompanied by a large-scale cultural parade. The three-day and three-night singing competitions and cultural performances of various ethnic groups attracted hundreds of thousands of people. [Compiled by the Local Chronicles Compilation Committee of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, 1999, P238]



Figure 48 The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in 1984

Source: Photo taken by Huang Gang 1984

On April 3, 1984, during the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, folk song talents from various cities in Guangxi gathered in Nanning, and the festival was unprecedentedly grand this year.

In 1985, the Department of Culture, Ethnic Affairs Commission, Music Association, and Dance Association of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region jointly held the first Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Nanning, which lasted for eight days. The activities included musical and dance performances by over a thousand participants from various ethnic groups in Guangxi, as well as academic seminars attended by scholars from outside the region.





Figure 49 The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in 1989
Source: Photo taken by Huang Lei 1989

In 1989, guests from across the country participated in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival held in Guilin, Guangxi, and many foreign friends were also attracted by the grandeur of the festival, eagerly capturing and documenting the moment.

Since 1991, the Song Festival has been renamed as "Guangxi International Folk Song Festival." Gradually dominated by official ideology, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, which originated as a traditional custom of the Zhuang people, has evolved into a world-renowned large-scale national singing festival in the form of a folk song festival, becoming a new form of external communication and development of Guangxi's traditional ethnic culture. In 1993, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region government held the first Guangxi International Folk Song Festival. By 1999, a total of eight festivals were held, and it was renamed the Nanning International Folk Song Art Festival in that year. The activities were divided into several major sections, including culture, economy, trade, and tourism. In 2003, Wuming County renamed the "Song Festival" as "Song Market," known as the Wuming Zhuang Sanyuesan Song Market. In 2004, the "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival" was included in the list of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region's intangible cultural heritage at the district level.

Based on the promulgation and implementation of the "Opinions on Strengthening the Protection of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage" in 2005, the protection of China's "intangible cultural heritage" has achieved overall and systematic development. In the same year, Guangxi promulgated and implemented the "Regulations on the Protection of Ethnic and Folk Traditional Culture of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region." The promulgation and implementation of the "Law of the People's Republic of China on Intangible Cultural Heritage" in 2011 led to the "Draft of the Regulations on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region." The Guangxi government has promoted the protection of "intangible cultural heritage" by promulgating and implementing regulations, increasing investment in "intangible cultural heritage" protection, setting up an "intangible cultural heritage" protection center under the Department of Culture, and carrying out substantive work such as inventorying and reporting "intangible cultural heritage" and building ecological protection areas. Through the organization and holding of "intangible cultural heritage" day-themed activities by governments at all levels, a series of folk cultural activities of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival have been displayed and performed in a concentrated manner.

So far, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, originally a spontaneously agreed custom among the Zhuang people, has gradually become a cultural symbol of Guangxi through the government's official cultural excavation and protection, taking on the role of a brand image.

1.3 The Evolution of Media for the Spread of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival after 2014

Every media revolution in the history of human development has had a fundamental impact on the direction of human social development. This fundamental impact has changed the social organizational structure, rules and regulations, human behavioral norms, and ways of thinking. As the most representative traditional activity of the Zhuang people in Guangxi, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival has inevitably been affected by the media revolution. In the long period of traditional media communication, people needed to mobilize all their senses and imagination to

enrich and reconstruct the integrity of simple or even vague information. In contrast, in the era of new media communication, people are surrounded by rich and detailed information. What they need to do is to choose based on their interests, while the thinking and analysis of information are completed by other information. All they need to do is click on the corresponding links. In the era of new media, digital technology has changed the way of communication of Zhuang traditional festivals. Mobile phones, mobile internet, and television have become new fronts for the dissemination of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. The cultural value and artistic expression of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival have undergone tremendous changes.

The completion of ARPANET in 1969 marked the birth of the Internet. On April 20, 1994, China achieved the first TCP/IP full-function connection with the international Internet and became a member of the Internet community. Since then, relying on the dissemination of the Internet, Chinese new media emerged at the right moment.

On New Year's Day of 1997, People's Daily Online, hosted by People's Daily, officially went online, becoming the first central key news and propaganda website launched in China. Since then, news websites have sprung up like bamboo shoots after a spring rain.

2003 marked the 10th anniversary of the development of Chinese network media. Blogs emerged in China, becoming a large-scale group phenomenon and sparking a research boom in the field of news and media. In 2005, the Internet entered the Web 2.0 era, and the development of China's new media also witnessed a small climax. In 2005, the first domestic video website, "Youku," was established, leading the trend of Chinese video websites. Since then, various forms of new media have emerged successively, including blogs, live webcasts, mobile applications, etc., greatly enriching the new media life of the Chinese people. In fact, since 1997, the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), established with the purpose of "providing services for Chinese Internet users and promoting the healthy and orderly development of China's Internet," has authoritatively released Chinese Internet statistical information every six months, providing data support for new media research.

In 2006, new media research entered a period of rapid development. As can be seen from the graph below, from 2006 to 2016, the scale of Chinese Internet users and the Internet penetration rate increased dramatically.





Figure 50 China's Internet users and Internet penetration rate from 2006 to 2016

Source: China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), 2024.4

In 2008, online media began to rank among mainstream media. In August 2009, the portal website Sina launched the beta version of "Sina Weibo," becoming the first portal website to provide microblogging services. Microblogging then flourished, not only with various online buzzwords quickly gaining popularity on the Internet but also gradually demonstrating its powerful dissemination power. 2010 was known as the year of media convergence, and China's "convergence of three networks" started. If microblogging was changing the form of communication, then the "convergence of three networks" was changing the media industry.

On January 21, 2011, Tencent launched WeChat, marking the entry of Chinese new media into the social media era. In 2012, WeChat introduced its public platform (public accounts), which immediately attracted a large number of organizations and individuals to set up their accounts. In a sense, blogs, which were defeated by microblogging, were reborn on the WeChat public platform. As of June 30, 2023, the combined monthly active user base of WeChat reached 1.327 billion.

Before the widespread use of network technology, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival was primarily spread through people's interpersonal communication in real life. With the development of new media and the application of network technology, the communication channels of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival have become increasingly diversified, and there have been significant innovations in communication methods. After being included in the fourth batch of representative projects of national-level intangible cultural heritage in 2014, Guangxi has held large-scale celebrations every year to commemorate this festival, making it a comprehensive holiday enjoyed by the whole people.

Ahead of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, in addition to traditional print media such as newspapers, magazines, and books reporting on the activities, radio, television, and various online platforms also extensively cover festival-related information during the holiday, creating a festive atmosphere for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival.

Compared to traditional medium, new medium is characterized by large amounts of information dissemination, fast speed, and less restriction by time and space. With the widespread use of smartphones, the Internet has become the primary platform for people to obtain information and engage in interpersonal communication. In addition to portal websites, various new medium platforms have also emerged strongly, such as Weibo, WeChat official accounts, Toutiao, TikTok, and Kuaishou³¹. The emergence of these new media has gradually changed the way people obtain information in the past.

According to the public opinion monitoring system of Guangxi Cloud ³², during the over 40-day period of the "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival" in 2023, the total amount of information related to Guangxi's "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival" on the internet reached over 290,000 entries, and it repeatedly ranked in the top ten of trending topics on Weibo, Kuaishou, Douyin, Baidu, and other platforms. Central new medium outlets such as People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, and China Media Group, as well as multiple overseas media, domestic and international short video platforms, and mainstream media at all levels in the region, have extensively promoted special and key reports on the "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival." Over 520,000 articles and reports have been published online and offline, with a total of over 4.3 billion clicks on new medium, creating a series of popular and influential "hits" that have achieved concentrated dissemination covering both domestic and international audiences, across multiple levels, and resonating at the same frequency to amplify the voice. Among them, People's Daily Online's headline article, titled "Embracing the Spring with Songs, the Sanyuesan Festival Rings Out the Song of Progress in Magnificent Guangxi," gave high praise to the activities held in Guangxi during the 2023 "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival." Media outlets in the region, such as Guangxi Daily and Nanning Daily, have conducted concentrated and substantial special and column reports focusing on building a national culture, enhancing national confidence, boosting consumer confidence, telling the story of magnificent Guangxi, and demonstrating high-quality development. Nanning Broadcasting and Television Station and Kuaishou jointly launched the topic "Singing Good Days During the Sanyuesan Festival," which attracted enthusiastic participation from netizens. By April 22, 2023, the number of participants in the topic across the internet had reached 120 million.

With the advent of the 5G era, new medium live broadcasting has become increasingly mature in terms of technology, platforms, mechanisms, and dissemination. Due to its advantages of being more intuitive, immediate, and interactive in the dissemination of major festive cultural activities, live broadcasting has become an important communication method for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. During the opening ceremony of the 2023 Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, Guangxi Radio and Television Station set up multiple camera positions focusing on three major sections: "Ancient Style Gathering," "Fashionable Trendy Play," and "National Unity," and conducted simultaneous live broadcasts of television and new medium

³¹ Kuaishou is a short video APP product owned by Beijing Kuaishou Technology Co., Ltd.

³² Guangxi Cloud is a news client launched by Guangxi Daily Media Group

movingly. The extensive distribution of camera positions, the long distance of dissemination along the way, and the complexity of camera scheduling made this live broadcast unprecedented in the history of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival's opening ceremony.

Nanning Radio and Television Station broke regional restrictions and collaborated with overseas platforms, central-level and other provincial stations, provincial capital city stations, and urban stations within the region to form a five-level live broadcast matrix. They planned and launched the "Good Times Are Spent in Songs" integrated media live broadcast. The live broadcast took the Nanning Radio and Television Station's integrated media broadcast control center as the command center for scheduling and controlling new media signals in the city, simultaneously and uniformly scheduling 14 cameras and mobile phone signals from the event sites in the city and various counties (cities, districts), providing live broadcast signals to 121 new media platforms and social media accounts worldwide. The total number of online views reached 16.307 million. To make the live broadcast more interactive, the entire broadcast was conducted in a vertical screen format, and VR live broadcasting was introduced into the new medium live broadcast.

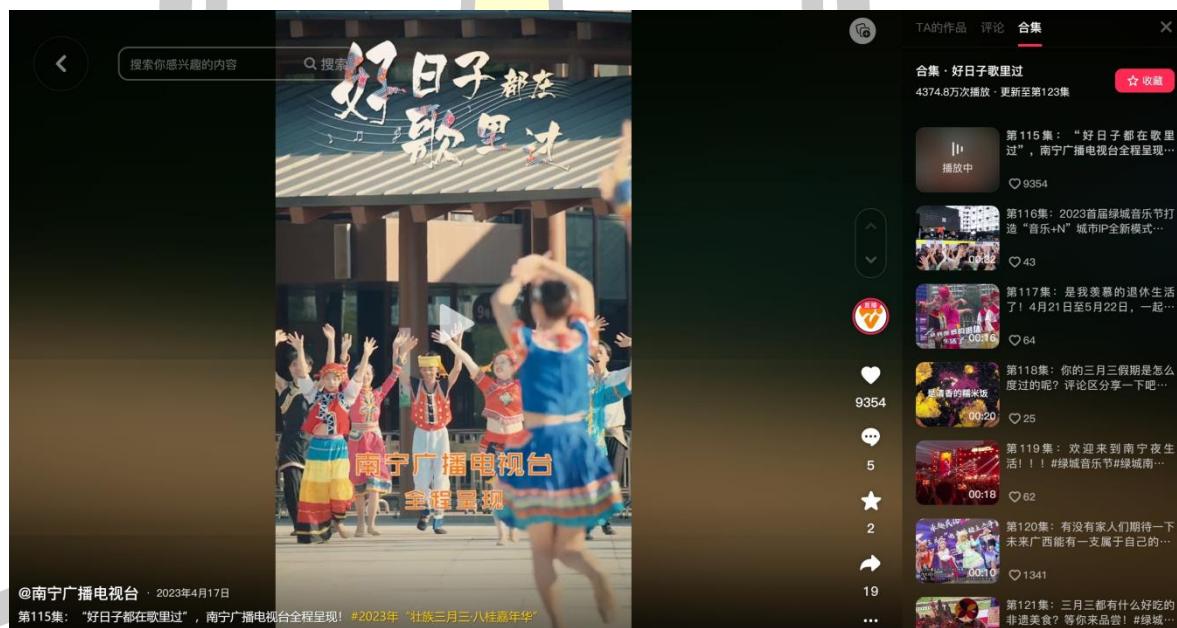


Figure 51 Screenshot of the interface of the "Celebrating Good Times Through Songs" short video collection published by Nanning Radio and Television Station on TikTok.

Source: @Nanning Radio and Television Station Douyin number, 2024.4

Various media also carried out fragmented short video dissemination of the grand event of the "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival". The short video collection titled "Celebrating Good Times Through Songs" released by Nanning Radio and Television Station on TikTok has received 43.748 million views across the entire internet.

As a significant news website in Guangxi and even nationwide, Guangxi News Network boasts a large volume of news releases with authority. It serves as an important window for Guangxi's external promotion and a major news source for

reporting the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. After entering keywords such as "Sanyuesan Festival" and "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival" into the Guangxi News Network website, researchers found that the search results reached 108,557 entries, and most of the relevant content focused on reports after 2014, covering aspects such as the origin of the festival, introductions to traditional activities, pre-festival promotion, and introductions to festival activities in different regions.

From 2014 to 2024, Guangxi News Network has set up relevant themes to report on the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Guangxi. In 2014, the theme was "Beautiful Guangxi, Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival." In 2015, the theme was "Charming Sanyuesan Festival" in the early stages, and it changed to "Bagui Ethnic Style" after the official start of the "Sanyuesan Festival" holiday. In 2016, the theme was "Zhuang Sanyuesan, Bagui Ethnic Style" in the early stage, and it was changed to "Guangxi Sanyuesan Festival, Bagui Ethnic Style" after the official start of the holiday. In 2017 and 2024, the unified theme was "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, Bagui Carnival." "Bagui" is another name for the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Additionally, the theme of "Carnival" in recent years' reporting reflects the Guangxi government's focus on transforming the traditional Zhuang "Sanyuesan Festival" into a public entertainment extravaganza that integrates cultural and artistic activities, recreational projects, and tourism trade.

Under the background of new media communication in China, the inheritance space of the "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival" is no longer confined to households, temples, and outdoor venues in rural communities. Cultural and entertainment activities in modern society, such as squares and theaters, have also become the main spaces for festival activities. The most prominent feature is the emergence of the Internet space. The development of the Internet society has not only changed people's production and lifestyle but also provided a new communication space for people. The conduct of online activities has undoubtedly expanded the activity space during the festival.





Figure 52 Screenshot of short videos uploaded by TikTok users during the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in 2024.

Source: Producing images by Chen Yanyan, April 2024.

During the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in 2024, the online singing contests, people's uploading short videos to social media platforms, watching relevant live streaming events on online platforms, and online promotional activities during the festival, have all expanded the festival's activity space to the internet, providing people with more choices of activities during the festival.

The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival has evolved over time, and its current form differs significantly from traditional ones. Especially since 2014, when the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, originally a regional ethnic traditional festival, was expanded into a public holiday in the Guangxi region. The legalization of ethnic minority traditional festivals and the organization of official activities have greatly enabled the widespread dissemination of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival through new medium, attracting more attention. The festival has gradually become a holiday with expanding time and space, diverse contents and forms, and diversified participants, attracting widespread participation from various ethnic groups across the country.

Part 2 The meaning and representation of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival

Hall focused on the process of representation and believed that there are two representation systems in the process of generating meaning. The first representation system is the system where objects are transformed into concepts through psychological representations. In this system, people and events generate a set of concepts in the mind, enabling us to give meaning to the world. The second representation system is the system where concepts are transformed into meanings through language/symbols, which means that language represents concepts and organizes symbols into languages that represent those concepts based on the similarity established between symbols and concepts in our cognition [Stuart Hall, 2003, P15]. Objects do not have meanings in themselves, but we construct meanings through various representation systems (i.e., various concepts and symbols) [Stuart Hall, 2003, P64]. The combination of these three elements is representation.

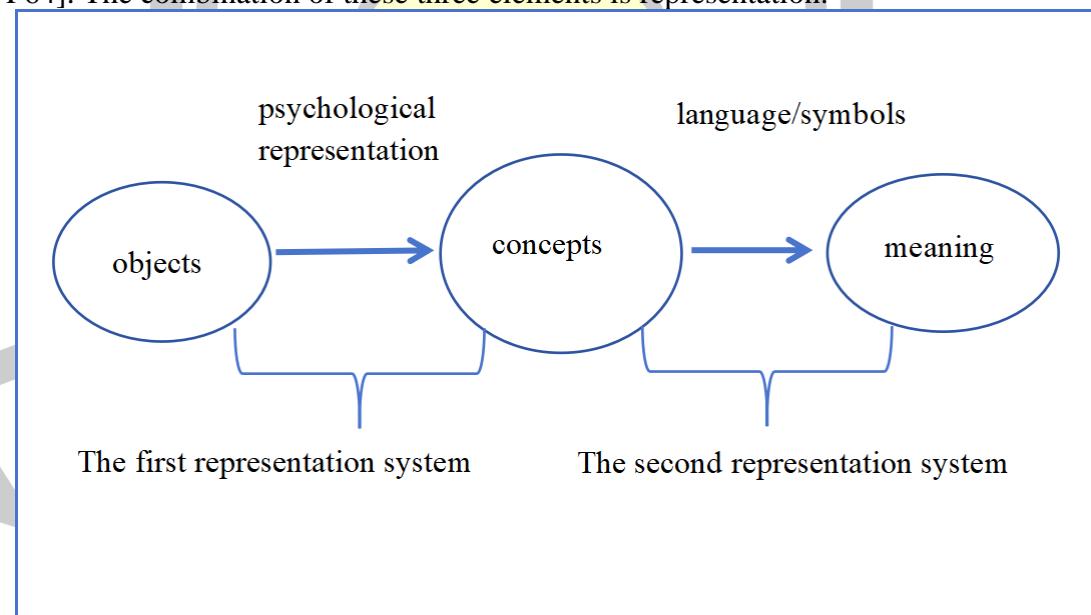


Figure 53 Two representation systems
Source: Producing images by Chen Yanyan, April 2024.

The researchers believe that under the background of new media communication, the representation of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is a media process that reflects the digital media images of the festival on the Internet. The conceptual form of processed videos and languages reproduces the cultural connotation of Zhuang food culture during the festival, which is the process of the first representation system for new media communication. When these digital images appear on the Internet, the audience watches the broadcast videos and languages, and then the cultural connotation of Zhuang food culture in the festival is transmitted to the audience through conceptual processing. The audience will generate their understanding of this, thus beginning to produce social significance for the public, which is the process of a second representation system.

2.1 The process of first representation system of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival

Representation means reproduction. In Stuart Hall's theory of representation, the first representation refers to the process of constructing concepts from objects. It is not immediately apparent how the first representation process of festivals is constructed and how meaningless objects become concepts with certain festival activities as symbols. Therefore, we have to approach the facts of the occurrence of festival activities as much as possible, deconstruct them, and thereby recognize and restore the first representation process of Zhuang food culture in festivals. What attracts researchers' attention is what can be provided by the organizers before the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival to successfully represent Zhuang food culture. In other words, in the representation process from objects to concepts in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, what factors do the organizers use and how do they complete the construction in the representation process?

To understand the first representation of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, researchers observed the first representation of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival through promotional videos released by the Guangxi Department of Culture and Tourism on various internet platforms.

On April 10, 2024, the Guangxi Department of Culture and Tourism released a tourism promotional video titled "A Thousand-Year Appointment: Guangxi's Sanyuesan Festival" for the 2024 "Trendy Sanyuesan Festival, Meet in Guangxi" campaign. Within 24 hours of its release, the video received over 100,000 shares and likes on WeChat's Moments, and related hashtags on Douyin (TikTok) rose to the top of the national trending topics. This promotional video reproduced the grandeur of the "Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival" from dimensions such as dance, sports activities, costumes, food, and rituals.



Figure 54 A screenshot of the promotional video for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival being forwarded on the Weibo video channel of China's People's Daily.

Source: Guangxi Department of Culture and Tourism official WeChat account,

2024.4

After the holiday of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Guangxi, the viewership of this promotional video has exceeded 16 million plays and has been forwarded by multiple mainstream media outlets. Among them, after being forwarded by the People's Daily, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, it received 5.15 million views.

In this promotional video, various behavioral symbols, object symbols, and linguistic symbols of the characters emerge as representative signifiers, hiding a rich system of meanings behind them. "In the context of visual communication, since people decode image symbols in a similar way to how they perceive the world in real life, image symbols are more easily accepted by audiences compared to other symbols" (Li Mengyao, 2018, P23). Therefore, this promotional video directly enters the audience's mind with its rich image symbols, constructing their cognition and memory of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival.

In April 2024, the researcher visited Guangxi Culture and Tourism Group to interview Ms. Huang Rong, the project leader of the promotional video "A Thousand-Year Appointment, Guangxi Sanyuesan Festival". She told the researcher, "This promotional video adopts a narrative technique of 'parallel timelines,' taking the main plot of a series of 'missed opportunities' between the male and female leads that ultimately lead to their union, showcasing the beautiful love theme of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Guangxi. Rendered with original songs composed in different ethnic languages, the video presents the unique beautiful scenery and folk customs of various cities in Guangxi. Amidst the interplay of stunning landscapes, modern fashion trends, distinctive cuisine, and folk customs, it depicts a colorful picture scroll. Guangxi Culture and Tourism Department hopes to push the festive

atmosphere of the 2024 Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Guangxi to a climax through the influence of this promotional video."



Figure 55 A photograph of researchers with Ms. Huang Rong, the project leader of the promotional video for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in 2024.

Source: Photographed by Chen Yanyan, April 2024.

On April 30, 2024, the researcher visited the Guangxi Culture and Tourism Group and conducted an informal interview with Ms. Huang Rong, the project leader of the promotional video for the 2024 Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. Ms. Huang Rong told the researcher, "The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is not only an important traditional festival for the Zhuang people, but also a common traditional festival for multiple ethnic groups such as the Han, Yao, Dong, Miao, and She. Although the customs of the various ethnic groups are not the same, they have been jointly celebrating the 'Sanyuesan Festival' as an important holiday for thousands of years. People of different ethnic groups wear festive attire unique to their respective cultures, passing down the traditional cultures of ethnic minorities through laughter and joy, and strengthening the cultural identity of the Chinese nation through singing and dancing. The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival has become an important bond for communication and integration among various ethnic groups, playing an increasingly important role in strengthening ethnic identity and promoting ethnic unity."

Based on the data collected during the research process and observations of promotional videos, researchers argue that the representation of Zhuang food culture during the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival can be achieved through cultural representation and media representation.

For the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival to become a sustainable event that attracts numerous consumer participation, it must inevitably be grounded in the corresponding Zhuang culture. It is not only a supplement and extension of Zhuang culture, but also, through the form of a festival, amplifies, consolidates, and centrally represents Zhuang food culture. This way, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival can be materialized into a cultural feast eagerly sought by consumers.

The director skillfully integrated the unique ethnic culture of Guangxi, including ethnic costumes, embroidered balls, dances, and drum and flute instruments, into the promotional video "A Thousand-Year Appointment, Guangxi Sanyuesan Festival," perfectly presenting them before the audience. After analyzing the promotional video based on the data obtained from interviews, the researcher found that the conceptual elements of cultural representation include the following six points:

Firstly, it is the national costume culture. In the promotional video, the actors wear unique ethnic costumes of Zhuang, Yao, Dong, Miao, and Han nationalities to perform. The patterns and designs on each ethnic costume are true embodiments of their respective ethnic beliefs. The first shot of the promotional video presents Zhuang brocade, which uses primary-colored cotton and hemp threads as warp and colored cotton threads and velvet as weft, adopting the weaving method of "full warp and weft" or "full warp and interrupted weft". With strong color contrast and rich and splendid patterns, it carries the historical memory and cultural spirit of the Zhuang people. In 2006, the skill of Zhuang embroidery was included in the first batch of national-level representative projects of intangible cultural heritage.

Secondly, it is the culture of embroidered balls. The third shot in the opening sequence, which features embroidered balls, is quite memorable. A girl holds a pink embroidered ball in her hand and stitches patterns with every stitch. Embroidered balls are not only ornaments for Zhuang men and women to express love but also symbolize family reunion and harmony between heaven and earth. They have become a medium for Zhuang people to convey love, affection, and friendship. In the process

of throwing embroidered balls, Zhuang people not only exercise their bodies but also convey beautiful emotions.

Thirdly, it is the culture of drum and sheng ethnic musical instruments. In the scene of a great harvest, the music of drums and shengs starts to play. Men play the reed pipes and beat the bronze drums, an ancient ethnic ritual instrument of the Zhuang nationality. The thunder patterns on the bronze drums symbolize the thunderous vibration of spring, the integration of heaven and earth, the revival of all things, and the prosperity of all beings, which are the aspirations of the Zhuang people for a happy life.

Fourthly, it is the culture of ethnic dance. There is the Yao nationality's long drum dance, a typical representative of Yao folk songs and dances. The long drum dance showcases the brave and resilient national character and distinctive artistic style of the Yao people through unique drumming rhythms and vigorous dance movements. There is also the Dong nationality's reed pipe casting dance, a traditional folk entertainment activity integrating music, dance, and sports. Additionally, there is the Miao nationality's traditional folk dance, the reed pipe dance, which is also a dance to celebrate harvest and express joy. Many dance moves imitate the ancestors' efforts in clearing land, farming, and harvesting.

Fifthly, it is the food culture of the Zhuang nationality. The second shot of the promotional video shows one of the most representative folk foods in Guangxi's Zhuang region, the five-color sticky rice. Symbolizing good luck and a bumper crop, the male and female leads in the promotional video establish their relationship by sharing the five-color sticky rice. It is not only a delicacy that appears during festivals, but also a symbol and sign carrying profound national cultural connotations.



Figure 56 A screenshot of the Five-Color Glutinous Rice in the promotional video for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in 2024.

Source: Designed by Chen Yanyan, April 2024.

In the promotional video "A Thousand-Year Appointment, Guangxi Sanyuesan Festival", there are 114 shots in total, but they involve various ethnic cultures in Guangxi, including costumes, sports competitions, scenic spots, and many other contents. Among them, eight shots are about five-color glutinous rice, which reflects its protagonist status in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival.

The sixth aspect is the national sports culture, which includes throwing embroidered balls. The embroidered balls of the Zhuang nationality are spherical and connected by twelve petals. The petals are often embroidered with patterns such as dragons and phoenixes, mandarin ducks, the 12 Chinese zodiac animals, plum blossoms, orchids, bamboo, and chrysanthemums. The inside is usually filled with grains, symbolizing throwing the seed of affection to the loved one and praying for love to be as abundant as grain every year. The embroidered balls have become a medium for the Zhuang people to convey love, affection, and friendship. In the process of throwing embroidered balls, the Zhuang people not only exercise their bodies but also convey beautiful emotions. There is also the game of catching fireworks, a traditional folk sports activity with strong ethnic characteristics popular among the Dong, Zhuang, and Mulao nationalities, and it is welcomed by many ethnic minorities. This game is a sport for the brave and has a history of over 500 years. Catching fireworks includes traditional ritual processes such as worshipping, returning the fireworks, catching, and receiving them, which have implications of praying for blessings, celebrating the new year, gathering, and networking. Another tradition is egg-bumping. During the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, each household selects eggs, boils them, and colors them with various pigments. In the promotional video, children dressed in ethnic costumes hang the colored eggs on their bodies and play the game of "egg-bumping" with their friends in the rice paddies. In folk culture, those who successfully bump and break the eggs are said to have good luck.





Figure 57 Screenshot of the promotional video for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in 2024

Source: Designed by Chen Yanyan, April 2024.

Through the process of first representation system utilizing digital media imaging technology, objects are transformed into conceptual elements, which become the final elements that the organizer aims to present to consumers, tourists, and audiences on the eve of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival.

To transform the Zhuang food culture during the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival into a perceivable concept, organizers need to utilize digital media imaging technology in the production process of promotional videos. Specifically, the question is how the promotional videos for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival should operate to realize the representation of Zhuang food culture through the festival format.

Media representation, essentially, is the depiction and presentation of a certain subject. However, this depiction is not entirely faithful to objective facts, but rather a product of careful planning and manipulation by the media. It plays a crucial role in shaping people's perceptions and solidifying attitudes, and to a certain extent, reflects the profound imprint of social culture. From this perspective, media representation is not only a product of meaning construction by media organizations but also exerts a significant influence on the cognitive representation of social members who encounter the media.

In the promotional video "A Thousand-Year Appointment, Guangxi Sanyuesan Festival," the creators utilized techniques such as symbolism, implication, metaphor, reinforcement, and contrast to control and design visual and auditory elements such as picture symbols, elements, rhythm, space, scene combinations, and

sound-image relationships. They intertwined love stories from ancient to modern times into a poetic narrative. The love of young men and women weaves through time and space, symbolizing the intersection of history and the present. In the film, women dance gracefully, their eyes filled with aspirations for the future; men arrive on horseback, their hearts filled with a longing for love. As the plot develops, the rich ethnic elements and modern scenes in the promotional video are rhythmically fused together, creating a fast-paced and rhythmic promotional video that showcases the cultural characteristics of various ethnic groups in Guangxi to the fullest extent, making it captivating and engaging.

Musical symbols are indispensable in the emotional rendering of the promotional video "A Thousand-Year Appointment, Guangxi Sanyuesan Festival." The music producers of the promotional video include Yu Wei (Zhuang) as the composer, Zhao Ajun (Yao), Su Yinzhang (Yao), Ban Xuanrui (Zhuang), Pan (Zhuang), and Yao Qiyuan (Dong) as the lyricists, as well as Pan Ting (Zhuang), Liu Haijia (Han), Jia Sen (Han), Qin Yikun (Zhuang), Yao Qiyuan (Dong), and Wei Xinlin (Buyi) as the singers.

The lyrics express:

The trees and grass are verdant, the cattle and horses are fat, and it's another good year to welcome!

Pour the wine, prepare the dishes, brothers and sisters, let's dance!

Come, call your friends from all corners of the world!

Oh, brothers and sisters, come back to the village!

Come, beat the drums, sing folk songs!

Oh, play the lute, blow the lusheng, Duye!

The lyrics in the promotional video fully utilize the uniqueness of ethnic culture, embodying phrases that represent ethnic characteristics. By utilizing the audience's ability to complement the visuals, it guides them to imagine the symbols appearing in the scenes.

For example, in the last line of the lyrics, "Oh, play the lute, blow the lusheng, Duye!", the scene shows a Dong man holding a Dong lute, surrounded by Dong people dancing the Duye dance. Duye is a transliteration of a Dong word, referring to a large-scale collective dance of the Dong people. Originating from labor, it is the most representative form of collective singing and dancing among the Dong people, without instrumental accompaniment. Additionally, when the lyrics sing, "Pour the wine, prepare the dishes, brothers, and sisters, let's dance!", the corresponding scene depicts a group of Yao men gracefully and vigorously performing the Changgu dance, successfully embodying the joy and happiness of the festival through the singing in the audience's minds.

The singers come from different ethnic groups and perform the song in different ethnic languages, highlighting their ethnicity. This allows the audience to perceive the emotional message that the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is a shared celebration among all ethnic groups in Guangxi.

In aesthetic perception, implication refers to the inner spiritual concept of cultural and artistic products, which is a far more profound spiritual experience than directly perceived images. The aesthetic implication presented in the promotional video "A Thousand-Year Appointment: Guangxi Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival" can be understood from two aspects: on one hand, it refers to the unique spiritual values,

ways of thinking, cultural genes, and aesthetic consciousness inherent in the Zhuang traditional culture during its historical sedimentation; on the other hand, it is the audiovisual presentation form adopted to represent Zhuang culture through the utilization of visual elements and the organization of audiovisual language in the promotional video for Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. The former is the inner soul, while the latter is its externalized form, and the aesthetic experience is achieved through the harmonious unity of both. Of course, the core function of the promotional video for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is to reproduce the form and content of the festival through imagery, thus achieving the purpose of disseminating Guangxi Zhuang traditional culture and shaping Guangxi cultural tourism brands.

It can be said that the cultural implications of Zhuang food culture have completed the process of the first representation system through cultural representation and media representation in the promotional video "A Thousand-Year Appointment: Guangxi Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival".

2.2 The process of second representation system of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival

Before the official start of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, the concept of Zhuang food culture presented in the process of the first representation system cannot yet become a truly perceptible concept, rather, it is just a preparation. Only when the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival officially begins, and participants in the festival feel the appeal of this culture simultaneously in society, entering the moment when they become "festivalgoers," will they receive the first representation of Zhuang food culture presented during the festival through their experiences. These concepts are then potentially perceived, accepted, and presented, becoming genuine concepts. During the reception of these concepts, participants in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival activities are not merely passive participants; they are also creators of concepts. Then, how do they complete the process of a second representation system?

As Mackellar points out, compared to ordinary participants, in the social context of subcultures, the core audience of festivals pursues a sense of "we" to confirm a certain social identity and strengthen certain ideals. This is also the case for the core audience of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. The enthusiastic interactions at the festival site and on the internet, as well as the various expressions of Zhuang food culture during the festival, jointly create the festival culture of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival and the lifestyle of the Zhuang people.

As a gathering of people from the same category, participants are not only an essential part of creating the attractiveness of the festival activities; they also create and develop a series of shareable symbols and become the default rules and recognized culture when participants gather during the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival.

When participants enter the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival and go through the experience and perception in the festival space, they gain an overall understanding of the Zhuang food culture. At this point, the concept in the process of the second representation system has transformed from the prepared one at the end of the process

of first representation system into a genuine concept, which is transmitted and received.

Researchers collected information on various festival activities held in Guangxi during the 2024 Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival and analyzed it in the form of news data, exploring the reception of the concept of Zhuang food culture by festival participants in the process of second representation system.

The 2024 "Guangxi Delicacies: Hundred Counties, Thousand Dishes" Guangxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Featured Cuisine Competition, as an important part of the cultural tourism brand event "Guangxi Sanyuesan Bagui Carnival" (hosted by the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Party Committee and the People's Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), has successfully held four editions. It not only presented the exclusive Guangxi intangible cultural heritage cuisine feast to all sectors of society but also gradually developed into a well-known food culture event in Guangxi and even the whole country.

The 2024 "Guangxi Delicacies: Hundred Counties, Thousand Dishes" Guangxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Featured Cuisine Competition has received widespread attention and support from all sectors of society. Authoritative media such as People's Daily Online, Xinhua News Network, and China Daily have conducted special reports on the event. Food enthusiasts have widely promoted it on social media platforms such as Douyin, Kuaishou, and Xiaohongshu through virtual visits and tasting, creating a strong atmosphere for protecting and inheriting the Zhuang food culture.

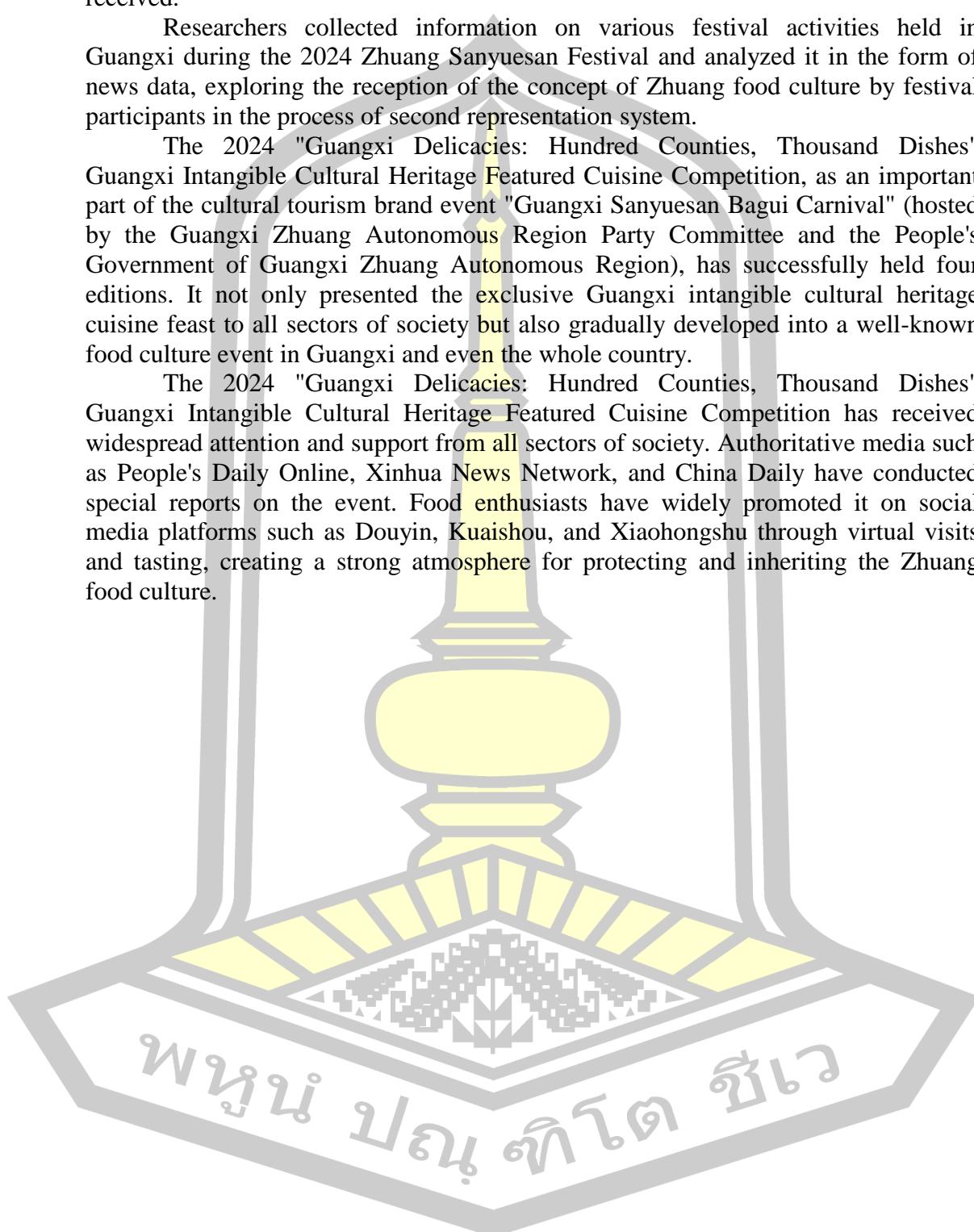




Figure 58 The researchers are at the event site of "Guangxi Delicacies: Hundred Counties, Thousand Dishes"

Source: Photo by Chen Yanyan, April 2024.

Qiuyue, a tourist who wore Zhuang nationality costumes to participate in the "Guangxi Delicacies: Hundred Counties, Thousand Dishes" event, told the researcher, "It looks like a gathering of Zhuang people. Their way of life is like they invented their own symbols and grammar, from hairstyles, costumes to dietary behaviors, and even ways of thinking."

From April 11 to 12, 2024, the network celebrity gathering activity "Cloud Talk about the Splendor and Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival" organized by the Internet Information Office of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Party Committee took place in Nanning. Network celebrities from both inside and outside Guangxi experienced the unique ethnic customs of Guangxi by participating in the opening ceremony of the "Guangxi Sanyuesan Bagui Carnival" and a series of cultural activities in Nanning. They shared the festival feast with the Zhuang people in Guangxi and immersed themselves in the charm of traditional ethnic culture. The network celebrity gathering activity also created an online tasting cloud space, inviting popular bloggers to broadcast live on the spot. Well-known bloggers on Bilibili streamed live tours, food broadcasts, and store visits, leveraging the advantages of online platforms to "taste intangible cultural heritage cuisine and tell intangible cultural heritage stories." This led more audiences to immerse themselves in a journey of intangible cultural heritage cuisine with a Guangxi flavor, contributing to the wider dissemination of Zhuang food culture in Guangxi.

"The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is similar to the Abundant Year Festival of the Amis people in Taiwan, as both festivals involve people from various ethnic groups gathering to sing and dance, creating a sense of being at home." Lai Shuzhen, a Taiwanese woman, recently traveled to Guangxi wearing traditional Amis clothing to participate in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. She sang and danced with people of different ethnic groups in Guangxi, saying, "We are of the same root and origin." During the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival holiday in 2024, the land was filled with songs and joyful drumbeats. Many Taiwanese media professionals and "internet celebrity" bloggers traveled to cities such as Nanning, Liuzhou, and Guilin in Guangxi to experience the diverse folkloric cultural activities and taste local specialties.





Figure 59 Taiwanese girl Lai Shuzhen (second from the right) dressed in Ami clothing danced and sang along with her Guangxi friends dressed in Dong clothing.

Source: China News Network reporter Lin Xin photo 2024.4

On April 13, 2024, in Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County of Liuzhou, Taiwanese girl Lai Shuzhen (second from the right) dressed in Ami clothing danced and sang along with her Guangxi friends dressed in Dong clothing. Lai Shuzhen captured these moments and shared them as short videos on online platforms. "This is my first time coming to Guangxi, and I particularly wanted to see the cultures and customs of the various ethnic groups here." Lai Shuzhen brought her ethnic clothing specifically to promote cultural exchanges between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Another participant who came to Guangxi specifically to experience the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is Cai Ruyu, a post-2000s self-media blogger from Taiwan. "I have participated in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival before, and I felt it was particularly interesting." Cai Ruyu, who is visiting Guangxi for the sixth time, is quite interested in Zhuang cuisine such as five-color glutinous rice, cultural activities like throwing embroidered balls and singing folk songs.

ພ້ອນ ປນ ຄົກໂຕ ຂໍເວ



Figure 60 On April 12, 2024, Taiwanese self-media blogger Cai Ruyu (first from the left) experienced cooking Liuzhou River snails rice noodle in Liuzhou, Guangxi.

Source: China News Network reporter Lin Xin photo 2024.4

At this event of Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Guangxi, Cai Ruyu focused her camera on the characteristic "internet celebrity" snack of Guangxi, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, as well as the Zhuang food culture, and shared them with the people of Taiwan through videos. She said, "I hope to promote traditional cultural exchanges between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, especially the intangible cultural heritage and ethnic culture of Guangxi, in the way of the younger generation." Lai Shuzhen concurred with Cai Ruyu. In recent years, she has continuously explored the ethnic culture and folk customs of the mainland and made ethnic minority villages and cultures in the mainland "visible" and "noticed" through new ways such as short videos and live streaming.





Figure 61 Taiwanese self-media bloggers recorded on their mobile phones the experience of tasting Liuzhou River snails rice noodle in Guangxi.

Source: China News Network reporter Lin Xin photo 2024.4

After experiencing the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in Guangxi, Lai Shuzhen said, "From ethnic costumes, songs, totems, and food culture, I can deeply feel that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait share the same roots, language, and ethnicity." She hopes to promote exchanges between the two sides through new media and bring the compatriots of both sides closer together.

On April 11, 2024, the "Guangxi Sanyuesan and Bagui Carnival" cultural tourism brand event kicked off in Nanning. This year's main event venue is located in Qingxiushan Scenic Area in Nanning, attracting guests from all over to attend this cultural feast filled with spring, appreciate the rich ethnic customs, experience colorful intangible cultural heritage, trendy technology, and creative culture, and enjoy the exciting carnival. The opening ceremony of the "Guangxi Sanyuesan and Bagui Carnival" covers a total distance of about 1.2 kilometers, focusing on "new folk songs + intangible cultural heritage," creating five intangible cultural heritage villages named "Joyful Guangxi," "Delicious Guangxi," "Splendid Guangxi," "Beautiful China," and "Colorful ASEAN," as well as five characteristic streets including Wine Street, Tea Street, Sugar Street, Technology Trendy Street, and Cultural Creativity Street. These arrangements allow tourists to understand the past and future of the "Zhuang Sanyuesan" through interactive and immersive experiences, and feel the

tradition and fashion of Guangxi from a close distance. In the "Delicious Guangxi" intangible cultural heritage village, Guangxi's diverse intangible cultural heritage cuisines attract tourists to stop and taste, and experience the production process.



Figure 62 The activity site of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in 2024

Source: Guangxi News Network (gxnews.com.cn), 2024.4

"Guangxi's camellia oil tea tastes good and is flavorful!" The experience of making camellia oil tea at the event of Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is not only popular with adult tourists but also favored by children. "Both the five-color glutinous rice and Gongcheng camellia oil tea are now available in portable packages." Ms. Pang, a tourist from Shandong, came here out of admiration and couldn't help but order and pack them up to take the delicious flavors of Guangxi home. It is not difficult to see that the participants have a high acceptance of Zhuang cuisine at the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival.

On April 12, 2024, in an interview with Nanguozaobao, the interviewees from Gansu Province, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, and Vietnam, who came from all corners of the world, believed that participating in the festival activities had given them a deeper understanding of the cultural significance and historical origins of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. They learned that the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is not only a traditional festival of the Zhuang ethnic group in Guangxi but also an important way for Zhuang people to express their emotions and inherit their culture. At the same time, the participants were deeply moved by the Zhuang people's reverence for their ancestors and their adherence to traditional culture. They admired the colorful ethnic costumes, joyful singing and dancing performances, and felt the rich ethnic cultural atmosphere. In addition, the participants actively participated in traditional folk activities such as singing competitions, throwing embroidered balls, and playing flat baskets, experiencing the enthusiasm and vitality of the Zhuang people firsthand. They also developed a strong interest in the ethnic characteristics and traditional handicrafts of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. They tried making five-color glutinous rice, kneading and steaming it themselves, feeling the charm of traditional handicrafts. Meanwhile, the participants were also attracted by the traditional competitive activities of the Zhuang people, such as bullfighting and throwing embroidered balls. These activities not only tested the skills and courage of the participants but also demonstrated the wisdom and strength of the Zhuang people.

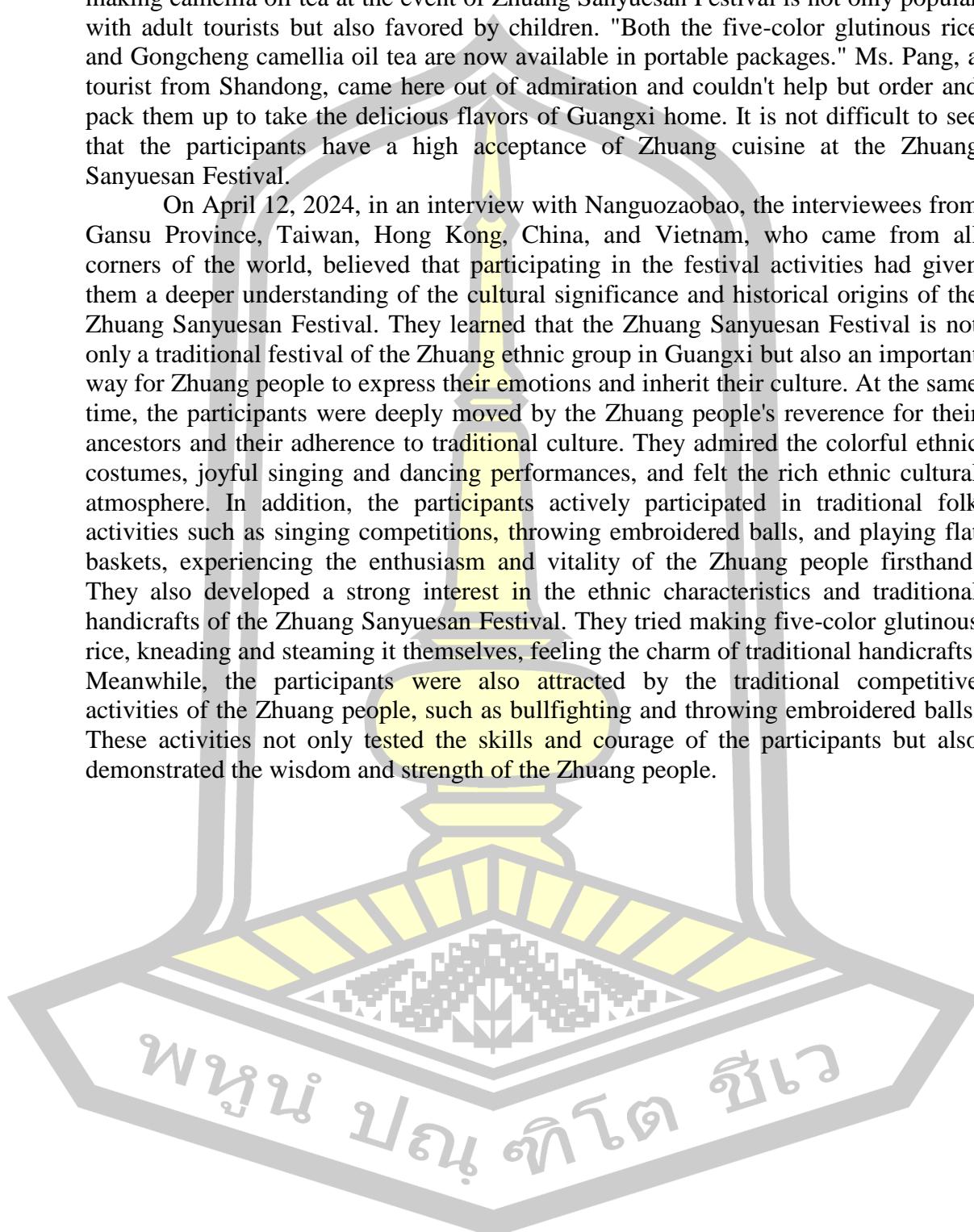




Figure 63 Guangxi Nanguozaobao reporters interviewed tourists from different places about their feelings about the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival.

Source: Nanguozaobao Client, Editor: Liu Xiaotong

According to the interview data from Nanguozaobao, researchers learned that tourists from different places have praised the festive atmosphere and ethnic customs of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. By participating in the festival activities, they not only gained a deeper understanding of Zhuang culture but also made many new friends and gained unforgettable memories.

The operational status of the cultural and tourism market during the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival holiday announced by the Guangxi Department of Culture and Tourism indicates that from April 11-14, 2024, Nanning, Guilin, and Liuzhou ranked among the top three cities in the region in terms of tourist arrivals. Qingxiu Mountain Scenic Area in Nanning, the main venue of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, received a total of 3.923 million tourists, representing a 43.71% increase compared to the same period last year. Total operating revenue reached 7.3009 million yuan, an increase of 57.05% over the same period last year. Based on the significant growth in both tourist numbers and tourism economic income, it can be seen that the cultural space of festival activities has become a new attraction for cities and tourism (Wu Guoqing, 2010, P137-141). From spontaneous organization by the people, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival has evolved into a national festival led by government departments and jointly promoted by local elites, scholars, and the media. In the public's perception, "the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is a cultural carnival integrating ethnic culture, mass sports, folk tourism, and unique consumption, with extensive participation from all ethnic groups in the region." The sincerity, passion, and friendship expressed by the joyful ethnic groups in Guangxi during the festive atmosphere have thus attracted more and more tourists who love Zhuang culture.

In Stuart Hall's system of representation, meaning is constructed and generated through the process of representation, which 赋予 objects meaning through practice [Stuart Hall, 2003, P15-64]. He believes that when we obtain a concept of something, we can consider that we know its "meaning," and this meaning must be actively read and interpreted [Stuart Hall, 2003, P15-64]. Here, the meaning refers to the cognitive understanding of concepts obtained in the language system. However, in the practice of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, participants gain meaning through experiencing festival activities. The represented concepts in the early stage are transmitted and received in the experience of festival activities, and meaning is also gained from them.

In China, chat software represented by WeChat and QQ has made communication during festivals more convenient. The posting of WeChat Moments has also provided a platform for people to share the joy of festivals. Increasingly, people record their lives by shooting short videos and sending them to short video platforms such as Douyin, Kuaishou, and Meipai.

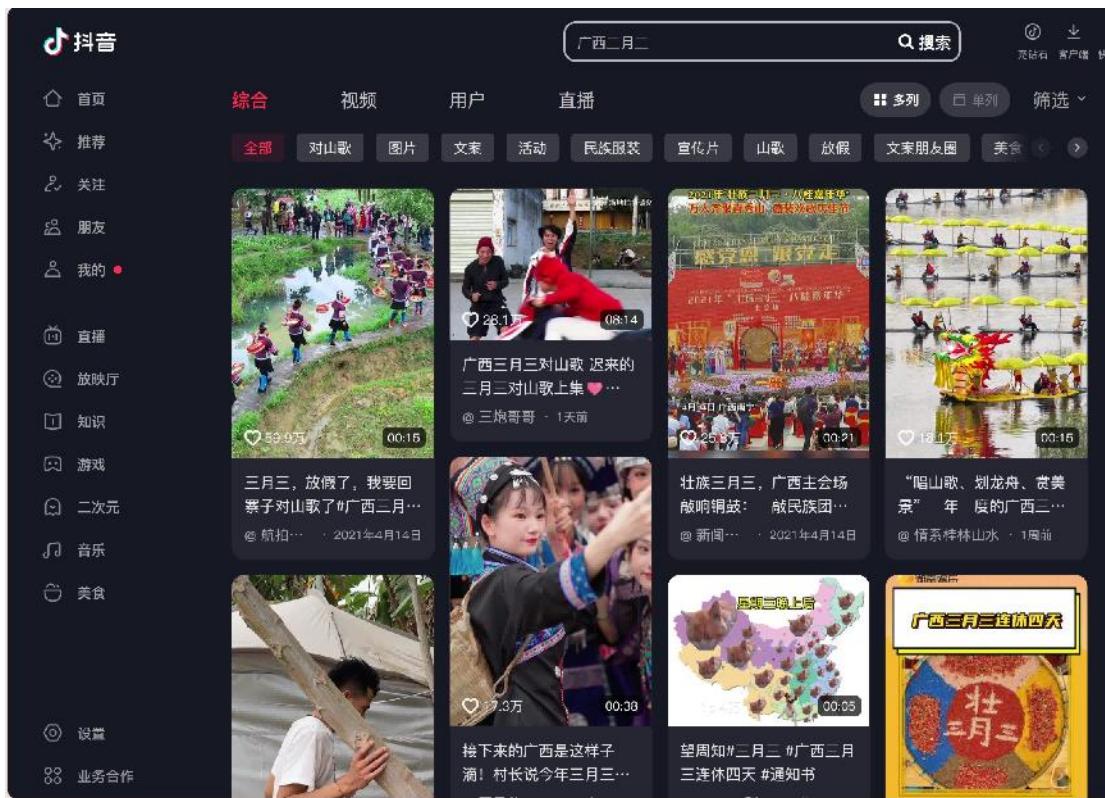


Figure 64 Short videos related to the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival on TikTok in 2024
Source: Chen Yanyan's illustration, April 2024.

During the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, the rich activities and joyful festival atmosphere always prompt people to record and share their experiences on the Douyin platform, allowing more people to feel the joy of the festival. Secondly, people can watch different festival activities held in various parts of Guangxi on the Douyin platform anytime and anywhere.

In general, participants of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival have a high degree of perception and acceptance of concepts related to Zhuang culture. The acceptance of the concept of festival atmosphere is also very high. It can be seen that the concept of the second representation system of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival not only comes from the concept prepared by the organizers in the first representation system, but also from the participants who, as a part of the festival, actively create new concepts in the festival when it starts, instead of just passively receiving the final concepts presented in the first representation system.

Finally, when the concepts presented in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival are received by the participants, the meaning is generated at this moment and may increase or change with the accumulation of the participants' experiences. In other words, the participants gain a sense of Zhuang food culture from the festival experience, and the perception generated by this experience becomes the meaning derived from the participants' experience. Meanwhile, the meaning does not stop when there is no new information input after the festival ends. It still exists as the participants leave, but it may be renewed, strengthened, or alienated from the participants' memories and emotions.

Part 3 The Inheritance Issues and Countermeasures of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in the Development of New Media Communication

"The celebration of ethnic festivals is a cultural festival, where ethnic culture and art are displayed in a concentrated manner. The festival itself is also the best carrier for inheriting ethnic culture and art." (Xu Junliu, 2015, P128) Today, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is no longer just a traditional festival that exists in the lives of Zhuang people. After several years of planning and development, it has become increasingly dazzling. However, from the perspective of protecting traditional culture, the widespread use of new media technology and changes in social development patterns indicate that the soil on which festival culture depends is also undergoing changes, and the development of the festival itself will inevitably be affected. Therefore, to better inherit this festival, it is not only necessary to recognize the favorable impact of new media technology on the festival during the inheritance process but also to see the problems that arise in the festival. Only by correctly understanding the existence of this "double-edged sword" of new media can we better inherit this festival culture in the process of new media communication.

3.1 The issue of inheritance of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in the process of new media communication

In today's society, continuous development is a necessity, and development is the primary principle. If the festival culture with rich connotations wants to survive in contemporary times, it must adapt to the requirements of social development. Since the 1980s, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival has always been a focus of attention for the Guangxi government, especially in the 21st century, when the need for economic development has made the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival an important platform for local economic development. It is undeniable that the government's attention is an important factor for the continuous inheritance of this festival to the present day, and it has also provided significant support for better protecting this festival culture. However, for the inheritance of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival culture, the intervention of this force has also impacted to the development of the festival itself.

In recent years, under the official organization, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival has witnessed numerous events annually, yet the content of these activities is varied and mixed, with various activities unrelated to the traditional Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival being organized, and even activities from other ethnic groups during other festivals being displayed. The traditional functions of ancestor worship and gathering friends and relatives have gradually been replaced by economic functions. In 2019, there were over 900 events related to the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. Even in the special year of 2020, there were dozens of online activities for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. However, few of these activities were related to traditional festival activities. Taking the main event arrangements led by the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in 2019 as an example, the total number of activities was 37, comprising cultural activities, tourism activities, sports events, online shopping events, and events promoting ethnic harmony. Out of the 13 cultural activities, only the 2019 China·Liuzhou "Yufeng Songyu" National Folk Song Invitational Competition jointly organized by the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Department of Culture and Tourism and the Liuzhou Municipal People's Government was closely related to the

traditional Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. Other activities, such as the exhibition of excellent theatrical performances for the "Ethnic Stage Sanyuesan Festival," the "Spring Blossom Sanyuesan Festival" symphony concert, the "Sanyuesan Festival in the Library" cultural exhibition, and the 2019 Guangxi-Taiwan Youth Celebration of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, were more like various activities using the name of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival to promote economic development. Among them, the most prominent were online promotional activities jointly organized with national well-known e-commerce platforms such as JD.com, Taobao, Suning, and local e-commerce platforms in Guangxi. In addition, there were various offline promotional activities. Guangxi is rich in tourism resources, which has also drawn the attention of officials to the advantages of developing tourism during the festival. Various preferential policies during the festival, such as 50% discounts on highway tolls for small passenger cars with 7 seats or less from 8 provinces including Guangdong, Fujian, as well as Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan (excluding direct transit vehicles), and 50% discounts on the listed prices of tickets to all A-level tourist attractions for tourists from 9 provinces and regions including Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, as well as Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan with valid identification documents, coupled with the holiday period during the festival, have given people more opportunities to travel. Traveling during the festival has also become a choice for many young people. Besides the activities led by the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, various cities, districts, and even counties will also organize various events during the festival, which has greatly promoted people's willingness to travel during the festival and driven cultural consumption. When researchers visited the Wuming District during the 2023 Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, they also observed a large number of people traveling during the festival, with various exhibitions and trade fairs attracting crowds of spectators, and a wide variety of entertainment activities.

Under such organizational arrangements, although the number of people traveling during the festival has increased when people participate in the festival activities, they often find that under the guise of various cultural activities, what is wrapped inside are activities that require various forms of consumption. If this continues, people's enthusiasm for participating in the festival will inevitably diminish over time. Nowadays, the relationship between culture and economic development is becoming increasingly close. It is undeniable that culture itself also possesses a certain economic value, and commercial and trade activities during festivals have always existed. We should not reject the idea of utilizing culture as a platform to develop the economy while protecting it, but how to coordinate the relationship between the two should be our primary concern. Overly emphasizing the economic value of culture will inevitably dissipate its humanistic value.

3.2 In the process of new media communication, the inheritance strategies for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival

The inheritance of festivals is a long-term and arduous task. In the era of new media communication, it is not a task that can be accomplished by a single group to both preserve the cultural connotations of traditional festivals and make the festivals adapt to social development. Instead, it requires joint efforts and cooperation from the government, society, and the public. Addressing the issue of inheriting the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in the process of new media communication, also requires multi-

faceted efforts to ensure that this festival receives good protection and development at this stage.

1. Government Level

The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival is celebrated with great enthusiasm in Guangxi, involving the participation of relevant government departments from the autonomous region to various cities and counties. With the layer-by-layer promotion of related activities, the top-level design must be professional and accurate to ensure the orderly implementation of various activities. This includes cultivating relevant talents, formulating relevant policies and regulations, and improving the construction of related platforms. Talent is also an indispensable resource for the development of cultural tourism, and government departments should select and use outstanding talents. Some professional event organizations, such as those involving ethnic culture, tourism management, and art design, still require relatively professional talents for design. During the festival, people gather for communication, and there is extensive interpersonal mobility and many issues involved. Therefore, issuing relevant policies and regulations and distributing relevant documents can more effectively ensure the stability of festival activities. As an important way for the government to promote the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival externally, the online platform should be further improved in the construction of related platforms. For example, creating a special column for the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival on the official website or inviting professionals to create an independent website dedicated to the festival. Standardizing promotional accounts on self-media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, TikTok, and Kuaishou can disseminate festival content from shallow to deep, from history to the present.

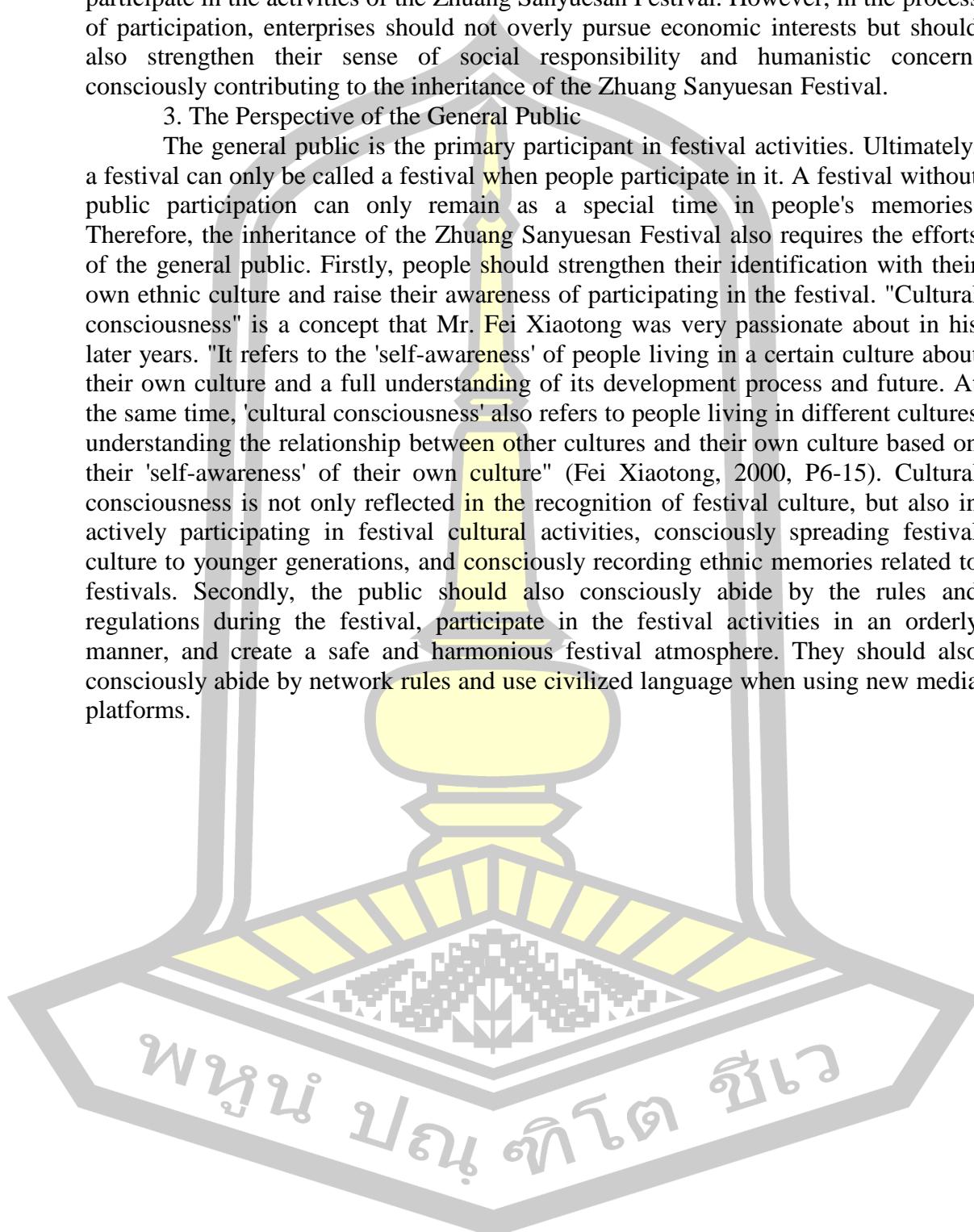
2. Social Aspect

In today's social development, the media often plays a role in guiding public opinion. With the emergence of various media platforms and diverse voices, cultural values also exhibit a pluralistic trend. How the Internet media reports on festival culture can influence people's judgment on it. Therefore, in the inheritance and development of festivals, firstly, media platforms should consciously enhance their sense of responsibility in disseminating festival culture. In 2005, the "Opinions on Utilizing Traditional Festivals to Promote Excellent National Cultural Traditions" jointly issued by the Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee, the Central Civilization Office, and others, pointed out: "It is necessary to fully exert the guiding role of news media in promoting national traditional festivals, effectively strengthen public opinion guidance on national traditional festivals, and actively create a strong atmosphere of respecting, loving, and participating in national traditional festivals." Media platforms should also actively play their role in popularizing national traditional festivals, establishing correct concepts of celebrating festivals, and making contributions to inheriting festival culture. Secondly, media platforms should innovate reporting content and focus on reporting quality. Content should emphasize reporting on the cultural connotations of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, such as the origin of the festival, people's memories of traditional festivals, different customs in different places, etc., rather than focusing solely on reporting various entertainment activities during the festival and promoting ways to have fun during the holiday. Focusing on the reporting of festival connotations can not only improve the quality of media reports but also help improve the cultural taste of the media itself.

As an important force in social development, enterprises should also participate in the activities of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival. However, in the process of participation, enterprises should not overly pursue economic interests but should also strengthen their sense of social responsibility and humanistic concern, consciously contributing to the inheritance of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival.

3. The Perspective of the General Public

The general public is the primary participant in festival activities. Ultimately, a festival can only be called a festival when people participate in it. A festival without public participation can only remain as a special time in people's memories. Therefore, the inheritance of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival also requires the efforts of the general public. Firstly, people should strengthen their identification with their own ethnic culture and raise their awareness of participating in the festival. "Cultural consciousness" is a concept that Mr. Fei Xiaotong was very passionate about in his later years. 'It refers to the 'self-awareness' of people living in a certain culture about their own culture and a full understanding of its development process and future. At the same time, 'cultural consciousness' also refers to people living in different cultures understanding the relationship between other cultures and their own culture based on their 'self-awareness' of their own culture" (Fei Xiaotong, 2000, P6-15). Cultural consciousness is not only reflected in the recognition of festival culture, but also in actively participating in festival cultural activities, consciously spreading festival culture to younger generations, and consciously recording ethnic memories related to festivals. Secondly, the public should also consciously abide by the rules and regulations during the festival, participate in the festival activities in an orderly manner, and create a safe and harmonious festival atmosphere. They should also consciously abide by network rules and use civilized language when using new media platforms.



Conclusion

Since 2014, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival has become a statutory holiday in Guangxi, which is not only enjoyed by the Zhuang people but also by all the people in Guangxi. In Guangxi, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, named after the Zhuang Ethnic Group, is an important symbol of the Zhuang Ethnic Group. Meanwhile, under the leadership of governments at all levels, various ethnic groups have participated in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival activities to showcase their respective cultures. The Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival has completed the process of the first representation system of Zhuang food culture through cultural representation and media representation and finally presented relevant concepts. Just as Stuart Hall believes that the first representation is the construction from objects to concepts, the representation of Zhuang food culture is also a process from nothing to existence. It is based on the corresponding social foundation, serving as a compensation or extension of Zhuang culture, and reproduces Zhuang food culture in the form of festivals. However, dietary symbols alone cannot be transformed into perceptible, participatory, and experiential activities in festivals. Only by constructing them into a specific perceptual concept through digital media technology in a materialized way, can Zhuang food culture be represented through festivals.

Before the official start of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, the potentially perceived concept cannot be a truly existing and perceptible concept, but merely a preparation. Only when the participants feel the cultural appeal of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival in society and enter the festival for celebration at the moment when the festival activities officially begin, can the Zhuang food culture be truly presented as a concept. When the concept of Zhuang food culture presented in the festival is received by the participants, the meaning emerges at that moment, and the meaning may also increase or change with the participants' increasing experience. In other words, the participants obtain the feeling of Zhuang cuisine from the festival experience, and the new experience of Zhuang cuisine becomes the meaning gained from this experience. Therefore, the process from the transmission and reception of the concept of Zhuang food culture in the festival to the generation of meaning is the process of second representation of Zhuang food culture.



Chapter VI

Summary, Discussion, and suggestion

Research Summary

This study is a fundamental research employing qualitative research methods. The research team comprises inheritors of Guangxi Autonomous Region-level intangible cultural heritage skills, government and relevant research operation management personnel, tourists, and other individuals. The research text is the Zhuang food culture. In different stages of historical development, Zhuang food culture has multiple meanings for Zhuang people. With the development of Chinese new media communication, people have utilized the audiovisual language of digital media to disseminate the meaning of the Zhuang food culture through cultural representation and media representation. Therefore, this study takes meaning and representation as the main concepts. By analyzing the research data collected from literature reviews and fieldwork, it presents the research results and provides a descriptive analysis with photos. The key findings of this study are summarized as follows:

1. Through research, it is found that there are seven levels of meanings in Zhuang food culture, which are respectively:

1.1 The meaning of primitive worship and belief : The Zhuang people in Guangxi believe in the theory of five elements, which are metal, wood, water, fire, and earth, and believe that they are 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 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.

1.2 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 full use of 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 not only increases appetite but also 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.

1.3 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. The five-colored glutinous rice not only implies peace in all seasons but

also provides people with enjoyment in vision and taste, making it a treasure in the traditional festival food culture of the Zhuang people.

1.4The meaning of ethnic identity: The making of five-colored glutinous rice by the Zhuang people in Guangxi during traditional festivals is a collective memory passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. Nowadays, the five-colored glutinous rice is not only used for ancestor worship, but also serves multiple purposes such as entertaining guests, making friends, and promoting culture. The five-colored glutinous rice brings people from the same ethnic group together, everyone participating in its preparation, which promotes the harmonious development of the nation and the family, and enhances ethnic identity.

1.5The meaning of moral norms: During the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, the Zhuang people make five-colored glutinous rice to offer sacrifices to their ancestors, allowing their ancestors to taste the food first, and then family members share the sacrificial food. The Zhuang people in Guangxi possess excellent moral norms, showing extreme respect for the eldest elders and parents of the family. During traditional festivals, the Zhuang people invite the elderly to sit in the honored position, fostering a good folk custom. The five-colored glutinous rice is not just a kind of food, but also a display of ethnic sociality and a reflection of good moral norms.

1.6The 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 who are deeply influenced by rice culture, believe that glutinous rice is the most precious. Therefore, 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."

1.7The meaning of integration of ethnic cultures : Liuzhou River snails rice noodle is the common dietary memory of the Guangxi people. It is not only a symbol of regional culture in Liuzhou City, Guangxi, but also a manifestation of the integration of various ethnic cultures in Guangxi. It has successfully gained popularity through the Internet platform, spreading all over China and even the world, reflecting more of a transmission of cultural integration. In this small bowl of noodles, there are diverse cultures: the sour culture of the Dong and Miao nationalities, the paddy culture of the Zhuang nationality, and the Brine products Culture of the Han nationality. Although Liuzhou River snails rice noodle has obvious local attributes, the ethnic attributes in the noodles are difficult to define, and the definition of ethnic boundaries is not prominent. From a folk snack to a local cultural symbol, Liuzhou River snails rice noodle have penetrated all aspects of Guangxi people's lives, becoming a common dietary memory and a symbol of ethnic unity and cultural exchange.

2.The Representation of Zhuang Food Culture in New Media

The researchers found that the representation of Zhuang food culture on new media is mainly conducted from three dimensions: the representation of food culture, the representation of regional culture, and the representation of traditional culture.

The representation of food culture shapes the resilient character of the Zhuang people in their constant pursuit and progress from three aspects: cooking utensils, ingredients for food, and food preparation process. The representation of regional culture discusses micro-documentaries construct cultural identity and guide aesthetic appreciation from the perspective of the regularity and purpose of regional cultural communication. The representation of traditional culture is characterized by the inheritance and adherence of Zhuang people to traditional festivals and traditional culinary skills.

There exists a mutually promoting relationship between media technology and representation. Specific media technology triggers new representational practices, which in turn promote the demand for media technology innovation. Meanwhile, the continuous advancement of media technology further expands the possibilities of representation, creating a broader space for representational practices. Digital media images active on various internet platforms serve as new representational practices, greatly enriching the representational forms of Zhuang food culture. Through these new representational practices, we are able to more comprehensively showcase and disseminate Zhuang food culture, endowing it with richer and more diverse expressions.

3. The meaning and representation of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival during the development of Chinese new media communication

Since 2014, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival has become a statutory holiday in Guangxi, which is not only enjoyed by the Zhuang people but also by all the people in Guangxi. In Guangxi, the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, named after the Zhuang Ethnic Group, is an important symbol of the Zhuang Ethnic Group. Meanwhile, under the leadership of governments at all levels, various ethnic groups have participated in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival activities to showcase their respective cultures.

Just as Stuart Hall believes that the first representation is the construction from objects to concepts, the representation of Zhuang food culture is also a process from nothing to existence. It is based on the corresponding social foundation, serving as a compensation or extension of Zhuang culture, and reproduces Zhuang food culture in the form of festivals. However, dietary symbols alone cannot be transformed into perceptible, participatory, and experiential activities in festivals. Only by constructing them into a specific perceptual concept through digital media technology in a materialized way, can Zhuang food culture be represented through festivals.

By representing the culture and media in new media, the Guangxi government has presented relevant concepts and completed the process of the first representation system of Zhuang food culture in the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival.

Before the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival officially begins, this possibly perceived concept cannot be a truly existing and perceptible one. Only when the public who feel the cultural appeal in society enter the festival space and the festival activities officially start, can the Zhuang food culture become a real concept to be presented. The moment the concept of Zhuang food culture presented in the festival is received by the participants, meaning emerges. Moreover, the meaning may be enhanced or changed with the increase in participants' experiences. In other words, participants acquire the feeling of Zhuang cuisine from the festival experience, and

the new experience of Zhuang cuisine becomes the meaning gained by participants in this experience. This is the second representation of Zhuang food culture.

Research Discussion

Work from this research. I can discuss new knowledge on some major issues from the research results:

1. The participants in festival activities are not only the receivers of the meaning of Zhuang food culture, but also the creators of meaning.

In Stuart Hall's system of representation, meaning is constructed and produced through the process of representation, which gives significance to things through practice [Stuart Hall, 2003, P15-64]. He believes that when we acquire a concept of something, we can consider that we know its "meaning," and this meaning must be actively read and interpreted [Stuart Hall, 2003, P15-64]. In other words, meaning refers to the cognitive understanding of a concept within a linguistic system, and its production relies on the process of representation, while its reception relies on active reading and interpretation.

In this study, the generation and reception of meaning can also be achieved through activity experiences. During the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival activities, participants enter the festival space with pre-existing concepts represented through new media and engage in Zhuang food activities. Through these experiences, they acquire a sense of Zhuang food culture, completing the transmission and reception of concepts. The perception resulting from this experience becomes the meaning gained by the participants through this experience. The meaning does not cease when the festival activities end and there is no longer any new information input. Instead, it persists even after the participants leave, but it may be updated, strengthened, or alienated through their memories and emotions. Therefore, the researchers believe that the participants in festival activities are not only the receivers of the meaning of Zhuang food culture, but also the creators of meaning.

2. The representation of Zhuang food culture changes as the festive culture evolves.

Researchers argue that under the background of new media communication, the Zhuang food culture is represented in a concentrated manner by the Guangxi Provincial Government through the field of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, and completes the process of the first representation through cultural representation and media representation, ultimately presenting relevant concepts to the general public. When the Zhuang food culture is disseminated to the public through various media forms of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, the public acquires the concepts from the first representation and gains perception and experience of the Zhuang food culture after entering the festival space. This leads to the generation of new meanings, completing the second representation, and in this process, the Zhuang food culture is presented, inherited, and developed.

The representation of Zhuang food culture differs from the production of material objects, as it is non-solid and changing. While food culture has its inheritance, it still changes with the evolution of social culture. For instance, the popularity of Korean cuisine among young people due to their interest in Korean dramas has altered their dietary preferences. Although Zhuang food culture is

inherited through media representation, each representation is never identical, as both cultural connotations and media forms may change. Given the periodicity and regularity of the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival, in the process of representing Zhuang food culture, the new round of representation can be updated and adjusted promptly based on feedback from participants in previous representations. Therefore, the control of power groups over the representation of Zhuang food culture during the Zhuang Sanyuesan Festival will be weakened, and concepts that are not recognized or accepted by participants will be challenged and undergo changes in the representation process.

3. The mediatization of Zhuang food culture is a variety of representations that reflect the public's response to the development of Zhuang society

In the process of new media communication, the mediatization of Zhuang food culture is akin to Zhuang people constructing a "Tower of Babel" to communicate with the outside world. They strive to break down barriers in language, culture, and form, overcome limitations in physical space and time, and transcend human cognitive boundaries, thus achieving communication among people and between people and the world. This allows the millennia-old Zhuang food culture to transform from a material expression to an informational presentation. The mediatization of Zhuang food culture is not merely a showcase of a dish or a snack; it is the embodiment of Zhuang people's thoughts and concepts, as well as various representations of the public's response to the development of Zhuang society.

Research Suggestions

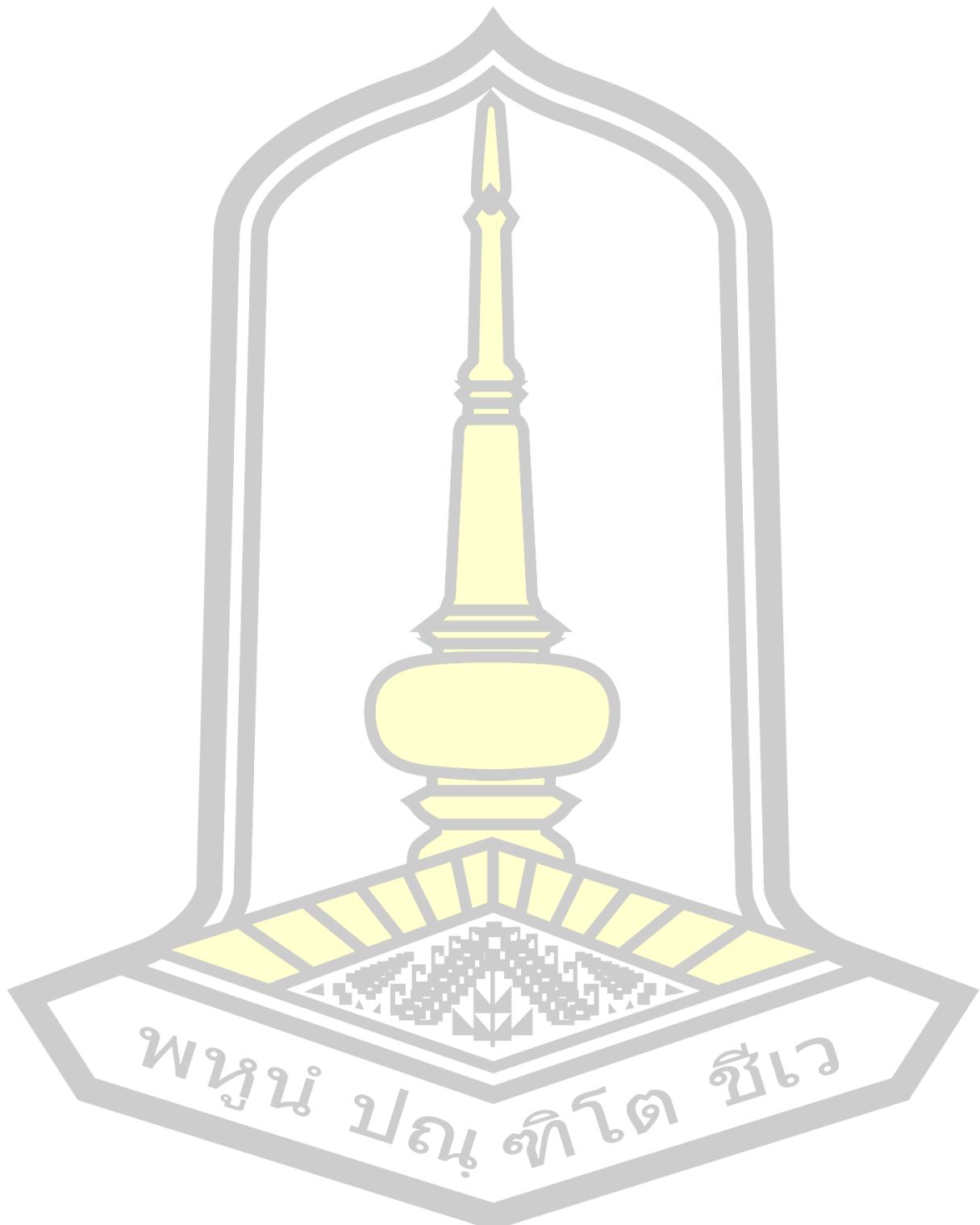
Zhuang food culture is not only an important part of Zhuang culture, but also a folk resource that can be developed and utilized. With a long history, rich content, and distinctive characteristics, Zhuang food culture has great potential for development and utilization. Therefore, in the post-epidemic era, with the rapid development of China's tourism industry, the inherent value contained in Zhuang food culture can and should be well developed and utilized. To develop tourism for Zhuang food culture, we should first identify the right path for development and form relatively mature development strategies, such as focusing on characteristics, systematically exploring and developing various flavored foods of the Zhuang people; encouraging tourists to widely participate in the cooking process of special foods; and adopting dining methods with rich activities. These are all important considerations in the development of Zhuang food culture. Meanwhile, in the development and utilization of Zhuang food culture, certain principles must be adhered to, without violating the objective laws of development. Among these principles, adherence to scientificity, protection, and comprehensiveness is particularly important.

From the cases of five-colored glutinous rice and Liuzhou River snails rice noodle, we can easily summarize a successful experience: local governments should deeply cultivate local cultural resources and create unique local food IPs. The twelve ethnic minorities in Guangxi have formed distinctive ethnic cuisines in their long-term life and development, such as Zhuang's bamboo rice, Miao's oil tea and sour soup fish, and Jing's windblown cake. However, From the perspective of both the breadth and depth of dissemination, these ethnic cuisines still lack a viable promotional pathway from "traditional communities" to "universal markets".

Local governments should incubate more local ethnic cuisine IP brands in Guangxi by setting topics and creating conversations. To achieve this, they can make full use of county-level converged media to construct a cyberspace that promotes local multi-dimensional connections. County-level converged media centers, rooted in the frontline, have the most direct news materials and undertake the function of "connecting the last mile of information." For example, the converged media center of Shache County in Xinjiang, which has won the national excellent converged media center, has reprocessed and produced short videos of local cuisine and life tips in ethnic minority languages, effectively bridging the gap with the audience while enhancing the local people's understanding of the country's relevant ethnic policies, further promoting communication and exchanges among ethnic groups.



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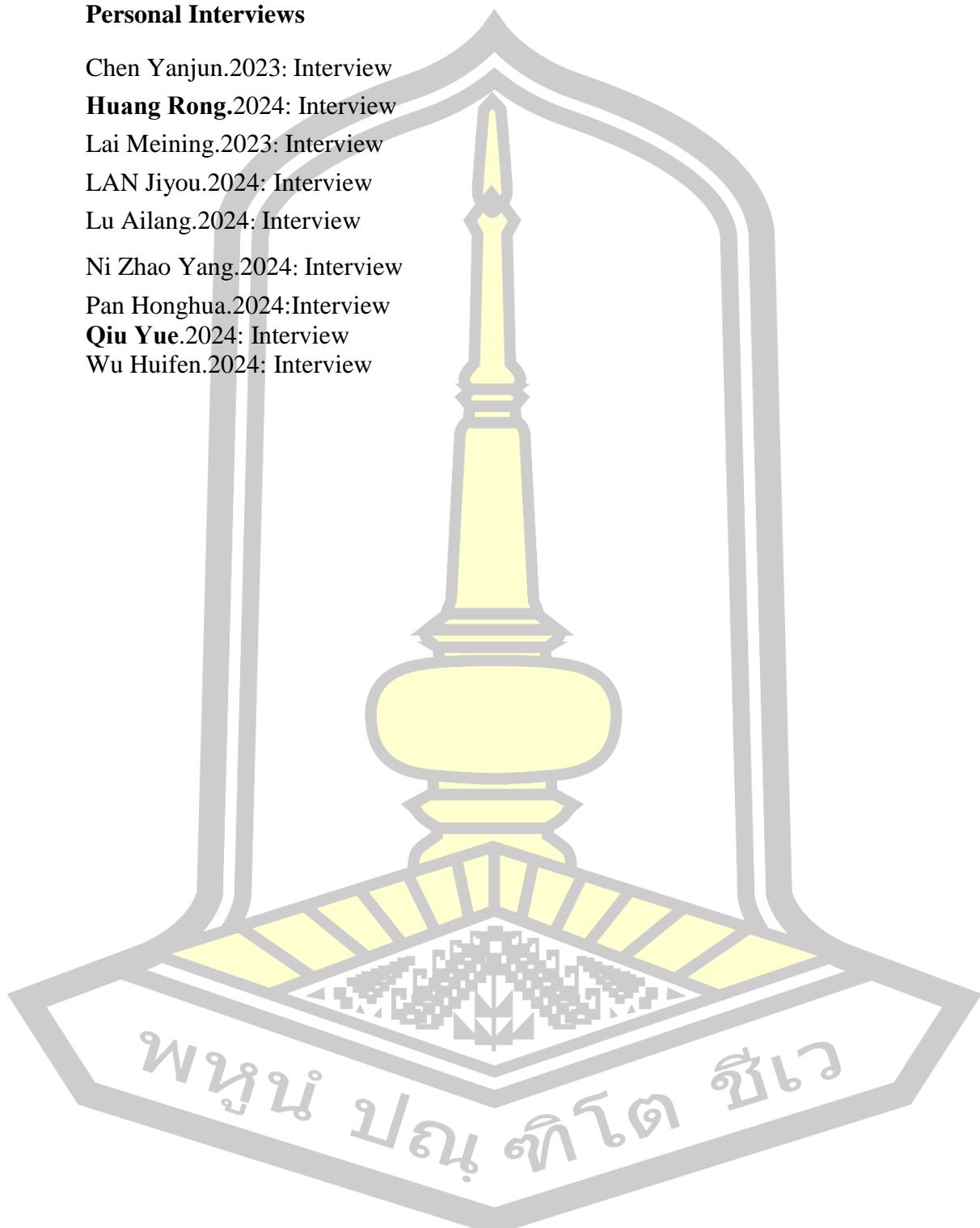
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