

Research on “Spicy” Culture in Chengdu based on Semiotics Theory

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Abstract: This paper takes spicy culture as an entry point, uses semiotic theory to study the development of “spicy” as a symbol of Chengdu's Tianfu culture and its “materialization” process, and finally forms the following viewpoints, from the introduction of chili peppers as an ornamental plant to the development of chili peppers as a cultural symbol of Chengdu's efforts to develop the city's culture and culture. The process of “visualization” of chili peppers has led to the following view: from the introduction of chili peppers as an ornamental plant, to their becoming a cultural symbol that Chengdu has made a great effort to visualize. The “visualization” of the “hot pepper” cultural symbol can give people a strong sense of cultural identity, and has a great dynamic effect on the subject and object of the region and the overall development environment.

Keywords: Semiotics, Chengdu Area, Spicy.

1. Overview of Theories Related to Semiotics

Saussure's semiotic theory has long been a centerpiece of the category system of the able and the referent. According to Saussure, in linguistics, denotation is the embodiment of a system of linguistic signs, a substance that exists objectively, while reference is simply a system of concepts in the mind of the hearer. In his famous book *A Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure utilized the principles and methods of constructivism to advocate the idea that there is a binary relationship between the signifier and its referent, the concepts of “signifier” and “referent” and their relationship. Many theorists have deeply explored and argued about the meaning of this pair of concepts and their relationship. According to Saussure, kinetic referent refers to the concrete form of things, such as sound, shape, etc.; referent represents the concept, which is the mental reflection of things. The referent expresses the conceptual meaning or symbolic content through the energetic referent.

Since the 19th century, with the gradual expansion of the object of symbolic research, semiotics as an independent discipline, from the field of linguistic symbols to various other fields. The scope of the “can refer” is no longer limited to the acoustic image defined by Saussure, but extends to different entities, thus transcending their linguistic concepts. Semiotics in the academic field is gaining momentum and establishing links with various disciplines. Cultural symbols are one of the symbols, which through their own creativity and unrepeatability become play a role in publicizing regional culture. It has an important dynamic influence on the subject-object relationship and the overall development environment of the region. When symbols have two forms, abstract and figurative, the concept of abstract symbols and figurative symbols arises. Figurative symbols can give people an intuitive feeling and help to understand the abstract meaning they contain.

2. Exploring “Spicy” Culture

2.1. The Spread of Chili Peppers in the Sichuan Region

After Columbus explored the Americas, a variety of New World ingredients continued to appear in the Old World, greatly improving the food culture of many Old World countries, including our own. Among them, wheat and groundnuts have made an indelible contribution to the staple food of the Chinese people, while the main New World crop that has really made an outstanding contribution to the Chinese people's cooking is the chili pepper. Without the introduction of chili peppers, Sichuan cuisine would have surely appeared in a different form, but never as spicy as it is today.

Some experts pointed out that the spread of chili peppers in China is likely to spread mainly along two lines of direction to the Zhejiang region, one of which is along the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal to the north to Zhili, and the second is through the Jiangsu Province along the Yangtze River to the west into the Hunan Province, and then spread around the core of the Hunan Province, the south to the two wide, the west to Guizhou, Sichuan, and then further spread to China. However, it was not until the Jiaqing period of the Qing Dynasty that chili peppers were widely consumed by the people of Hunan, Guangdong and Sichuan, and it was not until the late nineteenth century that dishes such as Hunan and Sichuan cuisines, which feature chili pepper flavoring, were initially formed.

2.2. Connotation of “Spicy” Culture

Chili peppers were introduced to China by Spain at the end of the Ming Dynasty, initially as an ornamental crop and a medicinal herb, but since their introduction into the cuisine, they have created a spicy trend that continues to this day. Each of China's eight major cuisines has its own specialties, and Sichuan cuisine, with its “spicy” characteristics, has made frequent appearances in the public eye, and the heat has not abated.

As early as the late Qing Dynasty and early Civil War, the food culture of Sichuan's love of chili peppers was already

known throughout the country, forming a stable custom of eating spicy food. The spicy, oil-heavy and thick-flavored Sichuan hot pot has solidified the public's perception of Sichuan's spicy food culture. Hot pot has become a typical representative of Sichuan and Chongqing cuisine, and "spicy" has also become a feature of Sichuan cuisine. Hotpot is the largest and most popular segment in China's food and beverage industry. According to the latest statistics in 2021, Sichuan and Chongqing have the largest number of hotpot stores, accounting for 40% of the total number of stores. As of the end of December 2021, there were 390,000 hotpot enterprises in the country, of which Sichuan had the most, accounting for about 12%; the number of TOP5 hotpot enterprises accounted for 40% of the country. In the famous snacks of Sichuan Province, the more famous ones are husband and wife lung slices, sad dried beans, cold noodles, etc. The shadow of chili oil can be seen everywhere, and Chengdu City, as the capital of the country of Tianfu, of course, also combines the essence of all the flavors of snacks from different parts of the Sichuan Province, and as the most important feature of the immigrant city, it brings together the tastes of different parts of the country at the same time. There is no doubt that the Chengdu region's "spicy" signature has gone nationwide and has become one of Chengdu's distinctive labels.

In recent years, the city of Chengdu has been promoting the Tianfu Spirit of "innovation and achievement, elegance, happiness and tolerance, friendliness and public welfare", and has made the spirit of Tianfu civilization a flag to showcase Chengdu's cultural charms. Chengdu's innovation and development of distinctive cultural symbols have contributed to the recognition and influence of Tianfu culture, enriched Tianfu culture and driven economic development. The figurative creation of spicy culture can help the development of Tianfu culture, which is an important part of Tianfu culture.

3. Spicy in the Culture of Tianfu

The spiciness of the Tianfu culture is shown in chili peppers, Sichuan cuisine, hot pots and writings.

In the *Huayang Guo Zhi* of the Jin Dynasty, it is written that the people of Shu "still have a taste for flavor and are good at pungent aroma". It is only natural that chili peppers, a strong aromatic spice, were widely used by the people of Sichuan after its introduction. At the same time, in the era of underdeveloped agricultural technology, the natural environment became the key factor affecting the growth of crops. The warm and humid environment unique to the Bashu region provided excellent conditions for the growth and cultivation of chili peppers. Moreover, compared with peppercorns and cornelians, chili peppers are also rich in nutrients, which can effectively alleviate the depression brought about by insufficient sunlight.

In February 2010, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) announced that Chengdu would be awarded the title of "Gourmet Capital", one of only seven such cities in the world. Sichuan cuisine is known for its wide range of ingredients, a variety of seasonings, rich and varied colors, fresh and mellow flavors, the full use of hot and spicy seasoning, as well as unique cooking methods and strong traditional styles of dishes, blending the characteristics of the southeast and northwest of China, adopting the strengths of many families, but also good at digesting and absorbing and constantly innovating. Szechuan cuisine is based on home-style dishes,

supplemented by high-end dishes, and is made from the usual flavors, but also from rare seafood. It is characterized by "making good use of three peppers" and "one dish, one pattern, one hundred dishes, one hundred flavors". There are spicy, hot and sour, pepper, fish, strange flavor and so on. But the most impressive is the spicy flavor.

When Chengdu is mentioned in books about Chengdu or by writers and writers, the word "spicy" is not far away. According to "Huayang Guo Zhi", Ba Zi State "planted five grains and six animals" and produced fish, salt and tea honey; Shu State "had mountains, forests, fish, gardens and fruits, and everything was ripe for four generations". At that time, the main seasonings of Ba and the former Shu were brine, rock salt, Sichuan pepper and "ginger of Yangpu". At the same time, "Huayang Guo Zhi" Volume 3 "Shu Zhi", from "Shu for the country, originated in the People's King" to start, a turn of the pen, asserting that the taste of Sichuan people "still taste good Xin Xiang" Qing Qianlong years, Sichuan Luo Jiang well-known poet Li Tiao Yuan in his "Hakuhai Wake Garden Records", also systematically collected In the Qing Dynasty, the famous poet Li Tiao Yuan in his "Huanhai Waking Garden Record" also systematically collected the thirty-eight main cooking methods of Sichuan cuisine, and recorded them all.

4. Meaning as a Figurative Symbol of Spice

Nowadays, people live in a highly symbolic social world, and their thoughts and communication cannot be separated from concrete characters. Cahill, a famous German thinker, once pointed out that human beings are symbolic creatures, capable of utilizing characters to create culture, including modern languages, myths and stories, fine arts, religions and other literary forms, all created by human beings using characters. Since people must have the power to turn information into symbols in order to change the real world, they cannot simply be passively exposed to the actual, as mammals are. Cultural symbols are the creations of people who have the ability to abstract, and they are also objects that have been given a certain meaning or symbolic content by the human beings who use them.

Cities under the state construct a distinctive regional culture, and mastering cultural discourse is an important point of focus for promoting local development, and is a necessary path to development. To use a variety of forms of cultural symbols to visualize the local culture, the formation of a good shape, to promote the development of politics, politics, humanities and other aspects of the development of the city, able to strengthen its soft national strength, increase its social impact, enhance its international competitiveness of the key chips. Urban cultural symbols also reflect the humanistic soft power of the city, and the meaning pattern in the cultural symbols itself has great permeability, and this permeability can change the people's understanding of the city subconsciously, and thus agree with the humanistic value of the city. Therefore, the development of the city cannot be separated from the efforts to create cultural symbols, and the promotion of the creation of concrete cultural symbols is not only an important focus for the promotion of Chengdu's culture, but also an inevitable choice to cope with the change of the mode of information dissemination. Compared with the traditional mode of communication, the figurative communication of cultural symbols has the new

characteristics of scene-based content production and hidden value dissemination. For every city, the dissemination of culture with regional characteristics is facing the realistic dilemma of insufficient interpretation power of the main body, insufficient attraction of the content, and weak penetrating power of dissemination. Only by adopting comprehensive measures in terms of innovating figurative communication methods and constructing a communication control mechanism can we continue to make culture “go out” and “come down”.

The following is a discussion of four aspects of Chengdu Spice, a cultural symbol of the figurative creation:

4.1. Spicy in Sichuan Cuisine

Chengdu can remind people of “spicy”, so that “spicy” can become one of the representatives of Chengdu's Tianfu culture, thanks to Chengdu for spicy this cultural symbol of intentional figurative creation, such as Sichuan cuisine, its characteristics are not only spicy, but also the “one dish, one style, one hundred dishes, one hundred flavors”, “fresh and mellow, spicy and pungent”. In history, Yang Xiong of the Western Han Dynasty used a great deal of space to describe the cooking and banquet customs of Sichuan cuisine in his “Fugue of Shudu”, revealing that the people of ancient Sichuan had a taste for sweets, and Zuo Si of the Western Jin Dynasty used a great deal of space in his “Fugue of Shudu”, revealing that the people of ancient Sichuan had a taste for sweets. Zuo Si in his “Shudu Fugue” describes the banquet life of the Sichuan gentry at that time the large number of products and food customs recorded in the fugue, are the later generations of in-depth study of the history of cooking in Sichuan is a valuable reference material. “Honey against Yuyu was its Fu”, and praised the Sichuan mountains at that time are full of honey beehives, which also gave the flavor of Sichuan cuisine at that time brought a rich source of sweetness, chili peppers, this species in Chengdu is not rooted in time is not very long, but now the Tianfu “spicy” more impressive! But nowadays, Tianfu's “hotness” is much more impressive, and it is most easily recognized outside of Chengdu. Spicy” has become a label for Sichuan cuisine, one of the first impressions of Chengdu for both outsiders and locals, and it continues to grow.

In terms of publicizing and promoting local dishes, husband and wife lung slices and spicy rabbit head have been the classic Sichuan dishes that have become famous in China, and the culinary culture has been driven. This is due to Chengdu's close integration of spicy and Sichuan cuisine, and also deliberately create to promote the story behind each dish. And it has been involved in interactive global food culture cooperation, participated in the establishment of the United Nations International UNESCO City Coordinator Mechanism for Food Capitals, and has been recognized by the Global Slow Food Consortium as the first Global Slow Food Capital in Europe. The example of Chengdu's catering company thanking the white messenger for solving the Xin Guan epidemic was publicized to the world through the United Nations International UNESCO. Successfully hosted international food festivals such as the Chengdu Panda International Food Festival and the Chengdu Global Gourmet Tourism Festival. In 2010, Chengdu was officially named by UNESCO as the “Global Gourmet Capital”, and became the first international city in Asia to be so honored, opening the way for “Spicy” to go global. From a national perspective, Chengdu's restaurant industry is also a big leader. In 2020, in

spite of the unfavorable factors of the new Crown Pneumonia epidemic, Chengdu still achieved a total revenue of 112.4 billion yuan from the catering industry, and the scale of the catering industry still ranked among the top four in the province.

4.2. Spicy in Character

Sichuan people are hot and spicy, and their food is just like their character. Their food is also like their character. In one word, it is hot and spicy. The term “Spicy Girls” refers to a group of girls with hot tempers like chili peppers, and the image of the “Spicy Girl” is very popular in the “Chili Pepper Zone” of inland China. The Sichuanese have a rebellious streak in their veins, and in 1911 a road-security movement broke out in Sichuan against the “imperialists”, protesting the imperialists' control of a new railroad in the province, a protest that sparked national upheaval and ultimately led to the downfall of the Qing Dynasty. From this incident, it can be seen that the fiery temper of the Sichuanese somehow started the whole process of modern Chinese politics. Some scholars have researched that 82% of the 1,052 generals and marshals who served in the early years of the People's Liberation Army came from the four most spicy provinces in China. Eating spicy food in Sichuan has come to be seen as a symbol of personal qualities such as courage and endurance, qualities essential to potential revolutionaries.

So food and the city are mutually shaping and complementary. Confucius said that food is character. In fact, sometimes food is character. In the Chengdu Plain, where there are more grain crops and canola oil is more abundant, Chengdu hot pot is based on canola oil, with a soft and delicate flavor. This is related to the comfortable natural conditions of Chengdu people, who naturally have little sense of crisis and do things unhurriedly. Therefore, Chengdu hot pot is all about freshness and delicacy. Chengdu hot pot restaurant hall open, from the hot pot restaurant name Chengdu hot pot more go literary style, “” clear heart “” four seasons pot “” five kitchen “. However, Chengdu's gentle sophistication is different from Guangzhou's old-fashioned warm soup. It always has a tough, spicy base of chili peppers in its bones, and this kind of spiciness is not easy to deal with.

4.3. Spicy in Urban Cultural Symbols

If Chengdu is to enter the global urban Internet system, it needs to play the “Tianfu traditional culture card” well and emphasize it. First of all, it must be found that the traditional Tianfu culture of Chengdu is the advantage that distinguishes Chengdu from any other city in the world and at home and abroad, as well as the city's characteristic historical and cultural mark. Therefore, what is national and regional is unique, and what is Chinese is global. Therefore, Tianfu civilization is not only of Chengdu City, but also of the Chinese nation and the world. If Chengdu is to become a world famous historical and cultural city, the richest, most humanistic, most lasting, most distinctive and most characteristic of Chengdu undoubtedly belongs to the Tianfu culture, and Chengdu City, through the visualization of its Tianfu culture, can further promote the shaping and dissemination of the historical and cultural brand of the “Three Cities and Three Capitals”, and highlight the “Three Cities and Three Capitals”, which is the only one of its kind. By visualizing its Tianfu culture, Chengdu can further promote the shaping and dissemination of the historical and cultural brand of “Three Cities and Three Capitals”,

highlighting the international popularity and reputation of the historical and cultural brand of “Three Cities and Three Capitals”, and further increase the international influence of Chengdu in the world city system and its cultural influence in the world.

As a “Famous City of Events”, Chengdu has also deliberately highlighted this cultural symbol in its publicity, using a tangible way for people to visualize it. The 31st Summer Olympics to be held in Chengdu is the third Summer Olympics to be held in the mainland region of China, and is the first comprehensive Olympics to be held after the implementation of the centennial development goal of “building a moderately prosperous society in all areas”, which is a clear indication of the importance of the Games. In preparation for the games, a giant panda named “Rongbao” was selected from Chengdu. In addition to the Olympic torch, which holds the “31” character flame, Rongbao's ears, eyes and tail are also in the shape of flames. Rongbao” was created in the shape of a panda. Known as the “National Treasure”, the panda is a symbol of Chengdu's overseas publicity with strong national characteristics. The face structure of Rongbao was borrowed from the traditional art treasures - the face shape of Sichuan Opera, and the flames and the red color of the whole and Chengdu's hot echo, the nickname of the volunteer team of the Universiade. The nickname of the volunteer team of the Universiade is “Little Green Peppers”, and the word “little” is added before “green peppers”, highlighting the active and lovely youthful characteristics of the volunteer service team of the Universiade. The word “青椒” harmonizes with the word “青交” and highlights the fact that the Chengdu Universiade is a global cultural exchange event for young people. The word “green pepper” also means “youth education”, which means that the Universiade volunteers, through participating in the vivid teaching of Universiade volunteer service practice, will further recognize the historical situation of the social era, increase their sense of responsibility and goal, cultivate patriotism, and have the courage to forge ahead and take on the great responsibility of the nation. The most important thing is the nickname. The most important thing is that this nickname reflects the new concept of “greening, environment, life”, and also represents Chengdu's cultural characteristics of “spicy”, in the promotion of the event will be spicy, Sichuan opera and other characteristics of Chengdu's cultural symbols figurative, can effectively enhance the image of the city.

4.4. Spicy in Visual Culture

With the deepening of the use of big data, artificial intelligence and other modern information technologies in information dissemination, it is possible to create a visualization of cultural symbols with the help of visualization for dissemination and promotion. Based on this, for Chengdu, the figurative communication of spicy cultural symbols can use the perceptible figurative symbols in the visual culture system as the form of expression and communication media, to visualize the abstract “spicy” feeling and impression, to carry and spread the Tianfu culture in a more concrete, intuitive, and graphic way, and to help promote the city's image. In recent years, Chengdu's visualization of this cultural symbol of spiciness has included various aspects, and we can see and feel its promotion of spiciness in documentaries about Chengdu, publicity for major events, recent works, and the promotion of bloggers on new media platforms, etc. In the city's publicity, the city uses

the visualization of spiciness to promote its image.

In the city's publicity, the abstract feeling and impression of “spicy” is visualized with the help of the visual culture system's perceptible figurative symbols as the form of expression and communication medium, and the production of Chengdu's promotional films or documentaries involves spicy many times, which plays a role in the city's publicity. Publicity effect. As early as 2011, the Media Planning Group of the Foreign Propaganda Office of the Propaganda Department of the Chengdu Municipal Party Committee took the initiative to contact CCTV 4's “Walking Through China” program to jointly plan and shoot a series of documentaries reflecting Chengdu's history, culture, folklore, natural environment, and so on. In the film, there are clips telling the story of “Chengdu, the capital of heaven” with Sichuan cuisine as the specific carrier, telling the legendary story behind the spicy and fresh aroma, and teaching the production methods of several classic Sichuan dishes. The 2019 documentary “Bashido - Breadth” records the three meals a day of ordinary people, in which the deep bond between the hometown dishes and Chengdu people is touching, showing that the spicy flavor has been integrated into the history, geography, society and other aspects of the material and spiritual factors, and is a valuable cultural memory of Chengdu. Chengdu's city promotional films, such as “New Line, New Chengdu”, “Come to Chengdu, Come to the Future”, “CHENGDU”, etc., all use a large number of attractive red chili peppers, boiling hot pots, or spicy Sichuan cuisine footage to promote the spicy culture.

5. Conclusion

From the beginning of the chili pepper as an ornamental plant, to the first time to be used as a substitute for salt, and then “spicy” has become the soul of Chengdu's food culture, Chengdu's efforts to build a figurative cultural symbols. The evolution of spiciness is a result of innate need, practical necessity, and Chengdu's intentionality.

In addition to the influence of geography and history, it also reflects the projection of too much social development and changes in social structure. People achieve the concrete expression of a certain city image through symbols, and similarly, realize the recognition of other images through symbols. The theory of cultural function points out that urban culture is an organic whole, and each component plays a role in its own cultural function. Through the continuous materialization of Chengdu's spicy cultural symbols, after correctly positioning the city and refining its image characteristics, the problem of spreading culture to the city will be solved.

In recent years, Chengdu City has made great efforts to promote the spirit of Tianfu, which is characterized by “innovation and achievement, elegance, happiness and tolerance, and friendliness and public welfare”, and has made the spirit of civilization of Tianfu a flag to show the charm of Chengdu's spirit. Chengdu's innovation and development of distinctive cultural symbols have contributed to the recognition and influence of Tianfu culture, enriched Tianfu culture and driven economic development. The figurative creation of spicy culture can boost the development of Tianfu culture, which is an important part of Tianfu culture. Chengdu will tap into the historical and cultural heritage of “spicy” as a characteristic cultural symbol, innovative development of Tianfu culture construction, and then drive the construction of Tianfu culture into the “three cities and three capitals”

construction project, enriching the city's ideological content and humanistic connotation.

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