

The Impact of Pre-Made Dishes on Cultural Inheritance: a Case Study Based on Suzhou Weizhixiang Food Co., Ltd.

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Abstract: With the development of science and technology the catering industry has gradually been penetrated by science and technology. As a major production process with rapid development in China's catering industry in recent years, prepared dishes have been controversial. The drastic reduction of chef positions and the replacement of food by technology has also brought about the discussion of hygiene, health and other issues. Its current impact has made more and more young people do not cook or do not know how to cook and so on. And the consequences of this series of problems need to be taken seriously. This paper will study the influence of prepared dishes on the development and inheritance of traditional food culture in combination with the case of "Suzhou Weizhixiang Food Co., Ltd." Prefabricated dishes is a cooking method that can be eaten by simply heating or some easy steps . With the development of this technology, more and more restaurants, enterprises and even families choose to have this kind of food instead of cooking. Most current discussions on this topic focus on health issues and their impact on health. At the same time, it can be expected that this impact on the chef industry is huge. Therefore, it is very likely to lead to the phenomenon of loss or dating of traditional production methods and techniques. This paper will adopt the qualitative research method , through the case study of Weizhixiang enterprises, analyze the current situation of prepared dishes, combined with the analysis and investigation of the impact on traditional food culture. Also give warnings and solutions to the problems. Through the study of this paper, we will come to the conclusion that prefabricated dishes will bring a new era of catering; The state and the government need to strengthen the control of the prepared dish industry; Schools and society need to pay more attention to the inheritance of traditional food culture among

the new generation of young people and popularize relevant knowledge.

Keywords: Catering Industry; Premade Dishes; Traditional Food Culture

1. Introduction

Society's swift evolution has created a need for quick and economical food services. As consumer demand has increased the prepared dish industry has seized the opportunity and gradually reached its peak after the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently catering enterprises account for the largest downstream demand for prepared dishes making up 80% (according to the China Chain Operation Association). Fast food restaurants, chain stores, takeout restaurants, rural kitchens and group dining halls are the main customers. Among these, some leading chain restaurants have a relatively high utilization of prepared dishes, with more than 80% of the dishes in certain restaurants being prefabricated.

The popularity of prepared dishes has sparked intense discussions about the future development of the chef industry. Most studies indicate that many chefs in the low-end market will likely be eliminated in the future, primarily because training a chef requires significant time and effort. In the future of prepared dishes, the need for ordinary chefs in various restaurants will diminish, leaving only high-end chefs responsible for dish development or for meeting the high-end market's pursuit of taste and quality. Following the release of Central Document No. 1, companies began to focus on developing prepared dishes for the consumer market. But this market still have to faces great risks and challenges.

However, the prevalence of prepared dishes has led people to rely on this technology. It has affected the unique tastes of the same dishes in different locations. For example, Kung Pao Chicken is spicy in Sichuan but tends to be sweet in Beijing. Due to the use of prepared

food, restaurants in different places are using the same seasoning packets and making the same flavors. This trend will gradually diminish people's understanding and recognition of food and may ultimately weaken or even erase food culture.

2. Definition of Prepared Dishes

The 3R catering concept proposed by the United States in the 1940s is the most basic model of prefabricated dishes. The 3Rs stand for "Ready to Cook" "Ready to Heat" and "Ready to Eat"[1]. With the advancement of industry and the realization of the complete 3R catering concept of the supply chain, this concept was entered the market with name of pre-prepared dishes. "China's prepared dishes have been developing for decades but they have long been in the awkward position of being lukewarm." [2] With the development of time, from the beginning of the epidemic to the peak, the future trend cannot be underestimated. "The contradiction between young people wanting to eat healthy, convenient and delicious meals and not being able to cook or not having the time to cook them has brought about a huge market that has been ignored by the giants: after simple processing of semi-finished dishes, they can become chefs in a second and in the special 2020 the market potential of prepared dishes has been stimulated."

The 3R catering concept introduced in the 1940s in the United States. It is the foundational model of prefabricated dishes. Where 3Rs stand for "Ready to Cook" "Ready to Heat" and "Ready to Eat." As the supply chain fully embraces this concept pre-prepared dishes have entered the market. Although [3] "China's prepared dish industry has a long history but it has often lingered in a state of mediocrity".

However, with the evolving landscape, particularly during the pandemic, the market for prepared dishes has significant potential. The growing demand among young people for convenient and tasty meals—paired with limited cooking skills or time—has created a vast and previously overlooked market. With simple processing, semi-finished dishes can transform anyone into a chef, and the unique circumstances of 2020 have further fueled this market's growth.

3. Chinese Traditional Food Culture and Its Current Situation

"Within the realm of Chinese culinary traditions,

a multitude of dishes are categorized into eight primary styles: Hunan, Sichuan, Shandong, Fujian, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, and Guangdong cuisines. The diversity and depth of China's culinary culture are evident from these eight distinct cuisines.[4] "Close to 500 varieties of Chinese culinary techniques exist. Typically, the prevalent methods include boiling, cooking, braising, roasting, steaming, frying, and crisping. Traits focus on the entirety of "color, aroma, taste," while cultural traits concentrate on the quartet of seasons, beauty, and the fusion of taste, cuisine, and medicine. The focus is meticulously on choosing the right food and materials, mastering knife techniques, maintaining the right cooking temperature, mastering cooking methods, selecting from five different flavors, and deciding on the mood and tableware. Dr. Sun Yat-sen initially introduced the idea of inheriting and evolving traditional Chinese culinary traditions in significant texts like "The Road to the Founding of a Nation" and "The Three Principles of the People," highlighting [4] the notion that "cooking originates in civilization, and without profound integration into the racial civilization, the flavor is subpar; vice versa. The elegance of Chinese cuisine merely reflects the extent of its development. Dr. Sun Yat-sen initially suggested [5] for the advancement and transmission of ancient Chinese culinary traditions, stating, "Food is seen as a paradise by the populace, marking the progression of contemporary Chinese culture, with all advancements trailing, yet the collective evolution of food surpasses that of civilized nations." China's culinary creations outnumber those in Europe and the United States, and its advanced cooking techniques are incomparable to those in Europe and the United States.

In recent years, the topic of prepared dishes has remained hot, and it will accompany the growth of a new generation, so it is of great research value to study its potential impact on the future inheritance and development of food culture. [6] "Understanding Chinese food culture is an important channel for learning the historical development of the Chinese nation, and has profound practical significance for college students to establish correct values and cultivate cultural self-confidence." [7] "Forgotten artisanal tastes are being replaced by more and more fast food with the same logo, and hundreds of years of word-of-mouth cooking skills are

being replaced by urban industrial production, convenience stores are full of bento food with various additives and chemical ingredients, and people are eating food quickly and saving time with money." Many traditional food cultures are being swallowed up by modernization, and China's long and ancient historical culture is gradually disappearing into the electronic urban era." [8] "Our main purpose in studying it is to apply it today and to predict the future." Therefore, in light of the current situation of The Times and the new problem of prepared dishes, this paper will conduct research on the future inheritance and development of traditional food culture, make up for the shortcomings of existing studies, and effectively discover potential problems that may occur in the future and make preparations in advance.

4. Research Status of the Relationship Between Prepared Dishes and Cultural Inheritance

"From the perspective of prepared food buyers, users between 26 and 45 years old are the main force of purchase, and the turnover of prepared food accounts for more than 70%." According to the survey results of Beijing Business Daily, people of different ages have different needs for prepared dishes, but 90% of the consumers who buy for the first time value the brand more, and 70% of the re-purchase depends on taste. [Data from Jingdong Supermarket] Baidu index shows that in 2022, the search for prepared dishes increased by 87% year-on-year, of which the search proportion of the "post-95" group exceeded 30%. Prepared dishes at home only require simple processing to be served, which is very popular among young people, although more and more prepared dishes are going to families, enterprises are still the biggest sales. [9] "China Chain Catering Industry Report 2022" shows that the largest downstream demand of China's prepared dishes industry comes from the catering industry, more than 85% of sales to the B end, mainly for group meals, fast food chain catering and other enterprises with high demand. Throughout the ages, people have traveled to a restaurant, a region, or even a foreign land because of a chef or a dish. Today, due to the development of prepared dishes, we can eat food all over the country and even around the world without leaving home. In the past, different production techniques and processes of each chef are exactly what people are pursuing.

Highly distinctive cooking techniques and regional characteristics of food can not only bring people different experiences, but also become the endorsement products of each "time-honored" restaurant.

However, in today's advanced technology, the labeling and use of prepared dishes are still unclear, whether we can confirm when the food we eat was made and who made it. Taking Guangzhou as an example, a survey shows that the proportion of prepared dishes in chain restaurants has reached more than 80%. The same thing is also happening in more and more "time-honored" restaurants, not only Guangzhou's Taotaoju, Guangzhou Restaurant and even Quanjude, Goubuli and other old brands in different regions are also using prepared dishes. But the uniformity of texture created by the machine makes the unique flavors of different cooks disappear.

China is an ancient civilization with a long history. Food cultural is one of the most important part of our country. When taking about history a lot of them has connect with foods. For instance: in the past, the whole families used to stay together to make dumplings during winter solstice; When it is Laba Festival people needs to get up earlier of preparing laba porridge for their families; In a same way when its Spring Festival people make various different kinds for food. But nowadays because of premade dishes people do not needs to spending time for making those traditional foods. It is convenience but the atmosphere of family cooking together disappeared and some of the family's unique skills were gradually forgotten.

5. Case Study of Weizhixiang Prepared Dish Enterprise

According to information obtained from the video released by CCTV, many people think that "freshly fresh things are completely different from processed things" and "they always think that freshly fresh things are fresh, have a better taste and have a better smell." For the question "Can you accept pre-prepared dishes for restaurant dining?" The conclusion we get: 55% of people think that it is unacceptable and need to have freshly cooked meals; 18% said consumers must be informed in advance; 16% said it was okay to eat occasionally, depending on the situation. 11% could answer it and thought it was easy and convenient. According to the conclusion of interviews and statistics,

people's low acceptance of prepared dishes is mostly due to concerns about hygiene, health and safety, and unclear product labeling.

"In early March 2024, the People's Procuratorate of Siyang County, while performing its duty to supervise public interest litigation, found that some restaurants used prepared vegetables as food raw materials to sell meals without explicitly informing consumers. "Many restaurants choose to use pre-prepared dishes in order to meet the need to serve large quantities of meals in a short period of time and to ensure a consistent taste, but very few restaurants voluntarily inform themselves that they are using pre-prepared dishes before eating." Although the prefabricated food industry is growing rapidly, the country and the industry still face a series of problems such as inconsistent standards and difficult quality assurance.[10]

5.1 Introduction of Weizhixiang Company

"Suzhou Weizhixiang Food Co., Ltd. was established on December 10, 2008" [12] "On April 27, 2021, the A-share main board was listed" [12] "Weizhixiang focuses on the research and development, production and marketing of semi-finished dishes, and provides consumers with healthy, green, convenient and delicious semi-finished dishes." [13] "In addition to offline franchise stores and malls, Weizhixiang has also begun to develop online channels, opening online Tmall flagship store, Jingdong flagship store, Tiktok flagship store, and other delivery platforms such as Eleme and Meituan." [14] "Guided by the needs and trends of online customers, cuisine improves old products through the research and development of new formulations, new processes and new products, so that products can meet the needs of online customers to the greatest extent and realize the transformation of the brand from facing the elderly to facing younger, fashionable and diversified users." "Weizhixiang has always been committed to providing families with nutritious and healthy food solutions, and has continued to contribute good products to society through continuous innovation and exploration of the dietary needs of families."

5.2 Development Status of Weizhixiang Prepared Dish Enterprise

According to Oriental Wealth Network and Sina Finance, we have learned that in the first half of

2024, Weizhixiang faces a year-on-year decline in operating income and net profit. The main reason is a series of problems such as the profit decline of franchise stores and the increase of closing stores and the intensification of market competition. With the continuous growth of the market size and the continuous growth of the C-end market, enterprises began to increase technological development and product upgrades. In addition to reducing costs, prefabricated dishes reduce the loss of human resources, shorten the dining time of restaurants, and promote the diversified development of products by upgrading dishes according to the eating habits of different regions.

Due to the good development prospects of the market, a large number of new enterprises have been integrated in a short period of time, which has broadened the choice of consumers and also brought some industry chaos. For example: technical and security assurance issues, supply chain transparency and stability and a series of issues. These problems have left the prepared dishes industry at a critical juncture.

From the perspective of the impact on traditional food culture, although the convenience of prepared dishes is favored by consumers, it also makes the taste of dishes standardized and simple. Although the spread of prepared dishes has enhanced the international influence of Chinese food culture, the understanding of food culture among the new generation of Chinese youth has decreased. The trend toward prepared dishes, which gradually eliminate the need to learn to cook, may have a subtle impact on a new generation of young people.

At the same time, due to the introduction of prepared dishes into campus and the unclear labeling of consumers for the use of prepared dishes in restaurants, the discussion on prepared dishes has been pushed to a higher heat. But combined with the feedback from the provincial documents, we can see that the development of the prepared dish industry will only expand in the future, "How can the Prepared Dishes on the" Tuyere "make consumers feel at ease - Suggestions on behalf of the Committee to promote the healthy and orderly development of the Prepared Dishes Industry", "2024 Fujian-Taiwan Aquatic Prepared Dishes Industry Development Seminar held", "Gathering strength to develop the Prepared dishes Industry Shanxi Ankang came to Guangdong to sign more than 800 million

"Although the recent industry situation has caused a big blow to Weizixiang prepared dish enterprises, but as an old brand in the emerging industry, Weizixiang's development potential is still not negligible.

5.3 Measures and Effects of Cultural Inheritance of Weizixiang Prepared Dishes

Donate to Wuhan Leishenshan Hospital in 2020; In 2021, the New Year donated 10,000 copies of the New Year's Eve dinner. The company produces and operates various semi-finished vegetable products of its own brands such as "Weizixiang"; "Weizixiang has always been committed to providing families with nutritious and healthy food solutions, and has continued to contribute good products to society through continuous innovation and exploration of the dietary needs of families," People's News said. Not only that, enterprises also combine traditional seasons and seasonal changes to launch traditional dishes that are more in line with Chinese tastes; "On July 20, 2023, at the 4th Corporate Sponsorship Conference of the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, Weizixiang received the official Supplier Certificate of the Hangzhou Asian Games, which witnessed the company's enthusiasm for the development of sports in China." Through this activity, the company not only improved its popularity but also promoted Chinese food better.

6. Conclusion

With the rapid development of society and the increase of consumer demand, the prepared dish industry will gradually move to the climax of the Chinese market, which will bring a new era of catering. Convenient and fast prepared food products shorten the restaurant's meal preparation time, labor costs and capital loss, and become the first choice for more and more restaurants and take-out.

However, this has led to a certain number of chefs being cut, and in the future, the chef industry will only leave some top chefs for dish development and to meet the high-end market demand. Although it has promoted the development of Chinese dishes in the international market, the influence of prepared dishes on traditional food culture has made the taste of dishes too standardized and lost the traditional taste and experience. Meanwhile, it will gradually cause a new generation of young people to no longer cook, so as to affect their

understanding of and attention to traditional food culture.

Therefore, the state and society should strengthen the standardized management of prepared dishes as soon as possible, ensure product quality and safety, and improve product transparency and information publicity. Make sure that in the future restaurant customer can know whether they are having premade food or not. At the same time, it is necessary to call on prefabricated dish enterprises to pay attention to cultural inheritance, retain local characteristics and traditional tastes, and innovate and develop new products that meet contemporary consumer needs. Schools should strengthen the publicity and popularization of traditional food culture so as to enhance the understanding and attention of the new generation of young people. Let students know how to cook, why to cook and the important behind cooking. In this paper, there is a lack of research on the processing, transportation, the definition of prepared dishes and so on. The research on the future development of the industry has limitations and problems that need further research. For example: A highly controversial topic is that the Market Supervision Administration says that frozen staple food like: frozen dumpling, frozen baozi and the same kinds of frozen staple food are not premade dishes but Judging from the Production process and preservation method, most of people do not agree with this statement. It is hoped that the specification of the definition of prepared dishes will be strengthened in the future: there will be no vague definition of the concept, which will confuse the public. Vigorously strengthen the publicity and inheritance of traditional food culture: increase the time and opportunity for people to cook for themselves.

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