

EATING FOR  
REUNION  
AND  
HAPPINESS

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## AUTO INTERVIEW

Hey, you're so busy with your graduation work, so what's it about?

It's about food, aiming to let audience understand Chinese culture through food.

Why you make a food project? Is it because you are a food-lover?

Hmm, yes, I love eating. Who doesn't? Every time when chatting with other Chinese international students, we say, "When I miss my hometown, the first thing into my mind is the delicious food." Western food can hardly hook us, because of our tongue memory and cultural background...

Sorry? What is *Tongue Memory*?

That's a word I learned from a Japanese TV drama named "おせん Osen". Tongue Memory means the taste we had before ten years old will always be memorized and loved throughout our life. That is the reason why everyone loves his or her parent's homemade food or special local dishes. This TV drama talks about the relation between food and era. The story based in fast paced city, Tokyo, people are used to eating prepared ramen and sushi from supermarkets. However, there is a hundred-year-old restaurant that still strictly maintains the old-fashion way of cooking, nothing quick or convenient. Unfortunately, they can hardly survive in this new era. In the last episode, the owner of this restaurant offered a boy some fine dishes, hoping he can remember the wonderful taste. But the boy said they are tasteless, and put tomato ketchup on every dish. His parents are always too busy to cook for him, so ketchup became his tongue memory. Sadly but he doesn't have a chance to fall in love with traditional slow food. Such a pity! This really touched me, it driven my desire to inherit and protect traditional food and culture. It is my initial intention of making this food project.

Time changes and moves forward. Those things are dying out for reasons. Continuously emerging new things naturally replace the out-of-date stuffs, as people no longer need them. Is it necessary to protect traditional food and culture?

Absolutely yes! The traditions are old stuffs from the past, true, but they are not out of date, they are still beautiful. China nowadays is developing extremely fast even in a violent way. Many beautiful things have been destroyed already. When we heard that Shanghai-style spicy soy sauce, which is special to eat with pork cutlet, is no longer in production, most of Shanghainese were heartbroken. I don't want to see my beloved taste becomes a victim of this fast-paced changing world, or the next generation lives in "universal lifestyle" forgetting their unique cultural background.

So you think food is also a part of traditional culture.

Food is much more than an eatable stuff that kills your hunger, it tells stories, shows emotion, carries memories, and represents culture. Food is identity, as Ludwig Feuerbach's well-known phrase "Man is what he eats". [*Feuerbach's "Man is what He Eats": A Rectification*, p397] You can surmise a person's cultural background and living conditions from his daily diet. In China, where the land nourished me, food is the thing matters most. We say, "Have you eaten?" instead of "How are you?" as greetings. All the Chinese know the idiom that *Man regard food as sky*, which means food is the first and foremost concern. We pay great attention and passion to food throughout the thousands years in history. I can even say, you can understand China if you know about the food culture.

What makes Chinese food culture special?

First of all, one big advantage of the Chinese cuisine is its great variety. China is a huge land, in which the different geographical conditions breed a variety of local products. A side of water and soil raises a group of people. Their cooking habits, taste preferences, and dining customs all have gradually shaped regional culinary and food culture. Plus, the big number of minority groups enrich the content of Chinese food, added more ingredients and cooking techniques. Besides, in 5,000 years of history, the Chinese food culture kept developing and improving, accumulated a lot of wisdom, including the utensils evolve, cooking technique and dietary philosophy, etc. There are also literature and art related to food, such as old legendary stories, ancient poetries, calligraphy and paintings. Therefore, not only the food itself is rich and varied, but also the cultural connotations around.

Sounds like that Chinese food culture is indeed profound with so many contents. How did you research on?

Yeah. That's actually a difficult part in the whole project. Because I'm living abroad, I have limited research resources. I mainly rely on google books and e-books collected by my friend in Shanghai. With nearly twenty books in total, a wide range of content, made me completely lost. I found that any small topics in Chinese food culture could be extended into a huge essay. I feel that I must find my interests and keywords to clarify the direction.

Then the interests and keywords are?

I started with my favorite red bean story, which is well known by most Chinese. My idea is using food as a storyteller to convey the traditional culture and thoughts. So, "food stories" is the first keyword. The stories I've chosen are all very old legends and poems, explaining the symbolism of a certain food. To link and unify all the food stories, I found the Five Elements Philosophy, and got this *A Recipe of Harmony* idea.

What kind of artwork is *A Recipe of Harmony*?

It's a video installation, with four round-shape loop films projected on a dining table, looks like four dishes offering to the audience. The foods in dishes are in five colors from Five Elements Philosophy, which are black and white, red, yellow, blue-green. According to the food stories and symbolism, they represent balance, love, regeneration, and peace. As ingredients of *A Recipe of Harmony*, they together create an ideally perfect world. There are detailed explanations of the concept and cultural story behind each film in this book.

What else in the book?

The first chapter is a brief introduction of Chinese food culture, generalized into three lines of time, space and ideology. In this part, I made a festival food calendar, a regional food map and a Yin-yang food chart. The second chapter is the main part of food project, *A Recipe of Harmony* video series and installation. I conclude with the chapter *Taste of Memories*, the award winning Rotterdam Museum Night project I co-designed, in which we used old-fashion candies to recall visitor's childhood. Since it's also about food, I'm writing it as a side program. I hope readers will like this book, and enjoy a bite of China.

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## 1. BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF FOOD CULTURE IN CHINA

There is a question above that “*What makes Chinese food culture special?*” and you first answered from innate geographical advantages.

Yes. It has been said that the reason of great differences between eating habits of various countries is the result of a multitude of factors, including variations in ecological environment, the level of population and productivity. China is the world's most populous country, second-largest country by land area, and one of the earliest civilizations. These conditions laid a strong foundation for unique Chinese food culture and its long history. China is one originating source of agriculture, farming techniques appeared about 7,000 years ago. As early as 5,400 BC, the Yellow River region already saw growth of foxtail millet. Soon after, areas along the Yangtze River had been planted with rice. That's the origin that Southern people eat rice, while the Northerner live with wheaten food. China's vast land area crosses several meteorological zones from south to north, a variety of topography from east to west. It is the complex and diverse natural environment breeds a wide range of food and ingredients. Perhaps, there is nowhere else can compare, having so many kinds of plants and animals within one country. [*Chinese Foods*, p8-9]

In terms of diet ideology, what's the difference compare with Western culture?

Differ from the Western rational pursuit on nutrition; Chinese cuisine focuses more on color, fragrance, taste, meaning and form. These five concerns are the standard of fine dishes since long time ago. It seems that Chinese people regard eating as a pleasure art of living, but this doesn't mean that we do not care about healthy diet. Actually, every Chinese knows *food and medicine share the same roots*, and has a basic knowledge of food therapy. “Balance” is a keyword in diet therapy, because of the deep-rooted Yin-Yang and Five Elements philosophy. I grow up with parent's guidance of what is Yin food and what is Yang food.

How about the relation with folk custom?

The interesting thing is that the Chinese are constantly eating during holidays and festivals. Almost every traditional festival has its particular food. In many life events, there are specific dietary customs. For example, the snacks mixed with red dates, peanuts, longan, and lotus seeds on wedding ceremony are the wish for having lovely baby. Speak further, not only human being want food, but also the ancestors and gods. Even things without a mouth, like rivers and mountains! Sacrifices in other cultures are usually flowers, but in China, it's still delicious food!

Wow, the Chinese are indeed crazy in food!

Since ancient time, civilians love food, and also the refined scholars were found of it. Poetry and literature about food is a special part of Chinese food culture. Poets who's whisper poems while drinking and eating, left behind many beautiful pieces. The most famous of them is Su Dongpo, whose poems have mentioned wild vegetable soup, litchi fruit, and pork. The Dongpo pork is a famous dish named after him, because it was his favorite.

What's the content of this chapter?

There is so much to say about China food culture, so I am not able to trace every origin and explain all details in this book, but only make brief introduction from my personal point of view. Next is the featured

content of Chinese traditional food and culture, illustrated through three dimensions of time, space and ideology.

## FESTIVAL FOOD CALENDAR

As an ancient civilized country, China has many traditional festivals, as an indispensable part of the culture. Each festival has its historical origins, beautiful legends, and unique atmosphere. They reflect national customs and traditions, morality and religion. Almost every traditional festival corresponds to a particular food.

Why it's always about eating?

First of all, there is no doubt that Chinese people love to eat. Food is the sky, is the heaven. Secondly, I think it is because that festival is an opportunity for friends and families gather together, and to share food is our favorite social style. Thirdly, most festival foods are easy to make. When all families get together, they help each other for preparing and cooking, and to enjoy the pleasant conversation. What a joyful reunion! This is precisely the meaning of these festivals.

Lunar Dec 30	Chinese New Year Eve	Reunion dinner. Dumpling, Rice cake, Spring roll
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It is the night crosses to new year. The most important meal of a year is the family reunion dinner in this evening. All the family members sit at a round table and enjoy feast. The Northern people must have dumplings, while the Southerners prefer rice cake and spring rolls. After dinner, many families have tradition of watching CCTV New Year's Gala, playing Mahjong, and fireworks. Other customs during the Spring Festival are paper-cuts for window decorations, couplets pasted on the door, dragon and lion dance, etc.

Lunar Jan 15	Lantern Festival	Tangyuan
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The first full moon of the new year comes at 15th January in Luna Calendar, marks the happy end of Spring Festival. Because full moon is a symbol of reunion, some families gather for dinner again at Lantern Festival. Tangyuan, also called Yuanxiao, is glutinous rice balls with stuffing inside, boiled in water. At night, people enjoy the lantern parade, riddles and games, wandering around in a sea of beautiful lanterns.

Solar April 5	Qingming Festival	Qingtuan
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Qingming is one of the Twenty-four Solar Terms, so it is not like other festivals following the Lunar Calendar. Qingtuan is a green rice ball with red bean paste inside. In the outer layer of glutinous rice flour, there is vegetable juice, which gives Qingtuan a green color. The day before is Cold Food festival, so Qingtuan should be eaten when it is cold. At Qingming Festival, families take trip to tomb sweeping, there recall their ancestors and enjoy the greenery of springtime.

Lunar May 5	Dragon Boat Festival	Zongzi
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The Dragon Boat Festival is a day to commemorate the great poet Qu Yuan. He had been concerning his nation during the whole life, wrote numerous poems, and finally drowned himself in River Milou at Fifth May. To prevent fishes in the river eat his body, people feed them with delicious Zongzi. Zongzi is pyramid-shape rice dumpling, wrapped by bamboo or reed leaves. The festival customs included boat racing, drinking realgar wine, hanging wormwood and calamus at the door.

Lunar Aug 15	Mid-Autumn Festival	Moon cake
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The full moon is always on the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month in Lunar Calendar, so Mid-Autumn Festival, which is also called Moon Festival, is another family reunion day. Just like the full moon, the moon cake is also in round shape. There are many different kinds of moon cakes, vary from making methods to stuffing. The most popular one is Cantonese-style moon cake. Besides, on the Mid-Autumn dinner table, there usually are crabs, taro and duck. Appreciating the bright full moon is an important activity at that night.

Lunar Sep 9	Double Ninth Festival	Chongyang Cake
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As the book *I Ching* said, 6 is Yin number and 9 is Yang number, so the date 9.9 is known as double Yang. In Chinese, "nine" and "long" is a homonym, so double nine has become the good wish for longevity of old people. In this day, offspring go to visit the elderly, enjoy Chongyang cake and chrysanthemum wine. Climbing and admiring chrysanthemum is the special custom of the festival.

Lunar Dec 8	Laba Festival	Laba Congee
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Laba Festival is related to Buddhism, regarded as enlightenment day of the Buddha. The legend said Sakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, had hard practice for many years, and became skinny. At the time he thought of giving up, he met a kind shepherdess gave him a bowl of congee, what made him regain strength instantly. So Laba is a grand festival of the Buddhist. The laba congee included many ingredients, such as rice, longan, lotus seeds, dates, green and red beans, walnuts, etc.

四月五日  
SOLAR  
APR 5



清明  
QINGMING  
FESTIVAL

正月十五  
LUNAR  
JAN 15



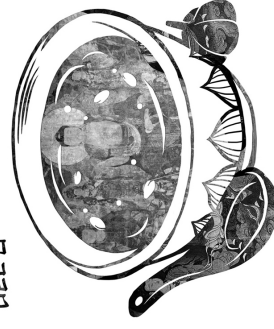
元宵  
LANTERN  
FESTIVAL

大年三十  
LUNAR  
DEC 30



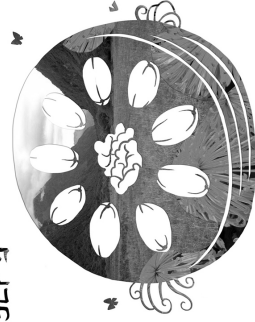
除夕  
CHINESE  
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腊月初八  
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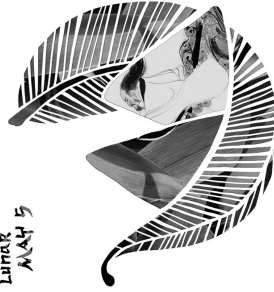
重阳  
DOUBLE-NINTH  
FESTIVAL

八月半  
LUNAR  
AUG 15



中秋  
MID-AUTUMN  
FESTIVAL

五月初五  
LUNAR  
MAY 5



端午  
DRAGON  
BOAT  
FESTIVAL



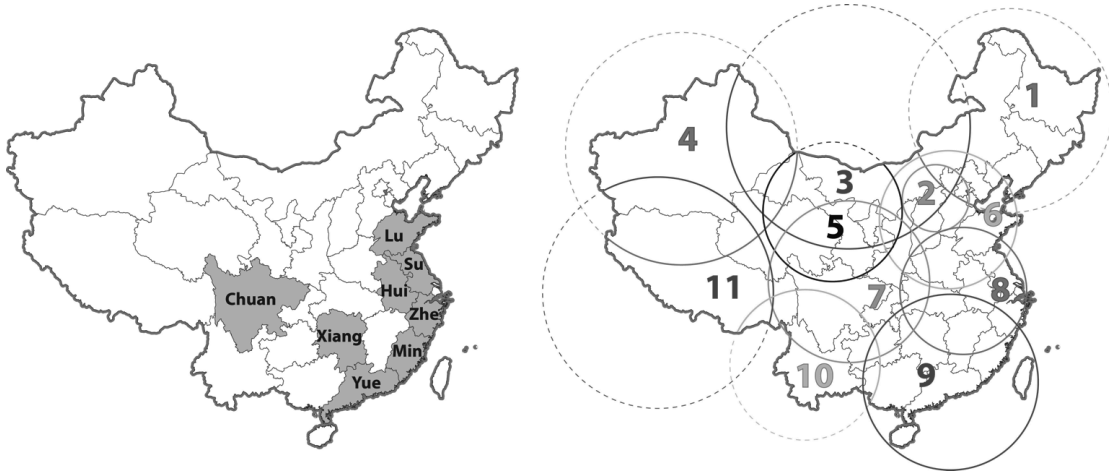
## REGIONAL FOOD MAP OF CHINA

Generally speaking, what's the difference in regional food culture?

Different geographical and ecological environment produces different eating materials, for instance, people in coastal areas enjoy seafood, while those living in prairie rely on cattle, sheep and dairy products. Ethnic group, custom, religion, politics, economy and other factors also influence the eating habit and cooking techniques. In terms of general taste preferences, it is getting saltier from Southern China to Northern, sweeter from Western to Eastern, stronger from seaside to land.

What is the highlighted *Eight Culinary*?

The Eight Culinary are widely recognized culinary genres, formed their distinctive regional characteristics in the long-term evolution, distinguish from the selection of materials, cutting, cooking and other skills. They are *Lu, Chuan, Yue, Min, Su, Zhe, Xiang, Hui*. They come from the mainstream diet preferences, but you can see from the map, that using Eight Culinary to categorize the regional food culture in China is very unilateral.



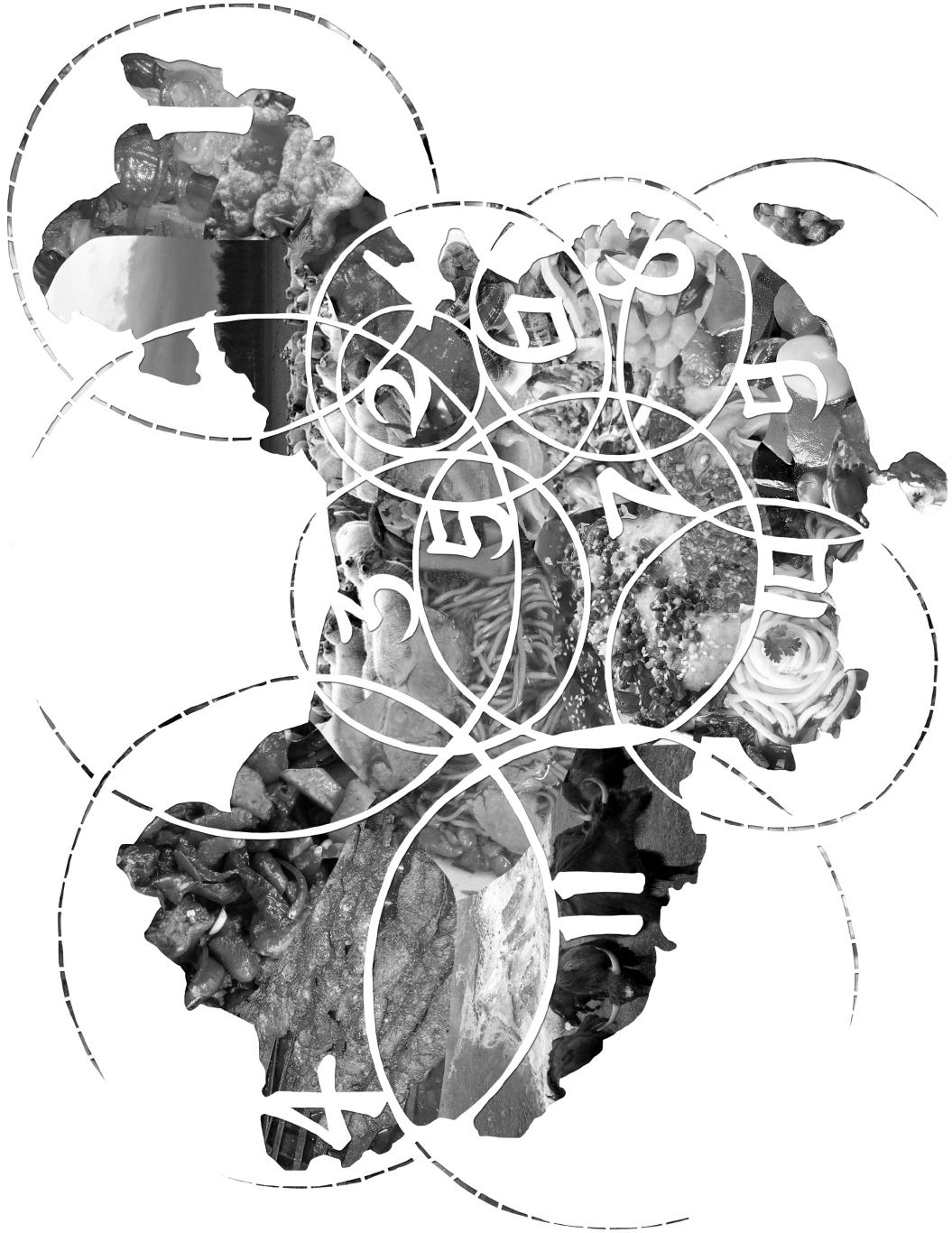
So, what is the most reasonable way to categorize regional food culture?

Look at the map on the right, there are 11 dietetic culture zones that cover the whole land and cultures of all ethnic groups. Zhao Rongguang, the dean of Chinese food culture Institute, raised this theory in 80's. The intersection of each circle shows the mutual influence and infiltration of the adjacent areas. In the following food map, you will see the general intro of each zone.

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. Northeast       | There has the most fertile black soil, abundant water resource and rich ingredients. Because of the long-period cold, people used to frozen and pickled food, prefer spicy flavors, and drink big amount of spirits.                      |
| 2. Beijing-Tianjin | As Capital city, Beijing is the political, economic and cultural center. Tianjin is the hub of canals. So this region is a melting pot of many culture and cuisines. People enjoy rich dinning content, and spend large food consumption. |
| 3. Mid-North       | Inner Mongolia, the main part of Mid-North, has special prairie culture, which rely on the nomadic and animal husbandry production. Livestock is an important family property, too precious to be eaten, so milk is a major               |

	source of food. The special local product is milk tea and cheese.
4.Northwest	Xinjiang is the major part of Northwest. Food there is based on animal husbandry, supplemented by farming. Lamb is consumed in large quantities. It's also the main origin of fruits and nuts. There are many minority groups gather in the region, make variety of special dishes. By the deep influence of Islamic religion, people maintain the strict food taboos and eating etiquette.
5.Mid Yellow River	The region around ancient capitals Xi'an and Luoyang is also called Central Plain area, has splendid prehistoric culture and long history. The staple food is cereals and different kinds of wheaten food. People there love big dishes.
6.Lower Yellow River	It's also known as the Qilu area. There is fresh and sufficient seafood because it's a coastal region. Shangdong Cuisine is the first one of Eight Culinary, with long history and special flavor. Grains made pancakes and tortillas are the featured staple food.
7.Mid Yangtze River	The geographical condition is diverse; there are hills, mountains, rivers and lakes. Warm and humid climate, abundant rainfall. Rice, soup, fish and shrimp are staple and specialties.
8.Lower Yangtze River	The Lower Yangtze River circle, includes Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui provinces and Shanghai, is the national economic center, also a bloomy market of food and beverage. The district is also called "land of rice and fish", so there are abundant rice, waterfowl and freshwater fishes. The culinary focuses on the freshness of raw materials, pays attention to cutting and level of fire. Light taste, in order to enhance the original flavor.
9.Southeast	Region centered with Fujian and Guangdong has plenty of fruits, vegetables, and seafood. People love rice, fresh food and tea. Refined cooking technique. Proficient in diet therapy. Since the area is an important external port, foods here had the most widely influence in foreign countries.
10.Southwest	The district, geographically blocked by lots of mountains, created a unique Southwest flavor. To fight against the wet climate, people live with alcohol, chili and pepper. Sichuan Cuisine is one of the Eight Culinary, has more than 40 kinds of cooking methods.
11Qinghai-Tibet Plateau	The unique plateau geography provides precious Chinese medicine. Less fruits. Animal Husbandry is mainly yak, sheep and goats. Beef, mutton and cereal are staple foods. Buttered tea and highland barley wine is the special beverage. Dining etiquette is deeply impacted by Buddhist Lamaism.

[*The History of Chinese Food Culture*, p33-40]



## YIN-YANG FOOD CHART



What is Yin-Yang, and how to understand symbol?

The concept of *Yin-Yang* is derived from the ancient Chinese's view on nature. They believe that many contrary forces are interconnected and interdependent, such as sky and earth, sun and moon, cold and hot, men and women, etc. In the pattern, there is a S-shaped curve divides the circle into two equal parts of black and white colors. The white half represents Yang, and the black half is Yin. Their shapes look like two fishes chasing each other, and maintaining a dynamic balance. The white and black dots in both halves, just like the fish's eye, means Yin and Yang are merged into each other, cannot be separated.

[*I Ching acupuncture*, p27]

How did Chinese people apply Yin-Yang Philosophy into food culture?

The philosophy of Yin-Yang, lies at the heart of Chinese culture, has been applied to food and cooking since *Huangdi Neijing*, the earliest classic of traditional Chinese medicine, helped to build a comprehensive theoretical system for Diet Therapy. It suggests achieving health through balanced diet. Foods and cooking methods has their Yin or Yang quality, commonly known as hot and cold property. For example frying is hot, boiling is cold; beef is hot, cucumber is cold. For a balanced diet, food from both Yin and Yang sides need to be eaten in one meal, or make choice according to the personal physical condition. In addition, *Five Taste in Harmony* is also an important thought. These five tastes are sour, sweet, bitter, spicy and salty. They blend, interact and support each other, and together to make a rich flavor. A dish is unsuccessful if it has only one taste. Five Tastes is not only to harmonize the flavor, but also for health. [*I Ching acupuncture*, p27-31]

Yin/ Cold	Neutral	Yang/ hot
boil, steam, braise, stew		deep-fry, stir-fry, roast, smoke
wheat, barley	rice, corn, potato	sorghum, glutinous rice
green bean, tofu, celery, spinach, eggplant, lettuce, cucumber, mushroom, seaweed, bean sprout	pea, soybean, cabbage, kidney bean, carrot	red bean, pepper, leek, pumpkin, garlic, green onions, ginger
duck egg, duck, frog, rabbit, crabs, clam, sea fish, snail	pork, pigeon, goose, river fish, scallops	chicken eggs, lamb, beef, dog, chicken, eel, shrimp, dairy products, ham
pear, orange, mango, banana, watermelon, grapefruit, kiwi	coconut, pineapple, olive	litchi, longan, peach, walnut, cherry, chestnut
salt, soy sauce	white sugar	chili, pepper, curry, star anise, brown sugar, oil, vinegar

## 2. "A RECIPE OF HARMONY" VIDEO SERIES AND INSTALLATION

### EATING FOR REUNION AND HAPPINESS

Eating together is the most common social style of the Chinese. We have big meals when enjoying holidays and festivals, celebrating happy events, gathering together with friends, doing business meetings, and we offer food to show our appreciation. That's also a distinguishing feature of Chinese food culture.

Ha, exactly. Take account of the way of dining, the Chinese prefer sharing. The big or small feasts are not only big meals, but also activities spending time with families and friends. Therefore, reunion is the initial aim of eating together.

And you can see the way of dining is a process of sharing and cooperation. Everyone sit around a big round table, share a dozen or twenty dishes, and have a bite of each dish. The one you don't like probably beloved by others. It's mutually beneficial.

Yay! I think it's so smart! The "Lazy Susan" (turning table) is such a clever design, which the neighbor countries haven't learnt yet. And the shape of round tables, round plates and bowls is a symbol of unity and harmony. In this way, eating together becomes more harmonious and happy.

Agree. It shows a sense of harmony. I remember at the grand opening of Beijing Olympics, *Harmony* was the word had been emphasized. It is one of the cores in Chinese classical philosophy. In the diet therapy field, *Harmony* is about balanced diet, and following the natural rules to eat regularly everyday, and choose local seasonal food.

"Harmony" is from the balance method of Yin-Yang and Five Elements, reflects the Confucianism, which talked about *harmony is gracious*, and *the Doctrine of the Mean*. Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, had a dream of *the Unity of the World*. It is the highest realm of him, which means all human are equal, loves each other, and unites as one family. This is an ideal society, just like "Utopia". Confucianism is extensive; it includes politics, economic, ethical and other aspects. It was adapted in many dynasties to rule the country, so the Chinese mainstream values are based on it. Confucianism also set the standards of formal dining etiquette. For these reasons, I suppose that the custom of eating-together comes from the dream of "the Unity of the World".

Hmm... That's logical.

I found the similar idea in another book I have been reading. It is written by an American author, there from it shows the Western point of view. The name is *In the Devil's Garden, a Sinful History of Forbidden Food*. This book categorizes forbidden food stories by Seven Sins. In the third chapter *Pride*, the author mentioned, "Man is what he eats. If we eat in a different way, or we eat different food ---- we are enemies. In some culture, 'enemy' can be literally translated as 'people with different mouths'. Does this mean that world peace can be achieved by a common recipe?" [In the Devil's Garden, p84] It reminds me the reunion purpose of Chinese dining, and the ideal harmonious society. They inspired me to do this video installation, to create a menu aims to visitor's reunion and happiness.

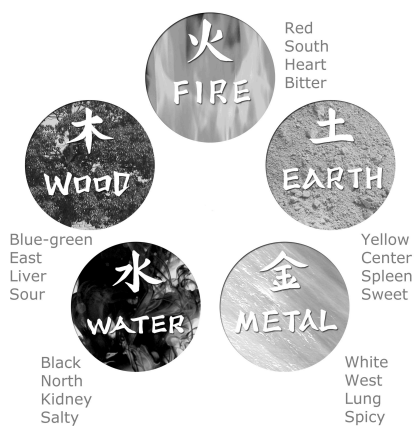
What kind of menu can achieve this goal of perfect world?

That's actually the concept links my videos. I applied the Five Elements Philosophy to create the recipe of harmony. Five Elements is a combination with five materials that you cannot live without. They are metal, wood, water, fire and earth. It also represents five colors, five directions, five organs, and five tastes, etc. The Five promote and control each other for a dynamic balance, just like Yin and Yang. I picked up five colors: black and white, red, yellow, blue-green, and selected food in these colors. Then, according to the symbolism of each food, I made four harmony ingredients, which are *Balance, Love, Regeneration, and Peace*.

[I Ching acupuncture, p49-54]

Why did you choose to make videos instead of actual food or recipe?

This food project focuses on the long history and unique custom of foods and dining habits. The videos show natural ingredients, no cooking process involved. Because I want to say that the majority of foods in China are universal, gifts of the nature. It is rooted culture gave them stories or symbolism, and made them special. You can cook them in any ways, but the meaning of ingredients will stay forever, as the national soul shaped it through ages. Therefore, I chose time-based media, using food as a storyteller to convey stories and the spirit of China.



## BALANCE ---- YIN-YANG INGREDIENTS

*All things carry Yin and embrace Yang; they achieve harmony by combining and balancing these forces.*

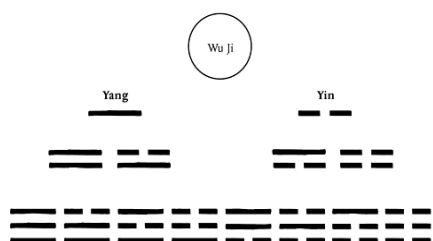
Why Yin-Yang Balance is listed at the top?

I paired up black and white from Five Colors as Yin-Yang, to make the first harmony ingredient *Balance*. Different from the other dishes telling narrative stories, this one is about ideology. The balancing methodology advocated by Yin-Yang Philosophy is the first principle and prerequisite component of harmony. In addition, Yin-Yang and Five Elements is one of the cores of Chinese philosophy, and essential of traditional medicine and diet therapy. So I must mention the content, as it stands at an important position in culture and food.

Yin-Yang philosophy is profound and mysterious, so much more than a pattern.

The world well known Taijitu appeared since North-Song Dynasty (960AD- 1127AD), and *I Ching*, the earliest source of Yin-Yang, was written in Zhou Dynasty (1146BC- 771BC), more than 1,000 years earlier. *I Ching*, also known as *the Classic of Changes*, is one of the earliest literature in China. It is a divination book, using a "code system" based on Yin and Yang two codes to describe changes of all things. It shows the ancient Chinese's philosophy and view on the universe, inspired religion, medicine, astronomy, arithmetic, literature, music, art, martial arts, and other fields.

What is Yin-Yang "code system" and it's view on the Universe?



In *I Ching*, it said, "From Wu Ji, Tai Ji emerges. This process is the One giving birth to the Two, Yin and Yang. Two produces the four forces, four produced Eight Trigrams". In the text, *Wu Ji* means the very original state of the universe, an infinite chaos. *Tai Ji* is manifestation and polarity emerges from *Wu Ji*, in which Yin and Yang are two opposite and dependent forces. The sign or code of Yin and Yang is -- (a broken line) and — (a solid line). Adding a Yang and Yin line to each produces the four forces. It's also used as four directions, and the corresponding gods, they are the Azure Dragon at the East, the White Tiger at the West, the Vermillion Bird at the South, and the Black Tortoise at the North. The Eight Trigrams (Ba Gua) are patterns with three Yin-Yang lines. And they produce 64 Guas, which can compose changes of everything. [I Ching Acupuncture, p38-41] This system is just like 0 and 1 in computer coding, uses only two purest signs to built up all things.

This opinion just matches on Laozi's view on how the universe started.

The chapter 42 of *Tao Te Ching* acknowledged, "The Tao begot One, One begot Two, Two begot Three, and Three begot all things. All things carry Yin and embrace Yang; they achieve harmony by combining

*and balancing these forces.* "Tao is *The Way*, the law of how the universe and natural world runs, the general discipline of everything. "Produces One, Two and Three" can be corresponded with the process from Wu Ji to Tai Ji, to Yin-Yang, Four Forces and Eight Trigrams mentioned in *I Ching*. It emphasized the formation of the universe requires a very long evolution process. The second sentence means, all things contain two opposite forces, through coordination, they can achieve a harmonious state.

[URL: [www.ebigear.com/newstext-479-62297.html](http://www.ebigear.com/newstext-479-62297.html)]

Is the so-called *Tao* the same principle of Yin-Yang?

*Tao* is a very abstract word, cannot be defined. Some scholars said *Yin-Yang is Tao*, and the Confucian agreed, "*Tao is the principle of how Yin and Yang changes.*" In addition, the earliest Chinese medicine book *Huangdi Neijing* mentioned, "*Yin and Yang is the way in the world.*"

Can it be concluded as, "balancing two opposite forces is Tao"?

That's a minimal understanding of the principle. I can just say "*they achieve harmony by combining and balancing these forces*", so harmony is a goal of balance.

## LOVE ---- RED BEAN

*Like drops of blood fall endless tears of longing.*

Why red bean is love bean?

Most Chinese people know the *One-Heated* red bean poem written by Wang Wei, but don't know the origin legend.

### ONE-HEARTED

*When those red berries come in springtime,  
Flushing on your southland branches,  
Take home an armful, for my sake,  
As a symbol of our love.*

For telling the reason why red bean symbolizes love, I can briefly quote a sentence from the masterwork *Dream of the Red Mansions*, "Like drops of blood fall endless tears of longing". The story came from Han Dynasty (206BC- 220AD), about a woman after waiting for her husband fighting in the war for a very long time, started weeping and cannot stop. Her tears became blood and dropped into soil. Later on, the red bean trees were grown on the land. [Interpretation of *Dream of the Red Mansions*, p16-19]



What a sad story, without any sweetness of love.

In China, Japan, and some other Eastern culture, there are many romance are tragedies. We say that's "the beauty of sadness". This oriental aesthetic and view on love is very different compared with Western happy-ending fairy tales. The four traditional Chinese folk love stories *Butterfly Lovers*, *Magpie Bridge*, *White Snake*, and *Goddess Marriage* are all beautiful legends ended as a tragedy. The Chinese Valentine's Day, Qixi Festival, is from the story, that the couple of Cowherd and the weaving girl could meet only once a year on the Milky Way with the help of magpies.

Do modern people still use red bean to show their love?

Yes, they do. People make red bean into accessories, and give them to lovers as gifts. There are also pop songs about love bean.

## REGENERATION ---- CHICKEN EGG

*In the beginning of the universe, there was formless chaos like a chicken egg. Pangu woke up from it, created the Earth and the sky.*

What's the story of chicken egg?

The story is from the Chinese mythology, in which Pangu is the god-like figure. The original sentence is "In the beginning of the universe, there was formless chaos like a chicken egg. Within it, the perfectly opposed principles of Yin and Yang became balanced and giant Pangu woke up from the egg. He created the Earth (murky Yin) and the Sky (clear Yang)..." [Sanwu Liji, written by Xu Zheng in Three Kingdoms Period (220AD- 280AD).]

Pangu is different from other gods. He didn't create things from nothing, but made chaos in order, gradually breaking down the messy situation and began the regeneration.

First, it reflects that the ancient Chinese believed the universe was formed from chaotic Wu Ji to half-Yin-half-Yang Tai Ji. I personally think it's more convincing than zero-based new world. Pangu showed his wisdom, patience, ambition and courage, which are essentials of great personality.

In China, what is the well-known symbol of the egg?

Egg symbolizes new life in many cultures. In China, most people continue the custom of offering families, friends and neighbors red eggs, in order to share the exciting news of a newborn arrival. Red is the color of luck, happiness, and joy, so red egg is also called lucky egg. It's boiled chicken egg coated with red pigment on the shell. But the city people, who are too busy or too lazy, use prepared soy-sauced eggs

instead. Those eggs are in red packages, passing on the same message, what you can easily find in supermarkets.

The color yellow showing in the egg video is an important color in Chinese culture. It is a color only used by the royal family, general officers and civilians were not allowed to dress in yellow.

In Five Elements, each element is also a direction. Earth in yellow color points center. The ancient Chinese worship the earth because of farming culture, and thought all energy concentrated in the central point, so yellow is the most powerful color. They believed that regality dominated by the nature. Yellow is the color of dragon robe, only for those powerful people, who stand at the top of the world, who rule the world. Ordinary people wearing yellow, painting house in yellow were regarded as the rebel.

[URL: [liubowen.tripod.com/history/yellow.htm](http://liubowen.tripod.com/history/yellow.htm)]

## PEACE ---- TEA

*Shen Nong tasted hundreds of plants. Once he suffered seventy-two poisons, and finally tea was the detoxification saved him.*

An old Chinese adage goes, "when we rise in the morning, the ready our daily firewood, rice, cooking oil, soy sauce, vinegar, and tea." In a very long period of time, these seven things are the necessities of everyday life. Tea is one of them. Today, tea is one of the most popular beverages all over the world. The birthplace of tea is China. So, about Chinese tea and tea culture, there is so much to talk about.

Starting with its origin, the tea plant was used as medicinal herbs. According to *Shen Nong's Herbal Classic*, dating from nearly 2,700 years ago, "*Shen Nong tasted hundreds of plants. Once he suffered seventy-two poisons, and finally tea was the detoxification saved him.*" [*Tea and Chinese Culture, p2*]

*Who is Shen Nong? And what is Shen Nong's Herbal Classic?*

Shen Nong, whose name can be translated as Holy Farmer, was a king of remote antiquity, he lived some 5,000 years from now. The stories of him are legends spread from mouth to mouth, since there was no way to document it. People believe that Shen Nong was the inventor of agriculture and herbal medicine. He tasted hundreds and thousands of plants, and taught people farming. In mythology, he had a strange appearance, slim shape, the limbs and head were normal, but other parts of his body were transparent, so his internal organs were visible. When he tasted plants, his organ changed into black, as if the plant was toxic. Therefore, he was able to know what herbs affect which part of the human body. In the end, Shen Nong died due to the rank poison of gelsemium elegans. *Shen Nong's Herbal Classic* is the earliest

herb medicine monograph. In fact, the author of this “Shen Nong’s book” is unknown. But the book certified that the Chinese Medicine, which focuses on herbs, developed from the early ancient time.

[URL: [www.shen-nong.com](http://www.shen-nong.com)]

Is detoxification the reason why people take tea as healthy drink?

Tea is good for health not only because its medical function, but also the philosophy and religion behind.

Is that religion Chan Buddhism (Zen)?

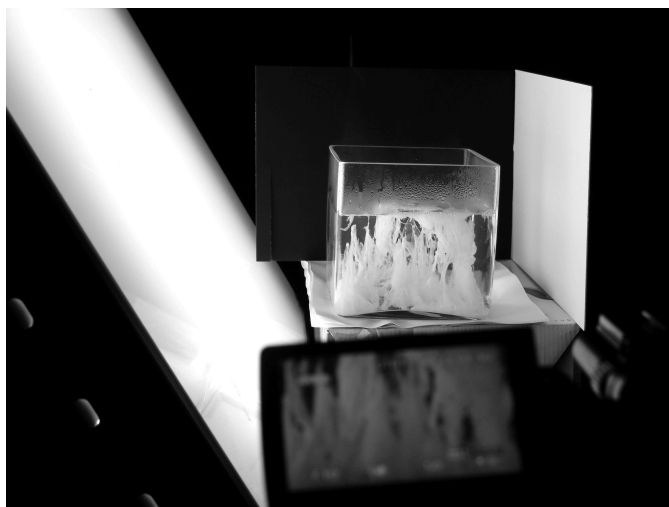
Buddhism was founded in India, and introduced in China since Han Dynasty (202BC-220AD). For localization, Indian Buddhism absorbed Chinese mainstream values, blended with the essential elements of Confucian and Taoist thoughts. Zen is a school originated from Chinese Buddhism as Chan, so it’s the unity of the three. [Wikipedia: Zen] One of the same pursuits of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism is spiritual peace. Tea, just cater for the needs.

How?

You see the tea plants are austere, with light fragrance. The process of brewing tea is warm and gentle. During the brewing, tealeaves slowly unfold, showing a sense of relaxing and easing. The taste of tea is bitter with a little bit sweet, close to the Chinese view on life, which is *bitterness ends and happiness begins*. As a result, tea was given a personality as peaceful, gentle and kind. In temples, tea break is a common leisure activity of monks. The main underlying percept of Taoism was to discard all desires and worries from one’s mind; the best method of preserving one’s health was by keeping one’s body and mind extremely peaceful whenever possible. According to Taoist beliefs, tea could contribute to good health and a long life. [Tea and Chinese Culture, p64]

## Behind the Scenes

(Photos and sketches from the working process)



### 3. "TASTE OF MEMORIES" ROTTERDAM MUSEUM NIGHT PROJECT

In the summer time of 2011, I met and joined an artist collective, Studio Zi. They are Chinese artists and designers based in Holland, most of them are born and raised here, a few of them stayed after study. We work together for assignments and projects, also organize events and exhibitions. This time we were invited to participate in Rotterdam Museum Night 2012, as one of the programs. Coincidentally, the theme is "Smaak" (taste), which can be directly link to my food project. So I have been working on it as a side program.

Where the idea of "Taste of Memories" came from?

My colleagues Man-yee and Kalam proposed it. At the very beginning, they planed to build a fairy-tale world like "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" and "Alice in Wonderland". Make a tree in the middle, where lots of eatable things would hang from. Visitors can eat them and replace them with their memories about the thing they've just eaten. That proposal was more about the interactivity with visitors, not a concrete idea of the content, what to eat and what to remember. Afterwards, I talked about "Tongue Memory". So we finally decided to let visitors eat candies, which are from the past and rarely can be found nowadays, to recall their childhood memories and think about the fast-changing era.

What kind of artwork came out in the end?

Our works were placed in the gallery-like space of Studio Zi. The main part is a wooden cube installation, our Memory Cube, 2.5m each dimension. There are hundreds of small grip bags filled with candies hanging on the outside of the cube. Colleagues working on the outside are all born in Holland. They know and did research on the Dutch old-fashioned candies and snacks. In the end, candies were divided into two groups, LOST & RENEWED and LOST & FOUND. Visitors are welcome to take the candies, write their memories on a small piece of paper, and put it back. So it is an exchange of candies and memories. Inside of the cube is a fancy, dreamy and child-like world, built by sliver wallpaper, clouds and colorful lanterns. The idea is to make a high contrast between inside and outside. To create a totally different world inside, and push visitors back to the childhood dream.

What else was happening in the gallery, except the Memory Cube?

Apart from the cube installation, there was a photo spot, a game zone, a tray wall, and some Missing Posters. At photo spot, visitors can fill in a paper, "I just ate .... My taste of memory is ...", then hold this paper and take pictures. In game zone, they can join the traditional Dutch game, spijkerpoepen (nail poop). On the tray wall, there were tray art works by Lulu and I. The Missing Posters is a really cool idea that every one loves. They are posters of lost food, asking people to find it and take our information. We pasted these posters everywhere in the city as promotion. In the event, some of posters are blank, so that visitors can draw their missing candies and leave personal information, hoping people can help them to find it. On the other side, we also attempted to use social network, a facebook page. This page started two weeks earlier than Museum Night, worked as a communication platform and promotional medium.

People can post their lost candies and childhood memories on the page. Some posts inspired us a lot, and were used in the cube. At night, we rewarded those people, who posted on our facebook page, by free hand-made chocolates.

<http://www.facebook.com/TasteOfMemories>

How do you work together? And which part was you in charge of?

This is teamwork by eight people. We discussed the concept and details together, and then allocated tasks. In the team, there is an illustrator worked out graphic stuffs for promotion, and an architect to take care of the very technical building work, etc. Each of us has a different specialty, so we cooperated. My main task was to design and build the inside of the cube, a dreamy space about 6M<sup>2</sup>. I also did three tray paintings showing my personal taste of memories. For final documentation, I made photographs and a short film.

How's the final result?

We are glad that visitors were interested and really involved in the interactivity. They wrote memories seriously and were talking with friends about childhood so happily. As time goes by, the outside candy wall changing into memory wall. It was a very touching and sweet moment while people sharing their beautiful stories. It was a big task, big challenge, and finally a big success! During the six-hours event, we reached over 200 visitors and got about 100 memories back, even though we are not located at the heart of Museum Night. Finally we won the New Moon Award! The €3000 prize will be the budget for next year.



## EPILOGUE

The initial purpose is to let more people know and appreciate traditional Chinese culture, in order to raise their awareness of protection and inheritance. Through doing this research, I found "food" is such a delicious theme. It's closely related to history, geography, philosophy, humanities and art, so that people can understand China in a tasty way. The biggest gain for me during this year is a better understanding of my own cultural background, which I consider as the spirit and backbone of the artwork. Those connotations inspire and composed every single image. Besides, through the previous work *MISS* ink video, and this *A Recipe of Harmony*, I gradually worked out my visual language, since I create mixed-media images and working methodology with personal style. And I learned how to visualize narrative using random and unpredictable experimental materials.

I attached great importance and hard work to this project, because I'd love to take it as a successful ending for my eight-years education on media design. Personally, I'm satisfied with the final results. First of all, I'm proud of the integrity. The media I applied for this project covered film, installation, book, and interactive activity in the side program. I also combined a variety of practices such as digital work, handcraft and physical object building. Secondly, I succeeded in blending theoretical research and art creation, let both sides support and supplement each other, achieve an effect that is more than the sum of its parts. Lastly, during the intensive process, I learned how to arrange time for a more effective workflow. In the end, I got enormous pleasure after crossing over the terrible pressure.

This graduation project is a gift for me, to memorize my blooming youth and to reward all efforts. I hope my audience can also feel my lots of love and passion filled in this project.

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