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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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The Flow of Food and Community Support during Song Dynasty Festivals

Abstract The custom of gifting food before and on the day of festivals was widespread during the Song Dynasty. The practice included gifts received from official and monastic institutions as well as exchanges between commoners, literati, and scholar-officials. In a sense, the circulation of food embodied the community support spirit. The attention people paid to food during the Song Dynasty, the correlation between food and social status, and the emotional value of "sharing joy" in the flow of food form the social foundation of "community support." Festival food serves the additional functions of seeking good luck and warding off evil, plays an important role in sacrifice and blessing ceremonies, and celebrates joyful reunions, all of the cultural psychology underpinning "community support." From the perspective of the literati and scholar-officials, the exchange of festival food in the Song Dynasty reflects the traditional ideal of "cultivating oneself, regulating the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world." The literary depictions of Song Dynasty festival food reflect a vibrant, mysterious, secular, and elegant Song culture that echoes the spiritual essence and aesthetic charm that says: "In the world, light and dust mingle, while in the heart, clear distinctions are made."

Keywords traditional festivals, food, awarding and exchange, community support, Song Dynasty

On the most basic level, human beings need food to survive. According to "The Conveyance of Rites" in *The Book of Rites* 礼记・礼运 : "Food and sex are the greatest desires of humans." Moreover, as a fundamental necessity for survival, food is closely tied to human rights and social status. In "Eastern Gate Song" in *Han Yuefu* 汉乐府・东门行, the man "goes out the eastern gate without thinking about returning home but feels desperately melancholic when going back," because "there is no grain stored in the pot, and no clothes hanging on the rack." Du Fu 杜甫 was outspoken in his criticism of this great inequality that saw "behind the vermilion gates meat and wine go to waste while out on the road lie the bones of the frozen." The ubiquitousness of food in politics, literature, and the arts in traditional Chinese culture is a testament to its importance. According to "Ten Wen Gong I" in *The Mencius* 孟子・滕文公上, "No one would leave the village even in the face of funerals and relocation.

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As they follow the nine-squares system of dividing the land, they go out together for work, help each other resist robbers, and watch over the sick and the affected, so they live together in harmony" (Yang 1960, 119). "Community support" is manifested on a material level and permeated in spiritual dimensions. The scarcity and commonplaceness of food make it the incarnation of community support par excellence. Feelings can be expressed in many ways, but the nature of the special festivals imbues the gifting of food and drink with a deeper social significance.

Much research has been done on the food of ancient China, with grand academic explorations of admirable vision covering everything from anthropology, folklore, ethnology, and sociology to religious study, literature, and beyond. This paper has settled upon those research results deemed most suited to the scope of this paper and seeks to summarize them below.

Archaeologist and sinologist Kwang-chih Chang looks at Chinese food culture through the eyes of anthropology and history in the book *Food in Chinese Culture: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* 中国文化中的饮食——人类学与历史学的透视, writing of how "One of the best ways of getting to a culture's heart would be through its stomach (Cheng 2003, 250) and "Food and eating habits are not only central to the way of life of the Chinese people but also integral components of their spiritual temperament" (Cheng 2003, 257). In a related monograph, *Huaxia Food Culture* 华夏饮食文化, Wang Xuetai 王学泰 states that the evolution of Song Dynasty food culture is best reflected in dietary theory and a preference for a vegetarian diet that would influence the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties profoundly. "The Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties adopted the achievements of Song and, based on which, fostered a unique food culture of scholar-officials that is different from that of bigwigs and civilians" (Wang 1993, 259). Wang Renxiang's 王仁湘 *Food and Chinese Culture* 饮食与中国文化 likewise considers the food culture in ancient China from an archaeological perspective, talking in Chapter 9, "The Art of Eating" 吃的艺术, about the refined taste, pleasing presentation, boastful appellations, beautiful utensils, picturesque atmosphere, elegant pleasures, superb poems, and witty metaphors. Chapter 12, "The Theory of Food Merit" 食功论, talks about sacrifices for ancestors and the god of courtesy, homecomings, and reunions with friends, and the power of food as a motivator of good behavior and help in the establishment of good relations, all significant in themselves (Wang 1993). In *The Food of China*, American scholar E. N. Anderson hits the nail on the head when he writes, that the complexity and sophistication of Chinese food can largely be attributed to the unique importance of food within the social system. Anderson further points out that as a marker of social status, ritual status, special occasions, and other social affairs, food is not merely a nutritional resource but also a means of communication (Anderson 2003, 195–196).

In a related paper, "An Anthropological Interpretation of 'Tasting' in Chinese Food Culture Tradition" 中国饮食文化遗产中"品尝"的人类学解释, Peng Zhaorong 彭兆荣 says something novel, "In the Chinese cultural system, 'tasting' is far more than just a physiological act and an activity of the organs, resulting in sensory experiences. It is an embodiment and experience of empirical rationality through bodily practice, representing a true 'philosophy of bodily practice'" (Peng 2013b, 77–82). In "A Comparative Study of Differences in Chinese and Western Dietary Customs" 中西饮食习俗差异论, Wan Jianzhong

万建中 notes that cultural traditions lead Westerners to focus more on romantic relationships between men and women than on food. In contrast, Chinese people channel much of their life energy into food. The distinct cultural background results in significant differences in perception, nature, methods, and objects (Wan 1995, 3–7, 16). Qu Ming'an 瞿明安 considers the deep structure, symbolism, and thought behind Chinese food culture. In his article "The Deep Structure of Chinese Dietary Symbolic Culture" 中国饮食象征文化的深层结构, Qu (1997) suggests that the symbolism found in Chinese food culture is a manifestation of the pursuit of ideals, a strong identification with traditional social norms, and the expectations placed on natural and supernatural phenomena. These span traditional views on love, marriage, reproduction, family, wealth, and life, encompassing nearly all the basic social values and ecological views of traditional Chinese culture. Qu's "Symbolic Signs of Chinese Dietary Culture: A Study on the Surface Structure of Dietary Symbolic Culture" 中国饮食文化的象征符号——饮食象征文化的表层结构研究 and "The Cognitive Approach to Symbolic Culture of Chinese Cuisine" 中国饮食象征文化的思维方式 are very enlightening (Qu 1995, 1999). When it comes to exploring the relationship between food and poetry, works such as Mo Lifeng's 莫砺锋 "Elevation of the Poetic Essence of Dietary Themes: From Tao Yuanming to Su Shi" 饮食题材的诗意提升：从陶渊明到苏轼 suggest that Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 pioneered culinary themes in Chinese poetry, which reached its zenith in the Song Dynasty with significant contributions from Su Shi 苏轼 . As for the breadth of the topic and the depth of poetic sensibility, Su Shi is unsurpassed (Mo 2010, 4–15). "The Depiction of Southern Cuisine and the Scholarly Mindset in Poetry from the Middle Tang to the Song Dynasty" 中唐至宋代诗歌中的南食书写与士人心态 by Cao Yimei 曹逸梅 discusses culinary changes that reflected shifts in scholars' life ideals, aesthetic tastes, and mental states (Cao 2016, 68–77). The two articles focus on dynamic changes to culinary culture in considerable depth. There are also master's theses, such as Tong Fei's (2010) 童霏 *Sequence of Poems in the Song Festival Food Culture Connotation* 论宋代节序诗词中的饮食文化内涵 and Qiu Liqing's (2010) 邱丽清 *Su Shi's Poetry and Northern Song Culinary Culture* 苏轼诗歌与北宋饮食文化, written at the intersection of cuisine and literature.

Duly inspired by such academic research, this paper focuses on gifting festive food in Song poetry and discuss the cultural functions and social significance of this folk practice to reveal the contribution of seasonal customs to Confucian culture and the establishment of a unique Song culture.

1 The Flow and Functional Orientation of Food in the Song Dynasty Festivals

According to Japanese scholar Masanori Sakurada, "These lavish and dramatic traditional festivals in bland life create a rhythm of life for each year. The cultural fabric of life, year after year, is woven around this axis" (Guan 1986, 119). Traditional festivals in ancient China employ this special time rhythm to distinguish everyday life from present gratification. From ancient times right up to the present, people have expressed their feelings, shared blessings, and sought to connect with others through the exchange of food. *The Book of Rites* states, "A gentleman does not force others to please himself at the expense of their happiness." For as Lu Bian 卢辩 explains, "Through the exchange of food, they seek pleasure together" (Wang

1983, 72). In the context of festivals, the act of sharing joy also serves additional social functions.

1.1 Official Food Gifted to Nobility and Scholar-Officials: Bestowing Favor to Maintain Order and Stability

During major festivals, like Lichun 立春, or the Beginning of Spring, the government gifted the nobility food of great variety. *Miscellaneous Records of the Imperial Court's Seasonal Customs* 皇朝岁时杂记, in the eighth chapter of *Extensive Records of Seasonal Customs* 岁时广记, written by Chen Yuanliang 陈元靓 from the Song Dynasty, records that "on the day before Lichun, the imperial court will send spring dishes and wine to trusted officials. The dishes contain fresh vegetables and dyed radish as decorations, along with cooked pork, baked white flatbread, and large round cakes in a box, which are ten times larger than common household ones." The court's gifts to trusted officials could vary greatly and besides wine and other beverages included cooked pork, cakes, and fresh vegetables. The eye-catching spring dishes are often vegetarian fare of radishes, spring pancakes, and fresh vegetables.

According to *The Mirror of Tang Seasonal Times* 唐四时宝镜, "On Lichun, people eat radish, spring pancakes, and fresh vegetables, together known as the spring dish" (Chen 2020, 171). During the Dragon Boat Festival, the court sent items such as candies and *zongzi* 粽子, namely rice dumplings, to high-ranking officials and princes. In the third chapter of *A Dream of Sorghum* 梦粱录, Wu Zimu 吴自牧 records, "On the fifth day of the fifth month . . . . The court also sent colorful threads named Baisuo, finely crafted gold and silver flowers, silver drums, candies, preserved fruits, delicate *zongzi*, and five-colored pearl strings in embroidered pouches . . . to various ministers, high-ranking officials, and princes" (Wu 1984, 21). In the first chapter of *Selected Works of Ding'an* 定庵类稿, "Thanks for Gifts on the Dragon Boat Festival" 谢赐端午节物札子, Wei Bo 卫博 writes with gratitude for the good time, "red charms and colorful threads are surprising new festival items; jade goblets and gold trays, reflecting the emperor's deep favor. Remembering the simplicity of my house, I am ashamed of my plain diet; the precious gifts bring great honor and joy. Having feasted on them, I feel lucky living in the prosperous era; eating frugally and drinking cold water, I still try to maintain integrity in later years" (Wei 1986, 131), describing the wine and seasonal fruits bestowed upon officials and literati during the Dragon Boat Festival. For the Double Ninth Festival, the court would send themed cakes. "As time swiftly passes, the Double Ninth Festival approaches . . . . On this day, stores will make steamed cakes with sugar and adorn them with shredded pork, lamb, and duck as well as small flags, which are called 'Double Ninth Cakes.' The court also distributes them to aristocratic families" (Wu 1984, 30). Double Ninth Cakes are made with sweet flour and topped with various meats.

These official ceremonial food gifts reinforced the cultural significance of food sharing. In *Collected Works of Yao Mian* 雪坡集, Chapter 25, "Reply to Xichang County Governor's Gifts on the Dragon Boat Festival" 回新昌宰端午送物, Yao Mian 姚勉 states, "At this auspicious festival, even the pavilion generously presented gifts, pure as the clear wind . . . . The precious wine soothes lasting sorrows; the stone pot brews spring tea, awakening me from a sweet dream. The lavish ceremony comforts the solitude of the festival. Bowing with

joy, I etch the memory on my heart with gratitude" (Yao 1986, 170). The fine wine and tea dispel melancholy and awaken dreams, with the lavish rituals alleviating the loneliness. The exchange of food established a lasting emotional connection between the giver and the receiver and created harmony.

1.2 Offerings from Daoist Temples and Buddhist Monasteries to Nobility and Commoners: Fostering Good Relations to Strengthen and Expand the Faith

Buddhism was introduced to ancient China during the Han Dynasty and set off fierce competition with indigenous Daoism. Both vied for support from the court and popularity among the general public. Folk festivals, in particular, were influenced by this competition and looked for opportunities to foster their growth, as Daoism did with the Dragon Boat Festival and Buddhism with the Laba Festival.

On special occasions, Buddhism and Daoism seek to cultivate goodwill and strengthen their ties with the populace by giving out food. The activity of Daoist temples in the Dragon Boat Festival can be gleaned from the third chapter of *A Dream of Sorghum*. "On the fifth day of the fifth month . . . . Various Daoist temples also distributed scripture tubes, charm pouches, spiritual charms, scrolls, delicate *zongzi*, and summer tangerines to noble families and patrons" (Wu 1984, 21–22). During the Laba Festival, Buddhist monasteries would distribute congee. "They all prepared five-flavored congee, called 'Laba congee.' Besides congee, they also made red fermented rice with wheat gluten, fruits, bamboo shoots, and taro, which was offered to monks or gifted to patrons and noble households" (Wu 1984, 49). The distribution of Dragon Boat Festival-themed *zongzi*, summer tangerines, Laba congee, and red fermented rice was aimed at building trust and support within society. In *Compilation of the Worthless* 鸡肋编, Zhuang Chuo 庄绰 notes, "In Ningzhou on the 8th day of the twelfth month, families compete to make plain congee that is decorated with persimmons and chestnuts in various colors to form a picture of flowers and birds, which they exchange with each other" (Zhuang 1983, 20). Finally, in Lu You's 陆游 "Walk to Western Village on the 8th Day of the 12th Lunar Month " 十二月八日步至西村 from the *Poem Drafts Written in Jiannan* 剑南诗稿, we can read, "Today, Buddha congee is exchanged, making the festive atmosphere in Jiangcun Village even fresher" (Lu 1985, 1847), testifying to the existence of a custom for distributing congee on the Laba Festival, clearly influenced by Buddhist traditions, in the North and South.

1.3 Reciprocal Exchanges between Civilians and Literati: Cultural Identity and Social Recognition

Unidirectional gifting emphasizes the power and social status of the giver, while bidirectional, reciprocal, gifting would occur primarily among commoners, literati, and scholar-officials, highlighting a psychological connection and affinity. Before Lichun, spring dishes were also common gifts among the people. According to Chapter 8 in *Miscellaneous Records of the Imperial Court's Seasonal Customs*, "On the day before Lichun . . . . Commoners also exchange spring dishes" (Chen 2020, 171). The Qixi Festival, also known as the Begging

Festival or Daughter's Festival, saw people exchange gifts a few days prior, "offering red-roasted chicken, fruits, and seasonal fresh fruits to celebrate the occasion" (Wu 1984, 25). During the Southern Song Dynasty, Hangzhou led the Winter Solstice food gifting trend, becoming a model for others, particularly in reciprocal gifting among citizens, literati, and scholar-officials. "Generally, the customs of the winter solstice in Hangzhou are highly regarded by both officials and commoners, including exchanging festival gifts and toasting each other, which surpasses regular festivals" (Wu 1984, 48–49).

Kuisui means exchanging gifts at year-end, a custom described in Su Shi's poem "At Year-End, People Exchange Gifts And Treat Others To Food And Drink, Calling It 'Bidding Farewell to the Old Year'; They Stay Awake All Night Long On New Year's Eve, Known as 'Staying Up All Night to See the New Year In.' Such Customs Are Common In Shu. While Serving In Qixia, I Long To Return Home At Year-End, Hence I Write These Three Poems to My Brother Ziyou" 岁晚相与馈问,为馈岁;酒食相邀,呼为别岁;至除夜,达旦不眠,为守岁。蜀之风俗如是。余官于岐下,岁暮思归而不可得,故为此三诗以寄子由 (Su 1982). By the end of the 7th year of Jiayou's reign (1062), Su Shi, moved by the similar Fengxiang and Sichuan customs of ushering in the New Year with gifts, dedicated a series of poems to the custom. In "Exchanging New Year Gifts" 馈岁, he writes, "Farmers have completed their work, and at year's end, they exchange gifts to express their feelings. Local products vary, and wealth differs; people often give gifts according to their means. The rich serve giant carp and double rabbits on trays, while the poor offer humble milled rice. In official residences, friends are few, but festivals bring joy to the neighborhood. I wish to uphold local customs, though no one joins my solo celebration" (Su 1982, 159–160). The picture is that of farmers helping each other throughout the year and exchanging gifts at the end of the year to express their appreciation. Varying means varying gifts, with rich feasts from society's haves and more modest offerings from society's have-nots, "reflecting the simplicity and richness of local customs and societal inequality" (Wu 2010, 219).

Mei Yaochen's 梅尧臣 poem "Responding to Scholar Shen Wentong's Gift of Warm Tangerines" 和正月六日沈文通学士遗温柑 is an eternal testament to the joy and cultural significance of sharing rare fruits during festivals. In it, the author describes the anticipation and pleasure of tasting a tangerine, of the ripeness of the Dongting, the unsurpassable deliciousness of the Yongjia, the pleasure of receiving a gift, the warm goodness of the food in the coldness of his teeth: "I can hardly find words to express my surprise when receiving the fruit. I appreciate their taste and feel the cold on my teeth while reciting your poem" (Mei 1980, 911). The significance of this sharing of food lies in the connection itself, the friendship enjoyed by peers. For those exiled, giving and receiving festival gifts provide warmth and temporary relief from life's disappointments by restoring a lost social connection.

Official gifts of food symbolize the court's favor towards the literati and scholar-officials, projecting power and the presence of the state in a one-to-many relationship that also reaps gratitude from nobles and scholars and contributes to social order. The offerings of religious institutions foster goodwill, gain public support, and spread influence. Exchanges among common folk often reflect the friendship of proximity, while scholarly exchanges are more about identity. Gifts from commoners to scholars express respect and admiration. Regardless

of the nature of the exchange, food sharing perpetuates relationships and reinforces social bonds. Just as Yunxiang Yan notes, "Chinese social relationships are largely supported by fluid, individual-centered social networks rather than rigid social institutions, making gift-giving and other reciprocal exchanges crucial in maintaining, reproducing, and transforming interpersonal relationships" (Yan 2017, 25).

2 The Social Foundation for the Flow of Food and Community Support in Song Dynasty Festivals

Food gifting during festivals on a national level is the icing on the cake for the mutual support among friends, family members, and neighbors, which is most valuable thing. All forms of food gifting highlight and elevate the Confucian ideal of community support. Sahlins believes that food is a more important component of reciprocal exchange in society than any other thing or substance. It is a key theme that reinforces sharing through food sharing (Peng 2013a). The significance of food sharing during festivals is reinforced through the following logic.

2.1 Song Dynasty's Attention to Food

The Song Dynasty produced many great culinary works, perhaps most notably *Notes on Bamboo Shoots* 笋谱 by Buddhist monk Zanning 赞宁, *The Manual of Fragrant Fungi* 菌谱 by Chen Renyu 陈仁玉, and *The Chef's Manuals* 膳夫录 by Zheng Wangzhi 郑望之 *Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era* 太平御览, compiled during the reign of Emperor Taizong (976-997), contains 25 volumes on food and drink, Volumes 843 to 867 detailing everything from beverages to condiments. Lu Dian's 陆佃 *Piya* 埤雅 in the Northern Song Dynasty lists eight delicacies: ox, sheep, musk deer, elk, pig, dog, and wolf. Lin Hong's 林洪 *The Simple Foods of the Mountain Folk* 山家清供 records how to cook and eat yam, chestnut, cherry, lotus pod, orange, and snow porridge.

Zheng Wangzhi's *The Chef's Manuals* describes various festival foods in Bianjing. "Lantern Festival, oil pancake. People's Day, six vegetables. Shangsi Festival, cooking. Cold Food Festival, rabdosia rubescens. April 8th, finger heaven buns. Dragon Boat Festival, wish-fulfilling balls. Sanfu or Dog Days, green lotus buns. Sediao Festival, spicy chicken. Mid-Autumn Festival, moon soup. Ghost Festival, Yulan cakes. Double Ninth Festival, rice brocade. Laba Festival, daylily noodles" (Zheng 1986, 401). The poetic names of the food, such as green lotus buns, wish-fulfilling balls, and moon soup, were popular in the Song Dynasty, often "arousing people's interest in or leaving a lasting impression on them" (Chen 1993, 30). "These names generally convey auspicious meanings like luck-seeking, evil-avoiding, longevity and happiness" (Chen 1993, 32). Besides dedicated culinary works, Song Dynasty notes like *The Eastern Capital: A Dream of Splendor* 东京梦华录 and *A Dream of Sorghum* also provide detailed accounts of food.

The rich and varied types of food reflect a reverence for nature, self-care, and hopes for societal stability and prosperity. The Song Dynasty's focus on and enthusiasm for food and food-related study is crucial to understanding the underlying community support in the flow of food.

2.2 The Correlation between Food and Social Status

Food was associated with one's social status and character from the early days of ancient China. One example is Yan Hui 颜回, who would become a model for later generations in "Yong Ye" in *The Analects* 论语・庸也 for his "contentment with simple food in a poor alley" (Cheng 1990, 386). The cultural choice between "fish" and "bear paws," symbolizing moral integrity, is mentioned in "Gaozi Part I" in *Mencius* 孟子・告子上 . The other side of the food coin is the joy it brings, particularly when it is rich enough to reflect the festive atmosphere and people's past efforts and inspire them to fully appreciate life. An abundance of quality food, therefore, reflects one's high social status, good financial standing, and overall well-being. A lack thereof signals poverty. It is noted in Lin Shurong's 林淑蓉 "Food, Taste, and Bodily Senses: The Social Life of the Kam People in China" 食物、味觉与身体感：感知中国侗人的社会世界 that food not only satisfies personal needs or preferences but also displays identity and symbolizes power relations, acting as a key mechanism to highlight differences between groups or classes (Yu 2008).

Shen Gou's 沈遘 "Approaching Double Ninth" 重阳近有作 describes satisfaction as "yellow chicken and fresh chestnuts, signifying a decent living standard without feeling impoverished" (Pu 2009, 448). Su Zhe's 苏辙 poem "Encountering Heavy Rain on New Year's Eve at Pengli Lake" 除夜泊彭蠡湖遇大风雨, however, is one of a bleak holiday experience. "Anchored on the eastern shore of Pengli Lake, I encountered a heavy snowfall with no neighbors to offer help and insufficient provisions. During the festival, I had only a small jar of pickled vegetables and less than a measure of cured meat. With my path blocked, all I could do was endure my wife's reproaches" (Su 1990, 254) . . . . The ability to provide ample food for one's family should, therefore, be considered a major indicator of social status. Su Shi's many writings on good food (both luxurious and simple) show his attachment to life and artistic aesthetic in a singularly revealing way.

The quantity and quality of food, especially festive food, often indicate social status and economic position and signify poverty and marginalization when found lacking. In any circumstance, changes in food involve profound shifts in people's self-image, perceptions of contrasting qualities of old and new lifestyles, and daily social life (Mintz 2019). This manifestation or transformation of identity often leads to the reconstruction and renewal of social networks. In difficult times, community support in food exchanges can blur stark social distinctions.

2.3 The Socio-Emotional Value of Sharing Joy in the Flow of Food

Chen Shidao 陈师道, living a life of poverty and isolation, laments in "Lichun" that "those in high positions overlook the humble scholars, and rural folks disregard the elderly" (Chen 1995, 532). He wishes for festival gifts to prove he has not been forgotten by society. In reality, he could only comfort himself with the metaphor of a small fish struggling in ruts (Chen 1995, 533). In "Thanks Bogong for Gifting Wine on the Double Ninth Festival" 谢伯恭重阳惠酒, Yu Jing 余靖 writes, "Early frost makes the new chrysanthemums flourish in vain, while raiders leave homes with empty wine cups. I am grateful to you for your care about my illness, which spares me from lonely days leaning by the eastern hedge" (CACCA 1996,

2681). Despite being unable to drink due to illness, the poet feels immense joy upon receiving the friend's gift of fine wine on the Double Ninth Festival. The wine, shared in celebration, replaces the solitude of standing alone by the hedge, naturally dispelling the negative feeling. In "Receiving Rice from Wang Wenfu and New Wine from Zhang Yunqing on the Dragon Boat Festival" 重午王文辅送米食张云卿送新酒来因成绝句, Zou Hao 邹浩 writes, "Rice dumplings arrive at my door, accompanied by fine white wine, filling my cup to the brim. Such festive offerings and heartfelt gestures are enough to intoxicate the soul, especially as I return to my rural retreat, graced by the court's favor" (CACCA 1996, 14031). Zou was deeply moved to receive these gifts on the Dragon Boat Festival, reflective as they were of the customs and shared joy of the festival, the grace of the court, and the warmth and generosity of friends.

People hope to give and receive gifts during festivals, activate the sharing of joy, and satisfy one another's socio-emotional needs. In "Gingko for Mei Shengyu" 梅圣俞寄银杏, Ouyang Xiu 欧阳修 mentions that "a thousand miles away, a gift of goose feathers is precious for the sentiment it carries" (Ouyang 2001, 88), emphasizing the security, attachment, and belonging brought by "sharing joy." Humans are social animals and can reduce risks and anxieties through unified actions. Morelly was a pioneering Encyclopédiste who advocated mutual assistance and cooperation as humanity's greatest achievement and promoted kindness and harmony in his 1755 work *Code de la Nature* 自然法典 . The effects of this gravity are twofold: First, it generates a benevolent feeling towards anything that alleviates or helps us overcome our weaknesses; and second, it fosters the development of reason (Morelly 1982). The exchange of gifts, especially food, during festivals evokes profound emotion—filling humanity's living space with security and order and turning it into a harmonious, warm spiritual home.

3 The Cultural Psychology of Community Support in the Flow of Food in Song Dynasty Festivals

Food and drink are not only fundamental to daily life but also of paramount importance during festivals. People often understand the rhythm of life, express their wishes, and gather spiritual strength through food and drink. The reason food becomes a significant cultural bearer is that all meanings depend on their positions within the system of human activities, the related ideas, and all associated values (Malinowski 1987, 16). Food serves as a festival gift because it provides a sense of safety that meets people's psychological expectations for "spiritual insights and cultural displays" (Chen 2017, 204).

3.1 The Function of Festival Food Is to Seek Good Fortune and Avoid Misfortune

The health benefits of festival food are closely tied to seeking good fortune and avoiding misfortune. Some of these benefits are scientifically based, while others are rooted in longstanding psychological needs and cognitive obsessions. American cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict suggests that people always view the world through the lens of specific customs, habits, and modes of thought (Benedict 1988, 5). Sometimes people cannot

transcend old customs or continue adhering to them because specific customs and beliefs exert strong formative and normative power over groups.

For example, the five-spice platter can dispel foul qi on New Year's Day. The second of "Three Poems on the First Day of the Bingzi Year" 丙子元日三首 from Liu Zhi's 刘挚 *The Collected Works of Liu Zhi* 忠肃集, mentions "blessing wine for a thousand years and five-spice platter for evacuating toxic gases" (Liu 2002, 366), in a nod to aged wine's life-prolonging effects and the ability of five spicy foods to stimulate the body's internal energy. In "New Year's Day" 元日, Xu Jizhi 许及之 writes about wine's ability to prevent disease, saying that "wine must be fully drunk to ward off illness" (CACCA 1996, 28319). Similarly, the chrysanthemum and dogwood of the Double Ninth Festival have the power to ward off evil and extend life. In the fifth chapter of *A Dream of Sorghum*, we find the lines, "The sun and moon shuttle, and soon it is the Double Ninth. Nine is a *yang* number, and both the day and month correspond hence it is called 'Double Ninth' . . . . Today, people float chrysanthemums and dogwood in their wine, as dogwood is called 'Ward-off Evil' and chrysanthemum 'Longevity Guest,' so these two items are used to dispel the *yang* nine calamity" (Wu 1984, 30). Chrysanthemum wine is also known as a remedy for headaches, as Chen Yuanliang states in *Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital* 西京杂记 in *Extensive Records of Seasonal Customs*, "When chrysanthemums bloom, gather their stems and leaves, mix them with wheat grains to brew wine, seal it tightly and store it in a room until the ninth day of the ninth month the following year when it matures. It can treat headaches and is called chrysanthemum wine" (Chen 2020, 643). Community Day wine is likewise known to cure deafness. In "Community Day Poem to Scholar Li" 春社日寄李学士, Li Tao 李涛 writes, "Today Scholar Li is not in shape, asking for a bottle of wine to cure deafness" (CACCA 1996, 7). Of course, the correlation between Community Day wine and a cure for deafness is cultural recognition, or a "strategy" created by people for their safety. As Mintz said, we should never ignore human's extraordinary—perhaps unique—capacity to create and enact symbolic meaning (Mintz 2015, 20).

3.2 The Function of Festival Food in Sacrifice and Blessing Ceremonies

The special sensory stimulation and immediate pleasure we derive from food and drink make them indispensable for creating a festive atmosphere. In other words, diverse food is both a measure of holiday joy and an essential part of rituals and can be found in ancestor worship, kitchen god worship, and commemorations of historical figures.

In *The Supplementary Collection of Lyu Zuqian* 东莱别集, Chapter 1, "Recommendation on Seasonal Items" 荐新及节物, Lü Zuqian 吕祖谦 speaks of a family's sacrificial offerings for various festivals: (1) spring rolls on the first day of spring in the first month; (2) dumplings, salted bean soup, and fried cakes for the Lantern Festival; (3) Community Day rice for Community Day in February and Autumn; (4) thick malt syrup porridge and steamed vegetables for Cold Food in March; (5) rice dumplings for the Dragon Boat Festival in May; (6) fruit offerings for the Qixi Festival in July; and (7) dogwood and chrysanthemum cakes for the Double Ninth Festival in September (Lü 1986, 175–176). The ancients believed that our deceased ancestors were connected to us emotionally and that it was great piety to treat them as if they were alive

and maintained the blood connection between them through food offerings.

The Kitchen God Festival was particularly important in the Song Dynasty because the Kitchen God was believed to control the family's fortunes. In "Ten Songs by the Land of a Village for the Twelfth Month Sacrificial Song to Kitchen God" 腊月村田乐府十首・祭灶词, Fan Chengda 范成大 writes, "According to ancient tradition, on the twenty-fourth day of the twelfth lunar month, the Kitchen God will ascend to heaven to report. Briefly halting his cloud chariot and wind horse, he finds the household adorned with rich offerings: tender braised pig's head, fresh twin fish, sweet bean paste buns, and fragrant flour cakes. The men make libations while the women avoid the scene, pouring wine and burning paper money to delight the Kitchen God. Servant squabbles go unnoticed, and the god overlooks the mischief of cats and dogs. Sent off full and content through heaven's gate, he is implored to speak not of ladle lengths but to return with blessings and fortune to share!" (Fan 1981, 411) The poem describes the lively Wu region custom of offering sacrifices to the Kitchen God on the 24th day of the 12th lunar month. Lavish offerings include braised pig's head, delicious fresh fish, sweet glutinous bean paste, and round flour cakes, all presented to delight the Kitchen God in the hopes he will ascend to heaven well-fed and pleased, speak favorably on the household's behalf, and return to bestow blessings. The Cold Food Festival, held on the 105th day after the Winter Solstice, requires advance food preparation, and only cold food is allowed during the period to commemorate Jie Zitui 介子推 . In *A Dream of Splendor*, Chapter 7, Meng Yuanlao 孟元老 speaks of the day before Cold Food Festival as "Cooked Day," with date cakes and flying swallows made of flour, called "Zitui Swallows," hung with willow branches on doorways (Meng 2006, 626). The founding father of anthropology, Robertson Smith, views the act of sharing food with the gods as a confirmation of responsibility and duty, speaking of how those who feasted together are united in a social role, while those who do not are separated, lacking both religious fellowship and mutual social obligations (Smith 2010, 18). In traditional Chinese festivals, the gods and ancestors enjoy the food before anyone else, a very realistic reflection of the relationship of mutual benefit.

3.3 The Function of Festival Food in Celebrating Joyful Reunions

Festivals break the usual taboos, allowing for lavish eating, increased consumption, and indulgence, all aimed at creating and enjoying happiness. In "Feelings about Qingming" 清明感事, Wang Yucheng 王禹偁 writes about the consequences of having no flowers or wine, feeling bored like an ascetic of the wilderness, "A Qingming without flowers or wine, I lead an as bland life as a wild monk" (Pu 2009, 194). In the second of Zhang Lei's 张耒 "Two Poems on Laba" 腊日二首, it is written, "In a foreign land, I miss old friends a thousand miles away. It is hard to forget a glass of wine on a fine day" (Zhang 1990, 445), further indicating how indispensable wine is when one may miss relatives and old friends, such as during the Laba Festival. The truth that festivals are about customs and joyful indulgence is attested to by the first of Zeng Feng's 曾丰 "Two Poems about Family Reunion on the Dragon Boat Festival" 端午家集二首, where he writes, "I was born in the Renxu year, and now is the Wushen year. Never have I had something special to send off the Dragon Boat Festival, but I should not waste the fine day. Wrapped rice dumplings, golden and frozen, pu rice paste, jade-

like. As a normal person, I have a good time with my family enjoying wine and food" (CACCA 1996, 30261). The poet said that although there were no special items to celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival, he could not let the good day pass by. Instead, along with wine, he enjoyed the tempting rice dumplings and delicate pu rice paste with his family. By sharing food, we spread joy and increase positive emotions.

The incredible popularity of food culture in ancient China goes beyond such tangible features as color, fragrance, and taste to intangible symbolic meanings and imaginative functions. According to German philosopher Ernst Cassirer, "Symbolic thinking and symbolic behavior are the most representative features of human life" (Cassirer 1985, 3), and "without a system of symbols, human life would be like the prisoners in Plato's famous allegory of the cave . . . unable to find the channel to the 'ideal world'" (Cassirer 1985, 52–53). Indeed, it is through symbols that we perceive, describe, and understand the world. For example, the *yuanxiao* (glutinous rice balls) of the Lantern Festival symbolizes completeness and happiness, the *zongzi* of the Dragon Boat Festival symbolizes the harmony of *yin* and *yang*, and the year-end carp symbolizes a continuing surplus. It is through this richness of symbolism that people are able to keep harmony with nature, society, and others and attain, however briefly, inner peace and self-contentment.

4 The Cultural Characteristics of the Song Dynasty through Works on Festival Food

The extensive festival poetry of the Song Dynasty expresses our passionate yearning and relentless pursuit of food and drink. From these writings, we can also discern certain cultural characteristics of the dynasty.

4.1 The Vivid Presentation of Visual Appeal and Taste Sensations Reflects Everyday Life

Food is presented visually, such as in Su Shi's "First Day of Spring" 立春日 where "Bear's fat comes from the north of the mountains, red pig slices from Jianan. Spring platter gains green chives, winter wine accompanies yellow oranges" (Pu 2009, 44). The bear's fat refers to the fat on the bear's back, a rare delicacy. The red pig or *zhuhong* refers to pig blood, also called blood tofu. The strong contrast of red and white and the harmonious green and yellow make a real feast for the eyes of the reader. In "Dragon Boat Festival in Tongling County: Two Poems to My Brother Jiyi" 铜陵县端午日寄兄弟二首・寄季毅, Kong Wuzhong 孔武仲 describes how "*zongzi* unwrapped reveals a snow-white skin, and wine in the glass mirrors a beautiful figure" (CACCA 1996, 10314), comparing the whiteness of the glutinous rice to the fair skin of a woman while the reflection of the beautiful figure in the wine glass highlights the clarity of the wine. Similarly, in "Mid-Autumn Banquet by the Pool: For the Guests" 中秋日池亭宴集呈席上诸公, Ouyang Xiu writes, "The spring buds of powdery leaves unfold, the red pomegranate fruit of summer begins" (Pu 2009, 335; also see Ouyang 2001), showcasing the visual appeal of food. A visual appreciation of food is accompanied by a consideration of taste. In "Ten Songs by the Land of a Village for the Twelfth Month: The Year-End Song" 腊月村田乐府十首・分岁词, Fan Chengda describes the texture of festival food as crispy and

soft as well as hard, frosty one in particular that leaves a fragrant taste lingering in the mouth, "The festival food includes crisp nougat, with a frosty crunch that impresses everyone" (Fan 1982, 412).

The concept of "texture" in Chinese food culture contains both "feelings evoked," where the consumption of a particular food arouses historical memories embedded in sensory thresholds, and "objective, authoritative identifications and evaluations" (Peng 2013b, 77–82). These memories and feelings inspire the poet to focus on the joy and anticipation of tasting such delicacies again. The vivid presentation of visual appeal and taste sensations reflects everyday life and enjoyment pursued by Song literati.

4.2 Creating Mystery and Novelty in Festival Food: The Ultimate in Elegance

The ancient pursuit of food combined color, fragrance, taste, shape, texture, and imagination into a comprehensive examination, described as an "indescribable 'artistic conception'" (Wan 1995, 3–7, 16), requiring the frequent poetic use of metaphors, contrasts, associations, imagination, and personification to create a comfortable and pleasant atmosphere. This atmosphere has to be novel and unique, firing the imagination and showcasing the elegant and refined aesthetics of the people of the Song.

Zhang Ji's 张镃 "Thanking Qi'an for Sending Glutinous Rice Balls" 谢岂庵饷澄粉圆子 is a primary example. "The old clam is said to give birth to pearls in Hepu, reflecting colors and emitting light interchangeably. It takes day and night to form the balls, illuminating the universe with their brilliance. The golden crow chases the silver toad, producing countless pearls. These rare pearls are only for consumption or play. Then the poet turns to the refined nature of his kin, who often dined on divine food and delicacies. He meticulously washes the fine powder to create smooth and round dumplings. When he opens the box, he is amazed by the sugar-frosted dumplings, unmatched by other rice products. In conclusion, he humorously suggests that making such delicate food is laborious, and satisfying a gourmet is endless, so he resolves to enjoy simpler foods like roasted taro while listening to the wind in the pines" (CACCA 1996, 31551) . . . . The opening describes the birth of pearls within old clams, a whimsical journey that transcends earthly realms, with the sun and moon nurturing these gems over millions of years. Yet these pearls, found in desolate and distant places, are rare in the mortal realm, reserved for consumption or admiration. The narrative then shifts to a sage possessing celestial wisdom and experimenting with divine cuisines and culinary arts. He carefully crafts pearls of fine flour, shaping them into perfect round spheres. As the poet unveils the box, he marvels at the sugar-coated delicacies that surpass any ordinary confection. The poem concludes with a twist: Acknowledging the exhausting effort required to create such exquisite fare, the poet humorously resigns himself to simpler pleasures, finding contentment in roasted taro and the whispering winds and eschewing excessive fixation on gourmet delights. The poet compares the creation of festival food to the process of an old clam absorbing the essence of the sun and moon to produce pearls, emphasizing novelty and interest. This romantic and aesthetic depiction of food elevates the mundane to the elegant to leave a lasting impression.

4.3 Honest Depictions of Simple and Rough Festival Foods: Virtue in Adversity

Festival foods are described as lavish and sumptuous, with no lack of rustic simplicity. This simplicity is a true reflection of the living conditions of the literati, their contentment in poverty, and their cultivation of virtue. Su Shi was exiled to Huizhou and faced many hardships, but perhaps the hardest of all was spending the Double Ninth Festival without chrysanthemums to admire. In his melancholy, he wrote that the fisherman's wine, though said to suppress poisons, tasted sour and sweet like pear and hawthorn. The only boon he received was a neighbor's gift of turtles and snakes, making for a meager feast. In "Two Poems on the Double Ninth Festival of the Bingzi Year" 丙子重九二首 from *The Collected Poems of Su Shi* 苏轼诗集, Chapter 40, he writes, "Three years in the miasma of the sea, crossing the Yue mountains feels like home. Climbing the mountain for Double Ninth Festival, I find no autumn chrysanthemums bloom . . . . The fisherman's wine suppresses many poisons, tasting sour and sweet like pears and hawthorns. What to accompany the drink? A neighbor gifts turtles and snakes. I force myself to get drunk, mixing joy with sorrow" (Su 1982, 2203–2204). Similarly, in *The Collection of Huang Tingjian* 山谷集, Chapter 7, "Su Shi's Poems for Tao Yuanming" 跋子瞻和陶诗, Huang Tingjian 黄庭坚 writes, "Well-fed on Huizhou rice, I delicately harmonize with Yuanming's poetry," expressing the resilience and courage of ancient Chinese literati in the face of adversity and the spirit of living-in-the-moment.

She Anxing's 佘安行 "Double Ninth on a Boat to Gaoyou" 重阳舟次高邮 expresses deep homesickness. In it, She notes that the beauty of cress does not need strong flavors like soy sauce, and with fat crabs, there is no need to envy fish and shrimp. "Cress is beautiful enough without soy sauce, crabs are fat enough without envying fish and shrimp" (Pu 2009, 447). Cress implies a reclusive, simple life free of fame and fortune and the choice between crabs and fish a food of moderation and simplicity. Yang Wanli's 杨万里 "Spring Vegetables" 春菜, found in *The Collection of Yang Wanli's Works* 诚斋集, Chapter 29, highlights the natural beauty in the simple preparation of radishes. "Use not-so-sour vinegar and not-so-salty salt" to preserve their natural flavor. The poet opts for a simple lifestyle, "only fitting to chew radish roots by South Creek, drunk with a jar of wine in the creek's clouds" (Yang 2007, 1480), embodying a contentment that does not envy wealth or luxury. This reflects the Song people's cultural appreciation of simple foods for nourishing body and virtue, embodying "a spirit of contentment and joy in adversity" and continuing the late Northern Song literati's pursuit of the mind of the "inner sage" (Cao 2016, 68–77).

5 Conclusion

The custom of gifting food before and on the day of festivals was widespread during the Song Dynasty. Official gifts symbolized the state's favor towards the literati and scholar-officials and were a way for the government to earn their gratitude and support, thus maintaining political stability. Exchanges of food within the populace, including the literati, fostered friendship and the psychological connection at the heart of this practice. As Zhang Juwen 张举文 points out, the act of gifting food during festivals derives from vitality and validity, two factors that are intertwined. "Validity refers to the practical utility of the tradition, while vitality pertains to its cultural foundation and spiritual significance" (Zhang 2009, 12–17). The

concept of community support in ancient China manifested on a material level, permeating spiritual dimensions and serving as a natural law for human survival, a fact corroborated by Montesquieu. Food, both precious and commonplace, is integral to the practice of community support. The attention paid to food during the Song Dynasty, its correlation with social status, and the harmony and warmth in the flow of food constitute the social foundation for community support. During the shared communal times of festive periods, there must be a collectively recognized spiritual culture to facilitate cohesion and leadership within the group. Ancestor worship, family ethics, and reverence for deities form the spiritual core, or the "soul" (Xiao 2019, 9–11), while festival food is auspicious, wards off evil, serves for sacrifices, blessings, and joyful gatherings, and embodies the cultural psychology of community support. On the one hand, Song literati and scholar-officials harbored a keen interest, enthusiasm, and curiosity for novel foods, while gradually embracing a simple fare cultivating personal virtue and integrity on the other. It can be said that Song literati and scholar-officials exhibited great concern and enthusiasm for simple cuisine, ordinary ingredients, and meticulously balanced recipes, establishing the model for a dynamic balance between richness and simplicity and elegance and coarseness in food (Chang 2023, 166), and that was perhaps their most outstanding contribution to Song food culture and Chinese food culture as a whole. The flow of festive food exchanges during the Song Dynasty carried warmth and healing, reinforced connections, and promoted balance and stability, showcasing the virtues advocated by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism—goodwill and mutual assistance—and embodying the ideal of "cultivating oneself, regulating the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world." The literary depictions of Song Dynasty festival food reflect a vibrant, mysterious, secular, and elegant Song culture that echoes the spiritual essence and aesthetic charm expressed in Huang Tingjian's poem "Response to Wang Shenzhong" 次韵答王慎中: "In the world, light and dust mingle, while in the heart, clear distinctions are made."

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