China and ancient cuisine: consumption of wild animals, western stereotypes and zoonoses

China e a culinária milenar: consumo de animais silvestres, estereótipos ocidentais e as zoonoses

China y la cocina antigua: consumo de animales salvajes, estereotipos occidentales y zoonosis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to highlight the characteristics of China's ancient cuisine, discuss the stigmas proffered by the Western media through image readings and, in the end, highlight the Western cultural horizon, with the demarcation of animal rights and concern about the emergence of zoonosis. The justification and problematic revolves around discussing the stigmas created about Chinese eating habits, the fakenews about their cuisine and the consumption of domestic and exotic animals. The methodology employed was descriptive and explanatory, as well as qualitative and bibliographical. The results obtained, through the analysis of a postcard and a virtual game about Chinese cuisine, show that there is a naturalization of stereotypes of the Chinese, something that is strongly linked to the scientific racism of the 19th century. We concluded that, although there are few outlets for these animals in China, where the number of consumers is small, it should be kept in mind that continuous contact with these species can lead to the emergence and spread of zoonoses.
Keywords: history, China, animals, zoonosis, stereotypes, culinary racism.

RESUMO
O objetivo dessa pesquisa é evidenciar as características da culinária milenar da China, discutir acerca dos estigmas proferidos pelos meios de comunicação ocidental, por meio de leituras de imagens e, ao final, evidenciar o horizonte cultural ocidental, com a demarcação dos direitos dos animais e a preocupação com o surgimento de zoonoses. Nossa justificativa e problemática gira em torno de se discutir sobre os estigmas criados sobre os hábitos alimentares chineses, as fakenews acerca de sua gastronomia e sobre o consumo de animais domésticos e exóticos. A metodologia que empregamos foi a descritiva e explicativa, bem como a qualitativa e a bibliográfica. Acerca dos resultados obtidos, por meio da análise de um cartão postal e de um jogo virtual sobre a gastronomia chinesa, a compreensão alcançada situou que há uma naturalização dos estereótipos dos chineses, algo que está fortemente atrelado ao racismo científico do século XIX. Concluímos que, apesar de os pontos de comercialização desses animais na China serem poucos, onde é mínimo o número de consumidores, se deve levar em consideração que o contato contínuo com essas espécies pode ocasionar no surgimento e disseminação de zoonoses.

Palavras-chave: história, China, animais, zoonoses, estereótipos, racismo culinário.

RESUMEN
El objetivo de esta investigación es destacar las características de la cocina ancestral de China, discutir los estigmas transmitidos por los medios de comunicación occidentales a través de lecturas de imágenes y, por último, destacar el horizonte cultural occidental, con la demarcación de los derechos de los animales y la preocupación por la aparición de zoonosis. Nuestra argumentación y problemática gira en torno a la discusión de los estigmas creados sobre los hábitos alimentarios de los chinos, las fakenews sobre su gastronomía y el consumo de animales domésticos y exóticos. La metodología que utilizamos fue descriptiva y explicativa, además de cualitativa y bibliográfica. Los resultados obtenidos, a través del análisis de una postal y de un juego virtual sobre la gastronomía china, muestran que existe una naturalización de los estereotipos sobre los chinos, algo que está fuertemente ligado al racismo científico del siglo XIX. Llegamos a la conclusión de que, aunque existen pocos puntos de venta de estos animales en China, donde el número de consumidores es mínimo, hay que tener en cuenta que el contacto continuo con estas especies puede dar lugar a la aparición y propagación de zoonosis.

Palabras clave: historia, China, animales, zoonosis, estereotipo, racismo culinario.

1 INTRODUCTION

When we analyze Chinese cuisine, we usually associate it with images that have been disseminated to us by the Western media. Several US online media outlets have already published various reports about pets, such as cats, being rescued, slaughtered or sold to be eaten as food in
Chinese cuisine. The way it is publicized causes revulsion and fear among Westerners, because we have built up the idea that domestic animals, such as cats and dogs, should not be eaten as food, but should be cared for and treated with dignity.

It is, therefore, a hegemonic narrative about Chinese culture and their dietary customs, which means that there is a danger when we only take into account Western discourse, that is, the narrative of a people who are foreign to the object studied, in this case Chinese food culture. This is the unique story, when a narrative is not constructed and told by the very people who live it, failing to show the other side of the story. That's why we need to carry out research and reflection (Adichie, 2017, p. 3).

In “The Danger of a Single Story” (2017) written by the researcher Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie we learn that it is impossible to talk about the single story concept without talking about power. This occurs because single stories tend to emerge as versions told from hierarchical relationships, where the one who overpowers the other considers itself superior to the latter (Adichie, 2017, p. 3). Beyond that, the way Western society sees Chinese culture has been imprinted on their collective memories, which leads them not to research the roots of Eastern customs (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 446).

Fakenews also come into this discussion. Information claiming that the consumption of these animals in China is excessive is often untrue. This is because, as we analyze, eating these animals in this country has become increasingly rare. It's no wonder that dog and cat meats are considered a delicacy for them today, being consumed by a minority of individuals, most of whom are young and of high purchasing power (Zhang, 2014, p. 2379).

Through **fakenews**, the stereotype of the "crazy Chinese" who eats wild animals has taken on a new level with the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. These reports gave rise to the idea of a "Chinese virus", a biological guerrilla strategy promoted by China for the possible conquest of the world. This notion of crazy is associated with the idea of primitivism, that is, something less complex, less advanced, less modern, often linked to a lack of hygiene and refinement (Sacramento; Monari; Chen, 2020, pp. 82; 90).

It is important to overcome this imagery and reconfigure the idea or concept we have of these people. Something we can make clear beforehand is that this type of eating is no longer accepted in popular taste, because this habit has been molded. So we ask ourselves: until when was it common to eat these animals in China? How did this become a stereotype that is still
utilized today, in the age of globalization? These are the questions we are raising in this discussion.

It is in this sense that we are seeking to bring reflections on the origins of Chinese cuisine to this paper, in order to provide guidance on its culture and tradition. Our approach focuses on illustrating the characteristics of this food culture, in order to indicate that there is a philosophy and belief that guides this rich and vast society. After this introduction, we then discuss the consumption of wild and exotic animals, highlighting the different concepts of eating.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article used works and bibliographies that cover the history of the Chinese culinary tradition, as well as works that highlight the Western stigma towards Chinese food consumption. Works such as Lu Zhaoyun's "Un tesoro culinario milenario Propuesta de una ruta culinaria por China para turistas europeos" (2015) and Sérgio Pereira Couto's "A extraordinária história da china: cultura, religião, economia, política, sociedade tecnologia e lendas. São Paulo: Universo dos Livros" (2008) address specific characteristics of its food tradition, from its earliest days, without imposing a value judgment on its customs. We make use of Douglas Porteus' text "Chapter 7: Smellscape" (2006) to discuss physiological perceptions, such as taste and smell, as they create strong identifications about what is eaten. We conducted an image reading and an analysis of a virtual game, to situate the stereotypes made about Chinese food culture and, finally, we made use of the work of researcher David M. Shaw "Invisible Enemies: Coronavirus and Other Hidden Threats" (2020) to discuss the emergence of zoonoses.

3 ORIGINS OF CHINA'S ANCIENT CUISINE

The stereotypes we have of the Chinese, through the Western media, is that they are a population with savage and tribal customs, an image constructed to place them in the place of barbarism, going against the discourse of civilization. This brings us the concept of invented tradition, discussed by historian Eric Hobsbawm, because this was a discourse created during a time of crisis to justify certain actions, that is, the imposition of power over the other (Hobsbawm; Ranger; 1997, p. 10). That is why we are going to present a brief history of Chinese cuisine until
it reaches its current state, aiming to clarify some important points about its behavior and food culture, in order to overcome old and current stereotypes.

In ancient times, hunters, fishermen and gatherers in China began to settle down and dedicate themselves to agriculture, a basic requirement for developing the culinary tradition. In the Yangtze River, rice fields dating back to the 8th millennium BC were discovered. With the beginning of the Neolithic Age, poultry, dogs and pigs were incorporated as basic food sources. Apart from these discoveries, there is little evidence of the rudimentary culinary practices of ancient Chinese civilizations, although the culinary tradition persisted for a considerable period of time (Zhaoyuan, 2015, p. 8).

During the Zhou Dynasty (1066-221 BC), the culinary perspective was vast. Grains such as wheat, rice, corn, barley and millet served as the primary food and, during prosperous periods, were served with vegetables sliced and cooked in bronze containers. The individuals used elongated sticks made of wood, bamboo or animal bones to consume their meals. While simple grain-based meals were enough for the common people, the rulers indulged in opulent luxuries. Several chefs dedicated themselves in preparing dishes for royal banquets, skillfully integrating medicinal properties with the use of seasonal ingredients (Zhaoyuan, 2015, p. 8).

In the mentioned period, individuals were already aware of the advantages associated with the fusion of balance, Yin and Yang in the realm of nutrition, meticulously preparing them with precision. In contemporary times, eating practices continue to be shaped by the ideologies of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Taoist principles prioritize the healing and medicinal qualities of food, while Confucian beliefs prioritize the harmonious combination of ingredients. On the other hand, in an effort to instill reverence for all sentient beings, Buddhism strictly forbids the consumption of animal products (Zhaoyuan, 2015, p. 8).

Given the general panorama about the origins of their food, we realize that the Chinese culinary tradition is closely related to a philosophy of life. If in an ancient Chinese saying it is stated that "food is the people's paradise", then this illustrates the importance that cooking has for this society (Zhaoyuan, 2015, p. 4). The Chinese believe that their food should bring balance and strength to the mind, body and spirit. That is why their cuisine is much more than any yakisoba or yakimeshi dish you can find on the market. Ethnic diversity is reflected in almost every field of activity of the Chinese, and cooking would not be different (Couto, 2008).
There are currently eight different types of Chinese cuisine: Anhui, Cantonese, Fujian, Hunan, Jiangsu, Shandong, Szechuan and Zhejiang. There are also Buddhist and Muslim sub-cuisines that work within the Chinese varieties. A meal in Chinese culture is made up of two or more things: a source of carbohydrate, usually rice, noodles or meat-filled buns (known as *pautzi*) and, once the carbohydrate has been chosen, it is time for the side dish, which is usually vegetables, meat, fish or another foodstuff (Couto, 2008).

An interesting detail is that the traditional Chinese believe that the human being is surrounded by five energy fields, which are fire, wood, earth, metal and water. In cooking, each of these elements would correspond to a different flavor such as: bitter-fire; sour-wood; spicy-metal; sweet-earth and salty-water. This type of knowledge could help the Chinese medicinal practice, as it would be necessary to know the state of these elements in order to treat a patient; the excess or appearance of one of them could lead to the appearance of diseases in the body (Couto, 2008).

As previously mentioned, they believe in the "Yin" and "Yang" balance, which is based on a philosophical rule that has crossed all areas of China, and which means that something, when elevated to the spiritual realm, can be complete. For example, if a person is too intelligent or too stupid, they cannot be a successful person. They can only achieve a balance between the two by being a complete person. This rule applies to many areas of life, including meals (Zhaoyuan, 2015, p. 4).

In China there are 8 major regional culinary traditions. They are: Yue (Guang Dong Province), Chuan (Si Chuan Province), Xiang (Hu Bei Province), Min (Fu Jian Province), Lu (Shan Dong Province), Zhe (Zhe Jiang Province), Su (Jiangsu Province), Hui (Na Hui Province). This is why it is very complex to organize gastronomic trips, as the country is very large and people from different provinces have different predilections for food and certain customs (Zhaoyuan, 2015, p. 4).

As there is a wide range of dishes from different regions of China, we will try to focus only on Han cuisine here. During the Han Dynasty (202 BC-220 AD), the general population's eating habits mainly revolved around the consumption of corn, soybeans, pickled meat or fermented seafood. Even back then, there was a deep understanding of various methods related to food preservation and cooking practices, including frying, steaming and stewing (Zhaoyuan, 2015, p. 8).
Due to the wide geographical expanse in the regions now encompassed by southern China, the rulers of the Han dynasty cultivated distinct gastronomic preferences: the inhabitants of the northern territories predominantly consumed sorghum, meat and wheat, while those in the southern regions opted for a diet rich in rice, vegetables, fruit and seafood. The transmission of products along the Silk Road facilitated the introduction of numerous innovations and influences on culinary customs (Zhaoyuan, 2015, p. 9).

It was possible to learn a lot about the condition of the culinary arts during the Han Dynasty, largely via the archaeological finds discovered in China over the last two decades, through the O Li Chi (Book of Rites) and the Chou Li (Rites of Chou). Han tombs, excavated at thirty-five sites, also showed a variety of buried food products and food stores (Huang, 1990, p. 139).

In these books it is written that the Han divided resources into four main categories: grains, fruits, vegetables, and animal products (meat and fish). The five grains constituted the basic food, the five fruits increased the action, the five animals provided special benefits and the five vegetables served to complete the diet (the number five related to the natural elements). This interpretation is consistent with modern ideas of food and nutrition. One category of food that is not mentioned in this list of records is fat and oil, which are indispensable in Chinese cuisine in order to achieve the characteristic flavor and texture of their dishes (Huang, 1990, p. 140).

Today, the Han is the largest ethnic group in China. The country has 1.4 billion inhabitants and 56 ethnic groups. This diversity is present in everything from language and dress to food and traditions. The Han (汉) ethnic group is the largest, accounting for 92% of the total population, around 1.1 billion. This makes them the most populous ethnic group on the planet. The Han can be found in almost every part of China. They live mainly in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow, Yangtze and Pearl Rivers, and in the Northeast Plain Region (Songliao Plain) (Ibrachina, 2023).

The term "Han" was first used in the 19th century to delineate the predominant Chinese population of the Manchu minority that rules China. Its beginnings date back to the communities of Huaxia, located in the northern region of China. The nomenclature is derived from the Han dynasty, which exercised control over certain territories in China before its unification (Ibrachina, 2023).
To estimate the extent of their food culture, we can mention the "Chop Suey", which is a Chinese dish that came from China and was gradually Americanized. This recipe was initially a large homemade dish made to meet the needs of Chinese workers and many ethnic workers on the West Coast, served at three meals a day. By the end of the 19th century, with the rise of the anti-Chinese movement, chop suey restaurants that offered "fried chop suey" gradually became an important means for Chinese immigrants to establish themselves amid racial discrimination. In an effort to attract customers, chop suey abandoned the old methods and progressively transformed itself into a different style of traditional Chinese food, but one that could appeal to American consumers (Liqun, 2020, p. 31).

4 BETWEEN THE EXOTIC AND THE COMMON: THE CONSTRUCTION OF FOOD STEREOTYPES

The Homo sapiens species' relationship with food resources has changed over time according to the technical knowledge formulated within the group and its social organization. During the Paleolithic period, the first humans were characterized as hunters and gatherers of natural resources. Animals and plants were not organized into productive spaces. Energy resources depended on the condition that they had to be acquired. Over the course of the Mesolithic period, this relationship slowly changed so that the search for food diversified and new forms of hunting were established in order to expand food supplies. However, the relationship between humans and nature changed profoundly with the Neolithic revolution, a time when the human species became capable of producing food resources through both livestock farming and the planting of agricultural resources. This process expanded populations and gave rise to social diversification (Perlès, 1998, pp.30-38).

Despite the possibility of consolidating sedentary life, hunting and fishing did not disappear from the practices of these first established communities. The movement to seize non-domesticated animals continued as a way of providing resources, but also as a way of providing a diversity of carnivorous nutrients. It is impossible to measure when the transition between eating and the pleasure of eating took place. If the former means obtaining an energy resource that allows life to continue, the latter determines habits, customs and tastes, where food is connoted as a pleasurable resource (Franco, 2010, pp. 9-12).
The relationship with food, whether of pleasure or appreciation, depends on internalizations that have been taught by the group, especially within the family. Those habits have deep roots in defining the identity of the individual and their group. It is in this way that the other person's food product causes a culture shock for the foreigner. This occurs at different levels, such as how the animal was obtained, what the animal itself is and how it is prepared. Food chauvinism creates a conflict between two binomials that can be expressed as Common-Comfortable food and Foreign-Exotic food (Franco, 2010, pp.13-16).

This elaboration of identity and food memory not only depends on cultural instrumentalization, but is also associated with the body's physical and chemical processes. The sensation of taste, of tasting a certain food, is a multisensory process. This is because flavor depends on the smell, the appearance of the food and the space in which it is being served (Spence, 2017, pp. 30-33). Taste memory is associated with the conditioning exerted on the taste buds on the tongue. The papillary cells, with their elongated shapes, come into contact with a variety of substances, so that the neurons process the taste. The continuity that a culture has in consuming certain anions and cations found in everyday foods directly influences eating habits (Bartoshuk; Duffy, 2017, pp. 21-23). If chemical compounds have a major influence on the formation of habits, the sense of smell, with its interpretative and mnemonic capacity, is essential in the establishment of food habits.

The sense of smell has the ability to perceive more than ten thousand chemical substances, as well as producing long-term memories. Human osmological perception, what is interpreted by smell, creates meanings about spaces. The idea that a certain space smells, and that this triggers a certain memory, is associated with the dimension of Toposmia. This concept can be flexed to give light to the idea that the smell of food is a memory phenomenon with strong internalization. So taste and smell, with their physiological perceptions, create strong identifications about what is eaten (Porteous, 2006, pp. 90-94). If common food shapes the idea of belonging, something that deviates from this condition becomes exotic and external, which leads to relationships of estrangement and, possibly, inferiorization of the other.

The strangeness that one culture presents about the cultural practices of another has accompanied humanity since evidence from the ancient world, where travel accounts or documents from dignitaries present such positions. The creation of a category such as Global Exoticism had no chance of occurring before the 19th century. It would be anachronistic to think
of such a process before the 1800s. However, it is true to say that the idea of exotic food and common food emerged from the consolidation of the European colonial world and the construction of Eurocentrism, processes that took place between the 16th and 18th centuries (Schmidt, 2015, p. 1-5).

The Westphalia Treaty of 1648 seems to have served as a watershed in terms of this perception in Europe. Before its enactment, the continuity of the 30-year war seems to have kept European states in conflict to such an extent that certain identifications were limited. After the treaty, the dimension of the "common" seems to have gained greater definition. Whether in art, leisure, food, health or the variety of everyday practices that existed, the lifestyle of each European state had similarities that guaranteed a common minimum of identification. In a world of European colonies being consolidated in the Americas, Africa and Asia, anything that escaped the commonplace of Europeans gained the connotation of the exotic, which carried with it a negative position of inferiority (Schmidt, 2015, pp. 6-13).

The estrangement of food from what one is familiar with is a common process in the contact between cultures. However, what happened between the 16th and 18th centuries in Europe was a process of hierarchization of the food world. The good and bad preparation of food depended on the construction of aristocratic and bourgeois habits in Europe, and on the mundialization of the globe, where European states were able to establish a gustatory scale over the world from a Eurocentric perspective (Franco, 2010, p. 121).

Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is remarkable how French habits conquered the nobility and aristocracy in Europe. French sauces, roasts, sweets and spices signaled the refinement and finesse of tastes and eating habits. The recipes increasingly indicated the tendency to use beef, pork and chicken as the most commonly consumed meats, while others, such as peacock, pheasant and wild boar, which were more common, slowly became more limited and exclusive. Livestock farming of specific animals took the lead over other meats. Hunting remained common until the end of the 19th century, but as an aristocratic and bourgeois practice in search of exclusive meat or as games and disputes (Franco, 2010, pp. 120-138).

Bourgeois habits and the 19th century's imperialism broadened Eurocentric perceptions and allowed for the construction of a series of stereotypes about the dominated peoples. The stereotype, with its discriminatory power, not only deepens the hierarchies between human groups, but also distorts the habits of others, so that food was not immune to such measures.
(Franco, 2010, p.160). Those impositions were not only in the interest of diminishing exogenous food, but there were also economic interests, where those impositions were intended to make the colonized consume bourgeois products. It is in this sense that the idea of what should and should not be consumed took shape. There is the animal that is eaten and there is the animal that is not eaten (Vialles, 1994, pp. 3-9).

The distortion of foreigners is a type of procedure that still continues in the immediate present. When we look at the Cold War period, the discrimination and stereotypes produced by the two clashing power blocs are remarkable. The dispute in this period was not only about hard power, that is, economic and military pressure, but also about soft power, which is about cultural and ideological measures (Rothman, 2011, pp. 49-50).

The hunting of exotic animals in China has been largely declining since the opening of the 21st century. In the 20th century, this practice had a certain presence in the country, due to the strength of tradition. The construction of the idea that the Chinese eat any animal is part of the Western and American media self interest involved, so that this creates a distancing of the Western masses from internal Chinese issues, such as their habits. But as well as falsifying reality, there is also prejudice against ancient practices in China itself. The construction of the difference between meat that is eaten and meat that is not eaten had its own divisions in the Asian country. The changes that have been occurring in eating habits depend on the dynamics of the globalization process that began in the 1970s, as well as the accelerated urbanization of the Sino-Asian country. The Chinese reality needs to be understood in its endogenous conditions and not based on Western criteria which, when applied to this reality, end up creating discriminatory procedures (Rothman, 2011, pp. 54-55).

The dispute between nation-states takes place through the power sphere. The popular imagination tends to think about power as political, military and economic disputes. However, the competition for power involves the mischaracterization of the other in different manners. Through advertisements, cartoons, cinematographic media and news from different media, the foreigner is distorted. The falsification of the other involves a project of cultural distancing. The production of distance is aimed precisely at the elaboration of a feeling of apathy and estrangement in regards to the other. These procedures, in the cultural and ideological sphere of power, within the realm of Soft Power, accompany the measures of more intense disputes, such
as economic sanctions and military operations, which fall within the dimension of *Hard Power* (Rothman, 2011, pp. 55-57).

Food and eating are versatile products that can be interpreted and analyzed in different ways. Both are vital resources and practices that involve the group's technical, cultural and utilitarian conceptions. Being essential for survival, food embodies a central position in the group, so that it assumes the role of the identity of a given population. In the contemporary post-1991 world, where nation-states are in continuous dispute, food has become a vehicle of power, where distortions about how a certain population eats, or about what food is in itself, have repercussions in the popular imagination, generating biased opinions, which are generally negative. The dynamism of *Soft Power* seeks to influence popular perceptions of all the practices and products of an exogenous culture. Food and eating practices are therefore not immune to distortions and the production of stereotypes (Nye, 2021, pp. 201-205).

The year 1992 is important because it marks one year since the end of the USSR. During the Cold War, the stereotypes produced were linked to a continuous clash between the two existing political blocs. Since 1992, the consolidated world no longer has a bipolar dimension, but a multipolar one. A world of diverse civilizations has been established, all seeking to maintain and expand their powers in order to increase their influence. There are multiple military and economic clashes that have arisen, but at the same time cultural disputes and ideological rhetoric fired at other peoples have expanded. If before the stereotypes produced in the West focused on images of the Soviet individual, in the multipolar world the stereotypes are broad, varied and aimed at many populations. With new states rising, such as China, the West felt that its hegemonic position was under threat. One of the mechanisms for defending itself against this scenario was through Soft Power, where attacks were made in the cultural sphere (Huntington, 1997, pp. 26-34). It is in this sense that Chinese food was stereotyped, where images of the Chinese who eat domestic animals, or the sinic people who eat everything that moves, became extremely common in the popular imagination.

This type of stereotyped composition can be seen in sources of varying types and from different time periods. In a postcard produced between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, we can see the characterization of the Chinese man as a dog-eater, an animal that, in the West, was thought of as domestic.
The picture on the postcard shows a Chinese man carrying a butchering axe, next to a dog that appears to be afraid of the situation, as if it knew what was waiting for it. If the drawing itself is already suggestive, the phrase on the back confirms the intentions of transforming the dog into a meal that will be part of the Christmas banquet, since this postcard is about this festivity. The written phrase reads “The Chinese does not know how to send Merry Christmas, so he brings a funny beast to the Christmas banquet” (Raphael Tuck & Sons, 1870 - 1920).

The idea of this document, in its context, was to be some kind of festive joke. The naturalization of the stereotype of the other is old and strongly linked to the scientific racism of the 19th century, which is the result of racial theories such as racialism (Gould, 1991, pp. 42-44).
The deformation of the other ranged from biological, behavioral and cognitive traits, to the dimension of the practices of these individuals, such as their ways of eating.

The naturalization of racism has left lasting marks over time. Compositions from the late 19th century may be more explicit than current records, but contemporary productions have just as blatant misrepresentations as the old ones, but in more veiled formulations. This aspect is notable in dynamic media, such as the mobile game Dirty Chinese Restaurant, which was released in 2017, but was canceled due to poor reception from the Sino-American community (Big-O-Tree, 2017). The title addresses the Western perception of these eateries.

Figure 3 – Scene from the game Dirty Chinese restaurant, of a chef hunting a cat.


The scene in the play where the chef chases a cat at a hunting pace indicates the American imaginary that the Sinic people obtain their food from any animal source, as well as having no hygiene criteria in relation to that source. There is a discriminatory combination of custom and hygiene in this scenario. The custom is to fantasize that this ethnic group eats any animal, including domestic ones. The extent of the lack of hygiene is due to the fact that the animals sought out are those without homes, that is, those that in the popular perception, by living on the streets, contain a series of diseases and illnesses. This imagery alludes to ancient racial hierarchies. The Chinese, as a less advantaged race, not only had cognitive limitations, but they
also had crude and backward sanitary and hygienic concepts that influenced their food and culinary practices (Liu, 2015, pp. 2-3).

The legacies of racialism and scientific racism, which remain to this day in contemporary racist practices, are generally analyzed from the perspective of the world of work or in the dynamics of phenotypical discrimination against a given group. However, the discriminatory elements are dispersed in a wide variety of everyday practices, including activities related to eating and its product, food. This inferiorizing aspect is not a movement that emerged in the present. It remains in vogue, but its roots are ancient, as is apparent from the postcard shown above. The issue is how this type of action manifests itself, what its repercussions are and how it is placed in the social fabric. Practices remain, but they mutate in order to remain in existence. If the postcard of the late 19th century was fully accepted in the Western world as a kind of joke, the electronic game of 2017 is already understood as a racist product.

These pictorial compositions appear harmless, but they carry with them discourses that are assimilated in different ways by individuals. This kind of repercussion negatively affects people of Asian origin all over the world. In a recent case, from January 2024, chef David Ravasong, from the Love & Thai restaurant in Fresno, California, commented on how stereotypes related to the food of people of oriental descent have racist and xenophobic bases, which even hinder the generation of income in these spaces (Tang, 2024).

The APNEWS group published a report on Ravasong's case of xenophobia in 2023. His Thai and Laotian restaurant suffered six months of barrage, until he decided to close the restaurant for the safety of his family. The conflict began when a pit bull dog was photographed chained up in a field next to the restaurant. The spread of the photos and comments on social media took on virulent proportions, with messages accusing Ravasong's restaurant of serving canine protein in its dishes. This traumatic discriminatory event drew Ravasong's attention to the persistence of racist and xenophobic images and discourse directed at ethnic groups with Far Eastern ancestry (Tang, 2024).

Ravasong's experience shows that racism towards the Chinese generalizes asian people. This is because even though Ravasong was not of Sinic descent, but of Thai origin, he still suffered from stereotypes aimed at the Chinese. This aspect reveals how racism towards Sinic people ends up having generalizing tones, so that through phenotypical prejudices, different
ethnicities are placed as being just one group, which in the case of culinary racism are said to be the group of dog eaters, or eaters of "Pets" (Flores; Huo, 2012, pp. 144-150).

These culinary prejudices are part of a confusing and complex patchwork that often seems contradictory. This is because while there are stereotypes about Chinese food, the United States also has a very high number of restaurants in this culinary niche throughout the country. This means that there is a large audience of non-oriental descent that largely consumes gastronomic products in these spaces. The clash that arises here is between memory, prejudice and permissiveness (Long, 2017, pp. 126-130).

As has been pointed out, there is a certain chauvinism in relation to food. There are clearly political and cultural movements to create distance from the other by stereotyping what the foreigner, or different, eats. However, there is a taste attachment, due to biochemical customs, and an identity attachment to what is eaten on a daily basis. There is the issue of familiarity with food (Long, 2017, pp. 132-134). Taste memory and the relationship of comfort with food affirm familiarity, but at the same time insinuate barriers and limits to contact with the different (Santos, 2005, p.13-16). Overcoming these aspects involves permissiveness and tentativeness (Regnier, 2009, pp. 129-132).

The dimension of taste barriers combined with stereotyped media stimuli reinforces chauvinistic perceptions, as well as amplifying culinary discrimination. The issue of permissiveness in relation to food is not unprecedented, since in ancient times tasting something different could be a matter of life and death. However, in the 20th century, there was an upward movement in which individuals increasingly tried foods that were unusual to their daily lives (Regnier, 2009, pp. 134-137).

The case of the historical presence of Chinese food in the United States, despite the continuity of stereotypes in present, raises the dimension of the growth of acceptance of foreign cuisine. The presence of Chinese culture in the US dates back to the beginning of the 19th century, but the significant increase in this population occurred in the middle of the same century. The rhetoric of Chinese people eating street animals comes from that time. This scenario became more virulent with the rise of communism in China after the Maoist revolution of 1949 (Liu, 2015, pp. 11-41).

Despite this scenario, since the beginning of the 20th century, many American cities have been filled with small restaurants selling Chop Suey. This scenario exposes the varied tastes that
a society has within itself. On the one hand, there are those who enjoy non-everyday flavors, while on the other there are those who attack these culinary values. From the 1980s onwards, the trend was towards transforming Chinese food into something more palatable to American tastes, so that Chinese fast-food chains were consolidated in the industry. The first Panda Express appeared in 1983 and the PF Chang's chain appeared in 1993 (Liu, 2015, pp. 55-131).

The loosening of the American population's barriers to Chinese spices, as well as the adaptation of centuries-old recipes to fast-food chains, which are more malleable to American tastes, have allowed for new meanings in this gastronomic world. This does not mean that prejudices have disappeared or softened, but rather that there is a larger portion of the US population that enjoys Chinese cuisine (Liu, 2015, pp. 157-158).

Beyond the political-racial issue in relation to food, cultural taste barriers are a strong blocking element. When you look at American eating habits, the taste for ultra-processed foods, processed meats and complex sugars is evident. However, this is for economic and social reasons. In a society with very limited purchasing power, these low-cost foods ensure the survival of the masses who earn minimum wages, and they also end up being the identity foods of these groups (Pillsbury, 1998, pp. 187-193).

The staple foods of a social group's daily life are subject to change, so the attribution of meaning and identification with food are also mutable. If, on the one hand, individuals with greater purchasing power in the USA have given more and more space to foods of different origins, poorer groups have become dependent on industrialized foods, so culinary racism and food prejudices have greater fluidity and presence among these populations (Pillsbury, 1998, pp. 198-200).

5 BETWEEN CULTURE AND HEALTH: ANIMAL RIGHTS AND ZOOSONES

The Chinese population's diet is not only the target of stereotypes, but is also criticized by different lines of thought. One of these judgments comes in the context of animal rights. Based on the consideration that there are animals that are eaten and those that are not, a number of international groups criticize ancient Chinese practices where animals considered wild or domestic are eaten. The second criticism comes in the sphere of epidemiology. Continuous
contact with or consumption of wild animals, plus the extent of environmental destruction, are factors that allow zoonoses to emerge or re-emerge.

The debate on animal rights and animal welfare is recent and dates back to the 1960s. During this period, it is notable that movements arose in the US to fight for an end to animal abuse in laboratories. These movements, seeking to broaden the scope of the law, expanded the debate on animal protection in such a way that different interpretative currents were founded. On the one hand, there are groups that defend the integrity of animals, so that all species are not consumed or tested, while on the other hand, there are more selective groups that defend only domestic and wild animals, not including those that are currently marketed by the food industry (Rollin, 2006, pp. 287-293).

China today has the largest meat consumption market in the world. This is true both in terms of the number of consumers and the per capita proportion of this demand. The country's high consumption of animal protein is criticized by a number of experts, but the problems in this production chain are global, as these products are produced in other regions of the world. Beyond this critical dimension, it is noteworthy that the Asian country is commented on as having a culture that disrespects animal rights, since there are consumers of domestic animals, as well as wild animals.

This line of reasoning presents complications in two senses. The first is the fact that the consumption of animals, which are thought of as domestic, has become very limited in China. The second issue is the selectivity of the animal rights world. The demarcation of which animal is edible and which is not depends on cultural inheritance. Therefore, the territory of what is edible is fluid and depends on each cultural horizon (Vialles, 1994, pp. 7-19). However, in addition to the prejudice against food differences, there is the fact that the consumption of these animals is unusual. Furthermore, there is the dimension of species selectivity in relation to the enhancement of animal dignity and rights. The idea is not to propose a forced vegetarianism over individual freedoms. Rather, it is to raise awareness of the fact that the way in which animals destined for consumption are raised and treated has an abyss in relation to domestic animals, precisely because of industrial interests and the unbridled and predatory accumulation of capital (Garner, 2013, pp. 61-73).

While there are environmental problems on a global scale in relation to the agricultural industry, there is also a Chinese problem in relation to the hunting and sale of wild animals and
plants. As we have seen, the consumption of both domestic and wild animals has fallen dramatically among the Chinese. However, the hunting of wild animals remains high because there are demands both on the parallel market, in search of rare and expensive resources, and on the urban market, both for the consumption of meat and the use of animal resources for the production of different products. The accelerated predation of these animals has created deregulations in local ecosystems, as well as influencing the proliferation of zoonosis (Edwards, 2023, pp. 33-34).

One of the most assertive global reasons for the proliferation of zoonosis is the loss of natural space through environmental destruction. However, a number of diseases and epidemics have been shown to have arisen from continuous contact with wild animals, either through local fairs where live animals are present, through the purchase of these species to keep them as pets, or even through the consumption of wild meat. These problems are not unique to China. Different places around the world have these practices. However, it is notable that these practices are systematized within the large Asian country. The combination of environmental destruction and the trade in wild animals, which provides continuous human contact with these beings, have been major drivers of the emergence and re-emergence of diseases, which may even have pandemic potential (Chomel et al, 2007, pp. 6-9).

One of the recent problems associated with zoonosis was the COVID-19 pandemic, which was caused by the presence of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). The virus originated in China and is related to contact with wild animals, making it a zoonosis. Investigations are still underway to determine from which animal this disease spread. The main targets are the pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*), some bats (*Myotis sp.*) and more recently the raccoon dog (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*). All these animals are preyed upon for different reasons in China. This type of practice, and its possible impacts, should be criticized uniformly and globally, as they present epidemiological risks that can take on proportions beyond the local level (Shaw, 2020, pp. 531-532).

Predatory practices against wild animals should be criticized to the extent that they cause widespread repercussions for the global human community. However, in the midst of the Covid pandemic crisis, it is remarkable how food racism towards Asian populations has been reaffirmed, and that it has taken on new dimensions as violent attacks on individuals of different Asian descent have been reported around the world. *Fake news* and misinformation in the media...
have fostered the idea that Asians are to blame for the pandemic, that they are carrying the Covid virus with them. These movements demonstrate how old behaviors and practices, such as culinary racism towards Asians, can survive or be reaffirmed amid the spread of fake news (Shaw, 2020, pp. 532-533). It is necessary to raise criticisms of wildlife predation, but it must be pointed out that this is a global problem, so blaming a specific culture or people for this process is part of a network of lies and prejudices that have been systematized in the immediate time.

6 METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this research was descriptive and explanatory, based on a literature review, so the approach is qualitative and bibliographical. First, we introduced the ancient Chinese culture and how it has changed over time. Next, we read an image, describing the characteristics of the "Christmas Postcard with stereotypical Chinese", as well as analyzing and explaining it. We brought another image, a "Scene from the game Dirty Chinese restaurant, of a cook hunting a cat", explaining how the dynamics proposed by the game are extremely stereotyped, in relation to hygiene and Chinese food. At the end, we explained about animal rights and the emergence of zoonosis.

7 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Our text dealt with a discussion that is historical and based on stereotypes, the analysis focused on the deliberate effort of Western multimedia to portray the East in a negative light through the lens of food prejudices (Gould, 1991, pp. 42-44). As explained, eating wild animals is no longer a practice that is adopted by the entire Chinese territory, only by small groups, as tastes have changed over time (Spence, 2017, pp. 30-33).

When presenting the Chinese culinary tradition and its transformation over time, we note that since the beginning of the Neolithic Age, Chinese hunters, fishermen and gatherers, in order to begin to settle down and dedicate themselves to agriculture, began to include avian, canine and porcine animals as basic sources of food (Zhaoyuan, 2015, p. 8). This practice and consumption have taken root in their cultural instrumentation, including the fact that they believe
their food should bring balance and strength to the mind, body and spirit. Thus, there is an intimate relationship between food and their philosophy of life (Couto, 2008).

8 CONCLUSION

Although we present a perspective that sees the Chinese culinary tradition as constructed in its own subjective terms, and therefore contains its own cultural horizon and food criteria, on the other hand, we do not fail to address some consequences in relation to frequent contact with these animals, which culminates in the spread of diseases and epidemics. As mentioned, although there are few outlets selling these animals in the Asian country, there are dangers in continuous contact with them, where a series of diseases can appear (Chomel et al, 2007, pp. 6-9).

Today, it is essential to consider that this habit can have negative consequences for society and even for the whole world. Thus, it can be seen that the predation of these animals can not only unbalance ecosystems, but also contribute to the spread of diseases transmitted from animals to humans (Edwards, 2023, pp. 33-34).

The discussion should not start from the point of stigmatizing oriental customs, a narrative that we can easily find in Western scientific productions, where they treat the Chinese as people with inferior habits and ethnicities. The focus should be on understanding Chinese food culture, which is, in some respects, different from that of the West, and then devising discursive strategies without stigmatizing them, in order to warn of the dangers of disrupting local ecosystems and continuous contact with these wild and exotic species, a situation that could erupt into epidemic diseases, causing an alert of global magnitude (Shaw, 2020, pp. 531-532).
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