

Comparison of Chinese and Vietnamese food cultures

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Abstract

As geographically adjacent countries with profound cultural ties, China and Vietnam share partially overlapping culinary traditions while exhibiting distinct culinary traits; however, existing academic literature lacks systematic comparative studies on their culinary cultures, leading to an incomplete understanding of their cross-cultural interactions in academia. This study adopts a cultural comparative approach—integrating systematic literature review, case study analysis, and cross-cultural comparison—to explore similarities and differences between Chinese and Vietnamese culinary cultures from three core dimensions: daily dining habits, festive culinary traditions, and dining etiquette. Key findings are as follows: for daily staples, Vietnamese phở typically features single-type meat toppings and lemon-infused broth, while China's Yunnan Crossing-the-Bridge Rice Noodles are characterized by diverse toppings and chili oil; for festive foods, Chinese zongzi focus on commemorating the patriotic poet Qu Yuan, whereas Vietnamese zongzi center on ancestor worship; for dining etiquette, China follows hierarchical seating arrangements, while Vietnam retains floor-sitting customs in traditional settings. This study enriches academic discourse in

Sino-Vietnamese cultural comparison and offers practical implications for cross-border tourism and catering cooperation.

Keywords: China-Vietnam, food culture, food habits, food etiquette

Introduction

China and Vietnam, neighbors since ancient times, have maintained frequent economic and cultural exchanges. The two nations share profound mutual influences in culture, language, and even dietary habits, with many similarities that often lead those unfamiliar with their culinary traditions to mistakenly assume Vietnamese eating patterns closely resemble those of Guangxi region in China. However, significant differences exist between the two regions. As food is considered fundamental to human sustenance, such misunderstandings inevitably hinder people-to-people interactions.

Therefore, studying the similarities and differences (Zhou, 2005, pp. 129-130) in Sino-Vietnamese dietary cultures holds substantial significance for enhancing mutual understanding and fostering bilateral exchanges. Zhou Hongfeng similarly noted in **Introduction to Cultural Communication Studies**: “With increasingly close Sino-Vietnamese exchanges, deeper mutual comprehension of each other’s dietary cultures would significantly boost people-to-people interactions”. Nevertheless, specialized literature comparing the two countries’ culinary traditions remains scarce. Existing works primarily touch upon these aspects during discussions of national conditions, as seen in Vietnam’s *National Conditions and Sino-Vietnamese Relations*, which briefly mentions dietary culture within its historical development analysis. This study specifically examines the similarities and differences in Sino-Vietnamese dining customs and etiquette, aiming to deepen mutual understanding of

each other's dietary practices and dining etiquette, thereby promoting greater respect for each other's preferences during social interactions.

For over two millennia, China and Vietnam have consistently maintained cross-border cultural and economic exchanges, with culinary culture serving as a vital medium for interaction. For instance, the spread of soy products (e.g., tofu) from China to Vietnam and the popularity of Vietnamese coffee in southern China both exemplify the mutual infiltration of the two nations' culinary traditions. However, against the backdrop of globalization, the traditional culinary cultures of both countries are undergoing transformations (such as the localization of foreign fast food), thus there is an urgent need to systematically organize and compare the intrinsic characteristics of their culinary cultures.

Existing studies on Sino-Vietnamese culinary cultures have two key limitations: First, most studies focus on single-country analyses (e.g., the regional diversity of Chinese cuisine or Vietnam's rice-centric dietary structure) and lack a cross-country comparative perspective; second, scattered comparative studies only cover border ethnic groups (e.g., the Zhuang ethnic group in China and the Tai ethnic group in Vietnam) and fail to address mainstream culinary cultures (such as national festive foods like mooncakes). This research gap hinders the academic community from gaining an in-depth understanding of how culinary culture shapes the cultural identities and cross-border interactions of the two countries.

Comparison of Chinese and Vietnamese food cultures

1 Characteristics of Chinese and Vietnamese food culture

1.1 Characteristics of Chinese food culture

China is a country with a long history. Since ancient times, clothing, food, housing and transportation have been the most important things for Chinese people. Food is an essential condition for survival and an important part of Chinese food culture (Wang & Wang, 1999, pp. 178-179). Food culture is the art of the Chinese nation, which is called “food culture and art”, occupying an important position in traditional Chinese culture.

Foreigners often marvel at Chinese cuisine’s ability to transcend flavor limitations by harmoniously blending “color, taste, and form”. This culinary artistry delivers holistic sensory delight through visual presentation, flavor profiles, and cultural resonance. The essence of Chinese culinary culture lies in its unparalleled diversity. China’s vast territory and abundant resources have fostered distinct regional cuisines shaped by varying climates, local produce, and customs. While all share (Zuo, 2013, pp. 1-10) the “Chinese Flavor Identifier, each region maintains unique characteristics—captured in the saying: “southern sweetness, northern saltiness, eastern spiciness, western sourness”. China’s spicy food preference is most prominent in southern regions bordering Vietnam (Sichuan, Yunnan, Guangxi), where high humidity (annual relative humidity 75%-85%, China Meteorological Administration, 2024) drives the demand for spicy dishes to promote sweating—this trait overlaps with Vietnam’s partial spicy preference but differs in seasoning (China uses chili oil, Vietnam uses fresh chili + lemon). In reality, the preference for spicy foods among people in these regions largely stems from their

relatively humid climate. Spicy and numbing dishes help stimulate sweating, which aids in detoxification. Shanxi's 'Xishan Sour' dietary trait (e.g., aged vinegar, sour soup noodles) is traditionally believed to improve appetite and digestion—local studies (Wang, 2021, p.56) show that the organic acids in sour foods can enhance calcium absorption efficiency by 12% (compared to non-sour diets), but there is no direct evidence that it 'prevents skeletal disorders'.

It can be seen that food varies greatly across China, and people in different regions have summed up their own food knowledge, which can help them better adapt to the local environment through food.

1.2 Characteristics of Vietnamese food culture

Vietnam, a friendly neighbor of China, also attaches great importance to food. In the long period of development, it has experienced many evolution and sedimentation, and finally formed its own characteristics of food culture.

The Vietnamese believe that spiritual activities can only be cultivated when material needs are met, hence the ancient proverb "Rice gives you a way forward" —a staple food and primary ingredient (He, 2006, pp. 289-292) in many other dishes. This traditional agricultural culture has been preserved for millennia in Vietnam. Additionally, the Vietnamese have a strong preference for foods made from crops like potatoes, cassava, and corn. Nutrition balance is considered paramount to their diet, with a saying describing their eating habits as resembling "heavenly bliss".

Compared to Chinese cuisine, Vietnamese food is generally lighter in flavor. This preference stems from Vietnam's humid climate south of the Tropic of Cancer. Vietnamese cooking emphasizes preserving the natural

freshness of ingredients, using minimal seasonings like green lemons, cilantro, and fish sauce, with most dishes prepared through boiling. While some baked or fried dishes are occasionally used, their flavors remain understated. Unlike Chinese dishes that often add spices like dried pepper or broad bean paste to enhance aroma during frying, Vietnamese chefs use fewer condiments to preserve authentic flavors. Additionally, Vietnamese people typically enjoy fruits as desserts after meals rather than sugary pastries. Ethnic minority groups in Vietnam maintain a lighter diet, primarily inhabiting high-altitude regions where sticky rice serves as the staple food, and cooking methods remain relatively simple.

Unlike Chinese cuisine, which predominantly uses red meats like pork, beef, and lamb, Vietnamese cooking features fish as its main ingredient. This dietary preference stems from Vietnam's geographical advantages: its extensive coastline and abundant waterways provide a rich variety of fish species. Consequently, numerous fish-based dishes have emerged, including signature dishes like Fish Rice, Sour Fish Soup, Fish Noodles, and Sticky Rice with Fish.

Vietnamese people also have a strong passion for alcohol, though their consumption is primarily reserved for festive occasions, family gatherings, and celebratory events. Their wine selection predominantly consists of white wines with alcohol content typically ranging between 30-45% ABV. In less formal daily settings, beer serves as a “thirst-quenching” beverage. During the sweltering summer months, they enjoy chilled beer, while in colder winters, they savor warm, freshly brewed baijiu (a traditional Vietnamese liquor). Additionally, tea and coffee hold equal significance in Vietnamese culture, with coffee being regarded as the “tea of the Chinese heart”. Due

to Vietnam's geographical advantages for coffee cultivation, the country ranks as the world's second-largest coffee producer. Beyond enjoying coffee, Vietnamese people take pride in crafting it themselves. Instead of using coffee machines, they prefer pouring thick layers of coffee grounds into hot water, watching the slowly dripping coffee through glass cups—a deliberate process that embodies their appreciation for the artistry behind coffee preparation.

Due to limited mutual understanding, there exist common misconceptions about each other's culinary traditions between Chinese and Vietnamese people. For instance, while many Vietnamese associate Chinese cuisine with spiciness and greasiness, the cuisine of the Wu-Yue region (ancient Vietnam) and Zhejiang cuisine are predominantly light and delicate. Many Vietnamese perceive Chinese and Vietnamese food as similar, yet in reality, Chinese cuisine is primarily characterized by diverse noodle dishes. Additionally, Chinese people have limited knowledge of Vietnamese food. Some lack awareness of contemporary Vietnam's development, mistakenly believing the country remains stuck in a backward 1990s era where three daily meals are difficult to maintain. However, in reality, major Vietnamese cities boast skyscrapers, thriving dining establishments, and sophisticated culinary traditions.

Therefore, it is crucial to further promote the exchange of culinary cultures between China and Vietnam. As food and cultural interactions between the two countries increase, tourism activities will also grow more frequent. This thriving tourism sector will significantly boost the catering industries in both nations. This virtuous cycle of development will create positive effects on cross-cultural culinary exchanges, not only strengthening

mutual understanding in food traditions but also driving economic growth for both countries.

Differences and similarities between Chinese and Vietnamese eating habits

Vietnam boasts two major plains: the Red River Plain and the Kiang Khoi River Plain. These fertile lands, abundant in rice cultivation. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2024) data, Vietnam's rice exports reached 7.3 million metric tons in 2023, ranking second globally (after India), accounting for 15% of the world's total rice trade. China, with its strategic geographical location and vast land area, provides ideal conditions for rice farming. Rice has become a staple food in every Chinese household, playing a vital role in daily life. Both nations also produce wheat-based flour products and legumes. Therefore, our comparative analysis of dietary patterns between the two countries focuses on rice-based dishes, soybean products, and wheat-based flour foods.

1 The similarities and differences between the origin and development of Vietnamese rice noodles and Chinese rice noodles

As food and cultural exchanges between the two countries grow more frequent, tourism activities will also increase. The thriving tourism industry will further boost the development of catering industries in both regions. People in the border areas of northern Vietnam, which share borders with China's Yunnan and Guangxi provinces, exhibit certain similarities in dietary habits. Although these regions are geographically adjacent, they belong to two distinct ethnic groups, resulting in some differences in culinary culture.

The Vietnamese call rice noodles “national food”, which is the most distinctive rice product in Vietnam. Fan (2012, pp. 45-52) Rice noodles are one of the most common breakfast products in Vietnam. The Vietnamese are used to eating breakfast in restaurants, so there are many rice noodle restaurants on the streets of Vietnam.

On the Chinese side of the China-Vietnam border, especially in Yunnan Province, rice noodles are more common (Xu, 2005, pp. 88-92). For example, “Yunnan bridge rice noodles” has become world-famous. Rice noodles and rice vermicelli are similar in that they are both rice-based staple foods processed into strips, but they differ in specific tastes.

Due to the wide variety of rice noodle products in China, there are different ways to eat them. Here, we only compare Vietnamese rice noodles and Yunnan bridge rice noodles. Both Vietnamese rice noodles and Chinese bridge rice noodles are made of rice. Table 1 below compares bridge rice noodles and Vietnamese rice noodles.

Table 1

Comparison between Crossing bridge rice noodles and Vietnamese rice noodles

	Vietnamese rice noodles	crossing-the-bridge noodles
Make the ingredients	rice	rice
jardiniere	Pork, beef, fish and dog meat (a bowl of rice There is only one kind of meat in the flour), bean sprouts.	Chicken, quail eggs, tofu skin, leeks, bamboo shoots Ribs, coriander, pickled mustard, bacon, chrysanthemum and bean sprouts.
charge mixture	Different kinds of meat, with different soups and	Chili oil, vinegar, wild chili pepper, salt, chicken powder

	Vietnamese rice noodles	crossing-the-bridge noodles
Make the ingredients	rice	rice
	scallions Flower, pepper, lemon, salt, chicken powder (flavor Fresh) and cilantro.	(monosodium glutamate Chicken soup)

The two production processes are different. The rice noodle production process is: wash the rice, sprinkle salt, soak for about half a day, then cut into rice noodles, put the rice noodles into a large pot to evaporate into thin sheets, and finally cut into strips. The rice noodle production process is:

- 1) Soak the rice in cold water for 30 minutes, then crush it into rice noodles;
- 2) Mix the rice flour and water to make a sieve with a flat surface;
- 3) The mixture is extruded into an extruder and dried for 24 hours to produce semi-finished rice noodles. Unlike flat noodles, rice vermicelli features elongated, more elastic strands. Its rich toppings include various meat products and ingredients, creating a visually satisfying appearance. In contrast, Vietnamese noodles have simpler seasoning but contain substantial meat content per serving. The key difference lies in the broth: Crossing Bridge Rice Noodles feature pepper oil while regular rice noodles don't. Both use sour flavors-lemon for regular noodles and vinegar for Crossing Bridge. Their soups differ significantly: Regular noodles simmer for 8 hours using beef and fish bones, requiring careful skimming of impurities and floating grease during cooking to preserve authentic beef flavor. Crossing Bridge Rice Noodles are prepared by simmering chicken, aged duck, and pork bones over low heat

for over four hours, then seasoned with salt and five spices including five-spice powder and pepper.

2. Differences in the origin and preparation of zongzi between China and Vietnam

For both countries, zongzi plays a more important role in festivals, but there are big differences in the way it is eaten and how it is made (see table 2 below).

Table 2

Comparison of zongzi between Vietnam and China

	Chinese zongzi	Vietnamese zongzi
form	Triangular, columnar	Square, columnar
raw material	Rice, red bean paste, cured meat, red beans, red dates, salted eggs, eight treasures	Glutinous rice, mung beans, pork, pepper and salt
charge mixture	bamboo leaves	leaf of Japanese banana
Use festivals	the Dragon Boat Festival	the Spring Festival
implied meaning	show respect to Qu Yuan	Thank heaven and earth, parents, and worship ancestors

While both Chinese and Vietnamese zongzi are made from glutinous rice, they differ in several aspects. Chinese zongzi are wrapped in reed or bamboo leaves, primarily using sticky rice but with a variety of fillings. Most scholars interpret the symbolism of Chinese zongzi as a tribute to Qu Yuan, the patriotic poet who chose to drown himself with a stone tablet to preserve his integrity. To protect Qu Yuan's body from aquatic decomposition, people would throw zongzi into rivers to attract fish and shrimp. Vietnamese zongzi, wrapped in banana leaves, contain glutinous rice, mung beans, pork,

pepper, and salt. According to Vietnamese tradition, zongzi are shaped into square forms to symbolize earth, serving as offerings to ancestors and prayers for a bountiful harvest. The contrasting approaches reveal how zongzi hold profound significance for both nations. Whether representing heaven and earth through square-shaped designs or honoring Qu Yuan's legacy, these traditions demonstrate the "heavy responsibilities" placed on zongzi by their respective peoples. In essence, the same food embodies distinct worldviews and values across different regions.

3. Differences and similarities between Chinese and Vietnamese pastry making and its significance

3.1 Literature on Chinese Culinary Culture

Scholars have conducted extensive research on the diversity and cultural connotations of Chinese culinary culture. Wang and Wang (1999) proposed that Chinese cuisine emphasizes the "four beauties" of color, aroma, taste, and appearance, and attributed regional differences such as "southern sweetness and northern saltiness" to historical migrations and climatic conditions. Zuo (2013) further analyzed the soft power of Chinese culinary culture, noting that it achieves global dissemination through overseas Chinatowns. However, these studies focus exclusively on China itself and do not involve cross-border comparisons with Vietnam.

3.2 Literature on Vietnamese Culinary Culture

Research on Vietnamese culinary culture centers primarily on its agricultural roots and tropical characteristics. Nguyễn (2018) emphasized that Vietnam's "light and fresh" culinary style—such as its reliance on fish sauce and herbs—is an adaptation to the country's long coastline and hot climate. He (2006) pointed out the central position of rice in Vietnamese

culinary culture, describing it as “the foundation of national identity”. While these studies capture the uniqueness of Vietnamese cuisine, they lack a comparative perspective with Chinese culinary culture.

There are also various kinds of cakes in China, each with its own unique characteristics. However, due to the geographical restrictions and limited cake-making technology in Vietnam, there are relatively few kinds of cakes, but there are some traditional cakes, such as mooncakes.

Both China and Vietnam celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival on August 15th, sharing similar rituals yet carrying distinct cultural significance. For Chinese families, this festival serves as a time for reunion beyond the Spring Festival. On this special night, relatives gather to enjoy traditional delicacies and admire the moon together. Even those far from home travel to distant places to gaze at the bright moon, expressing their longing for their hometowns. The traditions of eating mooncakes and moon-watching during the Mid-Autumn Festival have deep historical roots. As recorded in Tian Rucheng’s **West Lake Tour Notes**, “The 15th day of the eighth lunar month is called Mid-Autumn, when people exchange mooncakes symbolizing family reunion”. Additionally, many scholars believe that the custom of eating mooncakes originated from a late Yuan Dynasty uprising, where the tradition was established to commemorate the victory of the rebellion.

Vietnam’s Mid-Autumn Festival differs significantly from China’s. Falling on the 15th day of the lunar month, it is the most joyful time for children. Before the festival, adults purchase moon-viewing foods and toys to display for children during the evening celebrations. This tradition traces back to 1954 when President Ho Chi Minh wrote a poem expressing his

longing for children in the liberated South: “đến ngày nam bắc motif nha, cac chau xum xit thita vui long” (Only when the North and South reunite can all children be together – this is our greatest joy). That same year, Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh published an article titled “Telling Children Stories About the Mid-Autumn Festival”, which referenced the Chinese myth of Chang’e.

While Vietnam’s Mid-Autumn Festival has evolved from a family reunion celebration to a “Children’s Day”, children still revel in the festivities. Though kids play a central role, mooncake consumption remains a must. Since Chinese-style mooncakes were introduced to Vietnam, their preparation methods and flavors have seen significant improvements. Two distinct varieties exist: The “Banh nuong” (roasted mooncake), crafted following traditional Chinese recipes, closely resembles Guangdong-style mooncakes in both appearance and filling—featuring egg yolk and sausages, occasionally enhanced with Vietnamese specialties like coconut and lotus paste. The “banh deo” (soft mooncake) represents a homegrown innovation, using glutinous rice for the crust and preserved fruits as fillings, adapted to Vietnam’s tropical climate. This child-favorite naturally tops the popularity charts. Crafting these soft mooncakes demands specialized techniques: The filling is prepared year in advance using glutinous rice mixed with pomelo and lemon juices, then kneaded into dough, wrapped, and frozen. While store-bought versions are typically rectangular, roasted mooncakes are predominantly round—reflecting Vietnamese cultural traditions—hence the dual availability of both shapes in markets.

While the Mid-Autumn Festival has lost some of its former solemnity, people still eagerly anticipate its arrival. At the border between Heikou County in Yunnan Province and Vietnam's ancient city, festive celebrations are bustling with activity, featuring shops selling traditional mooncakes from both countries. The festival day sees frequent exchanges between Chinese and Vietnamese citizens, particularly along the border where lively crowds create a vibrant atmosphere. Despite being separate nations, residents here recognize each other's customs and culinary traditions during the Mid-Autumn Festival, demonstrating the cultural exchange between China and Vietnam has reached a significant level.

In 2023, the 'China-Vietnam Culinary Festival' (held in Nanning, China and Hanoi, Vietnam) attracted over 500,000 participants, with 30+ Vietnamese coffee brands and 50+ Chinese noodle brands signing cross-border cooperation agreements—this event boosted cross-border catering revenue by 35% compared to 2019 (China-Vietnam Cultural Exchange Center, 2024)”

“Chinese hot pot chains (e.g., Haidilao) in Ho Chi Minh City have adjusted their spice levels: the ‘mild spicy’ option accounts for 60% of orders (vs. 30% in China), and local ingredients (Vietnamese lemongrass, coconut milk) are added to adapt to local tastes (Li, 2023, p.78)

4. Similarities and differences in edible habits of soybean products between China and Vietnam

4.1 Tofu

As the most widely consumed soy product and a staple ingredient in Chinese cuisine, tofu has gained global recognition. Zhao (2010, pp. 66-70) The term “tofu” is even listed in English dictionaries. This ancient

food, with over 2,000 years of history, is typically made from high-protein legumes like soybeans and black beans. In Vietnam, tofu remains a staple in daily life despite its unassuming appearance. The most common preparation methods include baking and boiling, with deep-frying being particularly popular. While oil is used, this method preserves the tofu's natural flavor without additional seasoning. The golden crispy exterior contrasts with its delicate interior, which is marinated in fish sauce, lemon juice, and sea salt for a refreshing taste. Due to its affordability and simple production process, tofu has become a beloved choice in Vietnam. It's not only included in home recipes but also creatively adapted into innovative dishes like soy sauce-glazed shrimp tofu, fried tofu vermicelli, tofu hotpot, and even tofu-grilled meat.

4.2 Bean curd

In China, soy milk is more commonly associated with breakfast and is generally not consumed as a thirst-quenching beverage during summer. Chinese people are also less accustomed to drinking chilled soy milk (Huang, 2006, pp. 55-57). In Vietnam, however, there's a more distinctive version called "Nuoc **đ**au". During peak summer months, street vendors riding motorcycles with two insulated buckets filled with sweetened soybeans and ice can be seen everywhere. These items are remarkably affordable – a cup costs just 8,000 Vietnamese dong in central Hanoi. Vendors typically serve soy milk in disposable plastic or glass cups with a generous amount of cold water. The Vietnamese adore this "drink", with annual sales far exceeding those of milk and other beverages. While production methods for soy milk

remain largely identical between China and Vietnam, both countries have developed it into popular daily beverages enjoyed by their populations.

Differences and similarities between Chinese and Vietnamese food etiquette

1. The similarities and differences of Chinese and Vietnamese table manners

“Adapting to local customs” is the cornerstone of culinary culture and dining etiquette. Understanding others’ table manners not only demonstrates your politeness but also fosters a harmonious dining atmosphere. Conversely, failing to follow these customs can create awkward silences and misunderstandings that easily lead to conflicts. To truly embrace this principle, mastering proper dining etiquette is essential.

While China and Vietnam are close neighbors, their dining customs differ significantly. First, Chinese people place greater emphasis on ceremonial terms that denote social hierarchy and respect. When ordering, elders or guests are typically invited to choose first. However, diners should avoid being overly active during the process and refrain from ordering excessively expensive dishes. Chinese diners pay close attention to their manners and speech during meals, requiring constant awareness of their posture. Guests should greet each other politely and eat with courtesy. They prefer slow, deliberate eating. In contrast, Vietnamese dining etiquette emphasizes proper sequence: younger family members must invite elders to join before using utensils. Regarding seating arrangements, Vietnamese traditionally sit on mats placed on the floor, with a round iron plate at the center where everyone gathers around while sitting cross-legged. This poses

challenges for Chinese diners accustomed to seated dining. Additionally, while Chinese people stack food higher than bowls to show hospitality, Vietnamese consider this disrespectful practice, reserved only for ancestral worship ceremonies.

In conclusion, while China and Vietnam share many similarities in culinary traditions, there are also significant differences. Without thorough understanding, these cultural disparities could lead to misunderstandings, awkward situations, or even conflicts. Therefore, both nations should actively promote cultural exchanges in the food industry, recognize their unique dietary heritage, and foster comprehensive interactions. This approach will help people from both countries better understand each other's customs and appreciate each other's local culture.

2. The similarities and differences between Chinese and Vietnamese tea etiquette

China's tea culture is profound and extensive, profoundly influencing nations like Vietnam. Vietnam shares similar tea traditions with China, as most tea varieties and utensils were initially introduced from the Chinese mainland. For many Chinese people, tea drinking has become an art deeply rooted in daily life, resulting in uniquely crafted tea ware. Chinese tea sets not only serve practical purposes but also demonstrate exquisite craftsmanship, embodying both aesthetic value and decorative significance (Yang, 1983, pp. 241-243). The symbolic meanings of Chinese and Vietnamese tea ware differ across historical periods. In Lu Yu's "Classic of Tea", ancient tea utensils encompassed all tea-related tools for harvesting, processing, and consumption. Today, however, tea ware extends beyond mere brewing vessels. Among Chinese cultural treasures, the Yixing clay teapot stands as

one of the most renowned. To connoisseurs, these purple-glazed ceramic teapots integrate philosophical wisdom, the spirit of tea culture, and natural rhythms into sublime artistry. For tea enthusiasts, the act of sipping from these vessels brings inner peace, comfort, and a sense of transcendence.

To truly understand Vietnam's tea-drinking traditions, one must examine the cultural significance of the Chinese character "tea". In Vietnamese, the word "tea" has two pronunciations: "tra" and "che". The pronunciation of "tra" mirrors its Chinese counterpart, which explains why Vietnamese speakers commonly use the Chinese term for tea (Wu, 2001, pp. 65-66). The "che" variant, however, is a purely Vietnamese word or an indigenous vocabulary element (Wang, 1993, pp. 178-179). Currently, Vietnamese people primarily use two methods for tea preparation: the "dian cha" (steeping method) and the "chong cha" (brewing method).

In China and Vietnam, tea is a cherished tradition. When guests arrive, locals brew a cup to show hospitality. More importantly, both commoners and affluent families regard tea as a social pastime. The two nations also enjoy tea as a post-meal beverage that enhances social interactions. Through tea, people find common ground for conversation and discover its profound cultural significance through savoring the beverage.

While China and Vietnam share many similarities with tea, there are notable differences. The most obvious distinction lies in their preferred varieties. China's vast territory boasts a diverse array of teas, including rare specialties like Yunnan Pu'er, Wuyi Mountain Dahongpao, and West Lake Longjing. In Vietnam, lotus tea remains the most beloved beverage, particularly popular in Hanoi. This traditional drink carries special significance, being exclusively enjoyed by closest companions. Additionally, tea-drinking

customs differ between the two cultures. For Chinese people, savoring fragrant tea leaves evokes warmth and intimacy; whereas in Vietnam, where temperatures remain consistently high year-round, people prefer cool tea over scalding hot brews.

While both nations enjoy tea at home, residents frequently venture out to savor it, though their tea-drinking habits differ markedly. In the past, Chinese people would often visit teahouses during leisure time, enjoying tea while watching operas or movies. Today, however, they prefer entertainment venues like mahjong parlors. Unlike China, Vietnam features roadside tea stalls along highways where passersby pause to sip tea, especially during summer. These stalls are often surrounded by motorcycle riders sharing their beverages, alongside snacks like coconut candy and peanut candies.

Conclusion

For cross-border tourism: Scenic spots in Guangxi (e.g., Guilin) and Vietnam (e.g., Halong Bay) could set up ‘food culture explanation boards’—e.g., comparing the differences between Guilin rice noodles and Vietnamese phở, and explaining the cultural meanings of zongzi. This would reduce cultural misunderstandings and enhance tourists’ experience”

“For people-to-people diplomacy: The two countries could launch a ‘Sino-Vietnamese Culinary Exchange Program’—inviting chefs to collaborate on fusion dishes (e.g., ‘phở-style Crossing-the-Bridge Rice Noodles’) and hold joint food exhibitions. This would use food as a medium to strengthen bilateral cultural bonds”

In summary, China and Vietnam share many commonalities in culinary culture, such as using rice as the staple food, pursuing delicious flavors through color, aroma, and taste, and skillfully utilizing various natural ingredients. However, there are also significant differences in dietary preferences and dining habits between the two countries, which stem not only from geographical and climatic variations but more profoundly from differing cultural traditions. Understanding and respecting each other's culinary cultures can not only boost the development of their respective catering industries, but more importantly, enhance people-to-people friendship and cultural exchanges between the two nations. As times progress, cultural and economic exchanges between China and Vietnam will become increasingly frequent and profound, with culinary cultural exchanges being an indispensable component. Through studying these cultural differences, we can better promote mutual development.

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