

THE METAPHOR OF SADNESS:

Hakka's Bean Jelly as Culture and Consumption through Tourism

Abstract: This article presents a sensory ethnography of an ethnic Hakka specialty known as “Luodai Bean Jelly” (or, the *Sad Bean Jelly*) in Luodai Ancient Town in the suburban area to the east of Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China. From the perspectives of objectivity, historicity, modernity and sociality, the metaphorical meanings of the *Sad Bean Jelly* as an ethnic food used for the transformation of a place through tourism are explored. Individual feelings and collective memories of the ethnic food are constructed in the context of tourism-driven commercialization, which is felt to have transformed the ancient town into a place for out-of-town visitors. The research sheds light on, and hence has implications for managing change of a place associated with ethnic culture, food and tourism.

Keywords: Ethnic food; sensory ethnography; food tourism; destination change; China

INTRODUCTION

In the era of postmodernity characterized by urbanization, commercialization, service-oriented industrialization, and technology (particularly transportation and information), a local place (or area) has been struggling yet evolving in a global-local nexus (Chang, Milne, Fallon & Pohlmann, 1996; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001), having to face or embrace changes in its economic and sociocultural development, and as a result, maintaining, adapting or losing its unique cultural identity in this process of change. In tourism studies, local or ethnic food is often seen as a marker or cultural expression of a place, acting as a major player in its place-making and destination imaging (Fox, 2003; Hall & Gössling, 2013, 2016; Hall & Sharples, 2003). The dynamic and complex relationships between food and place have attracted research on subjects such as food tourism (Hall & Gössling, 2013, 2016; Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Macionis &

Cambourne, 2003), gastronomy and tourism (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Povey, 2011), food as attractions for local or regional development (Bessiere, 1998; Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Hall & Gössling, 2013, 2016; Son & Xu, 2013), globalization and food consumption in tourism (Mak, Lumbers & Eves, 2012; Mak, Lumbers, Eves & Chang, 2012), food tourism as boundaries of taste and class (Jong & Parley, 2017), as well as food or dining as tourist experience (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Quan & Wang, 2004).

This article is developed in the context of ethnic food as heritage and cultural consumption and its role in the place-making and image-building of the area under study. Richards (2002) referred to the study of food or gastronomy in a place as “a significant source of identity formation in postmodern society” (p.3). According to Hall and Sharples (2003), “the very fact that food is expressive of a region and its culture has meant that it can be used as a means of differentiation for a destination in an increasingly competitive global market place” (p.6).

Building on the above thoughts and perspectives, this study adopts a sensory ethnographical approach to the scrutiny of the natural and cultural environments of a Hakka ethnic community with respect to the (re)production of a local specialty known as “Luodai Bean Jelly” (or, the *Sad Bean Jelly*). Field research was conducted in Luodai Ancient Town in the eastern suburb of Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China (Figure 1). From the perspectives of objectivity, historicity, modernity and sociality, the naming and metaphorical meanings of the *Sad Bean Jelly* as a “reinvented” tradition are decoded and explored. A connection between individual feeling and group memory is constructed in the tensions between natural and cultural environments, which allows this Hakka ethnic group to be imagined and characterized as strong and intelligent. Along with commercialization acting as both causes and consequences, this Hakka community has been transforming interactively from its pure original form into a combination of original identity and structured identity. Beneath an individual’s cultural

identity is a bedrock of common social memory. Centering around queries such as “whose sadness?”, “why should one be sad?”, “who uses sadness?” and “who purchases sadness?”, a sensory ethnography is written on the *Sad Bean Jelly* to shed light on the discovery, construction, imagination, memorialization, and control of a particular facet of individual and collective identities, and to reflect transformation of the place along with tourist visitation and ethnic food consumption.

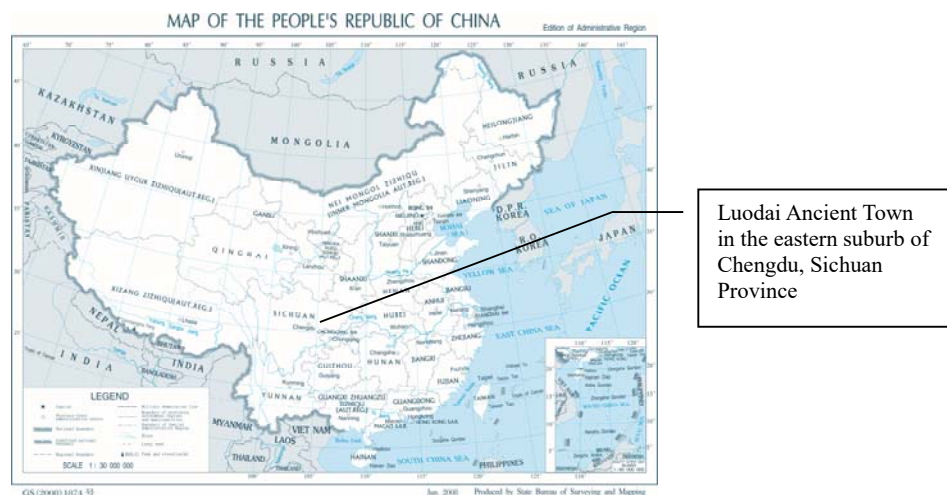


Figure 1. Location of Luodai Ancient Town in China’s Sichuan Province
(Source: State Bureau of Surveying and Mapping, 2008)

In this ethnic Hakka community, food is not only a physical requirement for subsistence; there are also rituals, traditions and cultural practices developed around food over the history of this place. A series of food-related cultures and corresponding rules were derived, and foodstuffs were given names reflecting people’s beliefs and experiences. The Hakka people, dubbed the “Jews of the Orient”, have repeatedly migrated across China, beginning with their repopulation of Sichuan, whose cultural characteristics have since become embedded in their daily food and drink. Hence, food offers “an important angle” for the exploration of cultural identity and for its “connecting-up of local stakeholders, people and institutions to create trust, new linkages and more efficient exchanges” (Hall, Mitchell & Sharples, 2003, p.29; Zhang,

2012, p.97).

In this research, the *Sad Bean Jelly* is a representative of the cultural identity of the Dongshan Hakka, a term used in the academic circle to refer to the Hakka ethnic group living in the Longquan Mountains to the east of Chengdu. This ethnic group is mainly composed of Hakka people originally from Fujian, Guangdong and Jiangxi Provinces, who began to migrate to Sichuan in the Qing Dynasty (1616-1912). They currently reside in 27 townships in Chengdu. The *Sad Bean Jelly* has even become “a famous tour and consumption brand” of Sichuan’s ancient towns (Kan, 2011, p.62). But how did bean jelly, an ordinary food, come to be labeled with “sadness”? How did it become a symbol of Hakka’s culture? How did it embrace tourism and become the must-eat local delicacy for visitors? Is it accidental or subject to sociocultural contexts for the *Sad Bean Jelly* to become now a “must-eat” for visitors to this Hakka community? To date, little research has been conducted on the subject, and interpretive inquiries into the sociocultural layers of this place-and-food relationship are warranted to offer explanations or answers to the above questions.

In cultural studies, culture is often seen as “publicly available symbolic forms or vehicles” such as beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, through which people experience and express meaning (Swidler, 1986, p.273). Anthropologists tend to think that, for its symbolic value, food was not so often selected because it was “good to eat (or not)”, as because it was “good to think (or not)”. However, Harris (1998) believed that the “riddles” of “good to eat” could only be solved once food was linked to broader contexts or factors such as demography, economics, ecology and nutrition science. For example, he conducted a transdisciplinary study of the sacredness of cows to Hindus, who regarded the consumption of beef as taboo, and concluded that Hindus’ worship of the “sacred cow”, which seemed to be advocated by religion, actually resulted from a series of ecological, political, economic and sociocultural circumstances (Harris, 2001). In comparison, cultural materialism offers a more

objective perspective on dietary preferences than the symbolic approach.

In this study, sensory ethnography (Pink, 2013, 2015) is used to reach and develop an understanding of the phenomenon in visual, gustatory and olfactory senses, as this approach enables the ethnographers to touch and grasp the world under study. This method also restores the cultural forms of the ethnic group to their daily lives. Marcoux (2010) advises that sensory ethnography should be informed by the perception theory and “[could be] best approached through a theory of place and place-making” (p.388). Notably, a place is a space where its people or inhabitants develop its image by creating their own identities. Such identity making involves elements such as language, food, rites, and housing. Sensory memories hence can form through both individual and collective practices. According to Pink (2015), individual memories inherited from the collective can be easily traced through their relationship with the senses. She further critiqued that recent research on the relationships between memory and the senses has resulted in two notable emphases in sensory ethnography – individual sensory memory and collective sensory memory (Pink, 2015). Additionally, as Sutton’s (2010) work demonstrates, this approach is relevant for understanding how collective memories are invested in food practices, which offer an important tool for the practical exploration and mapping of ethnic culture through sensory ethnography.

The rationale underlying the naming of the *Sad Bean Jelly* in the Hakka ethnic community was shaped by its members’ uses of food materials in their natural environment, their feelings about interacting with other ethnic groups or “Other” incomers such as contemporary visitors or tourists, as well as their traditional memories and their development of “Self” as first-person narratives. Therefore, the adjustment and containment of relationships between people and nature, people and people, and the past and the present offer a backdrop to this story of the *Sad Bean Jelly*. Thus, tasting food takes on the status of a new ethnographic approach, and becomes a form of “dialogic” interactions and cooperation (Peng, 2012) that

enable the researchers to meet their objectives. As such, the sociocultural, economic and environmental contexts within which the identity of this ethnic group is built can be understood. Each item of the foodstuffs can be addressed in terms of its cultural connotations and its constructive social functions. Hence, from cultural anthropologists' standpoint, food in this instance serves as a medium or mechanism connecting the "local" with the "global" as much as the "individual" with the "collective" in this exploration of the evolution and sociocultural change associated with this ethnic food and place.

THE SAD BEAN JELLY: AN SENSORY ETHNOGRAPHY

Through observing, experiencing and sensory reflections of the body, the main objective of this ethnography is to understand ethnic food naming and its embedded meanings or implications for sociocultural change in the ethnic community under study. First, in ethnographic work, the power of vision has emerged to overturn the previous emphasis on writing about a culture in ethnological studies that were "limited to words". Multisensory experiences – vision, smell, hearing, touch, taste and pain – offer important insights into diverse cultures. More and more research on sensory experience has been published, with queries or challenges on what senses (or which aspects of the senses) dominate the experience (Howes, 1991). Some scholars have prioritized vision, while others have argued that vision is not a qualitatively "higher" or objectifying sense (Ingold, 2000). Hence, if a research aims at a systematic or comprehensive understanding of experience or perceptions, a multisensory approach would facilitate the process. Grasseni (2007) proposes that the visual approach should not be used in isolation, but with its interplay with other senses. Nakamura (2013), citing a Harvard sensory ethnography lab as an example, reports on students and faculty undertaking sensory ethnography through vivid aesthetic-sensual immersion. The study draws attention to the roles of the senses (sights, smells and sounds) experienced by both the participants and the researchers. In a similar

sensory ethnographic account of women consciously performing masculinity in Sydney's "drag king" scenes, Drysdale (2016) reveals the nature of such gendered performances or stereotypes through the making of tactile places for subcultural groups. Recently, sensory ethnography has also been used to address cultural reproduction, especially in consumer research to gain insights into the contemporary forms of consumer culture (Valtonen, Markuksela & Moisander, 2010).

According to Pink (2013, 2015), sensory ethnography is a critical methodology relying on observation, experience and reflexivity in order to reach understanding and produce knowledge. It is defined as "a process of creating and representing knowledge or ways of knowing that are based on ethnographers' own experiences and the ways these intersect with the persons, places and things encountered during that process" (Pink, 2013, p.35). Hence, as an approach, it does not privilege any one type of data or method; "rather, it is open to multiple ways of knowing and to the exploration of and reflection on new routes to knowledge" (Pink, 2015, p.5).

Quintessentially, senses are linked to the body. According to rationalists such as Descartes, a human self is divided into an abstract consciousness and a physical body forming connections or relationships mediated by the common sense (Rosenfeld, 2011). Subsequently, Foucault (1978, 1988) is often lauded as having greatly influenced social theory with his understanding of the body as constructed through the processes of discipline and normalization by various regimes of domination (Swain, 2004, p.105). The notion of the body was introduced to the social sciences where "bodily pleasure" is seen as having extremely important influences on human experiences and perceptions in disciplinary inquiries such as anthropology or ethnography (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). In relation to politics, the body is designed and disciplined by various powers and techniques (Foucault, 1988). In the field of cultural anthropology, scholars have paid more and more attention to the role of the physical body in

explaining complex social and cultural phenomena (Swain, 2004). Indeed, a conspicuous “turn to the body” has occurred in several disciplines in addition to anthropology, such as philosophy and literary studies. Through investigations into the embodiment, psychological states, behavioral intention and emotional experiences of the human subjects can be more fully explored. In this regard, sensory ethnography based on “body research” offers an observational method that allows ethnographers to explain social structures and ethnic behavior in greater depth through the bodily perceptions of knowledge (Pink, 2015).

Taking the sensory turn in ethnography is an add-on to anthropological approaches. As Pink (2015) noted, while conventional observations result in in-depth and detailed descriptions, the method itself may be impractical for fieldwork on the lives or lived experience of the contemporary people. Researchers are therefore exploring innovative “ways of seeking to understand and engage with other people’s worlds through sharing activities and practices and inviting new forms of expressions” (Pink, 2015, p.6), which have become defining features of this emergent approach. This “sensory turn” offers a new way of understanding the world through sensory analysis, reflexivity and knowledge production. It emphasizes participatory observation, allowing the researcher to directly gain knowledge and awareness from the object under study and in the meantime to remain embedded in its local environments and practices. The research materials and data gained by the ethnographer through sensory practices are often credible and laudably rich in texture.

Research Methods

Attracted by Hakka culture, a steady stream of tourists travel to Luodai Ancient Town in an eastern suburb of Chengdu. Domestic tourism appeared in the late 1990s; it was not until 2005 when the World Hakka Conference was held in this place that the industry has started to boom. During the four years of this project’s field research, Luodai Scenic Administration reported

annual visitor arrival of 5 million in 2012, 5.3 million in 2013, 6 million in 2014, and 6.1 million in 2015. The subsequent year (2016) has also seen 6.2 million visitors to this ancient town.

Upon arrival, the first food that visitors are encouraged to try is the Hakka delicacy “*Sad Bean Jelly*”. Notably, Sichuan cuisine, known for its spice and flavor, has often been subject of research in subject areas such as nutrition and food science (Liu & Chen, 2013; Xu & Zheng, 2007), culinary tourism and destination attractiveness (Hu, Zhu & Tian, 2007; Kang, 2010; Tang, 2007), as well as marketing and management of restaurants featuring ethnic food (Chen, Shen & Fan, 2015). This ethnographical undertaking is the result of a China Ministry of Education’s (MoE) research project (2012-2015) to understand ethnic group identity of the Hakka people and to explore sociocultural change of the ethnic community from the perspective of food. From September 2012 to July 2016, the first two authors have paid over twenty visits to the study site, collecting materials, observing (and often participating) ethnic rituals or events, and talking to local people about food, identity and place. A series of interviews with ethnic group members, restaurant operators and visitors to Luodai Ancient Town were conducted as part of the field research. Participation and observation were facilitated through visits to restaurants in the study site, where the authors performed both the role of ethnographic researchers as well as leisure visitors enjoying some bean jelly and “tasting” the sadness associated with it.

Food Metaphor – The Influence of Local Conditions

The mountains around Chengdu are mainly situated to the east and west of the city. In eastern Jintang and Longquan, home to the Dongshan Hakka (Chengdu Chronicles Compilation Committee, 1993), mountain ranges are narrow and low, with asymmetric slopes. The long and low Longquan Mountain runs from Mianyang in the north to Leshan Pingqiangxia in the south;

it is about 210 kilometers long and 10 – 18 kilometers wide. The middle section of Longquan Mountain is in Chengdu, running through Jintang, Qingbaijiang and Longquan. Its ridge altitude is 800 – 1,000 meters and its relative altitude is 400 – 600 meters in height. Succinctly, geographical conditions of the area could be summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Geographical Conditions of Eastern Mountain Area

Geographical index	Descriptions	Impacts
Temperature and rainfall	Warm in winter with little rainfall; the temperature in spring rises quickly and remains variable; overcast and rainy days are common in autumn, with less sunshine. The temperature is much lower – about one degree less than the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River at the same latitude. Droughts and flooding alternate, as the period from June to September accounts for 75% of the whole year's rainfall, while that from December to March accounts for only 3 – 4% (p.33 & p.91).	The growth of crops, especially the double cropping of rice, is severely limited; food is subject to mildew and people to rheumatism. Either drought or flooding may occur.
Soil	The area starts at Longquan Mountain in the east and encompasses the districts of Xindu, Jintang and Longquan. Hilly land is covered with brick red and brownish red sandstone, and shale can be found. Soil washing is serious and the soil layer is thin (p.177).	The soil conserves neither water nor fertilizer, resulting in a limited planning range. Sweet potatoes and peanuts are produced with low yields.
Water resources	Water resources are distributed unevenly. The hilly land in the east is exposed to little rainfall and high temperatures, and has a rather high evaporation capacity. The area's underground water resources are fairly limited (p.158).	Agricultural and domestic water resources are limited.
Geological fault-zone	A fault-zone covers the east and west slopes of Longquan Mountain. It starts at Zhongjiang Hexingchang in the north and passes through Jintang and Longquan to the region west of Renshou (p.59).	Earthquakes with a magnitude of 4 to 5 in Richter scale are common.

(Source: Chengdu Chronicles Compilation Committee, 1993)

In terms of temperature, rainfall, soil, water resources and geology, Dongshan has rather harsh physiographic conditions. The main ingredients of *Sad Bean Jelly* are peas and sweet potatoes. Thriving in a cold and humid climate, peas are drought enduring, with little soil requirement. Some early maturing kinds take only three months to reach maturity, and are rich

sources of vitamin A, vitamin C and protein. Sweet potatoes adapt readily to soil environments and are easy to store. They can be preserved for a long time in basements, and are effective means to deal with hunger when there is a lack of food. Possible seasonings include salty sauce, garlic water, Sichuan pepper, chili pepper in cooked oil, chopped peanuts, scallions, *Capsicum frutescens*, fermented soya beans, soy sauce, sugar and monosodium glutamate. A salty sauce can be made as follows: Chop halved beans into small pieces and stir-fry until fragrant; add soy sauce, monosodium glutamate and five-spice powder and stir-fry a little more; then use water and soy flour to thicken the mixture into a paste. Five-spice powder contains fourteen spices: *Illicium verum*, fennel, Sichuan pepper, cinnamon, white pepper, galangal, clove, nutmeg, *Radix angelicae*, *Fructus amomi*, tangerine peel, elecampane, rhizome and black cardamom. These herbs and plants have low environmental requirements for growth, and can thus be cultivated in Dongshan. Peppers, especially *Capsicum frutescens*, are added to eliminate the dampness caused by humidity in the Sichuan Basin.

The *Sad Bean Jelly* is made as follows: Peas or sweet potatoes are soaked in water until they swell, then ground with water in a stone mill to yield a thick liquid; the liquid is poured into an iron pan to stew over a fire at a high temperature until the vegetables boil, after which they are simmered over a one-line fire while the pan is stirred with a stick. Finally, the product is scooped out and put into a basin to cool. The main ingredients, seasonings and production methods are all appropriate to Dongshan's geological environment, temperature and humidity. The ingredients are unitary, with readily available seasonings, and the method is simple. As a reflection of the bitterness of life and harshness of environments and living conditions of its people, the raw materials (e.g., recipes and ingredients) for the *Sad Bean Jelly* might thus be said to represent the objectivity or physical part of the sadness.

The *Sad Bean Jelly* has a spicy flavor, due to the use of *Capsicum frutescens* as a seasoning. “Piquancy substances in pepper are mainly capsaicine, dihydrocapsaicin, nordihydrocapsaicin, and high dihydrocapsaicin, among which capsaicine is the main pungency component” (Xu & Zheng, 2007, p.243). The amount of capsaicine in *Capsicum frutescens* is more than twice that in other kinds of pepper (Liu & Chen, 2013, p.299). On taking their first piquant mouthfuls of *Sad Bean Jelly*, diners immediately begin to sweat. Their watering eyes and running noses convey the appearance of sadness. “Sad” is also one of the descriptors frequently used in historical accounts of the Hakka ethnic group.

In terms of the sadness of migration, the history of the Hakka ethnic group has been written in blood, sweat and tears. Throughout their genealogy, the Dongshan Hakkas recall severe hardship and difficulties. “Under Emperor Yong Zheng’s rule in Qing Dynasty, we moved to *Shu* (previous name of Sichuan) regardless of the difficulty of the trek. *Shu* was also called Tianfu in ancient times, home to Yang Ziyun and Zhuge Liang. Our whole family reached Sichuan with great ambitions” (Sansheng Town, no date, *Yan’s Genealogy 2*). The journey was extremely difficult, but it only occupied four sentences in *Yan’s Genealogy*. Most Dongshan Hakkas are migrants from the Provinces of Fujian, Guangdong and Jiangxi. Traveling from Guangdong to Sichuan by land or sea, via Jiangxi, Hunan, Hubei and Guizhou, generally took about three months. The Fan family in Longtansi always offered three salty eggs during ancestor worship to commemorate the arrival in Sichuan of their ancestor Qinruogong, who had survived an oppressive journey subsisting only on such eggs. Zhang’s ancestors in Rongchang, Zhang Yanzhen and his wife, left Guangdong with another three family members in 1717 – the 56th year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign in Qing Dynasty, and gradually accrued more traveling companions on their route overland to Sichuan; eventually, the group of migrants had swelled to 200 – 300 people. Zhang Yanzhen had to stay in Huguang to look after his ill wife while their companions continued their journey. After his wife’s recovery, the

couple discovered that their companions had already rented a boat to enter Sichuan, whereas they had hardly any money left and were forced to walk. On arriving in Baxian County, they heard that their companions traveling by boat had encountered some rapids and overturned with only a few survivors, and felt lucky that they had not traveled in the same boat after all (Huang, 2005). Hakka people in Longchuan County, Guangdong Province who planned to relocate to Sichuan submitted a notice to the provincial government, which reads as follows: “If the Longchuan government supports us and won’t impede us, we will be glad to go by the main road, and we will all appreciate the Emperor’s grace. But if you plan to oppose us, we will have to take the route with high mountains and deep rivers. If accidents happen and we fall down a hill or into a river and die, it will be fate” (Huang, 2005, p.243).

The harshness of migration of Hakka people in the earlier years was also evident from the following archived account.

“We really can’t go back. No one in the universe understands the hardship we experience. We have just heard that Longchuan County has told local government officials in Jiangxi to offer rewards to people who try to stop us. Although we are civilized people, local officials have chased us and treated us badly, as if we were evil. When we lived [in Jiangxi], we always complied with the regulations and merely begged to be set free on our knees. If we are hindered in Jiangxi, we will fight to death. On our way to Sichuan, we didn’t dare to walk in groups. In big towns in administrative divisions and counties, we even had to pass our own homes stealthily and in single file, as we were afraid to be questioned. After that, encountering tremendous difficulties, we had to travel in numbers. Anyway, we all faced the same dilemma with the same attitudes. As migrants, we have to face not only the objective difficulties of a long journey in a harsh environment, but also man-made barriers, which make everything doubly difficult” (The First Historical Archive of China, 1981).

In addition to “sadness” on their migration journey, Hakka migrants also experienced sadness after they settled down in Sichuan. The Huguang people had arrived in Sichuan earlier than the Hakkas (Chen, 2005) and settled on the relatively fertile plains and hilly regions, leaving the Hakkas with smaller areas of hilly and mountainous land to farm (Lin, 1992; Wang, 1992). This put the Hakka people in a comparatively weak position in the ethnic group

hierarchy in the new place (new land). The Hakkas were even depicted as “vulnerable” in the following archetypes of folk legends (Table 2).

Table 2. Four Legends about Hakka People and Huguang People in Sichuan

Theme of story	Development of story	Outcome of story	Carrier(s) of story
Settling in mountains, not on the plain	Conflicting over land and fighting on the plain	Old Hakka man proclaims, “Let the Huguang people settle on the plain and be drowned”.	Land as resources required for life
Loss of text	The protagonist fights for his sister, learning to speak the language of the Hakka people. He pretends to be alone in the world and is adopted by a chieftain.	The protagonist drugs a gate keeper and steals the Hakkas’ sacred texts.	Text as inheritance of education
Speaking only Hakka language	A Hakka lad secretly learns the Huguang language and seduces a Huguang girl. In the end, he is beaten by the girl’s father.	The Hakka chieftain trades the lad back for cargo and punishes him by forcing him to kneel in front of ancestral tablets in public. Later the lad jumps from a cliff and dies. The chieftain prohibits speaking in the Huguang language, as a betrayal of one’s ancestors, on pain of death.	Language as social communication
No marriages with Huguang people.	Daughter of the Huguang chieftain marries one of the sons of the Hakka chieftain. Later the wife commits suicide due to a fight with her husband over a small matter. The Huguang chieftain sends a retributory expedition to the Hakka people.	The Hakka chieftain is tortured to death by the Huguang chieftain, resulting in the following rule: Hakkas are prohibited from marrying Huguang people.	Marriage as family establishment

(Source: Chengdu Longquan District Culture and Sports Bureau (2006). *Longquan Folk Literature Stories* 365. Chengdu: Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House. The theme, development, outcome and carrier(s) of the stories are the authors’ analyses and interpretations.)

The aforementioned four legends provide a series of negative images of Huguang people as fool hardy, unreasonable, bossy and cruel, offering a positive presentation of the Hakka people as tolerant, lenient, kind and strong. The inverse image created by (and of) the Huguang people builds up the “I” image advocated by the Hakkas and sets up good examples

to be learned by the ethnic group. In the process of establishing “Otherness” and “Others,” the homogeneity of “We” emerges and is confirmed (Pan, 2009). Components of daily life such as “living resources, educational inheritance, social communication, and family construction” which are closely linked with Hakka practices, are formulated through the story carriers of “land”, “text”, “language”, and “marriage”. The affinity, acceptability and inheritability of rules are guaranteed through their transmission from mouth to mouth and from generation to generation in the form of stories, which also delivers the living wisdom of the ethnic group in the context of sadness and weakness. The acceptance and inheritance of the strength of the ethnic group cultivated through sadness and suffering before and after migration give individuals confidence to face the future. Suffering provides the requisite “nutrition” for happiness in the future. The Hakka ethnic group memory conveyed by the *Sad Bean Jelly* may well be described as the “historicity” dimension of sadness.

Identity Metaphor – Cultural Symbol as Tourist Attractions

Nowadays, in the process of countryside construction, the Dongshan Hakkas no longer seek to preserve their memories of vulnerability and sadness. Instead, they are making use of the strength cultivated through the “sadness” to ensure that they live better lives. In particular, as Hakka cultural activities become more and more popular worldwide, the Dongshan Hakka, as a subset of the Hakka people, have made their own response. In today’s consumerist society, status is more than merely a cultural phenomenon of ethnic identity; it is a form of capital that confers economic and social benefits. The Hakkas’ practice of identity through tourism is vividly expressed by Uncle Zhang, “The bean jelly was not called ‘*Sad Bean Jelly*’ in the past. It had no name at the beginning; it was only named later” (Luodai Ancient Town, resident interview, 2016). So why was bean jelly linked with sadness? How did sadness represent the Hakka? Who was the first to make the connection?

An inscribed board in Luodai Sad Bean Jelly Shop offers one explanation (Figure 2, English translation by the authors): “The Hakka people are a migrant offshoot of the Han ethnic group, originating from the Central Plains. After hundreds of years away from home and facing troubling changes, they have disseminated their farming and agricultural technologies around the whole country, and even overseas. They get up to work when the sun rises and go to sleep after sunset. When they sit down to have dinner after a day of toil, they are sad because they miss their relatives far away. Bean jelly is originally made by hand: peas are ground into thick liquid to give the soft yellow bean jelly now known as ‘*Sad Bean Jelly*’. The grinding is tiring as much as the eating of it is felt sad”.



Figure 2. The Story of the *Sad Bean Jelly*

(Source: Baidu Image, 2017)

Yang Ming, who runs this shop and invented the *Sad Bean Jelly*, is now a popular figure in the media. He is a Hakka who migrated to Neijiang from Guangdong. In 1999, he managed the Guangdong Guildhall by contract, and at the beginning of 2002 began to sell bean jelly in the hall. During the golden week of May 1, 2002, he officially introduced the name “*Sad Bean Jelly*”, which was well received by tourists. Later, he established branches of his shop on Chunxi Road and in other flourishing regions in Chengdu. Stores from other provinces also wished to sell the product.

Why was it linked with sadness, a name conveying great pathos? In 1999, Yang Ming had been running a teahouse in the Guangdong Guildhall, with little income. In these strained

circumstances, his wife suggested that he sell bean jelly to make money quickly, as bean jelly was a popular snack among Hakkas and his wife had known how to make it since childhood. Bean jelly at that time had neither a brand nor any distinctive characteristics, which made it difficult to sell. Whenever it rained, all of the bean jelly would be wasted, and Yang's wife would cry. Yang Ming realized that the whole experience of opening a teahouse and selling bean jelly had been sad. His wife cried regularly and Yang himself was sad to have left his hometown (Neijiang) to become a sad man in Chengdu, far away from home. So why not just call the product "*Sad Bean Jelly*"? To help customers to make the connection with sadness, *Capsicumfrutescens* was the best choice.

Seen in this light, the *Sad Bean Jelly* intrinsically has nothing to do with sadness; its branding as such was nothing but the invention of a tradition, which is alluded to as ritual, symbolic, and implying a continuity of the past (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2004). The *Sad Bean Jelly* emerged from the memory of sadness of the Hakka ethnic group combined with personal feelings and modern trends in consumerism. Bean jelly, whose main ingredients are beans and potatoes, both nutritious and accessible in Dongshan due to suitable geographical, weather and other natural conditions, was already a popular daily dish, costing as little as 3 – 5 yuan for a bowl, and was thus universally welcome.

In terms of bean jelly's connection with sadness, the first type of sadness at stake is psychological. Hakka culture, expressed through sadness, has a unique and deeply rooted sense of selfhood and self-presentation, clearly forming the identity of "I" and its distinction from Others. The second type of sadness has to do with reticence or reserve: maintaining a low profile that ensures one's acceptance. As everyone is familiar with this sad feeling, it arouses a high degree of recognition from a general affective identification. It also triggers existential curiosity about why humans become distressed. The third type of sadness recalled through eating *Sad Bean Jelly* is physical. First, *Capsicum frutescens* ensures that every mouthful of

the jelly is spicy, making the diner sweat and giving him/her watering eyes and a runny nose, just like a truly sad person (Figure 3). Second, people living in the cold and damp Sichuan Basin have to eat more peppers to widen their skin capillaries, accelerate their blood circulation and enlarge their sweat glands to get rid of the moist chilliness inside their bodies. The jelly's flavor is thus designed to meet the body's requirements.



Figure 3. The Senses of Eating *Sad Bean Jelly*

(Source: Baidu Image, 2017)

The *Sad Bean Jelly* has gained widespread popularity and an excellent reputation; it is very well recognized by “Others”. From Zhaohua Ancient Town in northern Sichuan to Shangli Ancient Town along the southern Silk Road, from the old town of Laitan, east of Luodai Ancient Town, all the way to Shuimo Town in the west, home to Tibetan and Qiang minorities after disaster recovery from the earthquake, the name of *Sad Bean Jelly* can be heard everywhere.

Meanwhile, a war for ownership of the brand was fought. In 2005, Lin Yuanmei, Yang Ming's wife, registered the trademark “Hakka Sadness”, and continues to run a trademark registration project. In 2009, the pictorial trademark for the *Sad Bean Jelly* was registered. Subsequently, in 2010, the four Chinese characters of “*Sad Bean Jelly*” (伤心凉粉) and its

pinyin name were registered and approved for use on the packaging of starch food products, glass noodles (vermicelli), and bean flour. In 2011, Yang Ming initiated legal proceedings against a restaurant called *Sad Bean Jelly* in Jiezi Town, Chouzhou City, run by a Mr. Gan. In 2013, he even engaged in a lawsuit against Jinli, Chengdu for using *Sad Bean Jelly* on its billboard.

Like a physical attraction for tourists, it appears that the *Sad Bean Jelly* has also gone through a sacralization process of naming, framing and enshrinement, and has by now practically entered into the stage of mechanical and social reproduction (MacCannell, 1976). It has succeeded in evolving from the emotional carrier of Hakka culture into a platform for profit from commercial production. Homogeneous competition arising from recognition by “Others” has been banned under the current legal commodity system. Through layers of packaging, an ordinary dish has metamorphosed into a qualified and inexpensive “spokesman” for the “Hakka image”, consigning a foodstuff once common to the ethnic group to exclusive ownership. Neither “Others” nor the “I” of the Hakka ethnic group itself can sell the dish without legal permission, as the current property protection law prioritizes the interests of individuals over shared community memory. The *Sad Bean Jelly* is no longer merely a form of heritage; it is a cultural hegemonic product produced for economic as much as cultural reasons. What was once a salve for personal feelings, and carrier of the shared memories of an ethnic group is now an exclusive product. This is a modernist interpretation of “sadness”.

Resonance Metaphor – Value Induced by Taste

The key reason for the *Sad Bean Jelly* to become a popular dish representative of the Hakka people in Luodai Ancient Town is the value evoked by its taste, which carries a collective emotional resonance. Underpinning this emotional resonance is the following logical path: “spiciness → tears → sadness → hard work”.

Notably, resonance was achieved within the ethnic group. Migrating from one's hometown and settling down in a new place is never a smooth task. To express this painful memory during hard times, Hakka people found a way of converting bitterness into positiveness. First, in their new environment, there was no way to go back; they had to be strong enough to survive. Second, people who have migrated once would find it much easier to migrate a second time, as they have gained experience of overcoming barriers and enjoying success (Hou, 1988). The happiness that comes with success is built on overcoming difficulties. Passing down this experience from one generation to the next may have ensured long-term survival of the ethnic group. In general, traumatic memories are inhibited via two mechanisms: motivated forgetting and critical transition. The hardship experienced by the Hakkas during their migration was unforgettable and indelible, leaving them to live on beyond suffering. Bitterness is believed to be vital to personal growth and ethnic group reproduction. Evolving their rational coping strategy from "sadness" to "hard work", the Hakka people have gone beyond desperation to find hope.

Furthermore, resonance was also achieved outside the ethnic group through collective representations of the cognitive value of suffering. As can be seen from aphorisms such as "no pains no gains" or "the fragrance of plum blossoms comes from the bitter cold", it appeals to common sense to infer that society accepts suffering and even views it as a rich source of nutrition to strengthen an individual's or a group's character. Indeed, the Chinese society, in the process of dealing with hardship, seems to have distilled a cultural gene equipping individuals to fight against suffering. When tourists try the *Sad Bean Jelly*, they gain a collective recognition of the value of hardship from both the flavor of the jelly and the understanding of the Hakka ethnic group it represents.

Additionally, balancing the tastes of the *Sad Bean Jelly* is vital. There was a story of a grandmother who once came to Yang Ming's restaurant to eat her *Sad Bean Jelly*. When she

finished, she realized that her face was covered in sweat, tears and snot. To recover from this embarrassment, she drank a little warm water that she carried with her, only to make her face as red as a beetroot, as if she were unwell. How could the *Sad Bean Jelly* be made suitable for diners of all ages without losing its original and special flavor? Another Sichuan snack called Icy Jelly came into Yang Ming’s mind. The snack is cold, sweet and sour, and is thus perfect for easing spiciness. Consequently, the “*Happy Bean Jelly*” was born as the opposite of the *Sad Bean Jelly*. As the couplets in the restaurant state, “Through hard work comes happiness to enjoy”. From sadness to happiness, the *Sad Bean Jelly* has gained a new level of philosophical meaning and completed its semantic self-evolution, moving from sadness to cultural curiosity, cultural acceptance and finally cultural therapy.

Not surprisingly, for tourists visiting this ethnic community, the *Sad Bean Jelly* has itself become an attraction promoting interactions between the “hosts” and the “guests”. It has evolved from a means of private individual emotional projection into a tool for emotional reorganization shared by the Hakka ethnic group, and has further expanded to be a signifier of community interactions, which thus fulfills the sociality of “sadness”.

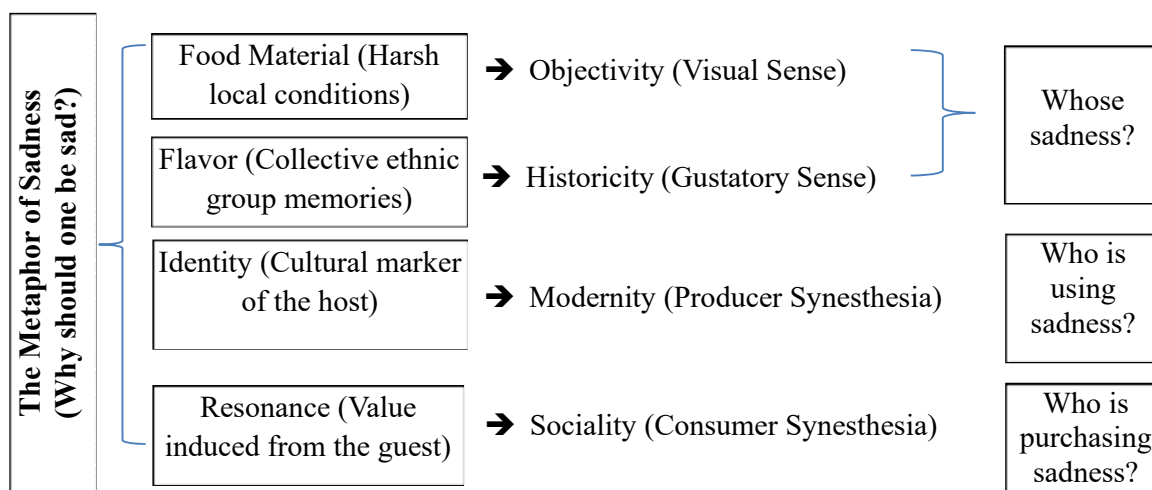


Figure 4. The Sadness Metaphor: A Conceptual Diagram

CONCLUSION

This account reiterates the significance or value of ethnic food as heritage and cultural tourism consumption and its role in the making or changing of Luodai Ancient Town as a place for visitors. The study adopts a sensory ethnographical approach to the scrutiny of sociocultural changes occurred in the Luodai Hakka ethnic community seen from the metaphorical layers of the *Sad Bean Jelly*. The discussion centers around questions such as what constitutes the sadness and why, whose sadness, and who is using or purchasing the sadness, and has resulted in interpretations from the perspectives of objectivity, historicity, modernity and sociality (Figure 4).

Notably, dietary preferences towards the *Sad Bean Jelly* arise from the sensory dimensions of sight, taste and smell, as much as from the social construction of the sadness metaphor underlying this local specialty and community. Since food is amongst the first to gain attention in tourist activities or visitor experience, metaphorical (re)production of its characteristics in a destination or place has been filtered through or shaped by the lived experiences, cultural characters and collective memories of the ethnic group, which are either individually or collectively linked with the “local” and “social” pathways of feelings and emotions. The metaphorical meanings of the *Sad Bean Jelly* as an invented tradition are mapped out, explored and analyzed. A connection between individual feeling and group memory is constructed in the tensions between natural and cultural environments, which allows this Hakka ethnic group to be imagined and characterized as strong and intelligent. Along with commercialization acting as both causes and consequences, this Hakka community has been transforming proactively and interactively from its pure original form into a combination of original identity and structured identity on its way towards new rural development which is currently under way in China (Ma & He, 2016; Yang, 2016). Apparently, cultural tourism and domestic leisure consumptions have much to contribute to the ongoing state of

commercialization and sociocultural change of rural ethnic communities in this country (Su, 2011; Yu, Xu & Qiu, 2017).

Following a sensory ethnographical approach, this study lays emphasis on sensory practices and presentations closely linked with the human body to probe and characterize the rules governing preferences, habits and behavior. While prioritizing one type of sensory or bodily experience over another is to be cautioned against in such inquiries, it is fully acknowledged that “in specific cultural contexts people tend to use particular sensory categories to conceptualize aspects of their lives and identities” (Pink, 2015, p.10). Notably, traditions and values of the Hakka ethnic group are constructed and changing, both internally within itself and externally in the contemporary Chinese society at large. Being a unique cultural constituent, food demonstrates its importance to the daily lives of ethnic groups. It is not only a material requirement for human survival, but also a cognitive system of characteristics and a means for ethnic groups to constructing self-image, identity and culture.

Arguably, in the instance of the *Sad Bean Jelly*, this ethnographic inquiry into the culture of consumption as much as the consumption of culture offers a fresh look at the place-and-food relationship and their combined role in shaping (or being shaped by) tourism to an ethnic community (Hall & Gössling, 2013, 2016; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). Presumably, in a fast developing country powered with technology and consumerism, new trends of globalization have triggered the demand for more creativities and cultural reproduction. As a result, tourism has become an expression or representation of the cultures of ethnic groups in leisure and consumption settings. Food is both a basic need and an important tourist attraction. In the contemporary consumerist context, the *Sad Bean Jelly* has become a “spokesman” for the Hakka ethnic group due to its visual and gustatory elements, connected through synesthesia. The study offers a map of metaphorical (re)production through multi-sensory synesthesia, following a path from ingredients to flavor and from reorganization to

resonance. The dish connects visual and gustatory sensation with the “objectivity” and “historicity” dimensions of the sadness. Under the auspices of today’s laws, the *Sad Bean Jelly* has also been transformed from a dish once shared by the community into a “hegemonic” operation run by an individual. This adds a sense of “modernity” to the sadness, as the ethnic identity constructed through the producer’s prandial synesthesia is no longer purely primitive but both primitive and constructed. The dish is accepted by the majority of tourists because it conveys an optimistic and positive experience of survival through consumer synesthesia that conforms to social, collective and emotional expectations. Tourism can thus be developed by using food heritage to reproduce the memories of an ethnic group, to identify cultural characteristics and survival experience, and to gain insights into the relationships between culture and consumption in an ethnic community’s development (Hall & Gössling, 2013, 2016).

The story about the *Sad Bean Jelly* and its role in the making and changing of the place where this study was undertaken, has both theoretical and practical implications – on the one hand, for more research and knowledge synthesis on this topic in the future, and on the other hand, for destination marketing or managing change of a place for planners and administrators. Notwithstanding, the positions and perspectives associated with this discussion have to be acknowledged. Notably, the authors are of Chinese origin (and one is a Hakka), affiliated with institutions both inside and outside the study site, and tourism academics working along the lines of cultural studies and human-geographical sense-making of place and place change. Their background knowledge and sensitivities to the issues under discussion, as much as their struggling with “insider” and “outsider” positions could all be reflected in this ethnographic essay.

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