

A Simple Analyzation of the Similarity Between the Italians and the Chinese: The Passion for Family and Food

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Abstract

China and Italy are two ancient countries with splendid culture, the relationship between China and Italy can be tracked to thousands years ago. With the globalization of the world in every aspect, how to avoid the misunderstanding and the conflicts in the cross-cultural communication become the extremely urgent need for every country and every people. For long time, in the communication between China and Italy, not only scholar but also common people payed more attention to the differences between two countries, but a good Chinese proverb "seek common ground and reserve differences on certain issue" can be taken as a good instructor of the cross-cultural communication of the new century. How to use better the similarities and reduce the differences is a new challenge of all the Chinese and Italian researchers and the scholars.

Key words: Similarity; Cross-cultural communication; China; Italy

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INTRODUCTION

With the globalization of the world economy and culture, the communication between different nations in different

countries has never been as close and close as it is now. Frequent political, economic, and cultural exchanges are often accompanied by a variety of conflicts, improper handling may lead to misunderstanding and even war. The study of intercultural communication is a new science born with the integration of the world economy, its birth had a radical relations with the rapid development of modern science and technology, also the urgent need of the communication in the ideological and cultural fields between different ethnic culture, all these elements improved the development of the study of the cross-culture. The desire of human being to know each other under the background of the globalization of the economy and the culture has laid the foundation of the study cross-cultural and improved the development of the study of the communication cross-cultural.

In today's world, the communication between different countries is often accompanied by intense conflict between cultures, so we simply will attribute these conflicts between different countries and ethnic to the differences caused by cultural differences. But the author thinks, in cross-cultural communication we should do be that to "seek common ground and reserve differences on certain issue"¹. Eliminating the differences is the highest goal of intercultural communication, but it is very difficult to achieve, then why don't seek between two kinds of culture in common, use the "same" to get the successful communication? Maybe peoples of the world have different color of skin, different cultural background, but are all human being, live in the same world, so actually are family, have certainly the common thing in life, in cultures. As a researcher of the cross-cultural study, our duty is to find the common point in different countries, cultures and use it for avoiding misunderstanding in the cross-cultural communication.

China and Italy are two important countries not only

¹ In Chinese "求同存异"

in the economic field, but also in the cultural field: Both of them are the star in the world's cultural story, and have contributed to the human's story. The friendship dated from thousands years ago, and the communication and cooperation between these two countries is becoming more and more intense, so how to avoid the misunderstanding during the communication was and is, even will be always the center of the communication. Just like Zang Yu in his essay "an exploration on the 'misunderstanding' in the contemporary Sino-Italian relation" has expressed, in the communication Sino-Italian, there are too many misunderstanding caused by the simple separation of "East-West" and he focused on the differences caused by the cultures. But according to the author, China and Italy have much more similarities in the culture, and if peoples of these two countries can utilize in the right way these similarities, the relation Sino-Italian will go much further. So at this essay, the author try to list the two most important aspects of these two countries with the hope to improve the successful communication between two countries.

1. SUMMARY OF THE BACKGROUND OF SINO-ITALIAN COMMUNICATION

China, as a country with a long history of civilization, has a splendid history, for other countries China was in the past and now is still the best representative of the mysterious Eastern countries. With the continuous development of China's economic power, the Chinese nation is rising, in the world political and economic arena, China is playing an increasingly important role not only in Asia but also in all of the world. Under the initiative of "The Belt and Road" the communication between China and different ethnic groups in the world will be more frequent, how to better carry out cross-cultural communication becomes the most important topic for China.

Italy as a direct successor to the ancient Rome culture, but also has a glorious history like China. Italy before the 1870 was actually a geographical term, in this land there were a lot of city-states, and there wasn't no uniform nation. In the second half of nineteenth century, with the waking up of the national conscious, in Italy started the national revival movement, after countless patriots bloody struggle, unified Italy was born.

As the end of the ancient Silk Road, the communication between Chinese people and Italian people can be traced back to the period of the Chinese Western Han Dynasty. After two thousands years, the relationship between China and Italy has never been interrupted: Marco Polo, Matteo Ricci, Giuseppe Castiglione, all have made great contributions to the communication between China and Italy, even to that between the Orient and the Western culture. China and

Italy have built the diplomatic relationship in 1970, even seven years before that with the United States. In the new century, the exchanges between China and Italy have become more and more frequent and intense, including political, economic, cultural and religious fields. And the people of two countries have always the strong desire to know each other, every year the high level communication and cooperation is always increasing, and more and more Italian tourists come to visit China vice versa. All these facts just improved that the communication between China and Italy is indispensable, and it is the common will of two peoples. But the communication between two countries accompanies always with the conflict causing the misunderstanding, how to reduce the misunderstanding and built strong common will be the focus of the scholars of two countries.

2. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE CHINESE AND THE ITALIAN PEOPLE

Family and food are the two most common thing in the world, and also two necessary of life. The Chinese people is famous in the world for the Chinese food but also for the traditional concept of family which is strongly influenced by the Confucianism; so do the Italians, they love the delicious food and also love their family.

2.1 Deep-Rooted Family Concept

To Italy and to the Italian people, many have a considerable deep misunderstanding, as the Chinese, we always believe that Italy belongs to the Western Europe countries, certainly so do the Italians think about the family value, and so between the Italians and other Europeans there should not be the difference, but this opinion is just one side of the coin, actually the Italians are not the common western Europeans like we think, whether judged from the geography or from the culture, between the Italians and the traditional Europeans there is a distinct difference. In China, we have always emphasized the difference of the two countries, but through the study of Italian, the author knows much about Italy and the Italians and found more and more similarities between these two country with a long history.

Italian scholar Luigi Barzini early in 60's of the twentieth century proposed such a view: We must notice that the Italians in many ways have in common with the Chinese people, namely the Chinese people loves to celebrate the festival, they have a complex traditional custom, speak loudly in the public place, they love fireworks, enjoy the gastronomy; love children, in family there are always a lot of kids; they are good at the handmade works and at the commercial and the business.

Not only scholars, also Italian General Consul in Chongqing in China Sergio Maffettone said in an interview:

Italy is the most similar European country to China, in many ways, the Italians are very similar to the Chinese people. For the Italians, the family is a deeply rooted concept that affects all social relationships. And so does the Chinese people, everything is based on the establishment of the family unit. In other European countries or in the United States, once the young kid becomes 18 years they should leave home, and rarely return to home. In Italy and in China, this situation will not happen, people even think that us, Italians could not live without the mother, in fact, it is because we don't want to live too far away from home.

We usually think that the United States as the representative of foreigners, or Europeans, family value should not be very strong, the children who have reached 18 years old will leave the original family, conduct a new independent life. But the Italians are not like this and so doesn't do the Chinese people.

In 2016 on Christmas Eve, the Italian State television RAI made a survey on the reaction of the Italian parents when their kids said to not come home on Christmas: Some young students from the southern Italy were selected, and they made a call to their parents or grandparents, told them that they would not go home for the Christmas, and waited the parents would have what kind of reaction. When the children were very disturbed made the phone call, told the decision for the Christmas, in the first sight, there was only the silence in the other side of the phone, then the parents asked the children what happened, at last the parents cried or even angered and hang up the phone. After the phone call, every young student was very worried about the parents, so they called back, told to the parents that all was just a joke, on Christmas they would come home certainly, all the parents smiled with tears on face, everyone was happy with the results. Such a situation may be unthinkable in other countries, but it is very common in Italy. For the Italians, the Christmas is just like Chinese Spring Festival, all the year round, this is the most important family reunion time, the Chinese people despite numerous hills and streams must come back to home, no matter how difficult, the family must stay together in that special day. As the old Italian saying, "Christmas with your family, Easter with the one who you love." Therefore, on Christmas do not come home and do not stay with the family to the Italians is simply ridiculous and can't be understood. From this view, the Chinese and the Italians are definitely the same. For understanding this reason, just look at the famous Chinese "Spring Transport" before the Chinese Spring Festival, although the Chinese railway, highway and civil aviation never stop continuously improving the capacity of traffic, but it is still hard to get a ticket for a lot of Chinese, everything is just because in the Chinese new year everyone must go home, and stay with the family again. If in China we do a similar survey of the Italian State television, the results would be estimated to be the same.

For such a strong family concept, the Italians have their own interpretation. Italian famous writer Beppe

Servegnini in his book "the Italian's mind" said: At the Italian home, each room has a symbolic meaning, the symbol of the Italian family is in the living room. Here, the whole family sits around and talks about all the problems of the family. The Italian family likes a bank: children are borrowing money from their parents, houses, cars, children.... The Italian family likes an insurance: there is no need to guarantee and terms. If there is a need, parents and family will provide unconditional help. The Italian family likes a career agency: 1/3 of Italians say that their jobs are found through family members. Fifty percent of notary, forty percent of engineers, twenty-five percent of dentists succeed to their father. The Italian family likes a nursing home: retired parents automatically become a nanny, cook, take care of the nephew, water the plant and walk the dog, can also be used to pay expenses of the family with their pension. The Italian family is a shelter, a twenty-four hour non-stop Hotel, one does not need to reserve a seat in the restaurant, you can find what you want to eat at any time. The Italian family is also an information station: Many Italian mothers not only have fixed phones, but also mobile phones, faxes and e-mail for looking for their sons. As a result, Italy does not need an anti espionage system, there are hundreds of thousands of such Italian mothers, the Italians are very safe.

The parents and children composed a family, the parent-children relationship in Italy, especially the relationship between mother and children is very important, just like what we often see in China. Italian men love to say "good mother" because the family takes the first place in the Italian people's life, and the mother is just the core of each family. At home, the Italians have no pressure, no posturing, they don't worry about exposing their shortcomings. They value the family very much, they take care for and love their mothers and children. According to the research, in Italy the men live longer than in others country, thanks to the delicates care of their mothers. Even though the Italians have formed their own families, they have a close relationship with their parents. "Good Mother" is one of the most frequently used words in Italian. This attachment to the mother is a rare phenomenon in other European countries. The Italians spoil unconditionally their children. It is not strange that a Western reporter said with emotion, "How I wonder I would be an Italian child in my next life." For this phenomenon, Beppe Servegnini also explained that the "good mother" did became a label of Italy, many foreigners think about it as a symbol just like when they talk about Venice or the Tower of Pisa, which are all the symbol of Italy. It is true that half of Italian parents live with their adult children, which is only 34% in France, 28% in Austria, 26% in the United Kingdom, 19% in Norway and only 17% in the United States. The "good mother" phenomenon is much more a serious social problem, because there is not enough rental house, higher unemployment, rising cost of living in Italy.

In China, children who leave their parents at the age of 18 are almost nonexistent. Just because, although at this age children have become adult, but they have no ability to feed themselves, most of them are still in school, so for the Chinese parents, they have the common sense that at least they must feed the children to college what is considerate as the first step to let them independent. And in nowadays society, more and more Chinese parents consider the child's work, their marriage and children as their own task. Therefore, in this world, the only thing that can be compared with the "good mother" of Italy is the "good mother" of China.

As two counties one Asian and another European, both have a very different cultural background, why there are many similarities? Behind the similarities, there is the most important cultural factor that influenced the concept of the people of these two counties.

The Chinese and the Italians love the family, but the reason is actually different. In China, there is a famous Chinese saying "when there is the country and then there will be the family", so the Chinese thinking emphasizes the importance of the country and the collectivism; in another hand, Italy was always a geographical term in the history, under the domination of several peoples: the Spanish, the Arabian and so on, there was non unified country in this land, so the Italians treasure their family as a precious thing, and they pay a lot of attention to protect the family, try to keep their families far from the danger, this is a very fundamental reason why the Italian army always failed in the war, because they didn't have the concept of the nation but the radical concept of the family.

2.2 Congenital Gastronome

"Eating in this country is not just about filling the stomach. The Italians pay incomparable attention to their appetite, they will do a lot of research for designing a various and fabulous cookbook for attracting the client. Because of the importance of eating, so they treat delicately everything refer to eating: there is a sequence of eating, which first, which second, and you can't make mistake; the eating time and environment even the feeling should be just right. As for the location and price of food, but it does not matter, cheap or small restaurants or expensive restaurants of famous hotel are all available. There is only one place where the Italians wouldn't go is the restaurant in the tourist area."

The Chinese people is also an absolute master in the field of eating. The "Yellow Emperor" is a preliminary exploration on diet. In the past two years, the famous TV documentary series called "A Bite of China" is very popular among the public, also created a documentary record. Chinese vast territory and abundant resources, each place has its own characteristics and delicacy, which have become the link between these Chinese and their hometown, no matter how time passes, the taste in memory forever will never fade.

As the same, the Italians take a long time to prepare meals, and they will take a long time to taste and enjoy the food. Eating a complete Italian meal takes 4 or 5 hours from the beginning of an aperitif, followed by appetizer, then is the first dish which is often the spaghetti and various pasta, and the second is usually meat with vegetables, and at the end there will be dessert and coffee, if need they can also take some liquor for helping digestion. Such a round down, with the talk between each other, even 5 hours are not enough for a complete dinner, so for the Italians is a very normal thing that they pay a whole afternoon just for eating with family and friends. Such a phenomena is unbelievable in other countries. So does the Chinese people, every holiday is the best time for the reunion of the family, and the best way to celebrate the festival for one family is just eating together and talk to each other, so everything can be done in the Chinese dinner table: life, work, study, business and so on.

Beppe Servegnini wrote also in his book: "According to the research data which shows that about ninety percent of the Italians are the faithful supporter of the Italian food. Similarly, forty-two percent of foreigners said they like also Italian food, followed by Chinese and French food." The same question asked to the Chinese, we believe that one hundred percent of the Chinese people will choose their own home food, so the Chinese stomach and the Italian stomach are all the most patriotic stomach in the world.

Between the delicacy and the family there are always inextricable topic:

As the British "Guardian" reported, for the British youth and their family eating regularly is simply an unbelievable thing, because the British youth is looking forward to freedom and independence. But in Italy, where parents and children eat at least one meal a day, the Italian youth learns from their parents how to use knives and forks, and how to be polite and talk to others. Therefore, in general, the Italian character is more optimistic, educated, and fluent in speaking.

Eating together with the family to the Chinese people is an indispensable thing. Life, study, work, small household affairs, are all the eternal topic in the table, the children at the table learn how to use chopsticks, how to respect the old and cherish the young. Even the adult children come to their original family at least one time a week in China, so the lunch or dinner at the weekend becomes the most important one of the week, the parents will prepare a very abundant table as possible as they can. So, no matter in Italy or in China, eating is important, but the most important is eating with the family. In China maybe there isn't a lot of rules to follow as the sequence of eating, but the Chinese people has extremely request for the material of food and the way to cook the food. Chinese dumplings is considerate as a symbol of China.

Maybe a lot of top dish's name is not sufficient to explain the position of the Italian food, but when one

refers to the pizza, the pasta which are famous and popular in all of the world. Not to mention the most popular Espresso coffee and the Cappuccino coffee can be taken in every corner of the world. But even these simple food and drink in Italy also have strict rules to follow: after ten in the morning drinking a cappuccino coffee in Italy is “immoral” and a cappuccino coffee in the afternoon is absolutely unacceptable, a cappuccino coffee after lunch will do only the Americans. The Pizza is a simple food but you can't take it simply, who eat pizza for lunch is only the university students; the Risotto with meat is perfect, but if there is meat in the pasta it is too strange, of course, if the meat in the sauce there will be no problem; the appetizer can be taken as the second dish, but if the second dish as the appetizer is simply a complete food aficionado.

But don't consider the Chinese and the Italians as the simple one who thinks only about eating. Eating is a way to love the life, even a way to live. So means the family to these two peoples. And between eating and family there is a connection: they are unseparated. Not just the family affairs, but also business affairs can be resolved during a good meal in China, so eating together is a good opportunity to deal a lot of things: such as the friendship, the business, and the Chinese like to say: “Eat well and drink well”.²

There is another thing very interesting: the Italians and the Chinese both like to say some words at the beginning of an important meal, such as “cheers to the health or to the friendship”. In Italy they usually say: “Cin-cin”, and this word has the origin from the Chinese. According to the legend, when Marco Polo came to China, he often heard people saying “Qing”³ when they began to eat, so he introduced this word into the Italian people, and this word keeps the original pronunciation of the Chinese. Such legend there are many others, like the origin of the noodles and the pizza, all the facts just improved that China and Italy have a long long story in their friendship.

CONCLUSION

Many foreigners have jokingly said: the Italians are the European Chinese, because they are lazy, unruly. In fact, this is not unreasonable, in many ways, the Chinese and the Italians have a lot of similarities. All the Chinese and the Italians love their family, pay attention to family and love delicious food; they do a lot of research on eating;

they love celebrating festival, because this is a good opportunity for family reunion.... Of course, between two distant countries there are more differences: the different location leads to different national character, the Italians are more opening with the creative mind. The Chinese relatively is more conservative; because of different economic and political system, the Italians advocate freedom, therefore they are more creative, the Chinese influence by the traditional feudal ideology, behavior and action are more conservative; the Italian culture is a product of the intersection of multi-nationality culture, such as the influence of the ancient Rome, the ancient Greece and Arabia which all have left deep culture brand into the Italian culture since ancient times; China from the ancient period is always a unified multi-ethnic country, Confucianism dominated the Chinese culture. All these factors created a similar but different Chinese and Italian culture. With the globalization in the world, the cross-cultural communication becomes more and more frequent today, how to avoid conflict and confrontation in intercultural communication, has become the common aspiration of all the people who dedicate to the Sino-Italian exchange programs. As an Italian learner and researcher, language is only a tool, and the culture behinds it is the ultimate goal of language learning. Through language learning, after in-depth understanding of Italy, is not difficult to find similarities in the Italians and the Chinese, and these similarities are the most fundamental part of the nation, if we can use effectively the Chinese and Italian's similarities to handle the conflict and resolve the misunderstanding between two countries, the exchanges between China and Italy will go further and the relationship will be deeper and more closely.

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² In Chinese “吃好喝好”

³ In Chinese “请”