

# Exploration of Chinese Buddhist Vegetarianism Culture

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## ABSTRACT

The global food culture is rapidly moving towards vegetarianism and environmental protection, and vegetarian culture has gradually become a new trend in the development of global food culture. The vegetarian culture of Chinese Buddhism is an important part of traditional Chinese culture, with a long history and rich connotations, which has had a profound impact on China's religion, ethics, and dietary customs. This study aims to systematically explore the historical origins, religious ethics, and practices of Chinese Buddhist vegetarian culture, and analyze its impact and application in modern environmental issues. The formation of Buddhist vegetarian culture is closely related to Buddhist precepts. After Buddhism was introduced to China during the Eastern Han Dynasty, it gradually integrated with local culture, emphasizing the doctrines of "non killing" and "compassion", and promoting the popularization and development of vegetarian customs. During the Tang and Song dynasties, with the flourishing of Zen Buddhism, the vegetarian culture further deepened and formed a unique dietary system, including classic vegetarian dishes, vegetarian dining standards, and vegetarian cooking techniques. Chinese Buddhist monks completely cut off meat consumption starting from Emperor Wu of Liang, Xiao Yan (464-549 AD). Since Emperor Wu stipulated that monks should eat vegetarian food, Buddhism has been the strongest advocate of vegetarianism. Many Mahayana Buddhist scriptures explicitly prohibit eating all the flesh of sentient beings and argue for the sin of eating meat based on the principles of karma and reincarnation. Therefore, vegetarianism has established a long-standing Buddhist tradition. In addition, Buddhist vegetarian culture also holds significant ethical and ecological importance. The emphasis on life equality and environmental protection coincides with today's global sustainable development issues. This study will explore the ideological origins of Buddhist vegetarian culture from religious scriptures and historical documents, analyze the enlightenment of Buddhist vegetarian culture on modern dietary ethics, and explore its application value in healthy eating, environmental protection, and cultural inheritance. Combined with archaeological and folk materials, it will explore the important nodes and influencing factors in its development process. With the rise of modern vegetarianism, how can Chinese Buddhist vegetarian culture serve as a bridge to promote exchanges between different cultures and religions? This study aims to comprehensively present the rich connotations and contemporary values of Chinese Buddhist vegetarian culture, provide reference for academic research in related fields, and promote the modern transformation and international dissemination of traditional culture.

**Keywords:** *Chinese Buddhism, Vegetarian culture, Non-killing, Ethical values, Environmental protection, Cultural heritage.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to vegetarianism, people often think of religion. For example, in the doctrine of the Way of Unity, emphasis is placed on cultivating and discerning the Way, which is implemented in terms of diet. The Way of Unity places great

emphasis on the concept of family vegetarianism. In order to achieve their personal mission of debate, vegetarianism has become their most basic cultivation. Most people would also believe that Buddhism should also be a vegetarian diet. In fact, the Buddha originally practiced the Dharma of begging for food, and apart from alcohol, he ate

whatever was offered, regardless of meat or vegetables. However, Indians did not have the habit of eating vegetarian food, and Buddhist monks were not forced to eat vegetarian food. Other countries in Southeast Asia, such as Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Nepal, etc., do not have mandatory vegetarianism. Monks are allowed to eat meat.<sup>1</sup> Since its introduction to China during the Han Dynasty, Buddhism has not only had a profound impact on Chinese society in terms of religious beliefs due to its regional, ethnic, and social characteristics, but has also integrated into daily life, forming a unique culinary culture.

The popularization of vegetarian culture in China began during the reign of Emperor Wu of Liang, who was an important figure in promoting vegetarianism in Chinese history. He used national power to advocate Buddhist vegetarianism. In the "Abstaining from Alcohol and Meat", Emperor Wu believed that Buddhist monks must shape their own image and identity, in order to clearly distinguish themselves from the outside world and the general secular army. This also reflects Liang's belief in the necessity of Buddhist monks rejecting drinking and eating.<sup>2</sup> As one of the core practices of Buddhism, the vegetarian culture of Buddhism embodies the doctrine of "non killing"<sup>3</sup> and has become an important part of Chinese food culture. Vegetarian restaurants such as "Spring Vegetarian" in Taiwan and "Gongdelin" in mainland China are successful examples of the combination of Buddhist vegetarianism and business models. With the increasing emphasis on health, environmental protection, and ethical consumption in modern society, Buddhist vegetarian culture has once again become a hot topic in research and practice.

After the introduction of Buddhist vegetarianism into China, it was influenced by the Confucian concept of "benevolence and love" and the Taoist concept of "self-cultivation", forming a cultural form that meets the needs of Chinese society.<sup>4</sup> The vegetarian culture is not limited to religious believers, but also influences the dietary

habits of the general public. For example, fasting and vegetarianism have become a common social and cultural phenomenon in festivals or sacrificial activities. The rise of contemporary Buddhist vegetarian restaurants is also the result of the combination of Buddhist culture and modern demand. Therefore, research on the vegetarian culture of Chinese Buddhism not only helps to understand the deep meaning and significance of its religious culture, but also provides a new perspective on the combination of religious culture and modern life, which helps to explore its value and function in modern society.

## **2. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE BUDDHIST VEGETARIANISM CULTURE**

### ***2.1 The Formation and Development of Vegetarianism***

At first, vegetarianism had three meanings, namely: eating without effort, raw food (as opposed to cooked food), and daily food. Fasting is a dietary behavior of eating vegetarian food, that is, daily diet. With the evolution of the times, the meaning of vegetarianism in modern times can be roughly divided into two layers: one is food made from relatively light plant-based raw materials; The second refers to a vegetarian diet composed of edible plants. For the definition of vegetarianism, Buddhism and Taoism classify certain plants as meat, such as garlic, scallions, chives, etc. Vegetarianism has become a unique dish that distinguishes between meat and fish, gradually forming a unique development trajectory. From the vertical axis of time, vegetarianism has gone through four periods, namely: from ancient times to the pottery cooking era (without distinction between meat and vegetables); Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties (embryonic stage); The period from the Han Dynasty to the Southern and Northern Dynasties (formation period) and the development period of the Tang and Song Dynasties.<sup>5</sup> In ancient times, in order to survive, people mainly consumed preserved fruits as their food. Although there were plant-based ingredients, it was not enough to prove the concept and ideology of vegetarianism at that time. In the three eras of Xia, Zhou, and Shang dynasties, the practice of vegetarianism was only reflected in specific festivals or times such as

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1. Fang Lianli, On the Origin and Evolution of Chinese Buddhist Vegetarianism Culture. Taipei Dongwu Chinese Online Academic Papers, 2016: 81-107.

2. Kang Le, Buddhism and Vegetarianism. Taipei: Sanmin Bookstore, first version in 2001, p106.

3. The core of the Buddhist doctrine of "non killing" is the clear prohibition of killing in Buddhist precepts (as stated in the "Vinaya", which states that monks should not kill and should cultivate compassion), and vegetarianism has become a specific way to practice this commandment.

4. Yang Zengwen, Sinicization of Buddhism and Zen Buddhism. Buddhist Studies, 2017: 33-37.

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5. Xie Dingyuan, The Origin, Development, and Dissemination Regions of Chinese Vegetarian Culture. News from the China Food Culture Foundation, 2003: 4-10.

sacrificial ceremonies, which showed the embryonic stage of their awareness of vegetarianism. The popularization of Buddhism and the rise of Taoism can be traced back to the Han and Northern and Southern Dynasties periods, when vegetarianism was mainly popular and spread among many religious believers. After the Tang and Song dynasties, vegetarianism became popular among the people, and the trend of eating vegetarian food became widespread. For example, in the Song Dynasty, in Bianjing and Lin'an markets, iconic developments such as vegetarian restaurants and vegetarian banquets gradually emerged. In summary, the development of vegetarianism has gone through a process from the initial non meat and vegetarian dietary form to the sacrificial status of vegetarianism in the upper class society, and then to the popularization in temples, markets, and folk society, reflecting its influence on various aspects such as the development of the times, ideological roots, and social factors.

## ***2.2 The Historical Process of Buddhist Vegetarianism Introduced to China***

Buddhism was born around the 6th century BC in India, when religions such as Brahmanism (now known as Hinduism) and Jainism advocated "non killing" as the core moral principle of practice. These religious beliefs have had a profound impact on Buddhist thought. The doctrine of Shakyamuni: According to Buddhist scriptures, Shakyamuni Buddha advocates compassion, emphasizes equality among all beings, and regards "not killing" as one of the five commandments. Although the Buddha did not explicitly require all disciples to be completely vegetarian, the prohibition of killing and the promotion of the idea of protecting life laid the foundation for Buddhist vegetarian culture. The dietary norms in the precepts: Early Buddhist monastic communities in India followed the tradition of "begging for food in bowls", accepting all food offerings from donors (including meat), but must avoid the "Three Pure Meals" (i.e. killing without seeing, hearing, or killing for oneself). These precepts are detailed in the "Dharmagupta Vinaya" and "Sarvastivada-vinaya", forming the core of the dietary norms of early Buddhist monastic communities. With the development and dissemination of Buddhism, vegetarian culture has gradually extended from religious practice to a wider range of cultural fields, exhibiting diverse characteristics in different regions.

The origin of Buddhist vegetarianism can be traced back to the formation period of Buddhism in India, and its tradition is deeply influenced by local religious culture and ethical concepts. Initially introduced to China through the Silk Road, vegetarianism did not become a clear doctrine at that time. Early Buddhist monks mainly came from India and Central Asia, and they mostly followed the practice of "begging for food in bowls". They did not have strict vegetarian requirements for their diet and accepted any food offered, including meat. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties, vegetarianism gradually became popular as part of the Buddhist monastic precepts. Emperor Wu of Liang (502-549) was an important supporter of promoting Buddhist vegetarianism. He personally led by example, advocated vegetarianism, and ordered the prohibition of meat consumption in temples. This move marks the formal formation of Buddhist vegetarian culture in China. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, Buddhism reached its peak, the number of temples increased dramatically, and vegetarian culture also spread widely. The vegetarian lifestyle of Buddhist monks has influenced the upper echelons of society and the literati class, and many people have begun to accept vegetarianism as an important way of practice or expressing compassion. After entering the Song Dynasty, the development of vegetarian culture was pushed into a new stage, with a large number of temples dedicated to serving vegetarians, gradually influencing folk dietary habits. At this time, Buddhist vegetarianism was not only a religious practice, but also gradually became a symbol of health and culture. With the secularization of Buddhism, vegetarian culture has penetrated deeper into the folk. In the Ming Dynasty, many places began to have vegetarian restaurants, and the vegetarian cooking techniques in temples reached new heights, forming some vegetarian cooking techniques that are still popular today. Until the Qing Dynasty, vegetarianism gradually integrated with traditional Confucian culture in China, emphasizing the idea of "harmony between heaven and man" and environmental protection.

From this, it can be seen that when Buddhism was first introduced to China, there was no provision in the precepts and scriptures prohibiting the consumption of meat. Only during fasting did people adopt a vegetarian diet. However, by the fifth century at the latest, the Tathagatagarbha scriptures with the idea of not eating meat had been translated and circulated in China, such as the "Nirvana Sutra" and the "Lengka Sutra", which

advocated the idea of "cutting off the seeds of great compassion by eating meat" and "abstaining from killing and releasing animals". During the reign of Emperor Wu of Liang, these scriptures containing the idea of not eating meat were further utilized to promote the trend of vegetarianism in Buddhism. In his essay "Abstaining from Alcohol and Meat", Emperor Wu believed that Buddhist monastic communities must shape their own image and identity, which is clear enough to distinguish them from outsiders and ordinary soldiers. They are representative figures in promoting Buddhist vegetarianism in Chinese history, and his ban on slaughter reflects the infiltration of Buddhist influence into social policies. In addition, Emperor Wu set an example by taking a vow with the monks to abstain from eating alcohol and meat, thus initiating the habit of vegetarianism among Buddhists.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, vegetarian culture has developed rapidly in Buddhism, from south to north, forming a rich vegetarian system in Chinese food culture. However, not all monks in the Southern Dynasty had already followed the rule of vegetarianism. The Buddhist tradition of prohibiting alcohol and cutting off meat was not strictly implemented until after the Tang Dynasty.<sup>7</sup>

With the internationalization of Buddhism, the vegetarian culture of Buddhism has gradually attracted attention from Western society. Especially under the promotion of healthy eating and environmental protection movements, Buddhist vegetarianism has been endowed with more modern values and has become an important force in promoting global vegetarianism. Buddhism spread eastward to Korea and Japan, and vegetarian culture also spread in Southeast Asia. In North Korea, the combination of vegetarianism and Confucian culture has formed a tradition of fasting that emphasizes health preservation. In Japan, the "Shojin Cuisine"<sup>8</sup> of temples is renowned for its rigorous production methods and aesthetic values, and remains an important representative of Japanese vegetarian culture to this day. Most Buddhist countries in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand and Myanmar, retain the "Three Pure

Meals"<sup>9</sup> standard of primitive Buddhism, while Tibetan Buddhism, due to geographical limitations, has relatively relaxed requirements for vegetarianism, but still emphasizes respect for life and the spirit of abstaining from killing. From religious practice to cultural tradition, Buddhist vegetarianism not only embodies the spirit of compassion and protection of life in Buddhism, but also has a profound impact on global vegetarian culture.

### **3. THE RELIGIOUS ETHICS AND PRACTICE OF CHINESE BUDDHIST VEGETARIANISM**

#### ***3.1 The Concept of Compassion and the Doctrine of Non-Killing***

Although Buddhism was one of the earliest advocates of vegetarianism, there was a traditional custom of abstaining from killing in India before Buddhism was introduced to China. At that time, it relied on begging for food through "begging along the way", and believers could eat whatever they gave. Tibetan Buddhist monks generally ate meat, and Chinese Dai and other Theravada Buddhist monks were the same. They begged for food by alms bowl, and meat was not ruled out. Although the Buddha emphasized non killing, there are no strict requirements for vegetarianism. In the early days of Buddhism's spread in India, there was no requirement to ban meat consumption. It can be said that vegetarianism is a characteristic of Chinese Han Buddhism. The Buddhist scripture "Vinaya Sutra" Volume 8 says: "If everyone does not eat meat, no one will kill sentient beings. If a person eats meat and there is no food available, they will seek to buy it everywhere. Those who seek wealth will kill and sell it, and those who seek to buy will kill. Buying is no different from killing. " Volume 6 says, "Those who kill are mostly for human consumption. If a person does not eat, there is no killing. Therefore, eating meat and killing are the same sin." Therefore, Chinese Han Buddhism believes that eating meat is indirect killing, and only implementing vegetarianism is the only way to abstain from killing. The principle of abstaining from killing is the direct theoretical basis for vegetarianism, and vegetarianism is a powerful guarantee for implementing the principle of

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6. Kang Le, Buddhism and Vegetarianism. Taipei: Sanmin Bookstore, first version in 2001, p106.

7. Xu Liqiang, The Relationship between Emperor Wu of Liang's Proposal of Making Cut off Meat and Chinese Buddhist Vegetarianism Culture. P15-16.

8. Shojin Cuisine: The name of Japanese temple cuisine, emphasizing the Zen spirit of pure vegetarian ingredients and cooking, aiming to pursue the purification of the body and mind and the harmony with nature.

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9. Three Pure Meals: As seen in the "Dharmagupta Vinaya: Food" and the "Samyuktagama-sutra", it refers to monks accepting meat that meets specific conditions, which was more common in primitive Buddhist monastic communities.

abstaining from killing.<sup>10</sup> The Buddhist concept of abstaining from killing the living, as one of the core ethical values of Buddhism, has had a profound impact on the formation and development of vegetarian culture. In the teachings of Buddhism, life is endowed with extremely high value, and all sentient beings have an equal right to survival. This concept of respect and protection for life encourages Buddhists to actively practice vegetarianism in their daily lives to avoid harming other lives due to food choices. The “Brahmajala Sutra” clearly states that “all men are my father, and all women are my mother”<sup>11</sup>, and this concept of equality among all beings has become an important foundation for Buddhism to promote vegetarianism. Buddhist vegetarianism is not only an adherence to the non-killing commandment, but also a concrete manifestation of the spirit of compassion. By avoiding depriving animals of their lives due to diet, practitioners can demonstrate their love for sentient beings through concrete actions and promote harmonious coexistence with all things. With religious beliefs, one naturally does not reject vegetarianism and can be content with it. As stated in the “Repentance Verses”, “Since childhood, people have various desires, do not understand compassion, and cannot distinguish the cause and effect of their actions. People regard animals as food and take it for granted, without considering their feelings and rights, which lacks empathy and moral responsibility. I have to do this every morning and evening, year after year, when I'm hungry and have to eat, there's no other way; In addition, I used to be young, ignorant, and immature, and when playing, I casually harmed my life. Once upon a time, whether wriggling animals or hidden creatures, there was no one who did not become a sacrifice; If they meet me, I will mercilessly hunt them down. Looking back, there are many types of behaviors in the past; Distant memories of those people and events that interact with each other are difficult to describe in detail... From now on, cut off evil deeds and forever cease the causes and conditions of creating evil karma. Buddhism is everywhere, and as long as there is a heart that seeks the Way, there will be corresponding responses. I hope that with my sincere heart now, all my wishes can be fulfilled.”

Due to ignorance and desire, humans have failed to recognize the importance of compassion, treating sentient beings as kitchen offerings and indiscriminately slaughtering them to satisfy their appetite and entertainment needs. This is because humans lack wisdom and compassion in their growth, causing various damages to sentient beings, including their restless lives. There is also a passage in the “Mahaparinirvana Sutra” where the Buddha explains that vegetarianism is driven by compassion: “The Buddha's words are: A good man speaks to me who thinks. It means that all living beings have great compassion and no desire to kill. It means that Arhat Arhat has an equal heart. It does not mean that Buddha has no reason to say otherwise. In the past, there was a great hunter in this royal palace city who killed many herds of deer to invite me to eat meat. Although I was invited by him, I developed compassion towards all sentient beings.” The Mahayana Buddhist scriptures with compassion explicitly state that one should not eat all the flesh of sentient beings. Chinese Han Buddhism, based on the concept of compassion, advocates not killing or harming sentient beings, and thus prohibits meat consumption.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Buddhists should be able to cultivate their compassion, alleviate the suffering of animals, and accumulate good karma for their own practice. In Buddhist scriptures, vegetarianism is endowed with many positive meanings, such as purifying the body and mind, increasing wisdom, and promoting health. These classics not only provide theoretical support for vegetarian culture, but also provide guidance for Buddhists' vegetarian practice, and sincerely devote themselves to practicing the path of compassion, hoping to be able to sense the Buddha's way and benefit all sentient beings in the future.

Zhou Yong's "He Yin's Writing on Stopping Killing" states: “In the midst of change, there is nothing more significant than life and death; In life, nothing is more important than life itself. Life is very important, and for us, deliciousness is only a temporary enjoyment. We spend our entire lives relying on these delicious foods to get through the long years, suffering from pain and cruel fate, but unable to defend ourselves. Our karma (karma) can last for a long time.”<sup>13</sup> There is also Yan Zhitui's "Yan Family Instructions · Returning to the Heart"

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10. Cao Wenbin, Chen Shenglei, Li Yi, The Reasons for the Formation of the Vegetarian Tradition in Chinese Han Buddhism. Beijing: China Religion, 2010(7): 47-49.

11. Zhu Xueqiang, The Buddhist Concept of Filial Piety. Research on United Front Theory in Inner Mongolia, 2009: 34-35.

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12. The same as footnote 10.

13. Wang Rongguo, Wang Zhilan, Zhou Yong and Buddhism in the Song and Qi Dynasties: Centered on the Hidden House of Zhongshan and Caotang Temple. Journal of Southwest Minzu University(Humanities and Social Sciences Edition), 2018, 6.

chapter discusses the teachings of returning to the heart and advocating for the prohibition of killing, while saying: “Confucian gentlemen advocate staying away from the kitchen because they cannot bear to see animals die when they are alive, and cannot bear to eat their meat when they hear their cries. Gao Chai and Zhe Xiang do not know the teachings of Buddhism, but they are both able to refrain from killing, which is the natural goodness of a compassionate person. Anything that has life, there is no one who does not cherish their own life; To stay away from killing.”<sup>14</sup> These scriptures explain the importance of abstaining from killing from different perspectives, highlighting the core idea of compassion and equality of life. Life and death are related to the most fundamental changes in all things in the world, and life is crucial to every life. However, humans deprive others of their lives just to satisfy their taste enjoyment, which violates the laws of heaven and accumulates karmic retribution, which is chilling. The Confucian viewpoint also points out that the heart of a benevolent person naturally holds a reverence for life. Even ancient people who did not enter Buddhism were able to refrain from killing, indicating that the prohibition of killing is a natural instinct and a duty that benevolent people should do.

The vegetarian culture of Chinese Buddhism is centered around the concept of compassion, and through the combination of the doctrine of non-killing and practical practice, it demonstrates profound religious implications; At the same time, its modern significance in terms of health, environmental protection, and ethical values further reflects the positive impact of Buddhist wisdom on society. Vegetarianism culture is not only a way of practicing Buddhism, but also an important path to promote personal physical and mental harmony and global sustainable development. The Buddhist concept of abstaining from killing and the vegetarian culture has also had a positive impact on society. With the popularization of vegetarian culture, more and more people are paying attention to the rights of animals and the protection of the ecological environment. This attention is not only reflected in personal dietary choices, but also in policy-making and public education at the societal level. Therefore, through the practice of vegetarianism, Buddhists can realize that abstaining from killing is not only a religious commandment,

but also a natural manifestation of human kindness and compassion. They choose not to consume meat as a way to show respect for life and avoid harm to animals caused by meat consumption. This practice not only reflects the religious beliefs of Buddhists, but also demonstrates their deep concern for life. The wisdom and advocacy of these ancient people provide a mirror for contemporary people to reflect on themselves, guiding us to more deeply understand and practice the importance of life equality and compassion in modern life. The Buddhist concept of abstaining from killing and the vegetarian culture has played an important role in promoting social progress and ecological harmony.

### ***3.2 Practice and Inheritance of Chinese Buddhist Vegetarianism Culture***

Vegetarianism holds an important position in Buddhist practice, especially in terms of meditation and physical and mental purification. Buddhism believes that consuming meat can cause afflictions and evil thoughts, hindering practitioners from focusing on inner purification. Vegetarianism is light and easy to digest, which can purify the mind, reduce desires and murderous thoughts, help practitioners maintain physical and mental clarity, further deepen the effect of meditation, and thus help improve their spiritual realm. In Buddhist scriptures, the importance of vegetarianism in spiritual practice is also mentioned multiple times. Since the pre Qin and Han dynasties, the worship of gods and ancestors has been based on the consumption of blood and meat as offerings. In the Middle Ages, influenced by the Buddhist concept of vegetarianism, there was a phenomenon of vegetarianism, where meat offerings as sacrifices were replaced with fruits and vegetables. During the reigns of Emperor Wu of the Southern Liang Dynasty and Emperor Wen Xuan of the Northern Qi Dynasty, even the most important ancestral temple ceremonies in the country were changed to vegetarian cuisine. In the Tang Dynasty, vegetarian worship became more common. The vegetarianization of sacrificial rites mainly comes from the Buddhist doctrine of abstaining from killing, opposing the use of meat and blood as sacrificial rites and demanding a change to vegetarian sacrificial rites, as stated by Zhipan of Southern Song Dynasty, “The king of heaven and earth, so called God, called the emperor of heaven and earth, the most holy to God, there is no sacred and good to kill the life of the prison, willing to move the fishy food? By the ancient custom, the hair of the blood, to be raised, must be the service

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14. Yan Zhitui, composed, Wang Liqi, collected and annotated, *A Collection of Explanations of the Yan Family's Precepts* (Volume 5), “Manage a Household, 5th”. Taipei: Hanjing Culture Publishing Company, reprinted. 1983, p369.

of God, the simple view, had no idea of the rock jail, the stench of the blasphemy also. Is it possible to serve the gods of heaven and earth and the ancestors and to blaspheme them with foul-smelling things?"<sup>15</sup>

Buddhism regards meat as a foul smelling and unclean substance, and using it as a sacrifice will "defile" the object of worship, so it should be changed to a clean vegetarian food for worship.<sup>16</sup> Since the beginning of sacrificial ceremonies, cleanliness has been highly valued, not only in the offerings, but also in the priests themselves. Therefore, before worshiping gods or ancestors, it is necessary to carry out rituals or activities that purify the body and mind. For example, the "Mahaprajnaparamita Avatamsaka Sutra" emphasizes that practitioners should treat sentient beings with compassion and avoid killing, which is in line with the concept of vegetarianism. However, the scripture does not directly state that vegetarianism can reduce karmic obstacles or promote spiritual purity and moral improvement. But in the "Avatamsaka Sutra: Pure Practice", it is mentioned that practitioners should make a vow during meals: "When wishing for all sentient beings to have Zen pleasure as food and be filled with Dharma joy This indicates that practitioners should consume Zen and Dharma joy as their food, transcending their attachment to worldly diets, and thus enhancing the purity of the soul. In addition, Buddhist scriptures such as the Vinaya Sutra mention: "Great wisdom, Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta should stay away from wine and meat, and from killing, which emphasizes that bodhisattvas should stay away from eating meat and killing, in order to cultivate compassion and reduce karmic obstacles. Buddhist scriptures such as the Avatamsaka Sutra state that vegetarianism can help practitioners reduce karmic obstacles, promote spiritual purity, and enhance morality. As Bai Juyi's poem states, "Midsummer fasting month, thirty days to ban the stink. I realized that my heart and bones were refreshed, and my body fluttered when I got up. I realized that the people who have cut off the grains are lighter in their bodies. The first time I can get rid of the disease, long time will become a god. ... But reduce the flavor of meat and

blood, a little clean. Taking off the scarf and recuperating, one can end one's life."<sup>17</sup>

The term "fasting month" mentioned in the poem refers to the three long fasting months of the Tang Dynasty. Influenced by Buddhism, starting from the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, the practice of slaughtering, fishing and hunting must be abolished on specific days such as the three long fasting months (the first, fifth, and ninth months of each year) and the six fasting days (the eighth, fourteenth, fifteenth, twenty third, twenty ninth, and thirtieth days of each month) in Buddhism. In the Tang Dynasty, in the second year of Emperor Wu De's reign, a decree was issued stating: "From now on, no execution shall be carried out on the first, fifth, and ninth lunar months, and on the tenth fasting day of each month. It is advisable to cut off slaughter and fishing in public and private places." From then on until the end of the Tang Dynasty, the rule of cutting off slaughter and fishing was implemented. However, the nationwide ban on slaughtering and fishing implemented in the Tang Dynasty was changed to "March 10th of the year". The original six fasting days were changed to ten fasting days (the first, eighth, fourteenth, fifteenth, eighteenth, twenty third, twenty fourth, twenty eighth, twenty ninth, and thirty days of each month), with an increase of four days per month compared to before. This means that one-third of the days in a year must be cut off from slaughtering, fishing, and hunting. Although March 10th of the year does not require complete vegetarianism, the purpose is undoubtedly to reduce meat consumption by prohibiting killing through the ban on slaughtering. Furthermore, these specific months and days are referred to as "Ramadan" and "fasting days", representing a close relationship between vegetarianism and Buddhist fasting.<sup>18</sup>

Temples are the core places of Buddhist vegetarian culture, and their refined cuisine aims to balance nutrition and simple living. The way vegetarian food is made and served reflects the simplicity and inner spirit of Buddhist practice, symbolizing self-discipline and spiritual pursuit in practice. The production of vegetarian food in temples adheres to the principles of purity and rigor, avoiding the use of stimulating ingredients such as meat, fish, and spices (such as garlic and onions),

15. Zhipan, composed, Shi Daofa, checked and annotated, Annotations on the Buddhist Annals., p857.

16. Tu Zongcheng, Vegetable and Vegetarianism Food: The Clean Symbol and Function of Vegetarianism in Medieval China. Chinese Food Culture, 2024, 20(1): 169-201.

17. Written by Bai Juyi, proofread by Zhu Jincheng, Midsummer Fasting Month. Bai Juyi's Collected Annotations and Proofs, 1988, p445.

18. The same as footnote 17.

and following Buddhist dietary rules. All ingredients need to undergo simple processing to maintain their natural flavor, reflecting Buddhism's respect for "food is offerings". The temple's fasting hall provides regular meals every day, and before dining, the monks must recite the "Offering Mantra" to express their gratitude for the food and encourage their practice. Offering vegetarian meals is an important way for temples to connect with the public and also an opportunity to promote vegetarian culture. The dishes in temple halls not only emphasize simplicity and simplicity, but also contain profound cultural connotations, and constantly innovate with the needs of the times. The abstinence hall cuisine emphasizes the harmony of "color, fragrance, taste and shape". Especially in major Buddhist festivals or when welcoming distinguished guests, symbolic dishes such as "Buddha's Delight" and "Su Bazhen" will be prepared to express the awe of nature and life.

The Buddhist vegetarian culture has important religious and cultural symbols in festivals, and fasting and vegetarianism are the core parts of these activities. Every year on the Buddha's birthday, the temple holds a large-scale charity event and provides vegetarian meals to the believers participating in the ceremony, expressing respect for the Buddha and equal care for all sentient beings. This festival emphasizes filial piety, and believers will do good deeds through fasting, returning merit to the deceased, reflecting the Buddhist doctrine of "repaying kindness with food". At this time, temples often offer vegetarian food that symbolizes filial piety, allowing people to understand the meaning of cause and effect and gratitude. Vegetarianism is not only a dietary choice in Buddhist rituals, but also has profound symbolic meanings: Symbol of purity: Vegetarianism symbolizes the purity of the body and mind. Eating vegetarian food can help practitioners stay away from troubles and karmic obstacles, and is suitable for various Buddhist activities such as ceremonies, chanting scriptures, and meditation periods. Accumulation of good deeds: Eating vegetarian food is seen as a manifestation of doing good deeds and accumulating virtue, reflecting respect for life and the practice of compassion. In Buddhist tradition, it has the symbolic meaning of "accumulating blessings". With the advancement of dietary technology, temple vegetarianism is no longer just about traditional vegetable tofu, but also incorporates modern cooking concepts, developing dishes such as vegetarian imitation meat dishes,

low oil and low salt dishes, which not only meet health needs but also enhance the attractiveness of vegetarianism.

The vegetarian culture of Chinese Buddhism has been inherited and developed in temples, festivals, ceremonies, and modern social practices, reflecting the core doctrine of compassion and non-killing in Buddhism. In modern urban life, the vegetarian culture of Chinese Buddhism has been continued and promoted through vegetarian restaurants. Many Buddhist temples and followers actively participate in the operation of vegetarian restaurants, which offer healthy, delicious, and culturally rich vegetarian dishes, attracting more and more young people and non-Buddhists to join the vegetarian community. A vegetarian restaurant not only provides food, but also plays a role in promoting Buddhist culture. For example, through menu design and restaurant atmosphere (such as Zen decorations and Buddhist music), customers can feel the profound significance of Buddhist vegetarian culture. Chinese Buddhist vegetarian culture has found new space for dissemination in the global vegetarian trend, demonstrating innovative value in modern health and environmental trends, while also facing various challenges. With the popularization of health, environmental protection, and animal rights concepts, the combination of Chinese Buddhist vegetarian culture and modern vegetarian trends has become an important model of sustainable lifestyle and further promoted to the international market. Through continuous adaptation and integration of new cultural demands, Chinese Buddhist vegetarian culture not only continues the millennium old tradition, but has also become an important component of global vegetarian culture.

#### **4. IMPACT ON SOCIETY OF CHINESE BUDDHIST VEGETARIANISM CULTURE**

With the development of contemporary culture and the awakening of environmental awareness, traditional religious vegetarian culture has gradually been combined with new discussions on vegetarianism. In addition to promoting healthy nutrition in modern society, there is also a greater emphasis on animal rights and environmental protection. On June 5, 2009, a wonderful film (Saving the Earth) was directed and released by renowned director Luc Besson. The movie depicts the large-scale breeding of carnivorous animals and the large-scale killing of marine animals to satisfy



human desires. This not only consumes a large amount of fossil energy and increases atmospheric carbon dioxide, but also accelerates the melting of ice sheets, posing a crisis of imminent flooding in low-lying areas around the world. The film mentions the difference in water volume consumed in the production of animals and plants, for example: producing 1 kilogram of potatoes consumes 100 liters of water; Producing 1 liter of rice requires 4,000 liters of water, while producing 1 kilogram of beef requires 13,000 liters of water. It can be seen that the natural resources consumed by humans will pose a threat of global famine to people.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Buddhism advocates respecting life and avoiding unnecessary killings. This concept coincides with the modern animal rights movement and has become the ideological cornerstone for promoting vegetarian consumption. From the Buddhist concept of non-killing to the humanitarian stance against harming animals, vegetarianism is a commendable choice. Modern medicine has further confirmed that vegetarianism helps promote personal health and is crucial for the sustainable development of the environment. Choosing a vegetarian diet is not only responsible for one's own health, but also for protecting the Earth's environment. The benefits of vegetarianism are not limited to the health aspect, but also encompass the concepts of environmental protection and humanitarianism. Studies have shown that taking a vegan diet may significantly reduce the risk of a variety of health problems, including cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, asthma, hypertension and some cancers. At the same time, the benefits of vegetarianism for the environment are evident, as it can reduce resource waste, release more food supply to food scarce regions around the world, and improve the living conditions of low-income populations. The World Resources Institute (WRI) report states that global vegetarianism will effectively reduce the waste of land and water resources, which is highly consistent with the philosophy of Buddhist vegetarian culture. The study by the American Nutrition Society emphasizes that a vegetarian diet has significant advantages in reducing disease risk and carbon footprint, which coincides with the Buddhist diet's advocacy of health and natural harmony.

The Buddhist vegetarian culture emphasizes reducing excessive consumption of natural resources, which is highly consistent with the

concept of modern sustainable eating. The concept of "dietary therapy for health preservation" emphasizes that food should be simple, light, and easy to digest. This health concept has gradually integrated into traditional Chinese cuisine and influenced the direction of health preservation in Chinese food culture. Buddhist vegetarian culture not only occupies an important position in Chinese food culture, but also plays a positive role on the international stage. With the spread of Buddhism, Chinese Buddhist vegetarian culture has also been introduced into East Asia, Southeast Asia, and other regions, becoming the foundation of local vegetarian culture. For example, Japanese cuisine and Korean temple cuisine are both deeply influenced by Chinese Buddhist vegetarianism. Chinese Buddhist vegetarianism has gained widespread attention for its rich cuisine and cultural connotations, especially in the context of globalization. More and more Chinese vegetarian restaurants have become important windows for promoting Buddhist vegetarianism, showcasing the diversity and creativity of Chinese food culture. Therefore, in the context of addressing climate change and food crisis, vegetarian culture provides a practical and feasible path for environmental protection. Vegetarians have created delicious and nutritious dishes, allowing people to enjoy them while also feeling the charm of nature and the dignity of life. In order to provide a sustainable living environment for people's future generations, vegetarianism is not only a personal way of life, but also an effective way to save the earth.

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Research Conclusions

#### 5.1.1 Historical Significance of Chinese Buddhist Vegetarian Culture

Buddhist vegetarian culture is an important component of Chinese culinary culture, and its formation and development reflect the profound influence of Buddhism in Chinese history. Since the introduction of Buddhism to China, vegetarian culture has gradually integrated into society along with Buddhist precepts and compassion, becoming an important part of religious life and social culture. The tradition and innovation of vegetarianism in temples, the festive and ceremonial significance of vegetarianism, and its profound transformation of China's dietary structure all highlight its undeniable historical position.

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19. Chen Rongji, *Vegetarianism/Vegetarian Saving the Earth*. Healthy World, 2018(494): 3-5.

### **5.1.2 Religious Value of Chinese Buddhist Vegetarian Culture**

The Buddhist vegetarian culture revolves around the core concepts of "compassion" and "non killing", highlighting the ethical values of respect for life and environmental harmony in Buddhism. Vegetarianism is not only an important practice in Buddhist practice, but also an external manifestation of religious life. Through specific forms such as fasting, meditation, and the provision of vegetarian meals, Buddhist vegetarianism strengthens the moral cultivation and spiritual purification of believers in religious practice, becoming a concrete carrier of Buddhist doctrine.

### **5.1.3 Practical Significance of Chinese Buddhist Vegetarian Culture**

In contemporary society, Buddhist vegetarian culture has multiple practical values. In terms of health, it not only advocates low-fat, low salt, and natural eating habits, but also provides a scientific health management model for modern people. In terms of environmental protection, the protection of natural resources and the reduction of carbon emissions are of great significance, providing a practical path for addressing global climate change. On an ethical level, by promoting animal rights and sustainable development concepts, Buddhist vegetarian culture has led to a more morally responsible way of life.

## **5.2 Research Limitations and Future Directions**

### **5.2.1 Reflections on the Limitations of Research Scope or Data**

Although this study explores Buddhist vegetarian culture from the perspectives of history, religion, and reality, there are still some shortcomings, such as limitations in the scope of research. This article mainly focuses on Chinese Buddhist vegetarian culture and rarely touches on Buddhist vegetarian culture in other countries or regions, failing to fully present the global impact of Buddhist vegetarian culture. Due to limitations in the use of data, some research materials mainly rely on literature and historical records, lacking empirical analysis of modern vegetarian culture, such as specific development models of vegetarian restaurants or social surveys of followers' vegetarian practices.

### **5.2.2 Suggestions for Future Research Directions**

Based on the above limitations, future research can further explore Buddhist vegetarian culture from the following directions:

- Cross-cultural perspective: In the context of globalization, the development and integration process of Buddhist vegetarian culture in different regions deserves in-depth research, such as the similarities and differences in vegetarian culture between China, Japan, South Korea, and Southeast Asian countries, and the interaction between Buddhist vegetarian culture and Western vegetarian movement.
- Deepening empirical research: Through field surveys or data analysis, people can understand the practice of Buddhist vegetarianism in contemporary society, such as the behavior patterns of vegetarians, the current operation status of temple halls, and the influence of vegetarian restaurants in the market, providing a basis for relevant policies and cultural promotion.
- Innovation and application of modern values: Exploring how Buddhist vegetarian culture can better integrate into contemporary trends in health, environmental protection, and ethical consumption, especially in terms of acceptance and influence among young people.

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