

Examining National Identity Australian Barbecue Culture

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Abstract: Culture is regarded as how a group of people live their lives. There are two main aspects such as the patterns of their social organization and the acceptance of common behaviours in their daily life (Kidd & Teagle 2012, p.12). In addition, rituals and customs also contribute to the formation and evolution of culture. Nowadays, rather than considering culture as a mixture of habits, rituals as well as the styles of living, researchers believe that culture is a product created by specific groups of people in different areas (Austin-Broos, 1984). This paper will focus on the culture and identity of Australians (Aussies) in comparison to the rest of the world. It will discuss how Australian Barbecue culture becomes an icon of Australia. Moreover, it will analyse this unique national identity through different aspects.

1. Introduction

1.1 What is Aussie Barbecue?

Nowadays, more than two third of the Australian Homes own a barbecue grill, according to McWilliams (2011), over 500000 grills are sold every year. Moreover, open-air grills with gas system could be found in almost every park or beach in Australia. Aussie barbecue has its uniqueness in comparison to other areas. Rather than a style of cooking, Aussie barbecue is regarded as the celebration of nations as well as individuals, it becomes an icon for Australian culture and identity. A typical Australian barbecue could be anything from a sausage sizzle in white bread with tomato sauce to elaborate meals involving steak, lamb, seafood and salad. Summer is the best time for Aussies to have an outdoor barbecue.

1.2 The history of Aussie Barbecue

Modern Aussie barbecue has its inception with European invaders in the late 18th century. However, the original history of Australian cooking could date back to 40000 years. The images of the modern Aussie barbecue are changing rapidly. Before the barbecue advertising campaign in 1984 aimed at Americans, primarily, red meat seems to be the only choice. In this campaign, Paul Hogan (1984) said 'throw another shrimp on the barbie' which was invented by the Australian Tourism Commission. Thanks to this campaign, nowadays, different types of food could be found on the barbie plates. However, the stereotype of forever tossing shrimps onto Australian barbecue plate is absurd. In fact, in Australia, people actually eat prawns, no shrimp. Australian barbecue culture is more reflective of the country's resources as well as its diverse ethnicities.

1.3 Different aspects contribution to Aussie iconic barbecue culture

There are three main aspects: culture immigrations, Australian geography and the instinct of Australian.

2. Culture immigrations

By the end of March 2018, Australia reached a population of nearly 25 million. And immigration plays an important role in the diversity of Australian population. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Based on the statistics provided by Australian Government, the main areas of immigrants are

from China, Lebanon, Vietnam as well as Italy. These immigrants bring different cultures to Australia and corporate with national Australian culture and identity, which makes a significant contribution to current diverse cultural Australian society with a more vivid content and value. However, it could be argued that culture immigrations are considered as a major threat to national cultural erosion. (Aew, 2010). Smith (1991) points out that how national individuals distinguish themselves from other nations is the national identity. As a successful multicultural country, culture immigrations help Australia create a unique and distinct culture for Aussies which also promotes Australian economy as well as politics. Back to Australian barbecue, since there are numerous ethnicities in Australia, the types of barbecue food also evolved by these groups. Therefore, it will provide more choices to taste Mediterranean-inspired dishes and Asian-influenced food in Australian barbecue.

3. Australian geography

Besides culture immigrations in Australian, one of the other aspects called the geography of the country also becomes an influencer in building Australian national culture and identity. It is generally acknowledged that Australia always has great weather: blue sky and crystal-clear seawater, which are quite different from the weather in Britain. The majority of Australian population lives near the seaside, especially in the eastern part of the country, which has a strong influence of Australian open-air cooking. There is a stereotype that all the Australian enjoy celebrating and having outdoor barbecue near the sea. However, the fact is that there is an increase that Australian start to consider having barbecue in their backyard for a private ceremony. Additionally, more and more Aussies Prefer the charcoal barbecue since it provides a more attractive flavour than the barbecue with gas system. However, Australian government establish a restricted rule on a naked flame in public areas.

4. The instinct of Australian

Australian are considered as a group of people who always pursue freedom and care about nature. To some extent, they tend to be more extroverted. In addition, they believe that enjoying open-air barbecue near the beach is one way of becoming a part of nature.

4.1 The features (stereotypes) of Australian Barbecue

4.1.1 Aussie has the ability to barbecue in their childhood

In the essay written by Pettigrew (2002), an eight-year-old Australian girl could cook on a barbecue, whereas, children from other countries might not know barbecue.

4.1.2 Holding tongs in the right hand and grabbing a drink in the left hand

Australian love beer, they are more likely to hold something and drink during the process of barbecue. However, the truth seems to be opposite since alcohol is often not allowed in public areas such as parks or beaches. The interesting point is that Aussies tend to be more likely to hold tongs in their right hands even some of them are left-handed.

4.1.3 Males always round the grill

Rhodes (2012) pointed out the women always do indoor cooking and outdoor cooking is the guys' job. Aussie barbecue in association with masculine outdoors represents a method of food preparation that maintains a perception of manhood (Hodge, Fiske& Tunner, 2016).

4.1.4 Sausage sizzle

Sausage sizzle is a community event that brought by Australian barbecue. On Saturday or Sunday mornings, there is always a group of dedicated people barbecuing delicious sausages and raising money for kids and local charities.

4.1.5 Marinated barbecue food

Aussies enjoy marinated meat or seafood for their barbecue, generally, they will prepare these marinated foods at least 2 hours in advance. The flavours are changing rapidly because of the multiple culture immigrations, which provides more wonderful choices for Aussies to enjoy their barbecue summer time!

4.2 Analysing Aussie barbecue culture through three dimensions (Visceral, behavioural, Reflective)

I hold a strong belief that the Aussie barbecue culture has influenced the Australia culture positively and profoundly. Moreover, this culture becomes an icon of Australia and nearly 90% of the Aussies are proud of it. For further expectation, new forms of Aussie barbecue ought to take into consideration to promote this national culture and identity.

Aussie barbecue is not just a style of cooking, but it also contributes to creating a unique Australian culture and identity with broader and dynamic contexts. For example, the experiences of having barbecue create an interacting and sharing culture. Almost all Aussie families have their family barbecues in their backyard on Saturday or Sunday since they regard this cultural activity of family reunion.

According to three levels of emotional design, Norman (2004) asserts visceral, behavioural and reflective levels all contribute to an appropriate design for a specific culture and identity.

In Australia barbecue culture, Blue sky, clear seawater, different kinds of meat, the instinct of adventure and the love of nature are considered as the basement of Australia barbecue culture. Considering the visceral level, Aussies feel quite relaxed in the process of barbecue on the beach or in their backyard. Therefore, Aussies start to barbecue only with red meat in the very early time, which is also considered as behavioural level. With the help of advertising campaign as well as different cultures immigration in Australia, the content of Australian barbecue food becomes broader, which is the reflective level. Based on the research, males take the role of barbecuing since it is a tradition of Aussie barbecue culture (Merrillees, 2013). It would be extremely strange if a woman uses tongs in front of the flame. Therefore, the majority of customers are still male, which is visceral level. Nowadays, the power of women is increasing in Australia, barbecue companies create some barbecue grills which are friendly to women. This process involves behavioural and reflective levels. Last but not least, outdoor barbecue is also acted as an activity of pursuing freedom since Australia was colonized by British in the past. The experience and fear of being colonized contribution to Australian outdoor barbecue culture, which reflects the essence of Australia: Cultural inclusiveness and comprehensiveness.

5. Conclusion

Australian barbecue is a national celebratory institution which contains tribal bonding, religious respect and ritual worship. The image of the Aussie barbecue is changing rapidly, however, the essence of it never changes, this culture brings all the family members together. It is a culture that provides Aussies with a feeling of fighting or being a part of nature even they just stand in front of the flame.

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