***1*** Chinese food culture, also called Chinese cuisine culture, has occupied an important part of Chinese culture in the aspect of cooking and leisure.

***2*** China has a vast territory with a long history. Different landscapes and weathers have fostered different food cultures. That is why China now boasts of the sophisticated Chinese food culture and tradition, which goes far beyond food itself.

***3*** Chinese food also has a very good worldwide reputation. Currently, Chinese food is easily found in every corner of the world, and it has become an impressive and influential symbol of Chinese culture.

**Culinary Differences by Region**

***4*** Similar to “Bread is the staff of life” in the West, the Chinese saying goes “To the people, food is heaven”. But food varies within China. Different weather patterns, products and customs affect the cooking style and taste in different regions. Different foods are fundamental in the formation of different Chinese food cultures and traditions.

***5*** Traditionally there are “Eight Chinese Cuisines” enjoying the upper reputation that consist of Anhui Cuisine, Guangdong Cuisine (Cantonese Cuisine), Fujian Cuisine (Min Cuisine), Hunan Cuisine (Xiang Cuisine), Jiangsu Cuisine (Huaiyang Cuisine), Shandong Cuisine (Lu Cuisine), Sichuan Cuisine (Chuan Cuisine), and Zhejiang Cuisine (Zhe Cusine).

**Using Chopsticks to Nip Food**

***6*** In ancient times, chopsticks were called “Zhu”1. At that time, our ancestors liked to steam or boil food. It was difficult for them to use spoons to dip vegetables in the soup. So they cleverly invented “Zhu” to nip food, thus it has become the most convenient tableware in their lives. Development of chopsticks has experienced a long history. Early in Xia Dynasty (21st-17th century BC), the shape was still in development. Chopsticks only became two sticks of the same length in the Shang Dynasty (17th-11th century BC). In the late Shang Dynasty, the tyrannical King Zhou ordered his craftsmen to make chopsticks from elephants’ teeth, which were seen as the most luxurious in the early history of Chinese food culture.

***7*** The appearance of chopsticks said goodbye to those days when our Chinese ancestors had to use their hands to eat, so it featured the coming of civilization to food culture. The invention has many scientific theories. The lever principle of mechanics was applied into practice. The point where two sticks crossed is the pivot of the lever.

***8*** Chinese people are familiar with the use of chopsticks. Many foreigners are interested in but also puzzled about how to use them with facility. Here are some notes you’d better remember when you use them. First, you must hold the upper part and don’t cross it. Second, hold it with your thumb, index finger, middle finger and third finger. One stick is against your third finger and the other leans on your middle finger. Third, when you pick vegetable or meat in the dishes, use your index finger and middle finger to control the sticks.

***9*** Nowadays, chopsticks serve many new functions besides tableware. For example, you can buy a pair as a gift to your friends and relatives. In Chinese, it reads “kuaizi”, which means “to have sons soon”, so a newly-married couple will be very happy to accept it as their wedding gift. Skillful craftsmen painted beautiful sceneries on chopsticks to make them fine artworks. Many people love to collect them as their treasure.

**Eating with the Seasons**

***10*** What you eat depends on what season it is. Eating with the seasons is regarded as one of the important features of Chinese food culture. Let the natural backdrop of spring, summer, autumn and winter be your guide.

● In spring, focus on tender and leafy vegetables that represent the fresh new growth of this season.

● In summer, stick with light and cooling foods in the tradition of traditional Chinese medicine.

● In autumn, select the warming autumn-harvest food. Also emphasize the warming spices and

seasonings, including ginger, peppercorns and garlic.

● In winter, even more exclusively turn toward more warming food. All of the animal foods fall into the warming category. Eggs also fit in here, as do corn and nuts.

**The Excellence in Color, Shape, Aroma & Taste**

***11*** Chinese cuisine is famous for its excellence in color, shape, aroma and taste, which is one of the features of Chinese food culture.

***12*** All Chinese chefs strive for the harmony of sight, smell, taste, and texture so that each individual dish has its unique features highlighted. The flavors must not overpower, yet be subtle enough to meet the tastes of those dining.

**Chinese Food Symbolism**

***13*** In China, food is given particular meanings, so that a type of food can only be eaten by some specific individuals on certain occasions, or must be eaten on specific occasions.

***14*** The symbolic significance of a food may be based on its appearance or on how the Chinese word for it sounds. Here are some symbolic Chinese foods:

● Noodles: Noodles are a symbol of longevity in Chinese culture. The Noodles of Longevity are a

must in accordance with Chinese custom for the seniors’ birthday celebration.

● Eggs: Eggs symbolize fertility in Chinese cuisine culture. Traditionally, during a baby’s first month birthday celebration, parents may serve round hard-boiled eggs painted in red to announce the birth.

● Fish: On New Year’s Eve it is customary to serve fish for dinner, symbolizing the wish for accumulations of prosperity and wealth in the coming year.

● Dumplings: Dumplings imply the end of the old year and the beginning of the new year. During the Spring Festival, Chinese families usually get together and have dumpling parties.

● Ducks: Ducks represent fidelity in Chinese food culture, which are a must for a Chinese wedding banquet.

● Chicken: Chicken is one of the most popular foods at Chinese New Year, symbolizing a good marriage and the coming together of families, and serving the whole bird emphasizes family unity.