



## STATUS OF ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF CHINESE DISH NAME AND ADAPTABILITY ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to discuss English translation of Chinese dish name in cross-cultural perspective by listing the most characteristic Chinese dishes and introducing language and cultural characteristics of Chinese dish name. First, background that causes the difference of Chinese and western food culture as well as the content of difference were discussed, followed by diet concept, social cultural implication, category and structure of raw materials and naming features of dish. Then based on the status of study on translation of diet name and the existing problems, necessity of translation standardization of dish name as well as principles, methods and contents were analyzed. Moreover, we discussed over English translation of Chinese dish name in intercultural communication context and under adaptability theory. At last, we pointed out the limitation of these English translation method, put forward the importance of transliteration and advised translators to show subjectivity.

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### 1. Introduction

Language and culture are interdependent and integrated. As the important carrier of culture, language can reflect the difference of geographical environment, history, custom and concept of English countries and China. Language can not only reflect wonderful history and culture, but also express different living approaches and thinking pattern. Chinese language has been existed for a extremely long time. With the expansion of Chinese territory and development of trade in Han and Tang dynasty, Chinese characters were spread to other countries and produced certain effects on East Asia and Southeast Asia (Junun, 2013). In the interview for the original editor of Language and Characters Newspaper, Du Yongdao, Dingyangyang said that, Chinese Word Sea Dictionary published by Zhonghua Book Company and Chinese Friendship Press in 1994 including 85, 568 characters is a dictionary collecting the most characters

(Yangyang, 2013). Compared to millions of English words, Chinese characters are of relatively small amount, but the meaning and culture implied is rich and distinctive. Chinese dish name is the most example. Chinese dish name is neat and orderly in form and distinctive in content, though it is simple; thus it is worth being concerned and studied.

American communication scholars Potter and Samovar believe that, the best explanation for intercultural communications is different recognition of social objects caused by culture difference (Manqiong, 2007). Moreover, Nida once said that, translation is communication (Lili, 2008). Translation of Chinese dish name not only involves simple conversion of Chinese and English words, but also is cross-cultural communication. Low efficiency of spread of Chinese catering industry oversea caused by low translation quality severely weakens international competitiveness of Chinese catering industry, and insufficient

understanding of ultimate objective of catering spread of translators goes against adjustment and optimization of national economical industry structure, which greatly blocks overall comprehensive development of economy; oversea spread of Chinese diet culture has not influence the world as expected (Xin, 2010; Xin, 2009; Xin, 2012). A key factor that determines the success of development of catering enterprise oversea is whether the concept insisted by the enterprise can be popular among foreign public which depends on the way expressing information of dish and foreign cultural emotional appeal by authentic target language.

Thus this study attempted to explore principles, method and strategy of translating Chinese dish name as well as status, adaptability and importance of translation standardization in intercultural perspective.

## **2. Difference of food culture between China and western countries**

Chinese food culture is well-known, and about two thousand dishes are developed from folk flavor (Xiaowen and Yifan, 2014). Western dish emphasizes nutrition of food and focus less on color, smell and form of dish. In cooking process, western dish lays emphasis on keeping nutritional component of raw materials; therefore, western catering is considered to be rational compared to Chinese dish which stresses sensory stimulation. On the contrary, sensuous Chinese catering excessively pursues for delicacy and beautiful form of dish and even ignores original color and flavor and nutritional component of raw materials. In Chinese food culture, eating is endowed rich cultural connotation by Chinese people and implies deep social significance that reflects national cultural psychology and recognizes the world, while western people consider eating as a behavior that ensures the normal operation of body. Raw materials of Chinese dish are diversified and not contraindicated, while some materials in western world are contraindicated due to humanity and history factor.

Difference of naming of Chinese and western dishes include the following points. First, Chinese dish is usually named considering rhyme and name structure matching as well as significance; naming of western dishes focuses on the complete expression of dish information, i.e., reality. As to food processing, Chinese dish pay great attention to diversity of matching of main ingredients and auxiliary materials and means of processing raw materials such as cutting, chopping, splitting, scraping as well as scaling, peeling, shelling and triturating. As to cooking method, Chinese dish emphasizes use of fire and dosage of seasoning, while western dish pay less attention on that. Main course, especially specialty (meat dish), is usually put on the most striking position of most menus used in Chinese restaurant, followed by stir-fry dish, cold dish, soups, snacks, drinks. Western dish menu usually put appetizers first, followed by soups, salads and entrees. Drinks are listed separately. As China is in line with the world, design of many Chinese menus gradually refers to western menu.

## **3. Standard of Chinese dish name translation in intercultural communication**

### **3.1 Status of research of Chinese dish name translation**

Nonstandard translation of Chinese dish name is common in translation activities in intercultural communication. Dish is often translated into different names as there is no reference to be used. Name of dish may be widely divergent even in different restaurants in the same area. Method of translation is also diversified, including transliteration, free translation and innovated translation. If not to be controlled, unified translated name will damage the image of Chinese culinary culture. Translated names that are used under different contexts are significantly different in word and structure now, which is hard for foreign people to know the dish translated into different names under different context.

### 3.2 Problems existing in name translation standard and the necessity

Appropriateness of translation of Chinese dish name remains to be enhanced. Blind translation should be avoided as it is bound to cause misunderstanding for translated names. The severest problems of intercultural communication of Chinese dish name is the disordered use of translated names and a unified and standardized translation method and term use principle has not formed. Translators with different theoretical level, practical experience and different view on translation objective will translate dish name in different ways, thus cause disordered translated names. Next we will analyze a piece of words from a paper On the Translation of Featured Dishes in Kangba (Rong, 2010) “dish name composed of cooking method and raw materials can be translated using literal translation, i.e., translating corresponding cooking method or cutting technique, then taking main materials as center word, and finally connect juice with preposition in or with”; with such a formula, most Chinese dish names can be translated, such as Kaoruzhu (roast suckling pig), kaoji (roast chicken), kaoquanyang (roast mutton), xunniurou (smoked beef), ..., ganchaoniurou (stir-fried yak shred), ganbianjiangdou (stir-fried cow pea), yangcongroupian (fried sliced beef with onion), hongshaoniurou (braised beef with brown sauce), ganbanniushe (Ox tongue in chili sauce), qingjiaoniurou (stir-fried shredded beef with green pepper), ...”. On the premise of using the formula, the author translated the cooking method “kao” in the first three dishes into “roast”. Here, the “roast” is not a verb but an adjective referring to being made by roasting. However, cooking method of the latter dishes “xun”, “chao” and “shao” is translated into “smoked”, “fried” and “braised”, past participle of three verbs. By doing this, pre-and-post consistency of translation cannot be kept under one translation principle. Such translation formula is not beneficial to establishment of translation principle of

Chinese dish name, let alone the establishment of translation standard for Chinese dish name.

### 3.3 Principle, method and content of translation standard

This study suggests to achieve standardization and unification of Chinese dish name translation with transliteration in intercultural communication of dish name. English name of every dish followed by several words of explanation and annotation is bound to lower ordering speed and affect economical benefits. Therefore, it is necessary to add explanation after dish name that emerges in the first time; and for those dish names that has been used for several years, explanation is not required. For example, like pot sticker and chow mein, spring rolls, Dan Dan noodles, Wonton, Beijing roast duck, general tso’s chicken or governor Tso’s chicken have been adopted and popular in Chinese restaurants over the world. Thus it is unnecessary to add explanation after dish name.

Transplanting word symbol or voice of source language into translated text breaks through the barrier of word symbol and lead readers to recognize and understand in the language and cultural environment of source language (Xin, 2010). Dissimilation value of transliteration only exists in language level. In the perspective of language, transliterated word is alienated; while in the perspective of culture, cultural meanings attached on terms mostly lose (Zhipei and Yunxiang, 2013). He Wu (Wu, 2010) once detailedly discussed over translation of Chinese dish name, especially foreignization and domesticating strategy and emphasized concerning about the relationship between dish names, culture and translation strategy, but he has not make an analysis of status of English translation of Chinese dish name as well as a detailed exploration of Chinese dish names of different types. The most appropriate words used to express special flavor of dishes, i.e., taste, smell and color should be found out from target language. For example, “cui” has corresponding words “crisp” and “crispy” in English and use of these

two words are usually mixed as they can be adjective and noun. Structure paradigm of Chinese dish translated name refers to the components that standard Chinese dish translated name should be included. To spread Chinese language and cultural characteristics more effectively, both realistic and impressionistic translated dish name can adopt the standard structure of “transliteration+annotation/explanation”. Explanatory translation can make western people understand the specific cultural imagery characteristics in Chinese language.

#### **4. Adaptability theory**

##### **4.1. Adaptability of transliteration of impressionistic dish name**

Yuan Na proposed multiple translation methods for Chinese dish names and detailedly discussed naming pattern and word formation means of English translation of Chinese dish name. She believed that, realistic dish names are mostly word group consisting of a modifier and the word it modifies and centers on noun, which is hard to operate (Na, 2012). The reason why impressionistic Chinese dish name is interesting is that, those names sounds elegant and contains a large amount of Chinese literary quotations, historical events, idioms, folk adage and proverbs and rhetorical device. When transliteration cannot give target audiences with enough information, it would be well to freely translate the dish name referred by impressionistic words with realistic translation. Transliterated words that have been entered English and accepted by English readers is few, though phonetic Chinese alphabet and English letters both belong to latin letter. Transliteration can maintain Chinese cultural elements implied in dish name to the largest extent indeed and arise readers' curiosity; however, transliterated words that have not been accepted by target audiences, such as Lvdagunr, Aiwowo and Long Kudou emerging without any explanation will confuse readers and make them unwilling to spend much energy and time on understanding Chinese dishes and Chinese

culture contained in the names and even produce psychological resistance.

##### **4.2 Adaptability of compound Chinese dish name in intercultural communicative translation**

Compound dish name refers to dish names composes of main materials as well as metaphor, metonymy and exaggeration words for modifying auxiliary material, cooking method, shape and texture or those containing people's name and place name. It contains humanity of impressionistic dish name as well as actual connotation of realistic dish name. Besides several dish names that can be freely translated, others require to be added with explanation to make people understand information and culture therein. That also can be seen in western menu, for example, “Buffalo Shrimp - Crisp, golden brown fried shrimp tossed in a mild or hot Buffalo shrimp” and “Mediterranean Shrimp Pasta - broiled shrimp are served over tender linguini pasta in a basil pesto cream sauce, Topped with fresh Mediterranean tomato bruschetta” (Yingfang, 2012). It can be noted that, the way elaborating translating dish name in western dish, i.e., free translation of place name + main ingredient + explanation” is useful for translation of Chinese dish in intercultural communication. For instance, “Beijing kaoya” can be translated into “Beijing Duck---Beijing famous food, pulp delicate, flavor mellow & fat but not greasy”, “Yangzhou Chaofan” into “Yangzhou Fried Rice or Yangzhou Chaofan - Yeung Chow Egg-fried Rice, healthy & tasty” using this principle. Dish name named by people's name can also be translated like that, for example, “dongporou” can be translated into “Dongpo Pork - Inspired by Su Dongpo, the greatest poet & calligrapher in Song Dynasty”. Dish name expressed in such form is concise and comprehensive, highlighting regional characteristics and informing people with the cooking method, raw materials, eating method and quality of dishes.

## 5. Conclusions

Chinese dish as a means for delivering information and culture plays an important role in external exchange. Translation of Chinese dish name plays a unique role in catering culture guided by words. Translation of Chinese dish should use proper method considering the characteristics of dish name and eating environment and pay attention to cross-cultural awareness. Accurate and authentic Chinese dish name translation can not only express the cooking method and characteristics of dishes but also promote Chinese catering culture to go onto the world stage. However, the study has a limitation, i.e., cross-cultural awareness cultivation in Chinese dish name translation still remains in theory and idea, and whether it can produce better effect requires to be further analyzed in practice.

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