

# Study of English Translation of Quzhou Food Names From the Perspective of Intercultural Communication<sup>\*</sup>

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Food culture is an important part of Quzhou characteristic culture. The name of food contains rich local historical and cultural information and plays an indispensable role in Quzhou cultural construction. For Quzhou, although all sectors of society are committed to the cultural construction of “Dynamic New Quzhou and Beautiful Garden”, it is obvious to find a rather weak awareness of food culture publicity translation as a result of insufficient attention to the potential value of English translation. This paper introduces some historical stories of Quzhou food followed by analyzing the existing problems in the process of English translation from a cross-cultural perspective. Finally, it explores some viable translation strategies, such as literal translation, literal translation annotation for translating Chinese food names into English to better promote Quzhou culture.

*Keywords:* Quzhou food, translation, intercultural communication

## Introduction

Food name is an important material carrier of Quzhou food culture and reflects Quzhou local characteristic culture. In cross-cultural communication, how to translate food names has become an important topic. Therefore, it is of great significance to study the long history of Chinese food culture and explore its translation skills. Quzhou is a modern city, located in the west of Zhejiang Province and close to the other three provinces. It has the title of the border central city of four provinces, and is rich in tourism resources and food culture. Doing a good job in the translation of local specialties can not only better show the world Quzhou's long-standing traditional culture, but also promote the development of local catering economy. However, in the investigation, the author found that there are many problems in the translation of many local cuisines in Quzhou, such as vocabulary vacancy, nonstandard spelling, lack of cultural connotation, and so on, and some foods even have no translated names.

At present, there are many studies on English translation of food, and many experts and scholars give unique translation characteristics. For example, Zhang Qiannan (2016) pointed out that the translation cases about culture gaped words, like the noun, advertisements, and verbs related to food and cooking, the translation of some place names which are closed related to food cultures. Zhang Zhenjiu and Sun Jianmin (2009) believed that literal translation can maintain the cultural characteristics of the source language and promote the diversity

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of language expression and style (pp. 238-241). Zheng Jianjun and Lin Luoling (2011), scholars, combined with functional skopos theory, believe that the menu belongs to the text of “information + call”, and the expected translation function is to let foreigners understand the information and deep-seated culture (pp. 75-76). Wen Yue’e (2008) proposed that the expected function of cultural allusions translation of Chinese dish names is to reproduce the various functions of the original text in the source culture in a new cultural environment (pp. 104-106).

These studies have their own merits. After absorbing the above new translation views, this paper points out three universal problems in the English translation of Quzhou food. The author selects the five most representative Quzhou foods, deeply excavates the cultural connotation behind them, and translates them into English together with the name of food, so as to add the English translation content of Quzhou food and better spread Quzhou food culture. This paper will elaborate from three aspects: the cultural background of five representative Quzhou foods, the existing problems in translating Quzhou food, and the specific English translation strategies of Quzhou food.

### **Five Special Foods and Their Cultural Background in Quzhou**

Quzhou has been known as the “ancient city of gourmet food” since ancient times. It is rich in many delicious foods that people forget to return, and these delicious foods have their own historical origins and abundant historical connotation. These special foods have even been promoted to other provinces and greatly appreciated by tourists from all over the world. Here, the author will choose the five most distinctive delicacies to introduce their cultural background.

#### **Specialty: Jiangshan Rice Cake**

This specialty, just as its name implies, originates in Jiangshan, a town in Quzhou. Jiangshan rice cake is one of the traditional characteristics of Jiangshan cakes, which contains the significance of rising step by step and good wishes. Making rice cakes is a traditional custom of the Spring Festival in Jiangshan rural areas. After the beginning of winter every year, families begin to prepare the raw materials for making rice cakes. At the end of the New Year, housewives take out their ancestral skills and carefully cook all kinds of cakes and delicious food to entertain relatives and friends. Like Jiangshan people, Jiangshan rice cake in the past gave people the biggest impression of being “hard”.

#### **Specialty: Three Heads and One Paw**

This specialty, just as its name implies, originates in Qujiang District. Quzhou three heads and one palm (rabbit head, duck head, fish head, and duck paw) is a local characteristic food in Quzhou, among which the most representative is rabbit head. Its meat is delicate and loose, with high protein, low fat, low cholesterol, as well as phosphorus, calcium, vitamins, and lecithin and other effective ingredients, which is conducive to the health and metabolism of skin and mucous, so it is called “beauty meat” and “healthy meat”. Quzhou has a long history of three heads and one palm. In the 1950s, a poor man set up a “spicy rabbit head” stall at his door in order to subsidize his family. Spicy rabbit head was cheap and delicious, and became popular in Quzhou. It was not until the early 1990s that the duck head and rabbit head really “caught fire”, and the resulting fish head and duck paw spread all over the country.

#### **Specialty: Shuangqiao Dried Vermicelli**

This specialty, originates in Qujiang District. Shuangqiao Dried Vermicelli is popular in the streets of

Quzhou City and is one of the favorite delicacies of Quzhou people. According to historical records, Shuangqiao Dried Vermicelli began in the Ming Dynasty and has a history of more than 500 years. Zhou Zhao, a scholar in the Qing Dynasty, spoke highly of Shuangqiao Dried Vermicelli in his book *Shuangqiao Essays*. The pure Shuangqiao Dried Vermicelli is dry, jade white, delicate, crystal clear, and boiled for a long time. It tastes soft, smooth, and fragrant. It is insatiable, and is deeply favored by consumers from everywhere.

#### **Specialty: Kaihua Steamed Cake**

This specialty, just as its name implies, originates in Kaihua County. Kaihua steamed cake is a special snack in Kaihua County, Quzhou City. When countless civilized people leave their hometown, the first thing they want to eat is the steamed cake with moderate glutinous, white, crystal, soft, and elastic. There are many kinds of ingredients for the steamed cake, such as dried silk, dried bamboo shoots, shrimp skin. Especially on the 15th day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar (also known as “Ghost Festival”), every household in Kaihua has to make several cages of steamed cakes, which is a necessary offering for people to worship their ancestors. This custom has continued to this day. Steamed cake is not only an ordinary food, but also a hometown memory, carrying the strong friendship of civilized travelers.

#### **Specialty: Changshan Suo Mian**

This specialty, just as its name implies, originates in Changshan County. Suo Mian is a kind of plain noodles pulled by hand and dried. It is commonly known as “longevity noodles”. It is as white as silver and as fine as hemp thread, and slightly salty. Toss in the boiling water for a moment, you can start the pot, put in the white lard, sprinkle some green onions, ginger, minced garlic and chili sauce, and scoop a small spoonful of soy sauce and vinegar. In an instant, you have “color, shape, aroma and taste”. Suo Mian, also known as silver silk tribute noodles, was paid as a tribute to the royal family in the Ming Dynasty. It is said that this is related to Yan Song, the Prime Minister of the Ming Dynasty. When the emperor drove to the prime minister’s residence, Yan Song received the Suo Mian given by others when he went to Beijing for the examination. After tasting it, the emperor was full of praise and immediately ordered it to be listed as a tribute, named “silver tribute noodles”. From then on, “silver tribute noodles” became famous and unique.

### **Existing Problems in Translating Quzhou Food**

We will marvel at the rich and colorful food of Quzhou. Moreover, the Chinese name of Quzhou food is not only easy to understand, but full of connotation. However, after looking for some food books and documents, we found that there is a serious lack of English translation of Quzhou food, most of which are vacant in English translation, and there are also some phenomena of mistranslation and omission. Then we will focus on three existing problems in the English translation of Quzhou food.

#### **Vocabulary Vacancy**

Many scholars have explored their translation strategies from a macro perspective, such as a study on the translation strategies of words with Chinese characteristics from the perspective of cultural globalization (Jing, 2016), a study on the English translation methods and strategies of words with Chinese characteristics (Zhang & Liu, 2017). Although some works have studied the English translation strategies of words with Chinese characteristics from the micro aspects of vocabulary vacancy, they mostly focus on the analysis of reasons. Because there are great differences between Chinese and English, it is often difficult or even impossible to find completely equivalent lexical expressions for some things in Chinese in English. In addition, Quzhou cuisine is

rich in raw materials, diverse systems and uses dialects when naming, which makes lexical vacancy an inevitable problem in the translation of Quzhou food. For example, take “Longyou Sponge cake” as an example. Its name comes from dialect and refers to a special cake. Due to different eating habits, there is no corresponding food in western culture, so there is no corresponding English noun. “Sponge cake” is a traditional Chinese food. Its production process is not only complex, but also exquisite in its eating process, which requires us to be close to its local characteristics and easy to be accepted by English readers.

### **Nonstandard Spelling**

In view of the problem of translation norms, Chesterman explained that translation is the survival carrier of memes spreading across cultural boundaries. Moreover, he also introduced Dawkins’s meme concept into translation studies, and “the concepts or viewpoints about translation itself and translation theory are collectively referred to as translation memes. A large number of translation memes, translation meme variants or translation meme complexes exist in the center of translation meme library” (1993, p. 5). He regards translation studies as a branch of Memetics and tries to explain the problems raised by translation with Memetics. Memetics is a relatively macro theory. For the discussion of food names in this article, the author only discusses the two small points of nonstandard spelling and word order.

There are many influencing factors for the non-standard or wrong translation of food names, such as the translator’s own education level, cognitive level. For example, Quzhou has a delicious food called “glutinous rice wrapped in lotus leaf” but this is not chicken, so you cannot translate it into glutinous rice chicken. It is a kind of glutinous rice wrapped in lotus leaf; many other stores mistakenly write “three heads and one paw” into “three head and one paw”, which is a common problem in the English translation of food. If you do not pay attention to it and translate it word by word according to the literal meaning, it will cause errors and misunderstandings.

### **Lack of Cultural Connotation**

With the enhancement of China’s international influence, our cultural soft power has also improved. One of the most important aspects is that more and more countries in the international community recognize our words with Chinese characteristics, whether politically, economically, or food culture. This is not only a great affirmation of our excellent traditional culture, but also a practice of the concept of a community of common destiny for mankind. Ding pointed out that some characteristic words with strong cultural color, such as the English translation of words with Chinese characteristics, are a huge project. Although some research institutions have established corpora of vocabulary with Chinese characteristics, which has promoted the development of vocabulary research with Chinese characteristics, scholars still need to further subdivide and label its sources and media on the basis of empirical research to promote its continuous development (Ding, 2020). Cultural factor is an important factor in the name of Quzhou food which must be paid attention to translation. Many English translated delicacies adopt Chinglish pronunciation, ignoring the cultural differences between China and foreign countries, so it is difficult to convey the rich cultural meaning of delicacies. For example, if Shuangqiao Dried Vermicelli is translated as “Shuangqiao Power Dried”, foreign friends will misunderstand the characteristics of Dried Vermicelli and its correct translation should be “Shuangqiao Dried Vermicelli”. Therefore, in English translation, we should not only show the characteristics of traditional food, but also make the language accurate, clear, and easy to understand.

### Specific English Translation Strategies of Quzhou Food

The name of food named after the place of origin, main materials, shape, etc., adopts literal translation.

Chinese dish names have become an important part of Chinese food culture. In order to retain the rhetorical effect, literal translation should be given priority to. Literal translation is a translation method adopted without changing the cultural information of the source language. This method generally takes faithfulness as the yardstick. There are various cultures and different language expression methods. If the translator can convey the various strange metaphors and witticisms in the source language culture to the target readers through literal translation, it will bring them a fresh sense of pleasure and feel the internal richness of the source language. Literal translation can maintain the cultural characteristics of the source language and promote the diversity of language expression and style. The author believes that literal translation can be widely used in the English translation of Quzhou cuisine and is the first choice for the translation of Quzhou cuisine, such as:

水晶糕: Crystal Cake,

全旺芋饺: Quanwang Taro Dumplings,

白切鸡: Sliced boiled chicken.

This kind of food names is descriptive names. The translator can understand them according to their literal meaning and translate them word by word or phrase without going deep into the cultural significance. Therefore, simply and directly using literal translation can make people easy to understand.

Literal translation and annotation are used for food names with historical allusions, anecdotes, or symbolic meanings.

Due to many cultural differences between English and Chinese, some cultural words in English have no equivalents in Chinese, forming a gap in word meaning. In this case, the annotation method is often used to make up for the vacancy in word translation. Notes can usually be used to supplement relevant information such as background materials and word origins for readers' understanding, such as:

年年有余: Surplus Year after Year (fish soup),

一帆风顺: Plain sailing (appetizer dessert).

This kind of food names has specific cultural connotation, so literal translation annotation method should be adopted, that is, to make the translation "concrete". The advantage of this is that it not only preserves the image of the source language culture without weakening its cultural value, but also makes it easier for foreign friends to understand and accept. For example, the dish "Surplus Year after Year", its Chinese meaning is to hope that there will be abundance every year and place people's good wishes for life. The essence of the dish is a carefully cooked fish soup. Therefore, literal translation can be adopted first to translate the literal meaning of Chinese, and then annotate to explain the cultural connotation of the dish. Such a translation will make foreign friends feel the charm of the unique Quzhou food culture and achieve the purpose of cultural exchange. Therefore, translating dish names into English names is not only to stop at the language conversion between the source language Chinese and the target language English, but also to realize the cultural exchange of Quzhou cuisine and the language conversion with cultural implication (Zhang, 2020, pp. 14-15).

Food names with strong local dialect color are transliterated:

余记烤饼: Yu Kee Scone,

干蒸烧卖: Steamed siu mei.

Roman Jakobson, an American linguist, believes that all human cognitive experiences and their classification can be expressed in some existing language. Once there is a word vacancy, we can limit and expand the existing terms by means of loanwords, foreign translations, neologisms, and so on (1959, p. 1). Transliteration can effectively make up for the deficiency of Quzhou food English translation lexical chunks. Although it has certain conditions and fuzziness, with the gradual enhancement of the external influence of Chinese food culture, some transliteration words have been widely recognized by foreign friends and even included in the dictionary. For example, “Siu Mei” has been included in the Oxford Dictionary, which is interpreted as “In Cantonese cookery: marinated meat roasted on a spit over an open fire or in a wood-burning rotisserie oven”. The use of transliteration not only makes Quzhou cuisine retain the original cultural elements and highlight the uniqueness of food culture, but also brings new and interesting translations to foreign friends and urges them to better understand the unique connotation of Quzhou cuisine.

### **Other Strategies**

Each culture has its own distinctive characteristics and is affected by internal historical and cultural factors. Sometimes it cannot be replaced by another culture. Although this paper mainly introduces the above three translation strategies, it does not mean that other translation methods are not feasible. On the contrary, the blending of various translation strategies can more accurately express the concrete behavior and internal beauty of the target language. For example, the foreignization strategy shows its advantages. Liu Jiangwei (2011) pointed out in the translation of words with Chinese characteristics by foreign media from the perspective of cross-cultural communication,

Translation must involve two cultures and must also face the challenges brought by cultural differences. If you blindly choose domestication and melt the exotic into your own culture, it will be a loss to the target language readers and their culture. (pp. 101-102)

At the same time, he also pointed out that

on the one hand, translators need to overcome language barriers and cross cultural boundaries. If they can bring the differences in the source language culture into the target language text, they will enrich the target language culture and reflect the value of culture. Although it is the introduction of foreign culture, in fact, the introduction of a large number of foreign cultures will slowly eliminate the two cultures over time and increase the degree of correlation between cultures. (pp. 102-103)

Therefore, when translating our words with Chinese characteristics, the translator can adopt the translation strategy of alienation and annotation, and try to retain the language characteristics and expression methods of the original work, so as to present the unique language and cultural characteristics of the Chinese nation, so that English readers can understand and gradually identify with Chinese culture.

### **Conclusion**

This paper mainly discusses the translation problems and countermeasures of Quzhou food from the perspective of cross-cultural communication. The author first introduces the five most representative characteristic foods in Quzhou and the historical stories behind them, and then points out the three difficult problems encountered in the translation of Quzhou food: vocabulary vacancy, nonstandard translation, and lack of cultural connotation. Finally, the author analyzes the specific application of literal translation, literal translation annotation and transliteration. The significance of this study is to explain that cultural factors are not

only an important factor in Quzhou food, but also an important content in the foreign exchange and dissemination of Quzhou culture. Under this consideration, combined with the relevant contents of cross-cultural communication, this paper explores the translation methods of Quzhou food, and enhances the influence of Quzhou traditional culture, especially the popular food culture, through excellent translation, in order to create a local food brand with Quzhou characteristics and promote the “going out” of local characteristic culture.

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