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A Study on English Translation Strategies for Food Culture in *Savoring Yanzhao* from the Perspective of Cultural Translation

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Abstract: As Chinese culture reaches out to the world, the translation of local cultures into foreign languages has drawn growing scholarly attention. Chinese traditional cuisine, one of the treasures of Chinese culture, embodies the cultural genes and local customs of the Chinese nation and forms a part of traditional Chinese culture that cannot be overlooked. Yet many culture-specific items in Chinese food culture are difficult for foreign readers to grasp, and obstacles do arise when such texts are translated for overseas audiences. Taking the local food-culture text *Savoring Yanzhao* of Hebei Province as a case study, this paper examines from the perspective of cultural translation the methods adopted in its English rendering, and shows that the translator's use of cultural retention, cultural compensation, cultural transformation, and cultural integration succeeds in conveying food-culture information while preserving the source culture and raising the acceptability of the target text. Through this case analysis, the paper hopes to offer some reference for the translation of local food cultures.

Keywords: Cultural Translation; Food Culture; Translation Strategies; Culture-Loaded Words; *Savoring Yanzhao*.

1. Introduction

In recent years, as China's overall national strength has grown, the question of how to introduce fine Chinese culture to the world has attracted increasing attention. Translation is the bond between two languages and two cultures: it is not merely a transfer between linguistic signs, but a means of cultural exchange and dissemination. Among the various domains of culture, food culture stands close to people's daily lives and serves as a vehicle for displaying national and local culture.

Chinese food culture has a long history and distinctive features. Translation practice on Guangxi food culture has likewise been discussed within the framework of cultural translation theory [1]. Influenced by geographical conditions, historical evolution, and social customs, different regions have developed different dietary habits. A local specialty is more than a material object; it carries a certain craft, historical legend, folk belief, and local sentiment. The translation of food culture is therefore by no means a plain linguistic transcoding but a process involving the reproduction of cultural connotations.

In translating Chinese food culture for foreign readers, however, cultural differences leave many Chinese-specific terms without direct English equivalents. The name of a local dish may contain place-name information; the vocabulary of traditional cooking methods refers to production practices peculiar to China; and historical allusions presuppose background knowledge. A translation that settles for surface meaning may therefore lose a great deal of the information that cultural communication requires. Research on the C-E translation of Guizhou Miao food culture also treats cultural information as an important consideration in translating regional food texts [2].

Domestic research on food-culture translation has so far concentrated on dish names, culture-loaded words, and translation strategies. Studies of Chinese dish names, including research based on A Bite of China I, have examined translation choices in relation to Chinese-Western cultural differences [3]. Such studies provide a useful basis for the outward translation of food culture, yet food texts that weave together regional culture, traditional skills, and historical stories still call for closer investigation. Research on the English translation of Manchu folk culture further shows that culture-specific material has been approached from perspectives concerned with cultural adaptation [4].

The material selected here, *Savoring Yanzhao*, is a short text introducing the food culture of Hebei Province. By describing local traditional

delicacies together with the people and stories behind their preparation, it presents the distinctive food-culture resources of the Yanzhao region. It contains a large number of food-culture terms and touches on intangible cultural heritage, historical sites, and folk customs, so its translation offers an opportunity to explore multiple paths for rendering traditional food culture into English.

This paper therefore takes *Savoring Yanzhao* as its object of study, analyzes from the perspective of cultural translation the methods used for typical food-culture expressions, and discusses how cultural retention, cultural compensation, cultural transformation, and cultural integration are applied in the English translation of local food culture, in the hope of providing some reference for the translation of this text and similar materials.

2. An Overview of Cultural Translation Theory

2.1 The Connotations of Cultural Translation Theory

Translation is not only a transfer between two languages but also a process of exchange between two cultures. Traditional translation studies placed much emphasis on correspondence in linguistic form and meaning, yet as research deepened, it became clear that language and culture are inseparable: the expression of any language is constrained by the social and cultural background in which it operates.

Cultural translation theory holds that the translator should consider not only the semantic level of the target text but also acquire a basic understanding of the culture carried by the language. The translator is not simply a converter of languages but a disseminator of culture, one who builds a bridge between the source culture and the target culture.

Cultural factors matter greatly in food-culture texts. Research on Chinese dish-name translation from a cross-cultural communication perspective also highlights the close relation between food naming and cultural information [5]. The name of a local food, a traditional production technique, or a single dietary proverb may carry rich cultural information. Recent research continues to identify culture-loaded words as a major issue in Chinese-English translation [6]. Zhongshan Songlao Liquor, Guyue tofu, and Liyang sun-dried vinegar, all appearing in *Savoring Yanzhao* as names of specific foods, stand for a regional culture and a traditional craft in addition to their literal meanings. In translation, word-for-word rendering should therefore be avoided in favour of expressing culture as a whole. Lin discusses the difficulties posed by culture-loaded terms and examines several ways of handling them in Chinese-English translation [7].

2.2 The Guiding Significance of Cultural Translation Theory for the English Translation of Food Culture

Translation of food culture from the perspective of cultural translation theory may follow the principles below. The first concerns the retention of cultural information: if the names of distinctive Chinese products and their production methods were rendered entirely by free translation, they would lose their original cultural colour, and certain measures of retention are therefore called for.

A second principle is that the translator should act with initiative. Because of differences between heterogeneous cultures, some Chinese expressions remain inaccessible to foreign readers, and the translator's explanation is needed to help the target reader build a degree of cultural cognition. Wang's study of culture-loaded expressions in the documentary Four Seasons of China similarly emphasizes the role of context in the selection of translation strategies [8].

A third principle requires clarity before translation begins: cultural translation regards translation as a mode of cultural dissemination, so the rendering of food culture should not stop at introducing food but should also bring in the meanings, values, and local customs behind it. The translator must therefore keep the cultural colour while ensuring that the target text remains intelligible.

3. An Analysis of English Translation Strategies in *Savoring Yanzhao*

Savoring Yanzhao is a text introducing the local food culture of Hebei. It contains numerous culture-loaded words, expressions of traditional technique, and culturally specific regional information. In translating it, the translator must transfer cultural meaning as well as linguistic form. In light of the features of the text, the present author analyzes its translation strategies

from four angles: cultural retention, cultural compensation, cultural transformation, and cultural integration.

3.1 Cultural Retention

The retention approach seeks to preserve the cultural features of the source language in the target text so that target readers may come to know culturally distinctive phenomena. For proper names of regional foods and traditional cultural images, retaining the original national culture prevents the dilution of cultural connotation.

Example 1: Source-text meaning: As a renowned traditional specialty of Dingzhou, Zhongshan Songlao Liquor is known for its long history and distinctive production techniques.

Translation: Zhongshan Songlao Liquor, a traditional famous specialty of Dingzhou, is renowned for its long history and unique craftsmanship.

Analysis: "Zhongshan Songlao Liquor" is a culture-specific term with evident regional features: "Zhongshan" carries geographical and cultural information, while "songlao" evokes the flavour of traditional Chinese liquor culture. Rendering it as an ordinary name for liquor would convey the meaning but forfeit its cultural identity. The translator therefore retains the culture by transliterating the name and adding a category word, attaching "Liquor" to the original name so that the target reader understands it to be a kind of food. In this way the cultural features of the source language are preserved and the message is effectively promoted.

Example 2: Source-text meaning: The traditional craft of making Guyue tofu has a long history and forms an important part of local food culture.

Translation: The craftsmanship of Guyue tofu has a long history and is an important part of local traditional food culture.

Analysis: "Guyue tofu" is not only the name of a local food but also one of the local cultural symbols; "Guyue" is a proper place name. A literal rendering as "tofu" would express only a type of food and fail to convey its regional character. The translator thus keeps "Guyue" as a proper name and adds "tofu" to indicate the food category. This again involves rendering a local food name by retaining its culture, so that target readers learn something of the cultural origin of the food.

Example 3: Source-text meaning: Liyang sun-dried vinegar is made by traditional methods and develops its distinctive flavor through prolonged exposure to sunlight.

Translation: Liyang Shaicu is produced through traditional techniques and develops its unique flavor through long-term exposure to sunlight.

Analysis: "Shaicu", or sun-dried vinegar, refers to a method of vinegar-making peculiar to China: "sun-drying" designates both the method and the process whereby Chinese traditional vinegar brewing draws on favourable natural conditions. A literal rendering as "vinegar" would strip the term of its overtones. The translator accordingly adopts transliteration with annotation, allowing readers to see the value of the traditional craft behind "shaicu" and completing an effective cultural transfer.

3.2 Cultural Compensation

Cultural compensation means that the translator supplies explanatory information to make up for the cultural background that target-language readers lack. In translating traditional food culture, some cultural concepts have no full equivalent in English culture, and compensation is therefore needed to improve the intelligibility of the target text.

Example 4: Source-text meaning: In 2018, the craftsmanship of Guyue tofu was inscribed on the seventh municipal list of intangible cultural heritage of Shijiazhuang.

Translation: In 2018, the craftsmanship of Guyue tofu was listed as a municipal intangible cultural heritage item of Shijiazhuang.

Analysis: "Intangible cultural heritage" is a typical culture-loaded term in the dissemination of Chinese culture. Although an equivalent expression exists in English, foreign readers do not necessarily understand China's heritage-protection system or its cultural significance. The translator therefore keeps the standard rendering while bringing out, in context, the historical value of the craft, so that readers understand it to be not merely a production technique but a cultural resource in need of protection and transmission.

Example 5: Source-text meaning: In tofu making, bittern is added so that the soybean milk gradually coagulates.

Translation: During the tofu-making process, bittern is added to gradually coagulate the soybean milk.

Analysis: "Dianlu" is a specialized term in traditional tofu production and has no direct English counterpart. A literal rendering as

"coagulation" would convey the idea of setting but not the distinctive character of Chinese tofu-making, so the translator explains it as "adding bittern", specifying the material used and its function in the process. The difficulty of comprehension caused by cultural difference is thereby overcome, and the target reader can accurately understand this traditional craft.

Example 6: Source-text meaning: After years of sun exposure in jars, the vinegar develops its distinctive color and mellow taste.

Translation: The vinegar acquires its characteristic color and delicate taste through years of maturation and natural fermentation in clay jars under sunlight.

Analysis: "Tan-shai", or jar sun-drying, carries information about a traditional Chinese method of food processing: the jar indicates the storage vessel, and sun-drying indicates a natural process. Since English lacks an exact counterpart, the translator adds explanatory information such as "traditional jars" to supplement the account of the craft. The translation conveys the production process and helps target readers appreciate the cultural value of "time" and "nature" in Chinese traditional food processing.

3.3 Cultural Transformation

Cultural transformation refers to the translator's appropriate modification of the source form, after correctly grasping its cultural meaning and taking into account the habits and cognitive patterns of target readers, so that the translation reads smoothly. For the many proverbs, four-character expressions, and sensory descriptions of food in *Savoring Yanzhao*, transformation can overcome the difficulties of comprehension caused by literal rendering. Bi's analysis of culture-loaded words in To Live also discusses the use of domestication and foreignization in relation to cultural meaning and target-reader reception [9].

Example 7: Source-text meaning: As the local saying suggests, careful work takes time, and honest people make good tofu.

Translation: As an old saying goes, "Fine products require patience, and honest craftsmen make quality tofu."

Analysis: This Chinese proverb is a product of traditional handicraft culture and expresses the values people uphold in work and life: patience, honesty, and an unremitting pursuit of quality. "Man gong chu xi huo" means that only patient work yields fine products, while "shi cheng ren chu hao doufu" means that a tofu maker must be honest and trustworthy. A literal rendering would leave English readers unable to grasp the implied meaning. The translator therefore transforms the values expressed in the source text into formulations more familiar to English-speaking readers: "patience" and "honest craftsmen" both convey the values of the original, making the translation readily understandable while retaining its meaning.

Example 8: Source-text meaning: The food has a mellow flavor, a delicate texture, and a lingering aftertaste.

Translation: The food features a mellow flavor, delicate texture, and a lasting aftertaste.

Analysis: The common sensory expression in Chinese food culture, "hui wei you chang", stresses the lasting impression a food leaves on the eater; in Chinese it implies not only a taste sensation but also a favourable judgment on the quality of the food. Rendered literally as "a long memory of taste", it would not conform to English conventions of food description. The translator accordingly transforms it into "lasting aftertaste", conveying the source meaning in more idiomatic English without losing the aesthetic character of the food culture.

Example 9: Source-text meaning: A local delicacy evokes countless memories, attachments, and feelings for one's hometown.

Translation: A local delicacy carries countless memories and deep attachment to one's hometown.

Analysis: The sentence piles up Chinese four-character expressions and has a strong literary and emotive force. "A thousand threads of longing" and "ten thousand strands of homesickness" do not refer to any quantity of food; they indicate the close tie between a local delicacy and people's emotional memory. A rendering that followed the original phrasing would read awkwardly in English. The translator thus resorts to cultural paraphrase, turning what Chinese expresses through vivid imagery into an abstract emotional statement in English, so that target readers understand the homesickness behind the food.

3.4 Cultural Integration

Cultural integration involves the combined use of different translation methods to preserve relevant source-cultural information while maintaining clarity and readability for target readers. Since parts of *Savoring Yanzhao* involve

historical references, regional culture, and culture-specific symbols, no single method can convey all of these elements adequately, and an integrated treatment is therefore appropriate.

Example 10: Source-text meaning: A popular saying pairs Moutai with the south and Songlao with the north.

Translation: There is a popular saying that "Moutai represents the south, while Songlao represents the north."

Analysis: "Moutai in the south, songlao in the north" is not a simple description of locations but a summary of the regional characteristics and brands of Chinese liquor culture; "south" and "north" are regional cultural symbols. A literal rendering as "South has Moutai and north has Songlao" would be hard for English readers to understand. The translator therefore retains the original cultural information and adds an explanatory formulation to achieve cultural integration, so that readers see the expression as a display of the regional features of Chinese liquor culture.

Example 11: Source-text meaning: The Song-dynasty writer Su Shi composed a fu on Zhongshan Songlao, helping the liquor gain wider renown.

Translation: The Song Dynasty writer Su Shi once created Songlao Fu of Zhongshan, which helped spread the reputation of Zhongshan Songlao Liquor.

Analysis: This example involves a work of ancient Chinese literature, and "fu" is a literary genre unique to ancient China. A literal rendering as "poem" would aid comprehension yet lose the character of the genre. The translator therefore keeps the title of the work and renders "fu" in transliteration, preserving the cultural information of the source language while acquainting target readers with a concept from traditional Chinese literature. In addition, the relation between the work and the liquor is explained in context, so that literary culture and food culture are disseminated together.

Example 12: Source-text meaning: Many time-honored food brands in the Yanzhao region have retained their traditional flavors through generations of inheritance.

Translation: Many time-honored food brands in the Yanzhao region have preserved their traditional flavors through generations.

Analysis: "Lao zi hao", or time-honoured brand, is a commercial term with Chinese characteristics: it indicates not only a long history but also consumers' recognition of quality, credibility, and tradition. "Old brand" does not adequately express the connotation, so the translator uses "time-honored brands", an expression suited to business contexts in English that preserves the original meaning while conveying the brand connotations of Chinese traditional culture. The retention of "Yanzhao region" marks the regional cultural origin, linking linguistic and cultural information.

4. Conclusion

Local food culture is one of the important carriers of fine traditional Chinese culture, holding a wealth of historical and geographical information as well as elements of national psychology. Examining *Savoring Yanzhao* as a case from the perspective of cultural translation, the present author has identified four methods commonly used in the English translation of traditional food culture: cultural retention, cultural compensation, cultural transformation, and cultural integration. Practice shows that for food names and cultural markers with regional features, retention helps preserve the cultural self of the source language; for traditional cultures and skills relatively unfamiliar to target readers, compensation bridges the cognitive gap; for proverbs and sensory descriptions steeped in national culture, transformation improves the readability of the target text; and for historical, cultural, and literary-geographical markers, integrated treatment helps convey cultural information as a whole. The analysis of *Savoring Yanzhao* suggests that translating food culture is not a simple transfer from one language to another but a process of seeking a balance of meaning between two cultural systems, in which the translator should grasp the connotations of the source culture and, in line with the cognitive habits of the target audience, adopt appropriate methods and reconcile the tension between retaining Chinese characteristics and improving the effectiveness of dissemination. It is hoped that this study may offer some reference for the English translation of *Savoring Yanzhao* and similar regional food-culture texts.

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