

A Study on the Differences Between Chinese and Western Food Culture and the Translation of Chinese Cuisine

Fangying Xiao¹ & Li Liu¹

¹ College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Xi'an Polytechnic University, Xi'an, China

Correspondence: Li Liu, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Xi'an Polytechnic University, Xi'an, China.

doi:10.56397/SSSH.2023.08.06

Abstract

Diet is one of the important factors for human survival and development, but different regions, climatic conditions and customs have formed their own distinctive diet cultures. In the process of globalization, the cultural exchanges between China and the West are becoming more and more frequent, which provides a good opportunity to understand the cultures of other countries, and one of the most concerned cultures is food culture. Therefore, this paper analyzes the dietary differences between China and the West, and then summarizes and analyzes the translation strategies of Chinese recipes, hoping to bring positive effects to the communication and integration of Chinese and Western diets.

Keywords: Chinese and the western, food culture, Chinese recipes, translation

1. Differences Between Chinese and Western Diets

1.1 Differences Between Chinese and Western Dietary Objects

There are many differences between Chinese and Western diet objects, which are mainly influenced by specific people and climate in specific areas. The West is dominated by marine climate, which determines that Westerners prefer to eat meat, while vegetarian food is only a supplement. It is no exaggeration to say that Westerners are carnivores. Beef, bread and milk have become the most important foods for Westerners. The types of western foods are relatively single, which is significantly different from those of Chinese diets. Chinese diet is mainly vegetarian, supplemented by meat, and the staple food is usually rice and pasta. However, there are many kinds of Chinese food, which is very rich, which is mainly related to China's vast territory, many kinds of natural crops and large output. China has a large population, but crops can meet the dietary needs of many people. In ancient times, ordinary people were basically vegetarian. Whole grains are the main source of diet, and meat is only available when paying homage to ancestors. Nowadays, with the improvement of material level, all kinds of meat and meat products are not scarce, and people are more pursuing balanced nutrition. Chinese people cook meat and mix meat with vegetables to absorb essential nutrients such as protein, fat and amino acids, and maintain their health.

1.2 Differences Between Chinese and Western Cooking Methods

Chinese cooking process belongs to skill type, which pursues the beauty of color, aroma, taste and shape of dishes. Each dish needs a variety of raw materials, and these raw materials are not independent like western food production, but combine various tastes into one dish, so that such dishes can be called delicacies. As the saying goes, you can't get tired of fine food, and you can't get tired of fine food. After processing, the shapes of raw materials are various, including whole, slice, segment, roll, dice and so on. There are more than 60 Chinese cooking methods, such as stir-fry, steam, saute, braise, simmer and so on. However, the main cooking methods in the West are basically pan-fry, deep-fry, boil, roast, mix and so on, all of which keep the original appearance of food well.

Westerners care most about nutrition and health in cooking. Excessive cooking will destroy the nutrients in ingredients. For example, Chinese people generally stir-fry vegetables, while Westerners eat them raw. For example, tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers and onions are mainly eaten raw. Although in formal banquet occasions, Westerners also pay attention to the collocation of colors, shapes and raw materials when cooking, chefs cook all the ingredients separately and do not cross each other.

1.3 Differences Between Chinese and Western Dining Methods

There are obvious differences between China and the West in the way of eating. As far as the way of eating is concerned, Chinese people are influenced by traditional culture. In order to create a unified and harmonious atmosphere when eating, they usually use round tables to eat. Everyone sat around and enjoyed the delicious food on the table. This way of eating is “sharing meals”. In the West, whether it is to entertain guests or a family’s daily diet, everyone has a separate meal, which is called “meal sharing system”. In tableware, there are also great differences between China and the West. Chinese people are used to using chopsticks to pick up food, while Westerners mainly cut with knives and forks. The difference of tableware is actually the external manifestation of the difference of food culture between the two sides. As we all know, in many Asian countries, especially in China, it is customary to eat with bowls, chopsticks and spoons. Westerners are used to loading food on plates, dividing food with knives and forks, and having special spoons for soup. Chopsticks and knives and forks have become symbols of Chinese and Western food culture respectively, which have an important impact on the lifestyle of Chinese and Western people. They are symbols of two different wisdom and translation strategies of food culture under the differences between Chinese and Western cultures.

2. Causes of Dietary Differences Between China and the West

2.1 Different Climatic Environments

Climate and environment can have a great influence on diet. Therefore, the differences between climate and environment have become one of the main reasons for the differences between Chinese and Western food cultures. China is located in the southeast of the Asian continent, with deserts, grasslands and Gobi in the northwest and the vast Pacific Ocean in the southeast. China has a vast land, but its geographical environment is quite different. Therefore, there is a saying in China that “relying on mountains to eat mountains and relying on water to eat water”. Coastal areas are characterized by seafood, while mountainous areas are famous for bush meat. The staple food of Chinese people is mainly rice and noodles. This is mainly because most areas in China belong to temperate monsoon climate, temperate continental climate and subtropical monsoon climate, which is very beneficial to crop growth. This is also the main reason why Chinese people are mainly vegetarian. Western countries are mostly located in temperate marine climate zone, which is conducive to the development of animal husbandry and seafood industry. In fact, Westerners, like Chinese people, also “rely on mountains to eat, rely on water to eat”. Westerners use their vast pastures and oceans to obtain abundant ingredients such as cattle, sheep and seafood, which also determines Westerners’ eating habits of preferring meat.

2.2 Different Lifestyles

Western industry is highly developed and agricultural mechanization is high, which makes Westerners’ life run at a high speed. People are subject to the influence of mechanical dichotomy to varying degrees, and their work and life are completely separated. This way of life is very boring, which directly leads to the singleness and boredom of Western diet. They prefer direct heating, which can preserve the original nutrients of food. No matter work or food, it is tasteless and boring. In China, on the contrary, Chinese arbitrariness is reflected incisively and vividly here. They advocate an empiricist way of working, or want to add elements they like to their work. This is as subjective and casual as Chinese food and cooking techniques. This subjective randomness refers to the instability of working mode, working method and working result. For example, people want to make a dish lighter, and southerners tend to use sugar to reduce salty taste. Another example is the sweet and sour taste of southerners, which dilutes the salty taste of soy sauce through the sweetness of sugar and the acidity of vinegar. Northerners can cook with water, changing the nature of dishes, and at the same time, changing the nature of dishes. It may change from a dish of stir-fried dishes to a beautiful soup, such as stewed sauerkraut. The pickled sauerkraut is stewed with water, so that the sauerkraut itself will not taste too exciting. However, due to the addition of sauerkraut, the soup tastes more delicious, resulting in a less salty taste. However, because of the differences in social experience and environment, there are different ways of change. This random experience change method makes the original simple dish become two or three dishes, which embodies high creativity and artistry.

2.3 Different Values

There are differences in thinking between China and the West. Chinese people express their opinions in a curved way of thinking, and the doctrine of the mean and smooth thinking are fully reflected in the table manners culture. When people eat together in public places, they usually use round tables, which shows the Chinese

people's thought of "harmony is the most important". China has always been a country of etiquette, and has its own unique views on the food culture on the dining table (Zhang Li, 2020). People also talk and talk in the dining process, and exchange their feelings by eating opportunities. Human feelings and face are full of all aspects of people's lives. If no one talks during the meal, the atmosphere will not be active enough, and the organizers will feel that they have no face and the banquet will not be successful. The thinking mode of Westerners is straight line mode. People express their opinions directly, and they don't think about each other's thoughts and take care of each other's emotions as Chinese people do. Act according to the rules, be honest, and communicate with others without involving too many human feelings. People don't talk loudly with each other and persuade people to drink alcohol. The food they eat is also a separate meal system, and they enjoy their own food. Dining on the table is just a way to eat, and they don't use this way to enhance relations and promote communication with friends.

Chinese people emphasize collectivism values. Chinese traditional culture teaches people to learn to be modest and courteous, not to strive for strength and win. Collectivism is dominant, emphasizing that individuals should obey the collective. In Chinese traditional thought, collectivism concept is also promoted to a valuable and excellent quality and concept. The difference is that Westerners attach importance to individualistic values, and their personal goals are higher than their loyalty to the team. Westerners attach importance to the free development of personality, take individuals as the development center, and emphasize individual freedom, enthusiasm and initiative. Reflected in the food culture, the most remarkable thing is that Westerners practice the meal sharing system. Westerners attach importance to personal privacy, which is largely influenced by individualistic values. In the popular phrase, "At a party, I just need to find like-minded people to communicate with and exchange topics, and others can be ignored at all."

3. Translation Strategies of Food Culture Under Cultural Differences Between China and the West

3.1 Understanding the Food Culture of Different Countries

Different countries' food culture has its own characteristics. Translators should understand the food culture of different countries before translating food culture, and then translate according to the characteristics of different countries' food culture. (Zhang Li, 2020) On the one hand, translators should be familiar with the food culture of their own country. Translators should make a profound analysis and cognition of food culture from the perspectives of culture and language, so as to use accurate methods to translate and avoid cultural differences. On the other hand, translators should also be familiar with the characteristics of food culture in western countries. Translators should have a deep understanding of western food concepts and drinking habits based on the relationship between culture and translation, so as to accurately transform the two food cultures and reflect the customs of different countries' food cultures.

3.2 Using the Method of Combining Literal Translation with Free Translation

Literal translation and free translation are two common methods in translation, which are often used in various fields of translation, and are also reflected in the translation of Chinese recipes. Literal translation refers to translating word for word according to the meaning of the original text. For example, "双冬牛肉" is translated as "beef with mushroom and bamboo shoots", "青椒肉丝" is translated as "shredded pork and green chili", "豆腐汤" is translated as "bean curd with mushroom soup". Free translation is a translation method to distinguish literal translation, which refers to translating the general idea of the original text based on the whole article. For example, "夫妻肺片" is translated as "sliced beef and ox tongue in chili sauce", "佛跳墙" is translated as "steamed abalone with shark's fin and fish maw in broth", and "驴打滚" is translated as "steamed glutinous millet four coated with soybean power". In the field of food culture translation, due to the differences between Chinese and Western food culture, it is necessary to combine two translation methods in order to achieve ideal results. First of all, when translating Chinese food, we should adhere to the method of free translation, supplemented by literal translation. Because Chinese diet embodies the implicit and tactful cultural characteristics of the Chinese nation in terms of dish names and dishes, only by using free translation can the true connotation of food culture be presented. For example: Secondly, when translating Western dishes, we should adhere to the translation method of literal translation as the mainstay and free translation as the supplement. Western food culture pays attention to the practicality of food, and both the dishes and the names of dishes reflect the direct personality characteristics of Westerners. Only by using literal translation can we translate them more accurately. Finally, the development of anything is not absolute. In the face of different food culture and language features in different countries, translators should learn to choose different methods and combine literal translation with free translation, so as to enhance the accuracy of translation.

3.3 Translate According to Different Cooking Methods

The biggest difference between Chinese and Western food cultures lies in the different cooking methods, so translation according to different cooking methods can also reflect the characteristics of different food cultures.

In China, there are many cooking methods, so special attention should be paid to the accuracy of words used in different cooking methods. For example, “stir-fried beans” is a cooking dish, and “干煸豆角” can be translated as “saut beans”, “卤鸭” as “stewed duck”, “火爆鱿鱼” is translated as “steamed crab”. In addition, translators should have a deep understanding of different cooking methods and inquire or consult unfamiliar cooking methods to ensure the accuracy of translation.

4. Conclusion

In order to accomplish the task of cuisine translation well, the translator must fully understand the differences in food culture between China and the West, and grasp different translation methods and skills according to the different naming methods of dishes, so that foreign guests can understand the Chinese characteristic culture contained in the dishes while tasting Chinese dishes, (Cheng Cheng, 2018) thus showing the Chinese food culture and promoting the enrichment and development of the food culture in different countries.

References

- Cheng Cheng, (2018). Analysis of Chinese and Western Food Culture Differences and Cuisine Translation Skills. *Journal of Hubei Correspondence University*.
- Xiong Yanli, (2015). Talking about the differences between Chinese and Western table manners. *Intelligence*, (8), 283.
- Yi Li, (2009). Translation of recipes and cultural differences in food. *Ethnic Translation*, (02), 30-35+39.
- Yuan Xiaohong & Tang Lixia, (2009). Differences in Chinese and Western food culture and translation of Chinese menu. *Journal of Jilin Radio and TV University*, (02), 73-75 +103.
- Zhang Li, (2020). Research on Translation Strategies of Food Culture under Cultural Differences between China and the West. *Yellow River. Loess. Yellow Race*. (17).

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).