

A Brief Comment on Translation of Names of Chinese Dishes

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Abstract: The translation of Chinese dishes is very important for better services and introducing Chinese culture. The name of Chinese dishes is full of variety, shows a strong and distinctive local characteristics and Chinese nation's splendid cuisine culture. Thus it can be seen that the normal translation of names of Chinese dishes make a contribution for Chinese culture merges into world culture.

1. Introduction

China has a long history of food culture. Through the innovation and accumulation for thousands of years, the exquisite Chinese cuisine has now become increasingly popular among more and more overseas gourmets. In recent years, along with the economic development of our country, the tourism industry develops rapidly, and a lot of foreign hotels appeared in China. Not only that, a huge number of Chinese restaurants are also open their business in other countries. These foreign Chinese restaurants served delicious Chinese food, and at the same time provide a window on foreigners to understand the Chinese culture. And during this process, the menu plays an important role, which should not be neglected.

A good translation of the menu not only can convey the message about dishes but also promote to the spread of Chinese cuisine culture. While the poor quality translation is hard for foreigners to understand the names of dishes, and also affect foreigner's image of Chinese food. So, the translation of names of Chinese dishes good or bad is directly relevant to whether the Chinese food can give foreigners a deep impression and happy memories. May the Chinese food become the envoy of cultural exchanges with foreign countries, and then be taken to global market. So, the correct translation of names of Chinese dishes is imminent.

2. The Associational Nomenclature Translation of Chinese Dishes and Its Cultural Connotation

China pursues the pristine beauty, and also rich in association and imagination. China has its own comprehension and pursue to the translation of names of dishes. We pay attention to the principle of "beauty in sense, form and sound." in translation. The cultural connotation contained in such names of dishes is profuse and profound. The customer can learn the long history of cultural heritage, the humanity scene and the distinctive ethnic culture and mentality of Chinese nation. And can enjoy the delicious food at same time.

2.1 According to the Historical Allusion and Folklore

“During the Qing Dynasty (1644--1911) there were many kinds of palace banquets. Imperial Palace dishes were cooked for Imperial family by Imperial kitchen. And it developed from Shandong cuisine and later from Islamic pastries and Tibetan dishes as well”.

“The characteristic of Imperial Palace cuisine is the strictness in selecting ingredients and emphasis on seasoned foods. For instance, the duck must be Peking duck, mutton must be black trotter or black-and-white faced sheep, instant-boiled mutton must be made or consumed at the beginning of autumn, and spring roll at the beginning of springs and shrimps is in the summer, and so on”.

“In the middle period of the Qing Dynasty, the palace food culture of Han and Man became mixed when the Full Man-Han Banquet came into being. It is said that when Emperor Kangxi first tasted the full Man-Han banquet, he wrote down the four characters”满汉全席”, Meaning Full Man-Han banquet, the banquet became famous in the palace, and became popular with rich businessmen and nobles. As time goes on, Mongolian, Hui and Tibetan foods were added to this banquet, so the Man-Han Banquet became a five-nation banquet, later known as the combined banquet. The delicate appearance of the foods had never been seen before and it became the most colorful and luxurious banquet food in Chinese history”.

Today, the Man-Han banquet has experienced considerable changes. Its contents have become richer, and its appearance has been further improved. Today there are more than two hundred kinds of courses, including varied materials from the mountains and sea. Indeed, this banquet has become a symbol of traditional Chinese cuisine.

2.2 According to the Meaning of Auspicious and Good Wishes.

Thousands of years of Chinese history, and culture created unique aesthetic pursuit. And it reflected in all aspects of social life, such as, pursuit the success in career, pursuit the wealthy life and happy marriage. All of these express the good wish for people's life. The dishes' name such like 金玉满堂 (Shrimp and Egg Soup), 发财好市 (Lack Moss Cooked with Oysters), 老少平安 (Steamed Bean Curd and Minced Fish), 锦绣中华 (Beautiful China), 百花凤翼 (Stuffed Chicken Wings with Shrimp Paste), 龙凤呈祥 (Dragon-Phoenix Present Happiness), and so on. For example, the auspicious name 锦绣中华(Beautiful China), this aesthetically-pleasing dish name embodied people's love for their country. The dish name 发财好市 (Lack Moss Cooked with Oysters), and “发财(make a fortune)”is the homophone for its ingredient “发菜(Mosses)”.And the dish name 龙凤呈祥 (Dragon-Phoenix Present Happiness), dragon in Chinese is associated with positive meaning such as success, luck and royal. And people believe it can bring good luck. Dragon is the symbol of royalty, and in the ancient time, it regarded as the king or emperor. The Chinese emperors considered they were the real dragon and the emperor. Similarly, phoenix is regarded as the “king of bird” in Chinese language. And it also stands for beauty and wealth.

And the six themes of “福,禄,寿,喜,财,吉”(Fu, Lu, Shou, Xi, Cai and Ji) are also the representative of auspicious and good wishes. The six themes show Chinese people's unique aesthetic features when they are building lucky and happy atmosphere.

“Firstly, “Fu” is stands for good fortune or happiness. The name of dish 全家福”Stewed Assorted Meats and Seafood” could express the meaning. As the main ingredient of auspicious, Fu means people's greatest expectation from life. And it also reflected people's beautiful desires and dreams”.

“Secondly, “Lu” is the connotation of pursuing power, status and rank. And the main meaning of

Lu is people trying to rise to a higher social position and climb up the social ladder. Many dishes, for instance, “五子登科”, “带子上朝” have this meaning to express people’s desire to reach Lu”.

Thirdly, “Shou” represents living for a long time. In the birthday of elderly people, we often see the “Shou”. As saying goes 福如东海,寿比南山 (Fu as long as the Eastern Sea, Shou as high as the Southern Mountain). The dishes often served on such occasion such as 寿桃豆腐 (Longevity Peach Bean Curd), 寿字鸭羹 (Longevity Duck Soup). 松鹤延年 (Mushroom and Cucumber with Chicken Breast).

“Fourthly, “Xi” means happiness, glad or celebration. And it becomes a good harbinger that could direct a person’s fortune and lead to his yearning for a better life. For example, we called marriage “Xi Yan”, and the dish 鸳鸯戏水 (Mandarin Duck Playing in Water Assorted Dish) usually served for wedding party”.

Fifthly, “Cai” has the connotation of fortune, money and property. And people think it also has the meaning of successful business, excellent harvest and prosperous facilities. 发财好市 (The dishes of Lack Moss Cooked with Oysters), 连年有余 (Rich and have a Surplus) are the typical dishes of this type.

“Sixthly, “Ji” implicates the peace, harmony or luck. And in Chinese culture, people regarded dragon and phoenix as “Ji” since ancient time, Chinese people still called them the “Descendants of Dragon”. And dragon also stands for harmony and luck. The dishes like 龙穿凤翅汤 (Chicken Living, Ham and Bamboo Shoots Soup), 龙凤金团 (Rice Balls with the Designs of Dragon and Phoenix)

3. Some Methods of Chinese Dishes’ Translation

According to the naming methods of Chinese dishes and it’s characteristics of dishes translation. The methods of Chinese dishes translation can group under the following headings.

3.1 Literal Translation

A large part of Chinese dishes are named after realistic. And it conveys the information of dishes’ raw material, knife techniques and cooking methods. And it also applies people’s understanding and expectation of names of dishes in English-speaking cultures. In other words, no matter in form and content, these dishes are closer to English-speaking countries. So, we usually adopt literal translation method to get concise and accurate effect.

Firstly, the dishes’ names are named according to the raw material. For example,

桂花童子鸡 Spring Chicken with Osmanthus

松子黄鱼 Yellow-fin Tuna with Pine Nuts

糖醋排骨 Pork Chops with Sweet and Sour Flavor

Secondly, the dishes’ names are named by cooking methods. For instance,

(1)cooking methods + main materials

红焖肘子 Braised Pork Joint

炒虾片 Stir-fried Prawn Slices

涮羊肉 Instant Boiled Mutton

清蒸桂鱼 Steamed Mandarin Fish

(2)cooking methods + main materials + auxiliary materials

豆腐烧鱼 Fried Fish with Bean Curd

虾仁海参 Stewed Sea Cucumbers with Shrimps

奶油鱼肚 Fried Fish Maw with Cream Sauce
京葱羊肉 Steamed Sliced Mutton with Beijing Scallion
(3)cooking methods + main materials + seasoning
红烧肉 Braised Pork with Brown Sauce
鱼香肉丝 Fried Shredded Pork with Sweet and Sour Sauce
油酱蟹 Fried Crab with Bean Sauce
茄汁牛肉片 Fried Sliced Beef with Tomato Sauce

Thirdly, the dishes' names named according to the shapes or taste of dishes. Such as,

香酥排骨 Crisp Fried Spareribs
盐烤荷叶鸭 Salt Baked Duck in Lotus Leaf
红烧冬笋 Braised Bamboo Shoots
酱爆鸡丁 Quick Fried Chicken Dices in Bean Sauce

Fourthly, the dishes' names named according to the founders or the places of origin of the dishes.

For example,

宋嫂鱼羹 Sister Song's Fish Potage
西湖醋鱼 West Lake Vinegar Fish
北京烤鸭 Beijing Roast Duck
东坡肘子 Dongpo Pork Joint

From the above we can come to the conclusion that literal translation is the appropriate way for the dishes names, which are named according to the cooking methods and main materials.

3.2 Transliteration + Literal Transition + Paraphrase.

“For these dishes with place name and strong local flavor, we should take the method with transliteration and literal translation. On the one hand, it can let customers know about the regional features of the dishes. On the other hand, it can make customers understand the cooking features of the dishes. For example, 北京烤鸭(Beijing Roast Duck), 蒸南京咸板鸭 (Steamed Salted Duck in Nanjing Style)”.

If you think use this way can't let the foreign customers a preliminary understanding of the dishes with strong local features. You can use a brief paraphrase illustrate the dishes' characteristics behind the translation. For instance, 蒙古牛肉”Mongolian Beef” (sliced tenderloins sauté with spring onions and bamboo shoots), 苏州熏鱼”Deep Fried Suzhou Salmon” (marinated salmon sliced in the sauce of scallion, ginger, sugar after being deep-fried), 川味牛肉”Shredded Beef in Sichuan Style” (shredded beef with julienned carrots and celery in hot pepper sauce), 京味牛肉丝”Shredded Pork in Beijing Style” (shredded pork sauté with special plum sauce with fresh scallion).

3.3 Free Translation

Some dishes with figures and lucky words, both literal translation and transliteration can't let customers know about the features of names of dishes. Therefore, we need free translation to convey the information included in the names of dishes. And provide customers with better service. We often see the dishes' names at restaurant. For example, 炒双冬 (Fried Sauté Mushroom and Bamboo Shoots), 炸响铃 (Deep-fried Bean Curd Skin), 蚂蚁上树 (Bean Vermicelli with Spicy Meat Sauce), 龙凤斗(Stewed Snake and Wild Cat), 积雪银钟 (Stewed Mushroom with White Fungus), 老少平安(Braised Bean Curd and Minced Fish) and son on.

4. Conclusion

The translation of names of Chinese dishes is not a simple thing, and the methods of translation are very flexible. We can translate the same course in different ways. The above methods are the general way in Chinese menus' translation. Chinese food culture has a long history and has a wide variety of dishes. So, in the process to translate Chinese dishes into English, we should treat it strictly and to consult modestly. To make sense of the raw material, techniques, characteristics and the cultural significance contained in dishes' names. And avoid word-for-word translations. We can use many different ways, every course can translate it from different angles and make a perfect combination between the principles of translation and the catering knowledge. In the progress of translation, we should comply with the basic principles and methods. The translation of Chinese dishes is a good guide when customers order dishes, and it can better explain Chinese dishes and culture to the world. To promoting cultural understanding and communication and develop and expand our country's tourism and catering industry.

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