

# *Research on English Translation of Sichuan Cuisine*

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**Abstract:** Sichuan cuisine, one of the eight famous schools of Chinese cuisine, is popular at home and abroad. With the expanding cultural exchange between Chinese and Western food, the translation of Sichuan cuisine shows its importance. Based on the translation principles of literal translation, free translation, and transliteration, this paper studies the characteristics of the naming and translation of Sichuan cuisine and proposes corresponding translation methods. It is found that the translation strategy is related to the food name. The name of cuisines made up of main ingredients and cooking methods can be translated literally; those named without this information can use free translation; and local specialties can be translated by transliteration. This dissertation is conducive to spreading Sichuan cuisine worldwide.

**Keywords:** China, Sichuan cuisine, English translation.

## 1. Introduction

Every dish of Sichuan cuisine possesses a different style and unique flavor. Sichuan cuisine is one of the most distinctive cuisines in China. It has taken the best of various cuisines and is characterized by profound culture. There are multiple ways of naming Sichuan dishes. Some are based on main ingredients; some include names of people or places; and some reflect the flavors. But sometimes, the information of the dish could not be easily obtained from its name. Translators should first distinguish the naming characteristics and then choose appropriate translation methods from literal translation, free translation, and transliteration. This dissertation starts with a literature review learning previous translation studies of Chinese cuisine and local specialties, especially Sichuan cuisine. Then, it introduces the naming characteristics of Sichuan cuisine. The emphasis is on studying the main translation principle of Sichuan cuisine by calculating the proportions of the three principles used in translating certain Sichuan dishes which have been classified according to diverse schools of cuisines and functions. Translating the name of Sichuan cuisine into English can not only make it famous overseas, but also promote the spread of Chinese food culture.

## 2. Literature Review

From Chinese cuisine to local cuisine, the research on the translation of cuisines in China has made certain progress. Besides, the application and exploration of translation theories such as the Skopos theory and functional equivalence have deepened the study of culinary translation.

Saiqun Luo and Min Zhao have organized translation methods of names of cuisines including literal translation targeting cooking methods or ingredients and transliteration where Pinyin should be added [1,2]. Plus, when there are no obvious ingredients in the name of cuisines, Saiqun Luo

pointed out that translators need to find out the ingredients while Min Zhao argued that translators should give the priority to vividness.

Recently, Chinese schoolers have continuously discussed and studied the translation of the name of cuisines with many translation theories. Based on Peter Newmark’s communicative translation, Rou Li explored its application in the translation of Cantonese cuisine and proposed three translation methods which are literal translation [3], free translation, and transliteration. According to the principle of multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection, Jing Guo proposed three kinds of adaptive selection on the linguistic dimension [4], communicative dimension, and cultural dimension. On the linguistic dimension, the more accurate and specific expression in western languages requires equivalent English translation according to the literal meaning of the food name. On the communicative dimension, in consideration of the cultural gap between the reader and the culture of the source language, translators should be faithful to the original content as well as the cultural habits of readers, in order to convey information effectively. On the cultural dimension, with the deepening of exchanges among countries, the translation of local specialties should first use Pinyin and then add English annotations, which is in line with the principle of spreading Chinese culture. Under the guidance of the Skopos theory, Yi Liu and Jinxiang Wang followed the principle of coherence and faithfulness and proposed literal translation, free translation, and transliteration methods to make foreigners know cuisines more quickly [5].

Shuqi Liang and Min Liu studied the history behind the food names in Sichuan cuisine [6]. They concluded that the combined translation method of literal translation and free translation is linked to the characteristics of Sichuan people. Because of their frankness, the translation highlights the principle of “faithfulness” through literal translation. Due to their humor, the free translation emphasizes the principle of “expressiveness” and conveys the main meaning.

There are mainly three translation methods – literal translation, free translation, and transliteration in both the translation of Chinese cuisine and Sichuan cuisine. The food name translation could be further specified according to ingredients, cooking methods, or flavors.

The dissertation focuses on the classification and features of the name of Sichuan cuisine, and studies the translation of Sichuan cuisine, in order to make translators familiar with the culture behind Sichuan cuisine and choose better translation methods. It is conducive to spreading Sichuan cuisine culture around the world.

### 3. Classification of Sichuan Cuisine and Specialties

Sichuan cuisine can be classified in different ways, such as schools of cuisine, functions, and so on, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Different Schools of Sichuan Cuisine and Their Specialties<sup>1</sup>

Schools of cuisine	Locations	Specialties
Upper River Style	The west of Sichuan, Chengdu, and Leshan	Mapo Tofu, kung Pao Chicken, Sliced Beef and Ox Tongue in Chilli Sauce, Sliced Boiled Pork with Garlic Sauce, Sauteed Sliced Chicken in Egg White, Sauteed Vermicelli with Spicy Minced Pork etc.
Small River Style	The south of Sichuan, Zigong, Neijiang, Luzhou and Yibin	Pan-fried Rabbit in Rich Spices, Fushun Soft Bean Curd, Sauteed Pig Kidney, Steamed Beef with Rice Flower etc.
Under River Style	Chongqing, Wanzhou and Dazhou	Sauteed Bullfrog with Pickled Peppers

<sup>1</sup> <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%B7%9D%E8%8F%9C/26409?fr=aladdin>

Table 2: Different Functions of Sichuan Cuisine and Specialties.

Functions [8]	Specialties
Banquet/ Feast	dry-Brasied Shark's Fin, Brasied Trepang, Brasied Abalone etc.
Casual Meals for Public	Braised Duck with Shredded Konjak, kung Pao Chicken, Sauteed Diced Chicken with Chili Pepper, Boiled Fish with Pickled Cabbage and Chili etc.
Home Style Dishes	Sweet and Sour Spare Ribs, Marinated Boneless Duck, Sliced Beef in Hot Chili Oil etc.
The Countryside Dishes	Steamed Pork with Preserved Vegetables, Dongpo Pig Knuckle, Fushun Soft Bean Curd etc.
Local Snacks	Marinated Pig Ear, Translucent Beef Slices, Deep-fried Egg Rolls etc.
Sichuan Halal Food	Fried Tripes, Braised Beef Offal etc.
Vegetarian Dishes	Cucumber in Sauce, Sweet and Sour Chinese Cabbage etc.

## 4. Translation Studies of Sichuan Cuisine

### 4.1. Literal Translation

Literal translation means to seldom or not change the form of original texts and retain the image and characteristics of the original language in the translation as much as possible in case of conforming to English expression habits [9]. As mentioned above in the classification of the name of Sichuan cuisine, ingredients, names of places and persons, flavors, and cooking methods have corresponding or similar expressions in English. So, food named in these ways can be literally translated.

1) The cuisine that is named by ingredients can be translated as “the main ingredient with other ingredients or seasoning.

蒜泥白肉— Sliced Boiled Pork with Minced Garlic

什锦烩面— braised noodles with assorted ingredients

皮蛋豆腐— tofu with preserved eggs

木耳肉片— sautéed sliced pork with black fungus

青椒肉丝— sautéed shredded pork with green pepper

The main ingredients of the above foods are sliced boiled pork, noodles, tofu, sliced pork, and shredded pork respectively, and minced garlic, assorted ingredients, preserved eggs, black fungus, and green pepper are accessories. In translation, the former is connected with the latter by the preposition “with”. To be specific, “白肉” is the pork boiled and then cut into slices, so it can be translated to sliced boiled pork. “蒜泥” is minced garlic. “什锦烩面<sup>2</sup>” contains sliced pork shank, ham, pork belly, chicken, and mushrooms which are stirred well with salt and are boiled with noodles. Because of the large amount of ingredients, the phrase “assorted ingredients” is used to generalize all of them. “木耳肉片” and “青椒肉丝” are stir-fried dishes, so they are translated with the word “sautéed”. Here the way of cutting needs to be translated carefully. They are sliced pork and shredded pork separately.

2) The cuisine that is named by the place of origin can be translated into places and main ingredients.

富顺豆花— Fushun Tofu Puddin

四川虾球— Sichuan Shrimp

古蔺麻辣鸡— Gulin Spicy Chicken

<sup>2</sup> <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E4%BB%80%E9%94%A6%E7%83%A9%E9%9D%A2/5012723>

It can be seen from the above examples that the place is put before the ingredients. In translation, the place name is transliterated and the ingredients are translated by corresponding expressions in English.

3) The cuisine that contains the name of a person can be translated into names and main ingredients.

东坡肉— Dongpo braised pork

麻婆豆腐— Mapo tofu

These are the same as the translation of those cuisine with names of places. So, the person's name should be transliterated and the ingredients should be translated by corresponding expressions in English.

4) The cuisine that is named by flavors can be translated into flavors and main ingredients.

糖醋白菜— sweet and sour Chinese cabbage

鱼香肉丝— fish-flavored shredded pork

琥珀花生— honeyed peanuts

麻辣牛筋— spicy beef shank

To translate this kind of food names, mastering the translation of basic flavors are the priority, which are sour, sweet, bitter, spicy, and salty. But a dish always contains mixed flavors, such as sweet and sour, spicy peppery chili hot (pungent), fish-flavored, and so on. “糖醋白菜”, “鱼香肉丝”, and “麻辣牛筋” all have corresponding English expressions. Thus, tastes are used as the attribute and ingredients as nouns in translations. “琥珀花生<sup>3</sup>” is made by stir-frying peanuts and sugar until the water has been evaporated. Then, honey is added, followed by quick stirring. So, “honeyed” is used as the attribute, which not only describes the flavor of the dish but also implies one of its ingredients.

5) The cuisine that is named by the way of cooking can be translated into way of cooking and main ingredients.

炸春卷— Deep-fried Egg Rolls

火爆腰花— Sauteed pig's kidney

粉蒸牛肉— Steamed Beef with Rice Flower

Likewise, to translate this kind of names, first is to master the translation of common cooking methods, such as steam, boil, scale, fry, scramble, stew, simmer, braise, smoke, roast and so on [7]. “炸春卷” is deep-fried, and the warp of “春卷” is mixed by eggs and powders, so it can be translated into egg rolls. The main cooking method of “粉蒸牛肉” is steaming, thus “steamed” is used as the attribute. Rice flower is the accessory while beef is the main ingredient, so “with” is used to connect these two words.

## 4.2. Free Translation

Free translation does not stick to the form and metaphor of the original text. It is only faithful to the original text and puts information transmission in the first place. It mainly expresses abstract or associative dish names in a specific and clear way, and translators can often use means such as explanation, deletion, and rewriting. This kind of dish name sounds catchy. They are mostly four-character words and convey different connotations and meanings.

“蚂蚁上树<sup>4</sup>” is a famous traditional dish, whose main ingredients are vermicelli and minced pork. The taste is light, smooth, and delicious and the color is oily and bright. The minced meat is attached to the vermicelli like ants crawling on branches. This dish is named after its vivid appearance,

<sup>3</sup> <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E7%90%A5%E7%8F%80%E8%8A%B1%E7%94%9F>

<sup>4</sup> <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E8%9A%82%E8%9A%81%E4%B8%8A%E6%A0%91/5192>

where minced pork is like ants and vermicelli is like branches. If foreigners do not understand the meaning behind the name of the dish and the translator directly translates it, it will make them confused and even shocked. So, this dish is best translated as Vermicelli with Spicy Minced Pork.

“夫妻肺片<sup>5</sup>” is created by the couple Guo Chaohua and Zhang Tianzheng. It is mainly made of braised and sliced beef scalp, heart, tongue, and tripe. Then chili oil, pepper, and other accessories are used to make spicy oil which will then be poured on beef. If it is translated literally, it will only discourage foreigners, because nobody wants to eat the lungs of a couple. Here, only free translation can be used to translate this dish from its main ingredients and seasonings into Sliced Beef and Ox Tongue in Chili Sauce. This translation can not only let foreigners know the relevant information about the dish, but also can eliminate cultural differences for easier understanding.

As a kind of hot pot, “鸳鸯锅” can meet the needs of people with different tastes. It is generally divided into two parts, one of which is spicy and the other not spicy. Free translation is enough to express the main meaning, and it can be translated as the Double-flavor hot pot.

“雪魔芋<sup>6</sup>” is from Mount Emei and was accidentally created by the Monk Shengwei during the Republic of China. Shengwei put a piece of leftover konjac (commonly known as black tofu) in the snow outdoor, and it foamed into a sponge which was very delicious. People then tried to imitate it. Because it is similar to the frozen tofu in Northeast China, it can be translated as Frozen Konjac.

#### 4.3. Transliteration

Transliteration is based on the pronunciation of the source language. It is suitable for the situation where corresponding words in the target language could not be found and the cultural characteristics should be retained. It can not only remain the pronunciation of the source language, but also express meanings.

Firstly, dishes with Chinese cultural characteristics and having been accepted by foreigners can be translated with Pinyin. For example, Jiao Zi (饺子), Shao Mai (烧麦), and Chuan Juan (春卷). Some dishes with place names can also use this method, such as Sichuan hotpot and Yibin Ran Noodle. Besides, other dishes with people's names can also be transliterated, for example, Dongpo Pork Elbow.

Secondly, dishes with Chinese characteristics and popular among foreigners can be translated with Wade-Giles. It is the main translation method before using Pinyin. The English translation in Wade-Giles is more similar to the pronunciation in the source language. Taking “宫保鸡丁” as an example, it can be translated into “kong Pao Chicken”.

Thirdly, when the name of dishes does not show their cooking methods or main ingredients, it can be translated by Pinyin with some explanations, for example, “太白鸭”. In this dish, a duck is cooked with centuries-old spirit (yellow rice wine), wolfberry, and pseudo-ginseng. It is said that Li Bai, the famous poet in the Tang Dynasty, presented this dish to the emperor. Therefore, people named it after Li Bai and the translation is Taibai Duck (Braised duck originally related to a poet called Li Bai).

#### 4.4. Others

Sometimes, the translation of dish names could not only adopt a single method. In the dish of “Dongpo Pig Knuckle”, “Dongpo”, a person's name, could be transliterated directly, and “Pig Knuckle” have a corresponding expression in English. Hence, it combines literal translation and transliteration.

<sup>5</sup> <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%A4%AB%E5%A6%BB%E8%82%BA%E7%89%87>

<sup>6</sup> <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%9B%AA%E9%AD%94%E8%8A%8B>

“夫妻肺片”，“蚂蚁上树” and “乐山甜皮鸭” could be translated into different versions. “Fu Qi Fei Pian” can be literally translated as Couple’s Sliced Beef in Chili Sauce, which remains its interesting naming method. It can also be called Sliced Beef and Ox Tongue in Chili Sauce, which shows its ingredients (beef and its tongue) and dressing (chili oil). The former version uses literal translation while the latter uses transliteration. “蚂蚁上树” is better to be translated liberally in consideration of the audiences’ awareness. But if they have already understood the culture of the dish, it can be literally translated to keep the aesthetics of naming. Thus, Sauteed Vermicelli with Spicy Minced Pork or Little Ants in a Tree is based on a certain situation. For “乐山甜皮鸭”, there are many translation versions. Leshan Sweet Skin Duck and Sweet-skinned Duck are literal translations which show the taste, the shape of the ingredients, and the texture of the meat. Spiced Sweet Crispy Duck, Oil burned duck, and Marinated Duck are liberal translations that reflect cooking methods.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Translation Features of Sichuan Cuisine in Different Schools

A total of 37 dishes and their translations are listed in the comparison of different schools of Sichuan cuisine. “夫妻肺片”，“鱼香肉丝” and “乐山甜皮鸭” have various translation versions, which means that they can be translated literally or liberally. Other dishes, such as “东坡肘子” and “合江烤鱼”, combine different translation methods. In addition to those having different versions of translations, there are 33 translations in total, including 17 literal translations, 10 free translations, 4 transliterations, and 2 mixed translations. Dishes are classified by schools of cuisine are generally translated in a literal way, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Translation Methods of Sichuan Cuisine in Different Schools.

Classification	Number	Translation Principles							
		Literal Translation		Free Translation		Transliteration		Mixed Translation	
		Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion
Upper River Style	15	6	40%	5	33%	3	20%	1	6.7%
Small River Style	8	5	62.5%	1	12.5%	1	12.5%	1	12.5%
Under River Style	10	6	60%	4	40%	0	0	0	0
Totality	33	17	51.5%	10	30.3%	4	12%	2	6%

In the three categories classified by schools of cuisine, literal translation is the main principle, followed by free translation, and a few transliterations.



## 5.2. Translation Features of Sichuan Cuisine in Different Functions

Similarly, in a total of 26 dishes, some of them have multiple translation versions. There are 26 literal translations, 2 free translations, 3 transliterations, and 3 mixed translations.

Table 4: Translation Methods of Sichuan Cuisine in Different Functions.

Classification	Number	Translation Principles							
		Literal Translation		Free Translation		Transliteration		Mixed Translation	
		Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion
Feast	4	4	100%	0	0	0	0	0	0
Casual Meals for Public	5	4	80%	1	20%	0	0	0	0
Home Style Dishes	5	4	80%	0	0	1	20%	0	0
The Country-side Dishes	4	3	75%	0	0	0	0	1	25%
Local Snacks	4	3	75%	1	25%	0	0	0	0
Sichuan Halal Food	2	2	100%	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vegetarian Dishes	5	4	80%	1	20%	0	0	0	0
Totality	29	24	82.7%	3	10.3%	1	3.4%	1	3.4%

In conclusion, no matter according to the classification of Sichuan cuisine by schools or functions, literal translation is the main method, followed by free translation, and transliterations are only a few. The reasons why Sichuan cuisine is mainly translated literally are as follows. Firstly, it is related to food naming. The name of Sichuan cuisine directly shows ingredients and cooking methods, so literal translation is more proper and accurate to express original meanings. Literal translation is similar to the linguistic dimension of “multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection” proposed by Jing Guo, that is, translation is carried out according to the surface meaning of dish names [4]. “糖醋排骨” and “粉蒸牛肉” convey basic information about dishes, so corresponding expressions can be found in English to translate. Secondly, it is linked with the living habits of the Sichuan people. They preferred homemade meals, so the naming of food is simple and straightforward. In this case, literal translation is easy to understand. What’s more, some dish names are translated through free translation. This is because some high-end dishes are named after some connotations so we could not know the ingredients, flavors, or other basic information. Foreigners will find the name less relevant to the dish itself if they do not understand the cultural implications behind it. To popularize the culture of Sichuan cuisine, of free translation can make foreigners better understand the connotation of the food name. At last, some dish names are related to folk customs and some words have no specific

meaning, such as Bo Bo chicken. “Bo Bo” is a container for food in the Sichuan dialect. Thus, it is hard to find a corresponding word in English. Transliteration keeps its local feature and reduces the translation difficulty.

## 6. Conclusions

Chinese food culture is profound and extensive while the naming rationales are multiple. Sichuan cuisine, one of the eight famous schools of Chinese cuisine, also possesses long-standing food culture. The name of Sichuan cuisine is concise and comprehensive, so literal translation is often adopted to directly express the main ingredients, cooking methods, flavour, or people's names and places in the dishes' names. It is so accurate and straightforward that makes foreigners know the origin of names and cultures in dishes. Certainly, some dish names, such as “雪魔芋” and “蚂蚁上树”, are not easy to understand at the first impression because of the metaphor and exaggeration. This kind of dish name usually uses free translation and conveys its main connotation to reduce barriers to cultural understanding. Plus, transliteration is also essential. On the one hand, it is because English words could not express the characteristics of the dish name. On the other hand, it can spread the Chinese culture worldwide and get the recognition of foreigners.

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